Ethnonationalism in Contemporary Context:
Shifting Discourses of Pro-Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey

by

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with identity driven non-state actors in international politics. Recent social movement scholarship, including work on ethnic groups and conflict, has legitimized non-state actors in world politics, through a reexamination of nationalism, ethnicity, ethnic conflict, and violence. This approach links comparative and international politics. By identifying the nature and role of nationalism in its current context, this paper addresses some of the ways in which the ethnicity-nationalism link has been misconstrued by work on ethnic conflict and violence. Although nationalism gives ethnicity a political direction, it is necessary to understand the discourses that are created during this process. I argue that sustained attention needs to be paid to the form and dynamics of ethnonationalism in the contemporary context, using a discursive approach. Examining the narrativizing structures embedded within nationalist movements would help to advance our understanding of contemporary ethnonationalisms, accounting for intra-group fractionalization and conflict. The case of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey will be used to examine how treating nationalist movements as a violent conflict motivated primarily by ethnicity and ethnic identities reifies ethnonationalist movements, treating them as unproblematically homogeneous. By adopting a discursive approach in an examination of contemporary ethnonationalist movements such as the Kurds in Turkey, this thesis facilitates the development of a more nuanced and insightful analysis of the role and function of nationalism today.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	(Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) Justice and Development Party
CHP	(Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi) Republican People's Party
DK	(Devrimci Karargah) Revolutionary Base
DEHAP	(Demokrasi Halkın Partisi) Democratic People's Party
ECHR	European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
HADEP	(Halkın Demokrasi Partisi) People's Democracy Party
HEP	(Halkın Emek Partisi) People's Labour Party
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KHRP	Kurdish Human Rights Project
KIP	(l'Institut Kurde de Paris) Kurdish Institute of Paris
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
NSC	National Security Council (of Turkey)
OSCE	Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe
OZDEP	Freedom and Democracy Party
PKK	(Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan) Kurdistan Worker's Party (also called KADEK, Kongra-Gel, and KGK)
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
SDP	(Sosyalist Demokrasi Partisi) Socialist Democracy Party
TİP	(Turkiye İşçi Partisi) Turkish Workers Party Socialist Party

Introduction

In this thesis, traditional literature on nationalism is problematized in order to demonstrate that the causal link established between nationalism and ethnic conflict relies on the homogonization and reification of ethnic identities. More generally, I argue that these theories rest on an understanding of certain terminologies, including nation, ethnicity, and ethnonationalism, all of which are still contested within scholarly work on nationalism and ethnic conflict. Recent literature on new forms of nationalism will be used to demonstrate that a discursive approach should be used in order to better understand these relationships. Particularly, I argue that a reexamination of ethnonationalism is key to understanding how nationalist movements form, how they survive, and the goals they seek to achieve. Nationalism is best understood not in terms of its relationship to the state or the nation, because these concepts are constantly being constructed and re-constructed. Rather, nationalism should now be understood as a discourse that can operate in a variety of non-traditional contexts. Examining the narrativizing structures embedded within nationalist movements would help to advance our understanding of contemporary ethnonationalisms, accounting for intra-group fractionalization and conflict. The Kurdish case provides both an example of, and demonstrates the necessity of this new approach, illustrating the highly fragmented and variable nature of Kurdish ethnonational identity within the political space of the Turkish state. Ultimately, it is concluded that the limitations imposed by terminologies in both international relations and comparative literatures on their own fail to properly address recent shifts and divergences within contemporary ethnonationalist movements.

Variations in the formation and articulation of sub-state nationalist movements have led to a number of arguments concerning the role and function of ethnonationalist movements. Many

have focused on ethnonationalism in particular, but have misinterpreted nationalism as loyalty to the state, while loyalty to an ethnonational group is often considered under the banner of primordialism, tribalism, regionalism, communalism, parochialism, and subnationalism.[1] As the argument below shall demonstrate, many of the major assessments of nationalism and ethnic conflict have reduced the complexity of ethnonationalism to the banalities of ethnic essentialism, in order to attribute responsibility to particular individuals or groups. At the outset, I explore the relationship that has been established between nation, ethnicity, and nationalism, in order to more clearly establish what is meant by 'ethnic nationalism' in the contemporary context. This includes a discussion of nationalism as a concept and it's role and function today. I then turn to a discussion of how those definitions and relationships are often used by the traditional literature on violence and ethnic conflict, arguing that although nationalism gives ethnicity a political direction, it is necessary to understand the discourses that are created during this process, as well as how they are maintained. Furthermore, traditional theories of nationalism, ethnic conflict, and violence have relied on the belief that political elites, actors, and the leaders of ethnic parties provoke violent conflict by managing the identities they claim to represent. These theories rely on the belief that all nationalisms are state-seeking, and thus unified in preference and goals. Instead, I explore the idea that ethnic identities are strategic and discursively constituted, adopted selectively by both elites and masses in order to achieve recognition and establish legitimacy, in variable and distinct ways. My discussion then turns to an examination of some of the key shifts in political opportunity structures that are often examined in the literature, including the role of elites and other external actors in framing ethnonationalist movements and conflicts. The role and function of identity plays an important part of this process, and I discuss the contributions of

[1] Connor, Walker, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) p.72

critical international relations theory to the study of nationalism and ethnic conflict. I then turn to a discussion of some recent changes to the political opportunity structures and the subsequent shift in discourses of Kurdish nationalism, from 2003-2008. Kurdish nationalism in Turkey is emerging at the popular level that is beyond the control of established political parties, terrorist groups, or other non-state actors. Having demonstrated that the link established between ethnic identity and political violence is questionable at best, it allows us to understand Kurdish nationalism in Turkey as non-homogeneous, contextual, and highly variable. These features illustrate some of the distinct features of contemporary ethnonationalist movements, as well as highlight the necessity of a discursive approach when examining these groups.

Nation, Ethnicity, and Ethnonationalism: Traditional approaches

What is a Nation?

Traditional understandings of nationalism represent an ideology that puts the nation first before all other forms of social and political organization. However, despite extensive theorizing on the relationship between nationalism and ethnicity, the nation as a political entity remains under-theorized in the literature itself. Ernest Gellner, for example, one of the most influential theorists of nationalism, has been criticized for offering a typology of nationalisms without first establishing a clear concept of nation.[2] Many scholarly approaches tend to treat nationalism as a feeling of loyalty to the state, rather than to the nation. Recognition of nations, however, is much more problematic than the recognition of states, leading us to the difficult issue of self-determination, the recognition of peoples, and their possible *right* to statehood. It has been argued that in the case of ethnically divided states, for a political community to form there must be a transcending bond of national unity, such as shared values, religious affiliations, shared

2 Bryant, Christopher G.A., "Civic Nation, Civil Society, Civil Religion," Chapter 6 in *Civil Society: Theory, History, Comparison*, John A. Hall (ed.) (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995) p. 136

symbols, etc. This suggests that the nation is imagined, invented, or reconstructed, stressing the relevance of self-definition.[3] The absence of a dominant nation or ethnic group within an ethnically divided state could potentially encourage the development of a 'transcending bond of national unity' within a shared political community, through the use of psychological elements such as symbols or the invention of tradition. Walker Connor, one of the most influential theorists of contemporary ethnonationalism has focused on the problematic idea of nation-building, critiquing other authors for omitting the crucial psychological elements of ethnicity, while viewing the development of nations and nationalism in terms of the historical trajectories of Western 'nation-states.'[4]

One of the major difficulties in articulating a clear definition of the nation is determining whether it should be based on subjective or objective criteria. Subjectively, members of a nation must feel bound by a sense of solidarity, common culture, and national consciousness.[5] As such, self-identification as part of a particular nation is a key indicator of whether that nation exists- of particular importance for Connor, whose approach infers that the nation is a psychological bond, which unites all members. Objectively, the nation considered to be a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture, a common economy, and common legal rights and duties for all members.[6] Thus, a nation is often considered to be a politicized ethnic group that has acquired its own state, and as such, can only be considered a nation through external legitimization. Despite the existence of subjective

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[3] Nationalism, as Benedict Anderson explains, should be understood by aligning it, not with self-conscious political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which and against which it came into being. For Anderson, nationalism is a phenomenon not to be taken as ontological reality, but rather as the result of an understanding that the nation itself is an "imagined political community." For further reading see Anderson, 1983.

[4] Smith, Anthony D., "Dating the nation" Chapter 3 in *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World: Walker Connor and the study of nationalism*, Daniele Conversi, (ed.) (London: Routledge, 2004) p. 55

[5] Seton-Watson (1977) as cited in Kirisci, K. and Winrow, G. M. (1997) *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-state Ethnic Conflict* (London: Frank Cass, 1997) p. 5

[6] Smith, Anthony D., *National Identity* (Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 1991) p. 14

criteria, it has been argued that without the establishment of a state, or zone of autonomy, the nation cannot truly exist.[7] This approach dictates that the nation must be other-defined, but at the same time should avoid using nation and state interchangably, a problem that has plagued scholarly work in the past.

One of the questions that arises out of these discussions is how to distinguish between a nation and an ethnic group. There has been little agreement on what constitutes a nation itself, insofar as there is no real way to distinguish a nation from other identities, if one is to base a definition upon any single criteria, such as language, ethnicity, common territory, common history, cultural traits, or any number of other variables. Adding to the confusion, some have defined the nation as a self-differentiating ethnic group, postulating a continuity between the ethnic and the national dimensions, and stressing the importance of self-perception.[8] Without clear distinctions, developing a more comprehensive analysis of ethnic conflict becomes difficult. Even if we recognize that individuals may prioritize their commitment to a locality which is smaller or larger than the nation-state, the normative challenges of articulating boundaries will not simply disappear.[9] Our definitions of both nation and ethnicity constitute the conceptual tools at our disposal when trying to theorize the link between nationalism and identity. However, these terms do not adequately address the multiple and often overlapping conceptions of identity that individuals or groups within a population may hold.[10] Although a useful exercise, establishing a definition of nation is ultimately out of the scope of this thesis;

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[7] For approaches to the nation see Smith, 1991 and 2004.

[8] Conversi, Daniele, "Conceptualizing Nationalism: An introduction to Walker Connor's work", Chapter 1 in *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World: Walker Connor and the study of nationalism*, Daniele Conversi, (ed.) (London: Routledge, 2004) p. 3

[9] Benhabib, Seyla, "Democratic Iterations" Chapter 5 in *Identities, Affiliations, and Allegiances*, S.Benhabib, I. Shapiro, D. Petranovic, (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp. 226-256, p.174

[10] Kirisci, K. and Winrow, G. M., *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-state Ethnic Conflict* (London: Frank Cass, 1997) p.3

furthermore, it is recognized that a stable and fixed idea of nation may limit our ability to move forward in an examination of nationalism today.

What is ethnicity?

There has been considerable disagreement amongst political scientists, as well within other social science disciplines, about which identities should be classified as ethnic, what constitutes an ethnicity, and furthermore, what constitutes an ethnic identity. Ethnicity, in its most basic sense, is "the social reproduction of basic classificatory differences between categories of people as to aspects of gain and loss in social interaction."[11] This definition implies that ethnic identities are socially constructed and reproduced through social interactions, an effect that can be ranked and systematized. Ethnicity itself is driven largely by the myth of a common ancestry, leading to the perception of commonality within ethnic groups-members must be conscious of belonging or membership. As a *belief* in some form of putative descent, it may or may not be real, but nevertheless exists as a perception of commonality. Ethnonationalism, then, has been used to reinforce the ethnic factors, group characteristics, and preferences that constitute the basis of a nation.

Conversely, Kanchan Chandra defines ethnic *identities* as a subset of identity categories in which eligibility for membership is determined by attributes associated with, or believed to be associated with, descent.[12] These descent-based attributes are not fixed, but some are difficult to change; as such, only some of the attributes associated with ethnic identity can be observed through what Chandra terms "superficial observation." Claims as to why ethnic variables

[11] Eriksen, Thomas Hylland, "Ethnicity versus Nationalism," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 28, No.3 (1991) p. 264

[12] Chandra, Kanchan, "What is Ethnic Identity and Does it Matter?" *Annual Review of Political Science,* Vol. 9 (2006) pp. 397-424, p. 398. Similarly, Walker Connor has stressed the subjective and psychological quality of this perception, rather than its objective substance, noting that perceptions are just as important if not more important than reality when it comes to ethnic issues. For further reading see Connor, 1993 and 1997

"matter" for some outcome, therefore, are always based on the assumption that ethnic identities have particular properties that explain that outcome.[13] This belief has been the driving force behind much work on primordialism; not necessarily a belief in the fixity of ethnic identities, but rather the unwillingness to address ethnonationalism as a relevant and contemporary phenomenon. Chandra concludes that in fact, it has not been shown that ethnic identity "matters" in determining causality in a number of important instances; concepts such as ethnic diversity, ethnic riots, ethnic parties, ethnic violence, ethnic conflict, and so on.[14]

Because it is so broad, and possesses no analytically distinct categories, ethnicity is not only difficult to define, but because of its characteristics, is often conflated with nationalism. Ethnic conflict, for example, is often considered to be the result of nationalism; similarly, nationalist or successionist movements are often considered to be motivated primarily by ethnic factors.[15] Ethnic groups are usually depicted as more exclusive, and nations as more inclusive entities. Ethnic groups that have become the dominant ethnic cores of a nation may still pursue a policy of forced inclusiveness through assimilation and integration. Therefore, if a nation is defined in terms of its ethnicity, the inclusive nature of the nation is severly curtailed by the exclusive boundaries of ethnic groups. Moreover, nationalism becomes a force that serves to politicize ethnic identities against the exclusivity of the state itself. Thus, although nations are commonly politicized ethnic groups that have acquired their own state, the state is by no means

[13] Chandra, "What is Ethnic Identity and Does it Matter?" (2006) p.398
[14] Ibid., p.298.
[15] Harff and Gurr distinguish between four types of politically active ethnic groups that coexist within modern states: ethnonationalists, indigenous peoples, ethnoclasses, and communal contenders. For more on this system of classification, as well as the terms of distinction, see Harff, Barbara and Tedd Robert Gurr, 2004. Gurr has been a leading figure in the study of political violence, using statistical analysis of large data sets, known as the inductive approach. His first major work (1970) outlined an "integrated theory of political violence" as the outcome of the politicization and activation of discontent arising from relative deprivation, while not specifically addressing the role of ethnicity.

necessary in order for nationalism to develop; indeed, as we will see, the unifying goal of achieving statehood does not necessarily need to be present.

Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Ethnic Conflict: Exploring the Links

Nationalism, as Benedict Anderson argues, should be understood by aligning it, not with self-conscious political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which and against which it came into being.[16] For Anderson, nationalism is a phenomenon not to be taken as ontological reality, but rather as the result of an understanding that the nation itself is an "imagined political community."[17] This process of 'imagining the state' allowed for the advancement and dissemination of the idea that the nation was a fixed referent object, upon which identity could be formed. Among contemporary theorists of nationalism, Anderson most emphatically stresses the idea that nations are *constructions*, a helpful point of departure in determining the relevance of nationalism in the contemporary context. Although the rise of modern nationalism is one of the most prominent and overarching themes in the scholarly work on the relationships between the nation and the state, Eric Hobsbawm suggests that both 'nation' and 'nationalism' are no longer adequate in their description of the political entities as such. To Hobsbawm, the nation is seen as the product of both modern nationalisms, which seek to make national identity supreme, and to the development of modern territorial states, which organizes the citizens under the banner of a singular nation.[18] He argues that nationalism is no longer the historical force it was in the era between the French Revolution and the end of WWII, and in fact that nationalist movements since that time have been the attempt to construct what was in fact

[16] Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* (New York: Verso, 1983) p.12
[17] Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* p.6
[18] Chernilo, Daniel, *A Social Theory of the Nation State: The Political Forms of Modernity Beyond Methodological Nationalism*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2007) p. 122

the opposite of the "ethnically and linguistically homogeneous entities which came to be seen as the standard form of 'nation-state' in the west."[19]

Modernist theories, such as those developed by Gellner and Connor, see the development of ethnic nationalism as a consequence of economic modernization and the development of the modern state. When the state or society poses ascriptive barriers to upward mobility for minority groups, they may develop separatist nationalist movements.[20] Very often, modernist theories address the notion of political legitimacy, and thus, the role of elites as central in the process of nationalism. One of the major shortcomings in the literature on ethnic and nationalist conflict lies in the lack of a precise definition of ethnonationalism. Walker Conner, one of the first scholars to systematically address the lack of an appropriate terminology in the study of nationalism, uses ethnonationalism to denote both loyalty to a nation deprived of its own state and the loyalty to an ethnic group embodied in a specific state.[21] This is addressed by Gagnon, who defines ethnic nationalism as the rhetoric by which political actors describe, justify, and explain policies with reference to the interest of the nation defined in ethnic terms[22]- a significant departure, then, from theories of nationalism developed by Anderson or Ernest Gellner, who rely primarily on the role of sentiment or belief.[23] However, very few of the current scholars of nationalism and ethnicity have attempted to address the character of ethnonational bonds in a sustained or

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[19] Hobsbawm, Eric J., *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) p.169

[20] Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War" The American Political Science Review, Vol. 97, No. 1 (Feb., 2003), pp. 75-90, p. 78

[21] Conversi, "Conceptualizing nationalism: An introduction to Walker Connor's work" Chapter 1 in *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World*, p.2. Conversi has written extensively on the work of Walker Connor, whose work has become seminal in most conventional literature on nationalism and particularly, ethnonationalism. For further reading see Connor (1973, 1987, 1994, 1995, 1999)

[22] Gagnon, V.P., "Ethnic Nationalism and Internal Conflict: The Case of Serbia", p. 133

[23] Anderson's analysis of the development of nationalism and the nation is, although rather universalistic, still a 'softer' analytic definition of nationalism. Ernest Gellner, conversely, provides a 'harder' definition, based on the liberal-individualist understanding of nationalism as it has emerged in the West. For Gellner, the "othering" of the subject is a necessity, in developing an understanding of nationalism rooted in the division of labour within a society. The author maintains that the problem of nationalism does not arise when there is no state, as nationalism holds that the nation and the state were destined for each other, and either without the other is incomplete. For further reading see Gellner, 1983.

attentive way. Below, I examine some of the ways in which these theories have been used to develop an understanding of the links between nationalism, ethnic conflict and violence, as well as the subsequent implications.

Approaches to Ethnic Conflict

In *Ethnic Groups in Conflict,* Donald Horowitz suggested that individual and group behaviour, viewed from the lens of psychology, could lead to a better understanding of ethnonationalism. This, he argued, could inform our understanding of conflict as motivated by changes in individual and group dynamics in society and the incidence of ethnic conflict. Because ethnonationalism has not been adequately addressed, he argues that this has led to the lack of an appropriate distinction between mobilization in defense of culture, and the political use of ethnicity for the purpose of establishing boundaries.[24] Although Horowitz provides a useful guide for understanding the key components of ethnically motivated conflict, it alone cannot adequately account for the changes in political opportunity structures within ethnic groups themselves, nor does it accurately assess their potential response. Existing approaches often assume either that ethnic sentiment itself is the main cause of ethnic conflict, or that external security concerns lead elites to 'inflame' such sentiment.[25] This is the result of the more general approach to violent conflict in the international arena, which is often described and justified in the literature through religion, class, and culture, as well as nationalism and ethnicity.

The assumption of universality or uniformity among ethnic conflicts is, according to Horowitz, leading to an increase in ethnic claims that demonstrate the use of a common rhetoric. Ethnonationalist movements very often fall into this pattern, advocating for a 'national

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[24] Conversi, "Conceptualizing nationalism: An introduction to Walker Connor's work", p. 13
[25] Gagnon, V.P., "Ethnic Nationalism and Internal Conflict: The Case of Serbia", p. 133. Examples of these works include, with regards to external security concerns, Mearshimer, "Back to the Future"; Posen, "Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power," *International Security* Vol. 18 No. 2 (Fall 1993), pp. 80-124

homeland' or a 'unified nation-state' free from external control and repression. Because of this, he argues that the control of the state, and exemption from control by others are among the main goals of ethnic conflict.[26] This has been, up until recently, been very often the case; during the time of writing, most of the 'ethnic conflicts' studied were, in fact, state seeking. However, the current international climate is increasingly less receptive to these demands, as traditional conflicts are replaced with ideologically motivated wars, concerned less with territorial claims and more focused on identity politics. Furthermore, the decisions of elites and 'rational actors' remain limited in scope. As such, traditional theories of ethnic conflict are less and less likely to be able to address the ethnonationalist movements we are witnessing today.

An ethnic conflict is a dispute about important political, economic, social, cultural, or territorial issues between two or more ethnic communities.[27] Conflict between groups is often considered to be a cohesive factor, determining whether an ethnic group or nation is able to 'flourish' within a state wherein another ethnic group is dominant. This may help to establish and maintain an ethnic group's identities and boundaries, specifically with regards to instances of trans-state ethnic conflict. It may also, however, result in the disintegration of groups or lead to the emergence of a despotism in cases wherein group cohesion is weak. [28] This type of conflict has become increasingly prevalent within the post-Cold War world, although many have placed too much emphasis on the resulting traumas of state collapse in the Soviet and Yugoslav cases, often treating all of Central and Eastern Europe as a hotbed of ethnic and nationalist violence.[29] A successful ideology, whether nationalist or ethnic, must simultaneously legitimize a social

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[26] Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985). In his discussion of the relationships between ethnic conflict and party politics in severely divided societies, Horowitz uses a number of case studies within Africa, including Sierra Leone, Uganda, Nigeria, and Guyana, in order to identify actors as well as factors conditioning the outbreak of violence in those countries.
[27] Brown, M.E., as cited in Kirisci and Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-state Ethnic Conflict,* p. 18
[28] Kirisci and Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-state Ethnic Conflict,* p. 17
[29] For further analysis of the implications of this trend see Brubaker and Laitin, 1998; Dodds, 2000.

order, such as a power structure, while providing a meaningful framework for the articulation of important, perceived needs and wishes of its adherents.[30] This approach lends itself not only to the importance of language and discourse in the process, but also to the consequences of improper or ill-defined terminology.

In traditional international relations literature, ethnic politics is often considered to be a zero-sum game, in which making one group better off necessarily implies making another worse off. Kurdish nationalists, for example, representing what is seen to be specific and distinct ethnic group preferences that are recognizably associated with 'Kurds' in Turkey, are often treated as state seeking and inherently violence-prone. However, as Chandra notes, for a zero-sum conflict of the above type to exist, there must exist stable groups with a collective preference for a single alternative. State-seeking nationalisms seem to provide a good example of a zero-sum conflict, given that a gain in territory for one group automatically results in the loss of territory for another. However, this assumes a unified group preference, or set of goals, within the nationalist movement itself. Furthermore, in order for a zero-sum conflict to exist even as a subset of cases, a single group will and stable group boundaries must also exist.[31] This type of unified group preference has become increasingly rare, and is reflected in the contemporary context of nationalism, which is neither territorially secure nor stable. Additionally, the number of nationalist movements continuing to seek autonomy or independent statehood is in decline. Recognizing these substantial changes, realist theories of ethnic conflict based on the assumption of a unified group preference and stable group boundaries no longer provide us with an adequate examination of the link between nationalism, ethnic identity, and violent conflict.

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[30] Eriksen, Thomas Hylland, "Ethnicity versus Nationalism," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 28, No.3 (1991) p.263

[31] Chandra, Kanchan, "Ethnic Bargains, Group Instability, and Social Choice Theory" *Politics and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Sep., 2001) pp. 337-362, p.342

Nationalism and ethnic conflict have been explored from a wide range of disciplines, and have gained in prominence from various scholars in a number of fields, including international relations, comparative, and theoretical perspectives. This has led to a significant debate over whether and how each inductive or theoretical approach accounts for instances of conflict or violence. Constructivist approaches to ethnic identity, notes Chandra, which emphasize the existence of diverse preferences within ethnic groups, and the fluidity of the boundaries of such groups, have more or less become conventional.[32] Although Fearon and Laitin argue that constructivist explanations for ethnic violence tend to merge with culturalist accounts, by now, the origins of ethnic group mobilization have more or less moved beyond the view normally associated with primordialism. Appropriately, the authors return to the question of what the proposition "identities are socially constructed" means. An ethnic affiliation, they argue, is too narrow, and instead should "invoke a *specific process* by which identities are produced and reproduced in action and speech."[33] What remains unclear are the shifts that cause divergences and fractionalization within those groups. Understanding that there are diverse preferences within ethnic groups is essential, but understanding how and why those diverse preferences *emerge* is key. Understanding the 'specific process' by which this takes place to be informed through a nationalist sentiment does not account for these divisions. If we are to take ethnicity and nationality more seriously, as Brubaker and Laitin suggest, we must pay 'sustained attention' not only to the forms and dynamics of ethnicization, but the variations within the identities that allow ethnicity and nationality to become politicized.[34] If we identify major shifts within these

[32] Chandra, "Ethnic Bargains, Group Instability, and Social Choice Theory" p. 342
[33] Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity" *International Organization* Vol. 54, No. 4, (Autumn 2000) pp. 845–877, p. 850, emphasis original.
[34] Brubaker, Rogers and David D. Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence" *Annual Review of Sociology,* Vol. 24 (1998) pp. 423–52, p. 427

groups, it may allow us to come to a more nuanced understanding of group preferences, and how they mobilize on the basis of ethnicity and nationality.

Sustaining the traditional discourse of nationalism, while witnessing events that supersede or even contradict our expectations of how these processes take place have left many authors, including a number in the constructivist camp, unable to produce general statements about how this process actually works.[35] This has been problematic for a number of regards, most notably, in the sustained approach to ethnic and nationalist violence that treats nationalism as a fixed, identifiable, and homogenizing process. The clear and identifiable goal of state-formation is no longer enough to serve as a unifying mechanism within a nationalist movement. While the *outcome* of nationalism may continue to be the same (a unified sense of national identity), the *process* by which this national identity is created has become vastly different.

Ethnic and Nationalist Violence

Traditional international relations approaches to political violence have only treated ethnicity as an incidental and peripheral factor in a movement's potential for violence. Stephen Van Evera's essay on *Hypotheses on Nationalism and War* provides a framework of four attributes, which are used to evaluate whether a nationalist movement has a large or small potential to produce violence. These attributes are 1) the movement's political status (statehood attained or unattained), 2) the movement's stance toward its national diaspora, 3) the movement's stance toward other nations, and 4) the movement's treatment of its own minorities. Beyond these four variables lie a number of factors that determine whether these four variables will lead to violence, discussed in terms of "benign or malignant values."[36] The problem with this approach, as is common with realist approaches to violence, is that it treats the state as a

[35] Fearon and Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity" p. 850
[36] Van Evera, Stephen, "Hypotheses on Nationalism and War", in *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict,* Brown, Michael E. *et al* (eds), (Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 1996-1997)

unitary actor, construing nation and state as congruent. To quantify a propensity for violence in this manner is to assume a distinct and unified set of preferences within that group, which is increasingly rare. Furthermore, it assumes particular features of ethnic nationalist movements to hold true in every situation, based on the assumption that ethnic identities have particular properties that explain the emergence of nationalist violence.

In *Violence and the Social Construction of Identity,* Fearon and Laitin seek to examine whether they can reject the hypothesis that the social construction of ethnicity has little or no bearing on the likelihood of ethnic violence.[37] Finding that there is considerable evidence linking strategic aspects of the construction of ethnic identities to violence, they offer a more "contingent view" of the link between ethnic cleavages and conflict, stressing the importance of divisions as intentional and strategic resources for group formation, interest definition, and mobilization.[38] In addition, they find more limited evidence implicating specific cultural or discursive systems, arguing that constructivist explanations for ethnic violence merge with culturalist accounts wherein "some or all discourses of ethnicity created a disposition to violence."[39] As such, they conclude that it is not just elites, but 'ordinary folk' that strategically construct ethnic boundaries, but that violence amongst ethnic groups remains mainly an elite-driven process.

In their study of ethnicity, ethnic conflict, and nationalism, Brubaker and Laitin observe that accounts of conflict have not been distinguished sharply from accounts of violence. Violence has generally been framed as a *degree* of conflict, rather than as a form of conflict, or indeed as a

[37] Fearon and Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity" p. 845
[38] Ishiyama, John, "Do Ethnic Parties Promote Minority Ethnic Conflict?" *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2009) pp. 56–83, p.59
[39] Fearon and Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity" p. 845

form of social or political action in its own right.[40] The authors argue that using a highly aggregated notion of ethnic violence allows violent conflict to be treated primarily as ethnic, as though ethnic violence is a homogeneous entity varying only in scale. Instead, they argue that it should be disaggregated from the study of conflict, illustrating what Brubaker and Laitin label as the "constitutive significance" of coding or framing processes in ethnic violence. The "ethnic" quality of ethnic violence is not intrinsic to the act itself; it emerges through after-the-fact interpretive claims.[41] Ethnic identities remain a fact of life, but it is what people make of them and how they use those identities determines whether there is ethnic conflict or not. Therefore, these ethnic identities are strategic; moreover, the labeling of a conflict as ethnic is a strategy in itself. Many authors are paying increased and sustained attention to the role of ethnicity in violence, however, the sudden and recent turn to ethnicity and nationality has often been too external and mechanical.

Horowitz's work remains seminal in the field of ethnic conflict and violence. His approach stresses not only the material, but the social and psychological underpinnings of violent ethnic conflict, highlighting the "ascriptive character" of ethnic identity.[42] This approach pays particular attention to comparisons of group worth and value, noting that this has a direct affect on ethnic groups often competing claims for legitimacy, while elaborating on the symbolic dimensions of violent ethnic conflict.[43] Representing the traditional perspective on violence and ethnic conflict, he seeks to illustrate the fundamental incompatibility of various ethnic groups in

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[40] Brubaker and Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence", p. 425
[41] Brubaker and Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence", p. 444
[42] For works that offer a more contingent view of the relationship between ethnic cleavages and conflict see Birnir, 2007; Chandra, 2001 and 2006; Fearon and Laitin, 2000; Posner, 2001.
[43] Brubaker and Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence", p. 432

their interests, claims and aspirations.[44] Stressing the need for a comparative analysis of ethnic conflicts, he argues that in order to ameliorate the effects of ethnic conflict, it must be theorized appropriately as well as in intellectual terms, in order to better understand ethnic group relationships and boundaries. This has significant implications for ethnonationalism, and does not always accurately portray the movement or its goals, often because of the expectation of irredentism and fixed group preferences. Theoretical and inductive approaches to nationalism and ethnic violence do not adequately assess the dynamics of ethnicity and nationality in an unproblematic fashion. Ethnic conflict may be at the centre of politics in divided societies, as Horowitz suggests, but this is not by accident. Theories that construct structural explanations claiming universality have failed to recognize how unequal social structures within a group impact in different ways on their security. A new approach to understanding contemporary nationalisms is necessary- one that successfully de-links nationalism from ethnic conflict and violence-and transcends the expectations and limits imposed by traditional analytic definitions such as nation and ethnicity.

Motivations and Factors Driving Nationalism, Mobilization, and Conflict

The key distinction between nations and ethnic groups is often considered to be their relationship to the state. Within sub-state nationalist movements, this relationship is very often determined by the potential or willingness of that group to achieve statehood or autonomy. However, not all groups believe that a situation of independence or autonomy is likely or possible. In order to understand more clearly the nature of contemporary ethnonationalist movements, an examination of internal divisions becomes necessary. It is often argued that while nations require a state to fulfill their potential, ethnic groups do not. Within the group

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[44] Horowitz, Donald L., *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), p. 297. Horowitz describes the difficulty of defining conflict within ethnic conflict theory, arguing that mutually exclusive ends or means need not be intrinsic to all conflict.

itself, some may still cling to this hope, while others seek alternative avenues for political mobilization. The question thus becomes not how to explain shifts within nationalist movements, but rather what effects those shifts may have. Furthermore, it needs to be determined whether there are a certain set of structural factors that need to be examined in each case, keeping in mind that we are concerned not with the constraints themselves, but with the discourses embedded within them. I address three potentially informative areas below, as evaluated by previous work on ethnonationalism, including whether and how the conflict is framed as ethnonationalist, the role of elites and ethnic parties, and other external factors. An examination of these areas, I argue, will lead to a more thorough and nuanced perspective of contemporary ethnonationalism.

Framing Conflict as Ethnonationalist

With regards to internal conflict and political violence amongst groups, ethnic conflict is often perceived as an inevitable outcome of ethnic group mobilization. In fact, it is only one of many possible ways through which ethnic nationalism can be manifested. It must be noted that the use of terms such as 'national self-determination' or 'autonomy' are not an accidental or inevitable goals of the movement, but rather used as a discursive assertion of political legitimacy. As Connor notes, there were two preconditions which were indispensable for the gestation of the self-determination idea: the first being the national consciousness of peoples and the second being the doctrine of popular sovereignty.[45] The focus of his work is on the subtle effects of these two features. The main idea is to illustrate that the seemingly banal, yet manipulative elements within nationalist discourse leads to the belief that the movement itself is in fact, nationalist in character, and is therefore unified in goals and preferences. If nation, ethnicity, or ethnic identity is treated as a primary force behind a nationalist movement, it will 'matter' in that any explanation of conflict or violence will be automatically linked to the nature of that term.

[45] Connor, "Nationalism and political illegitimacy", p. 29

Thus, if a conflict is portrayed as ethnonationalist, it is often assumed that the movement is state seeking, and united by the goals of national self-determination and territorial autonomy. The use of these characteristics has often resulted in many conflicts being framed as ethnonationalist in character, even though they may not embody the specific characteristics of an ethnonationalist movement. Conflict, therefore, is often considered to be 'ethnonationalist' even though the ethnonational elements within that group are only sometimes or partially present.

While many movements are considered to be ethnonationalist, this label may misconstrue the character of the movement overall, which may be fractionalized, diverse, and at times divisive in nature. Connor, in developing this argument, notes that it is not surprising that ethnonational peoples often blur the distinction between independence and autonomy, noting that these are terms that tend to obscure the important areas in the attitudes that members of a group can be expected to hold concerning goals.[46] By labeling movements as ethnonationalist without first assessing goals and preferences within the movement itself, it may be assumed that the movement has the potential to create conflict within a society, and in some cases, violence. While the Kurdish case can be, and has quite often in the past been labeled ethnonationalist, we should be weary of labeling this or any movement as such before a more careful analysis has taken place-one that involves an examination of the discourses operating within the movement itself. Moreover, it should no longer be assumed that sub-state nationalist movements today, whether civic or ethnic, are state seeking, as this goal may represent only a small component of the movement as a whole.

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[46] Connor, Walker, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) p.83

The Role of Elites and Ethnic Parties

Elites, and subsequently ethnic parties, have long been thought to drive ethnic groups into conflict. The literature on ethnic conflict also tends to explain violent conflict as a response to external threats to or opportunities for the ethnic group. Subsequently, nationalism, and in particular, ethnonationalist movements, are often considered to be elite-driven. With regards to ethnicity and ethnic parties, Horowitz argues that "democracy can not survive in the face of serious ethnic divisions" and that "unless precautions are taken, democratic arrangements tend to unravel in ethnically divided societies in the form of ethnically based parties."[47] This has led to the belief that the mere appearance of ethnic parties sets off a chain reaction, leading to a spiral of violence and extremism that derails democratic politics altogether. Thus, he argues that

> by appealing to their electorates in ethnic terms, making ethnic demands on government, and by bolstering the influence of ethnically chauvinist elements within each group, parties that begin by merely mirroring ethnic divisions help to deepen and extend them.[48]

Ethnic parties have often been treated as the driver behind most ethnically-motivated conflict, sparking debates within the comparative literature regarding the role of ethnic parties in democratic societies. More recently, John Ishiyama has examined the question of how ethnic parties affect ethnic protest and communal conflict. Arguing that the "ethnification" of politics does not necessarily translate into violence, he focuses on the question of whether the mere appearance of ethnic parties is associated with higher degrees of ethnic group political protest and ethnic group communal conflict.[49] Drawing on current research from Kanchan Chandra and Fearon and Laitin, Ishiyama argues that their approaches contribute to a more contingent view of the link between ethnic cleavages and conflict. Additionally, he stresses the importance of ethnicity and ethnic cleavages as cost-effective strategic resources for group formation, interest

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[47] Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 681
[48] Ibid., p.291
[49] Ishiyama, "Do Ethnic Parties Promote Minority Ethnic Conflict?"

definition, and collective action.[50] Identity as a motivating factor becomes particularly problematic when dealing with ethnic parties, as these groups can increase the costs associated with the political system, reinforcing and at the same time reifying group and ethnic identities. Since these parties are primarily classified as ethnic, it is more or less assumed that they will represent the interests of the ethnic group they claim to represent. This has often led to the belief that ethnic parties increase the likelihood of intercommunal conflict and violence, illustrated by Horowitz's approach. However, despite the temptation to conclude that ethnic parties were the cause of both increased ethnic group protest and ethnic group communal conflict, Ishiyama concludes that while the appearance of ethnic parties does lead to political mobilization, their appearance does not necessarily lead to an increased propensity to engage in communal conflict.[51] Furthermore, even if this propensity were to exist, it is no longer appropriate to assume that the entire ethnic group represented by that party would share the same propensity for conflict as the movement specifically. Therefore, while it is important to consider the role and presence of ethnic parties in an examination of contemporary ethnonationalist movements, it should be recognized that they play only partial role in ethnonationalist movements today.

External Factors

International relations theory has treated the state as the primary or driving force in determining why and how nationalist movements form, how they mobilize, and the nature of any resulting conflict. Very often, issues of 'security' and 'foreign policy' become primary factors in determining if and how an event is deemed to be significant and the subsequent effects that may have on classifying and explaining events in the future. Ethnonationalist movements, for example, that have a long legacy or history of behaviour within a certain state or territory may be

[50] Ishiyama, "Do Ethnic Parties Promote Minority Ethnic Conflict?" p. 59
[51] These figures are based on the period between 1985-2003. For further reading see Ishiyama, 2009.

understood by that state as a 'threat' to be dealt with in a very specific and often repressive fashion. Therefore, by continuing to frame a movement as ethnonationalist, the state is legitimated in continuing its pattern of treatment towards that movement, despite the fact that goals or preferences within that movement may have indeed shifted. In other words, some events, and not others, "have to be interpreted as threats, and the process of interpretation though which they are figured as threats employs some modes of representation and not others."[52]

This approach becomes especially salient when dealing with issues surrounding ethnonationalist movements such as security, conflict, cooperation, and violence. Because the ethnonationalist movement within a particular state may have been previously articulated or interpreted by the state as a threat or danger, the movement continues to be viewed as unitary, whole, fixed in it's preferences, and ultimately homogeneous. Thus, despite much recent academic work done to demonstrate otherwise, the limitations on our understanding of these movements remain. This is partly because there is no other feasible logic of interpretation or representation that adequately explains the movement as a whole.

The dominant realist approach in international relations theory tells us very little about violent conflict along ethnic lines, as it focuses on external security concerns, arguing that "conflictual behaviour in the name of ethnic nationalism is a response to external threats to the state (or to the ethnic group)."[53] Additionally, constructivist approaches to violence and ethnic conflict often over-emphasize the role of ethnic antagonisms, nationalist sentiments, and grievances to motivate rebel groups and their supporters.[54] Although they argue that shared symbolic frameworks associated with any ethnic category are artificially created and imposed,

[52] Campbell, "Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity", p. 137
[53] Gagnon, "Ethnic Nationalism and Internal Conflict: The Case of Serbia", p. 134
[54] Laitin and Posner have studied the implications of the constructivist approach to ethnic conflict and ethnolinguistic fractionalization, and emphasize that the politically salient dimension may be different within a sub-unit of a polity from the polity itself. For further reading see Posner and Laitin, 2001.

they demonstrate a major divergence in determining when and why the symbols and categories that individuals identify with change over time.[55] These factors have limited our ability to develop or shift our understanding of nationalism and it's relationship to ethnic conflict, assessing ethnonationalist movements based on their relationship to the state in question. The state, very often, is seen as the determining factor in whether or not a sub-state nationalist movement will likely engage in communal conflict or violence. Our understanding of nationalism, in these cases, remains significantly limited.

Contemporary Nationalisms: Recent Theoretical Work

The previously mentioned literature on nationalism associated with Deutch, Gellner, and Anderson represents, according to Fearon and Laitin, the "best developed 'case study' of the social construction of an identity- namely, national identity."[56] However, as the authors note, it is difficult to see how broad historical processes, such as economic modernization, can explain some of the more complex and increasingly identity-driven conflicts witnessed in the world today. With regards to nationalism specifically, national identity has become a particular bone of contention amongst theorists, noting the increasing inability to understand the processes linking ethnicity, nationality, and conflict. The contemporary context of nationalism involves an understanding that new conflicts are increasingly fought over 'identity politics', in contrast to geopolitical or ideologically motivated goals of earlier wars. Nationalism, according to Denise Natali, should be understood as "part of a contextually contingent process whereby a nation can follow multiple paths over long periods." This belief challenges some of the core assumptions made by traditional theories of nationalism, namely, that nationalism is primarly a sentiment or belief, and further, that the nation and the state should be congruent. There is an increasing need

[55] Chandra, "Ethnic Bargains, Group Instability, and Social Choice Theory", p. 345
[56] Fearon and Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity" p. 851

to treat the links between ethnicity, nationalism, ethnic conflict, and violence with skepticism; furthermore, it is hoped that various approaches should be used in order to more fully develop these heterogeneous processes.[57]

Nationalism is best understood not in terms of its relationship to the state or the nation, because these concepts are constantly being constructed and re-constructed. Rather, nationalism should now be understood as a discourse that can operate in a variety of non-traditional contexts. The first is the recent decline in states' capacities to maintain order through the traditional Weberian "monopoly of violence" in their territories, noting an increase in international scrutiny, lack of physical capacity, environment-related disasters, economic factors, or other. This contradicts a definition of nationalism based on Weberian postulates, as Connor and most other authors have done. The second is in the increasing inability to distinguish conflicts along the lines of the traditional left-right ideological axis that has been the defining feature of most political conflicts. Many nationalist movements are associated with such complex and variable ideological structures that it becomes difficult to assess goals or potential outcomes in any concrete way. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we have seen the emergence in some regions of sub-state actors and organizations that are not formally acknowledged and recognized as states, but possess the necessary self-identification mechanisms to be considered as such. However, these groups, despite possessing the empirical attributes of states, do not wish to form their own autonomous or independent states. Nationalism, it seems, continues to flourish in these regions, although desire for statehood is diminished or rescinded, and group preferences are increasingly diversified. As such, subjectivity remains a key factor, but the self-identification process can, in fact, be variable and in some cases, contradictory. The weakening capacity and legitimacy of the modern state has resulted in social polarization, while strengthening the role of

[57] Brubaker and Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence"

sub-state actors and social groups. These group identities are manifested in highly variable and contextual forms; the tendency to examine them from the perspective of ethnicity, ethnic identities, or ethnic nationalism demonstrates significant limitations.

Discursive Strategies

Critical international relations theory, exemplified by the writings of David Campbell, Andrew Linklater, Michael Shapiro and Rob Walker, has been instrumental in demonstrating how the sovereign state system has been impoverished by limiting the political and moral boundaries of political community.[58] At the forefront of the critical social theory debates has been the concern to ground meaning as unambiguously social, historical, and linguistic in construction- to connect "knowledge to power."[59] Campbell, whose work is widely regarded within critical international relations theory, demonstrates a significant ability to provide an alternative if not slightly obtuse perspective on the relationship between identity discourses and the state, without the concomitant assumptions of fixed or stable identity categories.

Discursive approaches to understanding the ideological construct of nation and ethnicity are relatively popular, although it remains less clear how those discourses are formed and managed. In his work on the narrativizing strategies used to create ostensibly objectivist works dealing with the Bosnian War, David Campbell notes that many of the major assessments of the conflict "have reduced this complexity to the banalities of ethnic essentialism in order to attribute responsibility to particular individuals or groups."[60] Thus, he argues that these assessments have been complicit in the constitution of realities they merely claim to describe. Similarly, then, we can take the case of contemporary nationalist movements, in highly diverse countries such as

[58] Walker, 1993; Shapiro, 1997; Campbell, 1998; Linklater, 1998
[59] George, Jim and David Campbell, "Patterns of Dissent and the Celebration of Difference: Critical Social Theory and International Relations", *International Studies Quarterly,* Vol. 34, No. 3, (Sep., 1990), pp. 269-293
[60] Campbell, David, "Metabosnia: Narratives of the Bosnian War", *Review of International Studies,* Vol. 24, No. 2 (Apr., 1998), pp. 261-281, p. 263

Canada, India, Uganda, Pakistan, Spain, Belgium, the Sudan, China, Russia, Cyprus, Rwanda, and the U.K. in order to evaluate not only their potential for violence, but their actual ability to discursively construct the conflict itself as a strategic enterprise.

As Campbell notes, "much of the conventional literature on the nation and the state implies that the essence of the former precedes the reality of the latter: that the identity of a 'people' is the basis for the legitimacy of the state and its subsequent practices."[61] However, he notes that more recently, the state has become an object that precedes the nation, and that nationalism is thus a construct of the state itself, in order to legitimate its presence.[62] As such, neither the state nor the nation itself can be understood as having a fixed or stable identity; as such, the state needs to be "constructed" every day, in order to ensure it's continual existence in the minds of the population it claims to represent. Consequently, "all states are marked by an inherent tension between the various domains that need to be aligned for an 'imagined political community' to come into being..."[63] Therefore, instead of evaluating the literature's ability to accurately portray and make sense of nationalism, ethnic identities, and violence, it becomes useful to look within the movements themselves. Highly variable discourses of nationalism appear to be operating simultaneously, indicating that while the outcome may be the same, the ways in which that outcome was achieved have shifted dramatically.

Instances of ethnic and nationalist violence are often large-scale and widespread, comprised of many different actors, events and processes that occur in multiple spaces and times. I argue, along with Gagnon, that ethnic nationalism refers to the *discourse* by which political actors describe, justify and explain policies relating to the nation primarily in "ethnic" terms.

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[61] Campbell, David, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 1992), p.11
[62] Campbell, David, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, p.11
[63] Ibid., p.11

Many nationalist movements today embody this characteristic, however, they contain other strands of discourse that go far beyond the understanding of a nation as a purely ethnic affiliation. If we then understand political actors not as elites, but as those who engage *actively* in nationalist movements, the term is significantly disaggregated and far more useful in the contemporary context. In this way, those who engage in institutionalized party politics, those who assert a strong identity claim despite significant state repression, and those who engage in low-level terrorism can all be considered political 'actors.' Arguably, Kurdish nationalism is emerging at the popular level that is beyond the control of established political parties and elites. Having accepted that the causal link established between ethnic identity and political violence is questionable at best, it allows us to understand Kurdish nationalism in Turkey as non-homogeneous, contextual, and highly variable- moving beyond simple ethnonationalism and beyond a simple state-seeking nationalist movement. The main question then becomes how this type of nationalism gives new strength to the national question, and becomes an issue of legitimacy in the international system.

Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey

The Kurds, the world's largest stateless nation, are spread across five states in and around the Middle East. The continued volatility of these regions have brought European governments directly 'inside' Kurdish affairs, and the Kurdish problem has become part of an increasingly complex transnational space including regional and international actors. As Denise Natali notes, managing Kurdish ethnonationalism in an age of transnationalism requires negotiations among states, European institutions, diasporic networks, and Kurdish nationalist leaders across the area known as Kurdistan.[64] The broader question associated with the Kurds is whether a firm

[64] Natali, Denise, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2005) p. 188

categorization of such a population group, which is scattered throughout the region and has no tradition of independent statehood, but demonstrates a strong nationalist sentiment, can be established. Even within Turkey they are a divided population-the boundaries of this ethnic group are not well-defined; moreover, up until recently they were not acknowledged by the Turkish state. The question of self-perception is thus crucial for the Kurds, and thus, part of the problem associated with the Kurdish movement in Turkey has been the emergence of a Turkish/Kurdish identity. Furthermore, the question of whether Kurdish nationalist aspirations can be respoved without violence or without statehood remains to be seen. Although this is a fairly distinct case, it is by no means unique within world politics today, and it's resolution may be important in determining the fate of other sub-state nationalist movements around the world.

The Kurds, once relatively unknown, have become an internationally recognized group, gaining huge influence in domestic politics as well as international affairs and relations. In Turkey, Kurds constitute an unknown percentage of the population (estimates range from 12 to 20 percent), and the state has worked hard to curtail the rights and freedoms of expression of Kurdish identity, attempting to define Kurds as ethnically Turkish. These policies led to an unintended backlash from the Kurdish population, giving rise to a host of different rebellious organizations and movements. Although highly diverse in tactics and political affiliations, these groups have all pursued the shared mission of reinforcing and legitimizing "Kurdishness" as an identity, and as a socially and politically recognized category of belonging.[65]

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[65] Yavuz, Hakan, "Five stages of the construction of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey" *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol.7, No.3, (Autumn 2001) pp.1-24 p. 1. Hakan Yavuz has elaborated on the modern origins of Kurdish nationalism by arguing that Turkey's policies are the determinant factors in the evolution and modulation of Kurdish ethnonationalism. He argues that "[t]he major reason for the politicization of Kurdish cultural identity is the shift from multi-ethnic, multi-cultural realities of the Ottoman Empire to the nation-state model." His approach provides a useful point from which to examine the development of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey, as he identifies five major stages that have ultimately resulted in the current construction of Kurdish ethnonationalism. However, this provides only one perspective from which the current conflict can be discussed- there are many other issues that play a determining factor.

Recent changes to the political opportunity structures within Turkish Kurdistan have re-shaped the configuration of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey. These changes have resulted from shifts in ideology, crisis management, population, through the efforts of political elites and ethnic 'brokers', and will inform the way future nationalist movements are mobilized. Essentially, this has marked a shift in the opportunity structures within which discourses of Kurdish nationalism are embedded. The variations that emerge illustrate the difficulty of explaining Kurdish national identity formation through our current understanding of nationalism, an ideology that traditionally holds that the nation and the state should be congruent. Furthermore, traditional theoretical and inductive approaches to nationalism rely on the problematic link between ethnic and nationalist conflict and violence, often treating violence as a degree of conflict, rather than a form of conflict or a form of social or political action in its own right.[66] A new approach to contemporary ethnonationalism is necessary, in order understand it as separate from traditional state-seeking nationalisms, as well as to de-link violence from ethnic conflict and ethnic identity in general.

There are five major shifts that have taken place within the Kurdish region of Turkey over recent years, and these shifts have had implications for the political opportunity structures within Turkish Kurdistan. These events, while structural in nature, indicate the changing ability to narrativize events and issues, including both the level and type of discourse used within the movement. These factors are useful in determining whether we are witnessing a new "stage" of Kurdish nationalism, by examining not the shifts themselves but the discourses embedded within them. These are 1) the recognition by the international community that Kurdish nationalism is not directly affiliated with the PKK, and that the movement is de-linked from violence but still

[66] Brubaker, Rogers and David D. Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence" *Annual Review of Sociology,* Vol. 24 (1998) pp. 423–52, p. 425

'nationalist' in character, 2) the presence and increasing success of ethnic parties in Turkish politics, 3) the increasing pressure on the Turkish government to adopt minority legislation because of EU accession negotiations, noting that the stalled negotiation process has increased pressure on Turkish government to reform, 4) the "internationalization" of the Kurdish question and the increasing attention on transnational nationalism as a political force, and finally 5) the relative success and international attention played to the role of the Kurds in Northern Iraq, changing the legitimacy of Kurdish ethnic identity and demands for autonomy. These factors are the variations within the identities that allow ethnicity and nationality to become politicized, as such, they are determined to be significant, not because of the events themselves, but because of the resulting changes in the discursive structures embedded within them.

Changes in Political Opportunity Structures 2003-2008

The PKK: Rescinding Demands and Changing Structure

Throughout the history of the Turkish Republic, and especially since 1980, the 'Kurdish question' has been one of the most important issues on the Turkish domestic and foreign political agenda. The most significant event, increasing the prevalence and popularity of the Kurdish struggle for a national homeland (unofficially known as Kurdistan), was the formation of the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* (Workers Party of Kurdistan, known widely as the PKK), which was founded in 1978 by Abdullah Ocalan. It's aim was to establish an independent Kurdish Marxist-Leninist state in southeastern Turkey, in the hopes of eventually uniting with Kurdish populations in the neighboring states. After the Cold War, both the US and Turkey began to agree that PKK-supported acts of terrorism had become a major destabilizing factor in Turkey, and posed a threat to national security. The US subsequently supported the action taken against PKK insurgents by the Turkish military; however, the two countries held differing opinions

regarding how the problem should be dealt with and solved.[67] Growing American influence in the region following the invasion of Iraq in 2003 left relations between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds severely curtailed, especially after the formation of an autonomous zone for the Kurds in the north. This newly formed region was governed by coalition between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) headed by Masood Barzani, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by the current Iraqi President, Jalal Talabani. These two groups had previously battled one another in a vicious civil war in the mid-1990s, which has left many lingering resentments and grudges below the surface of apparent unity. Despite this, the Iraqi Kurds' partnership with the United States heightened the Kurds' perception of their relative power in the region, resulting in a rather daring and at times confrontational attitude toward Turkey.

Although PKK militants are in a small minority, they are well organized and ready to utilize violent tactics. The PKK has recently intensified the use of some terrorist tactics and attacks on the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK). Recent terrorist attacks took place during the period of a unilateral ceasefire by the PKK which it had declared in early March, before later extending this until July 15, 2009. On the same day as the clash between the Revolutionary Base (DK) and the police, the leader of the Democratic Society Party, the so-called "political wing" of the PKK, gave an interview to the Turkish press in which he argued that the PKK might withdraw its militants from Turkish territory if the state adopted a "positive attitude" toward the Kurdish question in Turkey.[68] Nonetheless, it appears that the PKK wants to use the ambiguous political

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[67] A trilateral commission established between Turkey, the United States and Iraq to facilitate security cooperation against the activities of the PKK in Northern Iraq continues to operate. However it remains uncertain if it will produce tangible results that satisfy Turkey's expectations to "eliminate" the PKK threat. The trilateral mechanism was initiated in November 2008, following a change in Turkey's anti-terrorist policy against the PKK. Iraqi Kurds, who for a long time had refused to cooperate with Turkey on the issue, also changed their position and joined the process as part of the Iraqi delegation. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has taken a stronger line since then and promised to curb the activities of the PKK.

[68] *Taraf*, April 27 and *Milliyet*, April 15, as cited in Uslu, Emrullah, "The PKK Intensifies its Terror Campaign", *Eurasia Daily Monitor* Vol. 6, No. 83 (April 30, 2009)

environment to promote its own interests, and to present itself as the only unified Kurdish organization that advocates unifying the Kurds in Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria, on the basis of a 'unified pan-Kurdish state.'

Despite these changes, there has been increasing recognition that the PKK is not representative of the Kurds as a whole. The movement itself has been partially de-linked from violence, through the efforts of several Kurdish groups and organizations. Moreover, many Kurdish groups have accepted that the goal of a unified Kurdish state is no longer possible, nor advantageous for the movement. Murat Karayilan, the PKK's commander in northern Iraq, says the PKK no longer demands independence and is happy to let third parties negotiate a deal on its behalf. This has prompted Turkey's president, Abdullah Gül, to declare recently that there was now "an historic opportunity" to fix the Kurdish problem.[69] Without the unifying discourse of achieving statehood, it is increasingly clear that the movement will have to seek alternative approaches to promoting a unified sense of Kurdish identity, separate from the violence with which the movement is often associated.

The role of Ethnic Parties

Most popular and academic analyses of the pro-Kurdish movement in Turkey have focused on the PKK and its war against the Turkish state.[70] As Watts notes, little serious attention has been paid to the efficacy of non-violent struggles designed to reform Turkish state policies towards Kurds, or to pro-Kurdish use of electoral politics to promote the movement's goals. The escalation of the Kurdish question in the early 1990s brought the issue to the forefront of the political agenda in Ankara. In June of 1990, the first pro-Kurdish party, the Halkin Emek Partisi (People's Labour Party) was formed. Quite quickly, it's members were

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[69] "Turkey's rebellious Kurds: Stone-throwers in glass houses", *The Economist* (May 21st 2009)
[70] See, for example, Yavuz, 2001; Gunter, 1997.

subject to harassment by the majority in Turkish politics, the target of petty threats and abuse.[71] Since this time, pro-Kurdish political parties in Turkey have gone through a number of incarnations, given that the Turkish law gives the Constitutional Court, established in 1963, the power to shut political parties down. Turkey has a longstanding record of banning a succession of pro-Kurdish political parties. Despite this, Turkey's pro-Kurdish political parties have demonstrated longevity in the domestic political arena, despite major efforts to ban them altogether. The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) has condemned Turkey's practice on numerous occasions, in cases brought by, among others, the United Communist Party of Turkey (TBKP), the Socialist Democracy Party (SDP), the Freedom and Democracy Party (OZDEP), the People's Labour Party (HEP), the pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party (HADEP), and its successor, the Democratic People's Party (DEHAP). Moreover, thousands of pro-Kurdish party members have been detained, charged and sentenced to jail. Kurdish party offices were bombed, and dozens of leading members have been shot by 'unknown assailants' widely believed to have links to some parts of the state.[72] The inclusion of ethnopolitical Kurdish activists in local political processes did not end the conflict between the state and proponents of the pro-Kurdish program.[73] In the six weeks preceding the 1999 election, 551 HADEP members were detained by police; of those, 57 were sent to prison. In February 2000 three pro-Kurdish mayors were arrested, charged with aiding separatist rebels and then released 10 days later, under intense international pressure. In 2002,

[71] Zurcher, Erik J., "The Third Republic: Turkey Since 1980", Chapter 15 in *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 1993, 1997) pp. 292-343, p. 328
[72] Yavuz, 2001, Human Rights Watch, 1999; Kirisci & Winrow, 1997.
[73] Watts, "Activists in Office: Pro-Kurdish Contentious Politics in Turkey," p. 138

the Constitutional court ruled that such closures not only violated the rights of the party members to freedom of expression and association, but also the rights of voters to fair and free elections.[74]

Due to its expected closure, HADEP campaigned under DEHAP in the 2002 general election. The party obtained nearly 2-million votes, achieving 6.2 per cent of the national vote. It was the leading party in 12 provinces in the Kurdish regions, scoring an average of 47 per cent of votes in Diyarbakir, Batman, Sirnak, Hakkari and Van (mainly Kurdish regions of the southeast). However, the Turkish electoral system denies parties with less than 10% of the vote nationwide (the electoral threshold) from securing parliamentary seats. In March 2003 the Constitutional Court closed HADEP on the grounds that it was aiding the PKK and that it violated the constitution. The court is currently deciding on a motion to close the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), accused of promoting ethnic separatism. The DTP is currently Turkey's only legal Kurdish party. Most recently, the Turkish security forces initiated a nationwide operation in April 2009, detaining several DTP members, including senior local party members, and what police described as urban networks of the outlawed PKK.[75] The DTP continues to be perceived with suspicion by the state authorities, arguing that they support the political platform of the PKK and are inostensibly linked, and that the DTP is the political arm of the PKK. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has appealed to the DTP to "choose democracy or armed struggle." This is despite the fact that many political analysts question the evidence about the DTP's ties with the separatist PKK.

Participation in institutional politics, especially within a pro-Kurdish party, cannot be reasonably tied to ethnic separatism or violence; yet many continue to make this link. Moreover, some conservative Kurdish constituencies continue to support Turkish centre-right parties such

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[74] (Sadak v Turkey).
[75] Sariibrahimoglu, Lale, "Turkey's PKK-DTP Operations Further Complicate Kurdish Solution", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 6, No. 77 (April 22, 2009)

as the AKP, even if they consider themselves Kurds ethnically.[76] The tendency to ignore electoral politics is evident not only in studies of Kurdish politics, but also in more general studies of social movements and ethnic conflict.[77] While analysts studying ethnopolitical movements in fully consolidated democracies have examined their incorporation into political office, activists participating in electoral politics in 'unconsolidated' democracies are often relegated as too routine or irrelevant to be classified as 'social movement activity', or part of a serious ethnic conflict.[78] Birnir, Chandra, and several others have argued that ethnic identity can actually assist in stabilizing party formations and aid the development of democracy. Thus, if violence results, it is largely because of restricted access to the formal political arena in general. As we have seen, it is this exclusion that leads to violence, not the political mobilization of ethnicity itself.[79]

The Turkish State

Kurdish nationalism has sometimes been pointed to as a case of failed nationalism; some have attributed its variable success to the differences in official state nationalisms and state strategies towards the Kurds. Natali provides an explanation for the differential and variable nature of Kurdish nationalism by pointing to the relationship between between Kurdish communities and the states in which they live. Although the content of *Kurdayetı* (Kurdish national identity) is based on relatively objective group features, its character (urban or rural, religious or secular, etc.) is determined by the nature of the political space created by the state, which varies across time and geographies.[80] Certainly, within Turkey, the development of

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[76] Natali, Denise, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2005) p. 114
[77] See, for example, Gurr, 2000.
[78] Watts, "Activists in Office: Pro-Kurdish Contentious Politics in Turkey," p.126
[79] Ishiyama, "Do Ethnic Parties Promote Minority Ethnic Conflict?", p.59
[80] For further reading see Natali, 2005.

Kurdish nationalism has been significantly altered by Turkish state policies towards minority groups. Policies of the 1980s and 1990s included significant ill-treatment, repression, and violence, including the burning of several Kurdish villages (sometimes called the "scorched earth" policy) and forced evacuations by the Turkish military, often under false-flag operations. These practices were combined with what is sometimes referred to as a cultural genocide, as the state attempted to block all public expressions of Kurdish identity, and indeed, denied that the Kurds even existed. Ultimately, it has been recognized by the Turkish Parliament that the security operations, the repression, and the practice of village burning was fuelling Kurdish nationalism and was inadvertently encouraging young people to join the PKK. This marked a shift in the Turkish state's treatment and response to the expression of Kurdish identity.

The 'Europeanization' process, which began in the mid 1990s, has been pursued with increasing interest, especially by the AKP. Turkey took giant steps in the direction of democratic consolidation through a series of major reforms, including major human rights improvements, and dealing with the Kurdish problem through a series of democratic openings that involved the extension of cultural and language rights to its citizens of Kurdish origin. The EU Helsinki summit on 10-11 December 1999, declared Turkey was a candidate state destined to join the Union on the basis of the same criteria as applied to the other candidate states. The European Copenhagen political criteria require full implementation of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and the protection of minorities. On the basis of the Copenhagen criteria, the EU asked Ankara to reform its legal system and solve the Kurdish problem with peaceful means. This represents a turning point in Turkish-EU relations, and has created an optimistic environment to end the tragic conflict, which resulted in 30, 000 deaths and a cost of more than $100 billion.[81]

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[81] Yavuz, "Five stages of the construction of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey", p. 16. It should be noted that to recognize this in Turkey remains a criminal offence; in 2005 novelist Orhan Pamuk was put on trial for having

Turkey's President Abdullah Gül recently sparked another debate on the Kurdish question, following his recent statement that he is hopeful that a "peaceful solution" to the Kurdish problem might be imminent.[82] Yet, Gül's call to address the Kurdish question has encountered resistance from opposition parties increasingly skeptical about his policies. Furthermore, this has been met with a surprising amount of receptivity from the PKK, noting that in a recent interview, Karayilan stated, "We do not have any intention to propagate the PKK's views. We are optimistic and have hopes for peace. That is why we decided to talk to [the Turkish Press.]"[83] It seems that Karayilan and the PKK leadership has finally come to the conclusion that the armed conflict cannot resolve the Kurdish question.

Ankara's view on the prospect of Kurdish independence has never been favourable, but it has been forced to reexamine the strategy for dealing with the Kurdish problem in recent years. As Natali notes, the type of "ambiguous and variable" political space that sporadically appeased Iraqi Kurdish nationalists was absent in Turkey, given that the Turkish state made only token efforts to accommodate Kurdish ethnic identity.[84] Liberalizing reforms have begun to take place; their extent and meaning has been questioned, as they have often been paired with increasingly repressive tactics. The tightest restrictions on freedom of expression continue to be applied to Turkey's Kurdish minority. Although Kurds are theoretically now allowed to speak and publish in their own languages, in practice many restrictions remain. The Turkish authorities continue to

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"publicly denigrated Turkish identity." after his comment that "a million Armenians and thirty thousand Kurds had been killed in Turkey."

[82] Gul has played an active role in pushing for a democratic solution to the Kurdish issue. In early May, he held discussions with the leaders of the opposition parties. He maintained that there was a "historic opportunity" before the country to solve the Kurdish issue, adding that Turkey should exploit this opportunity. He called on the opposition parties to play a constructive role toward its resolution. "Opposition Rejects Gul's Call for Consensus on the Kurdish Question" *Eurasia Daily Monitor,* Vol. 6, No. 96 (May, 2009)

[83] *Milliyet*, (May 5, 2009) as cited in Uslu, Emrullah "Ankara Considering PKK's Proposals on Dialog", *Eurasia Daily Monitor,* Vol. 6, No. 88 (May, 2009)

[84] Natali, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran,* p. 104

regard even the most innocuous of statements as evidence of an attempt to call for the creation of an independent state; even peacefully advocating one remains a criminal offense in Turkey.[85]

These factors illustrate that the development of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey has been significantly altered by the state itself, increasing the possibility for fragmentation and conflict within the Kurdish movement. However, as Natali concludes, Kurdish nationalism is not just a consequence of a repressive state acting against a helpless periphery, or a by-product of political institutions and structure. The question of self-perception thus becomes crucial; while some regard themselves as a separate ethnic group, others regard themselves as both Kurd and Turk, while others have assimilated into Turkish society such that they no longer exhibit a separate ethnic consciousness. Some Kurdish groupings are highly politicized, while others claim no political alliegances or affiliations. Fragmentation and internal divisions continue to exist; it is, however, debatable whether or not these divergences are natural or not. As noted previously, it is often assumed that ethnic identities have particular properties that explain that outcome. The Kurdish case challenges that assumption. Similarities and variations in Kurdayeti within even Turkish political space illustrates the complex nature of identity and nationalism, indicating that the process extends far beyond the single relationship between a political centre and the minority group.[86]

"Virtual Kurdistan West"

As developed by Nicole Watts, "Virtual Kurdistan West" is used to describe a community conceived of as a "dynamic tendency" composed of a "family of related yet mutually competing stances…"[87] Despite vehement Turkish state opposition and significant internal

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[85] Jenkins, Garth, "Spelling separatism with a "W": Turkey Still Struggling with Freedom of Expression", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 5 No. 14 (January 24, 2008)
[86] Natali, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran*, p.182.
[87] Watts, Nicole F., "Institutionalizing Virtual Kurdistan West: transnational networks and ethnic contention in

divisions, pro-Kurdish activists outside of Turkey have created a political advocacy community capable of challenging Turkish state authority and influence in the international arena. As a transnational ethnic network, the movement has garnered support from transnational advocacy networks, human rights organizations, Kurdish cultural and political organizations, international media, and from a large diaspora population. Key to the recent emergence of Virtual Kurdistan West is the institutionalization of a set of pro-Kurdish norms and practices within nongovernmental and governmental arenas in Europe.

Conceptualizing Virtual Kurdistan West as a product of the collective efforts of a wide range of actors is a divergence from the usual depictions of the Kurdish movement that locate the PKK at the centre of analysis, a role that the organization has actively sought. This new transnational community seeks self-affirmation across national borders, and in the words of Riva Kastoryano, operates "as a de-territorialized nation in search of an inclusive centre around a constructed identity or experience."[88] It is often assumed that ethnonationalist movements such as the Kurds in Turkey maintain transborder identity networks in order to mobilize support for the domestic movement. These movements, it is argued, then mobilize on the basis of ethnic affiliations, as well as inter-group solidarity and communal support. The Kurds in Turkey, however, exhibit several variations with regards to ethnic affiliation and mobilization on that basis. As Kirisci and Winrow note, "the extent of the 'ethnic affinity link' among the Kurds in the region as a whole must be seriously questioned and this must have an impact on the amount

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international affairs", Chapter 6 in *Boundaries and Belonging: States and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Local Practices,* Joel S. Migdal, (ed) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004a) pp. 121-147. Watts uses Brubaker's words to describe a group that has been produced largely through cumulative effect, not by a nation but by certain segments of various Kurdish communities working in conjunction with non-Kurdish actors.

[88] Kastoryano, Riva, "Transnational Nationalism: redefining nation and territory" Chapter 7 in *Identities, Affiliations, and Allegiances*, S.Benhabib, I. Shapiro, D. Petranovic, (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p. 163

of support the PKK, for instance, may recieve from other Kurdish groupings outside Turkey."[89] In fact, many Kurds within Turkey itself are opposed to the politics and objectives of the PKK, and many fight in direct opposition to the group itself.[90] However, significant cleavages within the political identities of Kurds in Turkey remain. Although we have entered a new phase of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey, the formation and consolidation of a distinctly Kurdish political-identity formation will not generate the level of crisis necessary to realize independence or autonomy. This is, in part, because of the distinctive way in which Kurdish ethnic identity has manifested itself within and outside of Turkey-not as a unified force, but as a loose aggregate of multiple ethnic identities, affiliations, and allegiances. Despite this regional fragmentation, as well as vehement Turkish state opposition, pro-Kurdish activists have created a political advocacy community outside the region itself, capable of challenging Turkish state authority as it is manifested in the international arena. The emergence of Virtual Kurdistan West has been a particularly influential form of transnational nationalism, which has served to link a pro-Kurdish agenda with international human rights norms. The conflation of human rights and national goals within transnational networks is left unproblematized by the international relations literature, despite the profound implications in the domestic context.[91] Although not strictly based on fixed concepts of nation-building or ethnic identities, Virtual Kurdistan West is an important component of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey today.

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[89] Kirisci, and Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-state Ethnic Conflict,* p. 26

[90] The controversial village guard system, for example, recruits local men in southeastern Turkey to aid the Turkish security forces fighting PKK militants. Village guards, numbering around 90,000 at the height of the PKK's campaign, are currently around 58,000 members. Although the system began as a temporary measure, it has become an integral part of Turkey's security apparatus under the TSK. Village guards' familiarity with the terrain, as well as the local language and dialects, are important assets, as this helps to enhance the operational capability of the Turkish security forces. It should be noted that a large percentage of those in the village guard are Kurds.

[91] Watts, "Institutionalizing Virtual Kurdistan West: transnational networks and ethnic contention in international affairs", p. 128

The role of Ethnic Identity

Although Kurdish 'ethnic entrepreneurs' tend to identify Turks as their 'other' in the construction of Kurdish nationalism, major tribal, linguistic, religious, alphabetical, and regional fissures remain within Kurdish identity itself.[92] These divisions have prevented the emergence of a full-fledged Kurdish identity, given the major religious, linguistic, and cultural divergences that exist within the group. From 2003 through to the present, in the duration of the Iraq war, ethnic identity was the major factor determining inter-group relations within Iraq. Not surprisingly, these events have considerably influenced the role of Kurdish ethnic identity in Turkey today. Additionally, cross-border ethnic affiliations has also played a key role in shaping Kurdish ethnic identity, not only in Turkey and Iraq, but amongst Kurdish populations in Syria, Iran, Azerbaijan, and abroad. Because of this ethnonational consolidation, many believed that the Kurdish movement in Turkey would continue to employ violent tactics in order to achieve statehood, given this history of the movement, as well as the historic opportunity of the possible collapse and fragmentation of Iraq itself. It was also considered that the political platform of the Kurds in Iraq had the ability to threaten the entire Middle East region, resulting from trans-state ethnic conflict, cross-border spillover and irredentism. The Kurdish question in Turkey thus became the subject of increasing focus, with the Turkish government falling under heavy criticism for it's treatment of ethnic minority groups, both historically and in the present.

Despite significant polarization, what is important to note is that by and large it has not been widespread, and has generally not manifested in the form of violent confrontations between ordinary Kurds and Turks. This is because many Kurds now perceive themselves as Turks, a consequence of the Turkish state-building exercise.[93] This has had serious implications for the

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[92] Yavuz, "Five stages of the construction of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey", p. 3
[93] Kirisci, and Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-state Ethnic Conflict,,* p. 133

development of a distinct Kurdish identity in Turkey. Furthermore, the violence of the 1990s has encouraged many Kurds to explore their own ethnic affiliations and identity links, and increasing public debate and international attention has facilitated that process. 'Kurdishness', it seems, has more recently become a legitimate basis of identity; however, the avenues through which Kurds express that identity are highly contextual, variable, and diverse. As previously discussed, the conceptual tools at our disposal (nation and ethnic group) have not been adequate in conveying the multiple senses of identity that individuals within a certain population or group may hold. As Natali notes, with regards to the Kurds, *Kurdayeti* has become part of a larger repertoire of identities based on the nature of the political space in each state.[94] The Kurds are scattered across the Middle East, with significant populations in five countries, as well as large diaspora communities overseas, and have no tradition of independent statehood. Even within Turkey, they are a divided population- geographically, politically, socially, economically, and on the basis of religion- making a firm categorization of the population on the basis of ethnic or national affiliation very difficult. It is crucial to remember that ethnic groups are not homogeneous entities; but rather exist as a consequence of nation-building initiatives that invent different categories of inclusion and exclusion.

The Necessity of a Discursive Approach to Contemporary Nationalisms

This analysis of the Kurdish case has followed Campbell's strategy, which is to demonstrate that within each realm of policy discourse, it is possible to construct a competing narrative designed to "denaturalize" and unsettle the dominant way of constructing the world. Treating nation and ethnicity as important has been useful, but as previously mentioned, rational choice models and state-centric perspectives have done little to advance our understanding of the links between nation, ethnicity, conflict and violence. Because of the limitations of those conceptual

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[94] Natali, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran,* p. xvii

tools, we need to examine the events that those narratives deal with in a more critical manner, not only from the perspective of identity and discourse, or separately culturalist or rationalist approaches, but through an examination of what each of these brings to the movement as a whole.

Despite a number of arguments that highlight the primordial nature of Kurdish nationalism and its propensity for violent conflict, the five shifts in the structural factors within which Kurdish nationalist discourse is produced demonstrate otherwise. In terms of a new phase of Kurdish nationalism, recent changes in political opportunity structures have altered the trajectories of some nationalist groups. In some cases, these groups have turned to democratic political institutions, rather than armed struggle, in order to achieve a greater degree of independence or autonomy. The PKK and pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) have incrementally rescinded their demands for an independent state in southeastern Turkey. Pro-Kurdish groups outside of Turkey have been successful in blurring the boundary between nationalism and human rights norms, aided by the shift away from violence, garnering international support for the movement. However, it remains to be seen whether this will prove to be a unifying strategy amongst the Kurdish population. The Turkish state has shown signs of liberalization in terms of ethnic minority policies, but has combined these strategies with increasing tactics of fear and repression. This has mobilized support amongst certain groups within the Kurdish population to continue using violence to achieve the goal of achieving an "independent state", despite the PKK's admission that this is no longer a viable solution. Although certain groups may be disinclined to accept a peaceful or protracted solution to the conflict, it may be the only way to legitimize the movement as a whole: by demonstrating a preference for violence, groups will further isolate themselves. However, what we can see is that

it is increasingly unhelpful to treat the political and the state as synonymous. It is evident from the case study that in Turkey, "ethnic violence" consists of sporadic violent episodes, continuous low-level terrorism, state violence that responds to the terrorism, cultural violence, institutional and political shifts and symbolic events.

The effective discourses of nationalism and ethnicity that have led to successful instances of foreign policy (in terms of garnering international support) are those that have been able to combine both extensive and intensive forms of power, so that the social identity of the community has been aligned with the political space of the nation.[95] Similarities and variations in *Kurdayeti* across space and time show that nationalism is a more finely tuned process that extends beyond a single relationship between a political center and an ethnic minority group. Kurdish nationalism is not just a consequence of a repressive state acting against a helpless periphery, a by-product of political institutions and structure, a struggle for territorial autonomy, or a violence-prone trans-state ethnic conflict, but a complex and variable grouping that has the ability to strategically adopt and discard ethnic identities and affiliations. The variations in Kurdiyati indicate that we have entered a new phase of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey, marked by a number of significant events, and illustrated by changes in the discourse of Kurdish nationalism as a whole.

Conclusions

This shift has resulted on a re-examination of the tenuous border that has been maintained between Turkish and Kurdish national identity. This is both a reaction against the Turkish Constitution's definition of citizenship (currently described as 'Turkishness') and a strategy originally employed by the Kurds to maintain distinct and recognizable identities. Treating the case of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey as a violent conflict motivated primarily by ethnicity and

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[95] Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*

ethnic identity reifies the movement, while treating it as unproblematically homogeneous. Conflict described in purely ethnic terms, taking place along ethnic lines, while it may be about ethnic *issues,* may be caused by issues not directly related to ethnicity. Because of internal divisions, the configuration of incentive structures and limitations within nationalist movements can be significantly altered, and the strength of the nationalist movement diminished. The case of Turkish Kurdistan demonstrates the highly fragmented and variable nature of Kurdish ethno-national identity within the political space of the Turkish state. Methodologically, the case of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey shows the importance of recognizing that political discourse is itself a form of strategic political behaviour, as this dictates the formation of a distinct and observable ethno-national identity.

This thesis has used the case of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey in order to demonstrate the need to open the space for an alternative interpretation concerned with the entailments of identity. This alternative interpretation is bound up in an examination of the discursive economy of the nationalist movement itself. This nationalist movement, given its distinct and variable nature, has not been effectively addressed by the contemporary literature; furthermore, it is by no means a unique case within world politics today. Sub-state nationalist movements are increasingly prone to external volatility, and given their constant renegotiation and shifting opportunity structures, demands of establishing an autonomous state are increasingly rare. The Kurdish case exemplifies this. There is no reason to believe that these heterogeneous components this large-scale nationalist movement can be understood or explained through a single theoretical lens. Rather than attempt to construct an explanation of the Kurdish case around issues of ethnic and nationalist violence, we should seek to identify, analyze, and explain the heterogeneous

processes and mechanisms involved in generating support for an ethnonationalist movement in the contemporary world.

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