

Mapping Kurdistan

Territory, Self-Determination and Nationalism

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(Accepted version, not final)

Introduction

Since the early twentieth century, Kurds have challenged the borders and national identities of the states they inhabit. Nowhere is this more evident than in their promotion of the map of greater Kurdistan, a unified ideal homeland which encompasses large swathes of Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran, and a small part of Armenia, in a region with a complex history of ethnic, cultural and political background. The main Kurdish political actors in each of these states claim some ownership or control over a part of a state's territory and they are usually careful to restrict their claims to within the state they reside. All these Kurdistans have been geographically, economically and culturally marginalised in each state and have historically been buffer zones between regional and colonial powers. The idea of greater Kurdistan combines these areas and puts Kurdistan at the centre rather than in the margins.

The map of greater Kurdistan is embedded in the consciousness of the majority of Kurdish people, both within the region and, perhaps even more strongly, in the diaspora. The territory it depicts, Kurdistan, has never been a recognised state and does not have a unified political leadership. Yet the concept of Kurdistan, as a cultural and political abstract, survives the reality and exists in the minds of Kurdish nationalists, their supporters as well as those who deny it. The territory depicted on the map is a heterogeneous geography inhabited by different ethnic and religious groups such as Arabs, Turks, Persians, Assyrians, Armenians, Yazidis, Christians, and others. The map projects a historical continuity of Kurdistan, overlooking historical conflicting claims, for instance between Armenians, Assyrians and Kurds. The Kurds do not constitute one group with a similar culture, language, religion and political goals. Tribal divisions are important, sometimes more so than Kurdishness. Kurdish political parties and Kurdish societies in each state face different problems that emerged as a result of distinct political, social, historical and economic circumstances of the state they are in.

The map of greater Kurdistan is frequently used in Kurdish political programmes, on political party flags, on the walls of homes and offices, and its silhouette is even used on accessories

such as key rings, brooches, or necklaces. What is particularly noteworthy is that it is not only Kurdish nationalists who use this map, but also outsiders use it to show the location of the Kurdish homeland or to show the Kurdish demographic presence in the area. What is interesting is the almost identical cartographic depictions of maps showing Kurdish demography and maps showing the political aspiration of Kurdistan. Indeed, non-political maps that show the demographic distribution of the Kurds have similar contours in which the silhouette that emerges from coloured parts indicating Kurdish habitation looks very similar to the political map of Kurdistan. Although maps showing Kurdish habitation through the image of Kurdistan do not seek to make a political point on the existence of a Kurdish territory, the similarity of the contours of the demographic and political maps of Kurdistan is usually overlooked by outsiders using these maps.

This raises two fundamental questions about the Kurdish political project, both of which have important implications for thinking about national self-determination and how this is pursued by non-state nationalists. Why and how has the map of greater Kurdistan become a widespread image; and what is the perceived underlying relationship between territory and people that bolsters the greater Kurdistan map? Widespread use of this map does not mean that all Kurds aim for a unified Kurdish statehood in the Middle East or those outsiders who use it support the idea of a unified Kurdistan. Many would claim the relationship is straightforward in that such a map merely depicts a people's natural and actual homeland. For most Kurds, this is certainly the case. For its supporters, the map of greater Kurdistan makes the case that Kurds are a nation without a state whose homeland is divided by four states.

Yet it is worth pushing beyond the question of the actuality or viability of a greater Kurdistan. The focus of this book is not to establish whether such a territory actually exists or not. Clearly imaginations of homelands are socially and politically constructed, rather than being natural and perennial, and the same can be said for state territories. The fact that states have internationally recognised boundaries does not make their territories less constructed or more natural. The aim of this book instead is to examine the imagination and presentation of the Kurdish homeland through its cartographic depictions within the contexts of internal Kurdish dynamics and the international normative framework since the nineteenth century. Through this, it seeks to examine the resultant political, cultural and social effects of this construction and historically trace how the Kurdistan map/s are constituted by Kurdish nationalist politics as well as international norms.

Political maps have the power to influence our imaginations about where territories and states lie in the world because maps are seen as objective and scientific and they are powerful in making constructed ideas look natural (Agnew, Livingstone and Rogers 1996: 422). They are cultural and political discursive formations and represent perceptions, political discourses, ideologies and aspirations (Harley 1988, 1989, 1990; Crampton 2001). The narratives maps present create the lenses through which we see, understand and interpret territoriality, understood as the relationship between people and territory in this study. The power of maps derives from their embeddedness in the narratives of nation and identity. Conceptions of nation, identity and territoriality and how they define political realities and the rules of state legitimacy change over time. Their different meanings in different periods have implications for how we perceive political maps, both existing and aspirational. Kurds and outsiders imagine the Kurdish homeland through contemporary norms related to nation and territoriality, specifically self-determination. Fuzzy and changeable, this norm has influenced national politics, as well as the conception of Kurdistan and its map, in different ways over time.

The map of greater Kurdistan and the Kurds are an apt case to explore wider questions around maps, self-determination and territory. This map is a useful tool to navigate through a complex temporal and conceptual field in which ideas of self-determination and territoriality have changed and evolved, both in the case of Kurdish nationalism and internationally. Through this analysis, the book links politics around Kurdish nationalism to international-level politics and the international normative framework. The interaction of Kurdish nationalist groups, both in the region and in the diaspora, with international actors does not take place simply through the regional states they are located in. Their interactions with the international society of states, multilateral and international organisations and sub-state actors occur in a normative and political context that influences both states and non-state actors.

This book contributes to the scholarly work on self-determination, nationalism and territoriality by integrating the Kurdish case into the debates on these phenomena. The Kurdish case is underrepresented in the discipline of International Relations (IR) and in the study of Nationalism despite its potential for generating new insights and lessons. The book approaches the study of Kurds in a way that has been neglected to date by offering a new perspective to the study of territoriality and presenting an in-depth historical case study from an IR perspective. It connects the evolution of Kurdish territoriality and Kurdish politics to the international level.

The analysis developed in this book also contributes to the scholarly work on Kurdish politics. The existing work in this literature with an international angle examines the Kurds in each state and looks at how Kurdish politics influences the domestic, regional and international relations of these states (Voller 2014; Gunter 2011; Natali 2010, 2005; Barkey and Fuller 1998; Kirişçi and Winrow 1997). The literature also offers valuable analyses with different disciplinary perspectives, such as history, politics, sociology and anthropology.¹ However, an IR analysis of Kurdish politics is missing in the literature. This book meets this gap and it looks at Kurdish politics in totality, rather than country-by-country and situates this case in an international context.

Additionally, the book's focus on Kurdish territoriality fills another gap in Kurdish studies. Even though territoriality is a significant feature of Kurdish nationalism and its politics, there is limited literature on territoriality, except social and political geographers O'Shea's (2004) and Culcasi's (2010, 2006) work that study Kurdistan from a political geography perspective. This book builds on O'Shea and Culcasi's useful insights but situates the case in an international framework. O'Shea argued that the map of greater Kurdistan does not reflect the realities of Kurdish society or the region as a whole. She defined this map as a 'propaganda map' and saw it as a symbol of the effort to construct a Kurdish nationalist myth based on historical and territorial perceptions or imaginations (O'Shea 2004: 4). In her book, O'Shea examined the maps of Kurdistan and historical narratives about the origins of the Kurds as constructions created in order to produce a sense of unity in the minds of the people and to enable them to connect their identity to the territory they inhabit. Culcasi looked at the role orientalist discourses in the American journalistic geography of Kurdistan in presenting the Kurds in a way that supported and verified the United States' geopolitical and ideological

¹ Literature on the Kurds with historical, political, sociological and anthropological perspectives has been growing since 2000s. Some examples are Stansfield and Shareef 2017; Eppel 2016; Galip 2015; Tezcür 2016; Allsopp 2014; Bajalan 2013; Bengio 2014; King 2013; Entessar 2009; Lowe and Stansfield 2010; Olson 2009; Tejel 2008; Heper 2007; Tahiri 2007; Jabar and Dawod 2006; Jwaideh 2006; Romano 2006; O'Leary et.al 2005; Özoğlu 2004; Vali 2003.

position. Yet what is neglected is the international dimension and the international normative context in the construction of this map and how it is perceived.

The Kurds and their territory

One of the most common phrases that define the Kurds is ‘the largest nation without a state’² spread in a huge geography encompassing large swathes of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria and a small part of Armenia.³ Even if practical support and demand among the Kurds for a unified pan-Kurdistan is low, the idea that four states (five if Armenia is included) currently exist across what is ‘naturally’ Kurdish territory, has resonance in the minds of both Kurds and some outsiders as the continued and widespread use of the map of greater Kurdistan shows. The idea of territorial homeland played an important role in the emergence and development of Kurdish nationalism. Territorial identity is central to understanding Kurdish nationalist groups’ activities today. Despite this, the territorial aspect of Kurdish nationalism remains understudied and unproblematised in the academic literature. Existing studies depict the history of the region as the history of Kurdistan but fail to interrogate the basis and suppositions underpinning the assumption that a minority nationalism simply has a right to a territorial expression. In other words, most of these studies see the history of Kurdistan as identical to the history of Kurdish nationalism (Hassanpour 2003), essentialising this territorial identity and underestimating the prevalence of political claims behind it.

The concept of Kurdistan refers to a space, an area or a region, but in this book, this concept is used for ease of description. Space is ‘*structural*’ not territorial (Agnew 1994: 55, emphasis in the original). The territorial conception of space takes its representation for granted and this conception is quite dominant in the study of societies and politics. The structural conception of space, on the other hand, acknowledges its fluid and changing nature and its relationship with other social, economic and political factors (Agnew 1994: 55). The use of the concept of Kurdistan, therefore, does not imply that the region was historically defined as Kurdistan, or its inhabitants were all Kurdish, or the area had clearly demarcated borders/or its extent was clear. The concept of Kurdistan does not refer to ahistorical and ontologically permanent locations or territories but to the geographical context upon which social, economic and political interactions take place and in return, to a territory or geography shaped by these interactions (Agnew 1994: 56).

Territory is usually understood to be obvious or self-evident (Elden 2010). Mainstream perspectives in IR usually does not define territory – instead they see it as state territory defined in terms of jurisdictional control over a physical area and the people living on it (Kadercan 2015: 128). In this book, a political geography definition of territory is adopted, which connects territory directly to human agency and relations of power. In that sense, territoriality, the link between territory and society, is the primary concern here. The way Kurdistan and its map have been framed, used and interpreted throughout history have depended on how the relationship between nation and territory was understood in each period. The meaning and function of self-determination, a key international norm related to the legitimacy of political authority in

² Despite the existence of possibly larger peoples without states such as the Tamils, an estimated population of 70 million spread across Sri Lanka, Mauritius, India, Malaysia and Singapore.

³ There is also a large Kurdish diaspora in Europe and the United States, and substantial and long-standing Kurdish communes in Central Anatolia in Turkey, Khorasan in Iran, in Central Asia, Azerbaijan, Lebanon, Georgia and Armenia as a result of imperial deployments and forced deportations, and migration to escape persecution or conflict. In Turkey, a large proportion of Kurds live in big cities such as Istanbul and Izmir.

international relations, had constitutive roles in shaping the relationship between the people and territory. In other words, the changes in the meaning and function of this international norm have, in turn, changed the way the relationship between a national people and ‘their’ territory – territoriality – is perceived.

Kurdish nationalism asserts self-determination claims to territorial autonomy or independence based on a distinct cultural and ethnic identity. Kurdish activists, especially since the second part of the twentieth century, have disseminated the idea of Kurdistan to the international community through framing this promotion in the language of human rights, democracy and self-determination. This was done to enhance the legitimacy of their claims to democratic countries whose endorsement and support they seek. Kurds have been more successful than other smaller groups in the Middle East, such as the Assyrian Christians in Turkey, Syria and Iraq or the Turkmens and Yazidis in Iraq, in drawing attention to themselves and generating support and sympathy for the issues they have in each state and their desire to be recognised as a distinct people.

Today, Kurds in Iraq enjoy official or de jure autonomy as a region in a federal Iraq. They have their own government, parliament, administration and military forces. Meanwhile although heavily suppressed in the past, since the onset of the war Kurds in Syria have carved a de facto autonomy in the north of the country, labelled as Rojava by the Kurds. In Turkey, the military conflict between the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK, *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*) and the state army has been ongoing since 1984, interrupted by a short period of talks between 2012 and 2015. The PKK gave up on its goal for independence since early 2000s and now seeks decentralisation within a system it calls ‘democratic confederalism’. In Iran Kurdish political activists are facing a struggle to survive under an oppressive regime but Kurds have historically benefited from some degree of cultural and linguistic rights in this country. Each of these groups faces different challenges, have different leaderships and pursue different goals. What is more, these goals and leaderships have often come into conflict within one another in the past and the war in Syria has exacerbated these divisions further in many key respects (Kaya and Whiting 2017).

Given this picture, it is a fair statement to say that each Kurdish nationalist organisation typically defines its goals and problems in a way that is limited to the country they reside, with regional activities pursued especially by the PKK, but also by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK in Iraq at a more limited level. No contemporary Kurdish nationalist party in the Middle East so far has made an explicit demand to establish a greater Kurdistan that would unite all the Kurds living in different states within a new single political entity and each Kurdish political movement has its own understanding of the boundaries of the territory they wish to have full or administrative control over. Despite this, the map of greater Kurdistan has gained resonance in both Kurdish and international discourses and is a highly influential tool in advancing Kurdish separatist and autonomist demands.

The Map of Greater Kurdistan

Kurds have been using the map of greater Kurdistan since the early twentieth century to depict the Kurdish homeland, much to the annoyance of the states in which they are located. Kurdish nationalists see the map of greater Kurdistan as the cartographical reflection of the Kurdish territory. Kurdistan as a homeland and its maps are commonly used in the rhetoric of almost

all Kurdish nationalist organisations and activist groups, both in the region and in the diaspora. Kurdish nationalist historiography claims ownership of this territory since 4,000 BCE. Like other nationalisms it has a subjective view of national existence that goes back to ‘time immemorial’ and deploys past geographic and administrative terms to promote the idea that a Kurdish nation existed centuries ago (Izady 1992; Nezan 1996). In so doing, Kurdish nationalist historiography associates pre-modern meanings of ‘Kurdistan’ or ‘Kurdishness’ to the contemporary uses of national, territorial and political identity (O’Shea 2004: 2-3; McDowall 1996: 3).

Kurdish activists have produced many historical, sociological and political texts to legitimise and prove the Kurdish right to statehood and have created and distributed multiple maps of Kurdistan. Maps are useful tools for presenting nationalist views. The cartographic image of a territory with clear boundaries and a name that makes reference to a people gives the message that the territory and the people inhabiting it are related. In fact, this usage has moved beyond the discourse of Kurdish nationalists. For example, Bob Filner, Democrat Congressman for California’s 51st District pleaded for the recognition of Kurdish self-determination at the United States Congress on 1 May 1997. The justification he put forth was that Kurds have been ruling the area they inhabit since 2,000 BCE and the Kurds (then Gutis) ruled today’s Persia and Mesopotamia 4,000 years ago. He declared that despite this historical legacy, Kurds have been denied the right to nationhood and self-determination. Frank Pallone, Congressman for the 6th district of New Jersey, in a speech also on 1 May 1997 appealed for Kurdish self-determination and requested the United States government stop giving Turkey military support and making arms deals with it. Pallone gave another statement to the Congress 6 April 2000, referring to his 1997 address and referring to the ‘lands of Kurdistan’ and calling for support for action to stop the persecution of Kurds and violation of their rights in the hands of their states.

The map of greater Kurdistan has become one of the prominent features and symbols of Kurds. It has become synonymous with the idea of ‘Kurdistan’ in the minds of the Kurds and become a significant feature of Kurdish nationalist discourse. Kurdish parties do not promote this map or include it as a territorial goal in their party programmes, but they use this map to justify the ethnic presence of Kurds on the territory the map depicts. There is a striking similarity between Kurdish nationalists’ and outsiders’ descriptions of Kurdistan. The idea that there is a direct link between the area represented on these maps and the people living in that area has become embedded in both Kurdish and international political discourses. As it has come to be seen as a natural territory, it has come to “inscribe boundaries and construct objects that in turn become our realities” (Pickles 2004: 145).

The power of political maps and territoriality

The power of political maps partly comes from their perceived objectivity and naturalness. We see the world through maps. The world, from a traditional IR perspective is composed of state territories that frame the nation and the space it controls. The world political map reifies the idea of a world divided into sovereign domestic spaces of control and political authority (Black 2000: 12). Political maps are widely used in state offices, schools, newspapers and other forms of media, internet, flags, political pamphlets, which in turn further perpetuate our image of the world (Vujakovic 2002: 377-79). In this process, particular understandings of politics, society or the world a map depicts become common sense, as if the map reflects reality in a neutral

and transparent way (Weldes 1996: 303). Because of the perception that maps are scientific, the sense of territorial control and the boundaries of states appear both objective and natural.

Critical geographers challenged the idea that maps reflect objective cartographic information (Black 2000; Crampton 2001; Pickles 2004). They argued that the mapping process produces the territory and the identity of the people that live in that territory. Maps, including state maps, are social and political constructs shaped and understood through temporal, social and political contexts and discourses (Crampton and Krygier 2006: 15-17). Social constructions are things we consider as common sense because they appear to reflect reality, like gender roles or identity. Societies usually take social constructions for granted, as something natural, and hardly question their origins (Weldes 1996: 279-80). In the case of maps, those who are inside the boundaries of a map are considered to share an identity, different from those who are outside those borders (Anderson 1991), overlooking the fact that historically boundaries change, and do so more often than assumed.

The power of political maps also derives from the discourse through which we see cartographic images. There is interplay between the map and our knowledge of shared ideas and dominant discourse (Weldes 1996: 286). The overlap between dominant narratives of national identity and territoriality, in other words the idea that the world is composed of nations and their territories, is at the source of the power of political maps. Conceptions of nation and homeland constitute the context through which we understand maps. These conceptions are underpinned by notions of nationhood and territoriality, which change over time and in turn shapes the way we perceive cartographic information.

Our conceptions of national identity and territoriality not only shape how we see the maps of states but also maps of aspirational territories, claimed homelands of aspirant nations. The contemporary international system builds on territorially defined as national units and nation-states represented on the world map, which are perceived to have internationally recognised sovereignty (Krasner 1999: 9-25). Separatist nationalists use the same logic; they use maps of their imagined homeland to show their location in the world and imply that they deserve sovereignty over their territory in the same way that other recognised sovereign entities have. In that sense, cartographic images can become political tools not only for recognised states but also for those who seek recognition, such as separatist and autonomist nationalists. Maps become tools for showing competing understandings of territorial reality on the same land (Culcasi 2006: 681), making maps divisive.

Separatist and autonomist nationalists aim to achieve autonomy or devolved authority within the state or to form their own state on behalf of their nation on the territory over which they claim ownership (Breuilly 2001: 32). In that sense, when demanding self-determination, they claim their own territoriality and sovereignty and challenge the sovereignty of the ruling state (Mayall 1990: 51, 69). Here the tension is between a people's right to self-determination and another people's right to existing sovereignty (Bishai 2004: 7), in other words, between two different claims on territoriality.

By definition, the democratic enterprise is based on a defined group of people, and for the last couple of centuries this group is understood to be the nation. Popular sovereignty, a product of the French and American democratic revolutions, moulded into the nineteenth-century concept of nationalism in the transition from the sovereignty of monarchs to that of the peoples. Throughout the transformation of the doctrine of sovereignty in the nineteenth century, different types of sovereignties co-existed (Benton 2010: 1-2). But by early twentieth century,

people and popular sovereignty became the legitimate source of a state's sovereignty and absolute control within its territory in most parts of the world (Philpott 2001: 16; James 1999: 458-59; Krasner 2001).

With the devolution of states and empires into nation-states, the idea of popular sovereignty became associated with nationality, consent of the governed, and later, self-determination. People, or the nation, emerged as the source of state power, and state territoriality became defined as linked to the nation. The 1789 Declaration of Rights of Man and of Citizen by the National Assembly of France defines nation as “essentially the source of all sovereignty; nor can any individual, or any body of men, be entitled to any authority which is not expressly derived from it.” The association of sovereignty with a specific group of people, the nation, brought with it challenges to existing sovereignties, in the form of self-determination demands.

The principle of self-determination is a critically important principle. It is part of the rules and principles that bind or guide state relations. It has a geographical aspect because it involves people and territoriality. It pertains to processes both within the states and at international level (Knight 1985: 251). On one hand it stresses continuity of the territorial integrity of each state or, for instance, territorial administrations, but it also challenges the status quo, because according to United Nations (UN) documents, it is the right of all peoples. Self-determination, the right of peoples to “freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development”, as defined in the Article 1 of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, has had a determining role in the proliferation of nation-states in the twentieth century.

Demand for secessionist self-determination, or the “desire of minority nations to demand sovereignty” in the form of administrative regions or independence, increased dramatically in the post-1918, post-1945 and post-1991 periods (R. Griffiths 2014: 580). The number of states in the world in 1912 was 51; as of May 2018, this number was 195, according to the United States Department of State.⁴ Woodrow Wilson's, then President of the United States, ideal of self-determination, which he introduced as a pathway to statehood for small nations in the aftermath of the First World War, turned into an international framework for forming new states out of existing ones (Moynihan 2002; Moore 2014, 2015; Miller 2014). Enshrined as an international legal norm in the UN Charter of 1945, the principle was implemented in ex-colonial territories in the 1950-70s, and subsequently in ex-communist territories after 1991. Today some consider self-determination as applicable to certain territories that are neither ex-colonial nor ex-communist (Fabry 2010: 180). With the 1990s, the pressure to prioritise people over territory increased again with the return to Wilsonian self-determination. Although this last trend has not gained much legitimacy and traction globally, instances of people demanding self-determination, unilaterally declaring it (Kosovo in 2008) or gaining autonomous self-rule (Kurdistan Region of Iraq) have certainly increased. Within this context, the territory-nation link turned into something perennial for nationalists and their supporters, even if it challenges existing state territories.

Claims for self-determination actually are made to advance the sovereignty and territoriality of a new people in the form of independence or autonomy. Such claims assume the existence of a clearly definable territory that belongs to a people, or the possibility of drawing clear boundaries for such a territory, despite the fact that it is hard to define ‘people’, let alone where their territory lies. However, for a new people to attain legitimate sovereignty, recognition by

⁴ <https://www.state.gov/s/inr/rls/4250.htm>

other states, or in Krasner's words 'international legal sovereignty', is necessary. International legal sovereignty is recognition of a state's rule over a specific territory and people by other states (Krasner 1999: 14-20).⁵ Then the issue is with deciding which people a state is entitled to wield legitimate authority over.

Self-determination reifies territoriality – the assumed link between the territory and the people. After all, the “purpose and value of the division of the world into territorial jurisdictions is self-determination” (Banai et al. 2014: 103). Self-determination provides the pretext for assumptions on the nation-territory link, whether this link is understood in the context of a traditional state model or in relation to more plural forms of governance or separatists' demands. In all these cases, a link is assumed to exist between territory and people. This is despite the fact that assuming any such link can be problematic due to the obvious question of defining who the people are, the existence of multiple cultural groups on a piece of land, and the normative and subjective questions around who has territorial rights.

The link between nation and territory

Interrogating the link between the nation and territory is necessary for generating a nuanced understanding of self-determination in separatist cases. Assumptions on an intrinsic link between the nation and territory actually hinder theoretical discussions on self-determination and on the implications of separatism or autonomism. Therefore, an empirically grounded theoretical interrogation of the link between nation and territory sheds a new light on debates around self-determination and claims to sovereignty.

Separatist or autonomist nationalists perceive their national boundaries as different from the existing boundaries of the country they inhabit. Their claims emphasise that the people who are attached to a territory should have the right to exercise sovereignty over it. Most separatists bolster this claim with an assertion that they have distinct cultural, territorial and linguistic identities, arguing that the only way to protect their identity is through the democratic right to sovereignty over a specific territory. The right emerges from the process in which people's usage and habitation of a specific territory generates, or is believed to generate, a territorially defined identity. Territory, from this perspective, is seen as a material necessity to enforce laws and policies through which the national or cultural identity of people can be protected (White 2000: 22; Kacowicz 1994: 7), basically echoing the idea that “the political and the national should be congruent” (Gellner 2006: 6).

How can we explain this assumption that group identity and territory are linked? Why are ethno-national separatist movements associated with territory, or why is the right to self-determination usually framed around territorial identity? The existing literature in IR on self-determination provides useful explanatory and normative insights to some other relevant questions but has not necessarily interrogated how the link between territory and group identity came to be taken for granted. These scholars emphasise the resonance of self-determination, the rightfulness of such claims and the conditions under which such claims are given international recognition (Buchanan 2003; M. Griffiths 2003; Castellino 2000; Heraclides 1997; Shaw 1997). Others focus on the liberal and democratic underpinnings of self-determination demands, and solutions for territorial disputes (Tamir 2003; Moore 1997;

⁵ Krasner defines different types of sovereignty – a complex concept with multiple and changing meanings throughout the history – ‘domestic sovereignty’, ‘Westphalian sovereignty’ ‘interdependence sovereignty’ (Krasner 1999: 9-25).

Horowitz 1994), or the relationship between sovereignty, territoriality and self-determination (R. Griffiths 2014; Fabry 2010; James 1999; Mayall 1990).

There is also a more recent body work that tries to develop a theory of territory and to understand what constitutes attachment between people and territory and what justifies the territorial rights of states and non-state groups (Banai, 2014; Miller, 2014, 2012; Moore, 2014; Elden, 2013). This work builds on previous attempts by political geographers to theorise territory (Anderson, 1998; Agnew, 1994; Knight 1985), and this is a useful starting point to interrogate the assumption between territory and nation. Moore (2014) offers a theoretical perspective to territory and explains the different perspectives of the 'nationalist theory' and 'legitimate state theory' on territory. Nationalist theory of territory argues, according to Moore, that nations are perennial entities that have existed throughout history and therefore should be the foundational units in the organisation of the world. As such, the nation-state system is defensible. Although this theory does not claim to offer answers to all territorial disputes or to provide justification for all territorial claims, it asserts that a state can claim territorial rights only if it represents a people, a nation, understood as culturally integrated and continuous over time. According to this approach, basically, nations' ownership of territory comes from the material and symbolic value they add to the land (Miller 2011: 107); nation and territory are attached because they shape each other and people mix their culture with territory by creating cultural and political rules and institutional structures on that territory (Moore 2014: 124).

The assumptions about the link between nation and territory in the nationalist theory, as described by Moore, have resonance in the ethno-symbolist and primordial accounts of the concept of nation in the study of Nationalism. These accounts argue that the core of nations existed in the past before the division of the world into nation-states. Smith, whose definitions and theories have had a huge influence on contemporary work on nationalism, called this an *ethnie*, the pre-modern basis of nations, and emphasised territorial attachment as one of the significant characteristics of *ethnies* (Smith 1986). Although Smith distanced himself from less-respected primordialist accounts of nationalism, his concept of *ethnie* as the precursor of nationalism gave resonance to nationalist ideals about national awakening. Both separatist and state nationalists make reference to the historical existence of their distinct ethnic identity and territorial ownership, and both invoke democratic rights for their people. For these accounts, Smith's approach has a huge appeal, including Kurdish nationalists and parts of the Kurdish nationalist scholarship. As Alexander and Smith put it, "Smith's approach to nationalism satisfies the emotional gap that primordialism's collapse left behind" (Alexander and Smith 2015: 784). Though they also emphasise that Kurdish experts have overlooked the finer details of Smith's thinking about how complex phenomena *ethnie* and nation are, and instead but focused on the "idea of the transition *ethnie* → nation." (Alexander and Smith 2015: 774).

Scholars who adopt the ethno-symbolist perspective see territorial control and jurisdiction as a material necessity for the protection of the national and cultural identities of peoples (White 2000: 22). It is essential, for them, that new governing institutions represent the ethnic and cultural identity of the people (Kacowicz 1994: 7). Smith argued that 'ethnospaces', defined as sacred sites, mountains, battlefields, tombs and monuments, are significant in the construction of national identities or in the 'territorialisation of memory' (1996: 454). He accepted that territorial identity is socially constructed and that it is humans who give meaning to that territory. But he also argued that territorial associations asserted by nationalists should have implications on the political life of their people on whose behalf they talk. According to Smith, this is not particularly destabilising. On the contrary, what provokes instability is the failure to implement the national ideal (Smith 1981: 199). Ethno-symbolist (and primordialist)

arguments draw on the idea that a homeland is one of the key traits of ethnic or national groups. Most separatist nationalists aspiring to have their own sovereignty, use the idea of an ethnically defined territory as the content and justification for their aspirations. Territory and its history are central for ethno-nationalist groups and they believe that their objectively perceived territorial identity gives them the right to exercise sovereignty and jurisdiction over that territory (Buchanan 2003).

The other theory Moore describes, the legitimate state theory, adopts a different view on the territory and nation link, or territoriality. Legitimate state theory argues that people or non-state communities alone cannot be right holders over territory. The state and people living on its territory are the legitimate right-holders of land (Stilz 2011), and the state and its institutions generate a collective body of people, the nation. So here, the link between territory and people is established via a legitimate state, and is not assumed to exist already and naturally. Only nations with a legitimate state can claim ownership over a territory. National culture is also important for legitimate state theory in that nation and territory ultimately become connected, but the crucial distinction from nationalist theories is that the key justification for people's ownership of the territory is the legitimate jurisdiction of the state. This view echoes the modernist accounts of nations, which emphasise the constructed nature of nations and national identities – constructed through historical processes of state formation, capitalism, print-capitalism and the transition from monarchical systems to republican and democratic states (Gellner 2006; Breuilly 1993; Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). However, the legitimate state theory remains limited in accounting for non-state nationalist claims and offers a statist perspective in which states could also be the representative of a majority identity at the expense of others.

The division between nationalist and legitimate state theories builds on the widely used civic-ethnic typology in the study of Nationalism. The civic type has more in common with the legitimate state theory while the ethnic type corresponds more to nationalist theory. The civic understanding of nations (also known as solidarist or political) emphasises citizenship, while the ethnic understanding (also known as cultural) emphasises the common 'objective' traits of a group of people (Kohn 1929; Calhoun 2007). Although this ideal typology does not always apply to real cases and many cases incorporate elements from both types (Zimmer 2003: 177-181), it provides a conceptual frame for understanding claims made on behalf of a nation. The civic type is generally associated with the individual choice to be part of a nation and the significance of state institutions and political culture in constructing collective identity. The ethnic type on the other hand is associated with a belief in the perennial existence of a distinct group. It assumes the objective national or ethnic features of a group to be given and continuous throughout history.

Crucially, despite different emphasises between the nationalist and legitimate state theories, what they both have in common is that neither actually questions the assumption that nation and territory are linked. They disagree on the processes that creates the connection between nation and territory, but both consider the nation-territory attachment, or territoriality, as an existing core feature of a people. Similarly, although the two approaches differ in how they justify the territorial rights of people, again they both fail to interrogate this link. Instead they assume a territory-people link exists in theory and in practice. When assessing whether this attachment can be turned into a right to ownership for non-state peoples, they try to verify the existence of that attachment in empirical terms. As such, neither approach asks the bigger question of whether such attachments, whether in the case of states or non-states, should be accepted in either theoretical, conceptual or practical terms in the first place.

Again, the point here is not to discuss whether a link between territory and people actually exists or not. The question is why such a link is perceived to exist and how the perceived nature of this link changes over time and influences territorial politics of non-state nationalist actors. Assumptions embedded in the discourse and narrative on nations and territoriality shape how we see the world map or the cartographic depictions of aspirational homelands. These assumptions are two-fold as explained so far. One is the belief in the objectivity and accuracy of maps, which lends political power to these tools of communication. Second, and most important, the international normative and political context that shapes these perceptions have changed historically. International narratives of self-determination and territoriality, and their new meanings in different periods affected the way both Kurds and outsiders perceived the Kurdistan maps and Kurdish territoriality. The rest of this book explores the changing dynamics between international justifications for people's claims to territorial self-determination and perceptions of Kurdistan and its maps.

Conclusion

The map of greater Kurdistan conveys the message that the territory it demarcates belongs to the Kurds. Its influence comes from the assumed natural link between 'nation' and 'territory'. Though, it is more likely to be politically constructed because we see the world map through our assumptions about nation, territory and territoriality. Political maps have the power to shape people's images of the world in a manner that text alone fails to. They are visual expressions of apparently homogenous national territories. In reality, political maps are not simply reflections of how the world territory is partitioned; they are the outcomes of political projects and imaginations, and in return, they shape our perceptions of the world territory.

The argument the map of greater Kurdistan makes – that the boundaries depicted on the map reflect a Kurdish territory – is a political and subjective argument. Nonetheless, the widespread use and reproduction of the map bolsters the Kurdish struggle to generate support for their cause and raise awareness about their issues. This raises key questions relating to: how has the map of Kurdistan become a widespread symbol of Kurdish territorial identity; where does the idea of the map of Kurdistan come from; what messages does this map give; how is it perceived, and why; and has its purpose, use and reception changed over time?

The map of greater Kurdistan has been developed and communicated through the use of dominant international norms that give legitimacy to nationalist demands. The key international norm that shapes the rules of legitimacy on territorial and national rights is self-determination. This principle and related concepts such as sovereignty and territoriality influence the meaning of 'nation' and 'territory', and the relationship between them. Shifts in its meaning and in their relationship shape how maps are perceived.

The rest of the book historically traces the changes in the meaning of self-determination and in its relationship with territoriality and explains how these changes affected the use and reception of the map of Kurdistan by the Kurds and outsiders in different historical periods. Over time, self-determination expanded from being applicable to nations (initially understood as peoples of states) to include peoples with distinct ethnic, linguistic and territorial characteristics. This transformation increased the traction the map of greater Kurdistan has in international society. The book tells the parallel and interlinked stories of the map of greater Kurdistan and self-determination since the late nineteenth century until today. It argues that in its transformation,

the idea of Kurdistan and its map have been a constant term of reference for Kurdish nationalism. But, the framing, use and interpretation of both self-determination and the idea of Kurdistan have depended on how the relationship between nation and territory was understood in each period.

What follows now, in the second chapter ‘Kurdish territoriality under Ottoman rule’, is the analysis of the conceptual and historical underpinnings of the idea of Kurdistan and its later cartographic manifestations. This chapter explains the attribution of modern meanings of territory and nation to the past references of Kurdistan in the Kurdish nationalist historiography and examines the territoriality of the tribal leaders who revolted against the Ottomans in the nineteenth century. Third chapter, ‘Orientalist views of national identity and colonial maps of Kurdistan’ focuses on the maps of Kurdistan produced in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Western travellers and colonial officers. Colonialist understanding of what constitutes national identity shaped the way territorial identity of the peoples of this region. This perception shaped the construction of a retrospective view on Kurdish national identity later in the twentieth century. The maps European travellers produced were later adopted and used by Kurdish nationalists and became the key sources of mapping the Kurdish nation.

The fourth chapter, ‘Wilsonian self-determination: The rise and fall of hopes for Kurdistan’, is about how Kurdish nationalism adapted to the international framing for legitimate statehood in the first half of the twentieth century. This period was the height of Kurdish hopes for statehood, which did not come to fruition. Kurdish political elite presented their Kurdistan maps to international authorities to receive support for their project, similar to many other groups across the world in this period. The fifth chapter, ‘Kurdish nationalism during decolonisation and the Cold War’, is about another significant period of state formation worldwide, when Kurdish nationalism transformed from being an elite project to a grassroots movement and different movements emerged in the four countries Kurds reside.

The sixth chapter, ‘Kurds and the international society after the Cold War’, looks at the evolution of self-determination and new state formation process in the post-Cold War period and the international norms of democracy and human rights that framed and shaped the goals of each Kurdish nationalist group. The seventh chapter, ‘Kurdish diaspora: Kurdistan map goes global’ looks at the role of Kurdish activists in the diaspora in making the map of greater Kurdistan a widely used symbol of Kurdish territoriality. The Kurdish diaspora combined the prevalent normative and political discourse of human rights, justice and democracy with their identity-based territoriality and promoted pan-Kurdish ideas more strongly than the Kurds in the region. The concluding chapter offers a re-cap of the historical case study of the map of Kurdistan and its alignment with the evolution of the international normative framework, specifically self-determination, and looks at the situation of Kurdish politics today and the divisive impact of the war in Syria on the Kurds.