

Kurdish Identity Constructions In Iraq Since The First Gulf War (1991)

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Introduction

The First Gulf War (1990-1991) and the US-led Invasion of Iraq in 2003 significantly altered the political and social lives of the Kurds living in the north of the Republic of Iraq. For decades, the Ba'ath party of Iraq had persecuted the Kurdish population of Iraq as they enforced a form of Arab nationalism on the country. Two self-defined Kurdish nationalist parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), in Northern Iraq took advantage of the war in Iraq in 1991 to gain limited autonomy for the region under their authority. The 2003 invasion and overthrow of Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime then provided the opportunity for these parties to officially consolidate their regional autonomy, enshrined in the 2005 Iraqi Constitution which established Iraq as a federal democracy. They have jointly dominated the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) ever since and have subsequently taken advantage of their new-found autonomy to construct, develop and reinforce Kurdish national identifications in support of their political ambitions.

This thesis asks how Kurdish nationalist political parties in Iraqi-Kurdistan have attempted to construct and develop national identifications since 1991. It aims to show that the KDP and PUK have relegated the importance of primordial attachments in their attempts at building a "nation" and, instead, endeavoured to construct "Kurdistani" national identifications primarily founded on a sense of common history and civic rights. This thesis argues that such a construction is primarily grounded in political pragmatism. The ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq requires non-primordial identity markers to be formulated and promoted by the KDP and PUK to define their national identification and distinguish the Kurds of the KRG from "others", thereby supporting claims for political autonomy. It is political calculations – both at the domestic and international levels – that have influenced top-down constructions of a "Kurdish nation" as distinct from two specific political "others": i) Iraq under Baghdad's government; and ii) Kurdish groups in Turkey, Iran and Syria. This was particularly crucial in the period following the 2003 US-led invasion, when Iraq began its transition from dictatorship to federal democracy, reinforcing KDP and

PUK hegemony over the Kurdistan Region. Throughout this thesis, I highlight how KDP and PUK narratives of victimhood have underpinned the construction of Baghdad as the “unjust” and “threatening” other, whereas emphasis on civic values as allegedly embedded in the “Kurdistani identity” have distinguished them from other Kurds, in order to enhance relations with neighbouring states such as Turkey and Iran, and influential state actors such as the USA and EU members.

Iraq’s Kurds and the transition from dictatorship to federal democracy

The defeat of Iraqi forces in Kuwait by the US-led military coalition that intervened against Saddam Hussein’s attempt to occupy a neighbouring country, inspired the KDP and PUK to lead a revolt in the north of Iraq in early 1991. The parties’ *peshmerga* forces quickly achieved a string of military successes against the government forces, including the capture of the economically, politically, and symbolically important city of Kirkuk on 19 March.¹ However, a counter-attack by Iraqi government forces quickly recaptured lost territory. Hundreds of thousands of Kurds fled to the mountainous borders with Turkey and Iran, fearful of government retaliation for the rebellion.² The mass exodus led to a humanitarian crisis, which resulted in UNSC Resolution 688, creating a “safe haven” enforced by a “no-fly zone” north of the 36th degree parallel.³ The 36th degree became a border between Baghdad-ruled Iraq and a *de facto* autonomous region under the authority of the KDP and PUK.

In 1992, an alliance of political organisations called “The Iraqi Kurdistan Front” held elections and established the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).⁴ The KDP and PUK have politically and militarily dominated the Kurdistan Region of Iraq ever since. The KRG effectively became a state within a state, allowing the parties to control and utilise governmental and institutional apparatus for their own ambitions. Since 1991, the KDP and PUK have utilised mediums of mass

¹ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 3rd Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 248.

² Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 248.

³ Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 248.

⁴ Kurdistan Regional Government, “Contemporary History,” Erbil, accessed 10/05/2017 http://cabinet.gov.krd/p/page.aspx?l=12&s=050000&r=306&p=216_

communication to construct and transmit nationalist discourses in an attempt to create, develop and reinforce national identifications which legitimise their political authority and justify their nationalist aims. The parties promoted national historical narratives which stressed the Iraqi-Kurds' victimisation by previous Iraqi regimes, but also took pride in their history of resistance.

These narratives were not unchallenged, and this thesis does not make assertions about the success of the parties' imposition of national identifications on the KRG's population. In fact, politicisation of historical events by the ruling parties has often been controversial and has, on occasion, resulted in large protests from affected sections of the populace.⁵ Furthermore, other Kurdish nationalist parties throughout the Middle East present their own narratives and identification constructions which often contradict those of the KDP and PUK.

Kurdish identities and nationalisms in theory

Kurdish nationalisms

There is no single, unifying Kurdish nationalism. Rather, there are multiple Kurdish nationalisms being promoted across the Middle East and in the diaspora by a variety of political organisations. That said, in Iraq, the KDP and PUK are so ideologically congruent that David Romano reported that 'the PUK itself came in practice and behaviour to resemble the KDP so much that average Kurds were often unable to specify a single policy or ideological difference between the two.'⁶ Politics and pragmatism, rather than ideology, best explains the 1975 PUK leadership's split from the KDP, the intra-Kurdish fighting of 1976-8, KDP-PUK collaboration against Baghdad in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88),⁷ and the causes for the beginning and end of the 1994-8 Iraqi-Kurdish civil

⁵ Nicole F. Watts, "The Role of Symbolic Capital in Protest: State- Society Relations and the Destruction of the Halabja Martyrs Monument in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32:1 (2012):84.

⁶ David Romano, *The Kurdish nationalist movement: opportunity, mobilisation, and identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 197.

⁷ Yaniv Voller, *The Kurdish Liberation Movement in Iraq: From insurgency to statehood*, (London: Routledge, 2014), 58-59.

war.⁸ Historically, whether with or against one another, ideological distinctions have been less important than the long-term nationalist ambitions shared by the KDP and PUK or the competing political power ambitions of their leaders.

Internecine conflict directly contradicts the notion of a unified nation. This provided a strong incentive for the KDP and PUK to share power and unite towards their shared long-term nation-state goal. As Mohammed Ahmed stated: the KDP and PUK ‘realized that their people would damn them forever if they squandered the opportunity created by the 1991 Gulf War for laying the foundation of a Kurdish state in Iraq.’⁹ As this thesis shows, during the period being studied, the KDP and PUK were broadly united in their nationalist ambitions and they sought to influence Kurdish identities in congruence with one another. Their matching nationalist discourses supported the short-term political aims of both parties and their long-term ambitions of independent statehood. The congruence between the KDP and PUK nationalisms means that the nationalist ideologies of the KDP and PUK will be considered as one in the following discussion.

Creating a nation

Anthony Smith defined the nation as ‘a named community of history and culture, possessing a unified territory, economy, mass education system and common legal rights.’¹⁰ Smith’s theory about nations’ origins was a response to “modernists”, who broadly saw nations as the result of modern processes like industrialisation, capitalism or the emergence of the modern state.¹¹ Ernest Gellner, for example, saw the modern nation as a product of nationalism which, as a phenomenon, is itself ‘an effect of industrial social organisation.’¹² Emphasising the agency of nationalist movements, in contrast to “primordialist” assertions, he argued that ‘nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing

⁸ Mohammed M.A. Ahmed, *Iraqi Kurds and Nation-Building*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 9.

⁹ Ahmed, *Iraqi Kurds and Nation-Building*, 9.

¹⁰ Anthony Smith, “The Origins of Nations,” in *Becoming National: a reader*, ed. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, 106-130 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 107.

¹¹ Umut Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd Ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 72.

¹² Ernest Gellner, “Nations and Nationalism” (1983), in *Nations and Identities*, ed. Vincent P. Pecora, (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 294.

cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures.’¹³ Benedict Anderson similarly saw nations as a trapping of modernity, positing that modern nations are founded on “imagined communities” emerging from the innovation of print-capitalism.¹⁴

Smith criticised “modernists” for omitting ethnic components from their theories. He argued that, although the nation is a recent phenomenon, it has its foundations in ‘communities of history and culture’ which he termed “ethnies.”¹⁵ These “ethnies” include a common name for the population, myths of origin and descent, common historical memories and experiences, an identified territory, common cultural trappings – such as language, customs and religion – and a communal ‘sense of solidarity.’¹⁶ These “ethnies” evolve into nations when combined with civic components.¹⁷ However, Smith does not claim this to be natural process. Indeed, nationalisms pre-date nations and are the result of growing “national sentiment” throughout a population, which requires human will and effort. Thus, nations are formed, rather than perennial.¹⁸

However, Umut Özkirimli, has criticised “primordialist”, “modernist” and “ethnosymbolist” theories alike for failing to explain the process of how nations are formed, why they take the shape they do, and how they are affected by power and politics. For instance, he agrees that primordial attachments may well have provided the basis for future nations, but that “primordialist” theories provide no explanation for how and why particular attachments end up relating to modern nations while others are discarded in history.¹⁹ In response, he proposes a discursive explanation: ‘the link between primordial attachments and modern nations is provided by the “modern” discourse of nationalism. It is nationalism which takes pre-existing attachments and gives them political significance.’²⁰

¹³ Gellner, “Nations and Nationalism,” 300.

¹⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983), 46.

¹⁵ Smith, “The Origins of Nations,” 109-110.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 109-110.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 108-9.

¹⁹ Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism*, 201-2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 202.

Discursive construction of nations and national identities

By building on Özkirimli's argument, this thesis focuses on discursive constructions of the nation. Discourses are not merely language, 'they are statements that are enacted within a social context and determined by that social context.'²¹ Özkirimli summarises Foucault, arguing that 'how we interpret objects and events, and what we perceive to be significant, are dependent on discursive structures; discourses are what make objects and events appear to us to be real.'²² By analysing nationalism as a discourse, it presents a 'particular way of seeing and interpreting the world, a frame of reference that helps us make sense of and structure the reality that surrounds us.'²³

Özkirimli goes on to argue that nationalist discourses make three sets of claims: 1) identity claims, 2) temporal claims, and 3) spatial claims.²⁴ Identity claims stress characteristics which divide "us" from "them" while reinforcing the nation as the source of legitimacy and sovereignty.²⁵ Temporal claims promote a version of history, which establishes the 'diachronic presence' of the nation, while also relying on 'social amnesia' of elements incongruent with the 'authentic' version of history promoted by the nationalist elite.²⁶ Spatial claims express desire for a national territory or homeland. Whether real or imagined, owned or lost, territorial claims are sometimes utilised to explain national characteristics, provide evidence of a nation's historical existence and presence, or validate a claim over a particular area of land.²⁷

Of course, these three sets of claims overlap and interact with one another. Nationalist historical narratives attempt to anachronistically bind individuals together into a homogeneous unit based on national identification, simultaneously identifying that group's historic existence in a particular territory or region, thereby reinforcing identifications between the grouped individuals

²¹ Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism*, 208.

²² *Ibid.*, 208.

²³ *Ibid.*, 206.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 208-9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 208-9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 209.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 209.

based on their shared experiences. However, identity, spatial and territorial claims do not go unchallenged and we should be careful to avoid essentialism, and reification of identity claims.

Identity and Identification

Rogers Brubaker warns against the use of “strong conceptions” of the term “identity”. He highlights that the term contains problematic assumptions: that “identity” is something that all people and groups have, or ought to have, even if they aren’t aware of it; and that ‘strong notions of collective identity imply strong notions of group boundedness and homogeneity’ which imply ‘a clear boundary between inside and outside.’²⁸ On the other hand, Brubaker also criticises “weak conceptions” which contain so many constructivist “qualifiers” that the term loses its value.²⁹ Brubaker suggests alternatives to counter the essentialism inherent in “strong”, and the overly-broad and ambiguous “weak”, notions of “identity”. He proposes using the term “identification,” rather than “identity,” as it successfully avoids reification by specifying the identifying agents.³⁰ Furthermore, “identification” ‘does not presuppose that such identifying (even by powerful agents, such as the state) will necessarily result in the internal sameness, the distinctiveness, the bounded groupness that political entrepreneurs may seek to achieve.’³¹

Against this backdrop, this thesis does contend that identities can be multiple, malleable and (at least partially) constructed, but by specifying the political parties as the agents of (attempted) identification, it avoids reducing “identity” to a term ‘so infinitely elastic as to be incapable of performing serious analytical work.’³² Indeed, this thesis explores how and why Kurdish nationalist political parties in Iraq *attempt* to construct national identities; it does not make claims about the success of such attempts nor deny individuals their agency. By specifying KRG nationalists as agents

²⁸ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 37.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

³² *Ibid.*, 38.

of identifications, we can assess the intentions behind the manipulation of “identity” – as a “category of practice” – and how it can be politically beneficial to the KDP and PUK.

Controlling and politicising identifications can help political elites to gain and maintain power by supporting their ideological claims and political actions. By persuading people that they share an identity, parties attempt to ‘organize and justify collective action.’³³ As William Bloom asserts, when a large group of people share the same identification, mass mobilisation becomes possible.³⁴ Psychologically imbued with a shared identification, people may ‘act together to preserve, defend and enhance their common identity.’³⁵ It is advantageous, then, for a political elite to monopolise the ability to manipulate identifications and the symbolic content of shared identities.³⁶ For the KDP and PUK, the power to manipulate and reinforce identifications supports their joint control over the region by providing justification for their political leadership, policies and decision-making, subsequently preventing serious political challenges from other parties. In particular, national identifications constructed by the KDP and PUK legitimise their interactions with identified “others”, such as the government in Baghdad.

I specify the KDP and PUK as prominent agents of identification in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq because, between them, they control the KRG and its institutional power and apparatus. Although the KRG is not a *de jure* state, the *de facto* state does control ‘material and symbolic resources’ to impose categorisations and classifications which allow it to be a powerful identifier.³⁷ While certainly not the only source of identification, the classificatory power of state institutions makes it a significant agent of external identification.³⁸ External identification can be just as powerful as self-identification. People self-identify but they also identify others. Brubaker stresses the significance of both, stating that ‘self-identification takes place in dialectical interplay with external identification.’³⁹ As such,

³³ Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, 31-32.

³⁴ William Bloom, *Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 50-51.

³⁵ Bloom, *Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations*, 26.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁷ Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, 43.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

institutionalised capabilities to name and categorise people provide the potential to impact citizens' self-identifications. This thesis will address mediums through which the KDP and PUK utilised their authority to (attempt to) influence the Kurdistan Region's citizens' identifications.

Of course, there are many ways people may identify themselves – for example, by race, religion, gender, or socio-economic class – and many people will identify themselves with multiple groupings. *National* identification simply refers to the internalisation of the symbols of a nation.⁴⁰ William Bloom argues, from a psychological perspective, that external identification is not enough for this to happen. He states that 'identification with, and loyalty to, the nation is evoked from actual experiences in which it is psychologically beneficial to make the identification.'⁴¹ In other words, for people to internalise a nation's symbols, they must perceive that the nation directly touches on, and positively impacts, their lived experience.

As political authorities desire loyalty from their populace, they pursue nation-building policies to promote identification with the nation they claim to represent. Bloom argues that nation-building is performed by states, but that it will only be effective if the mass citizenry actually experiences state actions; either in defence against a perceived external threat or if it acts to benefit its population.⁴² Nation-building depends upon creating a sense of common experience between the community and the state actors.⁴³ Although Bloom limits "nation-building" to the preserve of *state* actors, this thesis argues that the KDP and PUK have utilised the institutional authority and power of the KRG to implement nation-building practices within their region of influence, thereby acting as one might expect an independent state to. They strategized to lay the foundations for future statehood: homogenising the KRG population under a "Kurdistani" civic identification and presenting themselves as the representatives of that identification, thereby legitimising and reinforcing their contemporary and future political hegemony.

⁴⁰ Bloom, *Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations*, 52.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 74-75.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 142.

Despite many trappings of statehood, the KRG is not a state and, as such, the KDP and PUK continue to produce identifications directly in contrast to the central state government in Baghdad, as a non-state party would do. As Bloom describes, if a centralising state is presented as devaluing or threatening an ethnically, territorially or culturally identified community, and this is communicated to that community as a common experience of being disadvantaged, nationalist leaders can ‘create an identity-securing interpretive system’ – otherwise known as a “nationalist ideology”.⁴⁴ Hence, a key element in the construction and dissemination of a politicised national identification is the perceived defence of a shared identification against a threatening “other” – whether that is a centralising state power or an international aggressor. The KDP and PUK aim to present themselves as protectors against a historically aggressive “other” – identifying that “other” as the Iraqi state – to justify their political authority.

Othering

One of the main points this thesis aims to highlight is that the KDP and PUK attempt to construct distinct “Kurdish” identities by juxtaposing homogenised and idealised images of Iraqi-Kurds to those of national “others”. In other words, the nationalist parties attempt to identify who the Kurds of Iraq *are* by identifying and emphasising who they *are not*. Henri Tajfel argued that, at an individual level, a person’s self-image is formed in relation to value-loaded comparisons with other groups.⁴⁵ At a communal level, ‘the internal unit of a national “group” can become indissolubly linked to its inherent and immutable differences from others.’⁴⁶ Indeed, Cătălin-George Fedor emphasises the interconnectedness of “otherness” and “identity”, arguing that identities can only be defined by addressing their “otherness”.⁴⁷ Fedor stresses that “otherness” and “identity” are oppositional pair

⁴⁴ Ibid., 142.

⁴⁵ Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: studies in social psychology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 322.

⁴⁶ Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 340-341.

⁴⁷ Cătălin-George Fedor, “Stereotypes and Prejudice in the Perception of the “Other”,” *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 149 (2014):322.

terms; one cannot be defined or understood without the other.⁴⁸ I will use the term “othering” to describe this process of indirectly defining oneself through comparisons to perceived grouped “others”. Lajos Brons provides a definition of “othering” as ‘the attribution of some undesirable characteristic to the other or out-group leading to the usually implicit conclusion that that other/ out-group is (in some sense) inferior and/or radically alien,’ in order to create ‘a boundary between the in-group and the other/out-group.’⁴⁹

Homi Bhabha argues that national “others” are discursively constructed: ‘The “other” is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we think we speak most intimately and indigenously “between ourselves”.’⁵⁰ Identifications of “others” are the outcome of discourses which reinforce perceptions of a distinction between “us” – the in-group – and “them” – the out-group. Nations, as discursive constructs, rely on nationalist narratives which promote othering; because a nation, as a supposedly homogeneous group unit, cannot be identified or bounded without simultaneously identifying perceived national “others”. Furthermore, as Fedor argues, because identification by othering and categorising occurs during interpersonal communication, identities can be constantly constructed and reconstructed through mass communication technologies.⁵¹ Thus, mediums of mass communication – such as those controlled by the KDP and PUK since 1991 – can potentially develop national group othering and self-identification.

Victimhood

A theme of victimhood is found throughout nationalist narratives promoted by the KDP and PUK. The Iraqi-Kurdish nationalist parties emphasise “their people’s” past sufferings, stressing the importance of bloody and violent events – such as the al-Anfal campaign, the chemical bombing of Halabja and the Arabization of “Kurdish lands” – in their national historical discourses. Since 1991,

⁴⁸ Fedor, “Stereotypes and Prejudice in the Perception of the “Other”,” 322.

⁴⁹ Lajos L. Brons, “Needing the other: the anatomy of the Mass Noun Thesis,” *Argument* 4:1, (2014):104.

⁵⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, “Introduction: narrating the nation,” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha, (London: Routledge, 1990), 4.

⁵¹ Fedor, “Stereotypes and Prejudice in the Perception of the “Other”,” 322.

the KDP and PUK have made the al-Anfal campaign and the Halabja attacks two of the focal points of their national historical narratives. These events became symbolic of the Iraqi-Kurds' historic victimhood and suffering. They are a focus of discussion throughout this thesis and, as such, require an overview here.

Al-Anfal (or, simply, "Anfal") refers to a military campaign in the north of Iraq which specifically targeted (ethnically identified) Kurdish guerrilla forces and Kurdish communities. By KRG estimates, the Anfal campaign by Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime, which culminated in 1988, killed 182,000 people and destroyed 4,000 villages.⁵² The *Halabja attacks* refer to the city where, in March 1988, the Iraqi military launched chemical weapons attacks in response to Kurdish *peshmerga* capturing the city with Iranian support. Roughly 5,000 people died in this attack alone.⁵³ The symbolic significance of the Anfal campaign for Iraq's Kurds was highlighted in a 1993 Human Rights Watch report, titled "Genocide in Iraq": 'As all the horrific details have emerged, this name [Anfal] has seared itself into popular consciousness -- much as the Nazi German Holocaust did with its survivors. The parallels are apt, and often chillingly close.'⁵⁴ Nearly twenty years later, Andrea Fischer-Tahir argued that 'the Kurdish nationalist discourse in the 1990s established Halabja as the most powerful symbol of collective suffering.'⁵⁵

Both events have been frequently referred to by Kurdish nationalist politicians since 1991 to symbolically aid the construction of a common history which is essential for the formation of a national identification. Take the following example as an illustration of how widely the words "Anfal" and "Halabja" were used in Iraqi-Kurdish political discourses. By 2015, "Anfal" had become so synonymous with extreme violence and genocide that Mala Bakhtiar, a senior PUK politician, could

⁵² Human Rights Watch, "Genocide In Iraq: The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds," *Middle East Watch Report*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, July 1993), Preface and acknowledgements. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1993/iraqanfal/ANFALPRE.htm>.

⁵³ HRW, "Genocide In Iraq," Preface and acknowledgements.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Andrea Fischer-Tahir, "Gendered Memories and Masculinities: Kurdish Peshmerga On The Anfal Campaign In Iraq," *Journal Of Middle East Women's Studies* Vol. 8:1 (Winter 2012): 104.

reform it to use in a speech in the Netherlands as a verb – “to Anfalize”.⁵⁶ When proper nouns are adopted and conjugated as verbs – e.g. “to google,” “to Hoover,” “to skype” – it shows that the reference to the proper noun is so widely recognised and understood that people will comprehend its use to describe an activity or process too.

Karin Mlodoč’s research into female survivors of the Anfal campaign highlights how traumatic events are integrated into nationalist discourses. She argues that the Anfal and Halabja attacks ‘are considered a “collective trauma” endemic to Kurdish national identity.’⁵⁷ In hegemonic discourses, a Kurdish nation is presented as an innocent victim of Arab domination and the genocidal Ba’ath Party’s regime.⁵⁸ Furthermore, narratives of persecution and oppression based on ethnicity can provide justification for politicisation of ethnic identities in response, and political mobilisation in defence of one’s own group.⁵⁹ For the Kurdish nationalist parties of Iraq, past sufferings justify entitlements to autonomy.⁶⁰ In fact, Iraqi-Kurdish political claims and requests for international protection since 2003 have sometimes been legitimised through comparisons to the Holocaust.⁶¹ However, Khalil Osman explains that narratives of victimisation in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq are not unique to the Kurdish population. Political elites from both the Shi’a and Sunni communities, for different reasons, have adopted rhetoric of victimisation into their ethno-national discourses. Osman states that victimisation narratives have ‘emerged as markers of identity on both sides of the Muslim sectarian divide.’⁶² Mlodoč similarly describes a competition between victimhood claims in present-day Iraq, with all factions utilising victimhood claims to justify political power claims.⁶³

⁵⁶ Mala Bakhtiar, “Salafism: A Foe of Nation and Democracy,” 9 August 2015, Political Forum, Netherlands, transcript from Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, accessed 23/05/2017, <http://www.pukpb.org/english/cgblog/124/15/Salafism-A-Foe-of-Nation-and-Democracyenglish>.

⁵⁷ Karin Mlodoč, ““We Want to be Remembered as Strong Women, Not as Shepherds”: Women Anfal Survivors in Kurdistan-Iraq Struggling for Agency and Acknowledgement,” *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* Vol. 8:1 (Winter 2012):80.

⁵⁸ Mlodoč, ““We Want to be Remembered as Strong Women,”” 80.

⁵⁹ David Romano, “Modern Communications Technology in Ethnic Nationalist Hands: The Case of the Kurds,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 35:1 (March 2002):127.

⁶⁰ Mlodoč, ““We Want to be Remembered as Strong Women,”” 80.

⁶¹ Fischer-Tahir, “Gendered Memories and Masculinities,” 108.

⁶² Khalil Osman, “The hissing sectarian snake: sectarianism and the making of state and nation in modern Iraq,” (PHD Thesis, University of Exeter, 2012), 345.

⁶³ Mlodoč, ““We Want to be Remembered as Strong Women,”” 84.

Andrea Fischer-Tahir argues that the Kurdish parties' narratives of the Anfal campaign are gendered. She explores how 'the ruling parties introduced the image of rural women dressed in black, mourning the fate of their disappeared husbands and sons' to symbolise the Anfal campaign.⁶⁴ This "weak woman" symbol of Anfal contrasts with the "strong man" representation of the Kurdish liberation movement.⁶⁵ This thesis' analysis of presentations of Anfal commemorations on Kurdish television supports Fischer-Tahir's argument and shows that men and women are presented differently in the narratives of the Anfal campaign.

This thesis shows that these contrasting historical narratives – victimhood, symbolically represented by mourning women; and pride in resistance, symbolised by the strong (male) peshmerga – are ever-present throughout nationalist discourses of the KDP and PUK. By promoting narratives which associate a historically aggressive "other" with the centralised Iraqi state, and the inhabitants of the KRG as the victims, the KDP and PUK sought to justify their long-term independence ambitions and legitimise their contemporary political authority over the semi-autonomous KRG. Furthermore, victimisation narratives support self-identifications by emphasising past events as nationally shared experiences. This strategy supports the nation-building process which reinforces KDP-PUK political authority. They attempt to distinguish "their people" from those in non-KRG-controlled Iraq to delineate the boundaries of the "Kurdistani" nation, justifying eventual secession from Iraq along those lines. Additionally, by identifying the national in-group as those who were collectively victimised by Baghdad's rule, the parties are distinguishing Iraqi-Kurds from other Kurdish organisations, thereby excluding other ethnic Kurds from the nation they are attempting to formulate. Non-Iraqi-Kurds become othered, highlighting that the KDP and PUK have rejected pan-Kurdish political objectives.

Chapter overview

⁶⁴ Fischer-Tahir, "Gendered Memories and Masculinities," 93.

⁶⁵ Fischer-Tahir, "Gendered Memories and Masculinities," 94.

This thesis will be divided into three main chapters, each looking at different methods and mediums used by the KDP and PUK to construct national identifications. The first chapter examines how national identifications are developed through political discourses. Critical Discourse Analysis of the 2005 inauguration speech by President of the KRG, Masoud Barzani, highlights how national historical narratives have been emphasised in key political speeches. Such emphasis aimed to construct and reinforce national distinctions and justify Barzani's (and the KDP's) political authority as protector of a threatened national identification. Furthermore, the analysis shows that the nation-building process inside the KRG has been founded on civil rights, legality and democracy, rather than primordial identity markers.

The second chapter analyses the utilisation of television as a medium of national identity construction. It will analyse *KTV* and *KurdSat* (KDP- and PUK-controlled broadcasters, respectively) during commemorations for the Anfal campaign. It will examine how and why television broadcasting of commemorations of "national" events attempted to reinforce historical victimhood narratives which aimed to construct and homogenise national identifications.

The third chapter will explore the symbolic, political and practical importance of Kirkuk to the Kurdish nationalist parties of Iraq. It will highlight how Kirkuk has been emphasised in KDP and PUK political discourses to construct national historical narratives and justify contemporary political action. Moreover, Kirkuk has been used as a focal point of political argumentation, which attempted to reinforce national territorial claims while developing identity claims vis-à-vis others.

Relevance and importance of Kurdish national identity constructions

The construction of national identifications by the KDP and PUK could have significant ramifications for the Kurdistan Region, the Iraqi Federation and the wider Middle East region. As nationalist parties emphasise differences to their neighbours, contrasting Kurdish identifications against negative representations of Baghdad's rule, they politically and ideologically distance

themselves. Reinforcing disparities with those in the rest of Iraq will only make the political connection between Erbil and Baghdad more tenuous.

The Kurdish nationalist parties in Iraq decided to remain part of Iraq and help the formation of the federal system, despite an unofficial referendum in 2005 which produced a result of 98.8% vote in favour of an independent Kurdistan.⁶⁶ Their decision was pragmatic rather than ideological. They did not have the international or domestic (non-Kurdish Iraqi) support for self-determination. Rather, the parties presented their decision as a “voluntary union” with Iraq, stressing that their continuation in Iraq was conditional on every group’s adherence to the Iraqi Constitution. As Aram Rifaat explains, ‘for the first time in Iraqi constitutional history the unity of Iraq was compromised and became a conditional issue.’⁶⁷ If the population of the Kurdistan Region view themselves as fundamentally different people to non-Kurdish Iraqis, at both an individual and societal level, then Iraqi unity becomes more dependent on political pragmatism without wide-spread ideological support.

In September 2017, the KRG held a referendum, asking their population (including, controversially, the inhabitants of “disputed territories” which the KRG and PUK *peshmergas* controlled at the time) to decide whether to unilaterally declare independence from the Iraqi Federation. At the time of writing, the full outcome of the referendum is still unclear. However, to summarise, the future integrity of the Iraqi state is uncertain and may depend on the extent to which the Kurdistan Region’s population value continued identification and association with the rest of Iraq.

⁶⁶ Gareth Stansfield, “The unravelling of the post-First World War state system? The Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the transformation of the Middle East,” *International Affairs* 89:2 (2013):270.

⁶⁷ Aram Rifaat, “The fundamental characteristics of the Kurdish nationhood project in modern Iraq,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 52:3 (2016):496-7.

1: The formation of Kurdish national identities in political discourse

Introduction:

As national identifications are discursively constructed, they are often heavily influenced by political elites and the institutional and structural means they possess. Political discourse, of course, does not always correlate with political action. Although, discourse is not merely a production of policy makers, it also influences and limits political decision making too. It can be a two-way street. As Paul Chilton explains: ‘it is a mistake... to think that would-be theorists can stand totally outside the particular natural language they happen to be using, and the particular historical discourses their social or professional situation expects of them.’⁶⁸ Kurdish nationalists are, to an extent, limited by social expectations for their position, which affects both the policies they implement and the discourses they use. There must be some correlation between policy and discourse for it to be acceptable to the intended audience.

Speeches by high-profile Kurdish political figures generally receive a lot of media coverage, especially as both the KDP and PUK own and control a variety of media outlets across a range of mediums. The content of the speech analysed in this chapter will have reached a large portion of the KRG population, even if in summarised form. Politicians produce their speeches to persuade and influence their audience and ultimately to support their political objectives. This study does not judge the success of KDP and PUK political speeches, but explores *attempts* to discursively construct Kurdish identifications which support their political hegemony and secessionist ambitions.

Sources:

This chapter’s primary source for analysis is a translation of the inaugural speech to the Kurdistan National Assembly by Masoud Barzani, President of the KRG, on 14 June 2005. The

⁶⁸ Paul Chilton, *Security metaphors: Cold War discourse from containment to common house* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 412.

translation was published, and remains accessible, on the official Kurdistan Regional Government website.⁶⁹ This speech was made at an important moment in time for the Kurds of Iraq: following the invasion in 2003 which had enabled the KDP and PUK to consolidate their rule over the previously-unofficial Kurdistan Region of Iraq, but before the referendum on the new permanent Iraqi constitution was held. As the first President of the KRG, this speech would be of great interest to many interested actors, inside and outside Iraq, and would influence expectations for his Presidency and the KRG in general. Analysis of this speech not only offers an introduction to the ideology of the KDP, but also provides an insight into the ambitions and decision making of the political leadership at this historically significant moment in time.

Methodology:

My analysis of speeches by KRG politicians from the ruling parties will be based on the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth “CDA”) put forward in *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* by Wodak *et al.* (2009). They approach “discourse” – both spoken and written – as ‘a form of social practice.’⁷⁰ Their approach ‘assumes a dialectical relationship between particular discursive acts and the situations, institutions and social structures in which they are embedded: the situational, institutional and social contexts shape and affect discourse, and, in turn, discourses influence social and political reality.’⁷¹ By applying CDA, they aim ‘to unmask ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language use.’⁷² Their “pluralistic” method of CDA utilises theoretical and methodological approaches from various disciplines in order to ‘throw light on the largely contingent and imaginary character of nation and to sharpen awareness

⁶⁹ The webpage does not state who conducted the translation into English and there is no way of me assessing the accuracy of the translation from the original transcript. However, as it was published on the official government website, it is probable that it was translated by a KRG bureaucrat and was proofread before being published.

⁷⁰ Ruth Wodak, Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl, and Karin Liebhart, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 2nd edition, trans. Angelika Hirsch, Richard Mitten and J.W. Unger (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 8.

⁷¹ Wodak (*et al.*), *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 8.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 8.

of dogmatic, essentialist and naturalising conceptions of nation and national identity.⁷³ Their method, therefore, is valuable for the purposes of this thesis, which aims to uncover how the KDP and PUK promote nationalist ideologies through discourses which support their political hegemony by constructing group distinctions.

The CDA method applied by Wodak *et al.* distinguishes three separate elements of analysis which require elaboration before proceeding: 1) contents, 2) strategies, and 3) means and forms of realisation.⁷⁴

Contents

For their study of discursive national identity construction in Austria, Wodak *et al.* devised a ‘matrix of thematic contents’ which enabled them to distinguish ‘five major thematic areas’ in their data which related to the discursive construction of an Austrian national identity.⁷⁵ By removing Austria-specific aspects, they can be adopted and adapted for application to this Kurdish-Iraqi case study with very little alteration. The adapted, and generalised, thematic areas are as follows:

1. The linguistic construction of a homogenised national figure or individual: linguistic homogenisation of the national “self” and “other(s)”.
2. The narration of a common history: myths of foundation and origin, politically significant moments of success and defeat, positive or negative past events.
3. The linguistic construction of a common culture: including language, art, religion and shared aspects of everyday life (e.g. food, drink, clothing).
4. The linguistic construction of a common political present and future: the current political context and future political ambitions.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

5. The linguistic construction of a national territory: physical delineation of the nation.⁷⁶

Strategies

In a broad sense of the term, a “strategy” is a ‘plan adopted to achieve a certain political, psychological or other kind of objective.’⁷⁷ Wodak *et al.* identified four “macro-strategies” which are utilised in discursive constructions of national identities, which can be adapted and summarised as follows:

- 1) Constructive strategies: discursively promoting notions of unity, sameness and solidarity.
- 2) Transformation strategies: transforming a national identification and its characteristics into another conceptualisation of national identification.
- 3) Destructive strategies: dismantling elements of pre-existing national identifications.
- 4) Perpetuation strategies: maintaining and protecting a seemingly threatened national identification.⁷⁸

They also identify a “special subgroup” of perpetuation strategies, which they term “justification strategies”: legitimising past and present political activity based on events in national historical narratives.⁷⁹ Wodak *et al.* argue that these “macro-strategies” are supported by strategies of “assimilation” and “dissimilation”.⁸⁰ The former aims ‘linguistically to create a temporal, interpersonal or spatial (territorial) similarity and homogeneity’ relating to the themes outlined above.⁸¹ This relates to Özkirimli’s distinction between the identity, temporal and spatial claims which he claims are inherent to nationalist discourses in general.⁸² The latter emphasises differences

⁷⁶ Wodak (*et al.*), *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 30-31.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸⁰ Wodak (*et al.*), *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 33.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸² Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism*, 208-9.

and heterogeneity in the same subject matters.⁸³ At times, such a strategy clearly supports the process of “othering”, discussed earlier in this thesis.

There is frequent overlap between these “macro-strategies”, as well as their supporting strategies. As will become clear from the analysis that follows, political discourses often serve multiple strategies simultaneously. However, the identification of, and distinction between, these strategies is important because it connects discourses to the political and ideological intentions behind them. It highlights that nations are not formed in a vacuum – naturally and without impetus – instead, political will actively constructs identifications upon which nations are formed. I therefore based my analysis of speeches by Kurdish-Iraqi politicians on the four macro-strategies identified by Wodak *et al.* to assess the ways the KDP and PUK attempt to construct national identifications.

Means and forms of realisation

Wodak *et al.* explore a variety of linguistic means, such as lexicography and semantics, which serve the construction of national identities. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, it will suffice to mention the three reference categories which they highlight as the most important:

- ‘1. Personal reference (anthroponymic generic terms, personal pronouns, quantifiers);
- 2. Spatial reference (toponyms/geonyms, adverbs of place, spatial reference through persons, by means of prepositional phrases such as ‘with us’, ‘with them’);
- 3. Temporal reference (temporal prepositions, adverbs of time, temporal conjunctions, temporal references by means of nouns, semi-prefixes with temporal meaning).’⁸⁴

Once again, there is significant overlap between these analytical categorisations and Özkirimli’s theoretical identity, temporal and spatial claims.⁸⁵ In addition to these broad categorisations, Wodak *et al.* also pick out the use of “we” in discourses because ‘the deictic

⁸³ Wodak (*et al.*), *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 33.

⁸⁴ Wodak (*et al.*), *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 35.

⁸⁵ Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism*, 208-9.

expression “we” can be very well used in the service of “linguistic imperialism” to verbally annex and usurp.⁸⁶ Furthermore, they highlight the effects of metonymy (substituting names), synecdoche (when a whole or totality of something is used to represent a part of it, or vice versa), and personification, as discursive techniques for identity constructions.⁸⁷ While there is only space for a cursory explanation of these means here, they will be referred to and elaborated on in the analysis below.

CDA of Iraqi-Kurdish political speeches

My analysis will primarily focus on contents of political speeches which relate to the representation and narration of a common history. The linguistic constructions of a common historical narrative can then be contrasted with the representations of a common political present and future. Regarding strategies, particular attention is paid to strategies of national construction – promoting homogenisation, unity and solidarity. Various linguistic means of realisation will be noted throughout the analysis, but certain means of “linguistic imperialism” – such as frequent use of “we” and “our people” – are highlighted due to their prominence in the discourses. The analysis highlights how speeches by KRG political leaders support narratives of collective victimhood which assist the construction of national identities by reinforcing the notion of shared experience.

Intranational unity

Intranational unity is a prominent theme within President Barzani’s 2005 inaugural speech. Intranational unity refers to the promotion of solidarity among those identified as Kurds and, more specifically, between Kurdish political parties. Broadly speaking, Barzani’s rhetoric promoting intranational unity was a constructive strategy: discursively constructing solidarity among the population of the KRG. Such a strategy appears to have been a pragmatic move, attempting to

⁸⁶ Wodak (*et al.*), *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 45.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 43-45.

overcome the bloody history of intranational conflict between the two largest parties – the KDP and PUK. By linguistically constructing a political present and future, characterised by intranational peace and solidarity, he utilised a strategy which distanced their parties from their violent past. For example, by stating that the parliament (KNA) was “the fruit of the unity and unanimous stand of our people, especially the efforts of both the PUK and KDP”, he was simultaneously emphasising that the parties were presently united, that this party unity was the cause of the success of the parliament, while also claiming ownership over the population by using a possessive pronoun – “our people” – and homogenising their aims and actions.⁸⁸

In October 2009, Barham Salih took over from Nechirvan Barzani as Prime Minister of the KRG. In his inauguration speech, he repeated Masoud Barzani’s 2005 emphasis on intranational unity. Although a representative of the PUK, he stressed his friendship and brotherhood with his KDP colleagues, especially his predecessor, Nechirvan Barzani.⁸⁹ He spoke at length about how the KRG parliamentary blocks needed to “all work hand in hand” and “strive together” to protect their progress and face future challenges.⁹⁰ This is just one example from many that could be produced to highlight that cross-party unity between the KRG nationalist parties was ubiquitously emphasised in political discourses in the wake of the 2003 Iraq war. The primary reason was to stress that the population of the Kurdistan Region were united, with common ambitions – national goals – to ideologically aid the nation-building process and practically strengthen their hand against the Baghdad government.

Masoud Barzani frequently made use of metaphors in his 2005 inaugural speech to linguistically construct intranational unity. Metaphors are not just a rhetorical tool, they are also understood to create a cognitive impact on the audience, helping us to understand and internalise complex information. As Paul Chilton notes: ‘metaphor is a part of human conceptualisation and not

⁸⁸ Masoud Barzani, “President Masoud Barzani’s Inaugural Speech,” 14 June 2005, Kurdistan National Assembly, Erbil, translation and transcript from Kurdistan Region Presidency, accessed 23/05/2017, [http://www.presidency.krd/english/articledisplay.aspx?id=7qYaDe19Tfc=.](http://www.presidency.krd/english/articledisplay.aspx?id=7qYaDe19Tfc=)

⁸⁹ Barham Salih, “Inaugural speech by Prime Minister Barham Salih,” 28 October 2009, Kurdistan Parliament, Erbil, translation and transcript from Kurdistan Regional Government, accessed 23/05/2017, [http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/print.aspx?l=12&smap=010000&a=32261.](http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/print.aspx?l=12&smap=010000&a=32261)

⁹⁰ Salih, “Inaugural speech.”

simply a linguistic expression.⁹¹ Additionally, metaphor is a powerful tool for persuasion because, as Brian Diemert states, ‘it can mask or at least alter our memory of the content.’⁹²

Barzani repeatedly used two metaphors to emphasise intranational unity: “family” and “house”. He referred to Jalal Talabani (“Mam Jalal”), the leader of the PUK, as his “dear brother” and, later, his “respected brother”.⁹³ He went on to declare that all the members and affiliates of the PUK, KDP, and all other parties, were “all dear brothers to me”.⁹⁴ He said that the families of the martyrs of the Kurdistan Liberation Movement were his “sons and daughters” and that he was a “responsible member of the families”.⁹⁵ He referred to the “Kurdish house”, which seems to be a broad reference to KRG political matters.⁹⁶ The listener is metaphorically reminded, repeatedly, of the Kurds’ unity, like a family, together under one roof. These “family” and “house” metaphors support a strategy which aims to construct a national identification by linguistically emphasising the population’s unity and solidarity – especially between previously warring political parties.

Constructing a common history

In the wake of the 2003 Gulf War, the KDP leadership constructed and reinforced a historical narrative through their political discourses which sought to unite the KRG population under one national identification by emphasising their shared experiences. This historical narrative emphasised a negative past, characterised by “struggle” and “sacrifice”, which they – the KRG population – should be proud of because it led to their present day (2005) “achievement” of regional autonomy. The following quotation from Masoud Barzani’s 2005 speech provides a good example:

“Forty three years ago when I took up arms as a peshmerga until today I have experienced many trials and tribulations and achievements of the Kurdistan revolution and witnessed many

⁹¹ Paul Chilton, *Analysing Political Discourse: theory and practice*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 51-2.

⁹² Brian Diemert, “Uncontainable Metaphor: George F. Kennan's "X" Article and Cold War Discourse,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 35:1 (2005):22.

⁹³ Barzani, “President Masoud Barzani’s Inaugural Speech,” (2005).

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

tragedies and the hardships of my people. But never had I any doubt about our eventual victory. I'm pleased to be with you here today to witness for myself the fruit of this lifelong endeavour. But what saddens me the most and hurts my soul is not to see here many dear ones and fellow peshmergas who shared the struggle and strife during our proud march and made the ultimate sacrifice. To my grief, they are not here to witness this achievement. While physically they are no longer among us, their spirits are hovering over us and sharing our joy. I am confident the spirits of our eternal leaders are also celebrating this moment with us.”⁹⁷

In the above passage, Barzani uses vocabulary with strong negative connotations to construct an image of the Iraqi-Kurds' common past: “trials and tribulations”, “tragedies”, “hardships”, “struggle and strife”, “the ultimate sacrifice”. Such negative descriptions are extremely frequent throughout the speech; for instance, the word “struggle(s)” was used fourteen times.⁹⁸ Such a negative description of the region's recent history not only constructs a narrative which a large portion of the population can associate or, at least, empathise with. It was not only the ethnically-identified Kurds who were persecuted by the Ba'ath regime. As such, a historical narrative which emphasises violence, suffering and persecution is one which many individuals and communities in the Kurdistan Region can relate to. Such historical descriptions, reinforced through political discourses, support the victimhood narratives the KDP and PUK promote. Victimhood discourses can be used to justify and legitimise nationalist political ambitions while reinforcing national identifications by contrasting the in-group to oppressive national “others”. Furthermore, they support a perpetuation strategy; presenting the nationalist parties as the protectors of a threatened national identity.

The quotation above also exemplifies another strategy which Barzani employed throughout his 2005 inaugural speech: constructing a positive image of the present and future political context. “Achievements”, the “eventual victory”, “the fruit of this lifelong endeavour”, “our joy”, “celebrating this moment” all emphasise the positivity with which the audience and population should have perceived the present moment in time.⁹⁹ While the victimhood narrative of the past justifies the

⁹⁷ Barzani, “President Masoud Barzani's Inaugural Speech,” (2005).

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

nationalist cause in general, the positive presentation of the present political context justifies the current political leadership – both the parties and the individual leaders. This combination of the historical narrative of struggle and suffering with the optimism and pride in the present and future is a recurring theme throughout KDP-PUK nationalist discourses.

Peshmerga

A key element in Masoud Barzani's construction of a national historical narrative was the *peshmerga* – the name for the Kurdish militia forces. Traditionally, each of the major tribes had their own *peshmerga* forces, which meant that each of the political parties that were founded on tribal affiliations – including the KDP and PUK – controlled their own forces instead of having a single unified military force for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Although the following quotation provides the most explicit discussion of the *peshmerga* in Barzani's 2005 inaugural speech, it is far from exceptional; he refers to the *peshmerga* no less than 13 times.¹⁰⁰

“The *peshmerga* of Kurdistan are our dearest. They were the ones who struggled in the most difficult days of hardship and uncertainty. I am a *peshmerga* just like you and proud to be among you. Your place is at the peak and in the hearts and minds of the people, and among the families of the martyrs. Kurdish people are still protected by your high morals and resolve. You were formed according to the decision of your own people, and a result of the sufferings and tears of the mothers of the martyrs. So long as the people of Kurdistan exist, you too will also exist. There were days when you defended the existence of the Kurdish people and wrote history with the blood of your sacrifices. Now you are the same fellow sons of our nation. Your names, your positions, and your fame shall remain the same, only your duties and tasks have changed. In the past, you struggled to overthrow the dictatorial regime and to achieve federalism and democracy. Today, you struggle to protect what has been accomplished, and to provide security to Iraq and to Kurdistan.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

The above passage is exemplary of how Masoud Barzani discursively constructed a common historical narrative through the focal point of the *peshmerga* and their idealised role in the history of Iraq's Kurds. "Struggle", "hardship", "uncertainty", "martyrdom" and "sacrifice" define the *peshmerga*'s past, according to Barzani.¹⁰² By describing (a version of) the *peshmerga*'s historical journey in a way identical to his description of the region's population in general, he was directly connecting the history of one to the other. The history of the *peshmerga* became synonymous with a history of a "Kurdish" national identification, which the population of the region in general could relate to.

The *peshmerga* fighters, from all tribal and political attachments, were linguistically constructed as national heroes: "The *peshmerga* of Kurdistan are our dearest", "your place is at the peak and in the hearts and minds of the people", "you defended the existence of the Kurdish people", "fellow sons of our nation".¹⁰³ They were also linguistically presented as role models, with high morals and personal qualities which others must aspire to: "Kurdish people are still protected by your high morals and resolve".¹⁰⁴ In addition to their morality, Barzani suggested (somewhat anachronistically) that the *peshmerga* had been fighting "to achieve federalism and democracy", along with several references to how the *peshmerga* served the "Kurdish people".¹⁰⁵ Rather than a tribe-based militia, loyally fighting for the power ambitions of one particular political party or another (as was the case in the civil war in the early 1990s), Barzani presented them as democrats fighting to protect their nation. Thus, transformation and perpetuation strategies are both being employed in this instance.

By heaping praise on the *peshmerga* fighters, presenting them as heroic and moralistic defenders of a democratic Kurdish nation, Barzani was reinforcing their status as national icons, making their narrative one which the KRG population (whether ethnic Kurds or not) could find appealing. To an extent, the *peshmerga* were constructed as the archetypal Kurdish man. Andrea

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Fischer-Tahir highlighted how peshmerga men were presented as strong, decisive and heroic throughout books and memoirs of Kurdish politicians and decision-makers, even becoming symbolic of the Kurdish liberation movement itself.¹⁰⁶ Such heroic representations of *peshmerga* discursively support assimilation strategies by making the historical narrative of the national identification more appealing to be associated with. Furthermore, they encourage people to take pride in being identified with such heroic figures in the present political context, thereby promoting Kurdish national self-identifications.

In his 2005 inauguration speech, Masoud Barzani repeatedly stated that he himself is a *peshmerga* fighter (seven times) and strongly emphasised how proud he was for being a *peshmerga*.¹⁰⁷ He combined it several times with descriptions of his personal experience of the Kurdish liberation movement:

“I grew up in the school of life that taught me that struggle is the only way of life. Whenever I see a chain I remember those chains that bound the hands and legs of the freedom fighters. When I see a rope I remember the gallows that hung another hero. And whenever I see a river I remember the Aras River crossed by the peshmerga from Kurdistan. When I joined the peshmergas and carried my weapon and walked behind the late Mustafa Barzani, I was greatly honoured. And today as I assume this position I accept it with the aim of serving you as a continuation of being a peshmerga. I do not have any purpose but to serve you.”¹⁰⁸

By presenting the *peshmerga* as national icons and heroes, deeply embedded in a proud historical narrative of a Kurdish identification, while simultaneously insisting that he was himself a *peshmerga*, Barzani’s 2005 inaugural speech sought to justify and legitimise his political power. In effect, he was linguistically constructing himself as a national hero and the personification of the national struggle. Furthermore, speaking in the first person singular “I” constructed a personal connection between himself and the national narrative which he promoted, potentially making the narrative seem more credible.

¹⁰⁶ Fischer-Tahir, “Gendered Memories and Masculinities,” 93.

¹⁰⁷ Barzani, “President Masoud Barzani’s Inaugural Speech,” (2005).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

Martyrdom

Martyrdom was a common theme throughout Barzani's 2005 inaugural speech.¹⁰⁹ The noun "martyr" carries strong positive connotations because it claims that the individual willingly died for the sake of a cause or higher purpose. Therefore, to label someone a martyr is to make claims to their individual motives. Barzani was linguistically claiming that those who had died (during an unspecified time period and in an unspecified location or situation) had, in fact, died for the political cause which he was leading and representing. He also used the possessive pronoun "our" to linguistically lay claim to those who died: "our martyrs".¹¹⁰ This is an example of what Wodak *et al.* might call "linguistic imperialism", similar to the deictic "we".¹¹¹ To claim martyrdom for your cause is to make a strong statement about the strength of the support the cause has. Thus, Barzani's use of the theme of martyrdom not only reinforces the historical narrative of Kurdish past suffering, it also works as a justification strategy for their nationalist cause and their party's political control.

al-Anfal and Halabja

The Anfal campaign and the Halabja chemical weapon attacks became significant events in the national historical narrative of Iraq's Kurds, as constructed by the KDP and PUK. They are symbols of their past victimhood and suffering at the hands of oppressive Iraqi regimes. Masoud Barzani, in his 2005 inauguration speech, referred to Anfal and Halabja several times. He listed the names of the towns and the families of the victims and offered them the KRG's support, as well as their respect. He also partially attributed the creation of the parliament to the victims of Anfal and the chemical attacks. Furthermore, Barzani utilised the symbolism of Anfal and Halabja for the discursive identification of a national "other" – preceding dictatorial Iraqi regimes: "Iraqi regimes... applied terrorism against us in the worst forms. Their terrorism reached its peak in the cruellest atrocities of

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Wodak (*et al.*), *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 45.

the Anfal Campaign of 1988, and the Anfal of the Faili and Barzani Kurds, attacking us with chemical weapons culminating in the infamously ugly crime of Halabja.”¹¹² He used synecdoche to help draw his identifications: by claiming the Anfal and Halabja attacks were attacks on the nation rather than the specific individuals or communities that were affected, he was formulating the notion that an attack on a part of the population is an attack against the whole national identification. He was also identifying a national out-group, distinguishing the “Iraqi regimes” from “us”, by attributing to them a historical narrative using strongly negative connotations – “terrorism”, “cruellest atrocities”, “ugly crime”.¹¹³ This aided the construction of the Kurdistan identification which Barzani was promoting because it reinforced the identification of Iraq’s Kurds as those who were historic victims of Baghdad’s aggression.

In his 2009 inauguration speech, PM Barham Salih spoke at length about the Anfal campaign and Halabja. Referring to these events as “crimes” and “genocides”, he emphasised support for the victims and their families, and mentioned their attempts to “bring back the remains of the Anfal victims from the mass graves in the middle and the south of Iraq to Kurdistan, where deserved monuments can be erected for them.”¹¹⁴ Like with Masoud Barzani in 2005, the victimhood narrative, exemplified by these two events, is the focal point of a Kurdistan historical narrative.

The linguistic construction of a common history is essential for the construction of a national identification. But Barzani’s reinforcement of a victimhood narrative also utilises, what Wodak *et. al.* called, a “perpetuation strategy”: linguistically presenting the speaker (Barzani), his party (KDP) or his cause (Kurdish national independence), as the protector or defender of a threatened national identification.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, a historical narrative based on past collective victimhood seeks to justify and legitimise subsequent political action on behalf of the victimised group.

¹¹² Barzani, “President Masoud Barzani’s Inaugural Speech,” (2005).

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Salih, “Inaugural speech by Prime Minister Barham Salih.”

¹¹⁵ Wodak (*et al.*), *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 33.

Othering

National identification requires the identification of a national “other” against which to contrast one’s own self. We identify the in-group by recognising its differences to out-groups. Barzani, in his 2005 inauguration speech, was careful with how he identified the Kurds of Iraq’s national “other”, avoiding using ethnic identifications (e.g. Arabs) or locations of power (e.g. Iraq or Baghdad).¹¹⁶ This was a pragmatic move, to avoid unnecessary tension with the Iraqi government or non-Kurdish groups within the KRG territory, while the KDP and PUK negotiated to participate in a federal democratic Iraq.

Barzani consistently identified “Iraqi regimes” as the enemy of Iraq’s Kurds, rather than “Arabs” or “Iraq”.¹¹⁷ He even rejected the notion that there was international or interethnic conflict or tension between Kurds and Arabs, and that this was a fallacy produced by specific *regimes*:

“Successive Iraqi regimes tried hard through wars imposed on Kurds, and our resistance to them, to portray our conflict as a one between Arabs and Kurds. Because those regimes had ill and ugly intentions, their efforts came to nought. On the contrary, many Arab freedom fighters joined us in our struggle for democracy, fought alongside us, and sacrificed their lives.”¹¹⁸

In the above quote, Barzani’s use of synecdoche simultaneously homogenises the Kurdish population while linguistically fragmenting the Arab identification. The “wars” weren’t against particular political groups or communities, they were against the “Kurds” in general and it was the “Kurds” who resisted them. Contrastingly, he selectively specified which Arabs (“many Arab freedom fighters”) joined the homogenised Kurds against the Ba’athists. This implies that (a) the majority of Arabs did not resist the aggressive Iraqi regimes with them, (b) the Arab identification is fractured whereas the Kurds are united in their values and ambitions, (c) because the majority of Arabs did not “struggle for democracy” as the Kurds did, in general, they must hold different values.

¹¹⁶ Barzani, “President Masoud Barzani’s Inaugural Speech,” (2005).

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Therefore, Barzani was “othering” while not being hostile to the Arab national identification. He was distinguishing “Kurds” from “Arabs” based on their history, their unity and their values.

He did, several times, explicitly name the “regimes” he was referring to as those under Ba’ath party rule. Although, he does briefly allude to their predecessors in a similarly hostile manner:

“We clearly see today the results of the barbarity and disasters of the Baathist regime and those earlier regimes in the mass graves that hold the remains of Iraqis.”¹¹⁹ Once again, attributing acts of extreme violence and aggression to a historic neighbouring power supports a perpetuation strategy. For example, Barzani claimed that the Ba’athists threatened the homogenous Kurdish culture: “Baathism tried hard to destroy the cultural basis of our society and our spirit. We should quickly remove its corrupt and inhuman effects.”¹²⁰ These two sentences promote a perpetuation strategy which aids the construction of a Kurdistan identification by (a) identifying a threat to the audience’s culture, (b) the culture under threat is one, singular, homogenised culture which those in the audience and population of the KRG all supposedly share, (c) Barzani claims that homogenised culture of the population as his own (“our culture”), (d) he presents himself, his party and cause as the solution to the problem (“we should...”), thereby presenting himself as the defender of a threatened identification and subsequently justifying his position as KRG President and the nationalist cause in general.

To briefly summarise the above points, Masoud Barzani, in 2005, was linguistically constructing a Kurdish identification by contrasting it to other historical actors and groups. He was constructing an image of what a “Kurd” is by emphasising what he or she was not. The figures against which the Kurdish identification was compared, were not other nations but political regimes which were synonymous with characteristics which the Kurds could differentiate themselves from. These figures may have also been identified as “Arabs” but that was not necessarily causation for their actions. “Arabs” were presented as a national “other” but they were not necessarily an enemy.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Democracy and rights:

One of the key themes of Masoud Barzani's 2005 inaugural speech was democracy. There were frequent references to "democracy", "rights", "votes", "equality" and vague statements about acting on behalf of "the people".¹²¹ This emphasis was used to differentiate the Kurdish identification from others; once again, constructing the national "self" in contrast to perceived "others". It is therefore a constructive strategy.

In general, he expressed his desire for a federal democratic ideal for the whole of Iraq. However, at times in his speech he differentiated between what Kurdistan *is* (democratic) and what Iraq *should be*. For example, he explains how he has been "nominated for this duty and responsibility by my fellow citizens through their elected parliament", that the Kurdistan National Assembly "manifests the will and aspirations of our people" and was "created by the votes of our people", and that "in Kurdistan, the media in all forms are free without censorship."¹²² In all these examples, he used either past or present tense to describe the current political context in the KRG. Whereas, when he described the political context in Iraq, he used the auxiliary verb "should" which specifically makes conditions or obligations on the future: "The new Iraq should be based on voluntary coexistence between the two main nationalities, Kurds and Arabs. All Iraqi citizens, whatever their ethnicity and religious persuasion, should feel this country is their own in which their rights and responsibilities are clearly stated."¹²³ Although he was inconsistent with how he referred to the KRG's political situation and he did acknowledge certain things they "should do" themselves, by never mentioning any positive democratic or legal development that Iraq had achieved he was implying a difference between their democratic-ness and stressing the Kurds' uniqueness. Furthermore, by emphasising the KRG's democratic and legal processes, he was also employing a justification strategy to legitimise his, and his party's, rule.

¹²¹ Barzani, "President Masoud Barzani's Inaugural Speech," (2005).

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

“Democracy” is an ever-present subject in Iraqi-Kurdish nationalist discourses. The table below highlights the frequency with which the democratic theme was mentioned in KRG inauguration speeches between 2005 and 2012 by some of the top political figures from the KDP and PUK. It demonstrates the importance of the subject to the Kurdish nationalist discourses as a way of differentiating them from their neighbours (who are often associated with dictatorial practices), marketing themselves to democratic international powers in the hope of gaining allies, and internally supporting an inclusive national identification based on citizenship.

Theme	Masoud Barzani (KDP)	Masoud Barzani (KDP)	Barham Salih (PUK)	Nechirvan Barzani (KDP)
	<i>2005 President's inauguration speech¹²⁴</i>	<i>2009 speech at inauguration of new cabinet¹²⁵</i>	<i>2009 PM inauguration speech¹²⁶</i>	<i>2012 PM inauguration speech¹²⁷</i>
democracy/democratic/democratise	13	6	8	14
elect/ -ion(s)/ -ed	1	9	2	4
legitimate/legitimacy	0	1	0	4
vote/ voting/ voter(s)	2	6	5	1
Total	16	22	15	23

The concepts of rights, liberties and citizenship are intertwined with the notion of democracy.

Masoud Barzani was explicit about his views on these matters in his construction of the KRG's

¹²⁴ Barzani, “President Masoud Barzani’s Inaugural Speech,” (2005).

¹²⁵ Masoud Barzani, “President Barzani’s Speech Delivered at Inauguration of New KRG Cabinet,” 30 October 2009, Kurdistan Parliament, Erbil, translation and transcript from Kurdistan Region Presidency, accessed 23/05/2017. <http://www.presidency.krd/english/articledisplay.aspx?id=nyBQTcXoztU=>.

¹²⁶ Salih, “Inaugural speech by Prime Minister Barham Salih.”

¹²⁷ Nechirvan Barzani, “Prime Minister Barzani’s Inaugural Speech,” 5 April 2012, Kurdistan Parliament, Erbil, translation and transcript from Kurdistan Regional Government, accessed 23/05/2017 <http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/print.aspx?l=12&smap=010000&a=43569>.

present political context. The following passage of his 2005 inauguration speech provides a good example:

“In the Kurdistan region there is no discrimination of its citizens, no matter what their ethnic or racial origins may be. They are all equal in both rights and responsibilities. Turkomen and Chaldo Assyrians are our respected brothers and sisters, and we will do whatever is within our capability and authority for the sake of their well-being. We all live together on this land. Our destiny, our joys and sorrows, are common. We consider ourselves their advocates and defenders of their rights. All our various religions and sects should be respected. In Kurdistan, all religions are fully free and are viewed equally. Our Yezidi brothers are original Kurds who participated in their nation’s struggle. They enjoy a special place in our hearts and are highly respected and esteemed by all Kurds.”¹²⁸

This quotation is an excellent example of an overlap between civic and ethnic elements within KDP nationalist discourses. On the one hand, he was linguistically constructing a united identity for the entire population of the KRG to relate and assimilate to: the “Kurd” was the one who had legally enforced rights and liberties, regardless of race, religion, or language.

This perspective was stated clearly to me in a recent interview with Dindar Koçer, a senior representative for the KDP in the Netherlands. I asked him: “The KRG controls a religiously, ethnically and linguistically diverse population. How do the political parties of the KRG aim to unite such a diverse population under one Kurdistanian national identity?” He replied: “We will give them rights. You are right that Southern Kurdistan is a very diverse region, we don’t aim to change that.”¹²⁹ In both 2005 and 2017, the KDP saw the provision of civic rights as the key aspect of their nation-building process; the most effective way to unite the population under one common identification. The quotation above reinforces this further by using a family metaphor to express that the Yezidi population are “original Kurds” and are members of the same nation as the Kurds.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Barzani, “President Masoud Barzani’s Inaugural Speech,” (2005).

¹²⁹ Dindar Koçer (Head of Media & Communications of KDP in the Netherlands), interviewed by James Hewitt, 4 August 2017, Amsterdam.

¹³⁰ Barzani, “President Masoud Barzani’s Inaugural Speech,” (2005).

On the other hand, Barzani's speech also distinguished the identification of "Kurds" from other ethnic, linguistic and religious groups – Turkomen, Chaldo-Assyrians, Yezidis – which shows he saw a differentiation between being a "Kurd" – identified by primordial identity markers, such as ethnicity and language – and a "Kurdistani" citizen.¹³¹ It could be argued that this is a contradiction in the KDP nationalist discourses: whether they identify their fellow nationals by primordial attachments or by civic participation ("romantic" versus "civic" nationalism). Although, as William Bloom explained, the process of "nation-building" is performed by political authorities with state power.¹³² Barzani's speech on 14 June 2005 came in the wake of the Kurdish parties gaining legal and constitutional authority over the KRG region of Iraq for the first time; thus, it heralded the start of the "nation-building" process. Therefore, the paragraph above can be best explained as a transformation strategy, rather than a contradiction. It referred to primordial identifications of the past and present, but promoted a future identification based on citizenship. It was also, therefore, a destructive strategy which sought to dismantle (or at least subordinate) national identifications based on ethnicity, religion or language.

Summary:

This chapter has utilised CDA to highlight how political speeches aimed to assist the construction of national identifications and support the political ambitions of the KDP and PUK. Masoud Barzani's construction of a "Kurdish" historical narrative in his 2005 inauguration speech simultaneously distinguished "Kurds" from "others" based on shared experiences, constructed a homogenised "Kurdistani" identity based on generalised values and ambitions, justified his and the KDP's political authority, and constructed a present political context which stressed Kurdish uniqueness from their neighbours. Relating this back to Wodak *et al's* CDA approach, we can see that Barzani was employing "constructive", "transformation", "perpetuation" and "justification" strategies,

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Bloom, *Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations*, 74-75.

which all assist the construction of a national identification which reinforces his political hegemony.¹³³

This analysis exemplifies one way in which national identifications are the outcome of discourses, which can be manipulated by political elites for their own ambitions. It has also provided an overview of the 2005 KDP leadership's nationalist ideology and what aspects they saw as essential identity markers. They promoted a civic form of nation-building: attempting national unity based on legal rights, liberties and democracy to the whole population, disregarding primordial distinctions such as race, language and religion. Their historical narrative, which formed the foundation of their national identification, consists of a negative presentation of the past which contrasts to a positive construction of the present, and optimism for the future. The narrative is supported by narratives about national heroes (the *peshmerga*), significant historical events (Anfal and Halabja) and the representation of Masoud Barzani as the personification of the national struggle.

¹³³ Wodak (*et al.*), *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 33.

2: Satellite television broadcasting

Introduction

This chapter examines how the KDP and PUK used satellite television as a tool for nation-building. With its capacity to circumvent state censorship and its ability to communicate to large amounts of people over a wide area, this modern communication technology is an effective way for stateless peoples to challenge the status quo. Satellite television has been used by various Kurdish groups in the Middle East and the diaspora since the mid-1990s as a means of resisting oppressive state powers. The KDP and PUK have used it to promote national discourses which justify and support their political hegemony and ambitions.

The televised use of Kurdish language(s), and exposure of national symbols, flags, political figures, and historical imagery promote the nationalist narratives of the KDP and PUK. Televised coverage of national celebrations and commemorations not only emphasise their symbolic value to nation but also reinforce a sense of shared experience which the KRG population have been encouraged to identify with. Negative depictions of “others” in the historical narratives assist the creation of a national identification by contrasting “Kurds” to their historically aggressive neighbours.

This chapter argues that presentation and framing of nationalist discourses on television have been used by the KDP and PUK to assist the construction of national identifications. This chapter’s conclusions are primarily drawn from analysis of KDP- and PUK-owned satellite television channels during the week of the annual commemoration of the Anfal genocide. Television broadcasting was utilised to reinforce Anfal’s symbolic place in national historical narratives. Reinforcement of victimhood and pride narratives attempted to aid the construction of Kurdish national identifications by promoting a nationally shared experience which distinguished Kurds from “others”. Furthermore, this chapter argues that the framing of Anfal commemorations sought to legitimise the KDP and PUK’s political authority.

Recent developments in Kurdish broadcasting capabilities

Pre-1991

Throughout the twentieth century, Kurds in the Middle East had their media, publishing and broadcasting capabilities severely restricted. Although Iraq's Kurdish population did not suffer the attempted "linguicide" and "ethnocide" as their neighbours in Turkey did,¹³⁴ the Iraqi state did monopolise publishing and broadcasting, controlling all mass media production and distribution. From the mid-1970s (at least), the Iraqi state framed the Kurds as subversive against the state and siding with the country's enemies (including Iran, Israel, and USA).¹³⁵ With no possibility to respond or portray an alternative perspective, such a discourse became dominant.

For Kurdish nationalists, television broadcasting, especially in Kurdish language, became as vital to the preservation of a national identity as other forms of publishing. In June 1974, the KDP sent the United Nations a document titled "Communication concerning gross violations of human rights in Kurdistan (Iraq)", in which the KDP authors decried the absence of Kurdish language TV programming and broadcasting capabilities.¹³⁶ Not only had they realised the importance of broadcasting for identity preservation, they also considered broadcasting in one's own language to be a human right.

1991-2003

The First Gulf War created new broadcasting opportunities for Iraq's Kurdish population. As the Iraqi military were forced out of the region in 1991, Kurdish forces captured Iraqi television stations. From then on, the Kurdish parties in Iraq were able to broadcast in Kurdish, free from

¹³⁴ Amir Hassanpour, Jaffer Sheyholislami and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, "Kurdish: Linguicide, resistance and hope," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, Vol. 217 (2012): 1-18.

¹³⁵ Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, 217.

¹³⁶ The Information Department of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, "Communication concerning gross violations of human rights in Kurdistan (Iraq)," in *On The Kurdish Question At The United Nations*, Know the Kurds series no. 2, (Iraq: Kurdistan Democratic Party, June 1974), 19.

Baghdad censorship to discuss previously prohibited subjects.¹³⁷ The broadcasting centres were initially taken over by the PUK, with the KDP adding channels the following year to be broadcast throughout the region.¹³⁸ The Kurdish television centres broadcast footage of Baghdad's recent genocidal campaigns against the Kurds, which was reportedly watched with 'extreme interest.'¹³⁹ In addition, Kurds' captured video recordings from Iraqi security buildings which showed Kurds being tortured and executed at the hands of the government; these were used as footage for documentary programmes, such as the highly-popular "Saddam's Crimes".¹⁴⁰

In 1995, MED-TV was established. MED-TV was the first ever Kurdish satellite channel. It was set up by Kurds from Turkish-Kurdistan and initially began broadcasting via cable and satellite from Britain.¹⁴¹ MED-TV is significant in the history of Kurdish broadcasting for many reasons. First and foremost, the producers broadcast in multiple Kurdish dialects (although primarily Kurmanji).¹⁴² This was a direct act of resistance to Turkey's suppression of Kurdish language and culture. Through the medium of satellite television, they were able to reach large audiences; Kurds around the world were able to tune in so long as they had access to a satellite dish.

The possibility to distribute information to the masses as they saw it, breaking the states' hegemony over knowledge dissemination, was a major opportunity for the Kurds to provide an alternative interpretation of world affairs, politics and history while promoting and legitimising their own culture and language. As David Romano stated: 'MED-TV gave the Kurds a tool with which to counter the disproportionate power that states such as Turkey wield in the realm of information.'¹⁴³ Turkey saw MED-TV as a propaganda machine for the PKK. Turkish authorities sought various ways to close or block MED-TV, but with little success. Under pressure from Ankara, Britain revoked the

¹³⁷ Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, 151.

¹³⁸ Amir Hassanpour, "The creation of Kurdish media culture," in *Kurdish Culture and Identity*, ed. Philip Kreyenbroek & Christine Allison (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1996), 81-82.

¹³⁹ Hassanpour, "The creation of Kurdish media culture," 81-82.

¹⁴⁰ David Romano, "Modern Communications Technology," 138.

¹⁴¹ Ahmad Mohammadpur, Norbert Ross and Nariman Mohammadi, "The fiction of nationalism: Newroz TV representations of Kurdish nationalism," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* (2016): 3.

¹⁴² Hassanpour; Sheyholislami; Skutnabb-Kangas, "Kurdish: Linguicide, resistance and hope," 14-15.

¹⁴³ Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, 154.

channel's broadcasting licence in 1999 and the channel then bounced from one European country to another, renaming and reforming its organisation.¹⁴⁴

Turkey, knowing the KDP's opposition to the PKK, in 1997 decided to support the KDP to set up their own satellite channel in Iraq; an "anti-PKK" channel which would show the Turkish state in a more positive light than MED-TV did.¹⁴⁵ Although, the KDP always denied accepting Turkish assistance.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, according to David Romano, MED-TV's founders were unfazed by the creation of the rival satellite channel; instead, they were pleased that there were more stations using Kurdish because it undermined the Turkish state's ban on Kurdish language.¹⁴⁷

In 1999 the KDP in Iraq successfully set up their own satellite television station called Kurdistan TV (KTV). One year later, the PUK did the same, naming theirs Kurdsat. Unlike MED-TV, both KTV and Kurdsat are based in Kurdistan, controlled and created by Kurds, legally and without censorship by a state authority. KTV and Kurdsat are inextricably linked to the political parties that founded them. KTV, for example, is owned by Masoud Barzani, the President of Iraqi Kurdistan.¹⁴⁸ Both channels closely follow the party lines. KTV is explicit about its political connection to President Barzani; on its official website it states:

'Kurdistan TV, media organization cultural Kurdistan, are going to approach the national ideology, national and democratic, and social justice, exemplified by Barzani's thought.' (sic)¹⁴⁹

Kurdsat is also open about their political affinities, declaring its founding and ownership by the PUK on its official website.¹⁵⁰ The television stations have been important to the KDP and PUK by supporting their political and ideological ambitions.

¹⁴⁴ Jaffer Sheyholislami, "Identity, language, and new media: the Kurdish case," *Language Policy* 9:4 (2010):293.

¹⁴⁵ Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, 158.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 158.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 158.

¹⁴⁸ Jaffer Sheyholislami, "Identity, Discourse, and the Media: The Case of the Kurds," (PHD diss., Carlton University, 2008): 219.

¹⁴⁹ Kurdistan TV, "About us," *Kurdistantv.tv*, accessed 20/03/2017, <http://www.kurdistantv.tv/en/About-us>.

¹⁵⁰ Kurdsat Broadcasting Corporation, "About the Kurdsat," *Kurdsat.tv*, accessed 20/03/17, <http://kurdsat.tv/about>.

Post-2003

During the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, the KDP and PUK *peshmerga* forces sided with the Western allies against Saddam Hussein. Segall (2013) describes how a particular political song was played every hour throughout the war on both television and radio to encourage resistance against Saddam.¹⁵¹ Militaristic images of Kurdish *peshmerga* heading for Baghdad were the visual backdrop to the song while it was playing on television.¹⁵² With lyrics about how various other historic dictators have failed to defeat the Kurds, Segall argues that ‘the song of protest encouraged people to identify with a common history and motivated political resistance.’¹⁵³ This exemplifies how television has been used to motivate the Kurdish population to political action by reinforcing a shared group identity based on a long and successful history of resistance stretching back to antiquity.

In 2005, during Saddam Hussein’s trial, both Kurdistan TV and Kurdsat broadcast documentaries about his reign – one in Kurdish, one in Arabic.¹⁵⁴ Using archive footage of Iraqi forces, they focused heavily on the wars, violence and atrocities committed against the Kurds such as the Anfal campaign and the chemical attacks at Halabja.¹⁵⁵ Additionally, KTV collaborated with al-Iraqiya TV to broadcast the trial live with a Kurdish voice-over explaining the commentary.¹⁵⁶ Meanwhile, the PUK-run Kurdsat broadcast a report to complement its documentary on Saddam Hussein, which included interviews with people from Kirkuk ‘to talk about the discrimination and injustices they were exposed to.’¹⁵⁷

The fact that KTV broadcast their documentary in Arabic and worked with al-Iraqiya to air the trial suggests they were keen to broaden their viewership to outside the Kurdistan region and to

¹⁵¹ Kimberly Wedeven Segall, *Performing Democracy in Iraq and South Africa: Gender, Media, and Resistance* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 20-21.

¹⁵² Ibid. 20-21.

¹⁵³ Ibid. 20-21.

¹⁵⁴ KRG Cabinet, “Iraqi Kurdish media note on Saddam Hussein trial,” published by Kurdistan Regional Government, Erbil, 19/10/2005, <http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?r=73&l=12&a=6867&s=02010200&s=010000>.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

also appeal to Arabic speakers within their territory. Furthermore, it could be seen as a way to gain legitimacy and respectability as a source of information among the wider Iraqi population. Kurdsat's decision to interview people from Kirkuk was a strategic move too. Kirkuk is one of the most symbolically sensitive cities in the country due to waves of Arabisation and ethnic violence throughout the twentieth century. Today, it is still one of the "disputed territories" which causes animosity between the KRG and their federal partners. Therefore, broadcasting witness accounts of Iraqi crimes from Kirkuk was making a symbolic and political statement which fitted with the PUK's national-territorial claims: the people of Kirkuk are Kurdish, they are victims of Baghdad's aggression, they and the city should be integrated into the KRG for their protection from Baghdad.

Broadcasting competition

The 2003 overthrow of Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime consolidated the KDP and PUK's political authority over the region. The subsequent 2005 constitution officially recognised the Kurdish language, which could then be freely used and broadcasted, not just to the Kurdistan region but also to the rest of Iraq. Since then, smaller Kurdish political parties of the KRG have opened their own satellite stations too, competing with the dominant KDP- and PUK-controlled channels.¹⁵⁸ Independent media outlets have set up television stations too. The increase in broadcasting competition means that the KDP and PUK cannot monopolise political and ideological discourse. Their narratives are challenged on various fronts.

The KDP and PUK have tried to resist losing their media and broadcasting hegemony. A 2011 *Human Rights Watch* report was very critical of the "growing assault on the freedom of journalists" in the Kurdistan Region.¹⁵⁹ The report included a quote from the Middle East Director at *HRW* stating: "The Kurdistan Regional Government promised a new era of freedom for Iraqi Kurds,

¹⁵⁸ Hassanpour, "The creation of Kurdish media culture," 73.

¹⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch, "Iraqi Kurdistan: Growing Effort to Silence Media," New York: Human Rights Watch (24 May 2011), accessed 09/06/2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/05/24/iraqi-kurdistan-growing-effort-silence-media>.

but it seems no more respectful of Kurdish rights to free speech than the government that preceded it.”¹⁶⁰ The report contradicted the tolerant and democratic identification the parties promote.

The parallels to Saddam Hussein’s regime were hyperbolic, as David Romano vehemently argued in his column for *Rudaw* (a KDP-funded media organisation).¹⁶¹ However, reports of repression of journalists and broadcasters are numerous. The 2016/17 *Amnesty International* annual report listed treatment of media workers as one of its key concerns for the Kurdistan Region.¹⁶² The KDP and PUKs resistance to media and journalistic freedom and competition continues to be a stern test of their democratic credentials and challenges the parties’ identity constructions.

Summary

Since 1991, satellite broadcasting targeting Kurdish audiences has proliferated. Sheyholislami observed that ‘a truly Kurdish mass medium seems to have emerged only with satellite television.’¹⁶³ He argued that its success is because satellite television is easier to access than print or cable television and the fact that it is difficult for states to block satellite transmissions from being received means that it can easily cross sovereign state borders without interference.¹⁶⁴ Television broadcasting has become a tool for political elites to attempt to develop and construct identities, homogenise and legitimise languages and cultures, reinforce historical narratives and promote ideological discourses. This is not to say that there is a singular identity being constructed. Multiple identity constructions compete with one another through a range of mediums. Television cannot create a nation, but, as Tamur Ashuri argued, ‘on account of its central position in the lives of billions of people, television is deemed to play a prominent role in the shaping, preservation and marginalisation of certain kinds of

¹⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch, “Iraqi Kurdistan: Growing Effort to Silence Media.”

¹⁶¹ David Romano, “Offensive NGO Watch,” *Rudaw*, republished by Kurdistan Regional Government (9 June 2011), accessed 05/06/2017 <http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?l=12&s=02010200&r=73&a=40293&s=010000>.

¹⁶² Amnesty International, *Annual Report: the state of the world’s human rights*, (London: Amnesty International, 2017), 199.

¹⁶³ Sheyholislami, “Identity, Discourse, and the Media,” 214.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 121

identities'.¹⁶⁵ The research in the following section shows how the KDP and PUK have been utilising television broadcasting to construct Kurdish national identities in line with their ideologies and political aims.

Televsual constructions of Kurdish national identifications

Sources

This section is based on a week-long study of Kurdistan TV, Kurdsat and Kurdsat News (the PUK's 24 hour rolling-news channel) in the week leading up to, and including, the annual commemoration of the Anfal campaign on 14th April 2017. The research primarily focused on news programmes, political debate shows and historical documentaries, due to their direct relevance to representations and identifications of Kurds (both within Iraq and outside) and non-Kurds. The purpose of this research was to analyse how KDP and PUK broadcasters attempted to aid the discursive construction of Kurdish identifications through the narration of a "national" historic event, the Anfal campaign, and assess what their intentions were for constructing identities in such a way.

Symbols, logos, subject matter, presentation and imagery can all influence the audience's perception of a topic and can therefore be altered for political purposes. Analysis of these (primarily visual) aspects of television content, would highlight strategies for supporting the nationalist historical narratives of the KDP and PUK. To collect data, I used two websites which both broadcast many Kurdish satellite television channels and radio stations live 24-hours each day: www.karwan.tv and kurdtvs.net. From 8th April to 14th April 2017, news programmes, documentaries, advertisements, talk shows and televised debates, broadcast at various times throughout the day, were streamed and recorded from the previously mentioned websites for later analysis.

¹⁶⁵ Tamur Ashuri, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in the Media: Producing Shared Memory and National Identity in the Global Television Era* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 2.

Framing and presentation of the Anfal commemorations

On the day of the Anfal commemorations, 14th April, Kurdsat and KTV channels reported on little else. KTV news programmes, aired regularly during the day,¹⁶⁶ always began with a report on the Anfal commemorations of the day. The report every time began with a brief historical account of the Anfal campaign which included emotive historical footage: mass graves, body-bags, skeletons and decomposing corpses being dug out of the ground, homes and villages being destroyed, women running through a rural village while a helicopter flies overhead, women and children looking stunned, lonely and sad. For 2 minutes and 30 seconds, the audience was bombarded with images which reinforced the historical narrative of Kurdish victimhood.¹⁶⁷ The emphasis on portraying women and children as those under attack (running, crying, in shock, desperate) supports Fischer-Tahir's argument that Kurdish national narratives are gendered; the Anfal campaign is symbolised by the "weak woman".¹⁶⁸ The victimhood narrative is symbolically feminised in contrast to the usual masculine presentation of Kurdish military resistance in which the Kurds are encouraged to take pride. Gendering narratives was likely to have been a strategy by the broadcasters to cause a greater emotional response from their audience because narratives of strong, brave men defending desperate, weak women relate to traditionally patriarchal notions of chivalry; thereby emotionally justifying the Kurdish resistance and the Kurdish nationalist cause in general.

After covering the Anfal commemorations, the extended morning news programme switched to a report on *peshmerga* fighters battling ISIS, which also included recordings of Kurds fighting Iraqi forces in the 1980s or early 1990s as well as footage from the ongoing conflict. The lengthy report included footage from military aircraft bombing targets and an interview with representatives from the WHO.¹⁶⁹ When combined in the same news programme as the historical account of the Anfal campaign, the viewer receives two narratives: 1) we, the Kurds of Iraq, were and still are the victims

¹⁶⁶ (full in-depth shows broadcast once in the morning, midday, early evening and night; short news bulletins aired bi-hourly)

¹⁶⁷ Kurdistan TV, "Afternoon news," KTV broadcast, Erbil, recorded from karwan.tv, 14/04/2017 <http://karwan.tv/kurdistan-tv.html>.

¹⁶⁸ Fischer-Tahir, "Gendered Memories and Masculinities," 94.

¹⁶⁹ Kurdistan TV, "Morning news," KTV broadcast, Erbil, recorded from karwan.tv, 14/04/2017 <http://karwan.tv/kurdistan-tv.html>.

of outside aggression; but 2) we should take pride in our historical resistance and our successes against such aggression.

Both KTV and Kurdsat News broadcast their own “Anfal Special” (“*Salvegara Enfale*”) news programme on the 14th April. The shows continued for several hours and were broadcast live from cemeteries (Kurdsat News broadcast from a cemetery in the historically symbolic Kirkuk region), with KRG flags attached to the grave stones, clearly visible in the background at all times. These images of Kurdish flags covering a graveyard created a symbolically powerful effect: those who died were *Kurds* not Iraqis, regardless of which state they were citizens of, and they will forever be remembered as *Kurdish* victims of external aggression. From the cemeteries, the programme hosts interviewed several Kurdish military personnel and politicians and both channels’ shows would regularly cut to archival footage from the Anfal campaign.¹⁷⁰ This combination provided a contrast between the past and present, reinforcing the dual narrative of historical victimisation versus contemporary strength and autonomy, encouraging pride in Kurdish resistance on both levels.

Documentaries

KTV and Kurdsat both broadcast documentary programmes about the Anfal campaign on the 14th April. The KTV Anfal documentary, which was being advertised in every break between every programme throughout the day, was broadcast at 21:30 (Erbil). The introduction to the documentary set the tone quite clearly: hanging moving images of dead bodies, mass graves, crying women, skulls, and coffins with the Kurdish flag draped over them.¹⁷¹ The Kurdsat Anfal documentary also showed violent archive footage but was largely based on interviews with survivors telling their accounts of

¹⁷⁰ Kurdsat News TV, Sulaymaniyah, accessed and recorded via karwan.tv 14/04/2017, <http://karwan.tv/kurdsat-news-tv.html>; Kurdistan TV, Erbil, accessed and recorded via karwan.tv 14/04/2017, <http://karwan.tv/kurdistan-tv.html>.

¹⁷¹ Kurdistan TV, “Anfal documentary,” KTV broadcast, Erbil, 21:30, recorded from karwan.tv, 14/04/2017, <http://karwan.tv/kurdistan-tv.html>.

what happened.¹⁷² Hearing first-hand accounts of events can create a sense of reality and empathy on a personal level.

The Kurdsat documentary also had English subtitles.¹⁷³ Not only does it make it understandable to a wider audience, it also makes the Kurdish historical narrative exportable to those outside the Kurdistan region. Only the UK, Norway and Sweden have recognised the 1988 attacks against the Kurdish population of Iraq as “genocide.” The KRG parties have been seeking wider international recognition of the genocide, so including English subtitles for the documentary could be an attempt to raise awareness outside the Kurdistan Region. Furthermore, as the channels can be received most places around the world via the internet, it may also be an attempt to provide Kurds living outside the region an emotive, historical connection to their “homeland.”

Violence and advertising

Throughout the week leading up to and including the Anfal commemorations, there was an abundance of programmes, on all channels observed, relating to warfare, military matters and violence. KTV had a discussion and debate show in which the host chaired a discussion with two high-ranking Kurdish military personnel sitting in front of a tank.¹⁷⁴ The programme was aired on KTV on both 10 and 11 April in the evening. It had been advertised heavily throughout both days, with short advertisements coming immediately after every single programme.¹⁷⁵ These adverts were almost always followed by a second advert for a historical-military documentary show, which included footage of warfare, soldiers, fighting and destruction; the programme was also to be broadcast twice that week on KTV.¹⁷⁶ Both Kurdsat and Kurdsat News frequently, throughout the day, showed advertisements of a documentary about the reign of Saddam Hussein. These

¹⁷² Kurdsat TV, “Anfal Documentary,” Sulaymaniyah, recorded via karwan.tv, 14/04/2017. <http://karwan.tv/kurdsat-tv.html>.

¹⁷³ Kurdsat TV, “Anfal Documentary.”

¹⁷⁴ Kurdistan TV, “Dastani kore bo bergiri Kirdin le Kurdistan,” KTV broadcast, Erbil, recorded from karwan.tv, 10/04/2017 and 11/04/2017, <http://karwan.tv/kurdistan-tv.html>.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Kurdistan TV, “Kotayi Hefte,” KTV broadcast, Erbil, recorded from karwan.tv, 10/04/2017, <http://karwan.tv/kurdistan-tv.html>.

advertisements showed violent archive footage – a blindfolded man having his hand cut off by a sword, a blindfolded man with his hands tied behind his back being thrown from a rooftop, topless and tied men being beaten – intercut by clips of Saddam Hussein smiling and firing guns in front of cheering crowds.¹⁷⁷ Although it would cut out the exact moment of brutality (e.g. cutting to the next footage clip just as the man thrown from the roof was about to hit the floor) it left little to the imagination of the viewer.¹⁷⁸

The association between Saddam Hussein, his regime and brutal violence and aggression was unavoidable. As an advert, it could be shown repeatedly throughout the day and week until it was broadcast on 13 April; therefore, a viewer of the Kurdsat channels need not even watch the documentary itself to be able to comprehend the message and implications of its content: The identity of a violent “other” is contrasted to the viewer’s “us”, the Kurdish victim of outside aggression. This advert was usually followed immediately by another advert for a programme on Kurdsat and Kurdsat News for a fictional drama about a group of Kurdish soldiers. The advert portrayed them as a well-trained, well equipped elite battle group with modern weaponry and uniform.¹⁷⁹ Here, immediately following the brutality of Saddam Hussein’s regime in an advert, a dual-narrative was developed: victims in the past, strong and independent in the present. This ties in directly to the Kurdish parties’ discourses of victimhood with pride in resistance.

Symbolism

Symbols are an effective tool for television broadcasters to be able to convey messages and perspectives instantaneously, in an easily understood way and without detail or dialogue. Regarding television broadcasting, the clearest place to observe this is in the channel logos. For example, the ever-present “MED-TV” logo in the corner of the screen on all its broadcasts was a constant reminder

¹⁷⁷ Kurdsat TV and Kurdsat News TV, “Saddam Hussein Documentary Advertisement,” Sulaymaniyah, recorded via karwan.tv, 10/04/2017-13/04/17, <http://karwan.tv/kurdsat-news-tv.html>.

¹⁷⁸ Kurdsat TV and Kurdsat News TV, “Saddam Hussein Documentary Advertisement.”

¹⁷⁹ Kurdsat TV and Kurdsat News TV, “Fictional Military Drama Advertisement,” Sulaymaniyah, recorded via karwan.tv, 10/04/2017-14/04/17, <http://karwan.tv/kurdsat-news-tv.html>.

of the Kurdish connection to the ancient Medes, thus permanently reinforcing a national historical narrative traceable back to antiquity.¹⁸⁰ KTV's logo also instantaneously denotes its connection to the Kurdish nation. A golden sun encircled by the word "Kurdistan" is a direct reference to the golden sun found in the middle of the Kurdistan flag.¹⁸¹ Geli Kurdistan – described by karwan.tv as 'the official spokesman' of the PUK¹⁸² - on 14 April had an additional logo in the corner: a black and gold depiction of the Anfal monument in Chamchamal, with the word "Anfal" written across the bottom in gold letters.¹⁸³ It immediately signified affiliation with Kurds in Iraq and their history, and reinforced Anfal's importance as a national event.

Flags, ubiquitously shown on KTV and Kurdsat programmes throughout the week, were an overt symbolic reference to nationality. Drawing on Michael Billig's *Banal Nationalism*, the flags were 'providing banal reminders of nationhood'... 'The remembering is mindless, occurring as other activities are being consciously engaged in.'¹⁸⁴ Throughout the week of research, the flag of Kurdistan seemed to be everywhere on television – draped over coffins and gravestones, flying over buildings, hoisted behind politicians and military personnel, at speeches and conferences, on the arms of *peshmerga* uniforms. They symbolically reinforced to the viewer that those people or items belonged to a Kurdish nation, differentiating them from others. Owning and displaying the Kurdistan flag openly at such public events also provides a sense of legitimacy to those who represent that identification – the KDP and PUK.

The producers of KTV were so keen to have the Kurdistan flag visible to the viewer that on a live debate between Ibrahim al-Jafaari (Iraq's Minister of Foreign Affairs) and Fuad Hussein (the KRG's Chief of Staff and national security advisor) a man scuttled onto the stage, trying to hide behind chairs, to move the previously hidden Kurdistan flag into a position where it was clearly

¹⁸⁰ Ozlem Belcim Galip, *Imagining Kurdistan: identity, culture and society*, (London: I.B. Taurus, 2015), 19.

¹⁸¹ Kurdistan TV, Erbil, accessed and recorded via karwan.tv 08/04/2017-14/04/2017, <http://karwan.tv/kurdistan-tv.html>.

¹⁸² Geli Kurdistan TV, Sulaymaniyah, accessed and recorded via karwan.tv 08/04/2017-14/04/2017, <http://karwan.tv/geli-kurdistan-tv.html>.

¹⁸³ Ibid., recorded 14.04.2017.

¹⁸⁴ Michael Billig, *Banal nationalism*, (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 41.

visible to the audience.¹⁸⁵ This small example highlights the keenness of party broadcaster's to symbolically claim ownership over a KRG representative. Furthermore, placing a different flag behind each man separated them and their views from one another, visually implying that each man spoke not just for himself, but for his nation. In the context of a political debate, it symbolised contrast and competition between the national identifications.

Focus on Kurdistan

Throughout the research, news programmes on KTV and both Kurdsat channels were almost completely focused on the Kurdistan region of the Middle East. The only times that news was reported about issues outside the state boundaries of Iraq, Turkey, Iran or Syria was when covering the following subject areas: states or organisations directly involved in actions concerning the Kurds and Kurdistan region (USA, UK, Russia, UN, EU); overseas attacks connected to ISIS or other terror groups (Egypt and Sweden); and European football.¹⁸⁶ As an example of this point, the table below lists the subject matter reported by news broadcasts and the order in which they appeared, the first is a Kurdsat News programme from 10 April and the second from a KTV news programme on 11 April. As is clear, news broadcasting on both channels was inward-looking, focusing on the Kurdistan region of the Middle East and Kurd-related issues. This is significant for the construction of a national identity because the subject matter chosen for news programmes can support the discursive delineation of a nation. In effect, the news broadcasters are deciding which matters are important or interesting to the in-group and how these issues should be perceived; thereby homogenising the audience's perspectives and beliefs. Moreover, framing certain topics as "domestic" or "foreign" issues discursively reinforces national territorial boundaries.

¹⁸⁵ Kurdistan TV, "Televised debate: Ibrahim al-Jafaari and Fuad Hussein," Iraq, 12 April 2017, Accessed and Recorded from karwan.tv 12/04/17, <http://karwan.tv/kurdistan-tv.html>.

¹⁸⁶ Kurdistan TV; Kurdsat; Kurdsat News, news programmes, accessed and recorded from karwan.tv 08/04/17-14/04/17, <http://karwan.tv/kurdistan-tv.html>.

Portrayal of news items supported KDP and PUK narratives. The headline story on both channels, which included footage of the KDP and PUK leaders shaking hands, joking and laughing together, sent a message of Kurdish unity despite political differences.¹⁸⁷ Interviews with leaders of Kurdish organisations in Turkey and Syria implied respect and concern about the struggles of the Kurds in the neighbouring countries, suggesting pan-Kurdish unity against their oppressive host states (even if the sentiment is not acted upon in practice).¹⁸⁸ Reports about fighting ISIS and the Syrian civil war identified the most potent contemporary enemies of the Kurds and expressed unity and support with those fighting against a common enemy.¹⁸⁹ In summary, content choice for news programmes from both broadcasters supported nationalist narratives by reinforcing intranational unity, homogenising the audience's perspectives on political, historical and social issues, delineating national boundaries and identifying national "others".

Summary

The above analysis of satellite television broadcasting by the KDP and PUK-run stations explores how nationalist political parties use television broadcasting to promote national narratives. Content relating to the Anfal campaign and the commemorations was ubiquitous on KTV and Kurdsat throughout the week building up to 14 April: documentaries, news reports, advertisements, debates and conferences frequently reminded the audience of Anfal's significance and reinforced its place in national historical narratives. National narratives, reinforced by annual commemorations, which can now be televised, aid the construction of national identifications. KTV and Kurdsat programming support national discourses of the KDP and PUK. The content, framing and symbols reinforce themes which attempt to construct national identifications: intranational unity, historic victimhood and pride, contemporary political legitimacy, and delineations between the national in-group and out-groups.

¹⁸⁷ Kurdistan TV, "Evening news," KTV broadcast, Erbil, accessed and recorded from karwan.tv, 18:30, 11 April 2017; Kurdsat News TV, "Evening news," Kurdsat News broadcast, Sulaymaniyah, accessed and recorded from karwan.tv, 17:00, 10 April 2017, <http://karwan.tv/kurdistan-tv.html>.

¹⁸⁸ Kurdsat News TV, "Evening news," 10 April 2017.

¹⁸⁹ Kurdistan TV, "Evening news," 11 April 2017; Kurdsat News TV, "Evening news," 10 April 2017.

Meanwhile, television broadcasters attempt to homogenise and unify the audience as an “imagined community” of co-viewers. The televised Anfal commemorations therefore support the KDP and PUK nation-building strategies while legitimising their political hegemony by portraying themselves as the protectors of a victimised identification.

Content of news programmes in order of appearance.

10/04/17 Kurdsat News ¹⁹⁰	11/04/17 Kurdistan TV ¹⁹¹
<p>1st item: PUK-KDP joint meeting and press conference</p> <p>2nd item: Mala Bakhtiyar (PUK politician) statement about the political parties being responsible for the actions and inactions of the national assembly</p> <p>3rd item: Cemil Bayik (PKK leader) interviewed about Turkish AKP and MHP parties collaborating in referendum</p> <p>4th item: Cihan Sex Ehmed (YPJ fighter and spokesperson) interviewed about ongoing fight against ISIS</p> <p>5th item: a long-running hunger strike in Iraqi Kurdistan.</p> <p>6th item: a report on the fighting against ISIS in Mosul.</p> <p>7th item: report on QSD (Syrian Democratic Forces) fighting against ISIS.</p>	<p>1st item: Meeting between Masoud Barzani (KDP leader) and Kosrat Rasul (PUK Secretary-General).</p> <p>2nd item: interview with representative of Ministry of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs.</p> <p>3rd item: report and aerial footage of bombing of targets in Syria.</p> <p>4th item: KDP conference, including a speech by a party representative.</p>

¹⁹⁰ Kurdsat News TV, "Evening news," 10 April 2017.

¹⁹¹ Kurdistan TV, "Evening news," 11 April 2017.

KTV Anfal documentary 14.04.17. An Iraqi officer executes a blindfolded and tied prisoner.¹⁹²



¹⁹² Kurdistan TV, “Anfal documentary,” KTV broadcast, Erbil, 21:30, recorded from karwan.tv, 14 April 2017, <http://karwan.tv/kurdistan-tv.html>.

Kurdsat News 12.04.17. Advertisement for documentary about Saddam Hussein. A tied and blindfolded prisoner is shown being beaten.¹⁹³



¹⁹³ Kurdsat TV and Kurdsat News TV, "Saddam Hussein Documentary Advertisement," Sulaymaniyah, recorded from karwan.tv, 10/04/2017-13/04/17, <http://karwan.tv/kurdsat-news-tv.html>.

PUK official statement 14.04.17. Geli Kurdistan. Shows the PUK logo and the Anfal commemorative symbol which Geli Kurdistan had in the corner of the screen throughout the day.¹⁹⁴



¹⁹⁴ Geli Kurdistan TV, "PUK official statement," Geli Kurdistan TV broadcast, recorded from karwan.tv, 14 April 2017, <http://karwan.tv/geli-kurdistan-tv.html>.

3: Kirkuk: the battleground for politicised identities.

Introduction

The city of Kirkuk has become a microcosm of the conflicts between national identifications being played out on a larger scale in contemporary Iraq. Kirkuk city, and the wider Kirkuk Governate, is multi-ethnic and its ethno-national identity is highly contested by Kurdish, Turkomen, and Arabic groups. As the most significant “disputed territory,” located at the border of Baghdad and Erbil’s regions of authority, competing ethno-national groups have politicised and manipulated the identities of Kirkuk’s population with the aim of influencing Kirkuk’s future political status.

The KDP and PUK shared the aim of incorporating Kirkuk into the Kurdish autonomous region. As will be shown below, the subject of Kirkuk has been prominent in both parties’ nationalist ideologies. They have claimed that Kirkuk city and governate are, and always have been, populated by a (ethnic) Kurdish majority. As such, Kirkuk has a “Kurdish” or “Kurdistani” identity and should therefore be included under KRG authority. However, political groups representing the Turkmen population made the same claim and received strong support from Turkey’s government. Likewise, groups representing the Arab population of Kirkuk argue for Kirkuk’s Iraqi identity and affinity to Baghdad. Kirkuk also has large Chaldean and Assyrian minorities who have often been violently targeted by the competing larger ethno-nationalist groups.

It would be an oversimplification to assume individuals primarily identify themselves into one of the ethnic categories mentioned above or that there is homogeneity on political or social issues within these categories. The residents of Kirkuk have agency; individuals are not simply passive to the outside expectations of their ethnic categorisation or to the desires of political organisations who claim to represent them and their needs. Denise Natali has argued that a unique “Kirkuki” identity can develop together with an ethnicised identity, or otherwise replace it.¹⁹⁵ Such self-identification looks

¹⁹⁵ Denise Natali, “The Kirkuk Conundrum,” *Ethnopolitics* 7:4 (2008): 438.

past politicised ethnic divisions and instead emphasises the need for improvement in public services, administration, education and general standard of living conditions.¹⁹⁶

This chapter aims to highlight how the KDP and PUK utilised the subject of Kirkuk as a “disputed territory” in their nationalist discourses to influence identity constructions which supported their political ambitions. It will investigate the symbolic importance of Kirkuk to Iraq’s Kurdish nationalists while also considering practical, political and economic motivations too. More than in the previous chapters of this thesis, this chapter will explore the interaction between Kurdish nationalist discourses and political policy and action. “Kirkuk” is not only the name of a city and governate, it is also a discursive subject which can be framed in different and contrasting ways in political rhetoric. This chapter will argue that the prominence and use of Kirkuk as a subject in the nationalist narratives of the KDP and PUK primarily served their party-political ambitions. Furthermore, the subject of Kirkuk was framed differently depending on the context in which it was used, in each case for a separate political purpose. Kirkuk was framed in ways to develop and construct national identifications, but which emphasised different aspects depending on the context and political aims of the situation.

Kirkuk’s modern history of transition

Arabisation

There have been Kurdish, Turkmen, Arab and Assyrian communities in Kirkuk for many centuries (as well as other, smaller ethnic groups) and by the 1920s it was still an ethnically mixed region. There are no reliable demographic statistics for the Kirkuk region before the 1957 census – which was then altered by the Ba’athists – which makes it difficult to estimate its pre-Ba’athist

¹⁹⁶ Natali, “Kirkuk Conundrum,” 438.

demographics.¹⁹⁷ The best estimates suggest that Kirkuk city was multi-ethnic but the wider Kirkuk region maintained a majority ethnic-Kurdish population, at least until 1957.¹⁹⁸

Since 1925, the Kirkuk Governate underwent significant demographic transitions as the new nation-state of Iraq tried to impose a new national identity. The emergence of “qawmiyya” Arab nationalism in Iraq began the process of “Arabisation” of non-Arab areas and from the 1930s the Iraqi government began sending Arab tribes to Kirkuk and giving Kirkuk administration positions to Arabs rather than other ethnicities.¹⁹⁹ Early Arabisation efforts were slow and, up until the 1960s, the Kirkuk Governate was still very mixed, ethnically balanced and tolerant; furthermore, Kurds and Turkmen still made up the majority of Kirkuk’s representatives in Baghdad’s parliament.²⁰⁰

From the late 1960s, the Arabisation of Kirkuk accelerated, especially under the control of Saddam Hussein. Non-Arabs were fired from administrative positions, they were forced to sign identity correction cards, forced to join the Ba’ath party, and many non-Arab homes and villages were attacked.²⁰¹ After Kurdish-Ba’ath negotiations between 1970-74 broke down, the government began bulldozing Kurdish villages to be replaced by Arab settlements, more Kurdish administration officials were replaced by Arabs and roads, schools and neighbourhoods were renamed in Arabic.²⁰² The broad aim was to change the demographics of the north of Iraq to homogenise the population under an Arab nationalist ideology and place Arabs in control of Iraq’s key cities and resources (such as Kirkuk’s oil fields). As well as the Kurds, the regime also turned on Turkmen and Assyrians too.²⁰³ Iraqi-Kurdish organisations claimed that at least 220,000 Kurds were forced from their homes in the 1970s.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁷ Brendan O’Leary, “Power-sharing, pluralist federation, and Federacy,” in *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq*, ed. Brendan O’Leary, John McGarry, and Khaled Salih, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 83.

¹⁹⁸ O’Leary, “Power-sharing, pluralist federation, and Federacy,” 83.

¹⁹⁹ Denise Natali, *The Kurdish Quasi-State: Development and dependency in post-Gulf War Iraq* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 12-13.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. 13.

²⁰¹ Ibid. 23-24.

²⁰² Ozum Yesiltas, “Iraq, Arab Nationalism, And Obstacles To Democratic Transition,” in *Conflict, Democratization, And The Kurds In The Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria*, ed. David Romano and Mehmet Gurses (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 50.

²⁰³ Ibid. 50.

²⁰⁴ Anthony H. Cordesman and Emma R. Davies, *Iraq’s Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict: Vol.1*, London: Praeger Security International, 2008), 195.

Saddam Hussein pushed the Arabisation of Kirkuk further in the 1980s and 1990s. Peter Galbraith asserts that ‘several hundred thousand Kurds were expelled from Kirkuk.’²⁰⁵ Another estimate states that Kirkuk was an Arab-majority province by 1987, but 16% of the population were in fact migrants from elsewhere in Iraq.²⁰⁶ Ali Hassan Majid, who led and conducted the Anfal campaign against the Kurds (hence the nickname “Chemical Ali”), moved his military headquarters to Kirkuk from 1987 to 1989.²⁰⁷ Then, the 1991 Gulf War caused Kurds to flee their homes in Kirkuk; thousands of families left and were unable to return after the end of the war.²⁰⁸ By 2003, it was estimated that roughly 250,000 Arabs had relocated to the Kirkuk region while roughly the same number of Kurds had been displaced.²⁰⁹

Post-2003

Until 2003, Kirkuk remained outside KRG control. Iraqi forces maintained control, partly for the sake of controlling Kirkuk’s oil production and supply. The 2003 invasion provided an opportunity for the KDP and PUK to expand their sphere of influence. On 10 April 2003, PUK *peshmerga* entered Kirkuk city. They portrayed the action to the public as the repossession of an oppressed Kurdish city.²¹⁰ The PUK hoped to be considered liberators by the Kirkuk public, gaining popularity with the Kurdish population.²¹¹ Because the move was not coordinated with the KDP, ‘the city became a significant factor contributing to further deterioration of internal relations between the PUK and the Kurdistan Democratic Party.’²¹²

However, the *peshmerga* were soon forced by their allies to pull out of Kirkuk again.

According to Mohammed Ahmed, fears of the Iraqi Kurds acquiring sufficient economic resources

²⁰⁵ Peter W. Galbraith, “Kurdistan in a Federal Iraq,” in *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq*, ed. Brendan O’Leary, John McGarry, and Khaled Salih, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 277.

²⁰⁶ Natali, “The Kirkuk Conundrum,” 435.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. 435.

²⁰⁸ Kerim Yildiz, *The Future of Kurdistan: The Iraqi Dilemma*, (London: Pluto Press, 2012), 78.

²⁰⁹ Aram Rifaat, “Kirkuk: The Central Issue of Kurdish Politics and Iraq’s Knotty Problem,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 28:2 (2008): 252.

²¹⁰ Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, 213.

²¹¹ Rifaat, “Kirkuk: The Central Issue,” 254.

²¹² Rifaat, “Kirkuk: The Central Issue,” 254.

and territory to declare independence prevented the US, Turkey and Baghdad from backing Kurdish claims to Kirkuk, so they pressured them to leave.²¹³ The USA and her allies were keen to maintain Iraq's territorial integrity and unity. Despite officially ceding control back to Baghdad, it is generally understood that Kirkuk in fact stayed under "de facto" control of the Kurdish political parties and their *peshmerga* forces.²¹⁴

Constitutional changes

The KDP and PUK still hoped to eventually bring Kirkuk under KRG authority. Iraq's *Law of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period* (TAL) was signed on 8 March 2004.

Regarding Kirkuk, article 58 was by far the most significant:

'(A) The Iraqi Transitional Government... shall act expeditiously to take measures to remedy the injustice caused by the previous regime's practices in altering the demographic character of certain regions, including Kirkuk, by deporting and expelling individuals from their places of residence, forcing migration in and out of the region, settling individuals alien to the region, depriving the inhabitants of work, and correcting nationality.'²¹⁵

It went on to elaborate that they intended to "remedy the injustice" by restoring displaced residents to their homes or providing compensation where that was not possible, resettling people that were 'newly introduced to specific regions,' providing employment opportunities, and permitting people to determine their own national and ethnic identities.²¹⁶ It also promised to undo the previous regime's administrative boundary corrections for political means.²¹⁷ Furthermore, it promised a 'permanent resolution of disputed territories, including Kirkuk' upon completion of a permanent constitution and a fair census to take into account 'the will of the people of those territories.'²¹⁸

²¹³ Ahmed, *Iraqi Kurds and Nation-Building*, 8.

²¹⁴ Yildiz, *The Future of Kurdistan*, 84.

²¹⁵ *Law Of Administration For The State Of Iraq For The Transitional Period*, Article 58, Coalition Provisional Authority (Iraq: 8 March 2004).

²¹⁶ *Law Of Administration For The State Of Iraq For The Transitional Period*, Article 58, Coalition Provisional Authority (Iraq: 8 March 2004).

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Therefore, not only did the TAL offer a frank admission of the previous regime's atrocities it also offered the first legal framework for how to rectify them. It was an official acknowledgement by Baghdad of the Kurd's historic victimisation claims.

Following a referendum, the permanent Iraqi constitution was adopted on 15 October 2005. Article 140 not only reinforced Article 58 of the TAL, but also set a deadline by which the reversal of demographic changes, census and referendum needed to be completed by:

‘The responsibility placed upon the executive branch of the Iraqi Transitional Government stipulated in Article 58 of the Transitional Administrative Law shall extend and continue to the executive authority elected in accordance with this Constitution, provided that it accomplishes completely (normalization and census and concludes with a referendum in Kirkuk and other disputed territories to determine the will of their citizens), by a date not to exceed the 31st of December 2007.’²¹⁹

As will become clear below, “Article 140” and “normalisation, census, and referendum” became integral to the KDP and PUK's nationalist discourses because the constitution had provided a legal basis for enforcing ethnicised demographic change in Kirkuk. Although the constitution stated that any such action should be carried out by the “executive authority”, the Kurdish parties would argue that any KRG action taken in line with Article 140 would be because of Baghdad's failure to enact constitutional procedures.

De-Arabisation

The KDP and PUK began attempting to implement the constitutional articles mentioned above before they had even been adopted into law. Their aim was to produce a Kurdish majority population in Kirkuk to be able to win a referendum on Kirkuk's political status in the KRG's favour. Ever since *peshmerga* entered Kirkuk in 2003, there have been allegations of Kurdish forces pressuring Arab communities to leave.²²⁰ In 2005 Barzani and Talabani agreed to reunify their

²¹⁹ *Constitution of the Republic of Iraq*, Article 140, (Iraq: 15 October 2005).

²²⁰ Yildiz, *The Future of Kurdistan*, 84.

administrations, explicitly stating that returning Kirkuk to Kurdish authority was in the Kurds' "national interest" and therefore a prominent reason to reunite.²²¹ The parties created a committee to organise the return of Kurdish refugees to Kirkuk as well as finances for Arabs who decided to leave.²²² Since then, many Arabs who did not leave voluntarily have been forcibly expelled from the city.²²³

While encouraging Kurds to return to Kirkuk, they have been preventing other non-Arab refugees, such as Chaldo-Assyrians, from doing the same.²²⁴ Indeed, non-Arab communities have also been targeted by the Kurds – including Turkmen, Assyrians and Armenians – causing some observers, such as Howard Adelman, to describe the Kurds' actions as "ethnic cleansing."²²⁵ The Kurdish parties also oversaw land reclamations and redistributions.²²⁶ Many KDP-PUK policies and practices have been challenged by representatives of the Turkmen and Arab communities. Although a 2006 report by International Crisis Group did not corroborate accusations against the Kurds of illegal or violent activities, its authors were keenly aware of rising ethnic tensions in Kirkuk. It summarised the situation as: 'equal parts street brawl over oil riches, ethnic competition over identity between Kurdish, Turkoman, Arab and Assyrian-Chaldean communities, and titanic clash between two nations, Arab and Kurd.'²²⁷

Rivalry between the dominant Kurdish political parties influenced the situation in Kirkuk since 2003. For instance, Denise Natali reported that land redistributions and resettlements have often been based on party affiliations.²²⁸ Although Kirkuk Governate is technically not part of the Kurdistan Region, Kirkuk's Kurdish administrators and politicians have been directly affiliated with one of the main KRG parties. Even Kirkuk's chief of police at one time complained that his police force had no

²²¹ Rafaat, "Kirkuk: The Central Issue," 255.

²²² Voller, *The Kurdish Liberation Movement in Iraq*, 99.

²²³ Natali, *The Kurdish Quasi-State*, 106.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

²²⁵ Howard Adelman, "Ethnic cleansing in Iraq: internal and external displacement," in *The Legacy of Iraq: from the 2003 war to the 'Islamic state'*, ed. Benjamin Isakhan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 170.

²²⁶ Natali, *The Kurdish Quasi-State*, 106-107.

²²⁷ International Crisis Group, *Iraq And The Kurds: The Brewing Battle Over Kirkuk*, (Middle East Report: No.56, 18 July 2006), i.

²²⁸ Natali, *The Kurdish Quasi-State*, 108.

loyalty to him or the police in general, instead they follow orders from the Kurdish political parties.²²⁹ Arab and Turkmen community representatives and parties have often accused the Kurds of monopolising power. To counter these claims the Kurdish parties have, at times, appointed non-Kurds to high-level council positions; however, council meetings would be held in Kurdish language so the non-Kurdish representatives would end up boycotting the meetings.²³⁰ In 2008, organisations and agreements were made by Arab political parties specifically to resist any attempt for Kirkuk to join the KRG, and the Turkmen Front threatened to boycott any future referendum on Kirkuk's status.²³¹

Various reports from international observers, including the UN, documented the *peshmerga*'s illegal policing of Kirkuk, including accusations of abductions and torture of non-Kurdish individuals.²³² The UNAMI Human Rights Office *Report on Human Rights in Iraq* in 2011 reported accusations against the *asayish* (Kurdish security forces) in Kirkuk of illegally detaining hundreds of Arabs since 2003 – which they denied.²³³ It also named Kirkuk as being one of the cities in Iraq with the highest levels of violence, particularly naming the targeting of Christian and Turkmen communities.²³⁴ The following year, the UNAMI report repeated the accusations with further details of specific cases.²³⁵ The equivalent 2013 report reported that Turkmen Shi'a were being targeted for violence in Kirkuk, plus Kurdish forces illegally detaining protesters and using live rounds.²³⁶

The politicisation of ethnic tensions and the continuing de-Ba'athification and demographic change processes continued to produce tension, violence and instability in Kirkuk throughout the decade following the 2003 invasion. The ethnicised battle for Kirkuk had become a flashpoint for potential conflict between the KRG and Baghdad on a larger scale. Tension was so high that in 2012 the *peshmerga* and Iraqi forces were deployed against each other in a standoff south-west of

²²⁹ Cordesman and Davies, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 196.

²³⁰ Natali, *The Kurdish Quasi-State*, 108.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 108-9

²³² Nicholas Al-Jeloo, "Post-withdrawal prospects for Iraq's 'Ultra-minorities'," in *The Legacy of Iraq: from the 2003 war to the 'Islamic state'*, ed. Benjamin Isakhan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 118.

²³³ UNAMI Human Rights Office/OHCHR, *Report on Human Rights in Iraq: 2011*, (Baghdad: May 2012), 18.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, vi.

²³⁵ UNAMI Human Rights Office/OHCHR, *Report on Human Rights in Iraq: July - December 2012*, (Baghdad, June 2013), 16.

²³⁶ UNAMI Human Rights Office/OHCHR, *Report on Human Rights in Iraq: July - December 2013*, (Baghdad, June 2014), v.

Kirkuk.²³⁷ The fact that no permanent solution to the “disputed territories” has been found continues to encourage conflict and tension based on ethnicised identity politics. As David Romano summarised it, the unresolved issue of the “disputed territories” continues ‘to hang over the Iraqi political system like a Sword of Damocles.’²³⁸ Many observers, such as Michael Gunter, agree that resolving the Kirkuk issue is a pre-condition for eventually ending the dispute between Kurds and Arabs in Iraq.²³⁹ Indeed, until a permanent solution is found, it is unlikely that ethnic politicisation and tension will reduce in Kirkuk.

Discursively framing “Kirkuk”

National historical narratives can be used to justify and legitimise political action. As Paul Chilton states: ‘history, and which parts of it are “close” to the “us” is central to national ideologies and to justifying present and future policy.’²⁴⁰ In the discussion below, I argue that from 2003 to 2014 a victimhood narrative constructed around the Arabisation of Kirkuk, expressed frequently in political discourses, was utilised to justify and explain political action in Kirkuk Governate and City by the KDP and PUK. Furthermore, the KDP and PUK leadership framed “Kirkuk” in ways which supported their temporal, spatial and identity claims, which Özkirimli argues are necessary for the construction of a nation.²⁴¹

The discussion below utilises Wodak et al.’s Critical Discourse Analysis – outlined in chapter one. The sources for analysis include a wide range of examples of KDP-PUK political discourse, including speeches, public statements, interviews and meetings. My study includes sources intended for a domestic audience (e.g. a speech by President Barzani in Kirkuk) as well as an overseas

²³⁷ Stansfield, “The unravelling of the post-First World War state system?” 272.

²³⁸ David Romano, “The Iraqi Kurdish View on Federalism: Not Just for the Kurds,” in *Conflict, Democratization, And The Kurds In The Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria*, ed. David Romano and Mehmet Gurses (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 198.

²³⁹ Michael M. Gunter, “The Kurdish Spring,” *Third World Quarterly* 34:3 (2013): 453.

²⁴⁰ Chilton, *Analysing Political Discourse*, 59.

²⁴¹ Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism*, 208-9.

audience (e.g. an interview with the LA Times), all ranging from 2003 to 2014.²⁴² I have not included sources from late 2014 onward because the rise of ISIS drastically changed the political and military situation in Kirkuk. It is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis to include detailed analysis of the discursive changes that accompanied the political and military ones from 2014 to the present day.

Kirkuk's symbolic value and political ambitions

The Arabisation of Kirkuk maintains a symbolically significant place in the national historical narratives of the KDP and PUK, reinforcing the victimhood narrative while identifying national “others.” But, more so than the Anfal campaign and Halabja attacks, the Arabisation of Kirkuk has been explicitly used by the nationalist political parties to justify and explain contemporary political action.

Since gaining *de facto* control of Kirkuk in 2003, the KDP and PUK tried to get it officially and constitutionally recognised as part of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Article 58 of the TAL, then Article 140 of the permanent Iraqi constitution, provided firm legal standpoints for their territorial claims. Many observers, such as Brendan O’Leary, argue that claims for Kirkuk are, at least partly, motivated by oil resources.²⁴³ The Kirkuk Governate has some of the country’s largest oil reserves and is a significant economic resource for whoever owns and controls it, therefore nationalist discourses could be utilised to stake a claim and justify action in the pursuit of oil riches.

KDP and PUK leaders have repeatedly denied that oil is a motivation for them, instead they have stressed Kirkuk’s symbolic and historic importance to their nation, relating to their historic victimisation. In an interview with Robin Wright of the LA Times in 2002, Masoud Barzani stated: ‘For others, Kirkuk is important because it lies on a sea of oil. For us, Kirkuk is important because it lies on a sea of our blood. Kirkuk is the symbol of the suffering of the Kurdish people.’²⁴⁴ From 2005

²⁴² Where the original speech or statement was made in Kurdish or Arabic, I have analysed official English translations of transcripts published on www.presidency.krd or cabinet.gov.krd.

²⁴³ O’Leary, “Power-sharing, pluralist federation, and Federacy,” 86.

²⁴⁴ Robin Wright, “Kurdish Eyes on Iraq's Future,” *LA Times*, 24 November 2002, accessed 19/05/2017, <http://articles.latimes.com/2002/nov/24/opinion/op-2wright24>.

onwards, the “normalisation, census, and referendum” process, specified in Article 140 of the constitution, guided KDP-PUK political actions and ambitions regarding Kirkuk, with the end-goal of subsuming Kirkuk into the KRG.

Kirkuk's identities

KDP and PUK politicians have made different identity claims about Kirkuk to justify their political actions to different audiences. A “Kurdish” or “Kurdistani” identity of Kirkuk was most explicitly stated when the perceived audience was an overseas one.²⁴⁵ The US maintained a strong presence in Iraq after the 2003 invasion, wielding political influence too. For example, pressure from the US and their allies forced the KDP and PUK to remove the majority of their *peshmerga* shortly after they had captured it during the 2003 invasion.²⁴⁶ KRG politicians likely considered it politically pragmatic to justify their political claims over Kirkuk to the US and international community, while they unofficially reinforced their control, by insisting on the “Kurdish” identity of the region. For example, in his 2002 LA Times interview, President Barzani argued:

“Kirkuk is part of Kurdistan, and it has the identity of Kurdistan. But at the same time, it's a city of Iraq, like Basra and Baghdad. So there could be Arabs, Turkmen and Shiites living there, too. But what we are not ready to compromise on is the identity of that city.”²⁴⁷

This insistence remained consistent for international audiences for the following decade. When responding to a question about the status of Kirkuk on an official visit to Washington D.C. in 2010, President Barzani began by stating that “Kirkuk has a Kurdistani identity according to all historical and geographical records.”²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ Although, many of these overseas interviews, statements and speeches were subsequently published on the KRG official website for the domestic audience too.

²⁴⁶ Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, 213.

²⁴⁷ Wright, “Kurdish Eyes on Iraq's Future.”

²⁴⁸ Kurdistan Presidency, “President Barzani concludes successful Washington visit,” KRG news release, 30 January 2010, accessed 18/05/2017, <http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?l=12&s=02010100&r=223&a=33605&s=010000>.

Because of the sensitive and volatile nature of ethnicised politics in Iraq, specifically in Kirkuk, political discourses aimed at domestic audiences often required more nuance, subtlety and lip-service to other ethno-national communities. The KDP and PUK tried to avoid disturbing non-Kurdish groups they were hoping to politically woo. Consequently, when Kirkuk's identity was presented to a domestic audience, it was more often described as having an "Iraqi" identity. When President Barzani made a speech in Kirkuk in 2008, he stated: "When we talk about Kirkuk as belonging to the Kurdistan Region, we do not seek to deny Kirkuk its Iraqi identity. Kirkuk, like Basra, Ramadi, Erbil, and Sulaimaniya is an Iraqi city."²⁴⁹

Alternatively, a "Kirkuki" identification has sometimes been alluded to. For example, Jalal Talabani stated that "ultimately we have said Kirkuk belongs to the Kirkukis."²⁵⁰ This "Kirkuki" identification gradually became distinct from "Kurdistani" or "Iraqi" identifications. As a "disputed territory", Kirkuk was not reconstructed after the 2003 invasion; the city fell into deprivation compared to other regions either inside Iraq or the KRG.²⁵¹ In 2008, Denise Natali argued:

'For some Kurds, a gradual change in attitude and awareness of 'being Kirkuki' is emerging alongside or instead of their distinct ethnic group or political party affiliations. Contrary to popular perceptions, the overriding concern of Kirkukis, like most populations in the Kurdistan region, is not necessarily the implementation of article 140, but rather, the provision of services, education and effective administration. The general disregard of Kirkuk has created a shared feeling of relative deprivation and heightened local populations' sense of being a special province and community.'²⁵²

Natali's point highlights that identifications made by political elites should not be taken for granted. Identity claims are often challenged, and such challenges are inherent to the discursive nature of nation-building.

²⁴⁹ Kurdistan Region Presidency, "Full text of President Barzani's speech in Kirkuk," KRG News/Speech release, 16 August 2008, accessed 17/05/2017, <http://www.presidency.krd/english/articledisplay.aspx?id=9HWfqp51H/A=>.

²⁵⁰ Eli Lake, "Practically Speaking, Iraq Has Broken Apart," *Daily Beast*, 15 June 2014, accessed 19/05/2017, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/06/15/practically-speaking-iraq-has-broken-apart>.

²⁵¹ Natali, *The Kirkuk Conundrum*, 438.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 438.

I presented just a few examples of how KDP and PUK leaders alter their identity claims about Kirkuk depending on the perceived audience. Whether they claimed Kirkuk's identity as "Kurdish", "Kurdistani", "Iraqi" or "Kirkuki", KRG political leaders were homogenising the identifications of thousands of inhabitants (and their ancestors) and each homogenised identification served a different political purpose. To an international (particularly American) audience, "Kurdistani" identity claims justified the KRG parties maintaining unofficial political and military presence in Kirkuk. "Iraqi" or "Kirkuki" identity claims discursively reinforced the Kurds' dedication to interethnic peaceful coexistence and democratic federalism, thereby constructing identification distinctions in contrast to Baghdad.

Victimhood

As Kirkuk was a *Kurdish* area, it followed that the victims of atrocities that happened there were *Kurds*, tying in with their victimhood narrative. Once again, Kirkuk was explicitly used as a symbol of Kurdish victimhood for overseas audiences: "Kurds were evicted from Kirkuk and became refugees in their own country. Kirkuk has become a symbol of oppression", President Barzani responded to a question from an MEP on the EU Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee in 2009.²⁵³ In 2008, President Barzani wrote an article which was published in the Wall Street Journal,²⁵⁴ in which he directly addressed Kirkuk and Arabisation during the twentieth century:

'The "disputed territories" have a tragic history. Since the 1950s, Iraqi regimes encouraged Arabs to settle in Kirkuk and other predominantly Kurdish and Turkmen areas. Saddam Hussein accelerated this process by engaging in ethnic cleansing, expelling or killing Kurds and Turkmen, or by

²⁵³ Kurdistan Presidency, "President Barzani meets Javier Solana and EU Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee," KRG news release, 14 November 2009, accessed 20/05/2017, <http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?r=223&l=12&s=02010100&a=32418&s=010000>.

²⁵⁴ Subsequently republished on the official KRG website.

requiring nationality corrections (in which non-Arabs are forced to declare themselves to be Arabs) and by moving Arabs into Kurdish homes.²⁵⁵

In the above quotation, Barzani presents a clear contrast between the aggressive enemy, Saddam Hussein's regime, who committed "ethnic cleansing", "expelling", "killing" and enforcing "nationality corrections", and the innocent Kurdish and Turkmen victims who lost their homes, their identities or their lives. Although he does not blame Arabs in general for these acts, he does link Saddam Hussein's regime to their preferential treatment of Arabs at the expense of Kurds and Turkmen, thereby reinforcing the ethno-national distinctions between Kurds, Turkmen and Arabs. The Arab identification became associated with violence and tyranny, while the Turkmen became identified as a friendly, fraternal "other" to the Kurds and shared, to an extent, the experience of victimisation.

This point was consistent with the narrative presented to domestic audiences too. At a speech in Kirkuk in 2008, President Barzani declared:

"You all know the extent of the oppression inflicted on the Kurdish people and Turkomans and Arabs [under the previous regime]. We never accused our Arab brothers of these terrible crimes of Arabization, displacement, and the destruction of our villages, [but rather the disastrous regime that violated all Iraqis' rights]." (Bracketed additions were included in official transcript of speech.)²⁵⁶

Once again, Arabs were associated with the Ba'athist regime but not blamed for its actions. Also, he was again reinforcing the victimhood narrative, but sharing this experience with the other communities who inhabit Kirkuk too. This notion of shared experience is an assimilation strategy, attempting to unite the population of Kirkuk through a common historical narrative, the same way nationalist historical narratives do through the identification of an "other" – in this case, tyrannical Baghdad regimes.

²⁵⁵ The Wall Street Journal, "President Barzani in Wall Street Journal: Kurdistan is a model for Iraq," KRG news release, 12 November 2008, accessed 19/05/2017, <http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?r=73&l=12&s=02010200&a=26462&s=010000>.

²⁵⁶ Kurdistan Region Presidency, "Full text of President Barzani's speech in Kirkuk."

Historical narratives for contemporary politics

By reinforcing the historic narrative of abuses and crimes perpetrated by Baghdad regimes, KDP and PUK leaders were constructing a reference point with which to criticise the contemporary Iraqi government by comparing them to the Ba'athists. This was often done indirectly, describing or criticising a situation rather than the government itself. Usually, comparisons to Ba'ath party rule were used by KRG politicians when they wanted to criticise Baghdad for not abiding by the constitution, or to pressure them to do so at particular times. For example, in 2010, President Barzani declared: "We are committed to the political process in Iraq and together with our partners in Iraq we are determined to overcome our problems, as long as Iraq abides by its Constitution. However, we are not prepared to live in a dictatorship."²⁵⁷ When combined with criticisms of the government in Baghdad for not implementing Article 140, the government were indirectly being accused of dictatorship.

Another example of this, to a domestic audience this time, came in Barham Salih's 2009 inauguration speech:

"In the permanent Iraqi Constitution and Article 140, there is a constitutional solution and legal framework for resolving the issue of Kirkuk and the other disputed areas. It is the duty of those who desire democracy in Iraq to cooperate in eliminating the traces of ethnic cleansing, and implementing Article 140."²⁵⁸

Salih was insinuating that the contemporary government was against democracy (i.e. dictatorial) and had no desire to eliminate "traces of ethnic cleansing". With the prominence and ubiquity of historical narratives which highlight the violence and brutality of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, associations between his regime and the contemporary government could be powerful and emotive for Kirkuk's residents. President Barzani was making a similar point directly to Arab

²⁵⁷ Kurdistan Presidency. "President Barzani concludes successful Washington visit."

²⁵⁸ Salih, "Inaugural speech by Prime Minister Barham Salih," (2009).

community representatives in Kirkuk when he stated: “We have all witnessed the fate of one-party rule in Iraq. We believe that in a country that is made up of several communities, a federal system is the best solution.”²⁵⁹ He was attempting to assimilate Kirkuk’s Arab communities into their victimhood narrative in opposition to Baghdad’s rule, while also using the past as justification for his commitment to constitutional federalism.

The above examples showed how KRG politicians were discursively identifying the present government (under PM Nouri al-Maliki at the time) as a common enemy to Kirkuk’s population by connecting it to the historical narrative, which supported a strategy of assimilation. By relating the violent past to the present, the Kurdish leadership were also justifying their political opposition to al-Maliki’s government. Furthermore, it supported what Wodak *et al.* would call a perpetuation strategy – linguistically presenting themselves as the protectors of a threatened identification, whether this self-identification is Kurdistan, Turkomen, Kirkuki, or any other identity perceived to be under threat from Baghdad.²⁶⁰

Contrasting identifications

The “othering” of Iraqi regimes, both past and present, was contrasted with positive presentations of Kurdish national identifications. KDP and PUK political leaders aimed to portray Kurds as democratic, legalistic, peaceful and tolerant. For example, at President Barzani’s speech in Kirkuk in 2008, he offered “a message of brotherhood and peace for all the people of Kirkuk” and spoke of “love, peace and fraternity; a message of peace from the Kurds towards the Arabs, Turkomans, Chaldeans, Assyrians and all other people in this city.”²⁶¹ He went on to suggest the government were to blame for ethno-national conflicts in the region: “Unfortunately, some people are trying to create divisions among us. Instead [of allowing them to be successful], we would like to

²⁵⁹ Kurdistan Region Presidency. “President Barzani to Kirkuk’s Arab representatives: Kirkuk must become an example for co-existence and tolerance.” KRG news release. 1 February 2009. Accessed 15/05/2017. <http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?r=73&l=12&s=02010200&a=27650&s=010000>.

²⁶⁰ Wodak (*et al.*), *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 33.

²⁶¹ Kurdistan Region Presidency, “Full text of President Barzani’s speech in Kirkuk.”

make Kirkuk an example of peaceful co-existence between different religious, sectarian and ethnic groups.”²⁶² Furthermore, he promoted his political aim of incorporating Kirkuk into the KRG by connecting this idyllic ambition of Kirkuk to the Kurdistan Region: “We believe that the Kurdistan Region is a region for all: Kurds, Arabs, Turkomans, Chaldeans and Assyrians. Equally, Kirkuk is a city for these same people.”²⁶³

KRG leaders made claims about their historic record to suggest that they have always maintained these traits and principles. For example, these following two statements by President Barzani imply a timelessness to Kurdish claims of peacefulness, compromise and tolerance, but also to the notion that Iraqi governments are the opposite:

“Kirkuk has been the main sticking point between us and successive Iraqi governments. Kirkuk must become an example for the rest of Iraq for co-existence and tolerance. Preserving fraternity between Arabs and Kurds is a principle that we will never forget.”²⁶⁴

“We are willing to show flexibility on power-sharing in the city, as we have in the past.”²⁶⁵

KDP and PUK leaders consistently contrasted positive characteristics of a Kurdistan identification with a violent and divisive identification of Baghdad regimes, past and present. This not only attempted to emotionally assimilate Kirkuk’s multi-ethnic population under KRG party influence, but also reinforced constructions of Kurdish and Arab identifications. Furthermore, emphasis on liberal-democratic values and peaceful multi-ethnic coexistence under one national identification, distinguished KRG-Kurds from other Kurdish organisations who ethnically identify the national in-group or demonstrate undemocratic, illiberal or violent values, such as the PKK in Turkey.

Constitution

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Kurdistan Region Presidency. “President Barzani to Kirkuk's Arab representatives.”

²⁶⁵ Kurdistan Presidency. “President Barzani concludes successful Washington visit.”

KDP and PUK politicians, since 2005, have used the Iraqi Constitution as a political weapon. Kurdish politicians frequently referred to the constitution when accusing Baghdad of not adhering to constitutional rule or overreaching their legal limitations. The point was usually to discursively present Baghdad governments as dictatorial, with all the historic connotations of violence and oppression, in contrast to the Kurds' identification with democracy, rights and law.

Barham Salih's 2009 inauguration speech argued:

"The [Iraqi] Constitution guarantees coexistence among the Iraqi factions, and the majority of the Iraqi people have voted for this Constitution. The issue of Kirkuk, Khanaqin, Sinjar and other disputed areas, the oil and gas and revenue issue and the power sharing issue can only be resolved through commitment to the Constitution."²⁶⁶

Salih tied the constitution to fraternal relations and democracy, presenting it as the solution to many of the country's problems. Therefore, by insisting that they – the KDP and PUK – were fighting for implementation of the constitution, he identified the Kurds with fighting for coexistence, peace, the will of (the majority of) Iraqi citizens, and democracy and law in general. Furthermore, in contrast, he was implying that the Baghdad government were in opposition to these ideals.

In 2012, Nechirvan Barzani used his Prime Minister's inauguration speech to the Kurdistan Parliament to confidently state that all disputed areas "will return to the Kurdistan Region" if the constitution is observed, "so that the people of the disputed areas will no longer live in suffering and fear."²⁶⁷ Therefore, by pushing for implementation of the constitution he was portraying the KRG as the saviour of scared and suffering people. Similarly, Masoud Barzani previously argued that Article 140 would "bring justice to Kirkuk, and to correct the crimes against Kurds committed by Saddam Hussein's regime."²⁶⁸ The KRG's constitutionalism has often been presented as benefitting Kirkuk's residents and following their wishes; as Masoud Barzani stated: "We want to leave this decision [Kirkuk's future status] to the people of Kirkuk themselves, as stipulated in Article-140."²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ Salih, "Inaugural speech by Prime Minister Barham Salih," (2009).

²⁶⁷ Nechirvan Barzani, "Prime Minister Barzani's Inaugural Speech" (2012).

²⁶⁸ The Wall Street Journal, "President Barzani in Wall Street Journal."

²⁶⁹ Kurdistan Presidency, "President Barzani concludes successful Washington visit."

These are just a few examples from many occasions where the Iraqi constitution has been used discursively as a political weapon by KDP and PUK politicians. Referring to the constitution has become a rhetorical device which portrays Baghdad's rule (past and present) as dictatorial and divisive, while Kurds are identified with notions of democracy, law, and peaceful coexistence. The constitution was presented as a way of preventing the tragedies of the past from repeating themselves, and therefore justified KDP-PUK political resistance to Baghdad, and their broader ambitions for greater autonomy, by relating contemporary Baghdad's actions to past experiences of victimisation.

National territory

As explained in the introduction to this thesis, Umut Özkirimli argues that the construction of a nation relies on three sets of interrelated claims, formulated through nationalist discourses: identity, temporal, and spatial claims.²⁷⁰ The discussion thus far has explored the use of Kirkuk to support identity and temporal claims for a Kurdish national identification, but Kirkuk is also important for the KDP and PUK leaders to delineate their national territory – reinforcing spatial claims.

The Kirkuk Governate is considered by Kurdish nationalists to be Kurdish territory. As Fuad Hussein remarked in an interview with *Rudaw* (a KDP affiliated media organisation): “Kirkuk is the home of the Kurds.”²⁷¹ To explain Baghdad's official control over the territory, Kirkuk is often portrayed as having been taken from the Kurds. For instance, in Masoud Barzani's 2005 inauguration speech he argued that “detached areas should be returned because they are integral parts of Kurdistan.”²⁷² Both “detached” and “returned” discursively construct the idea that the disputed territories were originally and historically part of a Kurdish homeland, thereby reinforcing national

²⁷⁰ Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism*, 208-9.

²⁷¹ Rudaw, “President Barzani's Chief of Staff: Kurds Cannot Decide to Replace Maliki Alone,” Rudaw news release, republished by www.presidency.krd, 15 May 2012, accessed 16/05/2017, <http://www.presidency.krd/english/articledisplay.aspx?id=IwEi1/8DN80=>.

²⁷² Barzani, “President Masoud Barzani's Inaugural Speech,” (2005).

spatial and temporal claims. Similarly, Nechirvan Barzani in 2012 declared that the disputed areas “will return to the Kurdistan Region” if the constitution is fully applied.²⁷³

The KRG’s political ambitions regarding Kirkuk – the “normalisation, census, and referendum” process to (re)establish Kurdish demographic majority and official authority – is founded on the notion that the victims were Kurds (identity) living on Kurdish land (territory). In fact, Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani’s letter to US President Bush in 2004 requested American support ‘to reverse the Arabization of Kurdish lands.’²⁷⁴ Jalal Tabalani (former President of Iraq and PUK leader) amplified the rhetoric in a speech commemorating the 1991 uprising against the Ba’ath party in Sulaymaniyah, by calling Kirkuk “Kurdistan’s Jerusalem” and encouraging a Kurdish-Turkmen coalition to free it from “terrorists and neo-occupiers.”²⁷⁵ Drawing a parallel between Kirkuk and Jerusalem emphasised its symbolic importance to the Kurdish nationalists. As it was a reference that people around the world would understand, it also aimed to internationally justify their territorial claims to Kirkuk. It also acknowledged, perhaps indirectly, that Kirkuk is claimed by others as well as Kurds and therefore implied the complexities of the situation.

Not only do these examples show how KDP and PUK politicians discursively delineate the nation’s boundaries, they also seek to justify KRG territorial claims and political authority through narratives of national victimhood and othering. Kirkuk isn’t just home to many Kurds (identified by the Kurdish nationalists as such), it was also part of the national homeland which was taken from the Kurds, reinforcing constructions of their temporal existence in the region and portraying the government in Iraq as the historic and contemporary enemy.

Summary

²⁷³ Nechirvan Barzani, “Prime Minister Barzani’s Inaugural Speech” (2012).

²⁷⁴ KRG Cabinet, “Letter from Barzani and Talabani to President Bush,” published by Kurdistan Regional Government, Erbil, 1 June 2004, accessed 14/05/2017, <http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?s=010000&l=12&a=89>.

²⁷⁵ Ahmed Hussein, “MP rejects proposal to summon President Talabani for his recent statement about Kirkuk,” *Iraqi News*, 13 March 2011, accessed 20/05/2017, <http://www.iraqinews.com/baghdad-politics/mp-rejects-proposal-to-summon-president-talabani-for-his-recent-statement-about-kirkuk/>.

In this chapter, Wodak *et al.*'s method of Critical Discourse Analysis was applied to KDP and PUK political discourses because it focuses on the connection between discourses and political strategies.²⁷⁶ Kirkuk holds significant symbolic value to Kurdish nationalists in Iraq. Kirkuk, and its place in the nationalist historical narratives, has been used to reinforce narratives of historic victimhood, promoted by the KDP and PUK. The application of CDA highlighted how historical narratives of Kirkuk's victimisation discursively legitimised contemporary political actions, such as the unofficial enforcement of the "normalisation, census and referendum" process, and ambitions of including Kirkuk into KRG territory. Furthermore, the historic portrayals of Iraqi regimes' policies towards Kirkuk's population have been used by Kurdish leaders to attack contemporary Baghdad governments and diminish the legitimacy of their claims to Kirkuk.

The supposed identity of Kirkuk changed in Kurdish political discourses, largely depending on whether the perceived audience was domestic or overseas. These alterations to their identity claims about Kirkuk are best explained as political pragmatism. Not only have the KDP and PUK politicians attempted to homogenise a multi-national and multi-ethnic region into one identification, they also tended to overlook the possibility that the inhabitants may not primarily self-identify based on ethnic markers. Instead, as Denise Natali argued, it is likely that a distinct (non-ethnic) "Kirkuki" identification may have taken primacy in the wake of the 2003 invasion.²⁷⁷

Kirkuk has been framed in discourses to construct and support national identity, temporal and spatial claims. The Kurdish nationalists' identity claims are predominantly reinforced through "othering", presenting Kurdish identifications positively in contrast to historic abuses by Baghdad's rulers. Kirkuk's position and identity in the national historical narratives reinforces temporal claims of a Kurdish nation's historic existence. These identity and temporal claims are essential for the KDP and PUK's ambition to include Kirkuk under their authority through the KRG.

²⁷⁶ Wodak (*et al.*), *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 33.

²⁷⁷ Natali, "The Kirkuk Conundrum," 438.

Conclusion

This thesis asserts that nations are the outcome of nationalist discourses. It supports Özkirimli's observations that nationalist discourses make three sets of overlapping claims: 1) identity, 2) temporal, and 3) spatial claims.²⁷⁸ The chapters above highlighted how the discursive construction of national historical narratives formulate and reinforce these claims: developing national identifications based on a sense of shared experience, asserting a nation's timeless existence and presence, and delineating a nation's boundaries. Historical narratives unite people through their common past, but they also produce identifications of the self in contrast to identified "others". This "othering" process assists the formulation of supposedly "nationally" shared cultural, as well as physical, characteristics. Nationalist discourses provide the means, through various mediums, to connect an individual to a narrative, and therefore to a national identification.

The 1991 war in Iraq provided an opportunity for the KDP and PUK to utilise various means of mass communication to develop historical narratives which aimed to construct "Kurdish" national identifications. Both parties took advantage of their new-found control over the KRG's institutional apparatus and their initial hegemony over the region's means of mass communication. The nationalist discourses they constructed placed collective traumas at the heart of their historical narratives. The Anfal genocide, the Halabja chemical attacks, and the forced Arabisation of Kirkuk were all emphasised as nationally important events for Iraq's Kurds. These events became symbolic of the Kurds' history of suffering.

On the one hand, they emphasised the Iraqi-Kurds' historic victimisation, which identified national "others" – against which the Kurdish identification could be contrasted – and justified political action perceived as protection and perpetuation of a threatened identity. On the other hand, historical narratives were framed to produce pride in the Kurds' record of resistance against tyranny and violence. Kurdish identifications gained connotations of strength, honour, persistence and

²⁷⁸ Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism*, 208-9.

sacrifice while also encouraging optimism for the present and future political contexts. Furthermore, KDP and PUK nationalists regularly used victimisation-focused historical narratives to draw parallels between past dictatorial Iraqi regimes and post-2003 Iraqi governments. Negatively portraying contemporary governments through comparisons to a negative past cemented the notion of Baghdad as the Kurds' enemy and reinforced Arabs as a national "other", thereby constructing Kurdish uniqueness and unity through their position as victims.

This thesis also set out to analyse *why* the KDP and PUK attempted to construct national identifications in this way, since 1991. Political elites can manipulate and reinforce particular historical narratives, they therefore maintain the ability to influence people's identifications, thereby constructing and reconstructing a nation. For the KDP and PUK, the narratives they formulated aimed to construct a national identity which not only demarcated a "Kurdistani" identification, primarily against an Arab-Iraqi identification, but also distinguished a homogenised "Kurdistani" identification of the KRG populace against other ethnically Kurdish organisations and populations. Emphasising civic, rather than ethnic, characteristics – in particular, promoting liberal-democratic values and legal rights – simultaneously aimed to differentiate them from socialist-nationalist Kurdish organisations who are internationally associated with terrorism – such as the PKK – and from the Iraqi state, which has historic associations with dictatorship and human rights abuses.

Constructing a distinguishable identification provided justification for KDP and PUK ambitions for autonomy from the Iraqi state. Their promotion of civic values which resonate with "Western" state powers, in the international political context from 1991 onwards, was an attempt to endear their nationalist cause to the international community, with the hope of gaining support for eventual claims to independent statehood. Their victimhood narratives, founded on atrocities committed by Baghdad regimes, aimed to further justify their national struggle to international observers, while domestically reinforcing the Iraqi-Kurds' uniqueness from other Kurdish identifications. Furthermore, historical narratives which presented the KDP and PUK as past and present defenders of a perennially threatened identification were utilised to justify and legitimise their political authority, maintaining their control over the KRG.

By applying Critical Discourse Analysis, this thesis highlighted how KDP and PUK political discourses supported their long-term ambitions to politically and ideologically sever ties with Baghdad, while maintaining their shared dominance over the KRG while the status quo lasts. Their discursive nation-building aimed to reinforce the KRG's (*de facto*) state powers and provided legitimacy for the nationalist parties' political control, actions and policies. Furthermore, their political leaders discursively laid claim to "national" territories which were also claimed by Baghdad and others, such as Kirkuk, by asserting that "Kurds" (identified by their ethno-national, rather than tribal, religious or linguistic, identifications) were present in these areas since antiquity and only lost control due to the aggression of others. The third chapter highlights how a historical narrative of victimisation has been emphasised to support the political elite's claims over Kirkuk, its people, territory and resources.

This thesis has also argued that KDP and PUK nationalists have sought to encourage a primarily civic notion of nationhood. Iraq's Kurds have historically been identified by the state and other political organisations based on ethnicity, and this thesis does not argue that this ethnic distinction has disappeared. However, with an ethnically, religiously and linguistically diverse population of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the KDP and PUK have promoted civic fraternity in their nation-building discourses. Primordial attachments matter less than commonalities based on legal rights, democracy, and non-discriminatory law. This pragmatic strategy aimed to homogenise minority ethnic and religious groups of the KRG into a broad "Kurdistani" identification. Moreover, it differentiated the KRG-Kurdistani identification, and the KDP and PUK, from other Kurdish nationalist organisations, such as the PKK, which achieve notoriety but receive very little international sympathy or support due to their widespread associations with terrorism and violence. Also, by making claims to liberal-democratic values, the KDP and PUK are attempting to distance themselves further from Baghdad's negative associations.

Finally, it is important to emphasise that this thesis has not assessed the success of the KDP and PUK's attempts at identity constructions. In fact, identifications and their politicisations are regularly challenged. The emergence of a distinct "Kirkuki" identification among Kirkuk's

inhabitants, as observed by Denise Natali, challenges the notion that individuals primarily self-identify with ethnic or national labels.²⁷⁹ At times, the politicisation of past events by nationalist elites has been directly challenged by sections of the KRG populace. Nicole Watts highlights a protest in Halabja in March 2006, which led to the Halabja Martyrs Monument being attacked and destroyed, as a rejection of the authorities' control over the production of historical memory.²⁸⁰ The protesters challenged the categorisations of victim and nationalist icon and sought to define Halabja in their own ways.²⁸¹ This example provides a reminder that national historical narratives, and the symbolic value they place on particular events and people, can always be challenged. This thesis has demonstrated how and why the KDP and PUK attempted to construct and develop national identifications; but it would be a mistake to forget individuals' agency to self-identify in contradiction to hegemonic discourses of political elites.

²⁷⁹ Natali, *The Kirkuk Conundrum*, 438.

²⁸⁰ Nicole F. Watts, "The Role of Symbolic Capital in Protest," 84.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.* 85.

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