

The post-2003 development of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq: a Critical Realist Perspective



Nathanael Trappelides

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DECLARATION

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in International Relations at the department of 'Politics, Philosophy and Religion' of the Lancaster University.

I declare that the thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

I declare that the thesis exceeds the permitted maximum length upon approval on behalf of the University.

Nathanael Trappelides

ABSTRACT

The question of whether a fully-fledged Kurdish nationalism does exist has attracted a reasonable amount of attention across recent decades, subject to the increasing appreciation of its modern development having been strongly influenced by distinct contexts experienced across the different states within which Kurds were separated after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Iraq always constituted a distinctively unique case, with nationalistic development coexisting with a processual movement towards a decentralised state inclusive of Kurdish rights. This thesis analyses and explains the post-2003 development of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq to determine the extent to which it has been affected by social, political, ideological and economic factors across time and space, the extent to which it has been enhanced with civic elements subject to the region's political development and the extent to which the decisions of political elites have been influenced by ethnic structures of nationalism. Kurdish nationalism is defined in accordance with the ethno-symbolist Smithian understanding of nations, demonstrating a case of a modern nation gradually constructed around a pre-modern ethnic core, while nationalistic development across time and space is analysed through the endorsement of the Critical Realist cyclical morphogenetic framework of Margaret Archer. Within a field largely dominated by classic primordial and modernist approaches, the employment of Critical Realism aims at convincingly explaining the interplay between structure and agency and at ontologically defining both observed and unobserved structures within the social world. Thus, appropriately determining their role and influence and explaining how ethnic and civic elements have interacted to generate a distinct sentiment of belonging after the emergence of the post-2003 contextual status across a period during which political elites were engaged in a conscious effort to enrich national identification with civic elements through a state-building process of problematic nature exposed in the aftermath of the 2017 independence referendum.

DEDICATION

In memory of Vassos Lyssarides (13 May 1920 – 26 April 2021)

*Πολύ την καθυστέρησα την καταμέτρηση
Γιόμισα τη ζωή με να και πρέπει
Όσο που έμαθα να περπατώ και τέλειωσε ο δρόμος
Καμπύλες που δε χάιδεψα χαράδρες που δεν είδα
Τώρα ρωτάω γιατί να είχα τα γιατί
και τα στερνά γιατί, σαράκι, για όσα ανέγγιχτα προτίμησα να αφήσω.
Ποια να `ναι η κατάρα που με δέρνει.
Μονάχος μου αλυσόδεσα τ' αγνάρια μου στο βράχο.
Άλλοι δεν έχτισαν τα τείχη ολόγυρά μου.
Και πίκρα, πίκρα ολόπικρη, πικρή ανοικτή πληγή.
Τα ονειράτά μου ξόφλησαν
Κι απόμεινε η ανάμνηση πικρόπικρη, φτηνή, στεγνή.
Δεν ξέρω αν σκόρπισα πικρίες, δε με δέρνουν.
Τα ανέγγιχτα με τυραννούν.
Δυο λιγωμένα μάτια, μια έστω ψεύτικη χαμένη ανατριχίλα,
ένα τοπίο στο Θιβέτ, μια που δεν έγινε κουβέντα στο Τραφάλγκαρ.
Γιε μου, αν θα γκρεμίσεις όσα τριγύρω σου άλλοι έκτισαν τείχη,
στο βράχο ενός νεκρού οράματος,
θα `ναι πικρό ν' αλυσοδέσεις τη ζωή σου.
Πολύ την καθυστέρησα την καταμέτρηση.
Μου φαίνεται πως τώρα, ζέχασα και να μετρώ.
Όχι, παιδί μου!
Αυτή η ορφανεμένη ηλιαχτίδα
που πάει να ξεψυχήσει στην ξεπορνεμένη πια πλατεία
μου θύμισε αυτά που είδα.
Κάλιο παιδί μου να πορεύεσαι με πίκρα,
την πίκρα ενός οράματος που ξέφυγε,
παρά την γλύκα μιας ανώφελης φυγής.*

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Lastly, I would like to dedicate this thesis in memory of the Cypriot visionary Vassos Lyssarides, who passed away on the 26th of April of 2021 at the age of 100 and who in the form of a modern Plato kept reminding us that ideas are immortal and cannot be murdered. Philosopher and revolutionary, but mainly a source of inspiration for anyone who fell in love with Freedom and struggled for Her, he often used to state that if one is to die for Dignity and Freedom, he deserves to have a thousand lives. And when he was being told that he is small and that if he takes another step forward, he will be wiped out, he kept repeating: “If I do not, I will be even smaller”. I will say nothing more than a humble ‘thank you’ to you Doctor for beautifying this world and especially our beloved semi-occupied country for over a century.

GLOSSARY

| Abbreviations | Explanations |
|----------------------|---|
| CIA | Central Intelligence Agency |
| EU | European Union |
| FDI | Foreign Direct Investment |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| ICP | Iraqi Communist Party |
| IEITI | Iraqi Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative |
| IKF | Iraqi Kurdistan Front |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| ISIS | Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant |
| KDP | Kurdistan Democratic Party |
| KDPI | Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan |
| KLM | Kurdish Liberation Movement |
| KNC | Kurdish National Council |
| KRG | Kurdistan Regional Government |
| KRM | Kurdistan Referendum Movement |
| KRP | Kurdistan Region Presidency |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organisation |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| OFFP | Oil for Food Programme |
| PKK | Kurdistan Workers' Party |
| PUK | Patriotic Union of Kurdistan |
| PYD | Democratic Union Party |
| SCN | Syrian National Council |
| UN | United Nations |

| | |
|-------|--|
| UNAMI | United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq |
| UNSC | United Nations Security Council |
| US | United States |
| USA | United States of America |
| USSR | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |
| WWI | First World War |
| WWII | Second World War |
| YPG | People's Protection Units |

TIMELINE

| Date | Event |
|------|--|
| 1920 | <u>Treaty of Sevres</u> : post-World War I pact between the victorious Allied powers and representatives of the government of Ottoman Turkey |
| 1923 | <u>Treaty of Lausanne</u> : final treaty concluding World War I |
| 1930 | <u>Establishment of the Modern Iraqi State</u> : independence of Iraq after the official end of the British mandate |
| 1937 | <u>Establishment of the Hiwa Party</u> : Kurdish party formed in Kirkuk by Kurdish intellectuals aimed at promoting Kurdish nationalism |
| 1945 | <u>Establishment of the Rezgari Party</u> : Kurdish party aimed at the liberation and independence of Kurdistan |
| 1946 | <u>Establishment of the KDP</u> : largest party in Iraqi Kurdistan and senior partner in the Kurdish Regional Government |
| 1958 | <u>Overthrowal of the Hashemite Monarchy</u> : rise of Qasem onto power through a coup d'état |
| 1961 | <u>Establishment of the Kurdish National Liberation Movement</u> : beginning of the Kurdish armed struggle in the form of a genuine nationalist movement |
| 1963 | <u>Rise of the Ba'ath Party onto power</u> : overthrowal of Qasem through the Ramadan Revolution and rise of Arif |
| 1968 | <u>Return of the Ba'ath Party to power</u> : military coup against President Arif |
| 1970 | <u>March 1970 Agreement</u> : agreement in the aftermath of the First Iraqi–Kurdish |

| | |
|------|---|
| | War, for the creation of a Kurdish autonomous region |
| 1975 | <u>Algiers Accord and end of the Kurdish National Liberation Movement (KLM)</u> : agreement between Iran and Iraq to settle any disputes and conflicts concerning their common border |
| 1975 | <u>Establishment of the PUK</u> : Kurdish nationalist party and senior partner in the Kurdistan Regional Government |
| 1979 | <u>Death of Mustafa Barzani</u> : Kurdish leader, one of the most prominent figures in modern Kurdish history and father of Masoud Barzani |
| 1987 | <u>Establishment of the IKF</u> : alliance of Iraqi Kurdish political parties |
| 1988 | <u>Anfal Campaign</u> : series of attacks carried out by the Iraqi army against the Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan |
| 1991 | <u>Kurdish uprisings</u> : series of popular rebellions during a ceasefire in the Gulf War that led to the withdrawal of Saddam Hussein from Iraqi Kurdistan |
| 1992 | <u>Establishment of the Kurdish autonomous region and first parliamentary elections</u> : facilitated by the implementation of no fly-zones to protect the Kurds by the Americans and the Europeans |
| 1994 | <u>Start of the Kurdish Civil War in Iraq</u> : military conflict that took place between rival Kurdish factions. mostly between the PUK and the KDP |
| 1998 | <u>Washington Agreement</u> : ceasefire signed by Talabani and Barzani in Washington that ended the Kurdish Civil War |
| 2003 | <u>US Intervention in Iraq</u> : invasion of Iraq by a United States-led coalition that |

| | |
|------|---|
| | overthrew the government of Saddam Hussein |
| 2005 | <u>Establishment of the new constitution of Iraq</u> : adopted on September 18 by the Transitional National Assembly of Iraq and confirmed by constitutional referendum, held on October 15 |
| 2009 | <u>Establishment of the Gorran Movement</u> : Kurdish political party in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq founded by Nawshirwan Mustafa |
| 2017 | <u>Independence Referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan</u> : led on 25 September demonstrating a 92.73 per cent of support for independence |

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INTRODUCTION

The Kurds, an indigenous group of people of the Mesopotamian plains and the mountainous areas of the region, constitute the largest ethnic minority without a sovereign state of their own in the entire Middle East. The Kurdish Question, as it is widely known, has received an increasing amount of attention from scholars, academics and policymakers across recent decades subject to fundamental regional transformations that brought the Kurds at the forefront of Middle East developments. However, when it comes to applying the concepts of nation and nationalism on the Kurdish case, conflicting understandings and views exist generating an extraordinary difficulty of attempting to fit Kurdish nationalism into the various schools that comprise the field of nationalism studies. Somebody could claim that this literature gap emanates from the fact that the development of the Kurdish national identity and Kurdish nationalism constitute phenomena that are often neglected; yet, the academic engagement with the social structure and political organisation of the Kurdish society (Van Bruinessen, 1996; Van Bruinessen, 1983; Stansfield, 2003) demonstrates the importance of researching them further to enhance the understanding of their origins and implications and provide a meaningful and convincing response to the question of whether a fully-fledged Kurdish nationalism does actually exist which is the question that determined the purpose and the outcome of this thesis.

Scholars tend to converge on the significance of variables capable of influencing or even altering a process of nationalistic development (Gellner, 1983; Smith, 2001; Natali, 2012; Loizides, 2010). The modern development of Kurdish nationalism has been strongly influenced across time and space subject to the distinct social, political, ideological and economic contexts experienced across the different states within which the Kurds were separated after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. When it comes to Iraqi Kurdistan, the evolution of Kurdish nationalism has coexisted not only with the establishment of the sovereign Iraqi state and the policies emanating from the central state, but also with the recognition of the Kurdish ethnicity and the processual movement towards a decentralised state inclusive of Kurdish rights; thus, generating distinct nationalist sentiments, claims and projects when compared to the Kurdish nationalism in Syria, Iran or Turkey (Natali, 2012). But more importantly, the 1992 establishment of the KRG and the repercussions of the 2003 US-led intervention in

Iraq, altered fundamentally the nature and dynamics of Kurdish nationalism, by opening the door for self-determination, civic loyalty, and political action based on perceived pragmatism. Shadeedi Hamzeh, a Policy Researcher at the ‘Institute of Regional and International Studies’ in Sulaymaniyah, portrayed accurately the significance of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq by asserting during an interview conducted for the purpose of this thesis the following:

“We have a Kurdish Question in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. But which one do we talk about the most? Which one is the one we are trying to fix? I mean, the situation is not miserable in comparison to the situation of Kurds in Turkey or in Iran who are still living under states that deny their existence. But we still, as an international community, focus on Iraq and try to solve the Kurdish Question in Iraq. And if a Kurdish state is going to be formed anywhere in the world, this is going to be formed on Iraqi soil. So, the Kurdish Question in Iraq is the only question that is actually being addressed in the international agenda. The Kurdish Question has become a Kurdish Question of Iraqi Kurds. That’s it.”¹

This thesis aims at explaining the post-2003 development of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq through the employment of a Critical Realist perspective and the adoption of Margaret Archer’s (1995) framework of ‘morphogenesis’; thus, using Critical Realism both as a theoretical approach and a methodological tool. Within a field largely dominated by classic primordial and modernist approaches (Geertz, 1973; Armstrong, 1982; Van Den Berghe, 1975; Newman, 1991; Hechter, 1975), the employment of such an approach aims at convincingly explaining the interplay between structure and agency and at determining, understanding, appreciating and incorporating all the variables that tend to influence nationalistic development. The complexity of causal relations that determine the sentiment of nationalism or a nationalistic process requires an approach that challenges the positivist dominant understandings of the role and nature of causal analysis. Causal relations function as a complex realm of generative underlying mechanisms which need to be identified in order to provide a methodological framework that can convincingly account for nationalist trends, deviations in terms of national awareness and different types of nationalistic sentiments. Nationalism, as a phenomenon, functions within a complex social world of both observed and unobserved structures which need to be ontologically identified to appropriately determine their role and influence.

¹ Interview with Hamzeh Shadeedi: Policy Researcher at the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) [Conducted on: 6 May 2020].

The analysis of the discussed topic is based on the evaluation of a combination of primary and secondary data. Primary data has been obtained through four qualitative semi-structured interviews of academics and policy-makers, specialising on the Kurdish Question of Iraq subject to their academic research or professional experience, conducted by the author during the third year of his doctoral research. It has to be noted that the fieldwork of the author in Erbil in March 2020 was cut short due to the measures taken by the Kurdistan Regional Government in an effort to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. Secondary data has obtained through books, journal articles, online sources, speech transcripts, political documents, organisational documents and audio and visual content reproduced across the Internet. In an effort to explain the post-2003 development of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq, the thesis addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent has the post-2003 trajectory of Iraqi Kurdish nationalism been affected by social, economic, political and ideological factors across time and space?
2. To what extent has Iraqi Kurdish nationalism been enhanced with civic elements subject to the political development of the region?
3. To what extent have the post-2003 decisions of political elites in Iraqi Kurdistan been influenced by the ethnic structures of nationalism in the form of an ethno-nationalist project?

By responding to these questions, the thesis makes four claims to originality:

1. The theoretical and empirical claim for a case of a modern nation which has been gradually constructed around a pre-modern core which results to the academic reinforcement of the ethno-symbolist school of thought with regard to Iraqi Kurdistan and the contribution to the nationalism debate.
2. The theoretical claim for the existence of both observed and unobserved structures in the social world that need to be ontologically appreciated in a Critical Realist manner which accounts for the fact that agency, culture and social structures are in a constant cyclical process of change of an interlocking and complex character, with nationalism being subject to morphogenesis or morphostasis within this context

3. The theoretical development and methodological application of a morphogenetic cyclical framework encompassing the effects of social, historical, economic and political factors, to empirically examine the post-2003 development of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq and determine certain circumstances which facilitated or hampered this development
4. The empirical claim of how civic and ethnic elements have interacted in the case of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq to generate nationalistic distinctiveness

The thesis is comprised of five main chapters:

1. **Chapter I:** This chapter critically evaluates the different schools of thought within the field of nationalism studies and situates Kurdish nationalism within the ongoing nationalism debate. It continues by determining the morphogenetic framework as the appropriate tool in terms of tracing, analysing and explaining the development of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq. It argues that the theoretical understanding of Kurdish nationalism should not only rely on empirical data but rather combine rich empirical analysis with sophisticated theoretical approaches, to suggest the employment of a Critical Realist ontological and epistemological stance as the appropriate tool to trace and explain its development, subject to the need of assigning primacy to ontology over epistemology when engaging with complex causal relations.
2. **Chapter II:** This chapter employs Anthony Smith's (1986) ethno-symbolist perspective to explain the origins of the Kurdish nation and of Kurdish nationalism and Critical Realism to analyse their historical development across time and space, assigning particular attention to the Ottoman period, the years that followed the 1930 establishment of the modern Iraqi state, the 1958 fall of the Monarchy in Iraq, the 1961 Kurdish national movement, the 1963 rise of the Ba'ath Party, the context which surrounded the March 1991 Kurdish uprisings and the 1992 establishment of the Kurdish autonomy. It argues that the Kurdish ethnic past should be understood through reference to the six criteria which comprise a Kurdish ethnie according to Anthony Smith (1986) and that the establishment of the KRG constituted the most fundamental property in terms of elevating the Kurdish nation as the absolute realm of political loyalty and altering the nationalist sentiment across the modern Kurdish history. Critical

Realism is employed to understand change across time and space and facilitate the understanding of the distinct nature of ethnic and civic sentiments.

3. **Chapter III:** This chapter evaluates and analyses the development of Kurdish ethnic nationalism by employing a Critical Realist perspective in accordance with Margaret Archer's (1995) morphogenetic approach. It applies the components of ethnic nationalism as determined by Anthony Smith (1986) on the discussed case of the Iraqi Kurds and explains how it has been shaped or affected by internal and external structures such as the structures of sovereign power. It argues that ordinary Kurdish agents continue to assign particular emphasis to their common roots and their emotional attachment to their history and symbols which are considered far stronger when compared to the rational attachment to any institution. This ethnic sentiment has enabled the Kurdish nationalism to survive, generating collective action and willingness to sacrifice at critical moments across the Kurdish history.
4. **Chapter IV:** This chapter evaluates and analyses the development of Kurdish civic nationalism by employing a Critical Realist perspective in accordance with Margaret Archer's (1995) morphogenetic approach, in an effort to portray a distinct sentiment of belonging. A sentiment which emanates from the development of democratic institutions and the distinct manifestation of self-determination. The chapter also refers to the interaction between the ethnic and the civic identity to assert the existence of a conscious effort by Iraqi Kurdish political elites to construct a civic nation through a pragmatist national agenda. It argues that the rational structure of civic connection determines the behaviour of the Kurdish agents by shaping the expectations of a population that experienced the civic institutions and principles and desires their maintenance and, by determining political action, since the political community and the decision-makers are required to act accordingly in order to ensure this maintenance.
5. **Chapter V:** This chapter focuses exclusively on the Kurdish nationalist project in Iraq and analyses it again through the employment of Archer's (1995) Critical Realist framework of morphogenesis. It assigns particular attention to internal and external dynamics and emergent properties that determined the nationalist trajectory such as the 2003 US-intervention, the inter-Kurdish rivalry and the intra-Kurdish rivalry. The chapter argues that the Iraqi Kurds have been acting

within a space of a distinct political, economic, and ideological nature and development when compared to either the rest of Iraq or the Kurds outside Iraq. This generated a distinct nationalist project which had to coexist with a state-building process of a highly problematic nature and which led to the independence referendum of 2017 and the debatable motives behind it which deviate from the ethnic understanding of Kurdish nationalism.

CHAPTER I – A Critical Realist Approach to the study of nationalism

1. Introduction

In recent decades, theories of nationalism and international relations have been paying increasing attention to the development of Kurdish nationalism, since the Kurds represent a unique case in the contemporary study of the phenomenon, as represented by the work of scholars such as Vali (2003), Van Bruinessen (1992), Ahmed (2012) and Gunter (2007) who have flagged it as an important area of study. The Kurds constitute a ‘nation without a state’ i.e., a territorial community characterised by a unique identity and a desire for self-determination situated within the boundaries of one or more states. The feeling of identity of such nations is based on their own common history and culture i.e., their ethnic roots, their attachment to a specific territory, their desire for self-determination. In the absence of a state their own, they lack the ability to function as political institutions within the international arena. However, the perception of the existence of a community which possesses a unique core exists and facilitates the emergence of a unique identity (Guibernau, 2004, p. 132).

Theorists of Kurdish nationalism can be broadly categorised into primordialists and modernists (Vali, 2003, p. 58-111). Primordialists tend to adopt an essentialist approach focusing on the primordial character of Kurdish identity (Horowitz, 1985; Van Den Berghe, 1978; Jwaideh 2006; Mella 2005; Nebez 2004; Meho 1997; Izady 1992) and overlooking the modern social reconstruction of Kurdish identity and its features due to a strong belief in the antiquity and historical continuity of the Kurdish nation. On the other hand, modernists tend to reject the primordial character and defend the modernity of Kurdish nationalism, arguing that it emerged as a noticeable phenomenon only after WWI (Vali, 2003; Bozarslan, 2003; Ozoglu 2004). This thesis argues that the emergence of the Kurdish national identity did not occur under an industrialised context according to most modernisation theories while no Kurdish state existed across history to facilitate the establishment of a national identity. Thus, the idea that nations possess primordial elements which precede all social and political interactions, seems strong in

the Kurdish case. However, their remarkable case of ethno-nationalistic delay and resistance to the ideology of nationalism as demonstrated by the work of Loizides (2010) generates the need for a revised approach which will encompass both the primordial elements of the Kurdish national identity and the effects of social and political factors to account for the gradual development of Kurdish nationalism and the context of its growth.

This chapter aims at situating the Kurdish nationalism in Iraq within the nationalism debate and determining a holistic approach in terms of tracing, analysing and explaining its development. This is fundamentally important when dealing with a phenomenon that operates within a social world encompassing both observed and unobserved structures which are in a constant process of interaction. The chapter begins by offering a brief outline of the debate and the different strands which comprise it and continues by critically evaluating the dominant approaches within the field. Following the sociological work of Margaret Archer (1995), this thesis argues that nationalistic development should be understood as a morphogenetic process that occurs within the structure-agency context; thus, the last part of the chapter focuses on analysing the morphogenetic cycle and explaining the reasoning behind its employment.

2. The nationalism debate

The concepts of nation and nationalism have been subject to various definitions by scholars and have taken different forms across different periods. Different strands comprise the academic field, with each embodying a unique interpretation of the concepts; these strands according to Tune (2018, p. 44) “often provide rival and mostly irreconcilable accounts on the development and origins of nation and nationalism”. Smith (2010, p. 11) formulates this complexity by mentioning: “definitions of the concept of the nation range from those that stress ‘objective’ factors, such as language, religion and customs, territory and institutions, to those that emphasise purely ‘subjective’ factors such as attitudes, perceptions and sentiments”.

Three academic approaches dominate the field of nationalism studies. Primordialism is based on a strong belief in the antiquity and naturalness of nations (i.e., that nations have roots which go back to the history of humanity) and assumes that the nations are identified through their distinctive way of life, their attachment to a particular territory

and their struggle towards political autonomy (Storey, 2001). Hearn (2006) mentions that primordialism assumes the organic development of ethnic groups into nations, with national identity attaining value through the existence of a shared ancestry, common language, and territorial roots. In accordance with Armstrong (1982, p. 290), national identities have been determined and are related to historical phenomena, with the attachment to a specific territory reaching “far back into the Greek and Roman past, even into the sedentary societies of the ancient Middle East”. Reynolds et al. (1986) argue for the biological naturalness of grouping which renders nationalism as an inevitable phenomenon while Van den Berghe (1987) argues for ethnic elements being the natural evolution of sentiments of kinship which, in turn, emanate from biological and cultural elements. Thus, primordialists, in general, converge on the naturalness of nations whose roots emanate from the antiquity, with nationalism functioning as the ideology for already established nations.

On the other hand, modernism is characterised by a strong conviction in the modernity of nations and nationalism and assumes that nations constitute modern constructions of modernisation processes used to mobilise and unite populations in order to cope with modern conditions. Therefore, nation and nationalism are assumed to be contingent and dependent on historical, political and economic circumstances (Hearn, 2006). Traits such as ethnicity, identity or culture are considered consequences of modern capitalism, industrialisation, and state-formation, or as tools used by states or elites, to impose their ideology on the population (Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 1991). Modernism assumes that nations and nationalism emerged for the first time in Europe between the sixteenth and eighteenth century, due to the rise of the industrial society that resulted to the unequal distribution of wealth (Gellner, 1983). The establishment of the modern state was accompanied by constitutional advancements in legislation, regulations and citizenship while the educational advancements and the expansion of common languages, facilitated the development of a mass culture and a common national consciousness (Hearn, 2006). Wallerstein (1991, p. 78-79), in a direct critique against primordialism, argues that nations are “all peoplehood constructs, all inventions of pastness, all contemporary political phenomena” while Brubaker (2004, p. 7-8) goes even further to challenge the “tendency to treat ethnic groups, nations, and races as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed”. Benedict Anderson (1991) points to

the fundamental role of print-capitalism in terms of facilitating a process across which individuals tend to 'imagine' their fellow community-members.

Ethno-symbolism assigns particular emphasis to the exchange of ideas between people and elites and appreciates the importance of ethnic past and long-standing social and cultural trends (Smith, 2001). In accordance with primordialism, ethno-symbolism argues that nations possess an essential a priori core and have existed before the modern era. Smith (2001) recognises the modernity of nationalism as an ideology but rejects the modernity of the idea of ethnicity, arguing for the development of an accurate connection between the two concepts. His ideas are centred around the idea of 'ethnies' which constitute collective identities representing "a sense of continuity on the part of successive generations of a given cultural unit of population, to shared memories of earlier events and periods in the history of that unit and to notions entertained by each generation about the collective destiny of that unit and its culture" (Smith, 1991a, p. 25).

3. Theoretical understandings of nationalism

Gellner's theory of nationalism

Ernest Gellner (1983) constitutes one of the main academic contributors to the modernist school of thought, due to his claim that whether nations possess ethnic pasts or not cannot promote an understanding of modern nations, since their emergence emanates from modernisation processes rather than "assumed givens of social existence" (Geertz, 1973, p. 259). He criticises the self-evident and self-generating character of the nationalist theory for owing "its plausibility and compelling nature only to a very special set of circumstances, which do indeed obtain now, but which were alien to most of humanity and history" (Gellner, 1983, p. 126). Gellner (1983) notes the existence of a close link between a nation and a state, claiming that they both have a contingent character, but can emerge independently from each other. Nationalism does not enhance national awareness, but instead, assists in engendering a nation-state; thus, nationalism is assumed to pre-date the creation of a nation-state. He argues that conflict occurs "where ethnic (cultural or other diacritical marks) are visible and accentuate the differences in educational access and power, and, above all, when they inhibit the free flow of personnel across the loose lines of social stratification" (Gellner, 1983, p. 96).

Gellner (1983, p. 1) defines nationalism as primarily “a political principle which holds that the political and the national units should be congruent” and as “a theory of political legitimacy” which requires that ethnic boundaries should not result in a separation between the power-holders and the rest of a population. Two individuals are considered to belong to the same nation only if two certain criteria are satisfied. Firstly, they have to share the same culture i.e., “a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating” (Gellner, 1983, p. 7). Secondly, there should be a mutual conscious recognition of belonging to the same nation; nations are understood as “the artefacts of men’s convictions and loyalties and solidarities” (Gellner, 1983, p. 7). According to this assumption, a category of people constitutes a nation only in the existence of a recognition regarding certain mutual rights and duties among them which emanates from the sense of a shared membership.

Gellner (1983, p. 1) argues that nationalism constitutes a powerful sentiment which is necessary for the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society; an industrial society requires a politically defined state able to develop feelings of belonging and shared culture appreciation. The nationalist sentiment is determined by the extent of perceived violation or fulfilment of the principle of congruency between the political and the national unit. Regardless of its potential form, such a sentiment can encourage the formation and rise of nationalist movements. The principle can be violated if a state fails to include all of the nation’s members within its political boundaries or if it includes a significant number of non-nationals. The most extreme violation is the case of division of a nation across multiple states which leads to the absence of any perception regarding a single state being the national one. However, the sentiment is characterised by remarkable sensitivity to a specific violation scenario; when the rulers of the political unit do not belong to the same nation as the majority of the population either through the incorporation of a national territory within the territories of a larger empire or through the establishment of dominance by a minority group.

Gellner (1983, p. 38-51) suggests that history of humanity reaches a climax in the discovery of modernity and the transition from the agrarian to the industrial society, with nationalism acting as the key functional element which filled the ideological gap left behind due to the disappearance of the agrarian society and the de-legitimisation of the political and economic system of feudalism. Gellner (1983, p. 57) supports his

heretic interpretation of nationalism by claiming that this transition is responsible for the holistic societal transformation in terms of political structure in order to adapt to a different set of needs and demands; those of industrialisation. He assigns specific emphasis to the human augmented need for knowledge and suggests that if knowledge exceeds a certain level, then it becomes standardised as a standardised and cultivated 'high culture' and establishes itself as an essential component of the process towards industrialisation. Gellner (1983, p. 48-62) assumes that only the nation-state is the entity to possess the legitimate authority to establish and maintain qualities of 'high culture' during the processual movement away from the agrarian society.

Often the conditions of industrialisation are uneven across different places and disproportionately affect multinational entities which he names Empires of Megalomania. The irreversible process of homogeneity does not favour large numbers of people (mainly peasants), known as Ruritians, who did not possess a prior incentive or capability of adapting to a standardised language. However, it forces them to come into closer contact with the dominant Megalomanian culture through labour migration and bureaucratic employment and this interaction generates the consciousness of being different and the perception that culture matters significantly. Gradually the sense of distinguishing between the hostility of the Megalomanian culture and the friendliness of their national culture, is developed. Some, being subject to discrimination, decide to assimilate to the dominant culture while others remain loyal to their Ruritanian background and attempt to resist cultural assimilation and defend their unique culture and language. Policies of exclusion trigger the need for a reaction to the Empire's top-down homogenisation in order to protect the Ruritanian will and this reaction is only possible through the gradual transformation into a 'high' culture which will possess legitimate authority; a process which is performed by the most educated and capable individuals within this powerless section of the society. Eventually, a national programme is created which renders the creation of a Ruritanian state as the absolute nationalist objective (Gellner, 1983, p. 48-62).

However, there is great uncertainty whether Ruritians could survive or not within the Empire without sacrificing certain aspects of their background to justify the presence of only the options to either assimilate or secede (Loizides, 2010, p. 517). This uncertainty forms a component of an even larger debate; the one of whether ethnic

identities are characterised by mutual exclusivity or whether political identities could co-exist within a political organisation. At the same time, his differentiation with regard to nationalism is characterised by extraordinary simplicity i.e., whether a group has access to power or not, whether a group has access to modern 'high culture' or not, whether the state is culturally homogeneous or not (Gellner, 1983, p. 93-94). No explanation exists regarding interstate conflicts emanating from nationalist incentives or the presence of nationalism between two educated 'high-culture' groups (O'Leary, 1997, p. 213). Instead, nationalism is assumed to emanate from a conflict between the educated powerholders of a 'high culture' and the uneducated powerless groups of a low culture.

The evident overemphasis and overreliance on industrialisation remains also problematic, rendering his whole approach excessively functionalist, leaving little space for the role of state institutions in the formation of identities; especially in the presence of nationalist groups asserting that state discriminatory policies constitute the root of their own nationalistic development (Loizides, 2010, p. 518). He explains the phenomenon by referring to the eventual historical outcome that rendered the industrial society unable to function without nationalism (Tambini, 1996), failing account for the national movements of Ancient Rome and Greece that existed prior to industrialisation or the presence of nationalism in non-industrial and post-industrial societies in Europe during the 16th century, due to his overreliance on the idea that nationalism is tied to modernity and cannot exist in the absence of the modern industrial society (Smith, 2007; Minogue, 1991, p. 107-109; Loizides, 2010, p. 517).

Anderson's theory of nationalism

In a similar manner, Benedict Anderson (1991) falls into the modernist school of nationalism which asserts that nations and nationalism constitute products of modernity and function as tools to meet certain political and economic objectives but refuses to embrace the opinion that nationalism is obsolete in a world constantly affected by globalising pressures. Harald Bauder (2011) highlights the contemporary relevance of his ideas in terms of understandings how the identities of nation-states are formulated with regard to domestic and foreign policies. Anderson (1991) understands nation as a socially constructed community i.e., as the product of the imagination of the people who perceive themselves as members of that group. The creation of such communities

has been the outcome of the rise of 'print capitalism'; a common discourse emerged as a result of the actions of capitalist entrepreneurs that printed books and directed media through the use of the vernacular language, maximising circulation and understandability among readers. The first European nation-states are assumed to have been formed around their 'national print languages'. In the modern era, media possess the ability to create imagined communities due to targeting mass audiences and due to generalising citizens and addressing them as the public while also using images which assist in establishing stereotypes.

According to the theory of 'imagined communities', nationalism emanates from the rise of mass vernacular literacy and the declining importance of privileged access to particular script language and is culturally rooted in the decline and territorialisation of religion and the abandonment of monarchy as the ideal political system of governance. Moreover, the construction of an imagined understanding of a homogenous and simultaneous time capable to connect people that never met, emanates from a temporal weakening of the link between cosmology and history (Anderson, 1991, p. 9-36). The nation is defined as an 'imagined political community'. It "is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 1991, p. 6). He argues that nations are products of our imagination before they are realised and once the transition takes place from an imaginative reality into a concrete reality, then the process of nationalism inevitably commences. The nation is defined as a community due to the fact that regardless of the prevalence of any inequality, it is always perceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. The brotherhood sentiment developed provides to the members of the community the willingness to sacrifice their lives for it.

Moreover, Anderson (1991, p. 7) describes the nation as a limited and sovereign product of the imagination. It is limited due to the presence of boundaries, beyond which other nations lie and sovereign due to the assumption that the birth of the concept took place during a period in which the Enlightenment was gradually decomposing the legitimacy of the hierarchically-driven dynastic systems. The incorporation of the limited aspect, however, implies a degree of contrasting with an 'other' and raises questions regarding the increasing influence of technology and importance of media on

the spread of certain nationalisms from country to country. Moreover, this understanding is not congruent with the factual reality that members of certain nations, such as the Kurdish nation, are divided across different sovereign states; thus, the idea of the nation seems unable to be limited by any territorial boundaries.

Anderson (1991) implies that nations can be re-imagined and thus, transformed. Nations are just what their members imagine them to be while nation-building is the outcome of political, economic and cultural processes. Anderson (1991, p. 154) specifically emphasises the key role of language in constructing national identity and nationalism within imagined communities:

“What they eye is to the lover – that particular, ordinary eye he or she is born with – language – whatever language history has made his or her mother-tongue – is to the patriot. Through that language, encountered at mother’s knee and parted with only at the grave, pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined and futures dreamed”.

Tracing the origins of national consciousness, Anderson (1991, p. 37-46) argues that they can be observed in the intersection between capitalism, print and linguistic diversity. Capitalism functions as the system which facilitates and enhances production and relations while print functions as the technology which facilitates communication. The combination of the two along with an evident presence of linguistic diversity, generated the growth of print languages which in turn, assisted in constructing a sense of national consciousness, by developing unified integrated means of verbal communication and by establishing through print capitalism languages that used to be unattainable in the past. Considering the European nation-state movements from 1820 to 1920, Anderson (1991, p. 67-82) argues that the struggle over the print vernacular functioned decisively. The movements emanated mainly from literate individuals that used to produce dictionaries and contribute to the literature in the vernacular language and from the emerging bourgeoisie. At the same time, the republican models of America and France, acted as appropriate models for the nationalist middle classes, in terms of understanding and determining what does the term ‘nation’ stand for.

It is observed that Anderson’s work is characterised by a significant overemphasis on the role of print capitalism (Hobsbawm, 1990, p. 10; Wogan, 2001) which emanates from the declaration of the nation as a political community, the neglect of ethnicity and culture and the absence of an explanation regarding why a nation should be

perceived as a terminal social group. Certain nationalisms, especially within the European world (e.g., Skopje) undoubtedly provide justification to this overemphasis. However, when it comes to ‘nations without states’ (e.g., Catalan, Kurdish), his framework remains weak in terms of providing an appropriate explanation. For example, no Kurdish state existed throughout history in order to forge Kurdish nationalism while the Kurdish population managed to protect its distinct cultural elements and nationalistic sentiments, despite being subject to the print capitalism of the dominant nations. Thus, exposing the fact that a distinct approach is required to embrace different kinds of nationalism.

Connor’s Theory of Nationalism

Walker Connor (1994, p. 103), who is considered as one of the founders of the interdisciplinary field of nationalism studies, distinguishes himself by insisting on the inherently ethnic nature of nationalism and arguing for a socio-psychological element which determines the strength and resilience of national ties, stating: “an ethnic group may be readily discerned... but until the members are themselves aware of the group’s uniqueness, it is merely an ethnic group and not a nation. While an ethnic group may be other-defined, a nation must be self-defined”. Thus, without neglecting objective factors or traits, Connor (1994, p. 92, 202) argues for a subconscious conviction of its members regarding a perceived differentiation when compared to members of other groups to overcome the problem of terminological imprecision and of conceptual conflation of the terms: nation, state, nationalism and patriotism).

Connor’s (1994, p. 202) work is marked by an argument regarding passionate and irrational elements that determine the nationalist sentiment in the form of perceived kinship ties located within a subconscious realm. However, the main weakness of Connor’s theory emanates from the lack of a qualitative explanatory account regarding the differences between nations and other forms of collective organisation such as ethnic groups. The self-defined membership of an individual in numerous groups requires an explanation regarding the terminal nature of the concept of the nation in the form of a dominant loyalty, with James (1996, p. 126) arguing for a need “to take seriously the fact that people are prepared to die for their nation, and not simply because of a willed national spirit or a deluding ideology”.

Breuilly's Theory of Nationalism

John Breuilly (1993, p. 1), through a distinctive contribution, argues for the existence of state accounting for the conceptual dominance of nationalistic understandings of identity. Breuilly defines nationalism “as a form of politics... as an especially appropriate form of political behaviour in the context of the modern state and the modern state system”; thus, requiring from an appropriate appreciation of the phenomenon of nationalism to follow the development of an accurate relationship between it and the state. Breuilly (1993, p. 2) identifies three assumptions based on which national movements are built: (a) nationalistic uniqueness (b) prioritisation of national interests over other collective interests (c) national sovereignty. He goes on to argue that the realisation of the aforementioned assumptions requires the acquisition of power which is directly related to structures of sovereign power i.e., the state.

However, the works of Calhoun (1997) and Billig (1995) demonstrate the existence of a rich bundle of commonalities evident across distinctively different national movements than merely the existence of state structures. The usual development of a connection between a nation and a state does not necessarily imply the holistic interpretation of nationalistic development as being related to the existence of a state. Moreover, despite the current thesis appreciating the political manifestation of nationalism, it rejects the absolute connection to power maintenance or acquisition and the neglect of nationalism's psychological strength and, in accordance with Hutchinson (1994), argues that national identification is a cultural act which can often generate political action. Moreover, this absolute connection holistically prevents the incorporation and eliminates the significance of pre-modern elements across a nationalistic process.

Calhoun's and Brubaker's Theories of Nationalism

Craig Calhoun's (1997) theory of nationalism does not classify nations as entities but rather understands them as a means of referring to the modern society. This understanding is based on an assumption that nations as collective identities are constituted primarily by nationalistic claims and their accompanied thoughts, perceptions and actions. Certain common elements characterising the nationalistic rhetoric are being appreciated but tend to vary in terms of intensity while the inability

of a group to satisfy certain characteristics should not necessarily imply its exclusion from the definition of a nation. Thus, what matters is the processual way a group tends to outline its aspirations which, if appreciated, can lead to the identification of a common pattern.

What further distinguishes Calhoun (1997, p. 29) is the deviation from the mainstream modernist identification of the state, print capitalism and modernisation processes as responsible for the rise of nationalistic understandings of identity and the argument that nationalism should be understood as a means of constructing collective identities that emerged along with transformations in structures of sovereign power, economic structures, means of communication and political agendas. These properties have, indeed, affected certain variations of nationalism but have been affected by the phenomenon themselves. Towards the same direction, Brubaker (1996, p. 15) challenges the classification of nations as existing entities which “adopts categories of practice as categories of analysis” and argues for the contingent nature of nations dependent on the nationalist ideology and the system of sovereign state power.

What remains problematic with regard to Calhoun’s (1997) understanding is the identification of a pattern in the absence of a definition. If a pattern is to be identified and accepted, then, a definition should naturally be possible that would serve analytical purposes and offer a certain degree of generalisation. Remaining committed to a common conceptual understanding requires a common denominator; otherwise, any classification will remain superficial and meaningless. Moreover, Calhoun’s (1997) and Brubaker’s (1996) commitment on the non-classification of nations as entities, ignores the fact that nations constitute the most abstract collective forms of social organisation that tend to exist in the modern era which challenges the argument that an ontological status should not be granted.

4. The ethno-symbolist understanding of nationalism

Anthony Smith (2010) is considered a key figure within the interdisciplinary field of nationalism studies. He does not challenge the modernity of the phenomenon of nationalism, but insists that nations possess a priori ethnic cores. His approach on nationalism is often referred today as ethno-symbolism. The study of ethnies holds a

fundamental role within Smith's (1991a) ethno-symbolist theory due to being understood as the precursors of nations.

Deviation from modernism

Modernist approaches fail to account for the passions which accompany nationalism, such as the readiness and willingness to fight and die for a nation. Smith (2002, p. 5-32) criticises them for paying insufficient attention to the long-term formation of national identities and argues for the presence of a significant degree of continuity between prior forms of cultural identity and modern nations. He appreciates and embraces the modernity of nations, but does not conceive them as modern collective arrangements that emerge *ex nihilo*. Instead, as social entities that have been gradually constructed around pre-modern ethnic cores i.e., based on primordial attachments and rooted on the pre-existing history of groups (2007, p. 57).

This thesis agrees that the most fundamental element in understanding nationalism is determining the role of the past in the creation of the present and rejects the modernist claim that the past is largely irrelevant i.e., that nations are simply contemporary phenomena of the modern, industrial society. Thus, what is required is the development of an accurate connection between historic past and the perception of shared identity and history. This requirement is not based on the assumption that history is necessarily valid or uncontested. Numerous nationalisms are based on historical interpretations encompassing historical distortions which lead to the mythologisation of historical developments suffering from inaccuracy. Smith (2009, p. 71) mentions that nationalistic interpretations of history are constructed deliberately in certain cases to provide justification to certain political and ethnic positions. It is true that elements of ethnic past are often used as a liberal tool to provide an answer to present needs and problems; in these cases, the present creates the past. However, the generalisation of this modernist understanding constitutes in many cases a deviation from historical realities. As Smith (1995, p. 18) claims:

“History is not sweetshop in which its children may ‘pick and mix’; but neither is it an unchanging essence or succession of superimposed strata. Nor can history be simply disregarded, as more than one nationalism has found to its cost. The challenge for scholars as well as nations is to represent the relationship of ethnic past to modern nation more accurately and convincingly”.

Smith (2010, p. 5-6) identifies five usages of nationalism within contemporary debates:

- 1) as a process of establishment or development of a nation
- 2) as a sentiment generating a sense of belonging to a nation
- 3) as a symbolic representation of a nation through traits such as language
- 4) as a socio-political movement
- 5) as an ideological framework of a nation

Modernism is based on the naïve assumption that the growth of universalism constitutes the tool towards establishing peace and rationality. However, the emergence and increasing importance of this philosophy during the Enlightenment period was followed by outbursts of nationalist feelings whose intensity has been traditionally challenging modernity (Smith, 1991a, p. 143-160). Despite the rise of democratisation and secularisation, nationalism has been demonstrating remarkable resilience, establishing itself as the dominant ideology of modern states and capturing the hearts and minds of all social strata. Smith (2000) explains this resilience by praising the ability of the nationalist ideology to connect the past and the present meaningfully and provide a sense of self-worth within the modernist atomistic era.

Modernity has been accompanied by the delegitimisation of monarchy and by educational advancements which along with the decline of religion and the rise of atomisation, have further enhanced uncertainty in individual and collective terms. National self-identification “in a secular era is the surest way to surmount the finality of death and ensure a measure of personal immortality” (Smith, 1991a, p. 160). The idea of the nation possesses the unique ability to develop a meaningful connection between the past, present and future generations and offer the sense of eternal life as a substitute for religious belief, expressed through the glorification of flags or sacrificed heroes (Smith, 2000).

Smith (2000, p. 792) posits sacredness at the heart of any nation-building process and assumes that the rise of modernity has rendered the nation as the major deity i.e., as a “sacred communion of citizens”, and nationalism as the dominant form of religious belief i.e., “a form of political religion” (Smith, 2010, p. 45) which allows individuals to give meaning to their lives in a modern world characterised by extreme materialism and individualism. A strong sense of attachment to the idea of the nation enables

individuals to establish a clear separation between the tragic reality of material life and their own emotional and ideological life. In other words, nations, acting as the ultimate representations of sacredness, generate a perceived distinction between sacred (i.e., national) and profane (i.e., modernist) realms (Smith, 2000; Malesevic, 2004).

Ethnies as pre-modern communal bases

Anthony Smith offers a middle position between modernist theories claiming that nations and nationalism are characterised by a recent, invented and constructed character (Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 1991; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) and traditional / primordial approaches claiming that nations are characterised by a permanent and eternal existence (Geertz, 1973; Armstrong, 1982). He appreciates the role of the history of nations, stressing the importance of accurately and convincingly representing the relationship of ethnic past and modern state. He assumes that the concept of the nation has been “coextensive with every larger territorial and cultural identity in any epoch” (Smith, 2007, p. 53).

The fundamental component of Smith’s (1986) understanding of nationalism, is the presence of a strong bond of solidarity to the idea of the nation and to other members of the nation i.e., a strong feeling of commitment to the community expressed in an altruistic manner which overrides any other form of collective identification such as class or religion. Despite solidarity changing over time to incorporate various societal strata, Smith (1986, p. 3) argues that “to speak of a genuine ethnies, this sense of solidarity and community must animate at least the educated upper strata, who can, if need be, communicate it to other strata and regions in the community”.

The idea of nationalism emanates from a dominant ideology based on previously established systems of kinship, religion, values, ideas and perceptions and “involves some sense of political community, history, territory, patria, citizenship, common values and traditions” (Smith, 1991a, p. 9). The modern nation is defined as “a named population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for its members” (Smith, 1991a, p. 14). A state can be termed as a nation-state only in the case of inhabitancy of its boundaries by a single ethnic and cultural population.

Smith (1991a, p. 19-42) recognises and appreciates the unique and extraordinary character of modernity in terms of constructing a certain structural framework for the emergence of nationalism and its establishment as a compact ideology. However, he argues that ethnic elements survive and can be observed within modern nations which have pre-modern communal bases and forms of collective cultural identity in the form of ethnies i.e., communities of shared myths and memories. As collective identities, they refer to “a sense of continuity on the part of successive generations of a given cultural unit of population, to shared memories of earlier events and periods in the history of that unit and to notions entertained by each generation about the collective destiny of that unit and its culture” (Smith, 1991a, p. 25). Their creation originates either from a division i.e., disintegration of a larger group, or a coalescence i.e., fusion of smaller cultural groups, and despite being vulnerable to external influences such as religion or warfare, once established, they are characterised by remarkable stability, continuity and endurance and possess the ability to determine the process of nation formation and the degree of social mobilisation (Smith, 1986, p. 21-46).

Historical development is understood as having a mission. The transition away from ethnies and towards nations is considered a natural inevitable development and evolutionary process due to the emergence of the modern ideology of nationalism and the historical circumstances which occurred since the eighteenth century and corresponds to a broader socio-historical shift away from tradition and towards modernity (Smith, 1986, p. 153-157). Despite some ethnies being subject to disappearance or assimilation, most of them are subject to a continuous process of politicisation and are destined to become nations which constitute the most functional vessels of modernity. This historical development consists of three components: (a) the development of capitalism (b) the emergence of a bureaucratic and cultural centralisation (c) the loss of religious power (Smith, 1986, p. 153-173).

The six main components of ethnies are (Smith, 1986, p. 32):

1. collective proper name
2. myth of common ancestry
3. shared historical memories
4. shared cultural distinctiveness
5. historical association with a demarcated territory

6. sense of solidarity among the community members

Thus, Smith (1991a, p. 33) emphasises the perceived cultural affinity of a community with its ethnic past and the fact that despite all the changes this community was subject to, it is still recognised as the same community; whether an ethnies, a nation or an ethnies in the process of being a nation. In the modern era, nationalism will act as “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential nation” (Smith, 1991a, p. 73). Smith’s deep research on the role of myths, memories, values, traditions and symbols assists in understanding the uniqueness of each culture and the fate of each ethnic community.

The conceptualisation of ethnies as traditional communities and nations as their evolutionary modern equivalent, portrays the presence of two distinct forms of collectivity which encompass a shared collective. This collective could be defined as “the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society [that] forms a determinate system which has its own life” (Durkheim, 1933, p. 79). Despite the fact that the collective seems stronger in traditional communities due to individuality being easily overpowered, it continues to influence modern societies despite the pressures exerted by the division of labour and the increasing importance of individuality (Malesevic, 2004).

Unlike ethnies which are characterised by a lack of diversity, simplicity and low levels of interaction, nations are characterised by a more intensive division of labour which facilitates a rise in social mobility and differentiation. They tend to develop a common public culture, a unitary economic structure and written laws and regulations which all together contribute towards creating a sense of inter-reliance and establishing an operational advantage compared to ethnies (Smith, 2002). Therefore, modernity entails the transformation of solidarity based on kinship to solidarity based on interdependence i.e., the replacement of mechanical solidarity by organic solidarity (Malesevic, 2004, p. 562).

Smith (1991a, p. 19-42) holds firm in his belief that trans-generational values, ideas and beliefs define ethnies and nations as distinct and long-standing, despite appreciating the impact of political elites in influencing mass behaviour and of capitalism in

generating disparities. These shared values, ideas and beliefs are expressed through myths and memories which develop a sense of similarity among the members of a group and render ethnies and nations as eloquent moral communities. Collective mythologies enable the members of a group to understand their past, develop a sense of a common descent and establish moral parameters in order to build their future based on their perceived past. In the absence of such myths, “a group cannot define itself to itself or to others” (Smith, 1986, p. 25).

Smith (1991b, p. 63-68) refers to six distinct components of ethnic mythologisation:

- 1) myth of chronological origins to determine location across time
- 2) myth of geographical location to determine a specific territory
- 3) myth of ancestry to develop a sense of kinship
- 4) myth of heroic past to characterise an era as the group’s ‘golden age’
- 5) myth of moral decay to generate resentment towards the current collective moral order
- 6) myth of regeneration to construct the need for collective reawakening

This bundle of myths creates a meaningful narrative which situates itself above any individual hypostasis and develops a sense of link between the present and the past which acts as a tool towards establishing ontological security (Malesevic, 2004, p. 571). The ethnie does not only assist in maintaining a sense of identity, but also contributes to its creation, since the sense of attachment is based on the existence of communal borders which determine individual and collective morality. As Durkheim (1986, p. 202) states: “man is a moral being only because he lives within established societies”. The societies possess the ability to construct a form of collective character which establishes rules of ethical behaviour. Morality acquires value only when there is an attachment to a group and what renders a group distinct is its tendency towards morality.

Since nations constitute extensions of ethnies, they are also composed of a particular bundle of values, ideas and beliefs. However, unlike ethnies, nations are characterised by a more comprehensively defined and institutionalised bundle which is expressed through references to common memories and history. Ethno-historical narratives usually emphasise elements of heroism to promote a familiar portrayal of history and

depict the nation as a coherent agent that has overcome difficulties across different epochs to arrive to its current form (Smith, 1986, p. 200-208). These narratives determine both the traditions and the moral requirements of the members while the stance and loyalty towards the group determine the degree of morality. The maintenance of traditions and preservation of memories corresponds to the development of a sense of loyalty towards the ancestry while any deviation corresponds to a sign of moral weakness. Thus, ethno-history and collective memories become the underpinning of modern nations and provide “an inner standard for the community, an *exemplum virtutis* for subsequent emulation” (Smith, 2007, p. 63).

Ritualistic practices which resemble practices employed by religious groups, such as “parades, remembrance ceremonies, anniversary celebrations, monuments to the fallen, oaths, coinage, flags, eulogies of heroes and memorials of heroic events” (Smith, 1991a, p. 162) ensure the continuation of the nation through repetitive articulation of values and beliefs and remind the members regarding the elements which should be preserved to maintain its uniqueness. In the absence of such an articulation, national identity disintegrates and the moral order collapses.

Smith’s understanding of the idea of the nation allows space for the incorporation of individual action and a distinction between the structure and the agency. Undoubtedly national identity constitutes the dominant form of collective identification; yet, Smith (1991a, p. 175) recognises flexibility, accepting that attachment can take various forms due to the existence of divisions in terms of gender, religion or class. Thus, every human being is characterised by multiple identities of various intensities dependent on the degree of pressures exerted across different social contexts. For example, a person may overly focus on his / her gender identity when present in a group composed of persons of the opposite gender or overly focus on his / her religious identity when present in a group composed of persons of other religions (Malesevic, 2004, p. 575). Smith (1991b, p. 230) differentiates between individual and collective identities arguing that the former is usually optional while the latter is not and thus, is characterised by enhanced stability and resistance to social circumstances. Thus, primacy is assigned to the collective over the individual identity.

Civic and ethnic types of nationalism

Hans Kohn (1967) was the first to develop the ethnic-civic dichotomy and argue that nationalism can encompass both organic ethnic elements and voluntary civic ones; a typology which continues to possess high levels of influence within academic circles (Ignatieff, 1993; Brubaker, 1996). Through reference to contradictions between the West and the East, Kohn (1967) argued for a distinct Western nationalism socially based on civic institutions and a bourgeoisie and a distinct Eastern nationalism of organic nature in the absence of institutions and dependent upon intellectuals responsible for articulating nationalistic ideals. In the West, nationalism encompassed political elements and was conceptually attached to individual liberty and rational cosmopolitanism, was preceded by or coexisted with the commencement of nation-building processes and did not develop based on historical myths and memories. In the East, nationalism emerged after nation-building processes, encompassed cultural elements and developed based on the regeneration by intellectuals of historical myths, memories, symbols and identities, in the existence of frontiers of states and nations rarely coinciding (Kohn, 1967, p. 329-330).

Smith (1986, p. 124-138), in accordance with Kohn (1967), argues that modernity can take two different routes: towards civic or ethnic types of nationhood. These two routes constitute the outcomes of the prior existence of lateral and vertical types of ethnies across history. Lateral ethnies tend to consist mainly of individuals within the higher classes of the society (e.g., aristocracy) while vertical ethnies tend to consist of individuals originating from various social strata. Thus, their inherent social diversity has been the one to determine their transformation into either civic or ethnic nations.

The rise of modernity facilitated the establishment of institutions compatible with the nation-state entity and the modern era. However, the developmental pattern of this transition is determined by the distinct roots of ethnies i.e., it can occur either from above through a bureaucratic state which forges a nation or from below through social mobilisation and the establishment of a nation which forges a state. These two divergent forms of nation-formation constitute distinct articulations of modernity and generate diverse forms of social conflict (Smith, 1998, p. 194). This pluralistic perspective is congruent with ongoing debates regarding 'multiple modernity's' (Eisenstadt, 2000) and provides the most convincing explanation to the two distinct forms of organic solidarity i.e., cultural and political.

The distinction between civic and ethnic types of nationalism constitutes the most appropriate tool in terms of contextualising sub-state nationalism. Civic nationalism is associated with modern notions such as citizenship, self-determination, state institutions and democracy while ethnic nationalism is associated with historical and perennial features of nationhood. In the modern world, these two types of nationalism often seem to overlap each other. Despite sub-state nationalist groups, such as the Kurds or the Catalans, employing ethnic nationalism by focusing on the long-standing historical existence of their identity and ethnicity, at the same time, they employ civic nationalism as well, by attempting to provide justification to their purposes by referring to liberal and democratic principles such as self-determination. Therefore, this deliberate association constructed between the self-identification due to historical factors and the right to self-determination, enables the democratic right of such nations to possess their own state, in order to acquire legitimacy.

Smith's understanding as a basis for future research

Smith's ideas have become increasingly influential within the field of nationalism studies, offering a meaningful connection between premodern and modern forms of social organisation without ignoring the fundamental role of modernity. Hutchinson (1987), for instance, employs an ethno-symbolist approach to make a distinction between political and cultural nationalism which are often in direct opposition to each other while Leoussi and Grosby (2007) through an ethno-symbolist lens argue for a fundamental role of history, culture and ethnicity in the formation of nation states. Scholars such as Armstrong (2007) and Gerber (2007) have used an ethno-symbolic approach to analyse and explain the development of Middle Eastern nationalisms.

When it comes to the Kurds, Martin Van Bruinessen (1992, p. 267) should be considered as a prominent scholar in terms of offering a meaningful connection between premodern and modern forms of social organisation by rejecting pure primordial claims, asserting the existence of Kurdish awareness as a distinct group across time and recognising the recently enhanced significance of Kurdish nationalism as a social force. In a similar manner, Olson (1991) argues for a historical continuity of the Kurds since antiquity and for the emergence of Kurdish nationalism only after 1800 while Hassanpour (1992, p. 62) insists on a historically formed community whose national awakening occurred across the 17th century. Bajalan (2016), in his analysis of

Kurdish nationalism at the beginning of the 20th century, asserts that the Kurdish movement used to be cultural and apolitical in orientation but Kurdish intellectuals at the time were committed to the Ottoman institutions through political activities.

Focusing further on Smith's ideas, an admirable outcome in terms of deconstructing the fluid and dynamic phenomenon of national identity is noted. Smith's (1986, p. 32) framework provides a comprehensive analysis of the cultural components the idea of the nation such as values, beliefs and languages which demonstrate a remarkable resistance to the pressures exerted by time and are transmitted from generation to generation. The process of consciously situating yourself within a specific culture generates the gradual development of solidarity among the members of a nation and the feeling of being a component of a unique community. Antiquity acts as a source of legitimacy for a nation and its culture, through the development of the consciousness that a continuity exists i.e., a link between individuals and their ancestors. Nations tend to go back to admirable national achievements or dreadful experiences in order to awaken national feelings and develop a collective memory. The consciousness of belonging to a community which proved capable of achieving something important in the past generates the belief that such achievements could and should be repeated in the future.

The psychological aspect emerges from the consciousness of forming a group based on the perceived unity which characterises the members of the nation. This unity can remain latent for long periods of time, but re-emerge once a perceived enemy threatens the members of the group, their culture, or their territory. The subjectivity of the components of national identity is not the one to matter; instead, what matters is whether they are perceived as real by the members of a group i.e., perceived rather than chronological history (Connor, 1994, p. 202). The tendency and readiness of people to sacrifice their lives for their nations demonstrates the intensity of such a perception. Smith (2002, p. 5-32) does not ignore the fact that certain perceived ancient nationalist myths constitute modern inventions; however, what matters is that such myths are perceived as true. This emotional bond which is directly related to the familiarisation with death portrays the psychological aspect of the nation. It generates a sense of belonging which usually encompasses loyalty and social coherence among the members of the nation. This belief in a common ancestry stimulates strong sentiments

of love for the nation and renders any calls for action through reference to its distinctive characteristics, as opportunities to contributing heroically towards a higher aim; that of preserving the nation.

For centuries, local communities represented the limits of the individuals' perceived territory since all social aspects were concentrated around them and identities of people were determined by their role within them. As Anderson (1991) argues, media and education facilitated a large shift by enabling people to perceive their nation as their homeland; most of them did not have the chance to travel all around their national territories. Smith (2002, p. 22) indicates that "nations for nationalists, are special kind of spatial communities, those that can trace their origins or roots to specific ancestral landscapes". The rise of international communication has contributed to creating awareness regarding the territorial boundaries of nations.

The political dimension of the idea of the nation is directly related to the emergence of the modern notion of the nation-state which was accompanied by a tendency to establish cultural homogenisation within its territorial boundaries. The fact that many states are composed of diverse nations, has been often disregarded and the cultural imposition of the dominant group has been sought, in an effort to establish a single nation. The nation-state established itself to its current form during the 18th century when territorial units were consolidated by bureaucratic states. This establishment was accompanied by a dramatic shift in the relations between the 'ruler' and the 'ruled', due to the development of education and the spread of new ideas such as liberty, equality and that the power should emanate from public consent. The previous understanding that legitimacy emanated from the 'ruler' was replaced by the belief that legitimacy should emanate from the 'ruled'. The facilitation of modern nationalism enabled the nation, through the personification of symbols and rituals, to develop a sense of attachment to a community while through the establishment of legal, political and social rights, to develop a sense of citizenship (Guibernau, 2001, p. 242-268). As Heater (1990, p. 21) mentions, the cultural concept of nationality was subject to politicisation which reveals that the political dimension of the idea of the nation should be directly related to strategies of nation-building. This process requires a unique approach to track change across time and space that will be thoroughly analysed in the next section.

While appreciating the theoretical strengths of ethno-symbolism, it remains equally important to refer to its limitations. Smith's (2002) definition of the nation is suffering from the absence of a clear distinction between the concepts of the nation and the state. He attributes to the nation some citizenship features considered by some as distinct features of a state such as the sharing of legal rights and duties among all of its members (Connor, 2004) which creates difficulties in incorporating nations without states, such as the Kurds, within his definition. In accordance with Conversi (2007, p. 25), this thesis argues that "state and stateless nationalisms should be treated separately, because the latter cannot enjoy the monopoly of information and exert over-whelming control of the media". Yet, it also argues that the ethno-symbolist connection between primordial ethnies and modern nations allows the analysis of nations without states, based on their progression along their ethnic past and their modern evolution.

5. Nationalism across a morphogenetic cycle

The Critical Realist philosophical stance has been increasingly influential across the fields of Political Theory, Political Science and International Relations in an effort to analyse change across time and space as demonstrated by the academic contribution of scholars such as Jessop (2007) who developed an approach to the dialectics of structure and strategy in the exercise of state power, Wight (2005) who explored the implications of ontology on the theoretical landscape, Kurki (2008) who argued for an re-interpretation of the meaning, aims and methods of causal analysis and Joseph (2012) who developed a relation between social ideas and world governance. However, no specific example of its methodological application is evident within the field of nationalism studies. Recognising the cultural, political and psychological aspects of the concept of the nation, this thesis argues for the important of developing an approach capable of examining nationalistic change across time and space and evaluating the effect of agents and social structures across this process. Towards this direction, it attempts to trace the development of nationalism within the structure-agency context and understands structure and agency as two distinct levels of stratified social reality. The two levels possess their own unique emergent properties which are real and causally related, but irreducible to one another. The main challenge in analysing them lies on the difficulty of accurately establishing a theoretical link between them, rather than conflating them. Conflation which has been established as the dominant practical

approach tends to be employed in three ways: (a) upwardly, through the holistic consideration of individual actions (b) downwardly, through the structural coordination and arrangement of agents (c) centrally, through the assumption that structure and agency are mutually constitutive and should be elided.

Social reality is not similar to any other kind of reality, due to its human constitution. It differs from natural reality, since nature is characterised by self-subsistence and by the absence of any existential dependence on human action, and from transcendental reality, since divinity is also characterised by self-subsistence and possesses qualities which remain unresponsive to human intervention. Society has three distinct features. Firstly, it cannot be separated from its human constitution since its very existence is fully dependent on human activities. Secondly, it is transformable due to the absence of any immutable or preferred state; its state is subject to the actions of humans and to the consequences of these actions. Thirdly, neither the social agents are immutable; they are also affected by the society and by any efforts to transform it. Thus, the task of understanding the relationship between the structure and the agency should derive from what the society intrinsically is (Archer, 1995, p. 1).

Archer (1995, p. 1) demonstrates the reality of the social condition of human beings by referring to the feeling of freedom which accompanies it which is contradicted to the inescapable awareness “of its constraints, sanctions and restrictions on our ambitions – be they for good or for evil”. Freedom emanates from the nature of social reality while constraints emanate from the reflexivity of human nature. Archer (1995, p. 2) claims that a potential recognition of any laws unaltered by the use or abuse of freedom, would render “moral responsibility meaningless, political action worthless and self-reflection pointless”.

Margaret Archer (1995), like Giddens (1979), argues that agents and structures cannot be conceptually separated; instead, they should be understood through a form of dualism of agents and structures, with each pole being treated separately i.e., by employing a critical realist ontological understanding of the social world. A critical realist social ontology asserts that the social world is characterised by openness and consists of activity affecting the behaviour of human agents that in certain cases can be perceived by the agents themselves and in others not. The social structures which are situated and which function within this social world are dialectically and causally

related to the occurrence of events and practices and should be granted an ontological status (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 9).

The two dominant approaches - i.e., methodological individualism and sociological holism - remain inadequate due to representing upward and downward conflation. Upward conflation promotes the disappearance of society and its replacement by an aggregated individual action (Webber, 1949) while downward conflation promotes the disappearance of agents, with individuals acting according to certain social norms and structures (Durkheim, 2009). The actions of people always take place within social or cultural structural contexts while causality should be understood within the context of human relations rather within a context of functional relations. Thus, Archer (1995) argues that the two poles constitute distinct realities and none is superior to the other.

However, the analytical dualism of the morphogenetic approach poses itself against Giddens's (1979) duality of structure which assimilates structure into agency through the understanding of structure as rules. Archer's (1995) dualism stresses the importance of analytically distinguishing between structure and agency which despite being causally interrelated, remain ontologically distinct. For Archer (1995), structure does not correspond to a set of rules, but to relations among the human actors or the social positions on which human actors are situated e.g., power, competition, dependency. Thus, analytical dualism distinguishes between structure i.e., social relations, and the agency i.e., people within any social structural arrangement.

Archer (1995), in an effort to avoid conflation, distinguishes also between culture and structure by referring to the ideal and the material or to the subjective and the objective; thus, maintaining one more dualism. Culture corresponds to the subjective cultural system determined by idealistic perceptions which is collectively produced while structure corresponds to the objective social structures determined by material interests. Change across time and space can be the outcome of either structural or cultural motivations. In this way, the relative autonomy and distinctiveness of cultural systems, social structures and agency, is acknowledged. At the same time, the people (i.e., the agency) are not solely occupiers of certain social positions, but possess material interests and idealistic perceptions which direct the way they act.

The morphogenetic approach

The morphogenetic approach depicts a dialectical relation to the structure-agency problem, by acting as an explanatory methodology to be practically used by analysts and holding a regulatory role by refusing to “countenance any form of conflationary theorising at the practical level” (Archer, 1995, p. 6). The ‘morpho’ element demonstrates the absence of any pre-set or preferred societal state while the ‘genetic’ element demonstrates the idea that the society is formed by the actions of agents and the consequences of these actions (Archer, 1995, p. 5). The approach constitutes the sociological component of transcendental realism; a philosophy of science and theoretical stance developed by Roy Bhaskar (2008) which argues for a stratification of ontology. More specifically Bhaskar (2008, p. 56) distinguishes between the empirical events experienced by the agency, the actual occurrence of practices and the unobserved social reality that cannot be manifested in terms of events or practices, with the three layers being collectively understood as a unitary realm of complex interaction and each one possessing its own unique properties.

Morphogenesis applies at all levels, from the capitalist system to the individual identity. Archer (1995) conceives ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ only as relational terms i.e., a certain stratum can be a micro or macro with regard to the stratum you relate it with. However, what justifies this differentiation of strata is the belief that properties across various levels possess a degree of autonomy from each other; she names this autonomy as ‘emergence’. For instance, the local, regional, national and international levels in a morphogenetic cyclical context are considered different strata related to each other with each possessing its own ‘emergence properties’. Archer (1995, p. 9) urges for augmented attention to these emergent properties affecting different strata pertaining to the macro level but not to the micro, despite having elaborated from it. Such properties are “relational, arising out of combination (e.g., the division of labour from which high productivity emerges), where the latter is capable of reacting back on the former (e.g., producing monotonous work), has its own causal powers (e.g., the differential wealth of nations), which are causally irreducible to the powers of its components (individual workers)” (Archer, 1995, p. 9).

Thus, social reality possesses a stratified nature since emergent properties and powers vary across different strata. A particular bundle of emergent properties corresponds to a specific society at a given time (Archer, 1995, p. 10). Archer (1995, p. 11) offers a

different way of understanding micro and macro rather than small to large; she refers to systemic properties which tend to represent the macro context and local social interaction which tends to represent the micro context. Social activities between people form the environment through which macro features are either sustained or transformed. This demonstrates the understanding of social properties as emergent properties. Emergent properties can act across all levels due to emanating from social interaction and creating an interplay which necessitates their examination. Moreover, Archer (1995, p. 138) characterises this autonomy as temporal: “such structural properties were neither the creation of contemporary actors nor are ontologically reducible to material existents (raw resources) and dependent upon current acts of human instantiations (rule governed) for all their current effects”. Thus, the properties are real and possess causal power and a full ontological character, providing a ‘realist’ element to Archer’s (1995) morphogenetic cyclical framework.

Morphogenesis is the idea that agents and social structures are in a constant process of change; this process has an interlocking and complex character. The genesis of agents takes place within the context of a bundle of social structures such as norms, ideas, values, power relationships or language communities. Across time, these structures are subject to adaptation or change as well due to the activities and choices of individuals within them. Archer (1995, p. 16) situates this ontology within a cyclical framework which follows change over time: structural conditioning stimulates social interaction and social interaction stimulates structural elaboration. She understands the relationship between the actor and the society as a reflection of a historical transition of social processes via formation and transformation (1995, p. 154).

Archer (1995) claims that actors are socially constituted and situated. Structural and cultural circumstances are the ones to trigger the actions of individuals. Structural motivations emanate from interests embedded in social positions while cultural motivations emanate from values, commitments or concerns. Across time, people’s actions occur within these circumstances and gradually structural / cultural elaboration takes place where these circumstances are either sustained or altered by human actions. This leads to a point where these sustained or altered circumstances constitute the new status for a further analysis of action (1995, p. 193).

The framework has been used across various contexts within the broad field of social sciences in recent years, in an effort to understand and explain the relationship between agency, culture and structure. Examples include Horrock's (2009) study on organisational change in the British Local Government, Clubb's and McDaid's (2019) research on the role of ideology and cultural systems in radicalisation and de-radicalisation and Wielecki's (2020) research on the contemporary civilisational crisis. Appreciating the importance of deviating from static understandings of identity, the thesis aims at incorporating the framework within the field of nationalism studies in an effort to facilitate the analysis of nationalistic change across time and space.

6. Aims and objectives

The primary aim of the current thesis has been the development of an appropriate methodological framework through which the development of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq after 2003 would be convincingly analysed across time and space. Towards this direction, this study has analysed major changes that occurred across this period in the form of internal or external dynamics in order to understand how nationalism as a phenomenon has been reshaped or evolved subject to those dynamics. The research objectives and claims to originality of the current study are:

1. The theoretical and empirical contribution to the nationalism debate by demonstrating a case of a modern nation which has been gradually constructed around a pre-modern ethnic core and the academic reinforcement of the ethno-symbolist school of thought with regard to Iraqi Kurdistan
2. The ontological appreciation of both observed and unobserved structures in the social world in a Critical Realist manner which accounts for the fact that agency, culture and social structures are in a constant cyclical process of change of an interlocking and complex character, with nationalism being subject to change within this context
3. The theoretical development and methodological application of a morphogenetic cyclical framework encompassing the effects of social, historical, economic and political factors, to examine the post-2003 development of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq and determine certain circumstances which facilitated or hampered this development

4. The empirical exploration of how civic and ethnic elements have interacted in the case of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq to generate nationalistic distinctiveness

The three core research questions of the study are the following:

1. To what extent has the post-2003 trajectory of Iraqi Kurdish nationalism been affected by social, economic, political and ideological factors across time and space?
2. To what extent has Iraqi Kurdish nationalism been enhanced with civic elements subject to the political development of the region?
3. To what extent have the post-2003 decisions of political elites in Iraqi Kurdistan been influenced by the ethnic structures of nationalism in the form of an ethno-nationalist project?

7. Methodology

As mentioned, the analysis of the Kurdish nationalistic development will occur within the morphogenetic cyclical framework in accordance with Margaret Archer's (1995) Critical Realist social ontology. In this way, the complexities which characterise the phenomenon of nationalism will be appropriately captured and convincingly understood and analysed across time and space. In accordance with Archer (1995), this thesis claims that the 'genesis' of Kurdish agents takes place within a specific structural context determined by elements such as norms, values and ideas which can be understood to a large extent through the employment of the ethno-symbolist theory. However, the actions of agents across time and space subject to material motivations (for instance, the willingness to acquire social or power positions) or cultural motivations (for instance, the commitment towards an ethnic community) generate processes of structural or cultural elaboration and contribute towards a revised understanding of the nature of nationalism which, in turn, alters the behaviour of political elites and the expectations of the agents. The proposed framework is ideal in terms of explaining the enrichment of a purely ethnical nationalist sentiment with more political or civic elements. The Kurdish nation represents a community of people culturally distinct when compared to other communities in the region, satisfying the six components of 'ethnies' as identified by Anthony Smith (1986, p. 32), and composed of agents possessing a strong sentimental attachment to the community expressed in an

altruistic manner. However, their separation across different states and the failure of political processes of inclusiveness, led to distinct notions of inclusion and exclusion, distinct sentiments of belonging and distinct manifestations of Kurdish nationalism.

In terms of data collection, this research combines both primary and secondary data. Primary data for the purpose of the study has been obtained through qualitative semi-structured interviews with Kurdish academics and policymakers of Iraqi Kurdistan conducted in March and April 2020 through Skype. Due to the expertise of the selected interviewees on the researched field and the qualitative nature of the conducted research, their consent for a named use of the information provided has been obtained, in an effort to enhance the reliability and strength of the research's findings. It is important to mention that subject to the situation related to COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken by the Kurdistan Regional Government in an effort to tackle it, a significant number of interviews with Kurdish politicians were cancelled in March 2020 across the period during which the author travelled to Iraqi Kurdistan for field work research purposes. Secondary data has been obtained through books, journal articles, online sources, speech transcripts, political documents, organisational documents and audio and visual content reproduced across the Internet.

Regarding the selection of the participants, this was based on an evident academic engagement with the Kurdish nationalistic development and the regional policies of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. The interviews were divided in five sections which were directly related to the five chapters of the current thesis: (a) the first section was focused on the feeling of Kurdish identity and the definition of Kurdish nationalism (b) the second section was focused on the political, ideological, economic and social spaces across which the Kurds functioned throughout history (c) the third section was focused on the ethnic understanding of nationalism and its interaction with traditional structures, ideological structures and sovereign structures of power (d) the fourth section was focused on the civic understanding of nationalism, the establishment of the KRG and its subsequent regional policies (e) the fifth section was focused on the post-2003 economic, ideological and political development of the Iraqi Kurdistan region, the agenda of the Iraqi Kurdish political elites and its interaction with regional trends, intra-national agendas and inter-national agendas. The responses provided empirical strength which further reinforced the theoretical strength of arguments. Conflicting views on

areas of discussion presented across the thesis have generated critical engagement in an effort to inform the development of constructed arguments.

CHAPTER II: The History of Kurdish nationalism

1. Introduction

This chapter will provide a historical account of the Kurdish nation and Kurdish nationalism. As mentioned, this thesis recognises and appreciates the unique and extraordinary role of modernity in terms of providing a certain structural framework for the emergence of nationalism and its establishment as a compact ideology. However, as argued in the previous chapter, ethnic elements do survive across time and space and can be observed within modern nations. In order to develop an accurate and meaningful connection between historic past and the perception of a shared identity and the strong bond of solidarity to the idea of nation altruistically expressed, it is important to determine the ethnic core of the Kurdish nation in the form of shared myths and memories and explain how it has been enriched and survived across time and space. A Critical Realist framework (Archer, 1995) will be employed to trace, analyse and explain the nationalistic trajectory of the Kurds with a particular emphasis on the case of the Iraqi Kurds and the distinct context experienced after the establishment of the modern Iraqi state which not only determined their own nationalistic trajectory but also generated a fundamentally distinct nationalist project.

The chapter will start by referring to the origins of the Kurdish nation and Kurdish nationalism by employing Anthony Smith's (1986) ethno-symbolist understanding of nationalism. It will then analyse the Kurdish national development across the Ottoman period and the social changes that occurred until and after its collapse of the Empire. A similar analysis will follow with regard to the years after the establishment of the modern Iraqi state and more specifically the fall of the Monarchy, the commencement of the Kurdish Liberation Movement and the rise of the Ba'ath Party onto power. The chapter will then engage with the resurgence of the national movement and the regime's brutal response through the Anfal Campaign to conclude by referring to the March 1991 uprisings, the Ba'athist withdrawal and the establishment of an autonomous region and of a regional government which altered fundamentally the nature of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq.

2. The origins of the Kurdish nation and Kurdish nationalism

One of the main issues when it comes to determining the origins of the Kurds is the issue of classification. The absence of a Kurdish statehood has generated uncertainty with regard to whether they should be classified as a nation, an ethnic group or simply as a group of people that was subject to interaction with neighbouring groups in the region. This thesis deviates from the state-centric understanding of the national aspect of identity to assert that “the world is divided into nations, each with its own character and identity” (Smith, 2007, p. 149). This deviation is necessary when engaging with the Middle East region, where groups have been through different stages in terms of their nationalistic development compared to European nations. Especially the Kurds have been characterised by a significant degree of ethno-nationalistic delay and have demonstrated a remarkable resistance to modernisation processes (Loizides, 2010). Thus, any reference to the Kurds across the thesis implies a community of people with unique characteristics which distinguishes them from other groups of people. Dilshad Hama emphasises the importance of incorporating the sentiment of belonging:

“The term Kurd is not only related to the actual ethnic, linguistic traits and the ancestral relations to the Kurdish ethnicity. It is mostly the feeling that someone is a Kurd and that he belongs to a community which belongs to the Kurdish nation. You do have actually people who are not ethnically Kurds but consider themselves as Kurds. You have people who are ethnically Kurds but consider themselves as belonging to other nations, sometimes even against Kurdish nationalism. It is a choice. Of course, I cannot call an English-speaking person as a Kurd. We have to consider the ethnic side of entity and not only the civil.”²

The Kurds constitute one of the ancient nations of the region, physically attached to their territory for thousands of years. In terms of the name given to the Kurdish nation, this obviously differs according to the chronological period and the subject providing the name while in terms of linguistic categorisation, the Kurdish language is widely accepted as a constituent of Indo-European languages (Jawad, 1981, p. 1). Despite not being able to determine and establish their exact chronological origins with absolute objectivity and certainty, historians tend to converge on the facts that the Kurds have Indo-European roots and that they have historically been the mixture of two categories of people: (a) an indigenous population located in the Zagros Mountains (b) groups that

² Interview with Dr Dilshad Hama: Head of IRD Department and Lecturer of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tishk International University [Conducted on: 03 April 2020].

gradually moved across time from India and Central Asia to the region. These two categories of people had significant cultural and linguistic similarities which facilitated the gradual construction of the pre-modern ethnic core of what we know today as the Kurdish nation (Khasbal, 1959, p. 13).

Randal (1998, p. 19) argues that since being nomads and herdsmen since 2400 BC, strong evidence of a culturally continuous pattern exists, which has survived for a much longer period than communities socially accepted and understood as nations within the European world. It is worth mentioning that Xenophon in 370 BC in his book 'Anabasis' mentions 'Khardoukhoi' as a group of mountain indigenous people that he experienced during his march back to Greece, implying a clear distinction between them and other regional ethnies (Yildiz, 2004, p. 7; Jawad, 1981, p. 1). Prominent scholars such as Hassanpour (1992) and Stansfield (2007) who have attempted to define the Kurdish ancestry through reference to geographic, linguistic, cultural and historic elements accounting for regional historic development, have classified Kurds as the descendants of the Medes that set up their own empire after seeking autonomy from the neo-Assyrian Empire in the 7th century BC.

The 'Sharafnama' – the first pan-Kurdish history – constitutes the most precise documentation of the Kurdish nation and acts as the evidence in the contemporary era that the Kurds survived across time through their unique history, culture, language, territory and desire for self-determination. It demonstrates that despite locational variations, there is a one and only origin of the Kurds which defines the modern Kurdish nation (Hassanpour, 1992, p. 56; Randal, 1998, p. 22). Moreover, it argues for the pre-modern existence of Kurdish nationalism, building a link between being a member of the community and struggling for national rights. Hassanpour (1992) employs the term 'Kurdayeti' to refer to Kurdish nationalism which stands for a well-structured and coherent bunch of ideas that was developed by the 1960s and represents "the idea of and struggle for relieving the Kurds from national oppression by uniting all parts of Kurdistan under the rule of an independent Kurdish state" (ibid., p. 62). He assigns particular attention on language and education which constitute essential components of nationalism acknowledging the importance of socio-economic and cultural circumstances in terms of determining or influencing the nationalistic process. It is worth noting that the idea of nationalism did not only emanate from inside Kurdistan.

The Kurdish diaspora played a prominent role in raising awareness among Kurdish elites. Especially Istanbul, which had close ties with the European world, was hugely influenced by the emergence of European nationalism while, as mentioned, the transition from a religious understanding of the Ottoman Empire towards a national one, accompanied by the emergence of the Turkish nationalism, facilitated the emergence of the Kurdish nationalism as well (Qani, 2006, p. 62).

Yet, the extent to which primordial history has determined the modern Kurdish nation, remains a matter of academic debate and interest. Firm modernist scholars aligning with Gellner (1983) or Anderson (1991) would assume that Kurds constitute a people with a past and a history that is not clearly visible and well-defined and that their growing sense of belonging to their land and to their nation constitutes a social construction of the emergence of the nation-state system in accordance with their growing sense of opposition to other communities. The most notable, Abbas Vali (2003, p. 58-111), rejects the existence of a Kurdish nation before modern times and asserts that Kurdish nationalism becomes noticeable only at the beginning of the 20th century. On the contrary, this thesis claims that there is a relative perceived cultural affinity of the Kurdish community with its ethnic past and the fact that despite all the changes this community was subject to, it is still recognised as a community sharing a “totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society” (Durkheim, 1933, p. 79). The Kurdish *ethnie* – and, consequently, the Kurdish nation as well – satisfies to a large extent the main components of an *ethnie* as classified by Anthony Smith (1986, p. 32):

1. collective proper name; the Kurdish *ethnie* / nation
2. myth of common ancestry; the Kurdish ancestry
3. shared historical memories; Kurdish history translated into shared memories
4. shared cultural distinctiveness; the Kurdish unique culture
5. historical association with a demarcated territory; Kurdistan
6. sense of solidarity among the community members; as demonstrated by the resilience of the shared collective

At the same time, any attempt to determine an appropriate definition for the concepts of nation and nationalism should be accompanied by an equally appropriate appreciation of the fact that the nationalistic paths of several nations have come through

different and distinct developmental stages. The completion of processes of nation establishment is dependent on numerous factors; economic, social and political. It would be scientifically inappropriate to holistically generalise the idea of the nation, since the understanding of the concept according to European standards had been completely absent from the Middle East's understanding of the world for centuries, with Baban (2018) noting that “national identities and nation-building efforts [in the Middle East], rather than developing over time as part of new class relations and social formations, became entangled with modernisation, colonialism, and imperial redrawing of boundaries”.

Nationalism as a concept is relatively new to the region, owing, to a large extent, its emergence to the period during which the rulers of the Ottoman Empire started deviating from the religious understanding of the identity of the empire. As Gunter and Ahmed (2007, p. 7) argue, “Turkish, Iranian and Arab nationalisms largely emerged only after World War I, following the demise of Ottoman Empire and its emphasis on Islam as the supreme focus of one's loyalty”. As mentioned in the previous Chapter, every human being is characterised by multiple identities of various intensities dependent on the degree of pressures exerted across different social contexts (Malesevic, 2004, p. 575). In the same way that a person overly focusing on his religious identity when present in a group composed of persons of other religions, national identity became the dominant form of collective identification as a result of the national fragmentation due to the mentioned shift away from religious loyalty and towards national loyalty. Nationalistic opposition across the years – especially due to campaigns of political oppression and resettlement against ethnic minorities such as the Kurds and the Armenians by the Young Turks - further intensified this tendency towards nationalistic identification (Natali, 2005, p. 9).

Moreover, expressing the reality represented by a nation usually requires identification of significant linguistic, cultural or historical similarities within a demarcated territory. However, this is not the rule in the Middle East where according to Baban (2018, p. 351), “except for Iran, Turkey, and much later Israel, national states...emerged by way of imperial bargains”; thus, leading to a situation of multi-ethnic states encompassing different nations and nations such as the Kurds situated within the territorial boundaries of numerous states in the absence of a sovereign homeland of their own. When

Mustapha Barzani was once asked to define the identity of the Kurds, he defined a Kurd as ‘anyone who considers himself a Kurd’ (Nabaz, 2002, p. 35). Thus, implying that it is not the existence of the state that defines the nation; but rather the sense of belonging. Van Bruinessen (1992, p. 268) portrays this unambiguity by mentioning that Kurdishness “depending on the context and the speaker, it could refer to groups differently demarcated”. Many Kurdish intellectuals or representative of Kurdish nationalistic movements have attempted to define Kurdishness, with all converging on the fact that the sentiment of belonging constitutes the integral characteristic accompanied by an element of sacrifice (ibid.). Kurdish nationalism is assumed to encompass a strong sentiment of belonging to the spiritual reality of the nation accompanied by a willingness to participate in any potential struggle towards the establishment of national rights and to self-sacrifice for the fatherland (Nabaz, 2002, p. 34). Barin Kayaoglu elaborates on Kurdish nationalism, distinguishing between the desire for a homeland and a nation-state, saying:

“Kurdish nationalism is the notion that the Kurds are a people with a land, a history, a culture, a language and an understanding that they have a homeland. The tricky part, however, is not so much about whether they have a homeland or whether they deserve it, but whether they want to be a nation-state. There are many serious divisions about whether Kurds could or even should have a nation-state, a fully independent country, member of the United Nations recognised by the governments of the region and by the governments of the world. There are very serious disagreements among Kurds themselves. There are Kurds who recognise that they constitute an ethno-national group but do not want a separate nation-state. The big issue is where you draw the line between a homeland and a nation-state.”³

Towards this direction, this thesis argues that modern Kurdish nationalism has embraced a political meaning as well; the awareness of the Kurdish ethnic existence and of the struggle for self-determination should be accompanied by an aspiration for a sovereign homeland. The growth of this element has been facilitated by two factors. Firstly, the violent treatment experienced across modern history and the strong deprivation of national rights which created the underpinning for the advancement of Kurdish nationalism through the enhancement of national awareness. Secondly, the elevation of the nation-state as the ultimate form of authority which rendered

³ Interview with Dr Barin Kayaoglu: Assistant Professor of World History at the American University of Iraq [Conducted on: 10 May 2020].

sovereignty as the final step of the nationalistic development of a nation or of an ethnic group in the process of becoming a nation (Yack, 2001, p. 517).

3. The Ottoman Period

The modern origins of Kurdish nationalism should be traced back to the period when the Kurdish-inhabited areas were divided among the Ottoman and the Persian Empires. This division prevented a nationalistic growth congruent with that of neighbouring nations and the formation of a united territorial community. The location of Kurdistan was critical in terms of historical development with the two Empires being in a constant process of attempting to gain the Kurdish loyalty and exploit it (Romano, 2006, p. 3). Kurdish efforts were frequently being made to facilitate processes of state-building, fight the problem of illiteracy and transform the dominant religious understanding of identity to a nationalistic one, by linking nationalism with education and literacy (Qani, 2006, p. 66). Despite being non-collective, this effort to elevate the idea of the nation as the primary form of identification rather than religion, relied on the idea of deciding for one's own destiny i.e., feeling and action combined together. Moreover, the adverse effects of foreign oppression triggered elements of national awakening across various occasions within a society in which feudal organisation was dominant, being often temporarily successful in overcoming tribal or local attachments (Hassanpour, 1992, p. 55).

The Ottoman Empire encompassed numerous diverse ethnic groups and thus, unity, cohesion and stability had to be achieved by employing the instrument of an 'Imagined Ottomanism' (Arai, 1991). Kurds constituted one such group and were often able to run their own affairs through local administrations. Numerous Kurdish intellectuals and political leaders that witnessed the ideological changes and political advancements characterising the transition of neighbouring ethnic groups to nations, expressed a commitment towards Kurdish nationalism and attempted to spread it (Hassanpour, 1992). Their efforts were based on the assumption that the Kurdish people deserved a self-rule destiny similar to the one of the Persians and the Turks and this assumption absorbed further justification and legitimacy due to the unfair treatment that the Kurdish population was subject to. Throughout history, Kurdistan experienced periods of self-rule through Kurdish Emirates, principalities or administrations; these structures either resembled small states or enjoyed a relative degree of autonomy (Hassanpour, 1992, p.

50). However, this was only until the second half of the 19th century when the restructuring of the administration brought Kurdistan under the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. The Emirate of Baban, which was established in the 18th century and lasted until the 19th century, enjoyed excessively large autonomy during the rule of Abdulrahman Pasha and cultural advancements such as the establishment of a school of poetry, allowing a gradual deviation of priorities from matters of personal survival to matters of national interest (Amin, 2005, p. 152; Soane, 2007, p. 371).

The local autonomy enjoyed by the Kurds within their Principalities during the Ottoman period constructed a structural environment where the element of national awareness became an integral part among the people; the rule of the semi-independent Emirates formed the underpinnings based on which this element grew and was strengthened. Hassanpour (1992, p. 50) claims that certain features within these locally autonomous regions created an ideological space that nationalism came to fill as a compact and modern ideology; such features included the well-defined territorial borders, the existence of military units and the exercise of power. The modern reference to those periods of Kurdish self-rule functions in the form of a collective mythology indirectly expressing trans-generational values, ideas and beliefs and enabling the Kurdish agents to understand and appreciate their past, develop a sense of a common descent and establish moral parameters in order to build their future based on their perceived past. In accordance with Malesevic (2004, p. 571), such narratives construct a meaningful connection between the past and the present contributing towards ontological security.

Istanbul which was the capital of the Ottoman Empire was always considered the main intellectual centre, marked by the presence of Kurdish members of the intelligentsia. Traditionally, people tended to create groups of cooperation to express their resentment for the policies of the Empire while ethnic groups tended to form organisational structures to express their sense of national identity after realising the efforts of shifting the religious understanding of the Empire to an ethnic one (McDowall, 2004, p. 93; Gunter, 2007, p. 7). Towards the end of the 19th century, educated Kurdish figures appreciating the importance of organisation, facilitated the establishment of political and nationalist groups and parties; many of which were significantly important in terms of historical development (Ibid.).

Moreover, numerous figures across time challenged the authority of the Empire aiming either at sovereignty or enhancement of national rights (McDowall, 2004). Sheikh Ubeydullah constituted the primary Kurdish leader to initiate a movement towards the end of the 19th century with a territorial narrative and a clear goal of establishing a sovereign nation-state according to European standards, significantly influenced by similar revolts which were taking place within Europe at the same time (Qani, 2006, p. 69). This effort co-existed with an organised effort by the Ottomans to divert the Kurdish loyalty from national to religious (Gunter and Ahmed, 2007, p. 6). The reasons for the failure of the effort are various and lie beyond the scope of this thesis; however, they include the non-mobilisation of certain Kurdish segments, the lack of advanced military equipment, the maintenance of tribalism within certain groups, the collaboration among the two Empires and the international opposition; especially from Britain and Russia (ibid.). Nevertheless, regardless of whether such a claim can be substantiated, Kurdish ethno-historical narratives tend to present the movement as the first national one conducted by European standards, emphasising elements of heroism to promote a familiar portrayal of history and depict the nation as a coherent agent that has overcome difficulties across different epochs to arrive to its current form (Smith, 1986, p. 200-208). In this way, both the traditions and the moral requirements of the agents are determined by collective memories that constitute the underpinnings of the modern Kurdish nation.

In general, the process of nation-building should be understood as a constantly evolving project influenced by outside forces and processes; mainly the arrival of nationalism within the Ottoman Empire which enhanced the consciousness of ethnic distinctiveness and facilitated the emergence of a national commitment of representation to the outside world (McDowall, 2004, p. 93). Towards this direction, the respected Kurdish poet Haji Qadir Koyi attempted to inspire the Kurds during the 19th century, calling them to take the example of the European nations, to raise awareness, facilitate nationalistic development and contribute towards the establishment of a sovereign statehood through the use of two necessary tools; the pen and the sword (Hassanpour, 1992, p. 29). This constitutes just one of the numerous examples of intellectuals trying to spread nationalistic ideas; thus, aligning with Smith's (1986, p. 3) assertion that for ethnicities academically classified as genuine, their "sense of solidarity and community must animate at least the educated upper strata". Kurdish elites were critical in terms of

enhancing nationalistic growth while Kurdish newspapers in the 19th and early 20th century played a leading role in terms of spreading ideas. The first one called 'Kurdistan' was published towards the end of the 19th century, promoting the idea of a sovereign Kurdistan and gaining support for the Kurdish demands (Ozoglu, 2004, p. 122).

As mentioned, the unity of the Ottoman Empire used to rely on religion rather than ethnicity; thus, preventing nationalism from blossoming among the citizens of the Empire who emanated from different ethnic backgrounds. The sense of belonging was more directed towards the Caliph rather than the nation and thus, subjects of the Empire, such as the Kurds, did not demonstrate strong and clear nationalist sentiments (Rae, 2002, p. 52). Turkish nationalism emerged after the rise of European nationalism and as a response to nationalist understandings of identity by neighbouring groups challenging the Empire's territorial integrity. Before 1900, local identities such as region or kin either overpowered or were perceived as more important than other forms of identification (ibid.). What triggered enhanced nationalistic understandings of identity by different ethnic groups, was the emergence of nationalist claims, promoting homogenisation and the establishment of an ethnically pure Turkish identity for the Empire, despite incorporating non-Turkish ethnic groups.

Once it became clear that there was a tendency towards the construction of a Turkish identity, the non-Turkish nations of the Empire reacted by demanding the recognition of their national rights and territorial self-rule (McDowall, 2004, p. 93; Van Bruinessen, 1992, p. 269); thus, this process of homogenisation acted as a cultural motivation which facilitated a process of cultural elaboration, leading to a new status of enhanced nationalistic understandings of identity. Van Bruinessen (1992, p. 270) confirms that "the nationalism of other Muslim minorities emerged largely as a response and reaction to the increasing prominence of Turkish nationalism and pan-Turk aspiration" subject to the rise of the recognition that Turkish nationalism was getting a more organised and coherent form upon facing the collapse of the Empire.

It should be noted that despite the fact that the Empire was characterised by a distinctive religious orientation, elements of the Kurdish identity were visible both in Iraq and Turkey. It was the engagement with the Western concept of nation-state subject to the rise of nationalism across the European world and the enhanced nationalist feelings

among Arabs, Turks and Iranians and the internal developments within groups that contributed significantly in terms of raising ethnic awareness (Van Bruinessen, 1992, p. 270). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the transition away from ethnies and towards nations is considered as an evolutionary process subject to the emergence of the ideology of nationalism and the shift away from tradition and towards modernity (Smith, 1986, p. 153-157). Gunter and Ahmed (2007, p. 9) determine the chronological origins of this transition and claim that the nature of state policies has been the determinant factor to account for it and for the rise of Kurdish nationalism. The transition away from a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural realm to a nation-state realm along with reforms promoted by the Kemalists to facilitate the establishment of a Turkish nation state, facilitated the politicisation of the Kurdish cultural identity and received a strong response by Kurdish ethno-nationalism.

The de-centralisation and loss of autonomy for various regions, left no other option for Kurdish elites apart from mobilising people to demand enhanced national rights. Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji was the representative of such an effort demanding from Britain the establishment of the Kurdish language as an official language through the provision of a partially autonomous region to be run by Kurdish officials (Tripp, 2007, p. 33; Wimmer, 2002, p. 170). The efforts by a dominant ethnic group to establish its rule tends to be opposed by non-dominant ethnic groups; especially when these groups tend to face the pressures of a centralised educational or cultural system such as the one facilitated by the aforementioned policies. The Kurdish elite attempted to mobilise the population, with language - that always embodies “the unique inner experiences of the ethnie” (Smith, 2007, p. 66) - possessing a critical role; at the period during which Turkish nationalists attempted to promote homogenisation in terms of language and culture, they met the strong reaction of the Kurds. Attempts for linguistic or cultural imposition, facilitated the emergence and publication of Kurdish newspapers in Istanbul and Sulaymaniyah while political groups were also formed, aiming at raising national awareness and at demanding recognition of Kurdish national rights (Wimmer, 2002, p. 165).

The historical transition that occurred can be portrayed through the employment of Margaret Archer’s (1995) three-stage morphogenetic framework which assists in terms

of understanding the processual politicisation of the Kurdish identity as a response to efforts for homogenisation:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) refers to the large structural and cultural context of the Ottoman Rule within which Kurdish agents took shape and acted and the experienced transition away from a religious and towards a national understanding of the Empire
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) refers to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by structural and cultural motivations and more specifically the engagement with the Western concept of the nation-state and the perceived promoted reforms favouring homogenisation
- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the formation of a new set of structural and cultural constraints subject to the politicisation of the Kurdish national identity and the enhancement of the Kurdish national awareness

Thus, the growth of Kurdish nationalism during the 20th century, should be considered as mainly a response to the growing nationalist sentiments among neighbouring nations; primarily, the Turks but also the Arabs and the Iranians (Van Bruinessen, 1992, p. 270). The denial of national rights encouraged intellectuals, tribal leaders and poets to spread the consciousness of the need and duty to demand those rights. Kurdish elites took the responsibility of raising national awareness regarding a community with linguistic, cultural and social distinctiveness and of encouraging people to realise and demand national rights which were either deprived of them or not recognised. This enabled the development of a social force which challenged the political and power dynamics of the region (Van Bruinessen, 1992, p. 267). As Smith (1983b) argues, every nationalist movement is a representation of a social force willing to change the status quo and emanates from a deeper understanding of the elitism within the society. Time is required to transform this concept into a social or economic force for change and this explains to a large extent the Kurdish ethno-nationalistic delay and the fact that the idea did not develop into a material form due to economic, social, political and cultural factors. It only developed a more concrete form of an ideological framework during the late stages of the 18th century when a series of uprisings took place and during the first half of the 19th century when the Kurdish Emirates were established. Certain tribal leaders attempted to lead nationalist movements with Kurdish nationalism, according

to Van Bruinessen (1992, p. 267), especially at the beginning of the 20th century, challenging internal social boundaries of the Kurdish society. It is true that certain aristocrats attempted to play a leading role in the growth of nationalistic movements; however, according to McDowall (2004), the Kurdish national movement emerged from the poorer social strata.

A holistic appreciation of the historical context demonstrates the long-standing significance of tribal structures for the Kurdish society the role of which should not be disregarded, considering that nationalism has been in a constant process of interaction with those structures across time and spaces, challenging them across certain occasions and being overpowered across others (Yalcin-Heckmann, 1991, p. 102). According to Van Bruinessen (1992, p. 58), tribal membership has often been unstable and dependent on the capacity to provide security and satisfy material needs while until the 19th century, tribes were subordinated to the imperial authority of Emirates that constituted the dominant centres of power, with rulers subordinating their society, maintaining order and security (Ripper, 2000). However, the abolishment of the Emirates elevated tribal loyalty as the dominant form of social and political organisation due to generating security concerns and a power vacuum that tribalism came to fill (Bozarlsan, 2006, p. 133). An extensive analysis of tribal structures lies outside the scope of this thesis; however, it is important to note the selective cooperation of the Ottoman empire with northern Kurdish tribes, the loyalty of certain tribes towards the Sultan and their participation in centralised activities which further increased the sentimental gap and enhanced tribal divisions (Klein, 2011; Jongerden, 2012; Verheij, 2012).

4. The foundation of Iraq

The creation of the modern Iraqi state following the end of WWI represented the outcome of the willingness of European powers to dismember the Ottoman Empire into several states. The borders that were drawn were not based on significantly rational criteria, but rather on the interests of those powers in the absence of any consideration of the problems of multi-ethnicity and multi-religiousness (Dodge, 2003; Tripp, 2007; Dawisha, 2009). Wimmer (2002, p. 173) confirms that Iraq “owes its existence almost entirely to the constellation of forces among the European imperialist powers at the end of the war”. For example, the Mosul province was incorporated into the Iraqi state despite Arab speakers only constituting a minority within it and this was solely the

outcome of Britain's willingness to bring the oilfields under its control and to prevent the establishment of a Shiite majority within the new state (ibid.). The creation of Iraq was based on the assumption that different ethnicities had to be enforced to live within their boundaries without their will, with the population consisting of "21 percent Sunni Arab speakers, 14 percent mostly Sunni Kurdish speakers, 53 percent Shiite Arab speakers, 5 percent non-Muslim Arab speakers (such as the Baghdad Jews), and 6 percent other religious-linguistic groups" (Wimmer, 2002, p. 173). The end result was the escalation of violence and the development of extremely harsh policies to contain the separatist ambitions of those ethnic groups.

The establishment of Iraq as an independent sovereign state came in opposition to the will of the Kurdish population which constituted the second largest ethnic group. The Kurds were hoping for a destiny similar to the one of other ethnic groups in the region (i.e., a state of their own) as promised by the imperial powers at the end of the war rather than remain trapped within the territorial boundaries of Iraq as a minority (Wimmer, 2002, p. 183). Wilson's 12th out of the 14 points made a clear reference to the right of self-determination and autonomous development of all ethnic minorities previously under the Ottoman Empire while the 1920 Treaty of Sevres (which was later overruled by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne) referred to the possibility of an independent Kurdistan; if within one year from the agreement, Kurds demonstrated the existence of a desire of the majority of the population for independence and the capability to exercise sovereignty, then this should be granted to them (Romano, 2006, p. 28). In 1923, the Lausanne Treaty which replaced the Sevres Treaty did not make any reference to the Kurds nor did it recognise their national rights (Anderson, 2007, p. 126). The promises towards the Kurds by Britain and the West in general were not met while at the same time, the Kurds did not manage to promote a unique distinct clear voice and a clear agenda in order to achieve their demands nor did they demonstrate the ability to defend their interests through the establishment of their own state (McDowall, 2004, p. 151). The main problem in developing a unified strategy was the existence of a tribal division within the population with Britain simultaneously encouraging the Agha and the Sheikhs to act as representatives of their tribes (ibid.). The historical background of the creation of the Iraqi state constructed a denial regarding the sovereignty of Iraq being the legitimate outcome of the Sevres Treaty and Kurds historically challenged it.

The period which followed WWI, was marked by the attempts of regional rulers to employ policies inspired by those of European rulers in terms of internal governance which aimed at establishing unity and cohesion among the population. King Faisal, the first King of Iraq, constituted a main representative of such efforts due to employing policies which aimed at the centralisation of the administrative and educational systems and the control of the army in order to establish homogenisation and creation of a dominant Arab identity within Iraq (Masalha, 1991, p. 690; Walker, 2003). Such policies were gradually aiming at enabling Sunni Arabs to be elevated into the dominant group responsible for the governance of the Iraqi state. In accordance with the situation within Gellner's (1983, p. 48-62) Megalomanian Empire, non-Arabs were indirectly presented with a dichotomy of options (a scenario that dominated life of non-Arab citizens for decades): (a) either to remain passive and accept the process of homogenisation (b) or to resist and be excluded. The control of the army and the monopolisation of resources meant that the dominant group had the appropriate power to enforce this dichotomic scenario and promote the imposition of a unitary identity. When a dominant ethnic group monopolises the access to resources, then joining that group could enable exploitation of those resources as well; a process that facilitates homogenisation against the interests of different ethnic groups that have actively resisted this process (ibid.).

After the establishment of the Iraqi state, since "Britain and the Arabs in Baghdad confirmed the Agha class as an intermediary through which to ensure Kurdish compliance with their policies", the Arab majority became responsible for the governance of the country, with the Kurds possessing limited means for exerting political pressure or influence (Masalha, 1991, p. 690; McDowall, 2004, p. 151). The Kurds were not given the opportunity to hold any important governmental positions or join the army, since the perception was created that ethnic membership constituted the vital characteristic required to maintain loyalty towards the Iraqi state and that membership in a particular ethnic group was the one to determine the access to certain rights (Kaufman, 2004, p. 43). This under-representation within the government and the military politicised notions of ethnic belonging and constructed a sense of opposition to an 'other'; with the other being the dominant ethnic group responsible for running the internal affairs of the country (Masalha, 1991, p. 690; Wimmer, 2002, p. 178). The problem developed remarkable dimensions due to the fact that, across time

and especially after the rise of the Ba'ath party, the Shiite Arabs and the Sunni Kurds contested the hegemony of the ruling Sunni Arab elite in the existence of the severe violation of the principle that a modern nation-state should be governed by an ethnic majority (Kaufmann, 2004, p. 48). The regime gradually constructed the authoritarian narrative that the Kurdish population lacks political reliability and should be excluded either politically or militarily. This whole process of increasing the reliance of the governance on the dominant ethnic group was aimed at creating an actual nation-state and encompassed numerous injustices against the Kurds such as mass deportation and illegal settlement of Arab populations in Kurdish areas (ibid., p. 44).

Critical Realism contributes again through the direct application of the three stages accounting for social change which result to a new status for further analysis of action and facilitates the understanding of how the ethnic sentiment was enhanced through the interaction with the Arab identity and the international community:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context formed after the establishment of Iraq within which Kurdish agents have taken shape and acted
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by structural and cultural motivations such as the perceived illegitimate outcome of the Sevres Treaty and the perceived injustices emanating from ethnic discrimination
- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the formation of a new set of structural and cultural constraints subject to the enhancement of an ‘othering’ sentiment, the resistance to the imposition of an Arab identity on the state, the lack of attachment to the state of Iraq and the consequent rise of national awareness

The ideology of pan-Arabism which started growing within Iraq from the early 20th century aimed at the gradual Arabisation of Iraq through the centralisation of administration, education, military and media and the establishment of control over all important senior positions. This strategy was based on the idea that Iraq should possess an Arab identity and all of its citizens should develop a sense of belonging towards an Arab nation-state while the centralised control was supposed to act as the instrument towards the nationalist agenda's application (Kaufmann, 2004, p. 45). After the establishment of the control of the Sunni Arabs over Iraq, there was a conscious effort

to build a homogenous state based on this ideology of pan-Arabism; something that triggered the objection of the Kurds. The Kurds demonstrated relative resistance towards the nationalist pressures despite experiencing exclusion and despite not being allowed to participate in the running of the affairs of the state which challenged the sentiment of belonging towards the state of Iraq (Wimmer, 2002, p. 180). The Arabisation and centralisation processes found Kurds facing a newly developed state elite presenting itself as possessing ethnic characteristics which are ideal for the nation-state as a whole. The exclusion of certain segments of the population from the decision-making processes and from modern political benefits, creates an environment of rejection towards the embracement of a nation-building and state-building process. This leaves no option for a regime apart from relying on force to control those segments; thus, further alienating them from the state (ibid., p. 194).

Kurdish nationalism which had started moderately developing within Iraq from the beginning of the 20th century, demonstrated a willingness to fight for a Kurdish nation-state similar to the ones possessed by their neighbours. The efforts of the Kurds to demonstrate their Kurdishness and their ethnic and cultural uniqueness were manifested through demands for the establishment of the Kurdish language as the language to be used in schools within Kurdistan which was successfully implemented in 1931 and came into contradiction with the centralised education system promoted by Baghdad (Hassanpour et al., 1996, p. 372). The intellectual community of Iraqi Kurdistan had a critical role in terms of spreading the demand for national rights through literature and media in response to the centralised educational system. Some members of the Kurdish intellectual community even established a centre in Sulaymaniyah where they attempted to 'purify' the Kurdish language, by removing words of foreign origin (e.g. Turkish or Arabic) while the centralised media system which promoted the publication of Arabic newspapers all over Iraq facilitated the emergence of Kurdish newspapers, books and magazines (Wimmer, 2002, p. 185).

Numerous political groups and organisation were established in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, such as the Hiwa party, the KDP and the Rezgari party, with all of them being characterised by a clear nationalist goal and agenda; to form a reactionary network against the attempts of Sunni Arabs to homogenise Iraq and construct an Arab identity. Wimmer (2002, p. 185) refers to this growing nationalist reality and asserts that after

the 1920s, a genuine Kurdish nationalism started developing; the idea of the Kurdish nation represented by history, culture and language started being accompanied by a tendency towards political autonomy or even independence and attracting large segments of the Kurdish population. Kaufmann (2004, p. 50) further elaborates on the reaction of the Kurds as a result of the narrowing of the concept of the nation by Baghdad to those sharing a Sunni-Arab background, claiming that the exclusion from the institutions of the state was responsible for the modern Kurdish national movements. According to Wimmer (2002, p. 194), the more a regime tends to promote the enforcement of its own understanding of how a society should be structured, the more the resistance that develops and this, in turn, results in the escalation of repression; thus, a constant cycle tends to be repeated and augmented across time to alienate minorities from the state and generate nationalistic aspirations

The Hiwa Party, which was established in Kirkuk in 1937, managed to attract the attention of numerous intellectuals, teachers, lawyers and military officers, by reproducing a willingness to demand self-determination. However, the party was dissolved in 1943 due to a top hierarchy power disagreement and certain leftist individuals that left it formed the Shorsh Party (Jadri, 2017). In 1945, the Rezgari Party was created to embrace inclusively and promote the Kurdish nationalistic efforts for liberation of Kurdistan. In August 1946, the two parties were unified to set up the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP); a process facilitated by Mullah Mustafa Barzani and his fellows. The KDP constituted the first Kurdish political party with a clear national political agenda in the 20th century; it is worth noting that most Kurdish intellectuals used to join the ICP before the establishment of the KDP due to a more appropriate position towards the Kurds (Gunter, 1992, p. 21). The establishment of the KDP aligned chronologically with the creation of the Ba'ath Party. Barzani who was not involved in politics before 1946, maintained a large influence within the party; especially with regard to the appointment of individuals in the central committee. The manifesto of the party was not characterised by a significant economic or social content, but rather referred mainly to the Kurdish right for self-determination and autonomy. Barzani carried with him the ideas that promoted the establishment of the autonomous

administration of the Kurdistan Republic of Mahabad in Iran⁴ after the end of WWII; a move that acted as the representation of a new era for the Kurdish national struggle. When the Republic collapsed, Mustafa Barzani was exiled to Sulaymaniyah; the city which was destined to constitute the centre of reproduction of Kurdish national awareness and appreciation of Kurdish nationalism (Gunter, 1992, p. 7).

5. The fall of the Monarchy and the Kurdish Liberation movement

In 1958, Qasem successfully overthrew the Hashemite monarchy through a coup and welcomed Barzani upon his return to Baghdad (Gunter, 1992, p. 11). Kurdish national rights were partially recognised for the first time in history in the new constitution which stated that Iraq was shared by both Arabs and Kurds (Romano, 2006, p. 190). As mentioned, prior to 1958, all political efforts were concentrated on creating an Arab identity for Iraq; Qasem followed a different route towards the establishment and maintenance of a nation-state through inclusiveness. Yet, things started changing once it became obvious that different political groups possessed different and conflicting goals (Wimmer, 2002, p. 190).

According to Wimmer (2002, p. 176), a large number of Kurds did not trust Qasem and rather believed that he was trying to eliminate any demands for national self-determination through the idea of an inclusive Iraqi state and a single Iraqi identity. Thus, behaving on the basis of perceived structures, they were afraid that this process of homogenisation would lead to a situation where the Kurds would end up losing their national identity and being dominated by the Arab majority. There was also evident scepticism with regard to the close cooperation between Qasem and the communist ICP and this enabled the KDP to facilitate the growth of Kurdish nationalism (ibid.). Barzani had declared his support towards Qasem publicly before the eruption of the political crisis; yet, by 1960, Qasem started developing concerns regarding the increasing power of Barzani which led to the break of several promises towards him (McDowall, 2004, p. 308; Wimmer, 2002, p. 190).

⁴ The Republic of Mahabad was a Kurdish self-governing unrecognised state in present-day Iran from 22 January to 15 December 1946 that exploited the vacuum that emerged after the invasion of Iran by the Allies (Romano, 2006, p. 227)

In general, the establishment of the new constitution based on prospects of mutual governance from Arabs and Kurds, acted as a positive force, with intellectuals reproducing an evident willingness for an active defence of national rights. KDP functioned as an appropriate political party that had developed a clear nationalist agenda aiming at the establishment of clear democratic procedures within the state of Iraq and autonomy for the area perceived as Kurdistan. However, it has to be noted that tribalism was strongly evident within the Kurdish population and tribal leaders had a prominent role with regard to Kurdish nationalism. In July 1961, following the deterioration of the relations between the KDP and Qasem, the party held a meeting in the absence of Barzani. Seeking to re-establish peace and trust, the party ended up sending a letter to Qasem encompassing certain Kurdish demands. Qasem responded with ignorance and insignificant attention and this left no other option apart from the enhancement of the revolution (Barzani, 2003, p. 23; Rubin, 2007; McDowall, 2004, p. 308).

The main problem that the Kurds practically had to face, was the problem of unity with different tribes being characterised by different objectives ranging from those who idealistically believed in a national struggle to those who only sought to achieve certain benefits for their own tribes. As Masoud Barzani (2003, p. 24) mentions, tribal objectives overpowered national objectives in numerous occasions. On the 6th of September of the same year, KDP organised a successful general strike aimed at demonstrating to Qasem the large influence of the KDP which was received positively by the Kurdish population (ibid., p. 25).

On the 11th of September of 1961, the Kurdish national liberation movement was initiated as a response to air strikes and ground attacks of the Iraqi army that reached Sulaymaniyah. Fighters were gathered in Erbil to gradually construct a regional leadership (Barzani, 2003, p. 26). The armed movement managed to attract the support of members from all the social strata such as individuals within the elite, intellectuals, workers, military personnel and students. The movement started establishing local administrations in the areas that came under its control and resembled a modern nationalist movement (Gunter, 2007, p. 10). According to Wimmer (2002, p. 186), KDP members not only represented the idea of national liberation but also the elevation of the idea of the nation. The employment of Archer's (1995) approach facilitates the

understanding of Kurdish agential action subject to the interaction with the Arab identity and the policies accompanying and representing it:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context formed after the establishment of the constitution of Iraq and the emergence of conflicting goals between different ethnic and religious groups within the state
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by structural and cultural motivations such as the lack of unity between different tribes which coexisted with an absence of trust towards Qasem, the resentment towards the Iraqi policies against the Kurds and the increasing perception that the process of homogenisation would lead to an Arab dominance
- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the formation of a new set of structural and cultural constraints subject to the 1961 development of a purely national movement that demonstrated the increasing sense of national consciousness among the Kurds by attracting the support of members from all the social strata and challenging religious and tribal divisions

6. The 1963 rise of the Ba’ath Party into power

The leadership of the Ba’ath Party always possessed a negative perception with regard to the Kurds, reflected in their manifesto which was characterised by a non-recognition of the Kurdish national distinctiveness and an overemphasis on the concept of Arab unity (Haim, 1962, p. 233). This demonstrated that the ideas emanating from the ideology of pan-Arabism clearly overpowered the importance of the Iraqi identity. The Ba’athists defined loyalty to the nation-state in a way that indeed facilitated the process of homogenisation. The decision of other ethnic groups to resist this process was labelled as treason and historically resulted in deaths, massacres and ethnic cleansing with the most characteristic example being the 1988 Anfal Campaign the events of which have been confirmed by the Human Rights Watch (1993). According to Wimmer (2002, p. 166), the root of the problem has been the introduction of the principles of the modern nation-state within the multi-ethnic society of Iraq while the demands of ethnic groups for autonomy or independence demonstrate the rejection of national, political or cultural homogenisation. The differences between the KDP and the Ba’athists, which

were obvious especially within the fields of history and governance and which led to numerous conflicts, took greater dimensions after the 1958 unwillingness of the KDP to allow the unification of Iraq with the United Arab Republic⁵. This further magnified the Ba'athist perception that non-Arabs would always constitute a challenge to the Arab unity and facilitated the process of homogenisation to prevent the rise of any non-Arab claims on a perceived purely Arab land (Jawad, 1981, p. 230).

The 1958 fall of the monarchy was marked by a tactical change of attitude of the Ba'athists towards the KDP through the provision of certain assurances regarding national rights' recognition, to win their support against Qasem and the ICP; the success of any revolt against Qasem required the unified support and contribution of all anti-Qasem forces (ibid., p. 235). However, as time progressed, it became obvious that no radical change had occurred with regard to their perception towards the Kurds and that no possibility existed for a national rights' recognition; negotiations acted as the tool in order to buy time and prevent the provision of national rights. At the same time, the Ba'athists failed to recognise an integral element of the Kurdish revolution that rendered the nationalist process and the demand of national rights non-reversible; the revolution was not only a struggle against Qasem but a national movement as well (ibid., p. 236).

For matters of historical accuracy, it has to be noted that negotiations between the Ba'ath Party and the KDP existed prior to the coup against Qasem. The success of the coup, which was accompanied by the murder of Qasem, left Kurds expecting positive steps towards a final solution of the Kurdish problem based on the recognition of national rights and the fulfilment of self-governance expectations (Jawad, 1981, p. 112). Thus, Kurds requested a ceasefire, an appropriate punishment for the individuals that had committed atrocities towards the Kurds and the establishment of Kurdish autonomy with Barzani as the Prime Minister of the Kurdish region. The Kurdish expectations, however, were not fulfilled; yet, a ceasefire was agreed. The negotiations which continued after the ceasefire and after the rise of Yahia to the Prime Minister position

⁵ The United Arab Republic was a sovereign state in the Middle East from 1958 until 1971 which was initially a political union between Egypt and Syria before the latter seceding in 1961 (Jankowski, 2002)

gradually led to the February 1964 agreement which remained unsatisfactory despite the recognition of certain national Kurdish rights (Barzani, 2003, p. 127).

The impression that was being gradually developed was that Baghdad was not seeking a mutually approved viable solution; an impression justified by the decision of the Prime Minister Yahia not to fulfil his promise of amending the constitution to align with the agreement. The outcome of the negotiations reflected the absence of trust from both sides. With regard to the Kurds, the absence of trust emanated from the memory of broken promises while with regard to the Ba'athists and Baghdad, the absence of trust emanated from the perception that the Kurds were unreliable and a threat to the territorial integrity of Iraq and to the Arab unity; for them, any provision of autonomy would gradually construct a state within a state (Jawad, 1981, p. 113). The exclusive ideology of the Ba'ath Party which started becoming more and more evident in the years that followed, enabled a nationalistic reaction which did only take a military form but had an educational character.

From the very beginning, the Ba'athist regime filled all governmental positions with Sunni Arab individuals from the area of Tikrit, further alienating the Kurds from the state and eliminating any sense of belonging towards it, its institutions and its symbols (Wimmer, 2002, p. 179). For Baghdad, an autonomous Kurdish entity within Iraq would not only challenge the territorial integrity of Iraq but would also create further instability through economic, military and administrative divisions. The Ba'athists understood that the Kurdish resistance would constitute an obstacle to the prospects of a homogenous state and tried to eliminate it by establishing punishment for those refusing to consent to Iraq possessing an Arab identity through regional party rules and through the Revolutionary Command Council (ibid.). Anyone that was perceived by the regime either actively rejecting the establishment of an Arab identity on Iraq or actively supporting the Kurdish nationalist movements, had to face exclusion, expulsion or extermination which according to Rae (2002, p. 26) was performed "in the knowledge that this would entail economic, and certainly in the later cases, political costs". It has to be mentioned that even individuals that gave their consent to the Ba'athist ideology and were allowed to possess certain positions, never achieved the status of those belonging to the dominant identity. Such individuals were perceived as traitors by their Kurdish compatriots such as Taha Yassin Ramadan who managed to

reach the position of the vice-chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council (Joffe, 2007).

When the Federal Arab Republic was established in 1963, Syria decided to send military force to assist the Iraqi army in their fight against the Kurds, demonstrating a strong relationship between domestic politics and regional developments. At the same time, as time went by, atrocities not only persisted but increased in accordance with the rising Kurdish demands, rendering violence as a fundamental component of the Ba'athist rule (Jawad, 1981, p. 122). The Kurdish quest for national rights demonstrated an undoubtable reality; the existence of a strong sense of belonging which was further enhanced due to the legitimacy which characterised their demands. Furthermore, efforts to portray the Kurds as traitors through the development of narratives framing them as agents or assistants of foreign powers, further constructed a sense opposition to an ethnic other and facilitated the perception of ethnic uniqueness (Wimmer, 2002, p. 179). At the same time, Arabs were deliberately presented by the Ba'athist regime as the sole defending actors of the Iraqi inheritance and the only ones who possessed legitimate claims over the land and the governance of the state (ibid.). As mentioned, this was reflected in the manifesto of the ruling party which was referring to Iraq as a land perceived as exclusively Arab and to the Kurds as a group able to constitute a security threat to the national interests of the state, implying their classification as second-class citizens (Jawad, 1981, p. 228; Wimmer, 2002, p. 166). Thus, the Critical Realist application to the post-1963 period can be summarised in the following way to offer an understanding of how the ethnic sentiment was empowered through the interaction with Arab narratives:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context formed after the rise of the Ba'ath Party onto power
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by structural and cultural motivations such as the increasing perception that the regime aimed at presenting Kurds as traitors and Arabs as the absolute protectors of Iraqi inheritance
- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the formation of a new set of structural and cultural constraints subject to a further enhancement of the 'othering' sentiment which further magnified national awareness and national unity

However, during the same period, the power struggle that existed within the Kurdish political community, left its mark on the Kurdish society and led to fragmentation which constituted a huge cost to the Kurdish nationalist movement. Gunter (1992, p. 23) mentions that the most significant conflict of the modern Kurdish political history has been “the one between the more conservative and traditional, tribal wing of KDP associated with Barzani and the leftist, intellectual, Marxist wing” which escalated in the 1964 KDP conference due to the decision of Politburo members to suspend Barzani from the presidency in his absence while in the July conference of the same year, Barzani ordered the arrestment of the Politburo members and their replacement with individuals that were perceived as more reliable (Barzani, 2003, p. 144). Barzani proceeded with the mobilisation of significant military force to attack the Politburo headquarters and force them to leave for Iran; the whole situation demonstrated the tragic fragmentation and relationship between the two factions. In 1965, their return was permitted under certain restrictions. However, despite any efforts for the development of a mutual political understanding, no reconciliation was achieved, with one side claiming that its survival was under threat due to the intentions of Barzani and the other side claiming that the Politburo members were collaborating with the Ba’athist regime. In 1966, the Politburo individuals, did, eventually, join the regime and their headquarters came under the control of Baghdad; a decision that created further fragmentation acting as a big blow to the Kurdish national efforts (ibid., p. 172). Thus, it would not be an overstatement to claim that this conflict not only left its mark on the Kurdish society but across a process of socio-cultural interaction and elaboration, Kurdish nationalism started following two distinct trajectories determined by both structural elements such as the acquisition of power and cultural elements such as the ideological differences between them that gradually emerged and were enhanced.

7. The 1968 Ba’athist return to power and the end of the Kurdish national movement

After the fall of the Ba’athists from power in 1963, a growing understanding was developed among them that fighting in Kurdistan acted as a distraction from the real internal problems they were facing at the time. When the Ba’ath Party recaptured power in 1968, the resolution of the Kurdish national issues constituted one of the main goals; a goal that emanated from a desire of consolidation of position. Yet, their decision to

end the military fight against the Kurds was not accompanied by a change of the policies of imposition of an Arab identity on the state of Iraq (McDowall, 2004, p. 324). In 1970, a more open political system was offered to the Kurds; an offer which aimed at persuading them to accept the mutual solution of an Iraqi identity to buy time, grip further onto power and concentrate on solving other issues. They were engaged in an effort of portraying themselves as having abandoned any extremist thoughts which directed their past policies and being focused on establishing a multi-ethnic Iraq (Romano, 2006, p. 192). Human Rights Watch (1995, p. 22) asserts that the policy of the regime after 1968 was based on pragmatism; the regime, able to understand its weaknesses, prioritised the development of an Iraqi identity which was more inclusive compared to the ideology of pan-Arabism. In March 1970, the vice president of the party, Saddam Hussein, met with Barzani assuring him of the government's honest intentions towards the Kurds and the two of them agreed on the fifteen articles of the historic March 1970 agreement (Ayşegül, 2020; Gunter, 1992, p. 14).

The agreement of the 11th of March of 1970 constituted the outcome of nine years of military struggle and an important achievement of modern Kurdish nationalism which enabled the Kurds to have national rights officially recognised for the first time after the 1959 constitution establishment (Ayşegül, 2020). Barzani (2003, p. 243) notes the undeniable significance of the agreement as a just settlement of the Kurdish problem in Iraq that marked an era of enhanced pride and sense of belonging. Some of the most important articles of the agreement were: (a) the elevation of the Kurdish language as an official language in areas of a Kurdish demographic majority (b) the full Kurdish participation in the government and the military (c) the Kurdish freedom to establish organisation of their own (d) the restoration of both Kurds and Arabs to their original place of inhabitancy (e) the provision of self-governance to Kurdish areas which were going to be united to a single unit (McDowall, 2004, p. 27). However, McDowall (2004, p. 327) denies that commitment of Baghdad towards a permanent solution through the agreement; the deliberate intention of willing to solve the problem and recognise national rights only reflected the willingness to establish concentration on consolidating power, controlling the military units and promoting a positive image towards the international community. It is worth mentioning that Saddam Hussein who was not considered a powerful figure within the hierarchy of the party in 1968, managed to move up gradually through the employment of family connections and performance of

backstage actions. His whole ideology was characterised by the willingness and aspiration to establish intervention within the everyday life of citizens (Al-Jazairi, 1998, p. 32).

In July 1970, the government issued the revised constitution with certain amendments; however, no inclusion of the recognition of the Kurdish national rights according to the agreement was made while the articles with regard to the Kurdish language and the prevention of Arabisation were not fully respected (Gunter, 1992, p. 17). The implementation of certain articles of the agreement was being continually postponed while the regime was being blamed of illegal resettlement of Arabs in disputed areas such as Kirkuk and Sinjar which was leading to the gradual altering of the demographic structure of those areas towards the establishment of an Arab majority. In September 1971, the expel of 40,000 Faili Kurds along with an unsuccessful effort to assassinate Barzani, destroyed any prospects for trust-building (Quil, 2008, p. 22; Gunter, 1992, p. 17).

The regime blamed Barzani for the failure of the implementation of the agreement due to the Kurds' perceived unwillingness to meet their responsibilities as citizens of Iraq while the complete absence of trust led to a situation of suspicion (Gunter, 1992, p. 18). The reason behind the failure of the agreement was the governmental tendency towards centralisation; autonomy constituted a temporary measure to concentrate the appropriate power and eventually impose direct control. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that any concessions were ideologically opposed by a significant number of members of the Ba'ath Party (McDowall, 2004, p. 323). The territorial boundaries of the autonomous region remained the biggest obstacle in terms of reaching an agreement with Kirkuk possessing a critical role; both with regard to whether it should be included in the autonomous region and with regard to the nationalisation of its oil fields. The Kurds were demanding its inclusion within their autonomous region and Mullah Mustafa was even recognising it as the capital of the Kurdish autonomous region while the regime was seeking a joint administration to maintain accountability towards Baghdad (Yildiz, 2004, p. 22; McDowall, 2004, p. 335).

It has to be noted that until 1974, the region experienced significant economic growth within an environment of relative peace while advancements also took place in terms of culture, music, literature and education and many Kurds even managed to acquire

military training. However, by the agreed deadline of March 1974, it became clear that there was no intention to implement the original agreement and instead, Baghdad started implementing its own understanding of autonomy, despite the rejection of the proposed solution by Barzani (Hannum, 1992, p. 192). The Kurdish autonomous region would possess the ability to elect a legislative body which would, in turn, elect an executive body. However, the president of the executive body would not only be subject to the appointment of the president of Iraq but also subject to his approval to maintain his position. Foreign affairs and oil administration would be an absolute responsibility of Baghdad while Kirkuk would not be included within the Kurdish autonomous region (Tripp, 2007, p. 204).

The announcement of the autonomy law which deviated significantly from the prior concessions towards Barzani, marked the end of four years of peace and fighting re-erupted while lasted for one year until the signing of the Algiers Accord (Gunter, 1992, p. 18). Despite the unsubstantiated expectation that the US would support them emanating from personal promises made from the Americans towards Barzani, the Kurds achieved a high degree of mobilisation with numerous individuals joining the KDP and the armed forces; the Peshmerga forces were composed of 50,000 trained individuals while 50,000 more irregular individuals existed (McDowall, 2004, p. 337).

Due to the Iranian assistance which prevented the regime from solving the Kurdish problem on the ground, Baghdad proceeded with concessions towards Tehran to end its support towards the Kurds (Bengio, 2012, p. 125-150). On the 6th of March of 1975, Saddam Hussein and the Shah reached an agreement through the Algiers Accord “under which Iraq recognised the middle of the Shatt al-Arab River as the boundary between their two states” (Gunter, 1992, p. 29) while Iran had to end its military assistance towards the Kurds; an agreement which led to the collapse of the Kurdish efforts (Tripp, 2007, p. 204). The Iraqi Kurds constituted simply an instrument employed by Tehran to exert pressure on the Iraqi government to achieve certain political objectives (Stansfield and Resool, 2007, p. 107). The decision to end the movement and to order the Peshmerga either to surrender or to flee to Iran, was announced by Barzani at the KDP meeting on the 19th of March of 1975. The decision was a solely Kurdish one and no pressure was exerted by Iran; Iran only informed of its intention not to provide further assistance (Bengio, 2012, p. 125-150; Chaliand and McDowall, 1993, p. 172).

Social criticism developed towards the Kurdish leadership for lacking ambition and courage to maintain the movement while the failure of Barzani acted as a source of legitimacy for the more leftist groups and individuals such as Komala which had been possessing a critical lens towards the feudalism and tribalism represented by the KDP and its assumed inability to secure the Kurdish national rights (ibid.).

The tragic end of the movement should be considered as an important reference point in the modern Kurdish history, accounting for changes across social and political aspects of the Kurdish society, leading eventually to the resurgence of the movement with completely different underpinnings and factors influencing it. It is worth mentioning that the nationalist movement mobilised thousands of students, workers, teachers and military officers while also enabling the Peshmerga forces to reorganise reaching a number of 100,00 men and facilitating the construction of local administrations and institutions (Ahmed and Gunter, 2007, p. 105). According to Dilshad Hama: “The revolution of 1961 was a new chapter in the Kurdish struggle in Iraq. It was a new opportunity. But just after four years, the internal divisions started until the collapse of the movement in 1975”.⁶

The cost for the Kurds after the collapse of the movement was huge; especially with the dissolution of the KDP and the end of the local administrations. Despite the instructions of Barzani to end the national movement, numerous KDP members deviated from those and created new groups with the KDP breaking into several factions (Bengio, 2012, p. 125-150; Gunter, 1992, p. 33). Komala which constituted the organisation characterised by the most nationalist ideological manifestation managed to take advantage of the dissolution of the KDP and attract more people to its ideology. On the 1st of June of 1975, approximately three months after the collapse of the movement, Jalal Talabani with some other nationalists (some of which being members of Komala), announced the creation of a new organisation called the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The PUK aimed at putting all the Kurds under a common umbrella but through a different ideology, to lead to a new Kurdish struggle further empowering the two distinct trajectories of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq (Stansfield, 2003, p. 71-73). According to Dilshad Sharif: “The PUK was the polar opposite to the KDP. The KDP

⁶ Interview with Dr Dilshad Hama: Head of IRD Department and Lecturer of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tishk International University [Conducted on: 03 April 2020].

was a nationalist party led by a tribal leader while the PUK was a Marxist Socialist party led by a group of neo-Marxists.”⁷ In 1979, Barzani died in the US where he was granted asylum (New York Times, 1979); he is still considered among the Kurds as one of the most important figures of the modern Kurdish history.

The Iraqi regime aimed at capitalising on its success by attempting to facilitate the Arabisation process i.e., occupying every Iraqi Kurdistan village and forcing thousands of people onto deportation while also centralising education and administration (Bengio, 2012, p. 147). According to McDowall (2004, p. 339) approximately one million Kurds inhabiting the disputed territories were forced into deportation in an attempt to establish a demographic balance according to the regime’s desires. The process involved to a great extent the deportation of Kurdish individuals around the oil-rich Kirkuk and their replacement through the illegal settlement of thousands of Arabs (Bengio, 2012, p. 147; McDowall, 2004, p. 335). In the absence of the KDP and in the presence of a huge political gap, the regime attempted to eliminate Kurdish nationalism by destroying any Kurdish institutions that had been previously established, enforcing membership of Kurds in the Ba’ath Party, building Ba’athist offices all around Kurdistan, imposing the Arabic language as the official language in all schools, dismissing Kurdish military personnel from the Iraqi army, preventing non-Arabs from maintaining or acquiring any significantly important administrative or military positions and offering rewards to Arab men marrying Kurdish women (Van Bruinessen, 1992, p. 19; Wimmer, 2002, p. 179). Kurds were forced to accept the dominance of the Sunni-Arab identity within Iraq and the refusal to provide legitimacy to this perception led to punishment.

Education was always considered critical for the regime in terms of developing a unique sense of national awareness within a state characterised by multiethnicity. As Gellner (1983, p. 48-62) argues, mass popularised education is key towards achieving national homogeneity. Numerous Arabic schools were established within Iraqi Kurdistan along with regulations to encourage Kurds to send their children to those schools (Haji, 2004, p. 85). Moreover, an organised effort commenced of renaming the villages and granting them either Arab or Islamic names while many Kurds were forced to change their

⁷ Interview with Dilshad Sharif: Assistant Lecturer in International Relations and Diplomacy at the Tishk International University and Senior Adviser to the Kurdistan Parliament [Conducted on: 28 March 2020].

nationality to Arabic (Human Rights Watch, 1995, p. 22). Haji (2004, p. 23) outlines the methods of the Arabisation policy with the most important ones being: (a) the deportation of Kurds and their replacement by Arabs (b) the change of the geographical boundaries of certain governorates such as Kirkuk to alter the Arabs-Kurds ratio (c) the enforcement of the change of nationality for Kurds in Kirkuk and Mosul (d) the change of the names of towns, streets, buildings etc. to Arabic alternatives.

Ahmad and Gunter (2007, p. 106) explain the Kurdish commencement of a process of reorganisation to maintain resistance to the policies of the regime through reference to the nature of Kurdish nationalism that “was no longer an ephemeral idea, capable of being quashed by force or assimilation... Kurdish myths of nation were rediscovered and embraced in the stability engendered in the autonomous period”. This anti-Kurdishness which characterised Baghdad’s policies was responsible for the generation of such a manifestation of Kurdish nationalism that later, in turn, promoted social mobilisation and the restart of the military struggle. The Kurdish resistance to social change is summarised through the employment of Archer’s (1995) framework which assists in terms of understanding the rejection of the incorporation into the nationalist sentiment of elements promoted by Baghdad:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context which the Kurdish agents were exposed to and started functioning within after the March 1970 agreement and the 1975 collapse of the Kurdish Liberation movement
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by structural and cultural motivations such as their opposition to any proposed amendments to the original March 1970 agreement and the anti-Kurdishness which characterised Baghdad’s Arabisation policies which coexisted with a period during which Kurdish nationalism had already been integrated into the Kurdish political culture
- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to morphostasis or the rejection of the new set of circumstances promoted by Baghdad subject to agential action as demonstrated by the rejection of the amendments proposed to the original March 1970 agreement, the development of a feeling of opposition towards

anything Arabic, the survival of Kurdish nationalism and the 1976 resurgence of the movement

8. The resurgence of the movement and the Anfal Campaign

In June 1976, the PUK decided the creation of small flexible Peshmerga units to be sent to the Kurdistan mountains, being responsible for mobilising people, boosting confidence and reproducing the Kurdish national objectives. This acted as a signal that the armed struggle was once again active (McDowall, 2004, p. 343). The failure of Barzani and the KDP subject to the 1975 collapse of the movement was exploited by the PUK to present Talabani as the new symbol of Kurdish nationalism; in response, Barzani activated his own military units for the performance of guerrilla operations. This created an evident political division with the PUK presenting itself as the representative of the loyal Kurd and as an inclusive pluralist umbrella for all the Kurdish agents (the PUK provided assistance to Kurdish organisations outside Iraq such as the PKK) and criticising the KDP for the collapse of the national movement, in an effort to mobilise people (Romano, 2006, p. 198).

The re-establishment of the KDP led to the gradual construction of a new political environment characterised by stronger ideological roots and stronger polarisation around parties, despite the negative outcome of the national struggle; this, on one hand, exposed the emergence of a political and societal division, but, on the other hand, demonstrated the resilience of Kurdish nationalism as well (Bengio, 2012, p. 273; McDowall, 2004, p. 344). The reactivation of the Peshmerga forces not only raised morale for the people at a time of destruction but also demonstrated that the Kurdish community was “prepared to endure hardships and make personal sacrifices, in defence of the nation” (Smith, 2007, p. 156). Thus, demonstrating how agency tends to act based on the idea of the ongoing struggle and to reject material interests (morphostasis) in support of the Kurdish nation.

The very specific circumstances which marked the resurgence of the armed struggle generated numerous disagreements among groups regarding the most accurate perception on political developments. The centralisation of power within parties sought by leaders to dilute criticism towards them, led to a division gradually transferred within the Kurdish society as well. This division was manifested in the narratives used by the

representatives of both parties; the KDP was supposed to represent the traditional form of struggle and the PUK was supposed to represent a more leftist ideological understanding of the struggle (Bengio, 2012, p. 273; McDowall, 2004, p. 346). Moreover, there was an evident disagreement regarding the appropriate stance towards the rulers of Iran at a time when the Iranian Kurds were conducting a military struggle similar to the one of the Iraqi Kurds; the PUK assisted them through an active Peshmerga support while the KDP sided with the regime; yet, even this partial support demonstrates the existence of a nationalist sentiment able to transcend physical boundaries (Romano, 2006, p. 251). The absence of a unifying political structure or figure and the decision of the KDP and the PUK to lead opposite Patriotic Democratic Fronts, prevented the Kurds from exploiting the opportunities presented due to the long stalemate experienced across the Iran-Iraq war (Gunter, 1992, p. 37); a situation which marked and determined the development of the modern Kurdish history and of the Kurdish society which remains politically divided until today.

In December 1984, after negotiations between Baghdad and the PUK, a ceasefire was achieved based on promises for an inclusive government where the PUK and the ICP would be represented, but for Gunter (1992, p. 39) it remains doubtful whether “either Baghdad or PUK viewed their negotiations as anything more than a way to gain time”. The realisation that the international powers would not permit a potential Iranian victory was accompanied by an understanding that Baghdad was not dependent on the Kurds anymore; thus, this gradually led to the re-eruption of the fighting one month later (Asadzade, 2019; McDowall, 2004, p. 350). The failure of the negotiations increased the PUK responsibility and the public criticism towards it, in the presence of a growing understanding that the KDP and the PUK did not have the luxury to maintain a strong conflict between them and that reconciliation between them constituted the only option. This facilitated a process of negotiation which eventually led to a joint declaration in 1986 between all Iraqi Kurdish parties for a unified strategy against the regime and a statement in January 1987 expressing the intention for the formation of a Kurdistan National Front (McDowall, 2004, p. 351).

The persistence of the Arabisation process was accompanied by the use of chemical weapons and the spread of panic and fear and the Kurdish political community had an obligation to protect its people like an actual state would do. The Iraqi Kurdish Front

(IKF) which was created in May 1987, responsible for overseeing all political and military activities (Logan, 2009, p. 165), demonstrated the developed perception that unity and collaboration in the absence of internal fighting, are necessary in defence of the Kurdish national rights. The main weakness of the Front, however, was that unity was not achieved holistically on military, financial and diplomatic affairs while decision-making had to be subject to the veto provided to each party (McDowall, 2004, p. 352).

The willingness of the Ba'ath Party to exclude the non-Arabs from the affairs of the state was once again reflected in the decision to exclude the rural Kurds when the 1987 census was taking place and to prevent officials from assisting people in villages to register. The people that did not register or participate were stripped of their Iraqi citizenship; thus, the census acted as the legitimate instrument to exclude the Kurds and facilitate the construction of an Arab identity within the territorial boundaries of the Iraqi state (Rae, 2002, p. 56). The first outcome was that all villagers within Iraqi Kurdistan had lost their citizenship while the next step would be their transfer to concentration camps in order to be subject to elimination through the Anfal Campaigns (Human Rights Watch, 1995, p. 60). This created a further alienation from their Iraqi citizenship and the Iraqi state which not only did not guarantee their security which is the primary responsibility of a sovereign state towards its population but also acted as a direct threat to them.

The appointment of al-Majid as the Secretary of the Northern Bureau of the Iraqi Regional Branch is considered a reference point for the implementation of the Ba'athist policies against the Kurds as he was sent with the sole mission of reaching a permanent solution. His first target was the elimination of the rural Kurds through the destruction of the Peshmerga forces in the rural areas the killing or deportation of every inhabitant of them. He expressed his intentions clearly by warning that "no one in the rural Kurdistan would be spared" (Hiltermann, 2007, p. 95). He was the person to order the use of chemical weapons in April 1987 while in June of the same year he issued order number 4008 which declared the PUK and the KDP members as security threats and prohibited the presence of human beings in the rural areas where action had taken place (Human Rights Watch, 1995, p. 55). Anfal refers "to the name given by the Iraqis to a series of military operations that lasted from 23 February to 6 September 1988" (ibid.,

p. 60), which were conducted under the command of al-Majid across the entire area of Iraqi Kurdistan. The existence of a centralised administration rendered the efforts of the regime to be perceived as legitimate within Iraq and Kurds to be portrayed as traitors for rejecting the process of homogenisation.

The eight operations under the Campaign aimed first at targeting the rural Kurds and then dealing with the Kurds as a whole. The case of Halabja is characteristic of the destruction which characterised the campaign since more than 5,000 people were killed within just a few minutes and 1,000 more were wounded. According to Romano “Halabja was only incidental to a more organised, sinister and less visible campaign” (Romano, 2006, p. 200). The psychological effect on the Kurdish population was huge and Kurds tends to use the word Anfal until today symbolically to refer to an act of elimination and destruction. It is worth mentioning that the whole strategy employed by the Ba’ath Party resembled significantly the one used by the Young Turks across the 1910s to establish homogenisation, since both aimed at constructing a homogenous nation nation-state and both resulted in significant resistance by non-dominant ethnic groups such as the Kurds and the Armenians which were perceived as a threat to the territorial integrity of the nation-state. In both cases, claims of treason acted as justification for the committed genocide (Rae, 2002, p. 127).

After the end of the campaign, the regime aimed through the issuance of two amnesties to persuade those that fled to Turkey and Iran to return within humiliation. Thousands eventually returned and entered camps; yet, the fate of most of them remains unclear. The Arabisation policies persisted with the exertion of pressure on the Kurds to join the Ba’ath Party and the facilitation of the change of Kirkuk’s demographic structure through illegal settlement (McDowall, 2004, p. 357). Once Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, the West decided to provide legitimacy to the Kurdish claims regarding the crimes that had already occurred and officially recognise them. There is little doubt that such developments had a dramatic impact on social structures across Iraq (Mlodoch, 2012, p. 80) as Critical Realism demonstrates, by indicating the significance of perceived realities:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context within which Kurdish agents operated after the resurgence of the national movement

- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by structural and cultural motivations such as the feeling of destruction and individual and national insecurity generated across the Anfal Campaign and the increasing realisation of Kurdish isolation and abandonment
- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the formation of a new set of structural and cultural constraints subject to the emergence of the realisation of the extreme brutality of the regime, the emergence of a sentiment of perceived Kurdish isolation from the international community incorporated into nationalistic narratives and the incorporation of pragmatism into the Kurdish national agenda. At the same time, the homogenisation efforts were unsuccessful in eliminating Kurdish nationalism and morphostasis rather than morphogenesis dominated as demonstrated by the survival of absolute opposition to homogenisation policies

By the end of 1988, the Iraqi regime had managed to regain territorial control over Iraqi Kurdistan and to almost eliminate all Peshmerga forces; a situation that significantly resembled the 1975 collapse of the Kurdish national movement. Kurdish intellectuals were the ones that once again took the difficult responsibility of raising morale. This time, however, the absence of any territorial control necessitated the conduct of solely guerrilla activities along with attempts for mass mobilisation (McDowall, 2004, p. 368). The misjudgement of Saddam Hussein with regard to his decision to invade Kuwait, acted as a new nationalistic opportunity for the Kurds. The USA ended up supporting Kuwait to maintain the oil flow from the Gulf and got actively involved, in accordance with other countries, to liberate the country (Romano, 2006, p. 204). Understanding the difficulties in terms of managing both internal and external threats simultaneously, Saddam Hussein sent representatives to Kurdistan to negotiate with the Kurds; this time, however, Barzani and Talabani refused to negotiate. At the same time, the Kurds had the political wisdom to remain neutral with regard to regional developments and did not take the risk of supporting the western coalition. The threat of a potential reaction from states encompassing Kurdish minorities and fearing their separatist tendencies, was evident with Turkish President Ozal declaring that these countries had agreed that “no Kurdish entity should be allowed to emerge from the Gulf Crises” (McDowall, 2004, p. 370).

9. The March 1991 uprisings and the Ba'athist withdrawal

The prospects of confrontation between Iraq and the West, provided an incentive for the Kurds to start reorganising and to perform discussions with other groups such as the Iraqi Shiites; the Kurds seemed to understand the geopolitical importance of the oil fields with regard to the regional developments. Once it became clear that the defeat of the Iraqi army was inevitable, the IKF declared an amnesty for all the Kurds - including the Jash - and urged them to unite under the same umbrella to attack the regime through a holistic and active support towards the Peshmerga forces. The liberation of Kuwait rendered the regime under the weakest position experienced since 1968 and encouraged Shiites in south Iraq to initiate revolts and Peshmerga forces to start attacking the Iraqi military (Jabar, 1992; McDowall, 2004, p. 371). As Rae (2002, p. 41) mentions, “ethnic conflict is most likely to occur under conditions of state weakness and loss of legitimacy. The first uprising occurred in Rania in March 1990, with the town going quickly under the control of the Peshmerga military units while uprisings in Duhok, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Kirkuk followed to gradually result to the absolute Kurdish control of Iraqi Kurdistan; these uprisings according to Barzani emanated from the people themselves (Jabar, 1992; Rae, 2002, p. 371).

The liberation of Iraqi Kurdistan constituted a partial indication that the Kurds possessed the willingness to proceed towards the accomplishment of national rights which was reflected in the high degree of social mobilisation, with Jash individuals massively supporting and participating in the uprisings (McDowall, 2004, p. 372). However, the development of consciousness regarding the decision of Americans to support Saddam Hussein and their unwillingness to promote a regime change, allowed the regime to counter-attack Shiites in the south and Kurds in the north and regain control of the situation. The western decision emanated from a fear that if “Iraq’s majority Shiite population came to control the country, it would ally itself with Shiite Iran” (Romano, 2006, p. 206) and from a willingness “to assure Turkey and Saudi Arabia that it would help neither the Kurds nor the Shiite” (McDowall, 2004, p. 372). The general perception that was developed was that the new geopolitical arena would be the outcome of the American decision to either maintain or block Saddam’s presence (Gunter, 1992, p. 53). Kirkuk was the first city to be recaptured and the rest of the cities followed, with Talabani and Barzani directly accusing President Bush. More than 1.5

million Kurds had to leave their homes for either Turkey or Iran while massive bombings took place, resulting once again in tragic experiences for the civilian population (Peterson, 2002; McDowall, 2004, p. 373).

The images that represented the outcome of Saddam's policies and which were reproduced internationally acted as a public humiliation for Western forces that could not demonstrate further ignorance and reluctance; especially after their actions with regard to Kuwait. The establishment of a no-fly zone for refugees to return safely back to their properties constituted an international initiative that reversed the Western position of non-interference (Peterson, 2002; McDowall, 2004, p. 373; Gunter, 1992, p. 56). Resolution 688 issued by the UN Security Council condemned the repression the Kurdish population was being subject to and demanded its end; a development which not only constituted the first time that "the world body has so explicitly addressed the Kurdish question in Iraq" (Gunter, 1992, p. 57) but also elevated the Kurdish issue to an issue of international concern. In the period that followed the aforementioned decision, large amounts of international aid started flowing towards Iraqi Kurdistan while numerous NGOs were established that survive until today (Wimmer, 2002, p. 156).

The large numbers of refugees compelled the Kurds to ask the Iraqi government for the commencement of negotiations and for a ceasefire; however, as time went by, it became more and more obvious that Saddam was solely using the process to prevent the amplification of the international sympathy towards the Kurds and condemnation of the regime's policies, minimise the Kurdish resistance and create internal division within the Kurdish society (Gunter, 1992, p. 115). The main problem in terms of reaching an agreement was the territorial aspect of a potential deal; especially with regard to Kirkuk which was subject to no concessions. The second largest problem was related to the conditions placed by Saddam on the Kurds to eliminate any ties with the Americans; something also rejected by the Kurds since that would mean that they would "depend on the Iraqi regime in the political, military and cultural fields" (ibid., p. 70). The Kurdish counter-demands referred to a clear status for Kirkuk, democratically accountable procedures in Iraq, freedom of speech and press and freedom of developing geopolitical relations (ibid., p. 72). In August 1991, the newly elected legislative body officially rejected Saddam's proposals. However, by the end of 1991, a new political

reality emerged with Saddam Hussein deciding the political and military withdrawal from Iraqi Kurdistan, with the Peshmerga taking control of all the Kurdish areas apart from the oil-rich Kirkuk and Mosul, with nationalistic development being manifested in the form of a self-rule of an ethnic territory and the establishment of an autonomous region under the law of the Kurdish political community (Romano, 2006, p. 208).

The Ba'athist withdrawal marked the end of the hegemonic dominance of the Ba'athist ideology and its subsequent pressures on the Kurdish population; a radical Arabist ideology characterised by an overemphasis on the concept of Arab unity (Haim, 1962, p. 233) and on a perception that non-Arabs would always constitute a challenge to this unity and to the Arab identification of the Iraqi territories (Jawad, 1981, p. 230). The 1970s efforts for the Arabisation of the Kurds and the 1980s efforts for the eradication of the Kurds constituted the systematic violation of ethno-national and human rights and involved mass killings, the destruction of Kurdish ancestral territory and the displacement of Kurdish population. The Ba'athist ideology was conceptually grounded on a desire to render Iraq as the centre of the Arab world and to maintain the Arab dominance over the economic resources of the Kurdistan region. Saddam Hussein's governance, as analysed, sought to promote an image of cooperation but was rather based on an effort to gain time for the Ba'athist party to enhance its control over centralised power institutions. The eventual outcome of massacres, destructions, deportations and forced demographic change efforts not only alienated the Kurds from the authorities of the central state of Iraq but also generated the denial of living under the authoritarian centralised control of Saddam's regime and enhanced the perception of ethnic distinctiveness.

10. The establishment of an autonomous region

The new reality that emerged with the establishment of the Kurdish self-rule, rendered the Kurdish nation as the absolute form of political loyalty. The main challenge that the Kurds had to face was the development of Kurdish institutions due to the vacuum left behind by the political withdrawal and the economic difficulties; the Iraqi state had imposed an economic embargo to deliberately develop a perceived sense of necessitated dependency among the Kurdish population (Romano, 2006, p. 378). The nationalist sentiment was accompanied by a genuine willingness for the development of a clear *de facto* political structure while the blockade was perceived as opportunity to do so. The

IKF filled the political gap, through administrative institutions and through the establishment of a body representative of the Kurdish public. Once more, disagreements existed within the political community, with Talabani desiring self-determination and an entity characterised by semi-independency while Barzani being sceptical of Iraqi reactions to such a development and preferring just autonomy (Gunter, 1992, p. 89).

IKF proceeded to temporary arrangements for administrating temporarily through the governorate structure and through the utilisation of the parties' Peshmerga forces. However, democratic elections were required to provide legitimacy to a new parliament and a new administrative structure (Stansfield, 2003, p. 123). Eventually, they were announced despite a fear emanating from the uncertainty of the possible Iranian, Turkish and Syrian responses, since none of the neighbours was willing to accept a Kurdish self-rule due to perceived structures that a Kurdish self-rule on their borders would lead to the escalation of the separatist ambitions of their own Kurdish populations; thus, the Kurds had to indirectly provide assurances regarding the maintenance of the territorial integrity of Iraq (McDowall, 2004, p. 379). The Kurds demanded from the Allies and the United Nations to assist them in terms of securing the election process towards a democratic leadership representative of the people's will. The elections, eventually, took place on the 19th of May of 1992 and led to the first parliament in Kurdish history consisting of 105 legislative members proportionately representing the Kurdish population (Kurdistan Parliament, 2020).

The election day marked the modern Kurdish history since Kurds had the right to choose their own representation in their own parliament while their participation demonstrated their willingness for self-rule; an integral element for the existence of a nation. Moreover, the whole procedure contributed towards the development of a political culture and constituted a critical step in terms of creating a sense of running affairs for yourself; a component of identity completely contradicted to the homogenous identity promoted by the central Iraqi State (Gunter, 1992, p. 90). The Kurdish nation was elevated as the dominant form of political loyalty due to the consolidation of state building processes in the presence of self-rule, a respected judiciary and protection of human rights, with Turkmen and Assyrians participating in the election process as well (McDowall, 2004, p. 380). However, it has to be noted during one of the interviews conducted for the purpose of this thesis, Dilshad Sharif highlights certain problems with

regard to the election process which demonstrate the existence of a poor democratic culture at the time:

“On the 19th of May of 1992, the first elections of the Kurdistan region occurred. I remember that for three days, they were not announcing the results. In Sulaymaniyah and Duhok, the turnout was 200 per cent. There were double votes. It was not a very clean election.”⁸

Seven per cent was required to enter the parliament; thus, many parties combined with other parties to increase their chances of being represented in the parliament. For many, the electoral result and the marginal difference in favour of the KDP reflected mainly the degree of loyalty to the leaders rather than the influence of ideological elements (Gunter, 1992, p. 91). A supreme executive leader would be elected by securing fifty-one per cent of the votes, with Barzani and Talabani being the main candidates (McDowall, 2004, p. 380). The PUK and the KDP – the only two parties that entered the parliament – agreed for the formation of a coalition government on a 50 to 50 basis, with a KDP member as the chairman of the National Council, a PUK member as his/her deputy, a PUK member as the chairman of the Executive Council and a KDP member as his/her deputy (Gunter, 1992, p. 92). None of the candidates managed to secure the supreme executive position; but for matters of unity, Barzani and Talabani agreed on a common leadership of the IKF (McDowall, 2004, p. 381). On the 4th of June of 1992, the first meeting of the Kurdish Parliament took place which represented the first post-1946 experience of Kurds ruling themselves. The formation of the KRG reflected mainly the parliamentary allocation, with the posts being divided mainly between the PUK and the KDP (Romano, 2006, p. 209; Gunter, 1992, p. 95).

The performed change, which created a new status with the Kurds being able to decide for themselves, was a change of both structural and cultural nature, with the Kurds exploiting a political vacuum to move towards the establishment of an autonomous region which would satisfy both their material and ideological motivations. The employment of Archer's (1995) approach indicates the emerged significance of civic elements in terms of determining the nationalist sentiment:

⁸ Interview with Dilshad Sharif: Assistant Lecturer in International Relations and Diplomacy at the Tishk International University and Senior Adviser to the Kurdistan Parliament [Conducted on: 28 March 2020].

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context determined by a political vacuum subject to the Ba’athist withdrawal and to the economic insecurity
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by structural and cultural motivations such as the lack of attachment to the Iraqi state, their tendency towards individual and national security and self-determination and the perceived fundamentally different nature of the newly-emerged reality
- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the formation of a new set of structural and cultural constraints subject to the establishment of the KRG, the elevation of the Kurdish nation as the dominant form of political loyalty and the incorporation of unique civic elements into the nationalist sentiment to be thoroughly discussed in Chapter IV

However, despite the administrative and financial challenges that the Kurds had to collectively face, the two parties kept damaging the political unity and the development of democratic institutions, by intervening within the KRG or the parliament through their party members. It is true that the elections exposed the Kurdish unity in terms of accomplishing political objectives, but at the same time enabled the deep societal and ideological differences that had marked the Kurdish society from long ago to emerge. The opposition between the KDP and the PUK was multi-dimensional encompassing not only personal elements due to the opposition between Barzani and Talabani, but also ideological, geographical and tribal ones due their distinct nationalistic projects, their control over different territories and their ties to specific tribes (McDowall, 2004, p. 385) and it is not a surprise that it demonstrated morphostasis towards pressures for social change. The absence of any tolerance towards the opinion of the other side led to the commencement of a military struggle among the two parties in 1994; thus, resulting to a political and military division (Ahmed, 2012) . Migration away from Kurdistan was a common phenomenon until 2003 while the instability was further deteriorated by the economic blockade and the intervention of regional powers. The opposition was characterised by a constant effort to exploit opportunities and weaken the opposite party while traitor claims along with the ongoing military confrontation further widened the gap and reduced the possibilities for reconciliation (McDowall, 2004, p. 388; Ahmed, 2012).

The re-eruption of fighting and the breaking of ceasefire agreements was a common scenario between 1996 and 1998. In August 1996, PUK assisted by Iran attacked KDP positions while the appeal of the KDP to the US did not receive a positive response; thus, Barzani appealed to Saddam Hussein to respond to the Iranian foreign threat. The attacks of KDP in Erbil in cooperation with Baghdad marked history dramatically while after the PUK defeat, Saddam Hussein lifted the economic blockade as a reward towards Barzani. Soon, however, the PUK reorganised and attacked back with the support of Iran (Ahmed, 2012; Stansfield, 2007, p. 147; McDowall, 2004, p. 388). Thus, the political and military division was further magnified by the attempts of Baghdad and Tehran to demonstrate to the international arena that the Kurdish parties were subject to their control and that they had to be considered the key regional players. It would not constitute an overstatement to assert that the conflict increased the dependency of the parties on foreign powers rather than between them and rendered reconciliation only possible through an international diplomatic intervention. After a Western diplomatic initiative, the two parties reached an agreement in Ankara for a ceasefire in October 1996 which lasted only until March 1997 when the KDP withdrew claiming that three of its officials were killed by the PUK (Pike, 2022; McDowall, 2004, p. 389).

It has to be noted that the internal fighting did not find a relatively strong response among the population while writers, independent media and intellectuals demonstrated a negative stance towards it through morphostasis. At the same time, the intervention of Baghdad and Tehran along with the collapse of ceasefire arrangements, kept damaging the US credibility; thus, a permanent deal needed to be sought. The Washington Agreement was signed on the 17th of September of 1998 between Barzani and Talabani which marked the beginning of a new era characterised by a further western economic support in an effort to challenge and overthrow Saddam Hussein (Stansfield, 2003, p. 100). However, the internal confrontation had already resulted in a new status quo and a political and territorial division. Kurdistan was separated into three zones of influence; one that included Kirkuk and was under the control of Baghdad and another two administered by the PUK and the KDP and having Sulaymaniyah and Erbil as their capitals respectively (Anderson, 2007, p. 130).

11. Conclusion

This chapter has provided a historical account of the Kurdish nation and Kurdish nationalism, by evaluating their primordial origins and examining their development and enrichment until today. Margaret Archer's (1995) cyclical Critical Realist framework of morphogenesis has been used to demonstrate how, across time and space, structural and cultural constraints such as the resistance to the imposition of an Arab identity, the lack of attachment to the state of Iraq and the tendency towards self-determination account for the resilience of Kurdish nationalism. The Kurdish ethnic origins have been determined through reference to the six criteria which comprise a Kurdish ethnics according to Anthony Smith (1986) and which are - to large extent - satisfied by the case study discussed across the thesis. The chapter then analysed the Kurdish presence across the Ottoman period and how the transition away from a religious and towards a national understanding of the Empire along with the engagement with the Western concept of the nation-state led to the politicisation of the Kurdish national identity and the enhancement of the Kurdish national awareness.

An engagement followed with the years after the establishment of the modern state of Iraq. The chapter claimed that the illegitimate outcome of the Sevres Treaty and the perceived injustices emanating from intra-state ethnic discrimination created a specific set of structural and cultural constraints subject to the enhancement of 'othering' sentiments, the lack of attachment to Iraq and the resistance to the imposition of an Arab identity on the state which, in turn, enhanced national awareness. The existential lack of unity among the Kurdish agents themselves was overpowered by the increasing perception that the process of homogenisation would lead to an Arab dominance and this gave rise in 1961 to a purely national movement that attracted members from all the social strata overpowering tribal or religious divisions.

The rise of the Ba'ath Party onto power was followed by efforts to present the Kurds as traitors and Arabs as the absolute protectors of the Iraqi inheritance which further alienated the Kurds from the Arabs of Iraq and increased their perception of national distinctiveness. Kurdish nationalism which had already been incorporated into the Kurdish political culture was the one to account for resistance to Ba'athist homogenisation policies and the 1976 resurgence of the movement. The Ba'athist withdrawal from Kurdistan functioned as the most fundamental emergent property in

terms of altering the Kurdish nationalist sentiment, with the establishment of the KRG elevating the Kurdish nation as a strong realm of political loyalty.

CHAPTER III: Kurdish ethnic nationalism in Iraq

1. Introduction

Ethnic nationalism, often referred to as ethno-nationalism, constitutes the form of nationalism according to which the nation is defined in terms of ethnicity. The Greek Historian Herodotus was the first one to historically define ethnicity and determine the three main components shared by an ethnic community of people; namely, ‘homaimon’ i.e., common kinship; ‘homoglosson’ i.e., common language; ‘homotropon’ i.e., common customs and habits (Hall, 2002, p. 189). Today, the proponents of ethnic nationalism understand nations as being defined “by a shared heritage, which usually includes a common language, a common faith and a common ethnic ancestry” (Muller, 2008, p. 20). Ethnic nationalism as a political concept is based on the idea that nations or ethnic groups can be identified in an unambiguous manner and are entitled to the right of self-determination; yet, this thesis recognises that despite based on primordial elements, identity is subject to reconstruction across time. The legitimacy of ethnic nationalism is absorbed from the status of a territory as the historic homeland of an ethnic group and the expressed willingness to facilitate the shared cultural and social life; a scenario which would be considered inconceivable through a simple recognition of status as an ethnic minority within an entity. When discussing ethnic nationalism, it is important that the concept of the ethnic nation should remain distinct from the concept of the nation-state, since they constitute separate and distinct concepts. A study on ethnicity demonstrated that despite the existence of 165 recognised states prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, approximately 8000 ethnic groups exist across the world (Mayall, 1990, p. 64). Thus, this prevents many nation-states from being classified as ethnic nations and legitimises the mentioned distinction; the heterogeneity which characterises these states constructs a status that facilitates ethnic competition.

Unlike civic nationalism, which is based on political membership, ethnic nationalism assumes a type of ethnic membership which is based on descent or heredity that follows a process of articulation in terms of blood or kinship. Nation-states characterised by strong ethnic elements tend to define nationality by *jus sanguinis* (the law of blood) compared to countries characterised by strong civic elements that tend to define

nationality by *jus soil* (the law of soil) (Kostakopoulou, 2008, p. 26-27). The distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism, which is necessary in understanding modern sentiments of belonging, is ideally portrayed by Kohn's (1967) dichotomy framework. According to the framework, the ideas of the nation and of nationalism emerged within pre-existing state structures that encompassed populations of a significant degree of cultural homogeneity. The western world, across a process of struggle against dynasticism, associated citizenship with membership in the nation. However, in the relatively backward areas of eastern Europe and Asia – both socially and politically - nationalism emerged within polities that proved unable to align with cultural or ethnic boundaries. Thus, nationalism failed “to redraw the political boundaries in conformity with ethnographic demands” (Kohn, 1967, p. 329). What is particularly important in further understanding a nationalistic process, is to determine the variables that influence it; namely, the political, social, economic and demographic (Loizides, 2010; Gunter, 1990; Romano, 2006); or in a Critical Realist manner the structural factors which account for social change across time and space (Archer, 1995).

For the purpose of this study, it is fundamentally important to understand the ethnic aspect of Kurdish nationalism and how it tends to interact with structures in the social world influencing the behaviour of agents. This chapter will evaluate the development of Kurdish ethnic nationalism by using Archer's (1995) Critical Realism with a particular focus on the components of ethnic nationalism and the forces that tend to affect it. The chapter will start by critically engaging with the academic debate and the approaches which comprise the field of ethnic nationalism; namely, the modernist approach, the primordial approach and the constructivist approach. It will then move to apply the components of ethnic nations to the case of Iraqi Kurds as determined by Anthony Smith (1986): (a) the myth of common ancestry (b) the myth of shared historical memories (c) a collective proper name (d) an association with a specific homeland (e) differentiating elements of a common culture (f) a sense of solidarity among agents. The next sections will attempt to interpret the survival of Kurdish ethnic nationalism, explain how it functions as a response to the Iraqi official narratives and how it interacts with structures of sovereign power within a context largely determined by a clash between distinct projects while also developing a connection between nationalism and power and tribal structures.

2. The academic debate on ethnic nationalism

As thoroughly explained across Chapter I, the field of nationalism studies encompasses ideas ranging from strong beliefs in the antiquity and naturalness of nations (Storey, 2001) to strong convictions in the modernity of nations and nationalism (Hearn, 2006). The same applies for studies exclusively focused on the ethnic element of nationalism, as will be demonstrated across the following sections.

The modernist account

Scholars such as Van Den Berghe (1975), Newman (1991) or Hechter (1975) tend to claim that the socio-economic variable constitutes the variable to mainly determine ethnic nationalistic processes, since uneven development is assumed to provide a favourable contextual framework for the emergence or rise of ethnic nationalism within the members of a group. The Kurdish perception or self-identification as a distinct ethnic group was constructed across time due to the uneven conditions faced after the establishment of Iraq as an independent state in 1932. Their low socio-economic status generated an environment of material and non-material insecurity which facilitated ethnic mobilisation and thus, the rise of consciousness regarding their ethnic distinctiveness. Horowitz (1985, p. 233-239) mentions that separatism or independence claims constitute phenomena that tend to appear in economically underdeveloped regions. Thus, the rise of ethnic nationalism occurs in the form of a political reaction by groups subject to social and economic inequality. In the case of Kurds, the Iraqi state ignored the ethno-political dimension of the problem which, in turn, facilitated the development of consciousness regarding cultural distinctiveness. This ignorance functioned in the form of an emergent property, facilitating structural elaboration and the development of ethnic consciousness.

Across a process of socio-economic development, the behaviour of agents is vulnerable to change due to structural forces functioning as material motivations (Archer, 1995). Considering the fact that this process of socio-economic development did occur in Iraqi Kurdistan, then ethnic elements were replaced by civic ones in the presence of an autonomous self-ruled region. High levels of socio-economic status can reduce ethnic nationalist orientation but increase attachment to the state and its institutions (Van Den Berghe, 1975); in this case, attachment to the state is not represented by the attachment

to the central Iraqi state but by attachment to the KRG. However, in the absence of absolute autonomy, ethnic nationalist sentiments are always subject to change in response to the policies of Baghdad. The differences on oil policy and the subsequent loss of wages by civil servants, increased the anger towards Baghdad and increased ethnic nationalist sentiments; these economic circumstances functioned as structural motivations and generated a process of structural elaboration across which the actions of the agents took place within this context of circumstances, to lead to the agents' reaction (Archer, 1995, p. 193).

Until the 1960s, theorists were assuming that modernisation would function as an instrument towards reducing ethnic consciousness due to the interdependence of modern economies and the modern social structures which could promote the loss of significance of ethnicity as a form of social organisation. However, ethnic consciousness not only survived but spread into the developed world as well. As Saul Newman (1991, p. 454) mentions, as ethnic conflicts "increased in number and scope, they were perceived as more than just stubborn relics of a bygone era"; thus, stressing the importance of re-evaluating the relationship between ethnic nationalism and economic forces. Modernist scholars such as Van den Berghe (1975) and Barth (1969), however, insist that a relationship does exist between ethnicity and class, with the latter claiming that modernisation amplifies the competition for scarce resources, jobs and economic opportunities; thus, generating conflict along ethnic lines as citizens believe that their interests are connected to the interests of their ethnic group. Competition is assumed to be the outcome of a cultural division of labour or of a split labour market, generating a perception of exploitation and increase of national consciousness emanating from the realisation of economic inequality and scarcity of resources.

Research supports the assumption that economic competition results in enhanced ethnic consciousness due to occupational dissatisfaction influenced by variables such as geographic mobility or occupational dissatisfaction. For instance, Markakis' (1989) study on Ethiopia demonstrates how economic forces increase ethnic tension to conclude that the control of the economic and political life over an heterogeneous population raises ethnic consciousness. Dependency theorists often refer to a modernised core region and to less-developed periphery regions, with the capitalist forms of production generating economic disparities between the core and the

periphery. The ethnic group within the developed core seeks to exploit the groups in the periphery, thereby raising ethnic consciousness for them (Hechter, 1975, p. 30). Conflictual modernists focus on the idea of differential modernisation and that different ethnic groups modernise at different rates (Connor, 1973, p. 21). On the other hand, ecology theorists assume that groups are by nature forced to compete and when two ethnic groups live within the same region, they have to compete for the same jobs and economic opportunities. Van den Berghe (1975, p. 75) asserts that within a culturally divided society, “the inequalities of class and ethnicity become cumulative, and the system of domination becomes doubly oppressive and exploitative”, with the class struggle becoming more complicated due to acquiring an ethnic nature as well. In the case of Iraq, the core ethnic group had the most influence over the state and thus, attempted to promote its own culture and identity.

This thesis embraces the previously mentioned assumptions but claims complementarily that modernisation did not manage to eliminate ethnic consciousness according to the expectation that the development of capitalism accompanied by the spread of the Marxist ideology would reduce the effectiveness of references to pre-modern social ties. For instance, conflictual modernists assume that the process of modernisation destroys traditional structures and replaces them with modern ones, upsetting ancient societies and constructing a social system within which some groups enjoy the benefits of modernity which give them an advantage over competing groups (Connor, 1973, p. 21). Economic forces do manage to awaken the ethnic sentiments of a group and raise ethnic consciousness due to functioning as material motivations determining the behaviour of the agency (Archer, 1995). However, they did not manage to eliminate or weaken traditional structures in Kurdistan such as the tribal structures; the cultural motivations emanating from traditional structures overpowered economic forces in the form of material motivations, resulting in morphostasis. According to Shadeedi Hamzeh:

“The KDP and the PUK themselves are traditional. They come from tribal societies. And I think adopting Kurdish nationalism is much more powerful than adopting political Islam in Kurdistan. That’s not to say that the KDP and the PUK are secular. They are still traditional and tribal. It is difficult to challenge Shariah

laws or Islamic teachings. The two parties still fund mosques and Mullahs that are affiliated with them.”⁹

Moreover, the main problem of numerous modernist approaches is their inability to address aspects of ethnic awareness such as the resonance of identity and the motivation of elites to politicise ethnicity (Isaacs, 1975, p. 30). Political elites tend to politicise ethnicity or promote political organisation along ethnic lines, out of fear of losing position or of domination by another ethnic group or after realisation that ethnicity has all the elements that make a group eligible for nationhood (ibid.) and can become “a crucial principle of political legitimation and de-legitimation of systems, states, regimes and governments” (Rothschild, 1981, p. 2). Furthermore, it is also worth noting that the non-economic forces of modernisation can impact ethnic relations. Isolated ethnic groups come into further interaction with other ethnic groups, realise their differences and this has a positive impact on national consciousness. To compete and survive, individuals often seek assistance from a larger collective group; in this case the ethnic nation.

Modernisation impacted the Kurdish society; a society which emanates from traditional structures. An interdependent economy with a centralised authority and a society which appreciates the rewards of modernity would be expected to replace traditional structures (Connor, 1973, p. 21). However, the Kurds proved unwilling to replace their traditional structures which are strongly related to their ethnic values but are vulnerable to the material forces of modernisation; thus, they reacted to protect their ethnic values. The economic competition and the realisation that their fate is linked to the fate of the ethnic group did not create ethnic nationalism, but, instead, increased the significance of ethnic ties. According to Critical Realism, agents and social structures are in a constant process of change (Archer, 1995). As mentioned, the genesis of the Kurdish agents did take place within a specific context of social structures while modernisation in the form of an emergent property functioned as a structural motivation to replace the traditional structures of the Kurdish society; yet, the cultural motivations emanating from values and concerns overpowered the structural ones and the Kurds refused to fully embrace the processes of modernisation. At the same time, the economic boom that Kurdistan witnessed in the post-2003 period in terms of property development, infrastructure,

⁹ Interview with Hamzeh Shadeedi: Policy Researcher at the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) [Conducted on: 6 May 2020].

supermarkets and urban planning (Natali, 2010, p. 88), in the form of a structural emergent property has facilitated a process of structural elaboration and increased their attachment to their own 'imagined community'; the KRG.

Moreover, the role of distinct dynamics and mechanisms should not be ignored due to their influence on an ethno-nationalist process. Relative deprivation constitutes the perceived discrepancy between the 'value expectations' i.e., the expectations that individuals possess regarding their life conditions, and the value capabilities i.e., the life conditions they are capable of attaining given their status within a certain structural context (Gurr, 1970, p. 13). The approach assumes that as the gap between the two variables increases, so does discontent; this, in turn, motivates political action and ethnic mobilisation. Differential treatment can encompass economic or political discrimination such as restriction of access to economic or political opportunities (ibid., p. 174). Regardless of the validity of their claims, since Kurds tend to perceive that Baghdad discriminates against them as members of the Kurdish ethnic nation, their discontent due to the restrictions on socio-political or economic rights tends to develop and maintain ethnic awareness and ethnic nationalist orientation.

The primordial account

Primordialism tends to emphasise the uniqueness of ethnic identity as a social identifier, arguing that it is unique because unlike class membership, which is subject to economic and social conditions, ethnic membership remains unaltered across an individual's life (Bayar, 2009, p. 2). Each person has premodern cultural and historical bases and ties to other co-nationals and regardless of economic status, his fate is inevitably linked to the fate of the group. In contrast to modernists who argue for rational motives, primordialists argue for the existence of irrational motives that tend to possess intrinsic worth; self-identification in a national manner is assumed to add to an individual's self-worth. Thus, identifying a nonelite element in ethnic nationalism and an element of sacrificing personal benefit for the collective wellbeing (Horowitz, 1985, p. 147). They reject that ethnic identity functions as a political tool employed by elites, claiming that is deeply rooted in the socialisation process of discovering an individual's sense of self-worth. Primordialism appeared as a theory to claim that ethnicity is a given natural principle of human organisation and developed a further dimension when Durkheim (1933) described humans as incomplete animals that only become complete through a

process of social organisation. In the contemporary era, it functions mainly as a critique to those theories arguing for a rational nature of ethnicity and asks for the examination of the psychological and cultural dimensions of ethnicity (Young, 1993, p. 22).

Barth (1969, p. 9) defines ethnic identity as a bundle of cues, symbols and values that determine the distinctiveness of a group of people while Van den Berghe (1978, p. 401) as “an extended form of kin selection”. Primordialists tend to emphasise the emotional side of ethnicity to explain the fears for the loss of a highly valued past, the state of insecurity for the future and the state of ethnic competition. Durkheim (1933) asserts that the moral unity of a society of people is grounded on a collective consciousness which is based on a shared experience represented through common symbols in the form of physical traits and traditions which hold the society together and unify it. Durkheim (1933) was assuming, however, that economic interdependence would gradually replace primordial symbols as the ultimate source of unity; thus, he misinterpreted ethnicity as something that fits to a specific era fundamentally different from the one we are experiencing at the moment. This belief emanated from the over-expectations with regard to the governmental ability to promote civic nationalism to replace ethnic loyalty. Leaders seem unable to create loyalties to the centralised state equally strong to the ethnic ones and the demands of ethnic movements are only considered as obstacles to modernisation rather than serious cultural demands.

For both rational (i.e., materialistic) and irrational (idealistic) reasons, the fates of individuals are attached to their ethnic groups as they have access to economic and social advantages or suffer disadvantages according to their group membership. Thus, the ethnic group’s position in the society matters. Moreover, individuals receive a sense of psychological worth through their ethnic membership which also determines their sense of individual security. A structural historical change or emergent property that would threaten ethnicity as a structure would be assumed to simultaneously threaten the identity of the agents (Bloom, 1990, p. 39). The uniqueness of the ethnic identity implies that the status of an ethnic group is more important to the sense of belonging than an individual’s status within the society. People derive self-worth from their value as an individual and as a member of a group (Isaacs, 1975, p. 30).

The perception that being a worthy person is the outcome of an ethnic affiliation implies that a threat to this valued affiliation generates anxiety and activates defence

mechanisms; thus, the struggle for ethnic survival holds a deep personal meaning to individuals due to the fear of extinction and relegation. Once ethnic evaluations take a subconscious role in a society, they become culture through the establishment of stereotypes while post-independence or post-autonomy, these stereotypes become politicised (Ross, 1962, p. 27). This thesis claims for the existence of this non-material irrational element of group identity and the emotional power of the affective ties while also recognising that they can be used as a tool for political organisation. These emotional elements of identity function as structures that determine the behaviour of agents in support of their ethnic ties even if this is performed in the absence of rational or materialistic incentives.

The constructivist account

Constructivism, as a philosophical stance, argues for the socially constructed character of reality. Individuals are assumed to participate in a process of internalisation across which norms and values are perceived, understood and absorbed as a part of the individual's identity which, in turn, determines agential action (Scott, 1971; Mead, 1934). In a unique contribution to the field of nationalism studies, the constructivist claim portrays the creation and recreation of identity as the ultimate cause of ethnic conflict. Constructivism assumes that a nation-state has no option apart from creating or constructing a national culture to ensure its survival; in other words, in accordance with Mayall and Simpson (1992, p. 10), "nations need myths to live by". A nation-state has to establish itself in the mythical past to absorb legitimacy from the agents within its territorial boundaries while rituals and symbols constitute political inventions to construct the essence of a nation (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

The ability to construct a national myth determines a nation's viability; the inability to do so can result in conflict and weakening of the centralised state. Ernest Gellner (1964, p. 169), in contrast to all accounts understanding nationalism as the element to generate self-consciousness within a given group, asserts that nationalism "invents nations where they do not exist". The modern international structure and the modern economies require the existence of nation-states due to issues of legitimacy and economic regulation. The industrial society generates forces of homogeneity which tend to emerge in the form of nationality (Gellner, 1983, p. 39). Thus, nationality is understood as a political construction created by individuals to justify their acquired sovereignty.

The instrumentalist branch contributes to the academic discussion on ethnic conflict, arguing that it does not emanate directly from ethnic differences, but rather from the politicisation or manipulation of identities, in an effort to produce advantages for an ethnic group at the expense of another one (Posen, 1993; Chandra, 2004). According to Laitin (1983, p. 339), the worst possible scenario is the establishment of control by an authoritarian dominant culture that proceeds to nation-building efforts through the elimination of any other forms of loyalty to maintain security for the state. In such cases, the ethnic loyalties of the dominant community are strengthened since their ethnic nationalism is transformed into a more contemporary form of state nationalism (Brown, 1989, p. 8). The other ethnic communities are presented with a dichotomic choice; either to assimilate or resist. Regardless of whether people would sacrifice or die for their ethnic identity, this process is the one that, according to constructivists, generates ethnic tension and conflict.

3. Kurdish ethnic nationalism

Kurdish ethnic nationalism claims to represent a people linguistically and culturally distinct from other national groups in the region (McDowall, 2004; Stansfield, 2003). Thus, the establishment of an ethnic state constitutes a legitimate demand to achieve official recognition of their distinct national identity. In Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey, Kurds represent a significant segment of the population; however, their number remains controversial due to the existence of incentives of over-representation or under-representation by nationalist organisation or the sovereign states respectively. Despite the large number of Kurds in each of these states, the centralised state remains negative to the possibility of giving statehood to their Kurdish population. As long as the ethnic nationalist demand is not satisfied, ethnic nationalism will continue to threaten stability and territorial integrity of these states.

This thesis will employ an ethno-symbolist approach to understand ethnic nationalism. In accordance with Anthony Smith (2007, p. 53) claiming that the concept of the nation has been “coextensive with every larger territorial and cultural identity in any epoch”, this thesis stresses the importance of accurately and convincingly representing the relationship of ethnic past and modern state. It argues for the existence of a strong sentimental attachment to the community expressed in an altruistic manner which overpowers other forms of collective identification while also accepting that this

solidarity is subject to change across time due to socio-economic forces capable of raising or reducing the levels of national consciousness. At the same time, the role of modernity is appreciated in terms of constructing a structural framework for the emergence and establishment of nationalism as a compact ideology and accounts for the transition away from ethnies and towards nations which corresponds to a broader socio-historical shift away from tradition and towards modernity and a process of politicisation (Smith, 1986, p. 153-157).

The following sections will analyse the six main components of the Kurdish ethnies according to the classification determined by Anthony Smith (1986, p. 32):

1. collective proper name
2. myth of common ancestry
3. shared historical memories
4. shared cultural distinctiveness
5. historical association with a demarcated territory
6. sense of solidarity among the community members

The application of the ethno-symbolist theory aims at emphasising the perceived cultural affinity of the Kurdish agents with their ethnic past as members of a community that has survived ontologically despite the historical challenges it was exposed to. What distinguishes the Kurdish agents of Iraq from the broader understanding of Kurdish nationalism in the Middle East is their transition away from the form of an ethnies to that of a nation, through the development of a common public culture, a unitary economic structure and written laws and regulations which all together contribute towards creating a sense of inter-reliance and establishing an operational advantage compared to ethnies (Smith, 2002). This transition was the outcome of the establishment of the KRG in 1991 and was facilitated after the intervention of the US and the institutional establishments after 2003 in the form of emergent properties. Subject to this transition, mechanical solidarity based on kinship (which corresponds to ethnic nationalism) was replaced to a certain extent by organic solidarity based on interdependence (which corresponds to civic nationalism), across a process of structural elaboration (Malesevic, 2004, p. 562). These social changes will be more thoroughly discussed in Chapter IV.

4. The myth of common ancestry and shared historical memories

According to Izady (1992, p. 3), most accounts converge on the fact that the Kurds constitute descendants of the Medes; an Indo-European group that appeared before 600 BC. Since that time, the Kurds have been involved in a process of interaction with neighbouring groups in the surrounding region but have remained culturally distinct. Kurdistan is situated on mountainous boundaries of the former Ottoman and Persian Empires, but neither the Ottoman nor the Persian culture penetrated Kurdistan to such an extent in order to achieve assimilation of the various Kurdish tribes; consequently, the Kurds remained geographically and culturally distinct (Entessar, 1992, p. 3). The mountains possess a symbolic importance that determines Kurdish narratives and sentiments, with the famous saying that ‘level the mountains and the Kurds will be no more’, perfectly portraying the perception that the mountains are the ones that have been proved critical in protecting the Kurds as an ethnic group historically and enabling them to survive (Izady, 1992, p. 188). This perception is so strong that it overcomes any opinions that mountains as geographical obstacles prevented the facilitation of communication between the Kurds, resulting to a degree of cultural and linguistic fragmentation (ibid.).

The myth of common ancestry is the one to establish a sense of national ties for its members and these ties tend to determine their sentiments. Such a myth does not only provide historical information regarding the geographical location and origins of the nation, but also defines its perceived destiny for the agents composing it. In the absence of the perception of a common ancestry, the nation fails in terms of defining itself and mobilise collective action on behalf of the nation (Smith, 1986, p. 24). These myths which emanate from historical events in the form of emergent properties, have gradually constructed through a process of elaboration, a strong structure which determines the behaviour and the expectations of the agents. Kurdish narratives often include reference to the dynasties and families that ruled Kurdistan in the pre-modern era such as the Shaddadids (951-1174 AD) while the myth of a common descent has been facilitated through the memory and maintenance of mythological stories such as the one of the Assyrian King Zuhak that used to execute the Kurds who ultimately managed to escape to the mountains and ensure the survival of the nation (Aziz, 2011,

p. 34). Archer's (1995) framework demonstrates the incorporation of the myth of common ancestry across time and space, enhancing the ethnic sentiment:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context within which the genesis of the Kurdish agents has occurred
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by structural and cultural motivations through the exchange of narratives and stories directly influenced by their perceived ancestral past and their expected destiny
- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the formation of a new set of structural and cultural constraints subject to the incorporation of the myth of a common ancestry into the nationalist sentiment which mobilises collective action on behalf of the nation

The history of Kurdish nationalism has generated several historical memories for the ethnic Kurdish population, emanating from the experience of struggle and discrimination. This history has been marked by the perception of central governments encompassing Kurdish minorities that the Kurds as a distinct ethnic group constitute threat to the stability of their regimes. Kurdish nationalism appeared in its current form after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and especially after the 1920 signing of the Treaty of Sevres which referred to an autonomous Kurdistan region that would be entitled to an independence within a year subject to the desire of the agents and the approval of the League of Nations (Fromkin, 1989). Despite the fact that the treaty was never ratified, the aspirations not only survived but were strengthened across time subject to the interaction with the structures of sovereign power and formed the roots for violent ethnic conflict in the years that followed (Van Bruinessen, 1983, p. 370). Dodge (2003) analyses extensively in his book 'Inventing Iraq' the historic failure of a misperception that the sovereignty of the newly established Iraqi state would be able to overpower all other values; instead, the civic values promoted by the Iraqi state were not only unable to dominate but were overpowered themselves by the elements encompassed within the ethnic identity.

Under the Ottoman and Persian rule, Kurdish resistance in the form of rebellions was evident in numerous occasions; such rebellions include the Baban revolt in 1806 against the Turks and the 1880 revolt of Sheikh Ubeydullah against the Qajar dynasty.

According to Turner (1988, p. 387) such revolts did employ nationalistic rhetoric through reference to an ethnic discrimination, but were mainly the consequence of taxation, unequal treatment at the level of leadership and intervention in the leaders' authority. This thesis accepts that social or economic forces generated the reaction of the agents, but claims, simultaneously, that these forces did not create national consciousness but were rather effective in raising it based on pre-existing cultural characteristics. Nationalism as a concept of western origins used to be completely foreign to the cultures under Ottoman domination while the Empire was basing its unity upon the religious instrument of Islam which was characterised by a philosophical worldview shared by most of the communities of the Empire (Besson, 1991, p. 137). Kurdish intellectuals, however, that interacted and engaged with western ideas subject to their western education or professional interaction with western agents, promoted nationalism as a means of cultural preservation, resulting to the publication of the newspaper 'Kurdistan' in 1898 and of numerous political organisations (Izady, 1992, p. 59).

Moving to the post-Ottoman years, the end of WWI was accompanied by an opportunity for an independent Kurdistan; however, the establishment of the authority of Reza Shah and Mustafa Kemal over Iran and Turkey respectively along with the decision of Britain to establish an Arab-dominated Iraqi state to include the oil-rich province of Kirkuk not only eliminated this opportunity but required the incorporation of Kurdistan into the new state (Wimmer, 2002, p. 173). To avoid unrest following the renegotiation of the Treaty of Sevres into the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, the British provided autonomy to the northern Kurdish region institutionalised in the 1921 Iraqi Constitution referring to two ethnic groups of equal rights while also establishing equal legal status between the Kurdish and the Arab languages (ibid.).

However, later, the central governments and their nation-building strategies were dominated by a secular conception of national identity and under this status, the Kurds' ethnic identity became the one to determine the stance of central governments towards them; thus, the Kurds were subject to exclusion and discrimination during the 1920s and numerous revolts took place across the four states of Iraq, Syria, Iran and Turkey. In Iraq, two major revolts occurred. The first one was in 1922, when Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji declared himself as the King of Kurdistan through a revolt led by the 'Free

Kurdistan Movement'. The revolt was not successful in attracting support outside the Sulaymaniyah district due to facing tribalism obstacles and feudalism accusations (Izady, 1992, p. 64). In 1931, Sheikh Ahmed Barzani initiated a rebellion against British, Turkish and Iraqi forces after successfully unifying a number of Kurdish tribes, but his forces were overpowered and he was arrested in Turkey; his younger brother Mustafa replaced him as the new main nationalist leader of Kurdistan (ibid.).

The 1946 establishment of the Republic of Mahabad constituted a state-centric manifestation of Kurdish nationalism. After the British and Soviet occupation of Iran, the Iranian Kurdish movement exploited the political space created to declare its independence, with Qazi Muhammad as the political leader and Mustafa Barzani as the military leader (Sluggett and Sluggett, 1987, p. 183). However, the entity was excessively dependent on Soviet assistance for its survival and once an economic deal between Moscow and Tehran was reached, encompassing concessions from the latter, the Kurds were defeated and Barzani had to flee to the USSR; thus, the Republic lasted only for a year (Ghareeb, 1981, p. 12).

Barzani returned to Iraq in 1958 when the monarchy in Baghdad was overthrown by a group of military officers led by Abd al-Karim Qasim and managed to expand his authority among the Kurds while also being used by Qasim against Arab nationalists, Ba'athists and communists (Entessar, 1992, p. 59). Across time, Qasim started perceiving the rising power of Barzani as a threat to his regime and initiated negotiations with the ICP in an effort to neutralise the KDP; this resulted in internal tension between the two parties which lasted until the 1963 mutual effort to cooperate against Arab nationalism after the overthrowal of Qasim. The new president Abdul Salam Arif, who was a non-Ba'athist, promised Kurdish autonomy initially in an effort to gain time and eliminate the communist influence, but ended up attacking the Kurds justifying his actions by referring to excessive Kurdish demands. Barzani was forced to accept the receipt of Iranian arms and establish close relationships with Iran, further deteriorating the possibilities of any common agreed ground between Baghdad and Kurdistan (Turner, 1988, p. 400).

When the Ba'athists rose onto power in 1968, they unsuccessfully attempted to cooperate with the Kurds in an effort to consolidate their power and an armed struggle erupted (Entessar, 1992, p. 70). The Ba'athists were supported by the Soviets while the

KDP was supported by the CIA, Israel and Iran that were aiming to destabilise the regime (ibid., p. 71). When the Algiers Agreement was signed in 1975, Tehran stopped militarily supporting the Kurds allowing the Ba'athists to attack Kurdish villages and initiate an Arabisation process of illegal settlement of Arabs into Kurdish properties (Izady, 1992, p. 68).

The incentives of Iran were exposed after the start of the 1979 Iranian Revolution when the political space was created for the KDPI and Komala to proceed with the establishment of an autonomous zone in Iranian Kurdistan. Iran not only presented the Kurds as an anti-Islamic group trying to dismember Iran, but also allied with other Kurds such as Barzani to eliminate the threat. The Kurds were always considered an obstacle to territorial and religious unity; even though, there was a tendency to provide religious rights to certain minorities, this provision was not allowed based on non-Islamic criteria (Ghareeb, 1981, p. 16). The ephemeral relationships persisted across the Iran-Iraq War when the KDP received military support from Tehran and Saddam promising the PUK regional autonomy and a significant amount from the Iraqi budget (Izady, 1992, p. 69). Despite uncertainty whether Saddam could keep his promise, this move enabled him to counter Iran (Entessar, 1992, p. 132). The 1988 end of the war was marked by the decision of Saddam to destroy Kurdish region and use chemical weapons (ibid., p. 138).

The 1991 Gulf War victory of the Allies determined the roots of the current form of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq, with the Kurds initially gaining control of their regions and the Iraqi Republican Guard counter-responding and resulting in 1.2 million refugees fleeing to Iran and 0.5 million to Turkey (Izady, 1992, p. 70). The Western powers, in an effort, to put an end to the humanitarian crisis, established a no-fly zone above Northern Iraq within which the Kurds established a federal state that encouraged. People started enjoying civic rights while student unions, NGOs and women's organisations emerged. Later, the 2005 constitution established Kurdish as an official language and acknowledged the national rights of the Kurds, ensuring equality of citizens regardless of race, religion and gender. The existence of a Kurdish state generated nationalist sentiments among Turkey's Kurds while the PUK used the no-fly zone to perform attacks against the Turkish government and Turkey reacting by sending forces after them (Rouleau, 1993, p. 124). Despite the further development of shared

historical memories, Kurds as an ethnic nation demonstrated a lack of a unified leadership at the time, with Abdullah Ocalan denouncing Barzani and Talabani as traitors to all Kurds, due to their cooperation with the Turkish government in the fight against the PKK, providing permission to attack it within Iraqi Kurdistan (Olson, 1994, p. 48).

Summarising, the history of Kurdish nationalism has been marked by attempts of cooperation between states and Kurdish movements, which the Kurdish agency maintained to strengthen their position within the structures of Kurdistan. Kurdish interests have often been conflicting (Wimmer, 2002, p. 190; Barzani, 2003, p. 24) and the absence of a unifying ethnic nationalist agenda created space for outside powers to use them against each other. At the same time, the history of broken promises by central governments gradually constructed a national myth from which the Kurdish nation attracts legitimacy; a myth which demands the absence of trust towards any ostensibly good-will measures and which requires a pragmatic policy to overcome obstacles. Arab leaders diachronically expressed a belief towards an equal ethnic group often through constitutional concessions such as the decision to include in the 1960 Iraq constitution a reference to a partnership between the Kurds and the Arabs; once able to consolidate power, they would repress Kurdish political rights, militarise Kurdish regions, ban nationalist parties and impose resettlement (Wimmer, 2002, p. 190).

History forms an important dimension of Kurdish nationalism since it does not only tell a story but also educates the nation. Shared history does not only imply the historical events related to foreign relations, but the internal history as well manifested through the repetition of cultural traditions (Smith, 1995, p. 18). The Newroz of the 21st of March [which originally emanates from the Zoroastrian tradition] constitutes the ultimate example; the day that mythology determines as the day that Zuhak was killed. Newroz has been adopted and politicised across the 20th century and acts a symbol of the Kurdish resurrection; today, it does not only correspond to a tradition; it is the ultimate symbol of freedom and victory over Zuhak and over anybody willing to damage the Kurdish nation in the future. The celebrations of Newroz have been taking place for decades and they, themselves, have created shared historical memories of the practice of the Kurdish culture (Aziz, 2011, p. 35; Murphy, 2004) which tend to reinforce the Kurdish national identity since, as mentioned, it has been associated with

attempts to express and resurrect the Kurdish identity (Yanik, 2006). Cultural traditions form strong structures created and maintained by agents through historical repetition, which tend to determine the behaviour of the agents by reminding them of their ethical obligations towards the Kurdish nation and by unifying them against and distinguishing them from ethnic others. Often this historical repetition is facilitated by the actions of political elites, in an effort to unify the society; events tend to be reminded or reinterpreted in a specific manner to construct a particular set of knowledge and beliefs and generate legitimacy (Hayes, 1960; Moeller, 2001).

Archer's (1995) framework indicates the significance of shared historical memories and cultural traditions in terms of enhancing the ethnic element of nationalism:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context within which the genesis of the Kurdish agents occurred determined by the influence of history in the form struggle and ethnic discrimination and the subsequent shared historical memories
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by structural and cultural motivations such as the willingness for freedom and self-determination justified and enhanced through the exchange, reproduction and establishment of shared historical memories and the historical repetition of cultural traditions
- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the formation of a new set of structural and cultural constraints subject to the understanding of the ethical obligations towards the Kurdish nation and to the appreciation of the importance of mobilised collective action against ethnic others

5. A collective proper name, an association with a specific homeland and differentiating elements of a common culture

As mentioned earlier, the Kurds are characterised by a collective proper name in accordance with Smith's (1986, p. 32) classification while the words 'Kurd' and 'Kurdistan' which can be traced back over 2,000 years tend to determine this identity. Collective names do not only enable the members of a nation to verbally distinguish themselves from the members of other nations, but also usually demonstrate the existence of a nation and the symbolic interpretation of its survival (Aziz, 2011, p. 33).

Despite any efforts by regional empires and states to assimilate the Kurds, the Kurds managed to survive and this is demonstrated by their choice to stay loyal to the words 'Kurd' and 'Kurdistan' (McDowall, 2004). Their collective proper name functions in the form of a well-established structure that generates cultural motivations to respond to narratives that challenge the Kurdish national identity.

When it comes to territory, their separation across different states has constructed several perceptions about what Kurdistan is, where is it situated and where its boundaries end. According to Kaya (2020, p. 1), the tendency of the Kurds to challenge the existing borders is demonstrated through the promotion of the idea of a Greater Kurdistan (Appendix A):

“Nowhere is this more evident than in their promotion of the map of greater Kurdistan, a unified ideal homeland which encompasses large swathes of Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran, and a small part of Armenia, in a region with a complex history of ethnic, cultural and political background”.

However, Iraqi Kurds tend to use the name Kurdistan to refer to the Northern Iraq territory either because of a perception that this area is what constitutes Kurdistan or either because they believe in the existence of liberated and occupied territories of Kurdistan. Nevertheless, territory constitutes one of the key dimensions of national identity and most nationalism scholars tend to converge on a connection between nations and territory. For primordialists and ethno-symbolists, this connection is mainly organic than constructed while for others is a consequence of modern nations and their need to define boundaries to achieve economic, political and administrative efficiency (Grosby, 1995, p. 143). Kaya (2020, p. 6) adopts a political geography definition of territory to understand the territorial aspect of Kurdish nationalism subject to the belief that “the way Kurdistan and its map have been framed, used and interpreted throughout history have depended on how the relationship between nation and territory was understood in each period”.

Despite any modern perceptual deviations, Kurdish nationalism has a visible territorial aspect both in its emergence and throughout its development. According to Kaya (2020, p. 22), “the importance of the territorial element, Kurdistan, partly derives from a strong attachment to the place of habitation and to the physical environment”. Moreover, the perception of a homeland is significantly relevant in terms of creating the sentiment of symbiosis between the agents and a piece of earth. The sacred city of Musasir in

northern Iraq generates the perception of a sacred association that agents have to maintain while the case of Kirkuk – which was subject to a campaign of Arabisation - demonstrates the strength of ethnic nationalism (Aziz, 2011, p. 36). The Kurds still consider it as their homeland while many displaced Arabs that were transferred from southern Iraq to Kirkuk still do not bury their dead bodies in the city but rather prefer sending them to their original areas since Kirkuk is considered as the homeland of the Kurds (ibid.).

The impact of the international structures and the role of international norms and rules should not be neglected in terms of creating ethnic nationalist sentiments and shaping political behaviour, since they construct the structural context within which nationalism grows in the same sense that any international actor acts within a framework of legitimate or illegitimate rules or ideas. For instance, Vali (2003) analyses how nationalism has been affected by modernity and the application of the modern nation-state system in the Middle East across the 1920s and 1930s which triggered assimilation policies towards minorities. The perception of Kurdistan as an ethnic territory emanates from three structural features, according to Kaya (2020). First, the development of the international principle of self-determination has facilitated the construction of an association within the international context between claims for autonomy within an ethnic territory and human and democratic rights rhetoric. Second, the establishment of the assumption that the territory is identical to the history of the nation has reinforced the ethnic perceptual nature of Kurdistan. Third, this nature has been further reinforced by the employment of the Kurdistan map both online and offline by the Kurdish diaspora communities (O’Shea, 2004; The Kurdish Institute of Paris, 2020) which according to Kaya (2020, p. 9), has “become one of the prominent features and symbols of Kurds” and a “significant feature of Kurdish nationalist discourse”. Barin Kayaoglu confirms:

“A Kurd is a person who calls himself or herself a Kurd no matter where they live. You have a pretty substantial diaspora of Kurds who live outside the Middle East from Australia all the way to Canada. You have a ginormous diaspora in Europe affecting the politics of the countries they are located at; especially to Turkey’s and Iran’s disadvantage.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Interview with Dr Barin Kayaoglu: Assistant Professor of World History at the American University of Iraq [Conducted on: 10 May 2020].

The territorial feature is a prominent structure of Kurdish nationalism. Kurdish ethnic nationalists are characterised by a strong attachment to their place of origin and to the concept of Kurdistan, imagining their territory as a unified territory that has remained unchanged throughout history, but has been divided by the emergence of nation-states (O'Shea, 2004). This perception is strengthened by the assumption that Kurdistan as a territory forms an integral part of the Kurdish ethnic identity and not solely a national aspiration; thus, the history of the region is identical to the ethnic history of the Kurdish nation (ibid.).

Differentiating elements of a common culture not only form an integral component of what constitutes a nation, but also constitute structures that can determine the behaviour of the agents. Kurdish culture is a group of distinctive cultural traits practiced by the agents and which constitutes a legacy from ancient agents that shaped and determined the genesis of the modern agents and the modern Kurdish society. A distinctive shared culture serves to unite the agents and distinguish them from the members of other cultures and nations (Smith, 1991a, p. 25). The most significant of the cultural components is the linguistic one. Nationalist movements recognise and understand common language as an important structural element for the development of an ethnic nation. The Kurdish language belongs to the Indo-European language family and differs fundamentally from Arabic and Turkish while being more similar to Persian despite distinct from it; it has been spoken and shared for centuries (Izady, 1992, p. 170). A process of absolute linguistic and cultural homogeneity has been prevented from geographical factors and the lack of a centralised authority to promote standardisation. Despite the existence of many sub-dialects, three are the main dialects of the Kurdish language; namely, Kurmanji, Sorani and Pahlewani (Entessar, 1992, p. 4). Heterogeneity also exists in terms of a common alphabet; yet, a sense of a common language as a cultural component exists among the Kurdish nationalists and language has been functioning as the differentiating structural identifier of the Kurdish nation. Kurdish music is an important element as well and has been traditionally employed for transmitting stories of Kurdish history by 'Dengbej' (The Kurdish Project, 2020).

It should not be disregarded that the lyrics of Kurdish songs have been used as a means towards promoting Kurdish ethno-nationalism through the representation of the nation (Wade, 1998, p. 4) in a form of a civil religion which "directs favour and fervour"

(Kong, 1995, p. 448) towards the nation. Narratives tend to incorporate, according to Donmez (2012), references to:

1. A feeling of subordination due to the Kurds being a nation without a state such as 'Kes Nema' which mentions: "there is no one not gaining independence in this world. We would not be the ones who are under oppression" (ibid., p. 329).
2. A feeling of injustice such as 'Welatê Min' which mentions: "They spread bombs in my homeland again. They exterminate children and mothers. Brothers/Sisters arise, our wound is deep" (ibid., p. 329).
3. A feeling of nostalgia towards the Kurdish Golden Age such as 'Ey Raqip' which mentions: "We are the heroes of Meds and Keyhüsrev. Our faith and our religion is our homeland" (ibid. p. 330).
4. A feeling of attachment towards the culture and the territory such as 'Newroz' which mentions: "Newroz is our feast. Newroz goes down towards mountains... Newroz is our feast. On the aestheticisation of territory"; or 'Gula Cîhanê' which mentions: "Glorious rivers flow from the heart of Kurdistan" (ibid., p. 331).
5. The necessity for social mobilisation such as 'Agire Azadi' which mentions: "We should unify with some holding pen and some loading weapons. Our salvation will be our unification" (ibid., p. 332).
6. Demands for an independent statehood such as 'Ah Kurdistan Kurdistan' which mentions: "For your independence, we become stronger, we will expel enemies" (ibid., p. 333).

The cuisine is also widely understood as an integral part of what it means to be Kurdish, characterised by the large use of lamb, chicken, vegetables, pilaf and dairy products and including dishes such as berbesel, biryani, dokliw, kellane, kutilk, tobouli, kuki and birinc. In terms of religion, a theological loyalty has not been effective in terms of forming a unique structural mark for the nation due to the extensive religious diversity among the Kurds (Aziz, 2011, p. 36). Today, the most common is Sunni Islam which is practiced by approximately 60 per cent of the Kurds in the region and 98 per cent of the Kurds in Iraq, but the Kurds tend to have different religions depending on the country they are living in and a significant number are Shia Muslims, Alawites and

Yazidis. It is worth mentioning that prior to the Islamic influence, most Kurds used to be followers of the Zoroastrianism religion (Foltz, 2017).

The role of religion should be examined when observing an ethno-nationalist process; especially when it comes to the Middle East. Attaman (2003) mentions that Islam does not reject different cultures or nationalities but does place primary importance to ideas such as the ‘Islamic brotherhood’ and the ‘ummah’ i.e., the international community of believers, which lies above the importance of ethnicity or nationality. This implies a degree of incompatibility between Islam and ethnic nationalism. Increasing religious loyalty as a determinant of the agents is assumed to weaken the role of ethnicity in terms of self-identification and restrict ethnic nationalist orientations. Houston (2001, p. 157) refers to the respect of the Islamic discourse towards the Kurdish nation and the Kurdish language, but calls for its subordination of the Kurdish identity to the Islamic ethnically neutral and universal identity. The different religious levels across states determine the level of ethnic nationalist orientations. In Turkey, for example, Islam is used and often functions as a unifying force between ethnic Turks and Kurds while anybody associating himself with perceived terrorist organisations such as the PKK is declared as having nothing to do with Islam (Yavuz and Ozcan, 2006, p. 103). Thus, Islam can act as a force that transcends all types of identities including the national one, but at the same time, when used as an instrument of legitimacy absorption, it can become “a source and arena of competition and rivalry, resulting in the politicisation of religion and the conflation of politics with religion” (Mabon, 2020, p. 49). This thesis argues that in Iraq, the different social and political context, has not permitted the emergence of a religious loyalty structure able to overpower the ethnic nationalist loyalty structure; thus, leaving ethnic nationalist levels at significantly high levels and demonstrating morphostasis against a religious dominant identity.

Archer’s (1995) framework demonstrates the role of the collective name, the association with a demarcated territory and the Kurdish culture in terms of determining the ethnic sentiment:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context within which the genesis of the modern Kurdish agents occurred and within which they started operating largely determined by their division across

different sovereign states and their interaction with different structures of sovereign power

- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by cultural motivations such as their identification by a collective proper name, their association with a specific territory and the experience of the practice of the Kurdish culture
- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the formation of a new set of cultural constraints subject to the development of a sentimental attachment to the name Kurdistan, a sense of symbiosis between the agents and the land and the appreciation of cultural distinctiveness, which strengthened national consciousness and, in turn, national identity

6. A sense of solidarity within the population

According to Smith (1986, p. 32), the members of a nation tend to feel a strong sense of solidarity to other individuals they perceive as fellow-members. This thesis argues that this solidarity structure is the strongest one in terms of determining an ethnic nation and the sentiments that tend to accompany it. In times of danger, this sense of solidarity in the form of a cultural motivation, is characterised by such an emotional power that it can overpower any social, economic, political or tribal divisions within the Kurdish society. Kurdish nationalism tends to consider the preservation of the Kurdish national identity as a sacred duty; a duty which can generate the capability to sacrifice for the well-being of the nation.

National symbols act as the ultimate symbols of this solidarity and have functioned since the 1990s as instruments towards Kurdish national identity consolidation (Aziz, 2011, p. 37). Such symbols which include flags and the Kurdish national anthem have been proved critical in terms of determining the nation-building process, mobilising the agents and promoting the idea of a strong unified Kurdish nation. This Kurdish sense of solidarity is observed across social media campaigns and events; for instance, the Flag Day established by the Kurdistan parliament in 1993 to be celebrated on the 17th of December of every year does not only encompass a ceremonial and traditional part but also sees many Kurds replacing their profile picture in social media platforms with the flag of Kurdistan and reproducing national rhetoric in support of self-determination and independence (Aziz, 2011, p. 37).

According to Kaya (2020, p. 1), “the concept of Kurdistan, as a cultural and political abstract, survives the reality and exists in the minds of Kurdish nationalists” with the map of Greater Kurdistan “embedded in the consciousness of the majority of Kurdish people, both within the region and, perhaps even more strongly, in the diaspora”. In recent decades, Kurdish nationalist groups in the diaspora due to their international location and ability to interact with and engage in international institutions, have been able to promote the Kurdish case to the international society, raise awareness regarding the Kurdish ethnic distinctiveness and gradually construct an association between their co-nationals’ ethnic identity and democratic struggle (O’Shea, 2004; The Kurdish Institute of Paris, 2020).

This trend has increased since the 1960s due to the increase of Kurdish immigrants and gradually evolved into a more organisational form. The Kurdish Institute of Paris (2020) refers to the important cultural and political role of the Kurdish diaspora and to how it has facilitated the development of the Kurdish written language, literature and music. The Kurdish diaspora has been in a constant process of mobilisation in order to establish connections between the Kurdish communities across numerous states and provide financial and organisation support for nationalist movements. Moreover, host-states have been subject to legitimate pressure for recognition of the Kurds as a distinct ethnic community and promotion of the protection of their legitimate rights. Thus, increasing international presence and attention and legitimising their struggle for human rights and self-determination (O’Shea, 2004).

Thus, Kurdish nationalists outside Kurdistan act as pure representatives of Kurdish ethnic nationalism and as long-distance nationalist actors – in accordance with Anderson (1998, p. 58-74) - employing trans-national agendas to promote the demands of their co-nationals. The Kurdish diaspora in the form of active Kurdish groups in Europe has promoted the perception of Kurdistan as a unified ethnic territory attracting sympathy for the Kurdish case and altering fundamentally how Kurds are perceived in the international context both by human agents and international structures and institutions (O’Shea, 2004; Van Bruinessen, 1992; The Kurdish Institute of Paris, 2020). The actions of the diaspora community have been implying a pan-Kurdish ethnic agenda often against the initiatives taken by political elites in Iraqi Kurdistan. Thus, it is important to recognise that the interaction of the Kurdistan region of Iraq with

regional trends has prevented a purely pan-Kurdish ethnic agenda. However, it would be important to note the significant role of the diaspora communities outside the borders of Iraq since the 1970s in terms of developing awareness internationally regarding the suppression and atrocities experienced by the Kurds inside Iraq, but also the post-2003 change of dynamics between the diaspora and Iraqi Kurdistan in terms of elevating the KRG as an important non-state regional actor through the establishment of Representation Offices across the world and through the enhanced ties between Iraqi Kurdistan parties and diaspora organisations with strong political affiliations (Baser, 2017).

With regard to the significance of solidarity in terms of shaping the ethnic sentiment of nationalism, Archer's (1995) Critical Realism demonstrates:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context within which Kurdish agents have taken shape and acted subject to their division across different states and the formation of a large diaspora community
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by cultural motivations such as the engagement with national symbols, their participation in collective ceremonies of ethnic character, the co-existence with their co-nationals and structural motivations such as the interaction of the Kurdish diaspora with the sovereign structures of the states they are located in and with international organisations
- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the formation of a new set cultural constraints subject to the development of a unified Kurdish nation and the relative reinforcement of a sense of solidarity, which not only strengthens national identity but also creates incentives for the promotion of the Kurdish Question to the international community

7. Interpreting the survival of Kurdish ethnic nationalism

Different schools of thought portray the existence of structural and cultural forces which facilitate the survival of ethnic nationalism; thus, converging on the fact that ethnic nationalism is a continuous variable. Their main disagreement is with regard to determining the nature of these forces. Modernists identify economic forces while primordialists claim for the existence of strong valued identities. The inability of the

recognised states to create national communities that would include the Kurds along with the suppression of the Kurdish national identity and the exploitation of the lack of political unity, religious and linguistic diversity, enhanced rather than weakened Kurdish ethnic nationalism.

Economic variables can, indeed, explain this persistence but only to a certain extent. The dependency model demonstrates that Kurds have been subject to economic discrimination along ethnic lines while also assuming different rates of modernisation for the Kurdish populations across Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. However, what historically has been common for them has been the economic underdevelopment relative to the regions of dominant ethnic groups. Governmental policies and actions have prevented the Kurds from benefitting significantly from their natural resources in areas other than jobs for unskilled labour (Izady, 1992, p. 232). Ba'athist policies included mainly the construction of cluster villages and infrastructure; decisions that according to the residents of Kurdistan were aiming at facilitating the monitoring of the Kurds and which promoted a cultural division of labour and the construction of a developed core exploiting the poor periphery (Entessar, 1992, p. 8).

The dependency model, simultaneously assumes, that modernisation destroys traditional social order and that old structures of authority lose importance across this process; thus, elites enter a process of competition for power while the economic disadvantage of nonelites compels them to resort to national identity (Connor, 1973, p. 21). In Kurdistan, however, traditional social structures (such as nationalist narratives and patronage networks) have not only survived and remained intact and powerful but continue to constitute the source of power of numerous ethnic elites, since cultural motivations in the form of nationalist narratives and structural motivations in the form of perceived access to power, determine the actions of the agency and demonstrate morphostasis against the pressures of modernisation. Kurdish leaders belong to parties that resemble modern political parties such as the PUK and the KDP, both in terms of name and organisation; yet, their legitimacy emanates from their authority as tribal or clan leaders. They possess a tribal surname such as Barzani or Talabani; thus, maintaining tribal political structures as the ultimate source of loyalty and relying on them to resist central governments. Thus, the survival of tribal and feudal structures challenges the modernist accounts of national identity and despite their western

education, Kurdish elites cannot be classified as disgruntled elites but rather as elites that employed western ideas such as self-determination or democracy to enhance their authority and increase resistance against the central authorities. For instance, David Romano (2006, p. 27) characterises Kurdish leaders as “more tribal than nationalist” and refers to historically conflicting incentives and identities which were exploited by state elites to divide and conquer them, reinforcing the claim of Paul James (2006) that tribal structures can survive against the pressures of modern and post-modern globalisation processes.

Moreover, the fact that the ethnic conflict between the Kurds and their ethnic neighbours began prior to any process of modernisation demonstrates an evident failure of modernist approaches to account for the origins of ethnic identity. Ethnic identities in the Middle East possess a psychological strength that cannot be satisfied by any rational economic explanations and which generates a willingness to die in defence of them. Kurdish leaders demonstrated resistance against central authorities before industrialisation or infrastructure development. Kurdishness offers an example of an ethnic identity characterised by strong emotionally-driven loyalties which encompasses certain psychological qualities in the form of unchallengeable structures, such as the willingness to sacrifice for the defence of the nation (Romano, 2006, p. 17).

Yet, this psychological affinity has not promoted a complete integration into a single unitary and unified ethnic nation. Although Kurdish nationalism has been calling for the idea of a single ethnic Kurdish nation, Kurdish agents have been characterised by remarkable loyalty towards their tribal leaders who have often directed them into violent conflict against other Kurds (Pelletiere, 1991, p. 1). Even in territorial terms, deviations exist with regard to what constitutes Kurdistan in the absence of a territorial expression to accurately describe the five parts as a whole. Kurdish leaders have often been involved in fighting against other Kurdish movements while no convergence has been evident regarding a single leadership for the region (Al-Jazeera, 2017; Kane, 2017, p. 2). When it comes to Iraq, the KDP and the PUK have fought each other in the past despite their prior decision to form a Kurdish Federated state in the absence of any hesitation to ally with Saddam to meet their political ends.

The empowerment of the Kurdish national identity, as mentioned in the previous chapter, has mainly been an outcome of the failure of states to build ‘imagined

communities' inclusive of all different groups within their territories through an appreciation of their distinctiveness. In Iraq, Arab-dominated regimes promoted either civic nationalism or pan-Arabism across the 20th century. Qasim attempted to promote an Iraqi national identity and even included a Kurdish sun disc on the state's flag to approach and embrace the Kurds into the national community (Izady, 1992, p. 67). The main problem was the inability to connect the idea of an Iraqi national identity to a mythical past while such symbolic acts lacked the strength to transcend the perception of Arab governmental dominance. For the Ba'athists, Iraq constituted a secular Arab state that had to respond to the Kurdish threat while any dismemberment or partition of the Kurdish regions was perceived as an obstacle to the exploitation of the population and the resources for the Arab nationalist benefit. Thus, this thesis argues that Kurdish ethnic nationalism has not been a product of uneven modernisation but has rather been enhanced in reactionary terms due to the state-building efforts of those advocating national homogeneity. Yet, economic disparities did magnify ethnic consciousness due to enabling the significance of cultural differences to emerge.

8. Kurdish ethnic nationalism as a response to the Iraqi official national narrative

In accordance with ethno-symbolism, nations, in an effort to respond to the challenges of modernity, rediscover their ethnic past and proceed to a reinterpretation of their myths, memories and values (Smith, 1986, p. 25). This process assists in two ways; first, it facilitates ethnic unification and secondly, it facilitates differentiation from ethnic neighbours. One integral element of the Kurdish nationalist project as represented by the KRG, is a form of ethno-symbolism that differentiates Kurds from Iraq and contradicts Baghdad's official national narratives in the form of a form of an Iraqi ethno-symbolism. The components of the Iraqi ethno-symbolism include the Arab and Islamic identity of the country which is perceived to be associated as a whole with the Mesopotamian and Islamic civilisation; thus, the official narratives mention that the Iraqis are direct descendants of Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians and Arabs (Rafaat, 2016, p. 489).

Iraqi textbooks classify the groups that the Kurds determine their origins back to – such as the Medes - as invaders, barbarians and destroyers of the Mesopotamian civilisation

(Rafaat, 2016, p. 489). To further challenge the Kurdish self-representation as a separate distinct nation, they do not only deny the Kurdish ethnic past but attempt to rediscover Arab origins for them. Sati' al-Husri, an influential thinker of pan-Arab nationalism, has been the theoretical father of the modern policies of Baghdad through a project that involved rediscovering Arab origins for the Kurds and legislating a process of forced Arabisation (ibid.). This project assumes that Iraq constitutes an Arab state and an individual identified as Arab is an individual that has inhabited Arab lands and speaks Arabic regardless of origin or race, in an effort to establish homogenisation of agents and eliminate the threat of a potential Kurdish secession to the state's territorial integrity. Thus, many Kurds that speak Arabic are assumed to share this extended Arab identity, regardless of how they identify themselves or whether they cooperate or not (Al-Husri, 1985, p. 157). This has formed a strong component of Baghdad's nationalist narratives manifested in policies of exclusion for those not embracing the Arab identity and inclusion for those embracing the Arab identity.

This denial of the Kurdish past and the Kurdish distinct ethnic identity through official discourses has determined the history of the modern Iraqi state. Qasim, for instance, who served as Prime Minister between 1958 and 1963 stated that the Kurds do not constitute an ethnic nation and that the term 'Kurd' has been historically employed to describe Persian nomads (Jawad, 1979, p. 176). Abdul Salam Arif that succeeded Qasim constructed a propaganda that referred to the Arab origins of the Kurds that functioned as a convincing Ba'athist myth after 1968 (Natali, 2000, p. 103). Rafaat (2012, p. 33) refers to Hani al-Fekaiki, a Ba'athist politician who admitted that establishing Arab roots for the Kurds had been a state objective. Naji Marouf, a Ba'athist historian, through a detailed account on the origins of the Kurds, argued that they possess an Arab background while similar narratives existed in Ba'athist magazines such as *al-Watan al-Arabi*, in an effort to gradually impose an Arab identity that would overpower the Kurdish one (Rafaat, 2016, p. 489). Thus, again, there was an organised effort to construct a structure of loyalty to an Arab identity that would determine the behaviour of agents manifested through policies of exclusion for those rejecting it and inclusion for those embracing it. Moreover, this structure was constructed to act in a historiographic manner to persuade Kurdish agents for their 'Arab origins'.

Archer's (1995) framework reveals the resilience and strength of the ethnic nationalist sentiment which accounts for the morphostasis demonstrated against the process of homogenisation:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context formed after the establishment of the modern Iraqi state, determined by the interaction with the newly-established structures of sovereign power
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by structural forces such as the non-inclusive structures of sovereign power and cultural forces emanating from policies of inclusion and exclusion and the promoted historiographic narratives
- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the morphostasis demonstrated towards a new set of structural and cultural constraints subject to the resistance towards the homogenisation process, the rejection of the narratives promoted by the Arab elites of Iraq and the rejection of the Iraqi identity

The Kurdish integrated history and shared culture

The survival of the Kurds as a distinct ethnic nation required not only the rejection of these narratives and the elimination of their effects on the Kurdish agents, but also a process of cultural elaboration through the form of narratives that emphasised the Kurds' integrated history and shared culture that emanates from antiquity and is associated with their territory. Kurdish scholars argue that the Kurds have existed under numerous names such as 'Kardu' or 'Kurti' for more than 2500 years while their language has been determined to originate from 700-300 BC; thus, constructing an image of a distinct group that has remained relatively pure across time to contradict the Iraqi official narratives (Mella, 2005, p. 53).

Moreover, pre-Islamic myths associated with the Kurdish nation have been revived and manifested through symbols. The Kurdish flag incorporates the 'golden sun' national symbol of the Kurds in its centre which constitutes an ancient Kurdish symbol (Nebez, 2004, p. 10). The national day of Newroz was established in 1997 by the Kurdistan Parliament as a national holiday which represents a pre-Islamic myth of the Kurdish liberation from tyranny; more specifically the myth of liberation from the tyranny of Zuhak. The first day of the Kurdish calendar is associated with the start of the Median

Empire in 700 BC in an effort to reinforce the narrative that the Kurds constitute descendants of the Medians which is also reflected in the Kurdish national anthem (Murphy, 2004). Through the rediscovery of such myths, the Kurdish nationalist movement in Iraq has been aiming at constructing a compact structure to determine the identity of the Kurdish nation and regardless of whether they represent the reality, they align with Smith's (1986, p. 31) understanding that a shared ancestry, history, culture and territory constitute integral elements of this structure that determines the nation.

Narratives do not only encompass pre-modern myths but also interpretations of major historical events of the last century to challenge the Iraqi interpretations. The 1920 revolution against the colonial power constitutes a symbolic myth for the Arabs of Iraq in an effort to promote homogeneity but the Kurds tend to portray it as an Iraqi Arab revolution and not a Kurdish one (Rafaat, 2016, p. 490). On the other hand, the uprising of the 6th of September of 1930 in Sulaymaniyah has been established as a national myth for Kurds and as a symbol of resistance and has been reproduced in numerous Kurdish poems; this day also known as the 'Dark Day' was when mass protests took place resulting in the death of 60 protestors by the Iraqi police (ibid.). Such myths assist in further alienating the Kurds from the Arabs of Iraq both emotionally and ethnically; especially in the absence of a convincing unifying national myth promoted by the Iraqi state and in the presence of a convincing national Kurdish myth represented through myths and memories and articulated through symbols and traditions.

The name Kurdistan

According to Bernhardsson (2006, p. 97), the term Iraq has been used by Arabs since the 7th century as a result of the Arab settlement of the region. However, Iraqi Kurdish historians and scholars insist that the term has been historically used to refer to two different regions; one in southern Iraq and one in southern Iran (Vanly, 1992, p. 143). They also argue that Northern Iraq used to be referred as 'bilad al-akrad' which means 'the land of the Kurds' and this implies the historical existence of two separate territories; a Kurdish one and an Arab one; as verified by the League of Nations commission. The Kurdish narrative considers the name 'Kurdistan' as not only referring to a separate territorial unit but a separate administrative unit as well since the 8th century and the Umayyad period; thus, it should be considered as a political entity that survived across time and history (Rafaat, 2012, p. 26). Historical documents tend

to support the Kurdish claims. *Sharafnama*, despite recognising the existence of several Kurdish principalities, considers them as a single homeland and political system (Bitlisi, 1860, p. 8). Kurdish scholars claim that Kurdistan used to be a national territory prior to the establishment of Iraq as an independent state and people identified themselves as Kurds. For instance, Izady (2004, p. 95) claims that the land has been called Kurdistan for approximately 1000 years while Nebez (2004, p. 56) determines the origins of the first map which refers to a Kurdish land back to 1073.

Kurdish agents insist that their origins should be traced back to ancient times long before the establishment of Iraq. Thus, Kurdistan represents a national separate territory and a well-established national identity. In 1931, Sheikh Mahmud mentioned that Kurdistan was never a part of Arab territories while Wehbi [a well-respected Kurdish scholar and governor of Sulaymaniyah in the 1930s] stated that southern Kurdistan was never subject to an Arab rule across history and referred to the inappropriateness of calling the Kurds as Iraqis in the same sense that it would be inappropriate to call the Irish as English (Rafaat, 2012, p. 30). Modern leaders such as Talabani have also referred to how the word Iraq constitutes a strange name for the Kurds and insisted that they are members of the Kurdistani nation (*ibid.*). In official Ottoman documents, as well, Kurdistan has often been depicted as a separate entity, with the KDP's *Khabat* newspaper suggesting in 1960 that Iraq has been historically employed as a term to refer to a much smaller piece of land than what constitutes Iraq today and that Kurdistan is a part of the greater Kurdistan region (Rafaat, 2012, p. 31).

Thus, the word 'Iraq' never determined the identity of the Kurds prior to the establishment of Iraq. History insists that Kurdistan and Iraq constitute two separate homelands and this is demonstrated in national narratives while also being deeply rooted into the Kurds' national identity. This leads to a Kurdish agents' denial of the legitimacy of Iraq as an independent unitary entity and the perception that Iraq constitutes an occupier of Kurdish lands, generating a distinct sense of self-image and a distinct type of an imagined political community (Anderson, 1991, p. 6). Kurdish nationalist narratives have been dominated by the perception of Iraq and of other states that incorporated Kurdish minorities as occupiers of Kurdistan. Jalal Talabani rejecting the legitimacy of Arabs' rule over Iraq, blamed the League of Nations for allowing the Iraqi army to proceed with the occupation despite the Kurds' disagreement over the

establishment of the modern Iraqi state (Rafaat, 2012, p. 67) while his PUK party official declared Kurdistan as an occupied territory and the Iraqi army as an occupation army. Rafaat (2012, p. 67) understands the relationship between Iraq and southern Kurdistan as a relationship between the occupier and the occupied; this view is demonstrated in Kurdish school textbooks which refer to the Kurdish nation as a subjugated one. Shadeedi Hamza offers a distinct opinion asserting:

“It’s fair to say that the majority of Kurds do not really feel that they belong to Iraq at all. You do not get the feeling that you are part of a bigger country. And you should not only blame Kurdish politicians but also Iraqi politicians who treat the Kurdistan region only through the KDP and the PUK. They never actually bothered to come and interact with the people.”¹¹

At the same time, narratives perceive the Kurdish national movement as a liberation movement, since the liberation from occupation constituted a national objective for all the segments of the Kurdish society since the 1940s; thus, glorifying the Kurds’ past struggles. The majority of the Kurdish parties have classified themselves as a part of the movement in an effort to portray themselves as continuators of this glorious history and attract support (Andrew, 1983, p. 43-45; Jwaideh, 2006, p. 233). The KDP and the PUK both have described themselves as leaders and continuators of the Liberation Movement in numerous occasions while the IKF insisted in 1988 that its primary responsibility was to lead the liberation struggle. The term KLM plays a prominent role in Kurdish political discourse and is described in the KRG’s draft constitution as a movement “for our freedom, for the defence of our dignity, [and] the protection of our nation” (Shallcross, 2015, p. 15) while areas under the KRG’s rule are referred to as liberated areas and areas such as Kirkuk are referred to as occupied territories.

This thesis argues that such perceptions have not only shaped the Kurdish political culture but have also functioned as the foundations of the Kurdish nationalist project in Iraq. Through the establishment of structures in the form of political narratives referring to a process of liberation, Kurds have been successful in responding to the challenges posed by Baghdad, mobilising their agents and damaging the legitimacy of Baghdad’s intervention in Kurdistan’s self-rule. In this way, the national awareness of the agents is not only enhanced due to cultural motivations but functions in such a way to expose

¹¹ Interview with Hamzeh Shadeedi: Policy Researcher at the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) [Conducted on: 6 May 2020].

the huge gap that separates the Arab and the Kurdish nationalist projects in Iraq. Thus, in accordance with Critical Realism, these cultural motivations facilitate a process of cultural elaboration, leading to morphogenesis and to an increase in the Kurds' national consciousness.

The glorification of the Kurdish political culture

As mentioned in the Chapter II of this thesis, prior to the establishment of the state of Iraq, Kurdistan historically enjoyed periods of self-rule that according to nationalist narratives contributed towards the development of a very specific system of values and a political culture. Kurdish historians assert that Kurdistan has functioned as a distinct administrative entity since the 8th century, referring to the era of sultans and kings, Kurdish rulers and princes; some of their names are mentioned in the Friday prayers known as 'khutbah' (Bitlisi, 1860, p. 9). Official Ottoman documents between the 16th and 19th century often refer to a separate Kurdistan province with Ottomans treating Kurds and Arabs separately (Ozoglu, 2004, p. 164). These centuries of self-governance have contributed in terms of shaping the Kurdish society and the Kurdish political life and in terms of the development of a political culture that contradicts a status of a sovereign Iraqi state dominated by an Arab rule.

Kurds demonstrated their expectations for freedom from direct rule in numerous occasions during the last decades through the political behaviour of the Kurdish society regardless of any tribal or urban divisions. Mustafa Barzani is considered a prominent figure among tribal leaders whose principles and political behaviour functioned in accordance with this developed political culture that determined the Kurdish society, since he called for an autonomous Kurdistan (Yildiz, 2004, p. 15; Natali, 2000, p. 77). This political culture is reflected both in the Kurdish literature and the Kurdish political discourse. The KDP calls for federalism in its 1961 founding statement and today calls for democracy for Iraq and autonomy for Kurdistan (Barzani, 2003, p. 209) while the same applies for the PUK. This deeply rooted culture of self-governance has not only determined the Kurdish society and the Kurdish expectations through cultural motivations but has also served to challenge Baghdad and its Arab nationalist project.

However, for many Kurds, rather than secession, a political partnership between Arabs and Kurds in Iraq has been considered over time a more pragmatic choice and path, as

demonstrated by the first political agenda of the KDP in 1946 (Rafaat, 2012, p. 52), the Kurdish political demands across the negotiations of the 1970s and the IKF constitution, that included the satisfaction of self-determination through a voluntary union between the two nations. On the other hand, Baghdad has rejected such notions, with Article 3 of the 1958 Interim Constitution recognising Arabs and Kurds as ‘partners’ (which was later removed), acting as an exception; yet, this exception formed the basis of the Kurdish nationalist project and the underpinnings of the Kurdish expectations (Rafaat, 2012, p. 29). The 2003 decision of the Kurds to re-join Iraq after the collapse of Saddam’s regime was justified by Barzani and Talabani through a reference to the establishment of a voluntary union in the absence of an obligation to reattach Kurdistan to Iraq (Barzani, 2003; Talabani, 2005). The 2005 constitution refers only indirectly to a voluntary union (e.g., through a reference to a free decision for unification) in the absence of a clear recognition. According to Dilshad Hama:

“The union of Iraq is not voluntary. If it was voluntary, the Kurds would not have entered this union in 1991. During the referendum, Masoud Barzani was saying that our union is conditional since the Iraqi government did not implement certain things. But the reality is that it is compulsory; not conditional and not voluntary.”¹²

However, for the first time, the constitution renders the unity of Iraq conditional through the first article which mentions that “this constitution is a guarantor of the unity of Iraq” (Iraqi Constitution, 2005) and avoids reference to the indivisibility of the territory like previous constitutions; thus, providing the legitimate right to the Kurds under certain circumstances to justify a possible secession from Iraq.

In 2006, Nechirvan Barzani stated that a potential lack of constitutional commitment by Baghdad, could compel the Kurds to rethink about their free choice to participate in a voluntary union (Barzani, 2006) while in 2008, Masoud Barzani declared that any violation of Article 140 referring to the de-Arabisation of Kirkuk could render the unity of the Iraqi state under threat (Smith, 2008). This constitutional understanding is evident in the KRG draft constitution which refers to a choice of their own free will, to be a federal entity within the state of Iraq (Shallcross, 2015) and despite not appropriately satisfying the right of self-determination, it functions as a strategy

¹² Interview with Dr Dilshad Hama: Head of IRD Department and Lecturer of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tishk International University [Conducted on: 03 April 2020].

towards its satisfaction once such a development becomes feasible. Thus, Kurdish political elites have constructed their nationalist agenda through interaction with legal and political structures which provide legitimacy to their demands. According to Shadeedi Hamzeh:

“According to the constitution, Iraq is composed of many nations that come together in this federal unity. That is the essence of the constitution. I think the status quo really benefits the political parties in a way that they are part of a bigger country and they are getting the funding from the federal government. And even if Iraq is a weak state, it provides a degree of protection from Turkish and Iranian aggression. And it also provides them with the narrative that Kurds will always be fighting for Kurdish independence.”¹³

The Critical Realist application to mythological rediscovery

Margaret Archer’s (1995) framework has been used in multiple occasions across this section to demonstrate the transition of social processes across time and space. In a more explicit manner, its application can be summarised to portray the process of change within which agents and social structures have participated which led to enhanced nationalistic identification and resistance to promoted narratives:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context within which the genesis of the Kurdish agents occurred and within which Kurdish agents started acting; a context largely influenced by the structures of sovereign power and the emergence of Iraqi official narratives challenging the Kurdish nation
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by cultural motivations such as the exchange of myths regarding the Kurdish integrated history and culture, the lack of historical association to Iraq and the Kurdish political culture and structural motivations such as the perception regarding a conditional unity of the state of Iraq
- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the formation of a new set of structural and cultural constraints subject to the enhanced national self-identification and alienation from Iraq which coexisted with a demonstrated morphostasis towards the influence of the Iraqi official narratives and the homogenisation process

¹³ Interview with Hamzeh Shadeedi: Policy Researcher at the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) [Conducted on: 6 May 2020].

9. A clash between distinct projects

As mentioned, the different religious and ethnic groups in Iraq have historically constructed and continue to serve distinct projects. Sunnis have been seeking to continue the Sunni tradition of exercising power, the Shias have been seeking to increase their power and challenge the Sunni authority across the state while the Kurds have been seeking to enhance their autonomy. These conflicting interests have generated distinct visions and agendas; especially due to the coexistence of religious and national elements across agendas. The Kurds tend to believe that an Islamised state “will merely attempt to subsume the Kurdish identity under the banner of Islam” (Al-Marashi, 2005, p. 156); thus, it is perceived as incompatible with their own nationalist agenda. This is demonstrated in official statements with Talabani asserting that the “Kurds will never submit to an Islamic order” and Barzani in a similar manner rejecting the imposition of an Islamic identity on the state of Iraq (Rafaat, 2007, p. 278). Kurdish agents tend to by embracing similar perceptions as demonstrated by a 2006 research study published in *Awene* confirming that only three per cent of the Kurds would accept the elevation of Islam as the main legislative source (*ibid.*).

Moreover, every group tends to have its own understanding of the democratic process and its own distinct anticipation from the democratic institutions. The Kurds have not only rejected an imposed version of an Islamic state but also demonstrated through their two official independence referendums that they anticipate from the democratic institutions to “provide a frame to realize the right of national self-determination and to strengthen their autonomy”, in contrast to Sunnis that understand this anticipation as a threat to their own perceived right to exercise power across the whole of the territory of Iraq (Wang, 2010, p. 9). It is obvious that sectarianism has contributed enormously in terms of generating differing views. However, the analysis of the way it has generated divisions lies beyond the scope of this research. What is of primary concern is the existence of opposing agendas within the territories of a sovereign state.

Dilshad Hama reinforces the argument regarding the non-existence of an Iraqi nation:

“An Iraqi nation does not exist. There has been an Iraqi state, but never an Iraqi nation. This applies to Sunnis and Shias; not only to Kurds. None of them considers Iraq as their nation. Neither do I consider myself Iraqi in terms of nation. In the civil form, I have an Iraqi passport. But I am not Iraqi in terms of

nationality. The Arab majority still considers Iraq as a part of the Arab homeland. Not a single Kurd accepts this.’¹⁴

This thesis recognises the large differences separating the agendas of different groups within Iraq since the Iraqi constitution, parliament and military forces do not sufficiently represent and indicate the existence of national unity. Instead, these institutional structures further emphasise the clash of identities and ideologies; for instance, the parliament reflects the division of ethnic and religious groups, disagreements on constitutional matters such as the de-Arabisation of Kirkuk and the implementation of Article 140 have been a source of continuous tension while the Iraqi military forces are anything else apart from a national army due to their ethnic or sectarian membership.

According to Galbraith (2006, p. 186) the military division is demonstrated by the existence of Shia forces in Southern Iraq, Sunni Arab forces in Sunni governorates and the Peshmerga in Northern Iraq while no group approves the presence of another group’s soldier in its region. The discussion of constitutional matters should not only involve the decision of the majority of Sunnis to reject it despite its acceptance by the majority of Shias and Kurds, but also that fact that Sunnis have been engaging in a contact process of amendments’ proposition rejected by other groups. The manifestation of perceptions also differs with the Kurds demonstrating their preference for independence through two official referendums. However, the Sunnis want to maintain the territorial integrity over Iraq while the Shias want to challenge the Sunni Arab authority and promote a shift of socio-economic balance (Dawisha, 2005, p. 726; Wang, 2010).

The Kurdish Question is an ethno-national issue as suggested by the constitution referring to an Arab and a Kurdish region while the demands of the other groups such as the Sunni or Shia Arabs are more focused on enhancing their power status; thus, lacking any ethno-national characteristics. While the Kurdish demands are focused on the control of territories (e.g., the control of Kirkuk), the sectarian tension within Iraq is not characterised by a territorial aspect but rather by a power struggle over the

¹⁴ Interview with Dr Dilshad Hama: Head of IRD Department and Lecturer of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tishk International University [Conducted on: 03 April 2020].

governance of the country and a desire to promote centralisation and maintain the territorial integrity of the state but under their own control.

These differences have been further magnified in the post-2003 era due to the emergence of a distinct form of civic attachment that deviates from the ethnic understanding of the concept of the nation to incorporate elements such as freedom, equality and individual rights, to be thoroughly analysed across Chapter IV. Yet, ethnic sentiments remain strong in determining the behaviour of Kurdish agency. Ethnic nationalism assumes that a community of people is assumed to have developed a sense of identity due to a consciousness of shared cultural values and practices performed over a well-defined geographical territory (Muller, 2008, p. 20). The development of institutions has been facilitated to serve the nation and the ethnic community, by functioning as the manifestation of self-determination. Ethnic nationalism has been the element that has more convincingly defined the Kurdish society through reference to language, customs and traditions and to pre-existing ethnic characteristics holding the group together. Despite deviations of the political elites, ordinary Kurdish agents tend to emphasise their common roots and the emotional attachment to their history and symbols which are considered far stronger compared to the rational attachment to any institutions.

Smith (1983, p. 216) asserts that what distinguishes ethnic nationalism from other types of nationalism is “the group’s claim to be distinct from others with which it is in alliance or conflict, and that it is distinguished by unique cultural features”. Secessionism, which is defined as the withdrawal of a group from a larger political identity (Pavkovic and Radan, 2007), is often perceived as the only path towards allowing state and ethnic boundaries to coincide; this evident secessionism in the Iraqi Kurdish case emanates from two elements. Firstly, cultural homogeneity as confirmed by Bengio (1999, p. 149) asserting that “as far as language, race and common history are concerned, the Kurds differ from the Iraqi Arabs”. Secondly, the existence of the Kurdish ethnic group within a larger political entity, with Kurds challenging the territorial integrity of Iraq since its 1926 establishment. Kurdish ethnic nationalism is often manifested by agents in the form of a pan-Kurdish agenda through the “claim that their defined entity is far larger than the existing political unit” (Smith, 1983a, p. 223). Despite this not being reflected in political action, the more traditional understanding of ethnic nationalism

tends to aspire to bring together Kurdish populations that have historically become separated along different oppressive units. The links between the Kurds across Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey predate the formation of those four nation-states while even Masoud Barzani in an interview in June 2006 identified as a single nation the Kurdish populations across those states and argued for the legitimacy of the willingness of the nation to be united (Fayad, 2006). Thus, demonstrating the strength of ethnic nationalism and the cultural motivations it can facilitate against any localised structural perceptions of identity.

Flags constitute the symbolic manifestations of secessionism; in the post-2003 period, Kurds have been rejecting the Iraqi flag's presence in Kurdistan and especially the symbolic interpretation of its three stars. The stars have been used in the 1960s to symbolise the union of Iraq with Egypt and Syria; thus, they did demonstrate and continue to demonstrate pan-Arab aspirations (Rahimi, 2004, p. 39). The opposite applies for the Kurdish flag which is present across all official places in Iraqi Kurdistan while the Kurds tend to have their own national anthem as well. The Kurdish flag flying in Iraqi Kurdistan is perceived by Kurds in other countries as their flag as well while the national anthem is also used by most Kurdish political organisations across the region. Thus, demonstrating a significant degree of ethnic attachment manifested through symbols such as the flag and the national anthem.

Trans-nationalism also demonstrates the survival of a pan-Kurdish agenda through trans-border networks that facilitate nationalist mobilisation. Mustafa Barzani and the KDP historically provided assistance to the KDPI in Iran and the KDP in Turkey while Jalal Talabani and the PUK to urbanised leftist groups in Turkey and Iran, while it is worth mentioning that Iraqi Kurds contributed significantly to the formation of the Republic of Mahabad in Iranian Kurdistan in 1946 (Natali, 2004, p. 111). Barzani as a representative of pan-Kurdish nationalism asked in 2006 for "a peaceful democratic solution to the Kurdish issue in every part of Kurdistan" (Fayad, 2006) while the KRG has been welcoming thousands of Kurds; more specifically, Rafaat (2007, p. 292) refers to "around 11,000 Kurdish refugees from Turkey, some of whom are affiliated with the PKK, and more than 7,000 Iranian Kurds", living in Iraqi Kurdistan. Dilshad Hama, however, elaborates on the difficulties of this trans-nationalism, stating:

“Each Kurdish community compelled their force to engineer nationalism in geographical terms. Kurds in Turkey had to do politics and engineer nationalism within the Turkish conditions. Within the conditions that are available as Karl Marx said. The same with the Kurds in Iran, Iraq and Syria. So, what natural comes is that the interests of these forces go against each other. The problem is that some of them do not accept and go with this pan-Kurdish sentiment. They forget that this is not possible anymore, because we are living in totally different conditions. Whether it’s been the PKK, the KDP or the PUK, whenever they tried to impose their own agenda or promote their political interests in other parts of Kurdistan, they failed. Because they face a different set of political interests in different parts of Kurdistan.”¹⁵

Yet, it is important to note that this trans-border nationalism has been historically functioning in the absence of any belonging to Iraq and in rejection of the Iraqi national identity. The Kurds in their vast majority do not seem to recognise themselves as Iraqis while any past rebellion has been perceived by the agents as aiming at the emancipation from Iraq rather than the appropriate representation within the state. Thus, demonstrating the conflicting ethnic nationalisms, identities, perceptions and nationalist projects within Iraq.

10. Kurdishness in relation to political power and tribalism

According to Smith, (1998, p. 188) independence constitutes the ultimate objective of all nationalist movements; but, in Iraqi Kurdistan, the three main political parties (namely, the KDP, the PUK and the Gorran), overly influenced by tribal structures, seem to be characterised by nationalist agendas that deviate from the historically ethnic nature of the nationalist process. Zubrzycki (2010, p. 514) argues that the nationalism of every society is discursively constructed by actors possessing competing interests in the presence of an uneven distribution of power; different outcomes may possess different meanings or levels of legitimacy. As mentioned, the Kurds have historically experienced different administrations and empires and across time not all tribal leaders did accept the embracement of a general nationalist approach to facilitate ethnic unification (Bengio, 2012, p. 1).

A reference point for the Kurdish history has been the 1946 KDP establishment which marked the commencement of a period of organisational advancement and of a clear political agenda while the nationalist movement that lasted between 1961 and 1968,

¹⁵ Interview with Dr Dilshad Hama: Head of IRD Department and Lecturer of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tishk International University [Conducted on: 03 April 2020].

according to Bengio (2012, p. 13) was characterised by such strong ethnic sentiments that were capable of overpowering all internal divisions. The 1975 PUK establishment marked the split of the nationalist movement and the emergence of Talabani's accusations over the excessive tribalism and the disagreements with regard to Barzani's resistance (Aziz, 2011, p. 76). This division did not only have a societal nature but a territorial and military as well; it is worth mentioning that the Peshmerga were divided from that point onwards and remain divided between the PUK and the KDP until today (Bruinessen, 1992, p. 30).

Tribalism has historically possessed a prominent role and numerous times tribal leaders have proceeded to agreements with Baghdad to avoid the expansion of control of their opponent tribal leaders; Barzani and Talabani have been employing different approaches and have developed different relationships with Baghdad across time (Ciment, 1996, p. 86). Even after the establishment of the KRG, internal tension led to a violent struggle between the KDP and the PUK which lasted between 1994 and 1997 and led to the creation of two administrative regions under the control of each party and which emanated from differences in terms of revenue sharing and territorial control in the absence of a strong national movement to overpower tribal loyalties (Bengio, 2012, p. 213).

The 2005 constitution recognised Kurdistan as a federal unit and the KRG as an autonomous administration capable of forming its own foreign relations and in possession of legislative and economic authority and of its own army. Since that time, significant developments have taken place in areas such as the educational and the health sectors in the form of a socio-political force that enhanced the levels of national consciousness of the agents (Aziz, 2011, p. 91). Yet, the establishment of Gorran in 2009 acted as a challenge to the post-2003 developed structures by bringing onto light not only the high levels of corruption but also the extent to which this corruption is related to the inexplicable survival, maintenance and significance of tribal structures (Independent, 2009). Employing Archer's (1995) Critical Realism demonstrates that tribal structures tend to generate structural motivations for the agency due to their perceived connection to power; political elites, in an effort to retain power and influence, maintain those structures, often against national unity and the ethnic nature of the nationalist process.

The post-2003 Kurdish incorporation occurred on an equal status with Arabs but the strength of nationalism was further demonstrated through the 2005 independence referendum that collected 1.7 million signatures; a result which was largely ignored by western powers that remained loyal to a united Iraqi state (Chorey, 2007). The Kurdistan region was recognised as an integral component of the Iraqi state with Arabic and Kurdish as the official state languages (Barkey, 2009, p. 11). In legislative terms, the KRG acquired the power to change laws unrelated to foreign policy or financial issues; in military terms, to have its own police and military forces; and in economic terms, to manage and exploit certain natural resources (Katzman, 2005, p. 5). The economic incentives acted as the main driving force towards remaining part of Iraq since the KRG was allocated 17 per cent of the federal budget; thus, creating a relationship of economic dependency between Baghdad and the Kurdish agency (Natali, 2010).

However, what remains debatable is the extent to which the unification of administrations of the KDP and the PUK according to the 2005 agreement between Barzani and Talabani – which was expected to weaken tribal structures - has occurred; especially in territorial and military terms (ibid.). Dilshad Sharif mentions: “When we agreed the unification of administrations in 2005, we did not unite the people, we did not unite the government, we did not unite the army. Only some ministries”¹⁶. This thesis argues that the 2009 election of Gorran marked a deviation from the absolute dominance of the two parties, since it did not only raise awareness regarding the high levels of corruption but also facilitated a process of gradual elimination of the significance of tribalism (Independent, 2009). Dilshad Hama, however, while recognising the loss of significance of tribalism in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, emphasises the persistence of tribalism in certain areas of Kurdistan, saying: “Dohuk does not consider the KDP as a political party. They consider it as a religion. They want money and freedom but this should only be provided by the KDP.”

The post-2003 criticism of Kurdish agents on the KRG has facilitated a shift of the Kurdish national project towards the establishment a system based on rights, rules and accountability; this criticism has been focused on three main issues: (a) the demands

¹⁶ Interview with Dilshad Sharif: Assistant Lecturer in International Relations and Diplomacy at the Tishk International University and Senior Adviser to the Kurdistan Parliament [Conducted on: 28 March 2020].

for better services and allocation of resources (b) the decrease of corruption (c) the fairer access to state resources and involvement in decision-making. The redefinition of the nationalist project has been conducted along two dimensions. First, the requirement to end corruption and enhance accountability has been classified as a patriotic duty towards the people that died in mass protests over recent years. Second, the incorporation of localised interests has been incorporated into the general effort to reform the system as demonstrated in the decision to declare Halabja as a province (Golpy, 2015).

The established autonomy along with structural motivations, in the form of emergent properties, have generated criticism towards the KRG which demonstrates clearly that the Kurds are disappointed with how the process of Kurdification of their territories is occurring and are re-thinking the concept of nationalism and what is implied by the term national governance. Agents are in a process of redefinition of ideas and construction of new structures that influence what more accurately constitutes the Kurdish national interest, further complicating simplistic accounts of a single type of nationalism and highlighting the significance of internal forces that interact with each other. In recent years, thousands of Kurds have been protesting in Halabja, Sulaymaniyah and Ranya, against corruption and for improved services, infrastructure, fiscal transparency and enhanced democratisation, challenging the power of their own KRG and its parties and demanding more influence over resources and nation-building and a more merit-based system of allocating jobs, contracts and resources (Petkova, 2018). Thus, national interest participates in a process of cultural and structural elaboration and is broadened to embrace the ideal way of governance which is perceived equally important to the ideal protection from Baghdad, ISIS and other external threats.

11. Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the ethnic component of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq through the employment of the theory of ethno-symbolism and the six elements of ethnic nations as determined by Anthony Smith (1986). The Kurds do satisfy these elements sharing a myth of a common ancestry, sharing historical memories, possessing a collective proper name, being associated with a demarcated territorial homeland and experiencing a sense of solidarity among them. Ethnic sentiments remain strong in terms of

determining the behaviour of the Kurdish agency heavily influenced by the consciousness of shared cultural values and practices performed over a well-defined geographical territory. It is true that the political process that has been facilitated after 2003 and which will be discussed in Chapter IV altered the nationalistic sentiment to incorporate civic elements as manifested by the behaviour of political elites. However, ordinary Kurdish agents continue to emphasise their common roots and their emotional attachment to their history and symbols which are considered far stronger when compared to the rational attachment to any institution. This ethnic sentiment is the one that enabled the Kurdish nationalism to survive and has been the one to generate collective action and willingness to sacrifice at critical moments across Kurdish history. Archer's (1995) Critical Realism has been employed to demonstrate how the components of Kurdish ethnic nationalism have constructed a distinct set of cultural constraints that, indeed, accounts for the strength of the ethnic nationalist sentiment and for collective action.

Yet, nationalism, does indeed operate within a context strongly influenced by social objects some of which possess a more structural form such as power and tribalism and some of which a more cultural form such as democracy and ideal governance. It is natural for nationalism as a phenomenon to be transformed subject to the interaction with these structures and is, in turn, logical for the behaviour of the agency to change subject to this transformation; thus, any appropriate evaluation requires a holistic approach. Towards this direction, the chapter has explained how Kurdish ethnic nationalism interacts with power structures, tribal structures and structures of sovereign power which – in a Critical Realist manner – function as structural motivations that determine the behaviour of the agency and account for a distinct set of structural constraints. Towards, the same direction, the next chapter will attempt to account for the development of the civic component of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq.

CHAPTER IV: Kurdish civic nationalism in Iraq

1. Introduction

National identity and the sentiments of belonging constitute the shared umbrella above a community of people historically, territorially and linguistically connected (Calhoun, 1997, p. 232). Attachment of a community towards a nation is usually expressed in an altruistic manner and encompasses elements such as love, loyalty, pride and care towards the co-nationals and the national land (Bar-Tal and Staub, 1997, p. 246). Yet, such emotional elements cannot define nations holistically; individuals often tend to admit their participation in a nation in the absence of any emotions of pride (Heywood, 2004, p. 127). Hans Kohn (1967, p. 16) in 'The idea of Nationalism' adds emphasis to the admission of participation and defines nationalism as a condition spread throughout a population, based on the element of loyalty which unites the members of the society and promotes the most efficient form of political organisation.

Anthony Smith (1991a, p. 14) defines the nation as a group of people sharing not only a territory, memories, myths and a public culture but also an economy and equal rights and responsibilities for all its members. Gellner (1997, p. 9) mentions that nationalism constitutes a political principle attracting its legitimacy from political representation; decisions made by a state become binding for all of its citizens because they were made by those selected to represent the citizens by the citizens themselves. This implies a sense of community articulated in terms of citizenship or national belonging which legitimises the political power and mobilises individuals to participate in the demos for the well-being of the nation. These definitions do not contradict but rather complete each other, to demonstrate the existence of a distinct form of civic attachment.

Civic nationalism constitutes a modern form of nationalism that deviates from the traditional ethnic or cultural understanding of the concept of the nation to incorporate the disposition of citizens to maintain the political institutions within a well-defined territory and accept the liberal principles of freedom, tolerance, equality and individual rights, based on which those institutions were established. Despite being ontologically and conceptually different from the traditional understanding of nationalism, it

generates a distinct sense of belonging; one promoted by the institutions of the state and the cultivation of membership rather than being the outcome of social mobilisation and development of an awareness of collective cultural distinctiveness (Barry, 1993, p. 79-109). This sense of belonging is gradually constructed around the idea of a shared citizenship within a state and does not emanate in definitional terms from shared traits such as culture, language or religion; instead, in terms of commonly experienced institutions of the state, common liberal or democratic principles and values that the members of the civic nation are subject to and a collective desire to maintain the aforementioned (Ignatieff, 1993, p. 5-9).

Civic nationalism does not emphasise cultural distinctiveness neither facilitates assimilation; it is fundamentally based on the mutual respect and acceptance of the constitutional elements of the state and the values that these promote. Contemporary democracies tend to align with the modern ideas of liberalism and tend to consist of citizens strongly connected together to define themselves as a unitary political unit characterised by a desire for self-determination and self-rule (Mason, 2000, p. 115-147). The right to self-determination is understood as a democratic collective right while the establishment of a democratic state based on a distinct identity is perceived as a pragmatic choice due to providing solutions to political problems and establishing the appropriate political and social context for the acquisition of civic liberties (Nodia, 1994, p. 4). This does not necessarily oppose the idea and elements of ethnic nationalism; as mentioned civic nationalism promotes a distinct sense of belonging that under ideal circumstances can coexist with ethnic sentiments. In Iraqi Kurdistan, the two nationalisms do not function against each other but rather operate together in terms of constructing a unique sense of identity composed both of cultural and liberal elements.

For the purpose of this study, it is fundamentally important to understand how civic nationalism interacts with structures within the social world influencing the behaviour of agents; especially in the case of the Iraqi Kurds where the civic aspect is the one to heavily determine the development of Kurdish nationalism across time and space. This chapter will evaluate the development of civic nationalist sentiments among Iraqi Kurdish agents by employing a Critical Realist perspective in accordance with Margaret Archer's (1995) morphogenetic framework, to demonstrate how civic elements have

been incorporated into the nationalist sentiment generating a distinct set of constraints and a distinct sense of belonging that tends to coexist with ethnic sentiments of belonging.

The civic sentiments have been the outcome of the development of democratic institutions and a distinct manifestation of self-determination which differentiates the Iraqi Kurds from their ethnic co-nationals across the Middle East. The chapter will start by determining and explaining the regional distinctiveness of Iraqi Kurdistan and will then proceed by applying specific aspects of civic nationalism on the Iraqi Kurdish case; namely: (a) the conscious choice of participating in the nation (b) the role of citizenship in defining the nature of belonging and the rational nature of attachment to civic institutions (c) the formation of a community of equal rights and shared political practices (d) the process of construction of an inclusive democratic mentality. The chapter will then refer to the interaction between the ethnic and the civic identity to claim that civic sentiments emanate from the primary role of the civic nation in terms of identity construction rather than vice versa as in the case of ethnic sentiments which determine the process of nation-building. The conscious effort of political elites to construct a civic nation through a pragmatist national agenda will then be analysed along with the new structure of national identification promoted and established.

2. The distinct context of Iraqi Kurdish nationalism

Iraqi Kurdistan constitutes a regional model for Kurdish groups when considering its distinct manifestation of self-determination through the establishment of an autonomous federal entity inclusive of Kurdish rights. However, it remains important to recognise that Kurdish nationalism coexists and is subject to numerous regional trends; especially sectarianism, the territorial flexibility in terms of recognised territorial boundaries and economic development (Natali, 2012). It is true that Kurdish groups and communities across the Middle East region are characterised by a shared sense of culture and identity; yes, certain cultural variations do exist but are not significant enough to challenge the common cultural base among them and their common historical origins. It is also true that all of them have historically demonstrated nationalist tendencies towards decentralisation, autonomy or independence. However, the manifestation of such claims has taken place in a different form based on the political context and space they have experienced in the past and they are operating

within at the moment (Vali, 2006, p. 49-78). Those political spaces which form a very specific political context which not only affects but also accounts for change, have been the outcome of distinct state policies and regime ambitions and have created “distinct and changing notions of inclusion and exclusion for Kurds as an ethnic group, but also as a tribal, religious and local community” (Natali, 2012).

This variation of political spaces across the region has been responsible for the distinctiveness in terms of Kurdish nationalism’s manifestations which can be defined by: (a) the nature of political elites (b) the nature of nationalist organisations (c) the nature of nationalist claims (d) the relationships with central governments. Shadeedi Hamzeh portrays these differences:

“There are lots of differences between the Kurds in Iraq and the Kurds in Turkey, for example. I would say the Iraqi Kurds are actually much closer in terms of culture, identity and way of thinking to Iraqi Arabs rather than they are to Kurdish Turks. Being a part of a country for 100 years shapes your development, how you perceive the Kurdish cause. While you have the PKK in Turkey trying to achieve some kind of autonomy within Turkey, you have Kurdish parties in Iraq that claim that they want Kurdish independence and to construct a Kurdish nation. At the same time, when the government formation at the federal level happens, you see the Kurds extremely involved. They want to get their share. They do not give up five per cent of their share in the government. That is not necessarily how a nation, or a group of political actors would deal with the federal government of a country that they want to get independence from.”¹⁷

Thus, demonstrating how particular power structures function as structural motivations to generate structural constraints which not only shape identity in spite of other ideas of belonging, but also determine agential action. The case of the Iraqi Kurds has been historically unique when compared to Kurds in other states due to the state-building process in Iraq being accompanied by the decision of state elites to at least provide a recognition of the Kurdish ethnicity but at the same time to attempt to maintain control over Kurdish groups (Natali, 2012). This created a distinct space within which Kurdish agents functioned; thus, leading to a distinct nationalist manifestation. The 1925 Iraqi constitution referred clearly to a Kurdo-Arab state and demonstrated linguistic tolerance, permitting the official use of the Kurdish language in certain areas; yet, any Kurdish group or any Kurdish activity classified as nationalist was banned (ibid.).

¹⁷ Interview with Hamzeh Shadeedi: Policy Researcher at the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) [Conducted on: 6 May 2020].

Across time, the regime became increasingly repressive and ethnicised and attacked the Kurdish region multiple times; yet, the Kurdish semi-legitimate status was maintained. An autonomous Kurdistan region was later recognised by the Iraqi elites and the Iraqi political community while there was an initial tolerance towards the Communist Party which was attracting significant Kurdish support under its inclusive umbrella until its ban. The outcome of this historical relationship with the central government shaped a significantly ethnicised Kurdish nationalism which fluctuated according to the political situation i.e., between compromise and violence (Natali, 2012).

The situation in Iraq and the context of Kurdish nationalist growth differs significantly when comparing it to the political context within which Kurdish nationalism grew in Turkey, Syria and Iran (Vali, 2006, p. 49-78). Dilshad Hama argues for the existence of different versions of Kurdish nationalism:

“We do not have a fully-fledged ideology called Kurdish nationalism. There are different versions but none of them can account for a fully-fledged Kurdish nationalism. When the first nation-states were formed in the Middle East after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Kurdish land was divided across 4 nation-states and this led to each party developing its own history and unique identity. This division had an impact on the fragmentation of Kurdish identity. We have different versions of Kurdish nationalism until 1991. We have the Islamic version, the Communist version, the pan-Kurdish version. None of them became a fully-fledged nationalism. They were stuck in their regional or tribal connections.”¹⁸

In Turkey, Kurdish nationalism was subject to change within a restrictive political space. The Kemalist state-building processes that took place after the establishment of the Turkish state were marked by a reluctance to recognise the Kurdish ethnicity; the possession of a Turkish citizenship implies a commitment towards the Turkish identity and culture. The outcome was a more complex and ethnicised nationalism that was subject to state restriction due to being perceived hostile towards both the state and the state-building efforts (Natali, 2012). In Iran, Kurdish nationalism was characterised by a less violent manifestation due to the existence of a more inclusive political space that recognised the Kurdish ethnicity and focused on traditional ties between Persians and Kurds. However, the prohibitions against any collective arrangements of Kurdish nationalism, rendered organisations either illegal or tied to leftist parties. Under the

¹⁸ Interview with Dr Dilshad Hama: Head of IRD Department and Lecturer of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tishk International University [Conducted on: 03 April 2020].

Shah, the institutions became increasingly exclusionary towards the Kurds; thus, 'ethnicising' Kurdish nationalism and promoting a more violent manifestation. In general terms, however, Kurdish movements remained weak due to the nature of authoritarianism, the assassination of individuals within Kurdish nationalist elites and internal fragmentation (ibid.).

In Syria, the state has traditionally engaged in policies to prevent the rise and enhancement of nationalist movements while the rise of Ba'athist Arab nationalism facilitated ethnic exclusion that in turn, generated Kurdish ethnic nationalism just as in Ba'athist Iraq, Kemalist Turkey and Shah's Iran. The degree of assimilation witnessed within the society and the state did not allow the small Kurdish community from enhancing its demands (Tejel, 2008). Therefore, confirming Vali's (2006, p. 49-78) assertion that distinct political spaces constructed distinct political contexts and structures which prevented the uniform development of Kurdish nationalist movements across time and space.

The claim regarding distinct political contexts does not imply, however, that the Kurds have not historically attempted to reach their national objectives across borders; KDP has historically maintained party affiliates within Turkey and Syria while the PUK used to have connections with Kurdish leftist groups in Iran (Natali, 2012; Koontz, 2019). This thesis claims that the existence of territorial boundaries along with the 'divide and rule' policies experienced across different states and regimes and the intra-Kurdish divisions, have rendered the nationalist projects distinct. Often, Kurdish elites across different states tend to ally with regional states against each other in order to maintain protection of their own national interests which may be differently defined politically, ideologically and tribally. Such strategies tend to reflect geographical and economic constraints; especially when it comes about discussing Iraqi Kurdistan.

Excessively dependent upon borders and flow of revenue, Iraqi Kurdish political elites have historically proceeded to agreements with regional states which required a compromise on their own nationalist goals and the ones of their ethnic co-nationals in neighbouring states. For example, when Iraqi Kurdistan was placed under a double embargo during the 1990s, the Kurdish leaders had full consciousness of the fact that 85 per cent of the region's revenues emanated from smuggling activities across the Kurdish border (Romano, 2006, p. 378; Natali, 2012). Thus, they proceeded into

negotiations with Ankara to reach an agreement targeting the PKK in exchange for an open border. Similar agreements were reached with Tehran to control Iranian Kurds in exchange for an open border and free trade as well (ibid.). Moreover, the two main Iraqi Kurdish parties – the KDP and the PUK – have also maintained offices in Damascus promising to the Assad regime that they would ensure keeping Syrian Kurdish nationalism under control (Koontz, 2019, p. 22—29; Koontz, 2019, p. 6-8).

Thus, the decision to follow a pragmatic policy across time, has gradually constructed certain structures capable to determine both individual behaviour and political action. It is true that the genesis of the agents took place within a specific context of social structures which include ideas and values very similar across the Kurdish communities of the Middle East. Across time, a historical transition of social processes has taken place, since the decision of the political elites to act according to what they perceive as pragmatic has altered the structures in order to embrace the idea that any political action that contributes towards the development of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq and not Kurdish nationalism in general should be considered legitimate. This structure not only has been determining political action but also has contributing in terms of altering the behaviour of agents that unconsciously have started to regard their own Kurdish nationalism as emotionally and politically distinct from other Kurdish nationalisms in Syria, Iran or Turkey.

3. The conscious choice of participating in the nation

Civic nationalism differs from ethnic nationalism with regard to membership. Membership of an ethnic nation is typically not voluntary but rather unconscious due to the existence of certain traits which render an individual as a member of that nation. On the other hand, membership to a civic nation is voluntary since it is conceptually grounded on two main assumptions and requirements. Firstly, it requires from a group of people to possess a will to live together and, secondly, it requires from an individual to identify himself as a member of the group (Gans, 2003, p. 11). These preconditions form a part of a much larger set of values and ideals which influenced the rise of representative democracy in western states, but also strengthened representative democracy within Iraqi Kurdistan.

As mentioned, a civic nation does not require nor does it assume unification based on traits of language or culture, but is rather grounded on the disposition of citizens to maintain the political institutions within a well-defined territory and accept the liberal principles of freedom, tolerance, equality and individual rights, based on which those institutions were established. Membership tends to be available to anyone sharing or willing to share these values while the promotion of one culture over another does not constitute a state objective (Tamir, 1993, p. 69). No requirement for assimilation to the main culture exists; instead, people should “assent to the principles of the constitutions within the scope of interpretation determined at a particular time” (Habermas, 1998, p. 228); thus, rendering constitutional loyalty as an essential source of legitimising participation in the nation.

Thus, the integration that takes place does not necessarily have an ethnic nature, but is rather functioning towards the construction of a common political culture unified around the KRG’s constitutional principles that determine the civic nation. The distinct sentiment that unifies the people is this political culture which has been subject to two elements. The structural circumstances due to the development of political institutions after the 1992 establishment of the KRG and the cultural circumstances due to the adoption of liberal principles have formed a very specific context within which people’s actions have taken place. The social, political and economic benefits that the Kurdish agents of Iraq have gained because of this context have generated the desire of the people to maintain both the institutions and the liberal principles which implies a willingness to sustain both the structural and cultural circumstances; thus, facilitating structural and cultural elaboration. The newly established circumstances not only determine the perceived collective identification of the population in enhanced civic nationalist terms but also constitute a new status for a further analysis of action:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context within which the Kurdish agents started functioning after the 1992 establishment of the KRG and the emergence of a space for political development
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by structural and cultural motivations subject to institutional developments and establishment of liberal principles

- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the formation of a new set of structural and cultural constraints subject to the incorporation of the structural and cultural circumstances accounting for collective identification which generated a collective political culture

An association between nationalism and liberalism has also been constructed by the political elites of Iraqi Kurdistan which derives from the idea that nationalism constitutes the collective ideology and source of legitimacy for a state to proceed towards the accomplishment of individual freedom through institutional arrangements at the state level. A distinct national identity accompanied by a desire for self-rule are essential components for the establishment of a new democratic system; this aligns with Fukuyama's (1994, p. 23) assumption that democracy is only feasible and able to survive when accompanied by moderate nationalism.

The Kurdish right of self-determination is, thus, understood as a democratic collective right while the establishment of a democratic state based on a distinct identity is perceived as a pragmatic choice due to providing solutions to political problems and establishing the appropriate political and social context for the acquisition of civic liberties (Nodia, 1994, p. 4). Thus, a meaningful connection is constructed between nationalism and individual freedom through the establishment of doctrine which assumes that humanity is naturally divided into nations and that the denial of self-determination implies a violation of fundamental human rights. Nationalism is grounded on popular sovereignty and the obedience to self-imposed laws; concepts which are only satisfied through self-determination which implies the right to decide for the future of a specific territory and legitimises the demand of the population that constitutes the majority to establish a state within that territory (Margalit and Raz, 1990, p. 440).

4. The role of citizenship and institutions

Ethnic nationalism is characterised by a nature of belonging defined by the common roots of the people constituting the nation (Muller, 2008, p. 20). On the other hand, with regard to civic nationalism, the nature of belonging differs and is defined by the common citizenship (Ignatieff, 1993, p. 5). Citizenship is the outcome of the decision of the members of the civic nation to subscribe to its political creed and does not depend

on ethnicity, race, religion, language or gender. How a person identifies himself may depend on numerous variables such as the socio-political context or his/her political orientation while ethnic and civic sentiments are not mutually exclusive; they can coexist with a person identifying himself both according to his/her ethnic or civic sense of belonging. Citizenship for the Iraqi Kurds does not only constitute a structural motivation due to the legal framework that agents have to operate within. It also constitutes a cultural motivation due to the political rights and democratic elements that the Iraqi Kurds have distinctively engaged with in contrast to Syrian, Iranian or Turkish Kurds. Thus, citizenship has facilitated both structural and cultural elaboration towards a new status for analysis of action which determines unique identification structures.

What is remarkable with regard to the case discussed across this thesis is that the Iraqi Kurds were subject to the structural and cultural motivations of the civic nationalism promoted by the modern Iraqi state for decades, being its constitutional members and participating in its institutions. Yet, they demonstrated a remarkable resistance to the civic nationalism promoted by Baghdad despite constitutionally being citizens of the Iraqi state; this resistance can be attributed to the homogenising policies described in detail across the second chapter of this thesis which acted as a threat to the ethnic sentiments of the Kurdish population (Wimmer, 2002, p. 166). After the 1992 establishment of the KRG and especially after the 2005 establishment of the new Iraqi constitution, the Kurds did not demonstrate resistance towards the civic nationalism promoted by the KRG and the institutions of the Iraqi Kurdistan region. This variance in terms of efficiency leads to the development of the following assumption: civic nationalism is significantly efficient only in the presence of tolerance and respect towards the civic nation and in the presence of perceived congruence between the ethnic sentiments of a population and the top-down promoted civic sentiments.

When it comes to ethnic nationalism, this is usually dependent on a sense of belonging defined by language, religion, culture, customs and traditions. People are held together through pre-existing ethnic cultural characteristics that were formed historically through a slow and gradual process of cultural elaboration and which tend to be very strong and stable (Muller, 2008, p. 20). On the other hand, the civic structure of nationalism implies that people are held together through their political rights and attachment is usually to civic institutions like a parliament or the rule of law (Ignatieff,

1993, p. 5). Their attachment to their own political institutions as a result of the establishment of the KRG is what distinguishes Kurds in the northern part of Iraq from Kurds situated within the territorial boundaries of other states. These institutions generate a unique structure that enables individuals to develop sentiments of belonging towards their institutions and identify themselves according to their membership or participation to them. Thus, this membership or participation becomes an integral element of the Iraqi Kurdish identity. In contrast to ethnic nationalism, which is more romantic, idealistic and emotional, civic nationalism constitutes a more realistic source of belonging (Ignatieff, 1993, p. 5-9). A common ethnicity can assist in terms of uniting people against ethnic others but does not assist in terms of overcoming other divisions such as class, gender, tribalism and scarce resources. Civic nationalism provides a structural framework of legislative, political and judicial participation to reconcile divisions of such a nature. Archer's (1995) framework is employed to frame the enhancement of the civic nationalist sentiment:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context within which Kurdish agents have taken shape and acted subject to the co-existence of a sovereign Iraqi state and the KRG and the decision to ascribe to the political creed of the nation
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by structural motivations such as the Iraqi and Kurdish legal framework agents had to operate within and the engagement with the institutions of the KRG and cultural motivations such as the enhancement of political and democratic rights
- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the formation of a new set of structural and cultural constraints subject to the absence of resistance towards the civic nationalism promoted by the KRG coexisting with a strong resistance towards the idea of an Iraqi citizenship defining the nature of belonging along with the rational nature of attachment to the KRG's civic institutions. Thus, the nationalist sentiment was further enriched with civic elements.

5. The formation of a community of equal rights and shared political practices

Civic nationalism is the outcome of the decision of a group of people to form a community of citizens experiencing equal rights and a shared set of political practices and values which promote a patriotic attachment based on territory rather than cultural traits. The existence of a cultural project is not a requirement; instead, the civic state, based on established legislation demands legitimately from its citizens to act considering the interests of their fellow citizens and sacrifice themselves for the common good of the community; thus, there is again a willingness to sacrifice but without adopting any cultural practices of the majority nation (Barry, 1993, p. 78).

In the case of Iraqi Kurdistan and the constitutional principles determining the political context, the KRG is expected by the agency not only to maintain a fair set of rules but also to ensure the protection of the identity of its historic nation. This is usual in the presence of high degrees of ethnic homogenisation within a territory but even more significant when referring to Iraqi Kurdistan where the issue of the disputed territories challenges the historic identity of territories such as Kirkuk and, thus, culturalism becomes an integral element of political narratives and decision-making. Across time, the Kurdish political elites have employed historical narratives to legitimise their claims regarding the Kurdish identity of their territories (Fischer-Tahir, 2012, p. 104). These narratives have gradually constructed certain structures which determine the expectations of the agents while the political leadership is required to maintain these structures in order to legitimise its political power and presence.

Since 2005, Iraqi Kurdistan is operating like a 'state within a state' (Bakawan, 2019) in accordance with Barry's (1993, p. 7) liberal unitary model of citizenship which is based on the idea that everybody should enjoy the same legal and political rights in the absence of any distinctions based on class or ethnicity. Linguistic, cultural and economic requirements are indirectly promoted upon citizens through the state's coercive power (i.e., taxation) and through its power to shape incentives (i.e., through public education, services and subsidies); thus, facilitating assimilation to and homogenisation of the Kurdish culture in the absence of any repressive policies (Yack, 1999, p. 108). As Dodge (2021, p. 463) argues: "Those who succeed in dominating the political field certainly utilize economic and coercive capital but they also deploy social, and in particular symbolic capital". In this case, assimilation to the dominant identity implies identification as an Iraqi Kurd or as a citizen of Iraqi Kurdistan. The

development of a common distinct cultural structure often through a common language has two functions. Firstly, it facilitates social solidarity which generates a stronger feeling of sacrificing private interests for the interests of the compatriots and the demos in general, since individuals are often asked to contribute to programs they do not benefit directly from (Miller, 1995, p. 83). Secondly, sharing a common language and culture reduces administrative and economic costs which could be better spent in other areas and contribute towards social welfare (Macedo, 2000, p. 96). Archer's (1995) framework depicts the importance of the KRG in terms of enhancing the nationalist sentiment with civic elements:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the structural and cultural context within which Kurdish agents have taken shape and acted subject to the 1992 establishment of the KRG and the development of a framework of rights, obligations and shared political practices
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by the indirect promotion of cultural and economic requirements by the civic state (i.e., the KRG) through coercive power (i.e., taxation) and through the power to shape incentives (i.e., education, services, subsidies)
- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the formation of a new set of structural and cultural constraints subject to the reduction of costs and the increase in social solidarity through the contribution to the demos, which not only increase incentives for the agency to maintain the status quo but also enrich the nationalist sentiment with civic elements

The major challenge of civic nationalism remains the contradiction between personal self-determination and national self-determination. John Stuart Mill (1991, p. 9) identifies the nature of government and individual choice as collective and subject to a governmental decision; thus, elevating individual self-determination to the national level and justifying national self-determination; thus, implying a reconciliation between personal and self-determination. This thesis claims that the existence of commonly accepted tribal and religious values within the Kurdish culture and tradition, does indeed create certain structural boundaries with regard to personal freedom; however, their mutual acceptance not only assists in maintaining and strengthening these

structures but also assumes and promotes the establishment of a community of equal rights and shared political practices. Tradition remains a determinant factor in terms of defining the Kurdish identity while the Kurdish nation at the same time employs this tradition in support of a specific nationalist project, creating a certain framework through which individual action is determined; regardless of whether individual sentiments tend to coexist with the sentiments promoted by this structural framework.

Civic nationalism in the Iraqi Kurdish context, brings together the elements and principles of national and individual self-determination. It extends from the traditional sense of nationalism to embrace the existence of a political community which implies a set of rules, laws and institutions that tie all individuals as a group around an authority that does not have historical or cultural significance but which is assumed according to national narratives to be the just and deserved outcome of centuries of national struggle. The civic aspect of a nation which implies the existence of a political community is mainly associated with territory; yet, historical nations demographically monopolising a territory tend to elevate a demarcated territory as historical and sacred. The political community has to represent elements that again do not have historical significance i.e., judicial equality and civic and economic rights of the society. Community is ultimately expressed through common values and traditions, aspirations, sentiments and ideas that hold people together with the demarcated historical territory.

This aligns with Smith's (1991a) interpretation of the western conception of a nation as an entity encompassing a historical territory, a sense of community, political and judicial equality and a public civic culture. It is important to note that the historical and sacred importance attributed to the territory is not enough to define the multi-dimensional character of the nation; through a civic lens, the nation is not idealised but instead critically evaluated. Civic nationalism, when emanating from a socially accepted agreement and as long it does not act as a threat to ethnic sentiments, functions as a positive force that works in favour of the national community in the absence of any required threat or enemy (Michnik, 1993, p. 151).

6. The process of construction of an inclusive democratic mentality

A civic nation is usually characterised by remarkable inclusive and democratic elements due to the central power emanating from all the citizens and due to the nation claiming

self-governing and individual rights for its citizens regardless of cultural elements. This implies a sense of community articulated in terms of citizenship or national belonging which legitimises the political power and mobilises individuals to participate in the demos for the well-being of the nation (Barry, 1993, p. 79-109). This membership is composed of two elements or assumptions. Firstly, the political decisions constitute the outcome of the collective willingness of the citizens to satisfy the common interest in support of their society which is appropriately defined in territorial terms. Secondly, the people that passively decide not to participate in the electoral processes will passively accept the decisions of the active members of the society. Thus, people are characterised by a common nationalist ideology as summarised by Anthony Smith (2010, p. 22):

1. The world is divided into nations each one having its own history and uniqueness
2. The nation constitutes the source of social and political power; thus, national loyalty comes first and overcomes any form of individuality
3. Liberty and personal identification are directly related to the identification with the nation
4. Nations can experience freedom and safety in the presence of peace and justice across the world

Civic nationalism does not aim at placing the interests of one nation above those of another and supports the concept of equality of all nations; thus, contributing towards stability in terms of international order (Heywood, 2004, p. 134). Civic nationalism tends to embrace an ideology of a dominant middle class representing civic politics and being able to unite individual freedom with ‘rational cosmopolitanism’ (Conversi, 1997, p. 3). According to Kohn (1967, p. 329-331), civic nationalism has been the historic outcome of the effort to construct a nation out of “political realities and present struggles without any sentimental attachments to the past”. This is contradicted to ethnic nationalism which puts a strong emphasis on the native culture and the attachment to the community where an individual was born while the common descent constitutes the essential element of a nation which is a form of an extended family (Horowitz, 1985). Instead of common institutions and laws, the state functions by the ‘will of the people’; therefore, popular mobilisation encompasses a moral role (Gellner

and Ionescu, 1969, p. 330). The idea of equality is overpowered by traditions and customs and the dominant ideology is the cultural one which focuses on the 'glorious past' that cannot be matched by the present.

Kohn (1967, p. 330) mentions that in Central and Eastern Europe there was no well-identified middle class; thus, nationalism was the creation of elites or groups that had sought power due to not having access to it. Nationalist intellectuals created the idea of an ideal fatherland that links past to present which had to become a political reality. In areas outside Europe, nation was understood as an organic entity that had to establish a mission, challenge modernity and substitute underdeveloped culture by historical myths. These areas were not influenced by the ideas of Renaissance while their underdevelopment generated essentialist rhetoric that was attractive for individuals to identify with. The situation in Iraqi Kurdistan started changing after 1991, since the process facilitated by external forces led to a system which despite its deficiencies is relatively democratic and inclusive when compared to other regional systems (McDowall, 2004, p. 380). In 1992, one year after the 1991 end of the Gulf War, parliamentary elections took place to elect a Kurdistan National Assembly which led to the KDP and the PUK agreeing to form a democratic unity government (Gunter, 1992, p. 90). From 1994 to 1997, however, a civil war took place that damaged democracy significantly but which ended in September 1998 with the peace treaty established through the Washington agreement (Stansfield, 2003, p. 100).

The autonomy and democratic government that was maintained after 2003, further assisted in developing democratic elements and rendering Iraqi Kurdistan as one of the most advanced democratic forms of government in the region. The main institutions within the Iraqi Kurdistan region are the KRG, the Kurdistan Region Presidency and the Kurdistan Parliament which exercise legislative and executive authorities in numerous areas such as security, education, health, financial management and economic policy (Abdullah and Hama, 2019). The unique experience of participating within a democratic process has distinguished Iraqi Kurds from other Kurds in the region in civic terms and has contributed in terms of reinforcing their national identification structures with democratic elements and principles through a process of cultural elaboration. At the same time, as mentioned, their attachment to their own

unique institutions reinforces the elements of attachment to the nation through a civic sentiment which is more rational and pragmatic in nature.

The KRG exercises executive power according to the legal framework enacted by the parliament while the government coalition consist of several political parties which reflect the cultural diversity of the region' population which encompasses Kurds, Turkmens, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Syriacs and Yazidis (Abdullah and Hama, 2019). The KRP which constitutes an institution established by the Kurdistan Parliament in 2005, possesses the greatest executive authority. He or she is elected every four years by a popular vote through a first-past-first-the-post electoral system. The president acts as the representative of the Kurdistan's people at a national and international level while also overseeing the relations between the region and the Iraqi federal authorities (ibid.). The Kurdistan parliament constitutes the elected legislature of the region responsible for examining law proposals, scrutinising government policy and debate relevant issues. It is grounded on certain founding principles; liberty, pluralism, accountability, openness and appropriate representation of all peoples situated within the Iraqi Kurdistan region (ibid.). In 2009, the election law of Kurdistan was modified to increase inclusiveness for all age and ethnic groups reducing the minimum age of parliamentary candidates from 30 to 25 while five seats have been since reserved for the Turkmen community, five seats for the Assyrian Community and one seat for the Armenian community (Kurdistan Parliament, 2009).

Moreover, there was an increase in the legal requirement for the seats to be held by female individuals from 25 to 30 per cent and women currently hold 39 out of the 111 seats of the parliament (Danly, 2009). Parliamentary elections have been taking place every four years since 1992 and have been recognised as free, fair and democratic by international observers (Kurdistan Parliament, 2020). Anyone aged 18 or above and is on the electoral register is eligible to vote in a secret ballot for a party's list of candidates. The parliament possesses the power to debate and legislate in numerous areas such as security, education, health, agriculture, natural resources, trade, industry, investment, transport, infrastructure, environment and social affairs (Abdullah and Hama, 2019). Legislative power is shared with federal authorities in terms of customs, electric energy and water resources, but priority is given to the laws of the Kurdistan

Parliament which under Article 121 has the right to amend the application of Iraq-wide legislation that does not fall under the exclusive powers of the federal authorities (ibid.).

The people of Kurdistan constitute the source of legitimacy for the KRG which is widely recognised by Kurdish politicians as an institution that will aim for development and prosperity in memory of the people sacrificed in the Kurdistan liberation and freedom movement (Abdullah and Hama, 2019). The democratic mentality that is manifested through the KRG is demonstrated by the Kurdish diplomatic embracement of the emergence of democracy and justice in some of the Middle East and North Africa countries while efforts for democracy are often compared to the post-1992 ‘Kurdish Spring’ which led to the installation of the rule of law, democracy and the development of the democratic process (McDowall, 2004, p. 380).

What has also been significantly important in terms of constructing national unity has been the political effectiveness in terms of building consensus on national issues; especially, in a national era of vital and historical importance. The agency managed to unify and develop hopefulness about the future despite the numerous challenges ahead which is manifested through a unified voice on issues of national significance (Gunter, 1992, p. 92). KRG functions as the connection point between all parties within Kurdistan; both those in power and those politically opposed to them in order to act as the inclusive government of all people within Iraqi Kurdistan (Abdullah and Hama, 2019). At the same time, despite the decision to participate in the building of a democratic and inclusive federal Iraq, the Kurdish political elite has been questioning whether such a system could serve the interests of the Kurdish people appropriately; something which further builds national unity by satisfying a structure of repulsion towards an Iraqi identity and a structural aim of an absolute future autonomy. There is a constant quest for addressing the Kurdish demands as a part of the legal and constitutional responsibilities of the federal government. Dilshad Hama, however, offers a distinct opinion saying:

“In terms of the formalities of democracy – for instance, parliament, political parties, elections, – we do have them. But when it comes to details, there is a democratic deficit. Nobody can deny it. There is a limit to the freedom of speech and to political activities. There was a process since 1991, but there have been obstacles and in 1996, everything stopped until 2003 when reunification started. Democratisation then started to recover. But there is no absolute democracy

anywhere. Compared to some other neighbouring countries, the Kurdistan region is more democratic.”¹⁹

Moving on to the foreign relations of Iraqi Kurdistan, they have contributed enormously in terms of building a distinct framework of regional and international relations that defines a people situated within a demarcated territory; just like an actual state (KRG Department of Foreign Relations, 2020). This also further develops a Kurdish identity that deviates from other Kurdish identities in the region since it constructs an identification structure dependent on certain international relations that are not subject to the expressed or tacit consent of the Kurdish people as a whole but solely to those living in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurdistan Region has been trying to develop good relations with other countries in the region on the basis of bilateral interests (ibid.). At the same time, the narrative of relative stability compared to the rest of Iraq possesses valid grounds and constructs a distinct sense of security for the Kurds of Iraq promoted by the actions of the Peshmerga and other military and security forces (Kurdistan Development Corporation, 2020). The security sector has been enhanced as an important institution of both practical and national importance that has developed a close connection to the people; thus, enhancing the attachment between the people and the institution (Fumerton and Van Wilgenburg, 2015).

The KRG has also made a commitment to strengthen democracy and human rights through the protection of domestic violence and the empowerment of the role of women, as demonstrated by the 2011 Act of Combating Domestic Violence and the formation of the High Council of Women Affairs respectively (Kurdistan Parliament, 2011; KRG, 2021). Peaceful coexistence in the region has been facilitated through the encouragement of respect for all religions and ethnic groups while also respecting the cultural and social norms of the Kurdish society. Islam constitutes a strong norm and its respect is promoted by the KRG law (Kelly, 2010, p. 730); however, religion, according to the KRG, cannot be used for political incentives to attack democratic principles. Religion is considered by the KRG as a positive force towards the establishment of peaceful coexistence; thus, any disrespect towards other religions is strictly prohibited by the constitution (ibid., p. 737).

¹⁹ Interview with Dr Dilshad Hama: Head of IRD Department and Lecturer of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tishk International University [Conducted on: 03 April 2020].

The constitution also recognises the importance of freedom for the vocational, social and civic society organisations in terms of establishing a democratic society. People should enjoy the appropriate freedom to promote positive change, public awareness and information availability (ibid., p. 777-781). Moreover, Article 60 guarantees the freedom of press in the Kurdistan Region and recognises the role of journalism in terms of monitoring governmental action and determining problematic areas to facilitate efficiency (ibid., p. 785).

What is also important to mention is that Barzani often emphasises the concept of democracy in political statements as a part of a larger effort to construct a distinct Kurdish identification structure which would enable the Iraqi Kurds to differentiate themselves from perceived ‘others’ such as Baghdad. For instance, in a 2017 speech in support of the Kurdish independence referendum, Barzani (2017) differentiated between what Kurdistan is and what Iraq should, to claim for the presence of democratic elements in Kurdistan which are either less evident or completely absent in the rest of Iraq, while in a 2015 interview, making a comparison between the region and the rest of Iraq, he emphasised the movement of Kurdistan towards tolerance, peaceful coexistence, freedom and democracy (Atlantic Council, 2015).

This differentiation is often reinforced by the KRG through reference to the electoral processes, the representation of the people and the existence of free media without censorship (Kelly, 2010, p. 777-785). The development of this identification structure does not only assist in terms of recognising the existence of a well-developed democratisation process but also to enable the agents to identify themselves as members of a democratic community due to the existence of democratic institutions, which increases both their emotional and rational attachment to the civic nation, as Archer’s (1995) framework depicts:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context formed after the establishment of the KRG, the development of institutions and the start of a process of democratisation
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by structural motivations such as the engagement with the newly-established institutions and cultural motivations such as the democratisation process, the experience of democratic elements and the

promotion of the KRG narratives differentiating between the governance of the region and the rest of Iraq

- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the formation of a new set of structural constraints subject to the material benefits of autonomy and cultural constraints subject to the development of an inclusive democratic community that not only increased their emotional and rational attachment to the nation but also enriched the concept with civic elements. Moreover, the engagement with the KRG narratives differentiating between the governance of the region and the rest of Iraq constructed unique identification structures that function as cultural constraints, further strengthening the attachment of the Kurds to the region and weakening their attachment to Iraq.

7. A clash between the Kurdish civic and ethnic identities

Despite the increasing strength of civic elements, external patronage networks (i.e., through the provision of political and financial support) do exist and do account for the expansion of Kurdish nationalism across territorial boundaries. Most of the Kurdish diaspora that lives in Europe has developed institutions that possess a clear aim of actively promoting national rights for all Kurds regardless of the state they reside in; such institutions include the Navend Centre in Bonn and the Institute Kurde in Paris (O’Shea, 2004; Kurdish Institute of Paris, 2020). Capitalising on open democratic spaces and the internet has enabled Kurdish nationalism to be manifested and enhanced through social media, lobbying and publications; it is worth noting that the activity of Kurdish youth in the diaspora has been remarkably significant demonstrating their commitment to their Kurdish identity despite not being resident of Kurdish-inhabited areas (Eliassi, 2011; Dag, 2020). At the same time, the access of Kurdish communities to external support has allowed them to successfully absorb legitimacy and recognition which in turn, enhanced the external patronage networks of Kurdish communities within states encompassing Kurdish minorities (Dag, 2020).

The 2005 emergence of the ‘responsibility to protect’ framework which conceptually holds its roots in the international action that took place in the 1990s (United Nations, 2020), has benefitted Iraqi Kurds by creating an international safe haven above the Kurdistan region after the Gulf War and by generating a non-reversible process that led to the 1992 establishment of the KRG. The federal political space that was created after

the removal of Saddam Hussein from power, undeniably strengthened Kurdish nationalism and the prospects for absolute autonomy while the American support enabled the Iraqi Kurds to absorb legitimacy and recognition from a national constitution; a decision that weakened the central government of Baghdad, empowered the region and the KRG and expanded its annual budget. Utilising the revenues provided by Baghdad, Iraqi Kurdistan developed in terms of infrastructure, energy and security forces (Kuruuzum, 2018, p. 185; Natali, 2010, p. 88). Thus, this unique situation altered the socio-economic structures of the Iraqi Kurdish population; external action and consequently, social and economic development in the form of emergent properties generated by a process of social interaction, altered the social and economic structures which determine the expectations of the agency. National identification structures were elaborated to embrace a perception of participation within a specific territorial community that deviates from other ethnically related communities in terms of economic development, social progress, geopolitical allies and international recognition.

However, during this period of political and socio-economic development, a 'double standard' condition was experienced on an ethnic national level; while Iraqi Kurds had access to and opportunity of exploitation of aid and resources, Turkish Kurds belonging to the PKK were perceived as 'bad' Kurds and were often referred to by the Turkish regime as communists or terrorists (Yavuz and Ozcan, 2006, p. 103). Turkish Kurds, their operations and their demands acted as a challenge towards a vital Western ally and key NATO member and thus, could not be provided with American aid and support. The radicalisation of Kurdish nationalism under the PKK further alienated it internationally while Iranian and Syrian Kurds have not attracted any worth-mentioning foreign support. Kurdish diaspora networks tend to be focused on supporting their home country's nationalism i.e., their compatriots (Shain and Barth, 2003, p. 459); something that deviates from the pan-Kurdish or ethno-cultural understanding of their identity. Instead, their self-perceived identity – if we assume that this is translated in terms of external assistance and support - seems to be defined mainly by territory but also by elements such as dialect (Kurmanji or Sorani), region or religious affiliation (Natali, 2012).

Thus, this situation of a ‘double standard’ condition generated the alteration of national identification structures; the distinct perception of the international community towards different Kurdish communities across different states implies a unique context of structural development. The political elites, on one hand, acted accordingly to distinguish themselves from other Kurdish groups perceived internationally as ‘bad’ Kurds while the access to aid and resources and the absence of any alienation for the Iraqi Kurds, generated the development of a political structure that defined the Iraqi Kurds as Western allies (Tisdall, 2017; Natali, 2012). This structure, constructed simultaneously either consciously by political elites or unconsciously by individual agents, was gradually incorporated into the perceived distinct identity of the Kurdish population of Iraq. This structure determines the behaviour of the agents against Western powers which is distinct when compared to the perceived understanding of them by other Kurdish groups in the area.

At the same time, the unique nationalist manifestations due to distinct political contexts, bring to light an extraordinary clash between two identities. A coexistence takes place between a shared Kurdish national identity based on cultural elements and distinct nationalist projects across countries; this coexistence has increased the complexity accompanying reform movements that have unsettled the Middle East region during the last years. During the last years, many groups have situated their nationalist agendas within the democratisation processes of the region pushing for Kurdish rights that go beyond their minority status and demanding new forms of democratic governance such as federalism or further decentralisation and the establishment of constitutional reforms able to protect and guarantee their autonomy within their system (Fatah and Goudsouzian, 2016). Such moves have been useful in numerous cases in terms of raising concern and awareness; the Syrian Crisis examples demonstrates that the decision of the Kurds to place their nationalist project within a mass movement for change, has turned attention towards them while also creating a larger political platform for Kurdish claims in Iraq and Turkey (ibid.).

Yet, each community tends to possess its own unique political and nationalist objectives rather than follow a pan-Kurdish agenda or ethnic nationalist project. Iraqi Kurds, especially since the establishment of regional autonomy, have been in a constant struggle with Baghdad over the nature of power in the Iraqi state, the energy sector and

its control, the disputed territories and the sharing of revenues. Turkish Kurds have been fighting for a recognition of the Kurdish national rights and a form of political decentralisation. Syrian Kurds have also been demanding recognition of their national rights within a stable de-ethnicised and decentralised Syrian state while Iranian Kurds have been mainly fighting mainly for democracy for Iran and then, for regional autonomy.

Considering the general picture, regional developments and instability have reinforced these distinct projects and have generated internal fragmentations, with Kaya (2020, p. 7) stating that “each Kurdish nationalist organisation typically defines its goals and problems in a way that is limited to the country they reside in”. The PKK and the PYD have attempted to exploit the political vacuum in Syria and the deterioration of the relations between Turkey and Damascus, to support the Assad regime against Turkey while Kurdish nationalists in Syria have proceeded to the creation of their own Kurdish National Council that focuses mainly on the recognition and enhancement of Kurdish rights and on preventing the rise of a post-Assad regime directly influenced by Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood (Carnegie-MEC, 2020). This creates a situation of uncertainty for the KRG which while supporting the national and political rights of their co-nationals and the commencement of a process of political change and democratisation for Syria, they cannot fully embrace their demands, since this would contradict the decision to operate in a state-centric and pragmatic manner and would act against the interests of the Iraqi Kurdistan region. Dilshad Hama confirms the pragmatic nature of the Iraqi Kurdish foreign policy by stating:

“The problem is that there is no unified KRG force. The Kurds have to act rationally. You cannot play with the nationalist sentiment anymore. Whether we like it or not, Iran and Turkey are our neighbours. Whether we like it or not, Kurdistan is landlocked. We cannot afford not to talk with Iran or Turkey. Kurds have to act rationally. But that does not mean that I believe they always act rationally. They do sometimes, but not always.”²⁰

Considering the distinct paths and structures of Kurdish transnationalism, the emergence of a pan-Kurdish sovereign entity to embrace all Kurdish groups remains unrealistic at the current moment and under the current status quo. Iraqi Kurds will most likely continue their strive for greater autonomy in an effort to reduce their dependency

²⁰ Interview with Dr Dilshad Hama: Head of IRD Department and Lecturer of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tishk International University [Conducted on: 03 April 2020].

on the central Iraqi state and their economic dependency on Turkey and to gradually transform their region into a self-sufficient fully autonomous or independent entity. Shadeedi Hamzeh provides his own perception regarding the most rational way forward for the Kurds of Iraq:

“I think the best way forward for Kurds, even if they want to get independence, is cooperation with Baghdad. You really need to keep Iraq as a friend. You cannot make Iraq an enemy state while you are surrounded by two countries that definitely want you to fail; Turkey and Iran. Those countries will make sure to use every single tool they have for the Kurdistan region to fail because they have Kurdish communities that are bigger in terms of number than the one in Iraq and they also want to get independence.”²¹

Turkish Kurds will keep pushing for the recognition of their national rights and democratic autonomy while Syrian Kurds will attempt through future negotiation to achieve elimination of foreign intervention in their land, recognition of their national rights and democratic autonomy along with a more decentralised or federalised political system. Iranian Kurds will continue to be in the least advantageous position due to operating within a closed political space that does not facilitate change and due to less developed nationalist organisations. At the same time, the role of regional states seeking to protect, maintain or seek their own interests should not be underestimated; often through different Kurdish proxy groups. Such alliances may “secure borders, leverage competing political interests, meet states’ energy needs and develop shared commercial interests” (Natali, 2012) or even enhance the political relations between Kurds and they states they are encompassed in. Yet, until Kurdish nationalism is addressed by a specific state as an integral part of its political agenda, it will remain an integral part of opposition politics and a factor operating against regional stability.

An exclusive contextual analysis of the Iraqi Kurdish case demonstrates overlaps taking place with regard to the ethnic-civic dichotomy. Despite the Iraqi Kurds referring to the historical existence of their distinct national identity and its features, in line with ethnic nationalism, they also attempt to justify and legitimise their demands through reference to liberal and democratic principles that have dominated the modern era such as the principle of self-determination. Their sub-state nationalism assumes a pre-existing ethnic identity while also emphasising a voluntary form of nationalism due to the

²¹ Interview with Hamzeh Shadeedi: Policy Researcher at the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) [Conducted on: 6 May 2020].

freedom of choice to decide on their political rule; thus, constructing an association between self-identification and self-determination to imply a democratic right for a sovereign homeland and render the nationalist project pragmatic (Nodia, 1994, p. 7). In accordance with Critical Realism, the behaviour of Kurdish agents has been affected by two structures; firstly, the ethnic structure attracting legitimacy from the perception of a pre-existing ethnic identity and secondly, the civic structure attracting legitimacy from the right of self-determination. The Kurdish agents, in an effort to align their nationalist objectives with a perceived pragmatist agenda, have been employing these structures to construct a unitary distinct structure to be promoted outside the territories of Iraqi Kurdistan that emphasises that their legitimate and democratic right for self-determination emanates from their self-identification as a distinct ethnic nation. This structure, in turn, determines the behaviour of agents and incorporates into the nationalist narratives not only ethnic elements but civic ones as well such as democracy and self-determination.

8. The conscious effort of political elites to construct a civic nation through a pragmatist nationalist agenda

There are multiple Kurdish nationalisms promoted across the Middle East by a variety of political organisations. According to Romano (2006, p. 197), however, the KDP and the PUK are characterised by a huge ideological congruence as “the PUK itself came in practice and behaviour to resemble the KDP so much that average Kurds were often unable to specify a single policy or ideological difference between the two”. Shadeedi Hamzeh explains the nature of their competition and the limited role of ideology in terms of shaping the political agendas:

“The competition between the two parties is a competition over power and resources. They want to maintain power within their territory and want to have resources to maintain their patronage networks and their ability to provide money and salaries for their Peshmerga and counter-terrorism forces. That is the problem in Iraq with all parties. They do not bother to define their ideology. Ideologies, in general, are really weak in Iraq.”²²

This comes as a surprise when considering the historical and political background of the two parties without understanding that political pragmatism rather than ideology is

²² Interview with Hamzeh Shadeedi: Policy Researcher at the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) [Conducted on: 6 May 2020].

the one to massively account for the 1975 PUK leadership split from the KDP and their historic military and political differences. Intra-national conflicts directly challenge the idea of a unified nation and this acted as the top incentive for the PUK and the KDP to unite towards their shared nationalist goals and the construction of a common nationalist structure to determine the Iraqi Kurdish population. Ahmed (2012, p. 9) further reinforces this idea by stating that the parties “realised that their people would damn them forever if they squandered the opportunity created by the 1991 Gulf War for laying the foundation of a Kurdish state in Iraq”. Both parties sought to influence Kurdish identity constructions in congruence with one another in support of their short-term political goals and their long-term independence ambitions; thus, it does make logical sense to consider the nationalist ideologies of the KDP and the PUK as a single unitary ideology. Barin Kayaoglu reinforces the argument regarding the limited role of ideology in terms of defining the nature of the parties. More specifically:

“Considering the KDP and the PUK, there is not much of an ideological difference between them anymore. They are both coal markets. They are both based on the patronage networks; especially the KDP because of its command of the Capitol city. The differences in Kurdish nationalism are more in terms of implementation. The PUK is probably less of a Kurdish nationalist party in the sense of wanting a Kurdish nation-state. It has tried to play nice in Baghdad and secure as many concessions for Kurdistan as possible. And of course, if we can contribute to the well-being and stability of Iraq, that is going to benefit us as Iraqi Kurds but also Kurds in other countries. KDP, however, is saying that the Iraqi project does not work and we need to go our separate ways or people are never going to be happy, safe or prosperous. But the two parties have more in common than they have in difference. After the American occupation, the two parties actually merged governance structures; although, not at the mid and local level. The parties are still running the show and how they are structured is still pretty much the same in terms of patronage networks, loyalty and militias.”²³

The 2003 invasion of Iraq significantly altered the social and political spaces of the Iraqi Kurdistan region. For decades, the region was subject to a form of Arab hegemony that employed policies of enforcement of an identity that significantly deviated from the actual identity of the Kurdish people, until 2003 when the PUK and the KDP exploited the opportunity to politically promote regional autonomy which was later included in the 2005 Iraqi constitution which officially transformed Iraq into a federal democracy (Stansfield, 2017). This autonomy has been used by both parties to

²³ Interview with Dr Barin Kayaoglu: Assistant Professor of World History at the American University of Iraq [Conducted on: 10 May 2020].

construct, develop and enhance Kurdish national identifications which satisfy and support their political ambitions, in accordance with Brubaker's (2004, p. 43) assertion that the one who exercises control over material and symbolic resources can impose classifications and identifications.

This section examines to what extent the two parties have relegated the importance and significance of primordial attachments and ethnic national identification in an effort to construct a nation and a sense of belonging based on a common Iraqi Kurdish history and civic rights. Iraqi Kurdistan is diverse ethnically, linguistically and religiously; thus, a politically pragmatist nationalist agenda recognises that non-primordial indicators are required to be promoted in order to ensure a distinct sense of national identification when compared to other Kurds in the Middle East and enhance claims for absolute political autonomy (McGarry, 2006, p. 109). This distinct political path was the one that determined the top-down construction of a Kurdish nation able to be distinguished from two 'others': (a) Iraq under Baghdad's administration (b) Kurdish groups in Turkey, Iran and Syria. The KDP and the PUK through their own unique manifestation of Kurdish nationalism created a unique nationalist structure that attracts legitimacy from the narrative of an 'unjust' Baghdad not to be trusted while also reinforcing it through civic values claimed to be part of the Kurdish identity distinguishing them from Kurds situated in Iran, Syria or Turkey (Salih Fantappie, 2019). This thesis, in accordance with McGarry (2006, p. 109) claims that this partially constituted an effort to enhance relations with neighbouring states such as Turkey and Iran and influential international players such as the USA and the EU member states. This section will analyse the development of the political positions of the KDP and the PUK after 1991 to explain the political actions that determined the post-2003 era.

As mentioned in the Chapter III, the 1991 revolt in northern Iraq organised by the KDP and the PUK was inspired by the defeat of the Iraqi forces by the US-led coalition in Kuwait. As a result of the response which followed by Baghdad, hundreds of thousands of Kurds fled to Turkey or Iran while this mass movement away from Iraqi Kurdistan generated a huge humanitarian crisis which led to the UNSC Resolution 688 which created a safe haven above Iraqi Kurdistan enforced through a no-fly zone (Tripp, 2007, p. 248). The Iraqi Kurdistan Front which constituted an alliance of political organisations held elections and established the KRG which gradually became a state

within a state allowing the two main parties to control and utilise governmental and institutional apparatuses to satisfy their own ambitions (McDowall, 2004, p. 381). The two parties also facilitated the use of mass communications to construct nationalist discourses in an effort to create, develop and reinforce certain structures of national identifications which assisted in terms of providing legitimacy to their own political authority and nationalist aims (Hussein, 2018, p. 88-90). These nationalist narratives in the form of nationalist structures determining the political behaviour and political positions of the Kurdish population, presented the Iraqi Kurds as victimised by Baghdad and promoted the idea of pride due to the Kurdish historical resistance.

As mentioned in Chapter I, Smith (1991a, p. 14) understands and defines the nation as “a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members”. This definition is contradicted to modernist accounts of the concept which regard it as a product of nationalism and regard nationalism as the outcome of industrial social organisation (Gellner, 1983, p. 294). This thesis criticises such approaches for ignoring the importance of ethnic elements and aligns with Smith’s (1996, p. 109) position for the existence of ethnies which constitute communities of shared myths and memories. These ethnies tend to evolve into nations as we understand them today once combined with civic elements; this position is not based on the assumption that this transition constitutes a natural process since nationalism is understood as the ultimate result of growing nationalist sentiments among a given population; something that requires human willingness and action. Thus, this thesis claims that nations are formed across a process determined by humans themselves and should not be considered solely perennial. Nationalism constitutes the element that combines primordial attachments and modern nations and results to discursive constructions of the nation.

According to Hewitt (2017, p. 8), nationalistic discourses promoted by the Kurdish political community in Iraq have been enacted within a specific socio-political context and are determined by this context and tend to make three claims: (a) identity claims to distinguish a nation from another and elevate the nation as the ultimate source of legitimacy (b) temporal claims to promote a version of history that verifies the diachronic existence of the nation (c) spatial claims to express the desire for a national

territory. Nationalist narratives are employed to construct a sense of unity among individuals i.e., a homogenous structure able to identify itself based on territory and shared experiences. Controlling and politicising identification structures has enabled the Kurdish elites to gain and maintain power by persuading people of sharing an identity; as Bloom (1990, p. 50) asserts, when a large group of people identifies itself in the same way, mass mobilisation becomes possible and collective action is justified, since a psychological structure is constructed which instructs people to act collectively towards the preservation and enhancement of their shared national identity.

The power of the PUK and the KDP to reinforce identification structures demonstrates their control over the region; this reinforcement acts as a justification for their political leadership, policies and decision-making and as a defence against political challenges and political instability. The role of the KRG should not be underestimated; despite not being a *de jure* state, it controls material and symbolic resources which allow it to be considered a powerful identifier in terms of acting as an agent shaping external identification (Brubaker, 2004, p. 43). The KDP and the PUK, through the KRG, have capitalised on institutional authority to perform nation-building in a way that an independent state would do, in an effort to construct a homogenous unit. The ultimate constructed structure has been a Kurdish civic identification with the two parties as the representatives of this identification; thus, legitimising and reinforcing their political hegemony in the absence of clear ideological elements. Moreover, they tend to present themselves as the absolute protectors against the external threat of an 'other' i.e., Baghdad (ibid.).

9. The elements of a new structure of national identification

National identification structures are discursively constructed; thus, influenced by political elites and the institutional and structural means under the control of those elites. Despite being promoted by the political elites, such structures can influence or limit political action as well themselves (Chilton, 1996, p. 412). Kurdish nationalist actions taken by individuals holding political positions are affected by the structures of social expectations that accompany their position; thus, policies and discourses employed are affected as well. For a policy or narrative to be acceptable to the audience, there must be a meaningful correlation between that policy or narrative and the audience i.e., the agency. Thus, they participate in a continuous cyclical framework of

morphogenesis or morphostasis in accordance with Archer's (1995) Critical Realism. Politicians or decision-makers that make speeches attempt to influence audience and support their political objectives. This section analyses the deliberate efforts of political elites to construct Kurdish identifications which assist them in maintaining their political hegemony and which support the secessionist ambitions of Kurdish elites, through strategies of national constructions which promote homogenisation, unity and solidarity.

Othering

The choice of the KDP and the PUK to deliberately construct a distinct Kurdish identity constitutes the choice of constructing an 'othering' structure determining not who the Kurds are but who they are not i.e., identifying them with regard to their historical enemies rather than with regard to cultural traits. An individual's self-identification is constructed with regard to the perceived relations to other groups while this applies at a communal level as well (Tajfel, 1981, p. 322). Identity structures are inevitably connected to 'othering' as they can only be defined by addressing their distinct difference with regard to another identity; one cannot be defined or understood in the absence of an 'other' (Fedor, 2014, p. 322).

'Othering' tends to be used to define an individual through comparison to perceived grouped 'others' and create a structural distinction between those within the group and those outside the group (Brons, 2014, p. 104). Identifications of 'others' constitute the outcome of discourses which facilitate the development of a perception of distinction between 'us' and 'them', shaped by context-specific contingent factors (Mabon, 2020, p. 4). Nations promote 'othering' through nationalist narratives because a homogenous unit cannot be defined without simultaneously identifying perceived 'others'. At the same time, since identification and 'othering' occur through interpersonal communication, identity structures are in a constant process of construction and reconstruction through mass communication technologies (Fedor, 2014, p. 322). In the case of Iraqi Kurdistan, media of mass communication have gradually developed group 'othering' structures through the exploitation of their impact power and potential, which are distinct when compared to the structures defining and determining the behaviour of Kurdish groups outside Iraq.

As mentioned, national identification necessitates the identification of an ‘other’ to contrast one’s own self and identification within a group can only be possible by recognising differences to other groups. After 2003, Barzani has been avoiding to ethnically define the ‘other’ in an effort to remain committed to a pragmatist agenda and avoid unnecessary tensions with Baghdad, referring often to Iraqi regimes rather than Arabs or Iraq (Barzani, 2009; Al-Jazeera, 2012) while he tends to reject the existence of an interethnic conflict between Kurds and Arabs, referring to it as a fallacy produced by specific regimes and political agendas (UNPO, 2005).

The direct reference to a Ba’athist disaster caused to the Kurds facilitated Kurdish identification structures in four ways. Firstly, there is an identification of an enemy to the enemy’s culture; so, a structural perception is established that they Ba’athists attempted unsuccessfully to destroy the Kurdish culture. Secondly, the culture under threat is the Kurdish culture; a culture which defines the whole of the population and establishes homogenisation of the audience. Thirdly, the homogenised culture is communicated by Kurdish leaders as their own unique culture, building and reinforcing associations between the audience and the leadership. Fourthly, parties and politicians are presented as the solution to all national problems and as the defenders of a nation under threat; thus, legitimising the maintenance of power.

Thus, a Kurdish unique identification structure is constructed through the emphasis of contradictions with regard to other historical actors and groups; this structure does not attract validity from what a Kurd is defined by but from what they cannot be defined by and what they do not represent. This identification structure directly determines the behaviour of the agents; both the population and the political community. The population develops specific expectations shaped by this sense of ‘othering’ and the political community has to satisfy these expectations in order to justify its presence in power and maintain it in the future.

Victimhood

Within the heart of nationalist narratives lies the Kurdish suffering through violent historical events; especially the Anfal Campaign, the chemical bombing of Halabja and the Arabisation of Kurdish lands which accounts for the current status quo with regard to the disputed territories. These narratives have created a distinct national historical

discourse which deviates from discourses of Kurds in Syria, Iran or Turkey. Especially, Halabja was established across the 1990s as the absolute national symbol of collective suffering (Fischer-Tahir, 2012, p. 104) while the verb ‘Anfalise’ is widely recognised and understood among Iraqi Kurds as a verb representing a scenario of absolute destruction. The aforementioned events have been used to symbolically facilitate the construction of a common history and memory; something essential for the formation of collective national identification structures.

Mlodoch (2012, p. 80) portrays this reality by claiming that events such as the Anfal Campaign or Halabja constitute a “collective trauma endemic to Kurdish national identity”. The presentation of the Kurdish nation as a victim of the Arab domination and of the Ba’athist regime implies that such narratives of oppression emanating from a different ethnicity can justify politicisation of ethnic identities and political mobilisation in defence of the Kurdish national group while also justify autonomy claims and political power claims in general (Romano, 2002, p, 127). Through the promotion of narratives which associate a historically aggressive ‘other’ with the central Iraqi state and the inhabitants of Kurdistan as the victims, the Kurdish political community has attempted to justify the long-term independence ambitions and legitimise its authority.

Thus, this constitutes a political attempt to distinguish the people inhabiting the Kurdistan region from Iraqis inhabiting areas outside the control of the KRG to construct the idea and perception of a structural boundary of the Kurdish nation and justify secession along these lines. By identifying those within their group as those victimised by Baghdad, they are distinguishing themselves from other Kurdish organisations and are excluding other ethnic Kurds from the nation in the process of being constructed. Thus, non-Iraqi Kurds become also othered; which demonstrates that the KDP and the PUK have abandoned pan-Kurdish political objectives.

It is important to note that this thesis does accept that significant events such as the Anfal Campaign or Halabja do represent the sufferings that the Kurdish population of Iraq has gone through and asserts that they constitute crimes against humanity and efforts towards ethnic cleansing. However, it does also recognise that the political elites and the political parties have used the memory of these events to remind the people of the oppressive ‘other’ and the atrocities they have been through due to that ‘other’. Even

if certain people did not experience or were not affected by such events, the fact that they are defining such disasters as attacks to the Kurdish nations implies the construction of structures of association and victimisation and the development of stronger national identification structures as a result. These events have been established as a part of a common history and are deeply rooted in the historical narratives of the Iraqi Kurds which, in turn, legitimise political action on behalf of the victimised group. Thus, the behaviour of the agents is determined by these narratives in the form of cultural motivations.

The establishment of national identification through political discourses has constructed national distinctions of a threatened community to facilitate a nation-building process founded on civil rights, legality and democracy, rather than primordial elements. In general, nationalist groups tend to emphasise their differences against their neighbours; in the case of Iraqi Kurdistan, contrasting Kurdish identification against the Baghdad rule does not only reduce the possibilities of establishing more trustful connections between Erbil and Baghdad, but also constructs a structure that promotes certain expectations, reinforces national awareness and increases the demands for absolute autonomy. The Kurdish parties decided to stay in Iraq after 2003 under a federal system and attempt to reinforce this system, despite the unofficial 2005 referendum which demonstrated a 98.8 per cent preference for an independent Kurdistan (Stansfield, 2013, p. 270). The decision for a voluntary conditional union with Iraq, dependent on the adherence of each side to the 2005 constitution, was based on pragmatism due to the absence of international support for self-determination (Rafaat, 2016, p. 496). Thus, demonstrating how Iraqi unity has become dependent on political pragmatism rather than ideological support.

Intra-national unity

Masoud Barzani has often referred to intra-national unity in order to construct solidarity among the Kurds and their parties; a rhetoric that aims at pragmatically overcoming the bloody history between the two parties (Barzani, 2009; Barzani, 2017; Atlantic Council, 2005; UNPO, 2005). In this way, he attempts to construct a present and a future and distance from the violent past by focusing on the common efforts of the PUK and KDP for the formation of the parliament and by holistically referring to the ‘people of Kurdistan’ to homogenise aims and actions. This reference to intranational unity has

been repeated numerous times by Kurdish politicians such as Barham Salih upon becoming Prime Minister of the KRG in 2009 (Salih, 2009). This demonstrates a collective effort to construct a structure of a united Iraqi Kurdistan population characterised by common ambitions and national objectives and constitutes a part of a general nation-building process to act as a counterbalance against Baghdad challenges.

After the 2003 war, the leadership of the KDP promoted the construction and reinforcement of a historical narrative through political discourses in an attempt to unite the KRG population under a common structural umbrella of national identification. The narrative emphasised the shared experiences which characterised every member of the Iraqi Kurdish population and encompassed the idea of struggles and sacrifices that everybody should be proud of because they were the ones to account for the 2005 success i.e., the official establishment of regional autonomy. Barzani referred to this success in a 2005 speech as ‘the fruit of a lifelong endeavour’ (UNPO, 2005). The emphasis placed on the difficult past and the shared difficult memories, not only creates a narrative that the Kurds feel emotionally associated with and constructs a common memory, but also functions as a victimhood discourse used to justify and legitimise nationalist projects and political agendas and ambitions (ibid.). Moreover, Peshmerga forces form an important part of modern national historical narratives through the development of an identification structure that embraces the whole Iraqi Kurdish population, despite the presence of tribalism within the Peshmerga and the fact that they were divided. They are presented as national heroes due to being characterised by high morals and personal qualities capable of inspiring every member of the Kurdish society and as democrats fighting for the freedom and protection of the nation, in the absence of any reference to their tribal nature (Atlantic Council, 2015; UNPO, 2005).

This constructs a structural perception that the Peshmerga are not politically controlled or tribal units but heroic and moralistic defenders of a democratic Kurdish nation which elevates their status to create an appealing narrative. Fischer-Tahir (2012, p. 93) confirms that even within books, the Peshmerga are presented as strong, decisive and heroic and have become symbolic of the Kurdish liberation movement; political actions and narratives further reinforce their role as such. People usually feel proud being associate with such heroic figures; this association further promotes assimilation and reinforcement of the Kurdish national identification. Barzani, in numerous occasions

emphasised the fact that he himself is a Peshmerga and that he feels proud about it, mentioning certain personal experiences as well (Jalabi and Chmaytelli, 2017). This constitutes a small part of larger political effort to justify and legitimise political power, by presenting himself as a national hero and personifying the national struggle. He aims to establish a personal connection between himself and the narrative in order to, firstly, make it sound more credible and, secondly, make the people feel attached to him as an individual that participated in a struggle for a higher purpose and motive. Thus, he is attempting to build a certain structure that will determine the behaviour of the agents based on their emotional and rational attachment to the national struggle; emotional because of the suffering and difficulties across the struggle and rational because of the successful outcome.

National identification evolution subject to morphogenesis

The employment of Archer's (1995) framework summarises the transition of social processes across time and space which have resulted in enhanced nationalistic understandings of identity. More specifically:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context subject to the 1992 formation of the KRG, the 2005 official establishment of autonomy and the monopolisation of symbolic and material resources by the KDP and the PUK
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by the promotion of historical narratives by political elites heavily influenced by 'othering structures', the idea of victimhood and the idea of intra-national unity, in an effort to construct a common memory and homogenise aims and actions
- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the formation of a new set of structural and cultural circumstances subject to the increase in unity and solidarity among the agency, through the construction of a common memory and the homogenisation of aims and actions that further alienates Kurds from Baghdad and strengthens identification structures

10. Conclusion

The current chapter has analysed the several contradictions that characterise the relationship between civic and ethnic nationalism. Ethnic nationalism constructs a structural sentiment that attracts legitimacy from the common roots of the individuals that constitute the ethnic nation while the attachment takes an emotional form through the perceived emotional elements that accompany a flag or a national symbol. Unity is established by ascription while governance takes place in the form of the rule of the ethnic majority. On the other hand, civic nationalism constructs a structural sentiment that attracts legitimacy from the common political rights, the common law and the common citizenship of the individuals that constitute the civic nation while the attachment takes a rational form through the perceived rational elements that accompany an institution of the state. Unity is established by consent while governance takes place in the form of democratic pluralism. All these differences expose the main structural variation between the two forms of nationalism; in the case of ethnic nationalism, the nation is the one that creates the individual while in the case of civic nationalism the individual is the one that creates the nation.

Kurds across the Middle East have historically created an emotional structure of ethno-national connection based on their common cultural traits which determines all the Kurdish individuals and generates the desire for the satisfaction of a nationalist manifesto that encompasses the establishment of a sovereign land. The Iraqi Kurds, however, being subject to their membership and participation in their own institutions, have created a rational structure of civic connection based on their common citizenship which emanates from the establishment of such an autonomy that resembles a sovereign state. Archer's (1995) Critical Realism has been employed to demonstrate how the process of elaboration which led to morphogenesis emanated mainly from structural motivations due to the establishment of democratic institutions and the satisfaction of national self-determination; however, across time cultural motivations due to the adoption of democratic political principles have contributed in terms of reinforcing and maintaining the civic structure. The rational structure of civic connection determines the behaviour of the agents in two ways. Firstly, it shapes the expectations of a population that experienced the civic institutions and principles and desires their maintenance and, secondly, it determines political action by requiring from the political community and the decision-makers to act accordingly in order to ensure this maintenance. Yet, the conscious effort of Kurdish political elites to construct a civic

nation by promoting the evolution of national identification structures should not be disregarded as it was proved to be a pragmatic way of enhancing unity and stability among the agents.

CHAPTER V – The Kurdish nationalist project in Iraq

1. Introduction

The interaction between ethnic and civic elements accounts to a large extent for the formation and nature of the Kurdish nationalist project in Iraq. However, someone should not disregard the importance of the internal dynamics of the region which were fundamentally altered after 2003 and which are shaped by both internal and external forces. It is true that Iraqi Kurdistan functions within an environment of non-recognition while possessing a peculiar status. Actually, analysts tend to disagree on how to appropriately classify Iraqi Kurdistan due to possessing many of the features of a modern nation-state but lacking external recognition of sovereignty. According to Article 1 of the Montevideo Convention, the four essential elements that comprise a state are determined as a permanent population, a demarcated territory, a governing body and the ability to establish relations with other states (Grant, 1999).

A holistic approach to the post-2003 creation of the Kurdish nationalist project requires the incorporation of an analysis of political, economic and ideological factors accompanied by the consideration of the historical background that generated its trajectory until 2017. The current chapter will analyse the Kurdish nationalist project in Iraq through the employment of Margaret Archer's (2005) Critical Realist framework of morphogenesis. It will start by referring to the emergence of a new status for analysis of action subject to the 2003 US intervention in Iraq and will then move to analyse Iraqi Kurdistan's post-2003 political, economic and ideological trajectory. The inter-Kurdish and intra-Kurdish rivalries will be examined and analysed in an effort to determine external and internal dynamics affecting the region. The last parts of the chapter will refer to the problematic nature of state-building and to the independence referendum of 2017, examining whether it was the outcome of a nationalist manifestation or solely a decision by political elites of the region.

2. The 2003 emergence of a new contextual status

When the US proceeded with the intervention in Iraq, the KDP and the PUK supported a potential regime change but decided to avoid getting involved militarily, maintain a neutral image and rather provide guidance to the US troops for areas such as Kirkuk and Mosul. Nevertheless, they performed a joint operation with the US against Ansar al-Islam; a Kurdish Sunni Islamist group characterised by an extremist interpretation of Islam (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 162). More importantly, apart from fostering their alliance with the US, the intervention marked the beginning of a political process which led to the establishment of the current Iraqi constitution through a referendum on the 15th of October of 2005 (Iraqi Constitution, 2005).

The constitution recognised Kurdistan as a federal region within the state of Iraq possessing its own institutions; governmental, parliamentary and military ones. With regard to the disputed areas such as Kirkuk which were subject to forced demographic changes until 1991, the Kurds were successful in terms of incorporating Article 140 which refers to a process of de-Arabisation to be followed by a census and then a referendum (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 174). With regard to the Iraqi state as a whole, the Kurds and the Shiite majority, marginalised for decades, became the dominant factions in Iraq (Rogg and Rimscha, 2007, p. 839). The Kurds managed to retain high-ranking positions within Baghdad's institutions, the Kurdish language was recognised as an official language of the state while the Peshmerga became part of Iraq's security forces (Iraqi Constitution, 2005).

Yet, it should be emphasised that this process was the outcome of external pressure and did not attract legitimacy from all segments of the Iraqi population. Main Sunni Arab and Islamist movements and some Shia groups such as the Sadr movement perceive federalism as a threat to Iraq's territorial integrity while the Kurds overly dependent on the US remain vulnerable in case of any western strategy change (Rogg and Rimscha, 2007, p. 824). At the same time, the gradual development of Kurdistan both in social and economic terms, did not only attract students, intellectuals, workers and PKK fighters but has also increased suspicion for regional neighbours such as Turkey that proceeded to an operation on its south-eastern border in 2007 (ibid., p. 825). The KRG employed a policy of attracting FDI to the region in an effort to render the political achievements sustainable while in 2007, an oil-and-gas law was established leading to numerous production-sharing agreements; a controversial move especially in the

absence of a federal oil law by Baghdad setting the framework for action related to the sector (ibid., p. 832). Despite the claims by Hussein Shahrstani that all deals signed by the KRG constitute illegal acts (Karouny, 2007), the reality is that both sides lay their arguments on contradictory and subject to distinct interpretations constitutional articles.

After the intervention, the Sunni insurgency emerged which lasted between 2003 and 2008 and which incorporated an ideology of an extreme interpretation of Islam, targeted civilians and depicted those involved in the political process facilitated by the US as traitors (ICG, 2006). During the same period, al-Qaeda proceeded to violent attacks with one of them in 2004 targeting the headquarters of the KDP and the PUK and resulting in numerous victims. Tension escalated once the Kurds started pushing for referendum before the end of 2007 but was de-escalated subject to the agreement of the Maliki government to initiate the payment of compensation towards displaced Arabs in order to leave the disputed territories and return to their original homelands (Rogg and Rimscha, 2007, p. 838).

Moreover, the Kurds demonstrated their willingness for a democratic process towards a solution of the issue, by consenting to the assistance of the United Nations through the UNAMI for the implementation of Article 140 (UNAMI, 2007). At the same time, in regional terms, the Kurds managed to develop their relationships with Ankara both in military terms allowing it to establish three permanent bases in Duhok but also in economic terms with Turkish companies heavily involved in trade and in the construction and oil sectors. Yet, Ankara has clarified its intentions by perceiving that an incorporation of Kirkuk into Kurdistan will not be tolerated while setting red lines for collective action against the PKK (Rogg and Rimscha, 2007, p. 839-840).

In an effort to thoroughly explain the post-2003 trajectory of Iraqi Kurdistan, the following three sections will deal with the political, economic and ideological aspects of the trajectory separately. All three sections will start by referring to the historical origins of the 2003 status and will then, accurately analyse its development after the new contextual status that emerged with the US-intervention in Iraq.

3. Iraqi Kurdistan's political trajectory after 2003

The examination of the political trajectory of the region after 2003 necessitates an understanding of the context that was formed after 1991. The defeat of Iraq in the war created incentives for Kurdish agents to perform uprisings against the regime, with Baghdad withdrawing in October 1991 and the IKF gaining control over a territory that included cities like Erbil, Duhok and Sulaymaniyah (Jabar, 1992). The new status facilitated a delegitimisation of the Ba’athist rule and a legitimisation of the IKF. On one hand, the new dynamics enabled Kurdish agents to circulate internationally photos and videos of the Ba’athist crimes with special focus on the Anfal Campaign, damaging the image of the regime (Human Rights Watch, 1995). On the other hand, the IKF proceeded to elections for a regional parliament in May 1992, with the KDP and the PUK gaining 50 seats each and being allocated an equal number of ministers. It is important to note that the initial outcome which gave a slight majority to the KDP was not made public, with the results being cancelled at a polling station and the two parties ending up with an equal number of seats; thus, suggesting a possible negotiation between them (Hoff et al., 1992).

The years until 2003 were characterised by tension between the two parties and a civil war that lasted between 1994 and 1998 when the US promoted an agreement that required reunification of administrations and elections within a year (Stansfield, 2003, p. 100). In reality, the agreement was not respected by the parties that established themselves as absolute rulers within the territories under their control and no elections occurred prior to the US intervention and the subsequent regime change; a development which received the support of both of them. Thus, it is important to understand that a proper evaluation of the post-2003 period should be accompanied by an appropriate understanding of the reality that since 1991, the party elites of the region established power consolidation through one-party rule and strong patronage networks that survive until today and constitute an element of the Iraqi Kurdish political tradition (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 159). Dilshad Hama portrays the problematic nature of the process of unification of administrations:

“Unification started in 2002 as a process. Many steps have been taken so far. But it has not happened yet. Anyone living in Kurdistan and especially the locals, can see that the borders are there. It does differ from one part of Kurdistan to another. For example, when it comes to the Ministry of Peshmerga, the KDP Peshmerga cannot go beyond geographical areas that belong to the PUK. When it comes to

other sectors like education, development do occur. But overall, we are still far from a unified Kurdistan region.”²⁴

The 2003 US-intervention dramatically altered the regional Middle East dynamics and the dynamics within the Iraqi state. However, with regard to Iraqi Kurdistan, the previously established and well-entrenched party structures not only did not experience serious challenges during the first years after the intervention but, instead, were further strengthened, since political elites exploited the newly emerged status and the increase in oil revenues to further enhance and consolidate their rule (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 163). It is important to note that when we referring to Iraqi Kurdistan, there should be a clear distinction from the rest of Iraq, both in terms of internal structures but also in terms of experienced impact due to the intervention. The Kurdish region, unlike the rest of Iraq, did not experience a post-2003 trajectory of economic difficulties, infrastructural damage, internal conflict or imposed political change; but rather relative stability, prosperity and democratisation, as a result of the enhanced autonomy and the increase of the regional budget (ibid., p. 169).

The 2005 establishment of the new constitution of the state of Iraq increased the status of the Kurds along two dimensions; firstly, in terms of the elevation of the region’s autonomous status and secondly, in terms of their increasing importance within the Iraqi parliament where no party could promote something significant in the absence of Kurdish support. The 2005 national and regional elections were enthusiastically perceived by Kurdish agents as an indirect international recognition of their gains. The KDP and the PUK entered both the national and the regional elections on a joint alliance named the ‘Democratic Patriotic Alliance of Kurdistan’; a development which had several implications (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 164). On one hand, the Kurds unified their forces to increase their influence within the Iraqi parliament in an effort to further their national interests. On the other hand, their participation in the regional elections through a joint alliance implied the loss of significance of the KRG from a body to facilitate discussion and accountability to a body primarily responsible for approving the decisions of the two parties and their elites. Through a power-sharing agreement,

²⁴ Interview with Dr Dilshad Hama: Head of IRD Department and Lecturer of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tishk International University [Conducted on: 03 April 2020].

Barzani and Talabani acquired the presidencies of the region and of the state respectively (ibid., p. 166).

What came to challenge the internal dynamics of the Kurdistan region and the power structures of the two main parties was the 2009 rise of the Gorran Party which was characterised by an anti-corruption, anti-tribal and pro-accountability agenda and a very critical rhetoric against the KRG and its resource allocation and gained 23.75 per cent of the votes (Independent, 2009). Gorran's leader Nawshirwan Mustafa openly criticised Barzani and Talabani in numerous occasions for running the region across dictatorial lines. In the regional presidential elections of the same year, Kamal Mirawdily, an independent Kurdish politician, author and poet won a remarkable 25.3 per cent of the votes despite the absence of any party structures and patronage networks. Barzani was still elected as president, but the results demonstrated that something was changing with regard to the behaviour of Kurdish agents (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 163). Dilshad Hama elaborates on the rise of Gorran, saying:

“It is true that Gorran did not have military power. But let's remember, Nawshirwan Mustafa and most of Gorran leadership, used to be influential leaders in the PUK and they still have some undercover support within the Peshmerga. Since 1992, there have been many opposition groups in Kurdistan. But none succeeded like Gorran did. This is because Gorran came out of the PUK, with an influential leader like Nawshirwan Mustafa and they did actually have support within the Peshmerga. As individuals. Not as institutions. This kind of democracy that Kurdistan has also helped Gorran's rise but mainly it was because of the charismatic leadership of Nawshirwan Mustafa and the support that the Gorran had within the Peshmerga forces. The other thing that helped them and is probably the most important one is that people are not happy with the system and the corruption. This was coming in the daylight. People became aware of this. People have not been happy with the traditional version of Kurdayeti and the political discourse. They were looking for something different. For tangible change and tangible impact on their life.”²⁵

The 2013 elections which were marked by the decision of the KDP and the PUK to abandon their joint alliance and compete separately, demonstrated a clear dissatisfaction with the political hegemony that had been governing the region for two decades. Yet, the KDP won 37.79 per cent of the votes and remained strong, despite attracting only approximately half of the votes within Erbil which constitutes a city under its implicit control. Yet, these results were perceived by KDP opponents as being

²⁵ Interview with Dr Dilshad Hama: Head of IRD Department and Lecturer of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tishk International University [Conducted on: 03 April 2020].

achieved “only with the aid of massive intimidation, patronage and outright vote fraud” while a parliamentary committee even detected a large number of dead voters that were not effectively removed from the electoral list (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 165). Gorran managed to get a remarkable 24.21 per cent of the votes and defeat the PUK; a party from which it originates from. The results demonstrated a clear challenge to the hegemony of the two traditional parties and an indirect demand by agents for more transparency and less corruption (ibid.).

Leaving aside the numerical outcomes of the electoral process, it is important to note that territorially the region remains divided into two distinct centres of power, despite a 2006 decision of administrations’ unification (Rudaw, 2017). The tribal and power structures historically constructed by the two traditional parties have been so strong that have enabled them to retain their influence over their territories; an influence which takes further dimensions due to the maintenance of the historical ideological rivalry between Barzani and Talabani both inside and outside Iraq. Yet, it remains debatable whether ideology does determine internal policies significantly, since to a certain extent, it has been overpowered by corruption and patronage. The political challenges that the political elites have been facing after 2003, have been mainly in the form of demonstrations or protests. Significant events include the 2006 attack on the Halabja memorial, the 2011 protests inspired by the Arab Spring and the Gorran’s protests against corruption in Sulaymaniyah in 2011, with the government often responding through the use of violence (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 166). Barin Kayaoglu reinforces the argument regarding an anti-corruption nature of the protests:

“The protests that erupted in October 2019 would suggest to us that there is something called an Iraqi nation, but not all members of the society recognise their membership. And especially, Iraqi Kurds. There is a sense of national belonging, but it is not very strong and is not shared by everyone. Iran’s influence in Iraq and the corrupt political system feed on each other. What the protestors wanted was to break the cycle of corruption and tell Iran to act like Iraq is a sovereign country.”²⁶

Such events demonstrate the establishment of new structures directing the behaviour of agents that facilitate demands for less corruption and more accountability within a system that does not significantly permit the emergence of free voices critical towards

²⁶ Interview with Dr Barin Kayaoglu: Assistant Professor of World History at the American University of Iraq [Conducted on: 10 May 2020].

the government as suggested by reports of the Human Rights Watch (2010) and Amnesty International (2013). Archer's (1995) framework explains the role of the perceived hegemony of the KDP and the PUK in terms of reinforcing the civic structures of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context within which Kurdish agents have taken shape and acted determined by the hegemony of the two main parties reinforced by tribal, power and ideological structures and the state-building process which facilitated stability, prosperity and democratisation
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by structural and cultural motivations such as the resentment with regard to the hegemony of the KDP and the PUK and their monopolisation over material and symbolic resources and the corruption within the KRG
- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the formation of a new set of structural and cultural constraints subject to the incorporation of the ideas of freedom and democracy and the willingness to end the hegemony of the KDP and the PUK and to transform the KRG into a fully accountable and democratic entity. Thus, civic values, which enriched the nationalist sentiment, challenged the traditional form of Kurdish nationalism as represented by the KDP and the PUK,

Furthermore, when considering the political trajectory of the region, it is important not to disregard the role of actors or circumstances that influenced it. The status quo that was created after 2003 was subject to a massive disruption following the rise of ISIS within an unstable regional period, due to the differentiated outcomes of the Arab Spring and especially the escalation of the Syrian Civil War. ISIS constituted a fundamental threat to Baghdad's control over southern Iraq and to the KRG in the North. The inability of the Iraqi army to effectively suppress ISIS in 2014 created a space exploited by the KRG by moving troops to disputed Kirkuk and Nineveh territories (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 176). Yet, the KRG had to respond to the socio-political challenges generated by the large number of refugees and displaced persons subject to the ISIS offensives. ISIS was engaged in a state-building process (Mabon, 2017) but did not employ a nationalist rhetoric; yet, that does not imply the loss of importance of national identity when examining its role and action. ISIS classified the

attacks on Kurdish territory as attacks aimed at recapturing disputed areas perceived as not belonging to the Kurdistan region (Abdulla, 2016).

Within this flexible environment, the Iraqi Kurds managed to accomplish both international and domestic achievements. In terms of international achievements, the Kurds have been enjoying the political and military support of the US and its western allies from which they received military equipment to respond to the ISIS challenges. The 2015 decision of the US to perform a joint US-Kurdish Raid in Hawija rather than cooperate with Baghdad, demonstrates a foreign policy perception of improved reliability of Erbil relative to Baghdad (Stuster, 2015). Iraqi Kurds and their Peshmerga forces are perceived by the West as the most effective opposition to ISIS in an effort to challenge the threat to their national security while their support has not only taken a military nature but a political as well, with leaders such as Francois Hollande performing separate visits to Erbil and Baghdad (Medium, 2017).

Moreover, the fight against ISIS has contributed in terms of elevating the international profile of Kurds to a group that has been subject to discrimination and continues to fight for freedom and democracy; thus, generating sympathy (Abdulla, 2016). In terms of domestic accomplishments, the Kurds managed initially to capture Mosul and Kirkuk from ISIS with the latter being of critical economic importance, since according to estimates it possesses approximately a quarter of Iraq's total reserves (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 176). Moreover, despite the loss of ten thousand Kurdish lives (Vohra, 2021), the inability of Baghdad to challenge ISIS, strengthened the national consciousness of the Kurds, since a perceived awareness was developed that any perceived reliance on Baghdad for protection does not match reality.

4. Iraqi Kurdistan's economic trajectory after 2003

A distinction should be established between the economic development of Iraqi Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq due to the exposure to distinct economic influences, with two emergent properties being largely responsible for the distinct modern economic history of the region. Firstly, the decision of Saddam Hussein towards the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s to proceed to economic reforms and excessive privatisations which facilitated the rise of crony capitalism at the advantage of certain power elites and at the expense of the poorer strata of the population of Iraq (Sanford,

2003). Secondly, the double embargo the Kurdistan region experienced after 1990 due to the UN sanctions on Iraq and Baghdad's internal blockade which fundamentally altered the economic life of Kurdish agents due to the large economic dependency of the region on the central state in terms of revenues, goods and energy (Romano, 2006, p. 378; Natali, 2012). It is worth mentioning that the region wisely retained a double currency across the 1990s preventing a further potential economic damage for agents due to the hyperinflation experienced across Iraq during the same period (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 159). More specifically, according to Cordesman and Hashim (1997, p. 141) inflation increased by 5,000 per cent between 1990 and 1995.

The structural restrictions experienced across the 1990s facilitated a large rise of smuggling through cross-border trade of goods and of human trafficking with individuals willing to pay large amounts of money for fake passports in their effort to exit the country in search for prosperity (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 160). During the same period, the agricultural sector experienced an extraordinary decline, heavily influenced by the preceding privatisations by Saddam Hussein and the destructive Ba'athist policy against villages and civilians that had to relocate in collective settlements called *mujamma'ats* and remain excessively dependent on the government (*ibid.*). Humanitarian efforts took place across the 1990s in an effort to rebuild the villages and promote the recovery of the agricultural sector within rural areas, but their impact was largely restricted by structural factors. Many agents refused to return to their rural original areas due to perceived insecurity while it remained cheaper to import goods from neighbouring states like Iran or Turkey rather than invest on primary production. Moreover, despite numerous significant positive economic implications, the OFFP magnified the reliance on imported goods and prevented the recovery of the agricultural sector (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 161).

In 2003, the termination of the UN sanctions on Iraq were accompanied by the termination of the OFFP and by the promotion of privatisation in an effort to heal the economy. Yet, the privatisation process was only partially implemented with the state remaining responsible for the oil industry and continuing to employ approximately 60 per cent of the Iraqi population (Yousif, 2007), with the relevant estimated percentage in the Kurdistan region being even higher at approximately 76 per cent (Natali, 2010, p. 91). Governmental jobs have mainly functioned towards satisfying certain segments

of the population in exchange for their support while the increasing employment of employees by the state implied a large rise in terms of the budget for salaries. This created a vulnerable environment of dependency on the central state for revenues in order for the region to meet its obligations towards the governmental employees, demonstrated by the inability of the KRG in 2014 to pay salaries once Maliki decided to cut the budget allocation following a dispute on oil policy (O'Driscoll, 2017). Barin Kayaoglu portrays accurately the problematic nature of the region's economic system:

“I think the big problem with the current political elites is that they are not running the country in a way that benefits the material needs of the people. I hate Saddam nostalgia. But you know, that is the guy who ran the country with an iron fist but he also provided services to his people. The Kurdish political elites in Iraq failed to do this. The reason why you do not build a modern diverse economy is because they have to account for the money and tell the patronage networks that they will not receive them because for example a road is going to be constructed. It was estimated that the region's population is approximately 6 million and 1.5 million people are on the government payroll. How crazy is that? Why not train and hire very good doctors, teachers, college professors, technicians, engineers and offer credits to reliable entrepreneurs.”²⁷

Yet, the new post-2003 status quo was marked by a sudden economic advancement of Iraqi Kurdistan due to the receipt of approximately 18 billion dollars from the US for reconstruction and the agreed allocation to Erbil of 17 per cent of national oil revenues (Natali, 2010, p. 88) while Turkey primarily and Iran secondarily having remained the main trading partners of the region (ibid., p. 94). A fundamental aspect of economic advancement has been the process of reconstruction through the attraction of internal and foreign investment. The prior hesitance with regard to investing in the local economy of a region of significant risk gradually disappeared after 2003 both for Kurdish and foreign investors; this had a direct implication on the property prices and the cost of living which rose significantly in major cities. In terms of the agricultural sector, no perceived significant incentive existed with regard to investing in it, since the KRG's rising economic prosperity allowed it to import almost everything required to satisfy its needs from abroad (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 171).

The most important sector, of the KRG's economy, is the one of oil production. More specifically according to The Kurdish Project (2021):

²⁷ Interview with Dr Barin Kayaoglu: Assistant Professor of World History at the American University of Iraq [Conducted on: 10 May 2020].

“With a whopping 45 billion gallons of Kurdistan oil reserves, the Iraqi-Kurds hold almost a third of all of Iraq’s 150 billion gallons of untapped black gold. If the KRG autonomous region were a nation-state, it would rank 10th in the world for largest petrol reserves, coming in just after Libya”

The oil sector, however, constitutes a sector characterised by high vulnerability due to the unstable relationship with Baghdad, the fluctuation of oil prices and the regional and international political context. Despite the high potential of the region, production has been relatively small with an IMF (2013, p. 6) report referring to only approximately 8.5 per cent of Iraq’s output in 2012 while internal demands for oil products cannot be totally covered by the region’s production which necessitates an import of 20 per cent (ibid., p. 6). The reality is that the region has been economically dependent on the received income from Baghdad rather than its own exports, with approximately 95 per cent of the KRG’s revenue emanating from the 17 per cent national budget allocation (Fathallah, 2015).

What cannot be determined with pure economic criteria, is the magnitude of informal illegal economic activity, with Leezenberg (2015, p. 172) referring to cross-border trade at prices far below the international market prices and the existence of the practice of mediation at the expense of foreign investment. Since the 1990s, the black market has been constituting an important component of the economy that increased economic inequalities and generated “an uneasy dichotomy in Iraqi Kurdistan between the majority who are destitute and a minority of merchants who are extremely wealth” (Stansfield, 2003, p. 59).

Moreover, the KRG suffers from a lack of transparency with regard to the budget allocation and agreement of contracts. It is worth mentioning that no annual official announcement takes place to publicly inform of the exact allocated monetary amount received from Baghdad; an area subject to Gorran’s criticism in 2010 (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 172). The decision of the KRG to join the Iraqi Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (IEITI) which aims at improving transparency with regard to oil policy constituted a move towards the correct direction; however, the initiative’s report in 2013 referred to inefficient communication with the KRG (EITI, 2013, p. 66). The lack of transparency along with illegal activity have become so usual across time, that they should be considered as structural features of the Kurdish economy.

5. Iraqi Kurdistan's ideological trajectory after 2003

Historically, Kurdish nationalism in Iraq has been positioning itself against Sunni Arab nationalism. However, even after the post-2003 rise of territorial nationalism and political Islam as influential forms of political identification across the rest of Iraq, secular Kurdish nationalism remains the dominant form of identification within the Kurdistan region, despite the existence of several Islamist parties. This is explained by the distinct ideological development of the region across time. Across the 1990s, the Kurdish society experienced a rise of militant political Islam with the Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan gaining 5 per cent in the 1992 elections and later dissolving (Romano, 2015). The attack of the US forces on one of its factions called Ansar al-Islam justified by accusations of organic connections to al-Qaeda, marked the end of a short era of political Islam as a major and influential political power (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 162). Dilshad Sharif elaborates on this trend:

“From the first day, the KDP and the PUK started to consolidate their power. When Islamic political parties started operating, they had limited room to manoeuvre and they were always checked by the KDP and the PUK so that they do not cross the limit. In 1993, the fighting between the Islamic movement and the PUK, stopped the expansion of the Islamic movement which used to be a very strong political movement. The other thing is that the so-called secular political parties did capitalise on the Islamic culture of the Kurdish uprising because they did not have their own cultural philosophy. Now, it is true that Islamic parties have very few political representatives in the parliament. But even the language and the mentality of the so-called secular members of the Kurdistan parliament is not that different from the Islamic MPs. Personally, I do not believe they are secular anyway. They are Islamists within the secular political system. You can find more Salafi members in the KDP and the PUK rather than in Islamic political parties.”²⁸

Barin Kayaoglu provides a distinct opinion on the status of Islamic parties in Kurdistan:

“Political Islam has been relatively weak in the Kurdistan region of Iraq for two reasons. One, because the country has years of experience under the Ba'ath regime which did not really think much of the Muslim brotherhood. But also because they were Kurdish. Second, because there is a strong religious observance and respect towards religious norms in Kurdistan. For example, alcohol stores in Turkey, do not close during Ramadan. A lot of people curtail or stop the consumption of alcohol in Turkey, but alcohol stores are not closed. Here they are. Many restaurants do not serve food during the day. Except for some

²⁸ Interview with Dilshad Sharif: Assistant Lecturer in International Relations and Diplomacy at the Tishk International University and Senior Adviser to the Kurdistan Parliament [Conducted on: 28 March 2020].

religious cities in Turkey, you don't get that. So, there is nothing much that a political Islamic party can make inroads into the political system of Kurdistan. On the other hand, the KDP has been smart aligning with these parties whenever it has been convenient for them.”²⁹

Post-2003 Iraq has experienced an ideological shift away from Arab nationalism or Arab socialism as a dominant form of ideology to a more sectarian form, as demonstrated by the fact that sectarian violence has been increasingly evident among Sunnis and Shias across Iraq, but not among Kurds and Arabs (Dodge, 2003; Tripp, 2007; Haddad, 2011). As mentioned, in Iraqi Kurdistan, political Islam has not been dominating political or even public discourse or challenging secular nationalism, in the same way that it did across the rest of Iraq or across neighbouring states, despite the existence of Islamic movements within the Kurdish public and political life (Romano, 2015). Secular nationalism constitutes the dominant framework of identification, despite the uncertainty which characterises the classification of Kurdish project as a nationalist one rather than a pragmatic one. The case of Kirkuk demonstrates this reality, since Kurdish agents often refer to Kirkuk as Kurdistan's Jerusalem; yet, the issue on areas such as Kirkuk or Sinjar remains unresolved (Park et al., 2017, p. 201) with political elites often using it to maintain legitimacy rather than seeking implementation of Article 140. Dilshad Hama mentions: “Article 140 is there but has not been followed. It was the last card that we had. But the referendum unfortunately failed both internally and externally.”³⁰ Dilshad Sharif, on the other hand, understands the implementation problem as a problem of seeking power acquisition and challenges the survival of Kurdish nationalism due to the decision of political elites to prioritise material interests over satisfying the nationalistic sentiments of the population:

“There is no such thing as Kurdish nationalism in Iraqi Kurdistan. After 1991 and especially after 2005, our politicians are involved more in trade than nationalism. Ever since, we could have done a lot to get the disputed territories back which are mentioned in the Iraqi constitution. But the KDP and the PUK care more about what positions to get within Baghdad than about the disputed territories. I blame the Shias and the Sunnis. But I blame the Kurds twice for not doing enough to implement Article 140. Kurdish Political parties have been fighting in Baghdad

²⁹ Interview with Dr Barin Kayaoglu: Assistant Professor of World History at the American University of Iraq [Conducted on: 10 May 2020].

³⁰ Interview with Dr Dilshad Hama: Head of IRD Department and Lecturer of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tishk International University [Conducted on: 03 April 2020].

about minister positions. Who cares if the Minister of Health is Kurdish? Who cares if the Minister of Interior is Arab?”³¹

Ideological development after 2003 does take place within a transnational public sphere influenced by globalisation and the rise of the Internet. On one hand, it is true that this context has reinforced nationalist sentiments among the Kurds due to rising ethnic awareness both locally and internationally across a period during which the Kurdish language has replaced Arabic as the main form of communication and education. On the other hand, the new generation of agents that are experiencing the current globalisation process are not so vulnerable to traditional nationalist narratives since they mainly refer to the memories of struggle of previous generations. The genesis of these agents took place at a period during which the Kurdish self-rule was already established and they have been exposed to the ideas of freedom and transparency which determined their ideological development. This is demonstrated on the younger generation’s resentment with regard to the KRG policies and the pressures exerted on the political elites for reforms (Petkova, 2018), often manifested through violent demonstrations. Archer’s (1995) framework indicates this increasing significance of civic elements and the reduced strength of ethnic elements in terms of defining the nationalist sentiment of the Kurdish population of Iraq:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context within which the genesis of the agents took place after 2003 at a period during which the Kurdish self-rule was already established, institutional developments were taking place and territorial nationalism and political Islam were on the rise across Iraq
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by structural and cultural motivations subject to globalisation and the exposure to the ideas of freedom and transparency accompanied by the existence of traditional nationalist narratives, but also subject to the interaction with an increasing influence of political Islam
- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the formation of a new set of structural and cultural constraints subject to the incorporation of the ideas of freedom and

³¹ Interview with Dilshad Sharif: Assistant Lecturer in International Relations and Diplomacy at the Tishk International University and Senior Adviser to the Kurdistan Parliament [Conducted on: 28 March 2020].

transparency and the resistance demonstrated towards traditional nationalist narratives by the younger generations; thus, morphogenesis contributed towards incorporating liberal ideas at the expense of the traditional understanding of Kurdish nationalism. Moreover, the pressure of the rising influence of political Islam was unable to render Islam capable of replacing the nation as the primary form of identification, with the Kurdish agency demonstrating morphostasis.

6. Inter-Kurdish rivalry

When discussing the Kurdish claims of self-determination, it is important to understand that these are undermined by external dynamics and the existence of an inter-Kurdish rivalry in the existence of a “fundamental misapprehension about what the ‘self’ is” (Kane, 2017, p. 2). As analysed in the 3rd chapter of this thesis, in socio-cultural terms, the element which mainly divides the Kurds is the language with the existence of two dialects taking further dimensions across time due to the Kurds being subject to the *lingua franca* experience of different host states. In religious terms, the differences are not so significant but do create distinct identification structures; for instance, Shia Iranian Kurds tend to oppose their Sunni co-nationals and have often been mobilised against them by Tehran (Van Bruinessen, 1996, p. 29). Barin Kayaoglu confirms and elaborates:

“The region of Kurdistan is divided in four and that is the first factor that complicates the idea that we can talk about Kurds as a sort of monolith. The second obvious one is language. Kurdish has many different dialects. They are not mutually intelligible. The people speaking to them tell that they understand what the other person is saying but they cannot get a very good grip on it. There are so many niche constructions in either of the dialects that it is sometimes hard to get your message across some other point of division. Third, tribal and religious divisions still matter in the Kurdish geography. Feyli Kurds had it even worse than Sunni Kurds under Saddam Hussein because they were Shia. Also, you begin to see the emergence of different value systems. There are a lot of people who have access to the outside world, because of their language skills, their connections with social media and cast media, and they do not necessarily accept the social and cultural dogmas of their parents’ and grandparents’ generation.”³²

Yet, this thesis argues that the most fundamental area of division is the political one, since it has been the one that has facilitated intra-ethnic conflict in the past. For

³² Interview with Dr Barin Kayaoglu: Assistant Professor of World History at the American University of Iraq [Conducted on: 10 May 2020].

example, during the Kurdish Civil War, the PUK allied with the PKK against the KDP while the KDP was supported by Turkey. Thus, the Kurdish parties as political actors have employed a self-interested policy even at the expense of their co-nationals. Considering the Syrian Civil War, this self-interested nature has also been evident with Peshmerga fighting against Yezidi PKK proxies in Sinjar (Al-Jazeera, 2017) while Barzani has been the main sponsor of the KNC; an alliance of parties characterised by the anti-PKK sentiments (Carnegie-MEC, 2020).

Competition has an economic nature as well due to the strong trading relationship between the KRG and Turkey. Iraqi Kurds remain highly dependent on Ankara and this has been demonstrated both in terms of diplomacy and political action. This relationship of perceived dependency has three main dimensions, with Ankara acting as: (a) a regional patron (b) a political ally (c) a key business partner. More specifically, Denise Natali (2012) states:

“This alliance has become even more critical as the KRG -- and its leaders -- has made significant commercial investments and political alliances in the region. In 2011, for instance, Turkish trade with Iraq was nearly \$10 billion, half of which came from the Kurdistan Region. Consequently, Iraqi Kurds have too much to lose by jeopardizing their ties with Turkey and undermining regional stability”.

Shadeedi Hamzeh reinforces further the argument regarding the economic nature of the cooperation between Erbil and Ankara:

“We should not see it as a Turkish-Kurdish cooperation but as a cooperation between Turkey and the KDP. The decision to let Turkish troops inside Iraq was a decision by Saddam Hussein but the KDP tolerated it. The cooperation is mainly economic of course. Turkey, over time, realised that it could tolerate the Kurdistan region. It does not want it to get powerful and get out of the authority of Baghdad. The KDP is choosing a foreign actor to cooperate with that being Turkey to maintain its economic network and its ability to export its oil over choosing Baghdad; its national partner supposedly. That is the case. Choosing Turkey over Baghdad. Kurdistan does not have access to the sea and needs someone to maintain its economic networks. The entire Iraq depends on Turkey for imports. We are a country that does not produce anything.”³³

Even though, this perception provisionally changed after the 2017 referendum due to the diplomatic and military reaction by both Turkey and Iran, the decision of the KRG to initiate diplomatic steps to maintain a good relationship with Ankara, demonstrates

³³ Interview with Hamzeh Shadeedi: Policy Researcher at the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) [Conducted on: 6 May 2020].

the scale of this dependency and verifies that it is of a pragmatic rather than a cultural nature (Pusane, 2019). The choice of such a foreign policy does not reflect the Kurdish public or the willingness to maintain good relationships with the neighbouring states solely for the sake of regional stability; it reflects the decision of the political elite to act in a pragmatic manner because this constitutes the only perceived way to facilitate and enhance the process of political and economic development of the Iraqi Kurdistan region, according to Dilshad Hama:

“KRG is not asked to give permission [referring to Turkey’s intervention in northern Iraq to attack PKK members]. Turkey just comes and attacks. I think Turkey does not consider the KRG as a political partner in the region. They do not recognise the Kurdistan region as a self-ruled political entity. They still call it Northern Iraq or Kurdish administration in Northern Iraq. They do not deal with it as a political entity. They benefit a lot from the trade and the side benefitting more because of the trade between the KRG and Turkey, is Turkey. By 2014, 3,000 companies were operating in the Kurdistan region. In 2017, the trade between KRG and Turkey was about 10 billion dollars. Turkey is benefitting more from the KRG than KRG is benefitting from Turkey but this is only one of the very few options that the KRG has to receive basic needs.”³⁴

Thus, political action which aligns with the general nationalist agenda of Iraqi Kurds is subject to structural constraints which gradually become established as components of a distinct form of civic nationalism. In this case, there is an evident presence of structural motivations emanating from the interests embedded in social positions. Across time, people’s actions occur within these circumstances and gradually structural elaboration takes place and these circumstances are sustained. These circumstances constitute a new status of perceived dependency based on political pragmatism to be employed for a further analysis of action.

The alliance between the KRG and Turkey has become even more critical after significant economic investment in the region after 2003. In 2016, Turkish trade with Iraq used to be approximately 7.5 billion dollars the majority of which was estimated to come from Kurdistan, which exposes the fact that Iraqi Kurds have too much to lose by risking their ties with Turkey and sacrificing regional stability (Stevenson, 2017, p. 4). Kurdistan has been full of Turkish companies which operate everywhere and are involved in many sectors of the economy while Turkish oil companies operate in

³⁴ Interview with Dr Dilshad Hama: Head of IRD Department and Lecturer of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tishk International University [Conducted on: 03 April 2020].

Kurdistan's oil fields. The alliance between Ankara and Erbil is perceived by the Kurdish political elite as not only useful but crucial as well at a period during which Kurdish relations with Baghdad are not at their best; demonstrated by the fact that the KRG is required to enhance its political leverage and seek alternatives to export Kurdish crude, considering the fact that the KRG does not hold any kind of control over the Iraqi export infrastructure. Thus, the political decision not to mobilise alongside their co-nationals in Syria or Turkey, is consistent from a political perspective; KRG decided not to embrace the Syrian National Council (SCN) project despite the Iraqi Kurds' reluctance to see an augmented Muslim Brotherhood influence emerging in Syria. Barzani has been acting as a regional envoy for Ankara engaging in controlling not only the PKK but cross-border nationalism in general (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 178).

Barzani and Erdogan have been following a coordinated policy with regard to the PKK and its presence in Iraqi Kurdistan as demonstrated by Barzani's official visits in Turkey. Dilshad Hama elaborates on the context of this coordinated approach:

“Both the KDP and the PUK, have some cooperation with Turkey since 1991 and the price has to be paid by the PKK. The parties function in such a limited political space that they have to compromise on principles or in a different language act rationally. In 1990s, they had to make an agreement with Turkey to open the border for the whole region to survive.”³⁵

It is worth noting, however, that Barzani refused to engage militarily against the organisation; a refusal which could be translated as the outcome of ethnic nationalist sentiments or as a communication strategy due to the possession of consciousness that any decision to attack the ethnic nationalist sentiments of Iraqi Kurds could significantly damage his own popularity and the one of his party.

The paradox lies on the fact that despite Turkey and Erdogan expecting from Barzani to control and moderate Kurdish regional nationalisms, Kurdish groups in the region are expecting exactly the opposite, with Dilshad Sharif emphasising the lack of pragmatism that characterises the relations between Erbil and Ankara:

“Turkey is not a reliable ally at all. Look at us Kurds. Look at the Armenians. Look at the Greeks. How can you be so ignorant and fascist? You deny that we need to have a Kurdish name or that we need to be dressed in Kurdish clothes. Turkey was never and is never going to be a reliable partner. Maybe, only a

³⁵ Interview with Dr Dilshad Hama: Head of IRD Department and Lecturer of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tishk International University [Conducted on: 03 April 2020].

reliable trader. They need us to solve their Kurdish problem and to sell our oil to them in cheap prices.”³⁶

As the awareness of the gap in terms of achievement of the Iraqi Kurds and other Kurds increases, Kurdish demands for equivalent achievements will increase along with Kurdish political expectations as a part of democratisation and reformist processes seeking to enhance equality and protect the rights of minority groups. Especially after 2005, such a situation has become more evident after Iraqi Kurdistan has been established not only as a “safe haven for Kurdish groups from Turkey, Syria and Iran seeking to mobilise freely, market their own Kurdish nationalisms, access jobs and educate their youth” (Natali, 2012), but also as a constitutionally recognised territorial community possessing its own economy, administration and military forces.

This irreversible nationalist process of equivalent ambitions will gradually put Iraqi leaders into a situation of a hard dilemma; a dilemma between their own material or political interests and the satisfaction of Kurdish nationalism across territorial boundaries. This dilemma is expected to chronologically coexist with a period during which Iraqi Kurdistan is facing a real internal problem; despite autonomy, the Kurdish population of Iraq is increasingly critical of the KRG and its leaders due to the perceived corruption and uneven distribution of wealth (Petkova, 2018). Kurdish leaders will be required to demonstrate a commitment towards Kurdish nationalism both in an inter-state level and a transnational level which will be accompanied by enhanced accountability, transparency and fair and equal distribution of wealth emanating from oil revenues. Otherwise, there is a great risk of losing support even within Iraqi Kurdistan; a support which is considered essential for maintaining and protecting their own nationalist project. Shadeedi Hamzah makes a distinction, though, between the KDP and the PUK claiming:

“I have to be fair. The PUK and its administration have more tolerance to opposition and to freedom of speech in comparison to the KDP. The KDP is not really democratic at all. You know what happened to journalists and people who criticised Barzani. Osman Sardasht was one of the most famous figures who once

³⁶ Interview with Dilshad Sharif: Assistant Lecturer in International Relations and Diplomacy at the Tishk International University and Senior Adviser to the Kurdistan Parliament [Conducted on: 28 March 2020].

wrote a satire piece saying that he is in love with Barzani's daughter. He was killed two days later. We do not know by whom, but it happened.³⁷

The structural circumstances in terms of socio-economic incentives which have been shaping and determining political action in Iraqi Kurdistan are expected to be challenged in the future by human action in the form of an emergent property. Political leaders have been following a policy very specifically adapted to the structural circumstances formed by the geopolitical context in order to satisfy a very specific form of intra-state nationalism. The maintenance of this policy attracted legitimacy from the approval of the agents. As agents start becoming more and more critical towards the KRG and its leaders, these structures will start becoming more and more unstable and may be unable to influence political action to such an extent compared to how they have been influencing political action in the post-2003 period.

Moreover, it is worth noting that the inter-Kurdish rivalry has a historically constructed ideological character as well. Within an unstable regional environment subject to the escalation of the Syrian Civil War, Syrian Kurdistan became an arena for intra-Kurdish rivalry. Initially, the Syrian Kurds did not take a clear position against the regime and when the governmental forces were withdrawn from the Kurdish regions of Syria, the PYD exploiting its military YPG wing proceeded to the control of these areas and the establishment of a Kurdish regional administration; thus, fundamentally altering the dynamics of the Kurdish question (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 177). More importantly, the re-emergence of the PKK's regional presence generated regional competition between the PKK's and the KDP's influence. The ISIS offensive against Sinjar exposed the clash of Kurdish nationalism, with the KRG withdrawing and the PKK providing protection to the civilians (ibid., p. 178). Shadeedi Hamzeh portrays the realities of this inter-Kurdish competition by claiming:

“KDP pretends that it has a pan-Kurdish agenda. But at the same time, competition between Kurdish parties is just so great. It is like the Arabs that pretend that are unified but are competing with each other. The same for the Kurds. No difference at all. Iraqi Kurdistan would definitely not be happy if a similar situation evolved for the Kurds in Syria. There is a sense that they want to be the only ones. The only Kurdish region in the area. The only Kurdish region with autonomy. They would not be happy to have an autonomous region next to them. Because then, people will judge who is doing better. So, it is a mistake to

³⁷ Interview with Hamzeh Shadeedi: Policy Researcher at the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) [Conducted on: 6 May 2020].

think of the Kurds as one. In the same way that it is wrong to think of the Arabs as one.”³⁸

It is worth mentioning that the Kurdish political progress in Syria was completely contradicted to the political progress in Iraqi Kurdistan; something that further reinforces the idea that the Kurdish nationalisms in the Middle East region emerged and developed within different contexts (Dinc, 2020; Kaya, 2020, p. 7). A historical evaluation of the Kurdish liberational movements of the previous century demonstrates a strong resistance against centralised state policies and a tendency towards an independent statehood as the ultimate goal of the nationalist agenda. However, over time, there was a significant shift when considering the Kurdish context within which Kurdish nationalism was developed for certain segments of the Kurdish population of the area. This context was influenced from the philosophical ideas of the PKK and its leader Abdullah Ocalan and gradually constructed a political structure that determined the expectations of the people towards a non-statist form of societal organisation and democratic autonomy (Ocalan, 2011, p. 21). The political organisation that was de facto established in Syria aimed at strengthening the self-governing potentials of local systems through the employment of a system that aimed to homogenise based on democratic autonomy (Dinc, 2020). Dilshad Hama confirms this division saying:

“There are different types of nationalism. PKK represents one of them which has changed from pan-Kurdish nationalism to Democratic Confederalism. There is still the traditional Kurdayeti which is led by the KDP in the Kurdistan region. Now, the problem is there between these two versions of Kurdish nationalism.”³⁹

This political organisation was the outcome of a process which, as mentioned, has its roots in the PKK and should be considered distinct from the process in Iraqi Kurdistan which has its roots in the KDP and was developed and formed within a completely different and distinct context. The genesis of the agents may have occurred within a common bundle of social structures such as norms, ideas, values, power relationships and language communities. However, across time, these structures have been subject to adaptation or change due to the activities and choices of individuals within them and social interaction, cultural elaboration and structural elaboration have taken distinct roots when comparing the Kurds in Turkey or Syria with the Kurds in Iraq. Today,

³⁸ Interview with Hamzeh Shadeedi: Policy Researcher at the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) [Conducted on: 6 May 2020].

³⁹ Interview with Dr Dilshad Hama: Head of IRD Department and Lecturer of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tishk International University [Conducted on: 03 April 2020].

Syrian Kurds do not share the same degree of aspirations for independence as their Iraqi co-nationals due to their more Marxist and anti-state ideology according to which the state is a tool of the bourgeoisie to suppress the working class. The decision for the implementation of autonomous cantons in full control of their internal affairs was based on the idea for a bottom-up form of governance in accordance with Ocalan's vision (Dinc, 2020).

7. Intra-Kurdish rivalry

The evaluation of the political, military and economic divisions within the society of Iraqi Kurdistan demonstrates the existence of a significant intra-Kurdish rivalry as well. In terms of governance, the region is divided along tribal lines with Erbil and Duhok constituting a KDP territory and Sulaymaniyah constituting a PUK territory. In military terms, the Peshmerga are not unified with approximately 75 per cent of them functioning along political lines subject to party loyalty (Rudaw, 2017). Mohammed Haji Mahmoud, a former Peshmerga commander, demonstrates this reality by saying that "when the political parties call them back, they will go back to the respective parties" (Fumerton and Van Wilgenburg, 2015). This division functions within the economic realm as well with Peshmerga commanders receiving their salaries from partisan commanders rather than a governmental body; thus, maintaining their connection to their parties rather than to the state institutions (ibid.). Thus, an inherent tension characterised by the lack of trust and the existence of hostility dominates society as a result of the significance of tribalism (Natali, 2010; Natali, 2012). Dilshad Hama elaborates on the significance of tribal structures saying:

"For the average Kurd, tribal or party loyalty is not more important than national loyalty. But for party members, it is. Things have changed in the last ten years. Before that, the society was deeply divided between the two parties. But right now, there is a portion of the population that do not consider themselves as belonging to any political parties. They consider themselves Iraqi or KRG citizens. There is a change in loyalty. The impact of tribalism is there unfortunately. Political parties capitalise on political realities to strengthen their party loyalties. Since 1991, they have been supporting tribal loyalties for their own benefits and paying huge sums in tribesmen to buy the loyalty of tribes. Things changed. But tribalism still matters a lot. This differs from one region to

another. It is very strong in some parts of Sulaymaniyah and Erbil but in some other parts, it is losing ground.⁴⁰

Modern internal structures of the Iraqi Kurdish society should be traced back to the 1990s when the geographical division of the KDP and the PUK in the western and the eastern part of the country respectively along with their differentiated access to revenues, facilitated competition. During the same period, an underground economy emerged subject to the control of traditional families associated with the two parties while the international aid which created price differentials across the region further intensified competition at the expense of Kurdish nationalism (Natali, 2005, p. 58). More importantly, the relations of each party to neighbouring states constructed a new dimension to the conflict, with the KDP and the PUK cooperating financially and militarily with Turkey and Iran respectively, with the two regional powers simultaneously cooperating with Baghdad against the Kurds. As an absolute example of the magnitude of the competition, KDP and Baghdad in a joint military operation in 1996 removed the PUK from Erbil with the latter achieving a ceasefire through the assistance of Iran (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 158).

The intra-Kurdish conflict allowed those opposing the separatist tendencies of the Kurds to classify their movement as “pre-modern, divided, tribal and hence incapable of representing Iraqi Kurdistan in any institutionally enshrined autonomy or political self-determination” (Romano, 2006, p. 211). The establishment of the KRG which was supposed to eliminate any political or economic networks associated with tribal identities, instead, indirectly institutionalised them since the two parties divided up the region into two distinct governance zones associated with two distinct centres of power. Any efforts towards promoting an appropriate state-building strategy and an attention to the rule of law were suppressed by narratives referring to the possibility of Saddam’s return in case of a sudden status quo change (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 178).

This thesis argues for the post-2003 increasing importance of economic factors in shaping and determining the behaviour of the agency in Iraqi Kurdistan, with the idea of economic prosperity generating material motivations. According to Natali (2005, p. 26), today’s Kurdish society demonstrates a preference towards “stability and growth

⁴⁰ Interview with Dr Dilshad Hama: Head of IRD Department and Lecturer of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tishk International University [Conducted on: 03 April 2020].

rather than economic decline or conflict for the cause of independent statehood”. This behaviour emanates from the dependence of clientelism on the maintenance of the status quo. This consciousness directed the political elite to fully participate in the political process that followed after the US intervention that legitimised the region as a federal entity in which the federal law supersedes the regional law in only very few cases. Yet, a large dependency does persist especially in economic terms demonstrated by the fact that since 2003, approximately 95 per cent of the KRG’s revenue has been emanating from the 17 per cent national budget allocation (Fathallah, 2015); thus, Baghdad possesses the power to exercise considerable leverage over the region (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 170).

Until today, the patronage networks survive as indicated by the fact that more than half of the budget goes to governmental salaries rather than being used to develop the primary production of the economy and the private sector. The existence of such a large public sector further facilitates patronage behaviour within an entity where finance, military and justice ministries remain divided between the two parties (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 178). Moreover, the two parties practically have no executive authority over each other’s territory - not even through governmental action - while two separate phone companies operate in those territories (U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, 2015). Shadeedi Hamzeh reinforces the argument regarding the existence of a patronage behaviour:

“All over Iraq, the money either goes to corruption, to pockets of political parties or to finance patronage networks. Iraq needs 44 billion dollars per year only to pay salaries, aside other forms of maintaining patronage. There is no real investment in becoming self-sufficient economically. You see the same mistake all over Iraq.”⁴¹

The KRG has been following a methodical approach to attract investment, promote trade and transform the region as a potential global centre of business through an advertising campaign called ‘The Other Iraq’ that presents the region as a peaceful, prosperous place that practices democracy (Kurdistan Development Corporation, 2020). Yet, the economic boom experienced after 2003 has improved the well-being of only a small segment of the Kurdish agents; a development which has facilitated

⁴¹ Interview with Hamzeh Shadeedi: Policy Researcher at the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) [Conducted on: 6 May 2020].

protests and the rise of other political actors such as Gorran. The strength of the structure of economic prosperity is verified by Mohammed Ihsan (2007), the ex-Minister of Extra-Regional Affairs, asserting that “people are no longer willing to live in abject poverty for the sake of the nationalist cause. The democratic experience has brought high expectations” (Chorev, 2007, p. 8). Natali (2005) provides further legitimacy to this argument by referring to the inability of nationalism to define political life in the same way that it did prior to 2003 and asserting that the shared sense of struggle has been replaced by demands for revenue generation in a liberal manner. Thus, the social contract experienced prior to 2003 is being replaced by a new social contract that determines new requirements for Kurdish political leaders.

8. The problematic nature of the state-building process

The question that naturally arises is whether a unified Kurdish national movement could potentially become a reality in the near future. Kurdish nationalism coexists and interacts with other regional trends or emergent properties; such trends include sectarianism, border instability and economic advancement. These factors and their impact can undermine the development of a unified Kurdish nationalist movement. Despite Kurdish communities being characterised by a shared sense of culture and identity, they have manifested their claims in distinct ways based on the distinct political spaces they have been experiencing and functioning within across their host states. These political spaces, across a process of cultural and structural elaboration, have generated distinct notions and understandings of inclusion and exclusion for Kurds as an ethnic group, but also as a tribal and religious community, while also resulting in distinct manifestations of Kurdish nationalism defined by the nature of elites, the nature of nationalist organisations and the relationship with central governments.

In the Iraqi context, the state-building project was accompanied by the recognition of the Kurdish ethnicity by the state elites which used this concession to enhance their control over Kurdish groups. The first Iraqi constitution of 1925 referred to a binational Iraq and permitted the use of the Kurdish language in certain areas (Natali, 2012). However, Kurdish nationalist organisations and activities were banned while across time, the central government attempted to extend its control by military attacking Kurdish regions and negotiating with tribal leaders to attract their support at the expense

of Kurdish ethnic nationalism (Ciment, 1996, p. 86; Bengio, 2012, p. 1). Even during the Ba'athist years when the state employed a significantly repressive and ethnicised policy, it continued to recognise the Kurdish autonomy (Gunter, 1992, p. 14); a status which enabled a highly ethnicised Kurdish nationalism to emerge that fluctuated according to the relationship with the central government (Natali, 2012).

As mentioned, Kurdish communities in Iran, Syria and Turkey experienced and functioned within completely different structural contexts. Despite limited development in terms of a unified nationalist movement, Kurdish groups have attempted to consolidate their national interests across borders. The KDP has party affiliates in Turkey and Syria (Carnegie-MEC, 2020) while the PUK has maintained links with Kurdish leftist groups in Iran. Dilshad Hama argues that the existence of proxies has become a historical reality:

“If you consider the Kurdish history since the 1960s, political parties have proxies in other countries. And they use these proxies against each other. You can see Kurdish political parties in Syria being supported by political parties in the Kurdistan region. Since the autonomy of the Kurdistan region, this has become very easy.”⁴²

This, however, does not emanate from a pure willingness to develop integration of ethnic agendas and this is demonstrated by the decision of Kurdish elites across states to ally with regional states against each other in order to protect their own tribal, ideological and political interests. Certain Kurdish communities tend to remain committed to their own political objectives at the expense of ethnic nationalism and of a pan-Kurdish agenda and the same applies for the Kurdish community of Iraq that has been historically engaged in a power struggle with Baghdad. This power struggle – which has functioned as a material motivation determining political action - has been marked by disagreements over the nature of power, the control of the energy sector, the territorial boundaries of the Kurdish autonomous region and the division of revenues.

This distinct agenda is likely to continue in an effort to reduce external dependency and transform the KRG into a self-sufficient entity. The whole political attitude of the Kurdish elite towards an ideal status quo has been the outcome of an effort to pursue a doctrine which assumes that “civilised societies have a state and the establishment of a

⁴² Interview with Dr Dilshad Hama: Head of IRD Department and Lecturer of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tishk International University [Conducted on: 03 April 2020].

state would bring the ultimate recognition of Kurds in modern society” (Jongerden, 2019, p. 62). The political manifesto constitutes a structural umbrella which is shaped around the objective of a sovereign statehood and self-determination is considered the element to legitimise such a development. This perception is aligned with the idea that social life is only natural and normal only if it occurs within a modern state which is the ultimate form of societal development which is also a strong and stable structure which dominates modern life (Clastres, 1989).

It was the 1992 establishment of the KRG that marked the beginning of a state-building process within Iraqi Kurdistan accompanied by the establishment of institutions. The civil war that lasted between 1994 and 1998 and resulted in the death of more than 2,000 Kurds not only hindered this process but also determined its future nature (Irwani, 2015, p. 5). After the 1998 peace treaty, the Kurdistan region was territorially and militarily divided between the KDP and the PUK, with Erbil and Duhok under the control of the former and Sulaymaniyah and Garmian under the control of the latter (Leezenberg, 2005). Thus, the state-building process was fragmented and this facilitated competition between political and military institutions. In economic terms, between 1996 and 2003, the region was being allocated 13 per cent of Iraq’s oil revenue within the framework of the OFFP (Irwani, 2015).

The US intervention in Iraq functioned as the emergent property to alter history for the Kurdistan region of Iraq due to generating material motivations in the form of unique opportunities for self-rule and rendering the Kurdish parties as allies to the western effort of overthrowing the regime. The 2005 constitution granted autonomy to the region and allowed it to have its own government, parliament and military forces (Stansfield, 2017). Yet, the post-2003 decision of the Kurdish political elites in Iraq to stay within Iraq as a federal unit within a sovereign state was not the outcome of self-determination, but rather the outcome of the US pressure towards the Kurds to remain in Iraq in order to act as a stabilising element between the Sunni and the Shia communities of the country; thus, the commitment towards a federal Iraq was equivalent to the conscious pragmatic decision to align with their main perceived ally with the hope that this ally would support their nationalist agenda in the future under a different geopolitical context. Articles 117 and 141 of the 2005 constitution officially

instituted the autonomy of the Kurdistan region of Iraq and its legislative, executive and judicial authorities (ibid.).

After 2003, the region enjoyed relative stability and prosperity while the high oil prices and the liberalisation facilitated an economic boom and a subsequent rise in foreign direct investment and establishment of production-sharing agreements (Kuruuzum, 2018, p. 185; Natali, 2010, p. 88). Internationally, the KRG developed an image of such a strong non-state actor both due to its economic and political advancement that it is often called the 'other Iraq' (Shea, 2016). Politically, the KRG has been diplomatically successful legitimising its international presence by promoting the image of a functioning political system (Kurdistan Development Corporation, 2020) and by establishing representations internationally while many countries have established their own representations in the region (KRG Department of Foreign Relations, 2021). Economically, the KRG has proceeded to business deals especially with big oil companies elevating its status within the international community with Woolf (2010) depicting it as the 'next Dubai'. However, as mentioned the distinct political paths followed by each party did not facilitate a process of sufficient national reconciliation and rivalry not only persisted after 2003 but survives until today. The KRG unification agreement was signed in 2006 while the ministries were united in 2012, but lack of collaboration does remain on numerous areas in the presence of strong party loyalties and separate military forces (Leezenberg, 2015, p. 165).

This thesis claims that these distinct structures have constructed across time two competing Kurdish nationalisms represented by the KDP and the PUK. What always united the political community of Iraqi Kurdistan has been the issue of independence which remained central in the nationalist agenda. Yet, despite the initiative of activists to form the Kurdistan Referendum Movement (KRM) and conduct an unofficial referendum in 2005 which demonstrated a 98 per cent preference for an independent Kurdistan, the two parties expressed a commitment to a unified Iraqi state (Berwari and Ambrosio, 2008); an act which demonstrated the significance placed on international support.

The post-2005 era found the Iraqi state becoming more sectarian and more centralist according to the wishes of the Shia political leadership which was characterised by anti-federalist ideas and agendas (Gunter, 2008, p. 20; Dodge, 2018; Saleem, 2018). The

political community of Iraqi Kurdistan employed a justified rhetoric of poor relations with Baghdad within a failed state. The Kurdish parties have blamed Baghdad in numerous occasions for violating the constitution with regard to governance of the state, budget allocation and the status of the disputed territories (Hama and Jasim, 2017). Tension was particularly evident across the second term of al-Maliki as a Prime Minister of Iraq which was characterised by authoritarian elements, arrests of Kurds and unconstitutional centralisation policies. The decision of the KRG to design its own infrastructure and policy of oil exportation resulted in Baghdad refusing to provide to the KRG the agreed 17 per cent allocation of the national budget in 2014 (O'Driscoll, 2017). According to Hussein (2018):

“In 2014, the KRG’s oil revenue was about \$2.3 billion, while its 17% national budget share was about \$7 billion (including federal expenditures). Iraq’s Prime Minister at the time, Nuri Al-Maliki, cut the KRI’s share of the national budget entirely, leading to economic hardship in the region and a significant loss of income for one quarter of the population. At the time, 70% of the region’s public expenditure went to the government payroll”.

This tension reactivated the fear structures of the Kurdish agents with regard to the intentions of Baghdad which directed their behaviour even when al-Abadi rose onto power promising to improve inter-ethnic relations. However, the main issue of disagreement and area of Kurdish disappointment had been the implementation of Article 140; Baghdad refused to follow the Article which required from the Iraqi authorities to “perform a census and conclude through referenda in Kirkuk and other disputed territories the will of their citizens” until December 2007; this constituted in reality, a violation of the constitution (Park et al., 2017, p. 201). The Kurdish political community expressed in numerous occasions the perceived sad reality of the federal partnership (Hama and Jasim, 2017), with Masoud Barzani (2017) referring to it as a failed one. The Shia-dominated central authority of Baghdad did not satisfy the expectations of the Kurds, especially due to the unwillingness to proceed with the implementation of the constitutional provisions agreed and the decision to proceed with the violation of the constitution. Relations between Baghdad and Erbil gradually worsened, with Baghdad considering the Kurdistan region’s autonomy as anything but normal and Erbil considering the whole federal partnership as a failed one (Park et al., 2017, p. 199).

On the 25th of September of 2017, the Kurdish population of Iraq had the opportunity through a referendum to decide about the future of the Kurdish areas of Iraq; both those under the constitutional control of the KRG and those not, such as Kirkuk. The referendum not only demonstrated that the primary objective of the nationalist manifesto remains the idea of a sovereign statehood but also symbolically acted as an unofficial deviation from the post-2003 official position for a constructive KRG role within a federalised Iraq. Just before the day of the referendum, Barzani referred to the Kurdish partnership within Iraq as a “failed partnership”, adding that Iraq had become a “theocratic, sectarian state” (Chmaytelli and Butler, 2017); demonstrating the irreversibility of the Kurdish political direction towards the ultimate goal of a *de jure* independent sovereign state recognised by the international community and the relevant international organisations (Park et al., 2017, p. 199).

The political community has historically constructed this structural expectation among the agents and has to act accordingly in order to politically support it and legitimise its political power as Archer’s (1995) framework demonstrates:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context formed after the establishment of the 2005 constitution which granted autonomy to the region and allowed it to have its own legislative, executive and judicial authorities.
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by structural and cultural motivations subject to the experienced transformation of Iraq to a more sectarian and centralist state, the evident lack of constitutional implementations, the political and economic advancement of the region, the nationalistic rhetoric promoted by the KDP and the PUK and the narratives promoted by the KRG referring to a failed partnership in Iraq and to a conditional state unity.
- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to the formation of a new set of structural and cultural constraints subject to the perceived limited material motivations for supporting the unity of Iraq and the increased cultural motivations – as a result of increased national awareness - for abandoning a partnership with a perceived unreliable partner for a sovereign independent statehood through a revised agenda of KRG regional policies. The new constraints shape the agential

expectations from the political elites of the region which need to adapt in order to maintain support.

The response of Baghdad after the referendum through external assistance included the use of violence and arrests for the organisers of the referendum while the Kurds lost control of the disputed territories. The whole situation exposed the absence of a unified Kurdish leadership and military force to proceed with the execution of either a political or military response (Anczewski, 2017). This kind of response would expect somebody from a state and the Kurds demonstrated their inability to act as an actual state in this occasion. This demonstrates that the state building process in the Kurdistan autonomous region after 1991 cannot be characterised by absolute success; the referendum, indeed, depicted the weaknesses of the Kurdish governmental institutions. KRG could not function appropriately while military groups could not act simultaneously due to the antagonistic nature of the relationship between them.

The political unity demonstrated by the harmony in the relationships between the KDP and the PUK and their mutual cooperation in drafting the 2005 constitution constituted a situation that was altered until the 2017 referendum. Across that period, the PUK suffered from a significant lack of stability and cohesion and experienced the breakaway of the Gorran Party; a party that not only ended the era of the absolute political dominance of the KDP and the PUK but also demanded through its political leaders and through its supporters, stronger institutions and elimination of the corruption within the KRG (Salih, 2017). These unexpected developments contributed towards the failure to establish political coherence and towards the absence of any appropriate political and military strategy due to the dominance of clientelism within the KRG (Aziz, 2017). However, across this period a strong structure was developed that determined both the expectations of the population and the political actions of Kurdish leaders that sought to satisfy these expectations; this structure was based on the narrative of a failed partnership and was the one to determine the tendency towards a referendum for independence which was held in September 2017 in order to satisfy the expectations of the agents and legitimise the political power of the decision-makers.

The referendum symbolically demonstrated the failure of a political process towards the development of a federalised Iraq, but, in reality, also demonstrated the inability of the Kurdish leadership to develop a state-resembling unit within a federal partnership

as aspired by both the political leadership and the population. The institutions were proved to be weak and neither the government nor the parliament had proved to be stronger than the clientelism which characterised the personal and family connections functioning in the absence of any form of coordination or pragmatist nationalist agenda (Aziz, 2017). As mentioned previously in this chapter, the attachment to the civic institutions generates unique national identification structures. However, as the problems that characterise these institutions become further exposed, this attachment may become more and more unstable and challenge the current structures which generate this unique national identification. Thus, demonstrating once again that the civic elaboration emanating from structural and cultural components can be successful in terms of identity construction but cannot match the strength and stability of ethnic elaboration.

A referendum is supposed not only to provide a legitimate tool in the hands of decision-makers to follow a specific political route but is also expected to contribute towards political unity (O'Driscoll and Baser, 2019, p. 2024); especially in the case of Iraqi Kurdistan where a referendum is directly and clearly asking for the approval of an objective aspired by every individual within the Kurdish society for decades. This 2017 referendum, however, exposed the clientelism within the networks of the Kurdish society which determined the political decisions of the KRG and the territorial control established by these networks which acts against the sovereignty rule of a state in the modern era (Aziz, 2017). Thus, concluding, this thesis asserts that the post-2005 period was marked by a double failure. Firstly, a failure to construct a federal Iraq and a trustful partnership (Barzani, 2017) and, secondly, a failure to institutionalise appropriately an administration in Erbil congruent with the ideas and elements of an appropriate independent state (Anczewski, 2017). This thesis does not claim that a political process towards an appropriate federal autonomy or absolute autonomy is definitely going to end up in failure in the future, but rather aims to depict the problematic nature of state-building which cannot be defined as a process towards social progress and away from political party loyalty, discipline and involvement in national and local governance.

9. The 2017 independence referendum: a national or party decision?

This thesis argues that the referendum that was conducted in September 2017 was the outcome of internal political competition and the response to the challenges posed by the reaction of the agents against the poor economic performance of the KRG in an effort by political elites to maintain and enhance their power. The timing of the referendum coexisted with poor political and economic dynamics in the absence of regional and international support and, thus, did not constitute part of a pragmatic process but rather functioned as a distraction from the rising internal turmoil. Ethnic nationalism was utilised as an instrument towards the acquisition and maintenance of power in accordance with Breuilly's (1993) understanding of state nationalism.

The referendum was announced on the 7th of June of 2017 by Masoud Barzani and took place on the 25th of September of the same year (Stevenson, 2017, p. 3). From a historical perspective, it is important to note that the referendum was the outcome of an individual's decision, since it was called by Masoud Barzani himself rather than the parliament of the region which had been closed since October 2015 (ibid.) and initially received significant support and legitimacy mainly from the KDP rather than other parties that perceived it as a move towards power consolidation within a period of political and socio-economic instability. Yet, the parliament met 10 days before the day of the referendum and proceeded to its approval heavily influenced by the preceding KDP campaign that portrayed a possible non-approval of the referendum as an unpatriotic act (ibid.). With regard to the result, 92.7 per cent of the participants expressed their desire for a sovereign Kurdish statehood but a closer examination of the results in areas out of KDP's control once again demonstrates the fragmented nature of the Kurdish society. More specifically, in Sulaymaniyah and Halabja the turnout was approximately 50 and 54 per cent respectively (Watts, 2017) while in Kirkuk just above 30 per cent (Park, 2018, p. 46), with Dilshad Hama explaining:

“Masoud Barzani tried to make the referendum as national as possible. But he failed to do it as national as possible. Parts of the PUK supported it. Parts of the Gorran, at the last moment, supported it. The problem is that the KDP failed to consolidate parties around this agenda, around this move. Other political parties interpreted the move as a KDP agenda trying to consolidate political power in the Kurdistan region. This was the perception of other political parties. Especially parts of the PUK and the Gorran movement.”⁴³

⁴³ Interview with Dr Dilshad Hama: Head of IRD Department and Lecturer of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tishk International University [Conducted on: 03 April 2020].

The political response of Baghdad reflected the large perceptual gap separating Erbil and Baghdad, with the Iraqi Prime Minister at the time, Haider al-Abadi, declaring the process unconstitutional and the KRG referring to the legality of the constitutional right of the Kurds to declare their will for an independent sovereign statehood (Reuters, 2017). Turkey and Iran proceeded to a condemnation of the referendum and in full cooperation with Baghdad employed a coordinated military response. The Iraqi parliament approved sanctions against the Kurdistan region and a military operation on the disputed territories (Stevenson, 2017) while the two regional powers performed joint operations on their borders with the region and threatened to economically isolate it. The KRG looked unable to perform a counter-response either in political or military terms and, thus, to function like an appropriate state would do. Dilshad Hama elaborates on and explains the stance of Turkey saying:

“The mentality of Turkey against a Kurdish state is there and has been there since the establishment of the Turkish state. Kurds cannot do something to change their mentality. The reaction of Turkey was expected after the referendum. Turkey would not accept a Kurdish state even in Mars. Because for them, that would instigate the Kurds in Turkey and Iran. The mentality is there. As long as there is no culture of democracy, self-determination will not be tolerated. The Syrian Kurds fought against ISIS but their self-determination was not accepted by the Syrian regime or Turkey. There is no Kurdish Question for them.”⁴⁴

Kurdish nationalism as an instrument towards power consolidation

According to Voller (2015), unrecognised states tend to perform a process of democratisation in order to legitimise and enhance their claims for independence. With regard to the KRG, democratisation has been facing obstacles due to the political hegemony of the KDP and the PUK; obstacles which persisted even after the emergence of the Gorran party and its anti-corruption agenda (Independent, 2009), since the party loyalty structures had been so strong that the two main parties had managed to maintain their domination over all military and governmental institutions. However, the growing financial and political pressure, often expressed through protests against the KDP (ibid.), did challenge the power of traditional Kurdish elites who employed the referendum as an instrument towards the consolidation of power. It is important to clarify that this thesis does not deny the existence of independence aspirations among

⁴⁴ Interview with Dr Dilshad Hama: Head of IRD Department and Lecturer of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tishk International University [Conducted on: 03 April 2020].

Kurdish agents, but rather than the nationalist rhetoric that marked the period prior to the referendum aimed at unifying Kurdish nationalism behind the KDP and its leader Masoud Barzani.

According to Breuilly (1993, p. 1), nationalism can be employed as an instrument towards the “objectives of obtaining and using state power”. Elites tend to use nationalism in order to mobilise and coordinate the behaviour of agents and establish legitimacy for their aims. However, the case of Iraqi Kurdistan is distinctively unique since the power dynamics are situated and function within the framework of the Iraqi state but also within the framework of the Kurdish autonomous region. Kurdish political elites tend to use nationalism as an instrument through an emphasis on the elements that compose a nation, to maintain hegemonic power within their own autonomous region but also to gain power from Baghdad and oppose the hegemonic system of the Iraqi state. Thus, the KDP constitutes both a ruling party and an opposition party within the federal Iraqi framework.

It is not a surprise that the referendum campaign employed an excessive emphasis on the Kurdish history and identity which imply the right for self-determination. However, the use of nationalist rhetoric in Iraq functions across numerous levels due to the involvement of multiple actors. As mentioned, the KDP and the PUK are geographically and militarily divided and have followed two simultaneous but distinct routes with regard to nation-building and have been competing for power in the absence of a recognised state. These distinct routes do not only determine the political priorities, with Tezcur (2019, p. 5) claiming that “strategic organisational interests typically prevail over common ethnic identity”, but also the nationalist rhetoric with the KDP characterised by a more traditional conservative philosophy and the PUK by a more leftist liberal one. In political terms, the KDP’s philosophy has been the dominant during the last decades. Yet, the referendum offered an opportunity for Barzani to render his philosophical worldview as the legitimate hegemonic nationalist vision and damage the legitimacy of the visions of the competing parties in the region (O’Driscoll and Baser, 2019, p. 223).

When evaluating a campaign, it is important to refer to the role of the media; especially with regard to the Kurdistan region, since any reference to an independence of media outlets remains debatable. The main outlets are owned by the main political parties and

have been functioning as instruments towards the promotion of competing nationalist views, impeding the homogenisation of nationalist sentiments among Kurdish agents. In the period before the referendum, different channels participated in a process of construction of distinct notions of what constitutes the more ethical or pragmatic choice for the Kurdish nation (Chmaytelli, 2017), demonstrating the historical construction of competing nationalisms influenced and determined by tribal or party loyalties.

This thesis does not claim that the Kurdish agency is not collectively characterised by inspirations for an independent sovereign statehood. These inspirations have been constructed and strengthened across decades of nationalist struggle and cannot be challenged. However, it is important to understand the elements which directed the political elite towards taking the initiative to proceed to a referendum and determine the actual motives behind such a decision. The referendum was not called by the Kurdish parliament but rather by Masoud Barzani himself while it did not initially receive the support of all political parties in the region, resulting in political competition (Stevenson, 2017, p. 3). Moreover, there is significant uncertainty whether independence was feasible under the 2017 circumstances in the absence of international support and recognition prospects and in the presence of rising economic instability. Thus, it is legitimate to argue that the process was not an opportunity for self-determination but rather an opportunity to challenge the internal competition for power, as Shadeedi Hamzeh argues:

“The referendum was a Barzani project. He saw Talabani and Nawshirwan Mustafa dying. He was the only one of the Kurdish heroes left. He wanted to do something before he was out. He knew well that if he declared the referendum, no Kurdish political actor would dare to oppose it. To oppose a referendum, is like you are rejecting the Kurdish nation. That is how it would be translated. He knew well that nobody was going to say no. He needed a moment for himself. A moment for Masoud Barzani. Anytime that a referendum would be conducted, the people would vote yes for independence. Everyone knew this. Barzani did not need a referendum to know this. But he would use it as a bargaining tool against the federal government. There was no support for the referendum from any political actor. Israel may have supported it, but Israel is really irrelevant. These messages were clearly communicated. But it was a good moment to contact the referendum because Baghdad was extremely weak. It was fighting ISIS. It was a right moment to conduct a referendum.”⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Interview with Hamzeh Shadeedi: Policy Researcher at the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) [Conducted on: 6 May 2020].

The paradoxical nature of the referendum decision

In economic terms, the status of the region was remarkably improved after 2003 experiencing an increase in terms of National Income, GDP and GDP per capita of 46.6 per cent, 68.9 per cent and 64.3 per cent respectively, until 2008 (Ministry of Planning, 2011). However, later on, the economy was affected negatively due to disputes with Baghdad over budget allocation and oil exports as well as regional development such as the emergence of ISIS. For instance, GDP experienced an 8 per cent decrease in 2014 while the poverty rate more than doubled in 2015, following the decision of Baghdad to proceed to a cut of the KRG's budget allocation (Manis, 2016).

Even if someone disregards such economic indicators, the Kurdish economy is characterised by significant vulnerability. The KRG employs 53 to 65 per cent of the working population, the economy is excessively dependent on oil while the region possesses an amount of debt of approximately 2,000 billion USD. In recent years, the Kurdish agents have been experiencing a status of reduced or unpaid salaries; a status emanating both from the inability of the political community to proceed to a diversification of the economy or improvement of the private sector, across the years of remarkable prosperity, but also due to the high corruption. Often, political elites have attempted to shift the blame to the war against ISIS and the refugee crisis, but this does not appropriately portray the reality (O'Driscoll, 2017). The new status that emerged was characterised by increased criticism against the Kurdish political community and a perception that the crisis did not affect the rich strata of the society and a necessity of re-approaching Baghdad to solve the budget allocation dispute.

Moreover, the economic status of the region is significantly dependent on the regional relationships with Turkey and Iran. The KRG is not only far from self-sufficient but also excessively dependent on imports from the two countries to satisfy its needs and on Turkey specifically to export its oil (Kirisci, 2011). The two countries clarified their opposition to the referendum and threatened to economically isolate the region upon conducting it (Park, 2018). At the same time, the international community did not express support towards the process; not even the US that attempted to facilitate communication between Erbil and Baghdad prior to the referendum. External recognition remains the most vital element towards the success of a declaration of

independence and the Kurds did not seem to have any of it (Crawford, 1977); an argument further reinforced by Dilshad Hama:

“Many factors played in the failure of the referendum. First, international factors. Not even the US and the European states accepted it was the right time. But the main problem was internal. The referendum occurred during a time of economic turmoil, a time of economic crisis and a time of high corruption. During a time, people were not happy with the way political parties were functioning in the Kurdistan region. There was not a unifying sentiment. Most of the ordinary people voted yes, but political parties had their own agenda. Barzani got the understanding that it was the right time. The Iraqi Government was not playing its role; not only in relation to Kurdistan, but also in relation to other parts of Iraq. The Kurds played a great role against ISIS and proved that they are powerful parties in the region and did not believe that the US would not intervene. They knew that Iran and Turkey would intervene but believed that Western countries would stop them from massacring or invading the Kurdistan region. It was a rather emotional idealistic understanding of international relations rather than a rational one.”⁴⁶

Dilshad Sharif presents his own experience and understanding and argues for the significant role of the absence of international support, saying:

“Twenty days after the death of Nawshirwan Mustafa, on the 7th of June of 2017, Kurdish political parties agreed to go for a referendum and they decided to do that on the 25th of September of 2017. This was a catastrophic decision. Because for you to conduct a referendum, you need to campaign for it. You need enough time to convince your friends and allies why you want to do this. In those three months, there was not much done. Barzani had this belief that we are not going to get abandoned. We always have this kind of naïve belief that we are going to be helped. No country endorsed the referendum. Internally, everybody had to support the referendum because anybody against it would be considered a Jash. I was against the referendum but at 16:00 on the day of the referendum, I thought that in thirty or forty years, when my kids will ask me what I voted on that day, I would not want to say that I voted against the independence of Kurdistan. I thought that in my life I was going to see a Kurdish state. But after this strong strategy that we used to do our referendum, unfortunately I am not sure whether in my life I will see it”.⁴⁷

The poor economic and regional status obviously did not favour the process. Thus, it is important to understand the political background that generated the motives for conducting a referendum. When in 2015, the KDP sought the extension of the Barzani’s

⁴⁶ Interview with Dr Dilshad Hama: Head of IRD Department and Lecturer of International Relations and Diplomacy at Tishk International University [Conducted on: 03 April 2020].

⁴⁷ Interview with Dilshad Sharif: Assistant Lecturer in International Relations and Diplomacy at the Tishk International University and Senior Adviser to the Kurdistan Parliament [Conducted on: 28 March 2020].

presidency term for the second time, the Gorran party opposed it and protests emerged outside the KDP's offices in Sulaymaniyah resulting in five people being killed (Stevenson, 2017). The KDP's political response was to exclude the five Gorran ministers from the cabinet and prevent the party's Parliament Speaker to enter Erbil; thus, suspending the parliament. Barzani continuing serving as a president in the absence of a functioning parliament and this created rising political instability (O'Driscoll, 2017). The decision of the PUK and Gorran which had 42 seats together to proceed to an agreement for a partnership acted as a challenge to the political dominance of the KDP that had 38 on its own (Salih, 2017).

The new political landscape generated motives for action to respond to the challenges and the referendum acted as a distraction and as an instrument towards national unification behind the KDP. The referendum was called by Barzani himself and was approved by the parliament just a week before the day of the referendum (Stevenson, 2017, p. 3). The nationalist rhetoric that was developed until the parliamentary approval rendered a possible opposition to it as inconceivable since it would reflect an opposition to Kurdish nationalism. Yet, it is worth mentioning that only approximately 60 per cent of the MPs participated in the voting procedure while Gorran attempted to boycott the meeting and PUK asked from Barzani on the 23rd of September to postpone the referendum (Hama and Jasim, 2017, p. 59). Barzani proceeded since this was the only way to counter the financial and political challenges, nationally unite the Kurdish agency behind him and legitimise his nationalist project as the dominant one (O'Driscoll and Baser, 2019, p. 2023). The Kurdish agency, overly affected by a rhetoric encompassing references of past struggle and suffering, constructed a perception that independence was indeed feasible which acted as a distraction from the poor and unfavourable dynamics surrounding the referendum, as demonstrated by Archer's (1995) framework:

- a) Structural conditioning (T1) – referring to the large structural and cultural context formed after the establishment of a new socio-political landscape characterised by political and financial challenges and the disagreements between Erbil and Baghdad over budget allocation
- b) Socio-Cultural Interaction (T2-T3) – referring to the interactions of the Kurdish agents determined by cultural motivations subject to the reproduction of ethno-

nationalist narratives and structural motivations subject to the financial differences between Erbil and Baghdad

- c) Structural Elaboration (T4) – referring to morphogenesis through the formation of a new set of structural subject to the perception of an unfair treatment by Baghdad and cultural motivations subject to the increase of ethno-nationalist sentiments and the development of the perception of a feasible independence under the current landscape which distracted agents from the unfavourable regional dynamics.

The next day after the referendum saw the western allies of the Kurds refusing to support the outcome; a decision in alliance with Caspersen's (2011) assertion that the international community prioritises stability over democratisation. This was demonstrated when the US recommended a process of negotiations for a year between Erbil and Baghdad with the possibility of referendum in case of unfruitful outcomes; but a cancellation of the referendum would equal to a political defeat of Barzani given the nationalist rhetoric that determined the political battle. Barin Kayaoglu argues for increased attention to a misperception of the Turkish political agenda which determined the Kurdish political action:

“I think the KDP put too many chips on the Turkish side of the roulette table. When Barzani met with Erdogan in Ankara, the Kurdish flag was at the airport. They essentially gave him the head of government's welcome. So, a lot of people took this as a sign that Erdogan was just going to get along with the KRG. Erdogan did not really start speaking out against the referendum until very late in the game. It was only in late August or early September that Ankara started making a serious noise. There was a miscalculation definitely on the part of Barzani not to pay close attention to domestic Turkish political. And of course, you can proceed without Turkey, if you have Iran and Russia or the United States on your side. But we actually had a person from the US State Department visiting our university before the referendum and telling both the young audience at the university and the interlocutors that they would support the Kurds if they sat down with Abadi and tried to solve their disputes first.”⁴⁸

Yet, it is important to note that a political battle over the nationalist agenda does reinforce and unite a nation (Hutchinson, 2005); even if Barzani purely employed it seeking consolidation of power. The paradox of the process is portrayed by the

⁴⁸ Interview with Dr Barin Kayaoglu: Assistant Professor of World History at the American University of Iraq [Conducted on: 10 May 2020].

democratic expression of the Kurdish population against the undemocratic tendencies of the ruling political elite to maintain its political hegemony.

10. Conclusion

The current chapter has analysed how Kurdish nationalism coexists and is shaped by both internal and external forces which function as obstacles in terms of the development of a unified Kurdish national movement. From a cultural point of view, Kurdish communities across the Middle East share a common sense of identity, but subject to the distinct political, economic and ideological trajectories experienced across time and space, they have manifested their claims in distinct ways. Processes of cultural and structural elaboration have generated distinct manifestations of Kurdish nationalism defined by factors such as the nature of political elites and the relationship with central governments. Subject to the impact of these processes, Iraqi Kurdistan has developed a distinct nationalist project which is not only unique compared to other Kurdish regional projects but often deviates from the common denominator of what would someone call as ethnic understanding of policymaking.

As demonstrated across the chapter, after 2003, the Iraqi Kurds have been acting within a space of a distinct political, economic and ideological nature and development when compared to either the rest of Iraq or the Kurds outside Iraq. New structural and cultural constraints were formed subject to the experience of a distinct political realm, the regional economic development and the incorporation of liberal elements into the nationalist sentiment at the expense of the traditional understanding of Kurdish nationalism while the pressure of the rising influence of political Islam across the rest of Iraq was unable to generate morphostasis and replace the nation as the primary form of identification.

Across the same period, the region experienced the persistence of inter-Kurdish and intra-Kurdish rivalries which also altered the internal dynamics and the nature of the nationalist project of Iraqi Kurds. A nationalist project, however, which had to coexist with a state-building process of a highly problematic nature and which led to the independence referendum of 2017 and the debatable motives behind it. The incorporation of civic elements into the nationalist sentiments through a process of morphogenesis, did indeed create new structural and cultural constraints determining

the behaviour of the agency that demonstrated demands for democratisation, transparency and end of corruption. However, the disagreements between Erbil and Baghdad over budget allocation and the increase of ethno-nationalist narratives prior to the referendum, resulted in another morphogenetic cycle which led to the perception of a feasible independence under the landscape of 2017 despite the unfavourable regional dynamics.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has utilised two theoretical approaches to conceptualise Kurdish nationalism in Iraq and understand its development across time and space, with a special focus on the post-2003 period: ethno-symbolism and Critical Realism. It has demonstrated the unique trajectory of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq when compared to other forms of Kurdish nationalism outside Iraq, which has resulted in a distinct sentiment of belonging which is not only shaped by political and agential action but simultaneously determines them as well. The thesis set out to answer three research questions:

1. To what extent has the post-2003 trajectory of Iraqi Kurdish nationalism been affected by social, economic, political and ideological factors across time and space?
2. To what extent has Iraqi Kurdish nationalism been enhanced with civic elements subject to the political development of the region?
3. To what extent have the post-2003 decisions of political elites in Iraqi Kurdistan been influenced by the ethnic structures of nationalism in the form of an ethno-nationalist project?

By responding to these questions, the thesis makes four claims to originality:

1. The theoretical and empirical claim for a case of a modern nation which has been gradually constructed around a pre-modern core which results to the academic reinforcement of the ethno-symbolist school of thought with regard to Iraqi Kurdistan and the contribution to the nationalism debate.
2. The theoretical claim for the existence of both observed and unobserved structures in the social world that need to be ontologically appreciated in a Critical Realist manner which accounts for the fact that agency, culture and social structures are in a constant cyclical process of change of an interlocking and complex character, with nationalism being subject to morphogenesis or morphostasis within this context
3. The theoretical development and methodological application of a morphogenetic cyclical framework encompassing the effects of social, historical, economic and political factors, to empirically examine the post-2003

development of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq and determine certain circumstances which facilitated or hampered this development

4. The empirical claim of how civic and ethnic elements have interacted in the case of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq to generate nationalistic distinctiveness

This conclusion offers an overview of the key findings of the thesis followed by an analysis of how the thesis has responded to the research questions set in the introductory chapter. It will then analyse the very specific claims to originality made by the author of the thesis in terms of academic contribution. The last part will analyse the main limitations of the research project and will depict how the current thesis and its results can be used as a basis for future research.

1. Structure of the thesis

Chapter I of the thesis situated Kurdish nationalism within Iraq within the nationalism debate by critically evaluating the dominant approaches which comprise the field of nationalism studies and determining ethno-symbolism as the most appropriate one in terms of understanding the cultural component of modern Kurdish nationalism. Nationalistic development is understood as a cyclical morphogenetic process within a structure-agency context in accordance with Margaret Archer's (1995) Critical Realist framework of morphogenesis; thus, Critical Realism is used in a complementary manner in order to explain the changing nature of nationalism across time and space and especially with regard to the incorporation of political elements apart from cultural ones subject to ethno-symbolism.

Chapter II of the thesis provided a historical account of the Kurdish nation and of Kurdish nationalism by determining their origins and analysing their development and transformation across time and space. The Kurdish presence within the Ottoman Empire is of fundamental importance in terms of understanding this development both when it comes to understanding the effect of the transition away from a religious and towards a national understanding of the Empire and when it comes to understanding the effect of the engagement with the Western concept of the nation-state which led to the politicisation of the Kurdish national identity and the enhancement of the Kurdish national awareness.

The establishment of the modern state of Iraq subject to the perceived illegitimate outcome of the Sevres Treaty accompanied by perceived intra-state injustices of ethnic nature generated a very specific set of structural and cultural constraints which enhanced 'othering' sentiments, increased the distance between the Kurds and their sense of attachment to Iraq and increased the resistance to the imposition of an Arab identity on the state; all of these elements, collectively, enhanced national awareness. The 1961 rise of the national movement which attracted all members of the social strata against any tribal or religious divisions was the outcome of the aforementioned constraints which generated resistance towards any process of homogenisation that would lead to an Arab intra-state dominance. The Ba'athist years contributed even further in terms of alienating the Kurds from the state and contributing towards the perception of national distinctiveness and eventually resulting to a 1976 resurgence of the national movement. The Ba'athist withdrawal from Iraqi Kurdistan functioned as the most fundamental emergent property in terms of altering the Kurdish nationalism's dynamics, with the establishment of the KRG and the political process that survives since the 1990s enriching nationalism with political components rather than solely cultural ones and elevating the Kurdish nation as the absolute realm of political loyalty.

Chapter III analysed the ethnic component of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq emanating from the cultural understanding of identity through the employment of the theory of ethno-symbolism and the six elements of ethnic nations as determined by Anthony Smith (1986). The Kurds do satisfy these elements as demonstrated across the chapter by substantiating a claim for the existence of a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, a collective proper name, an association with a demarcated territorial homeland and a sense of solidarity among the population. Across the chapter, it is argued that ethnic sentiments remain strong in terms of determining the behaviour of the Kurdish agents manifested in the form of shared cultural values and practices. The fact that the political process facilitated after 2003 altered the nature of the nationalistic sentiment to incorporate political and more rational elements is appreciated as demonstrated by the behaviour of the Kurdish political elites.

However, the chapter substantiates the idea that ordinary Kurdish agents continue to emphasise their common roots and their emotional attachment to their history and symbols which are perceived far stronger in sentimental terms when compared to the

rational attachment to any institution. Moreover, this ethnic sentiment has been proved resilient in an extraordinary manner and is the one that enabled Kurdish nationalism to survive and has been the one to mobilise collective action and willingness to sacrifice at critical historical moments for the Kurdish nation. The last part of the chapter proceeded to an analysis of how nationalism operates within a context strongly influenced by social objects of structural (e.g., power and tribalism) and cultural form (e.g., democracy and ideal governance) and how it transforms subject to the interaction with these structures; thus, stressing the need for a holistic approach when evaluating the phenomenon.

Chapter IV analysed the several contradictions that characterise the relationship between ethnic and civic nationalism, with the former constructing a structural sentiment of a cultural irrational nature that attracts legitimacy from the common roots and the shared culture and the latter constructing a structural sentiment of a rational political nature that attracts legitimacy from the common political rights, the common law and the common citizenship of the individuals that constitute the civic nation. In contrast to the rest of the Kurds across the Middle East, the Iraqi Kurds have incorporated political elements into their emotional structural of ethno-national connection subject to their membership and participation in their own institutions. More specifically, they have created a rational structure of civic connection based on their common citizenship which emanates from the establishment of such an autonomy that resembles a sovereign state. The process of elaboration has been determined by structural motivations due to the establishment of democratic institutions and the satisfaction of national self-determination; however, across time cultural motivations due to the adoption of democratic political principles have contributed in terms of reinforcing and maintaining the civic structure. Across the chapter, it has been argued that this civic attachment shapes the expectations of the agents but also determines political actions; yet, the conscious effort of Kurdish political elites to construct a civic nation by promoting the evolution of national identification structures should not be taken lightly as it was proved to be rational way of enhancing unity and stability among the agents.

Chapter V analysed how Kurdish nationalism coexists but is also shaped by both internal and external forces which function as inevitable obstacles for the linear

development of a unified Kurdish national movement. A common cultural identity does exist to a large extent but different Kurdish communities subject to distinct political, economic and ideological trajectories across time and space, have manifested their claims in distinct ways. As demonstrated across the chapter, processes of cultural and structural elaboration have been the source of distinct manifestations of Kurdish nationalism differing in terms of factors such as the nature of political elites and their relationship to the sovereign structures of power. Especially, across the post-2003 era, the Iraqi Kurds have been acting within a distinct space when compared to either the rest of Iraq or the Kurdish communities outside Iraq while also experiencing the persistence of intra-Kurdish and inter-Kurdish rivalries altering the internal dynamics and the nature of the Iraqi Kurdish nationalist project. The 2017 Iraqi Kurdish referendum is being discussed towards the end of the chapter to substantiate a claim regarding its irrational nature.

2. Research Questions

The thesis has been focused around answering three main research questions. More specifically:

1. To what extent has the post-2003 trajectory of Iraqi Kurdish nationalism been affected by social, economic, political and ideological factors across time and space?
2. To what extent has Iraqi Kurdish nationalism been enhanced with civic elements subject to the political development of the region and to what extent do those elements determine the behaviour of the agents?
3. To what extent have the post-2003 decisions of political elites in Iraqi Kurdistan been influenced by the ethnic structures of nationalism in the form of an ethno-nationalist project?

With regard to the first research question and the extent to which the post-2003 trajectory of Iraqi Kurdish nationalism has been affected by social, economic, political and ideological factors across time and space, the thesis has demonstrated across Chapter V, through the employment of the Critical Realist morphogenetic framework that nationalistic development has indeed been determined by the KRG's political development and the establishment of institutions, the post-2003 economic

advancement of the region and the ideological incorporation of democratic ideals subject to an ideological development that occurred within a trans-national sphere. All these, collectively, have led to the formation of a new set of structural and cultural constraints. The primary aim of the current thesis has been the development of an appropriate methodological framework through which the development of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq after 2003 would be convincingly traced, analysed and understood but which could also be potentially useful within the field of nationalism studies for the purpose of conceptualising nationalistic development. The Critical Realist morphogenetic framework of Margaret Archer (1995) accounts convincingly for the effects of social, economic, political and ideological factors across a nationalistic process and allows the researcher to develop a meaningful connection between the changing nature of nationalism and the changing expectations and behaviour of agents. Moreover, the framework demonstrates how agents and social structures are in a constant cyclical process of change of an interlocking and complex character and that nationalism is subject to change within this context.

With regard to the second research question and the extent to which Iraqi Kurdish nationalism has been enhanced with civic elements, the thesis has demonstrated across Chapter IV that in the case of Iraqi Kurds, the altruistic ethnic element of belonging tends to coexist with a more rational element of civic attachment. The Kurds across the Middle East have historically created an emotional structure of ethno-national attachment based on their common cultural traits as analysed across Chapter III. The Iraqi Kurds, however, being subject to their membership and participation in their own institutions, have created a rational structure of civic connection based on their common citizenship which historically emanates from the establishment of the KRG and the autonomy of the region. The process of elaboration emanated mainly from structural motivations due to the establishment of democratic institutions and the satisfaction of national self-determination; however, across time cultural motivations due to the adoption of democratic political principles have contributed in terms of reinforcing and maintaining the civic structure. The rational structure of civic connection determines the behaviour of the agents in two ways. Firstly, it shapes the expectations of a population that experienced the civic institutions and principles and desires their maintenance and, secondly, it determines political action by requiring from the political

community and the decision-makers to act accordingly in order to ensure this maintenance.

With regard to the third research question and the extent to which the post-2003 decision-making has been the product of an ethnic nationalist agenda, the thesis has demonstrated across Chapter IV the conscious effort of Kurdish political elites in Iraqi Kurdistan to construct a civic nation by promoting the evolution of national identification structures; thus, creating a distinct sentiment of belonging which is not only a rational way of enhancing unity and stability among the agents but also determines agential expectations and political action. The independence referendum and its contextual background demonstrate convincingly a deviation away from an ethnic and towards a civic understanding of nationalism. As explained in Chapter V, the referendum should be understood as a party rather than a national decision aimed at power consolidation and at responding to the challenges posed by the altered nature of demands of the agents.

3. Claims to originality and academic contribution

The first contribution of the current thesis is its theoretical support and provided academic reinforcement of the ethno-symbolist school of thought, through the demonstration of a case of a nation constructed around a pre-modern ethnic core in the form of an *ethnie*. Ethno-symbolism offers a convincing middle position between the theories of primordialism and modernism, simultaneously embracing the modernity of nations and appreciating the significance of pre-modern ethnic cores (Smith, 2010). The thesis embraces the belief that trans-generational values, perceptions and ideas tend to define ‘ethnies’ and rejects that idea that nations can be simply perceived as contingent phenomena of a modern social order. Through the application of the ethno-symbolist perspective and the six components of ‘ethnies’ as identified by Anthony Smith (1986, p. 32), it has been argued that a strong cultural affinity of the Kurdish agents does exist with their ethnic past and a strong sentimental attachment expressed through altruistic acts able to overpower other significant forms of collective identification.

The second contribution and claim to originality of the current thesis is the endorsement of a Critical Realist social ontology to understand and explain nationalistic development and change. Within a field largely dominated by classic primordial and

modernist approaches (Geertz, 1973; Armstrong, 1982; Van Den Berghe, 1975; Newman, 1991; Hechter, 1975), the employment of such an approach aims at convincingly explaining the interplay between structure and agency and at determining, understanding, appreciating and incorporating all the variables that tend to influence nationalistic development. Apart from acting as a methodological framework, Critical Realism offers a solution to the 'epistemic fallacy' which determines the debate between positivist and post-positivist theoretical standpoints. In an anti-positivist manner, the thesis argues for an appreciation of the ontological status of both observed and unobserved structures in the social world which account for the fact that agency, culture and social structures are in a constant cyclical process of change of an interlocking and complex character, with nationalism being subject to change within the context. Social forces determining the phenomenon are often unobservable but do possess a 'real' nature and only through the understanding of underlying mechanisms in the absence of heavy reliance on identified patterns, nationalism can be conceptually captured convincingly. Critical Realism is proved to be theoretically valuable in terms of dealing with the high complexity which defines causal contexts within which various forces operate and interact with each other.

The third contribution and claim to originality of the thesis is the employment of a very specific Critical Realist methodological framework for the analysis of a nationalistic process. The Critical Realist philosophical stance has been increasingly influential across the fields of Political Theory, Political Science and International Relations as demonstrated by the academic contribution of scholars such as Jessop (2007), Wight (2006), Kurki (2008) and Joseph (2012), in their effort to analyse change across time and space. However, no specific example of its methodological application is evident within the field of nationalism studies. In the current thesis, Kurdish nationalistic development in Iraq is traced, analysed and understood through the employment of the cyclical framework of morphogenesis developed by Margaret Archer (1995) which has not been used within nationalism studies in the past. Apart from recognising in an Aristotelian manner that the perceived reality tends to emerge out of a pre-existing causal context and that the Kurdish nation does possess a pre-modern ethnic core, the framework accounts for the development of nationalism across time and space and the influence of structural and cultural motivations which should be appreciated and understood.

The fourth contribution of the thesis which emanates from the use of the Critical Realist framework, is the appreciation of the fact that modern Kurdish nationalism in Iraq is characterised by both ethnic and civic elements which interact to create a distinct sentiment of belonging when compared to the Kurds in Syria, Iran or Turkey. The thesis has argued for the emergence of a new post-2003 contextual status that determined distinct political, economic and ideological trajectories which influenced the Kurdish sentiment of belonging. At the same time, the thesis has also argued for a conscious effort of political elites of the region to construct a civic nation and enrich national identification with new elements. This whole development has coexisted with a state-building process of a problematic nature exposed in the aftermath of the 2017 independence referendum which is understood by the thesis as a party decision rather than a national decision.

4. Limitations and basis for future research

This thesis faced a number of challenges, both intellectual and practical, predominantly stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. What constitutes the main limitation of the current research study is the limited primary data obtained through interviews; a problem that emanates from the difficulties faced by the author while conducting his field work research in Iraqi Kurdistan in March 2020. The situation related to COVID-19 and the restrictive measures imposed in Iraqi Kurdistan during the field work period prevented the author of the thesis from obtaining the expected data subject to the imposition of a curfew in the region and the subsequent cancellation of numerous interviews. Despite an initial target of 15 elite interviews, four interviews were conducted with Kurdish academics and policymakers which were characterised by remarkable quality in terms of the obtained outcome but as mentioned, the quantity of the interviews deviated from the initial target set prior to the field work research.

In terms of the intellectual challenges, the endorsement of a Critical Realist social ontology by the current thesis has been aiming at stressing the requirement for an anti-positivist stance when it comes to understanding the phenomenon of nationalism and at eliminating any challenges or potential limitations emanating from pre-dominantly positivist stances. As demonstrated across the thesis, the unstable nature of nationalism due to embracing both rational and irrational elements, objective and subjective ones, interacting within a complex social world, renders the employment of a positivist stance

as too simplistic to understand the discursive and the structural elements of the phenomenon; thus, preventing a process of ontological inquiry with regard to observed and unobserved structures in the social world. Thus, the anti-positivist Critical Realist position employed, in accordance with Margaret Archer's (1995) framework of morphogenesis, is an asset rather than a limitation for the thesis which offers a solution to the 'epistemic fallacy' which surrounds the debate between positivist and post-positivist stances.

In terms of the implications of the current study, the most important one remains the methodological framework developed to understand and explain nationalistic development through the endorsement of a distinct Critical Realist ontological metatheoretical position. Despite being influential within Social Sciences, Critical Realism has not attracted the attention it is worth and has not been used yet within the field of nationalism studies. As explained, social forces determining the phenomenon do possess a 'real' nature and should be ontologically defined; thus, if the academia desires to appropriately and convincingly understand nationalism and its underlying mechanisms, then, Critical Realism could potentially be the key to deconstruct the high complexity which characterises causal contexts. Especially with regard to cases, like the Kurdish one, which involve the incorporation of new elements into the nationalist sentiment across time and space subject to structural and cultural motivations, Critical Realism allows for the analysis of the co-existence and interaction of ethnic and civic elements which should be appreciated and understood despite often constituting unobserved social structures.

Moreover, the thesis contributes in terms of understanding the distinct nature of Kurdish nationalism within Iraq when compared to other forms of Kurdish nationalism across the Middle East. This distinct nature is subject to a unique political process that has reinforced civic elements which have been incorporated into the nationalist sentiment. Middle East analysts willing to explain and understand the behaviour of Kurdish agents in Iraq or the actions of the political elites in Iraqi Kurdistan should take into consideration the distinct trajectories and dynamics of the region and how they are shaped by internal and external forces. The current study not only assists towards this direction but also argues for particular attention to those dynamics that should be

appreciated and analysed for purposes of future research either with regard to Iraqi Kurds, Kurds outside Iraq or other nations.

The future research suggestions proposed by the current thesis can be divided into the four following categories: (a) the use of the Critical Realist framework of morphogenesis to understand nationalistic development in different, contexts, locations and cultures (b) the use of ethno-symbolism in combination with a Critical Realist ontological stance to understand the distinct nature of Kurdish nationalism within Syria, Turkey and Iran (c) the comparative analysis between distinct versions of Kurdish nationalism across the Middle East to determine the extent to which the Kurdish nationalist projects are congruent to each other.

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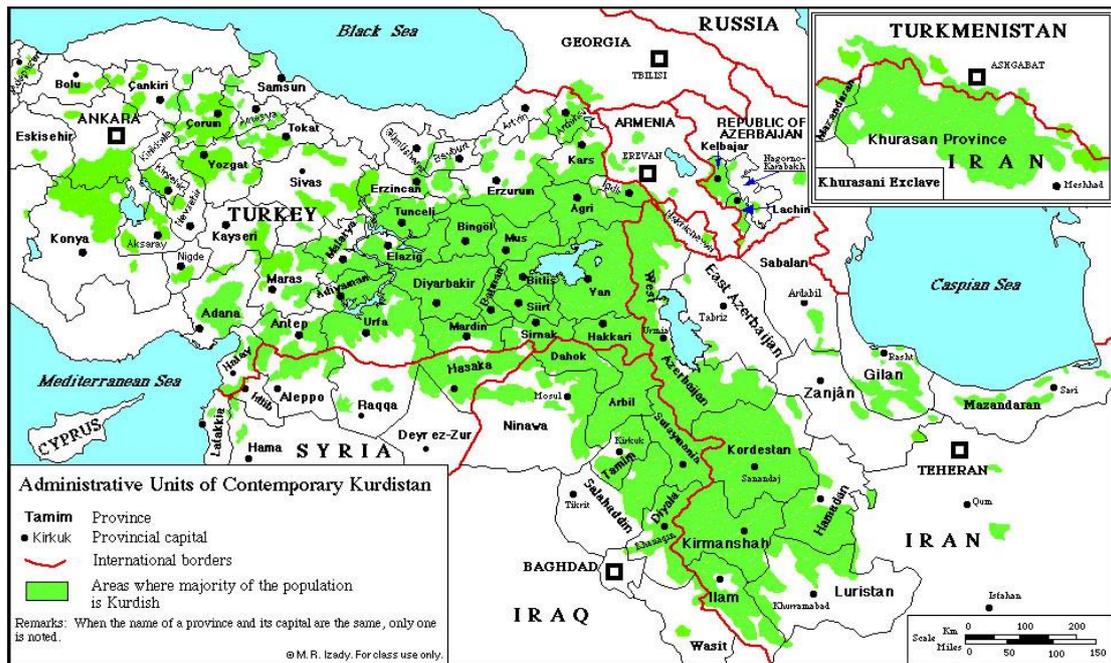
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APPENDICES

Appendix A



Source: The Kurdish Institute of Paris (2021)