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MASTER THESIS

Titel der Master Thesis / Title of the Master's Thesis

„The Ambiguities of Independence: Autonomy, Devolution and Sovereignty. The Case of Iraqi Kurdistan from 1970-2017. “

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Advanced International Studies (M.A.I.S.)

Wien 2018 / Vienna 2018

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt
Postgraduate programme code as it appears
on the student record sheet:

A 992 940

Universitätslehrgang lt. Studienblatt
Postgraduate programme as it appears on
the
student record sheet:

Internationale Studien / International Studies

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Professor Thomas Row



diplomatische
akademie wien

Vienna School of International Studies
École des Hautes Études Internationales de Vienne

Abstract

This thesis examines current theories of separatism in order to determine their relevance for separatist aspirations in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Iraqi Kurdish movement towards more autonomy and even independence has a diverse and complex history reaching back to the 19th century. Especially since the establishment of the modern Iraqi state, there have been numerous uprisings against the central government in an attempt to gain more recognition for their cultural and ethnic distinctness. The theoretical understanding of separatism itself is an important problem in its own right. Two main schools of thought, the philosophical theories and the explanatory theories of separatism, are presented and analyzed. This thesis applies a dual and mutually reinforcing approach, using both the available theory on separatism as well as empirical evidence from the case study of Iraqi Kurdistan to explain each other. The analysis shows that the theories presented fail to acknowledge the interconnectedness and complexity of the reality of separatism and fall short in explaining the multifaceted history of Iraqi Kurdistan. At the same time, the complex Kurdish case suggests that theories of separatism need to be more fully developed in order to provide a general theory of separatism. Separatism and nationalism remain two of the most controversially discussed concepts in modern day politics, not at last because of recent independence referenda in Catalonia, Kurdistan or Scotland.

Abstrakt

Diese wissenschaftliche Arbeit befasst sich mit aktuellen Theorien des Separatismus, um deren Relevanz für die separatistischen Bestrebungen in der Autonomen Region Kurdistan zu determinieren. Die irakisch-kurdische Bewegung nach Autonomie und Unabhängigkeit hat eine vielfältige und komplexe Geschichte, die bis in das 19. Jahrhundert zurückreicht. Besonders seit der Etablierung des modernen irakischen Staates gab es zahlreiche Aufstände gegen die Zentralregierung, mit dem Ziel, mehr Anerkennung für die herrschende kulturelle und ethnische Diversität zu erlangen. Dennoch ist das theoretische Verständnis von Separatismus zweideutig. Um diese Ambiguität zu verdeutlichen, werden zwei unterschiedliche Ansätze, das heißt sowohl philosophische Theorien als auch begründende bzw. erklärende Theorien präsentiert und analysiert. Diese wissenschaftliche Arbeit bedient sich einer dualen und gleichwertigen Vorgehensweise, indem sowohl die Theorie über Separatismus als auch die empirischen Daten des Fallbeispiels der Autonomen Region Kurdistan verwendet werden und sich gegenseitig erklären. Die Analyse zeigt jedoch, dass es den genannten Theorien an Berücksichtigung der Komplexität und Vernetzung der separatistischen Realität mangelt und dass eine Erklärung der facettenreichen Geschichte der Autonomen Region Kurdistan fehlt. Die weitere Forschung sollte sich der Ambiguität von Unabhängigkeit in der Autonomen Region Kurdistan widmen, die Einzigartigkeit des Fallbeispiels sowie die Bedeutung der grundlegenden Definitionen berücksichtigen und die Verwendung einer allgemein gültigen Theorie des Separatismus überdenken. Anderenfalls werden die Themen Separatismus und Nationalismus zwei der kontroversesten Konzepte der modernen Politik bleiben, nicht zuletzt auch wegen der aktuellen Referenda in Katalonien, Kurdistan oder Schottland.

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List of Abbreviations

ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government - Iraq
KRI	Kurdistan Regional Government - Iraq
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
SCR	Security Council Resolution
UN	United Nations
US	United States of America

Introduction

The concept of *separatism* has been commonly used in the global media to describe some form of identity politics aimed at the devolution of the state, usually referring to movements of independence or regional aims towards more autonomy. Since the re-introduction of the ideal of self-determination by Woodrow Wilson after World War I, decolonialization and the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, this form of “political divorce”¹ represents an important trend. In fact, more than half of the current 193-member states in the United Nations have been founded as separatist states, i.e. by a distinct group of people claiming the right to self-rule and/or autonomy, thereby forcing politicians to reconsider the old assumptions about permanent unions².

Despite the concept’s apparent importance in shaping the international state system and global politics, the interest in separatism has faded since the beginning of the 21st century, turning a blind eye to the multiple attempts of separatism which continue today. In fact, in 2011 Brian Beary³ listed fifty-nine ongoing separatist movements all around the world, ranging from the Quebecois in Canada, the Catalonians in Spain or the Kurds in Iran, Iraq⁴, Syria, and Turkey to the Somalis in Ethiopia, the Maori in New Zealand or the North Caucasians in Russia. Not surprisingly, these movements are highly heterogenous with some of them calling for autonomy and/or multiculturalism within an existing state, while others aim for full independence. Yet, narrowed down to the shared desire for increased self-rule and autonomy, these highly diverse movements have often been depicted as similar. Few comparative analyses take the historical circumstances, normative concepts, and intertwined variables into account on which each separatist movement is based and consequently fail to acknowledge the diversity and complexity of the topic.

¹ Don H. Doyle, “Introduction. Union and Secession in the Family of Nations”, In *Secession as an International Phenomenon: From America’s Civil War to Contemporary Separatist Movements*, edited by Doyle, Don H., 3. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010.

² *Ibid.*: 3

³ Brian Beary, *Separatist Movements. A Global Reference*, Washington D.C.: CUPress, 2011: xi ff. – In comparison, Roth (2014) lists even more movements in his book *Let’s Split* and already needs revision as new movements, as e.g. Yezidi autonomy movement emerged just after the book was finished (Christopher F. Roth, “Springtime of Nations”. 2015. Accessed June 10, 2018. <http://springtimeofnations.blogspot.com/2015/02/lets-split-now-available-for-purchase.html>)

⁴ The movement in Iraqi Kurdistan will be the case study of this thesis.

The limited theoretical understanding of separatism is also reflected in the definitions of the main concepts of the idea of separatism, i.e. the nation-state, nationalism, independence movements, irredentism and civil war, which continue to be highly controversial. Indeed, most authors use their own definitions when talking about a specific case study, adapting them to their need and so making a comparison actually impossible. Yet, exact definitions are key to the understanding of the underlying issues and the individual case study in the first place. For example, while separatists' goals range from the recognition as ethnically different group of people⁵ to being a fully independent country⁶, independence movements exclusively focus on the latter⁷. Irredentism, on the other hand, implies the union with another state or the joining of a nation split up in different countries⁸. Civil war, finally, entails the armed conflict of two nations over the central power⁹. In addition, all these movements rely on the concept of the modern nation-state, a state which is founded on the construction of a distinct group of people with a shared history and language which makes it different from other groups¹⁰.

This thesis is aimed at filling the above-mentioned gap in the research on separatism. It seeks to demonstrate the ambiguity of the concept, the seemingly contradictory definitions it entails and the interconnectedness of the variables that influence separatist attempts. What does separatism *really* mean? What principles have influenced separatism? What conditions are necessary for separatism to arise in the first place? What factors influence the evolution of a movement? In order to answer these questions, this thesis determines the relevance of the current theory for separatist movements in general, and the case study of Iraqi Kurdistan in particular.

This thesis claims that the existing framework on separatism is insufficient to explain the case study of Iraqi Kurdistan. General observations made are too all-

⁵ Doyle, Introduction

⁶ John R. Wood, "Secession: A Comparative Analytical Framework", *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 14, I (1981): 111.

⁷ David Armitage, "Secession and Civil War", *Secession as an International Phenomenon: From America's Civil War to Contemporary Separatist Movements*, edited by Doyle, D. H., 37. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010.

⁸ Donald L. Horowitz, "Irredentas and Secessions: Adjacent Phenomena, Neglected Connections", *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, XXXIII (1992): 119.

⁹ Doyle, Introduction; Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Clarendon Press, 1995.

¹⁰ Roth, *Springtime of Nations*; Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, 11-33.

encompassing and fall short of explaining historical facts and the development of the movement. Mere factual analyses, on the other hand, fail to place the movement in the broader theoretical discussion on separatism, missing the ambiguity of definitions and normative arguments. It is further assumed that because of this distinction between case study and theory, the generalizations made in modern day journalism and academia might actually harm the development of a separatist movement as well as a nation's international perception of identity. This thesis, therefore, seeks to answer the question how the theory on separatism influenced the Iraqi Kurdish separatist movement? How has the theory on separatism contributed to the shaping of separatist movements in general and the case of Iraqi Kurdistan in particular? Is the theory relevant to its development?

The movement in Iraqi Kurdistan appears to be the perfect case study for this thesis, as the region has a long history of separatist attempts which can be used to demonstrate the diversity of the topic even within one single example. The mountainous region of Kurdistan, containing parts of Iran, Northern Iraq, Syria and Turkey, has been occupied by the Kurds for four thousand years¹¹. Since then, various attempts have been made by the local population to reach autonomy. The first, so-called national uprising dates back to 1880, when Sheikh Ubaydallah of Nehri revolted against the Ottoman Empire¹². Sovereignty was also promised under the Treaty of Sevres in 1920 but was eventually reversed by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923¹³. In 1945, the Kurds succeeded in founding the Republic of Mahabad in Iran, but their revolt was crushed by the Iranian forces in the wake of the withdrawal of Soviet support¹⁴. Their

¹¹ "The Time of the Kurds". COFR, 2017, Accessed June 6, 2018.

https://www.cfr.org/interactives/time-kurds#!/?cid=soc-at-the_time_of_the_kurds-infoguide;

Kerim Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iraq*, London: Pluto Books, 2004: 7.

¹² Separatism is based on the idea that a movement intends to split from "a modern nation state". This was clearly not yet fulfilled in 1880 during the Ottoman Empire. However, as almost all historical narratives include this uprising into the history of Kurdish separatism, it shall also be included here (Peter Sluglett. "Common Sense, or A Step Pregnant with Enormous Consequences. Some Thoughts on the Possible Secession of Iraqi Kurdistan", In *Secession as an International Phenomenon: From America's Civil War to Contemporary Separatist Movements*, edited by Don H. Doyle, 319-337. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010); David McDowell, *A modern history of the Kurds*, London: Tauris, 2014). Whether or not the term *separatism* is adequate to describe the movement in the first place, will be the focus of Chapter III.

¹³ McDowell, *Modern history of the Kurds*; Abdulkader Brifcani, *Mustafa Barzani: Leader of the Modern Kurdish National Movement*, London: Kegan Paul International Limited, 2000; Gareth R.V. Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan. Political Development and Emergent Democracy*, New York: Routledge, 2003.

¹⁴ Sluglett, *Common Sense*, 328

distinctness was first acknowledged in the 1970 March agreement and since the beginning of the 1990s, the Kurds in Iraq have lived in relative autonomy from the central Iraqi government through the enforcement of a no-fly zone by the United States (US)¹⁵. Separation from the state was further increased through the new Iraqi constitution in 2005, which established the Kurdistan Region of Iraq as a federal province¹⁶.

Over 22 million Kurds live today in one of the largest non-state nations of the world¹⁷. A distinct language and culture distinguish the Kurdish people from others living in the region which has put them at the forefront of ethnic discrimination by ethnically-based nationalist regimes with little tolerance for individual expression in all states¹⁸. While the modes and scale of oppression have varied in time and place between the different Kurdish regions, they share some similar conditions: first, they often have been the poorest regions of the countries, systematically discriminated by the centers of economic power¹⁹. Second, the dynamics of each attempt of resistance has affected the direction and outcome of the Kurdish struggles in the other regions²⁰.

As the Kurdish territory is vast²¹ it is important to take into account that the Kurdish people themselves are by no means homogenous and differ widely with regards to politics, ideology, social class and dialect²². As a matter of simplification, this thesis will focus exclusively on the Kurds living in the region of Northern Iraq. This becomes especially important when analyzing the efforts to split from Iraq and the Iraqi response to such attempts. For example, although Iraq currently has a weak artificial government²³, this did not prevent it from using military force against the uprisings in the aftermath of the 2017 independence referendum. This distinction also becomes important when analyzing the influence of foreign players, as Northern Iraq

¹⁵Sharon Otterman and Lionel Beehner, "IRAQ: Drafting a Constitution", *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2005, accessed May 1, 2018. <https://www.cfr.org/background/iraq-drafting-constitution>

¹⁶ McDowell, *Modern history of the Kurds*; Sluglett *Common Sense*; Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*

¹⁷ "The Time of the Kurds"

¹⁸ Beary, *Separatist Movement*

¹⁹ Amir Hassanpour, "The Kurdish Experience", 2017, accessed June 9, 2018 <https://www.merip.org/mer/mer189/kurdish-experience>

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ The territory claimed has varied over time but in some interpretations, it almost reaches from the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea. For more detail please see the maps in Annex I and Chapter II.1

²² McDowell, *Modern history of the Kurds*; Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*

²³ "Country Profiles", BBC News, October 10, 2017a, accessed December 12, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18175030>

has important oil fields, which the Kurds intend to capitalize on²⁴.

Kurdistan in Northern Iraq²⁵ has struggled with several crises in recent years, ranging from internal power struggles in the Kurdish parliament, to a financial crisis related to the global oil prices. Also the fight against the Islamic State Against Iraq and Syria (ISIS), triggering an influx of refugees from Syria into the KRI and regional disputes with neighboring states such as Iran and Turkey have dominated Iraqi Kurdish politics. They have found themselves torn between two major global players, the US and Russia, which have both used the region to advance their own interests. Indeed, today the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is dependent on US help to fight ISIS and pay its fighters salaries, while it relies on Russia for oil exports²⁶.

In recent years, due to the threat of ISIS in the region, the separatist aspirations had been put on a hold and have only been taken up in autumn 2017 with the referendum of independence. Despite international opposition and Iraqi prohibition of the referendum, the Kurds overwhelmingly (70% turnout) voted for independence in September 2017 (92% in favor) 72%²⁷. Soon thereafter, the central government escalated the dispute and threatened to send troops to assert its authority²⁸. Masoud Barzani, president of the KRI resigned, leaving politics after having dominated local government affairs since the 1980s²⁹. Yet, politics in the KRI remain influenced by the Barzani clan, with the leadership of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) being handed over to Nechirvan Barzani, the cousin of Masoud Barzani.

The thesis will be structured in three distinct parts. Part I will present the philosophical and normative theories of separatism, looking into the questions of whether different organized groups of people and/or nations have the unilateral claim to split from the larger nation-state and if so, under which circumstances. Four main normative theories

²⁴ “Iraqi-Kurdistan Profile”, BBC, October 31, 2017, accessed January 17, 2018.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-15467672>

²⁵ i.e. what today constitutes the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (federal region) or Iraqi Kurdistan (the region where Kurds live in Northern Iraq)

²⁶ “Iraqi Kurdistan Profile”

²⁷ Eric Pichon, “Iraqi Kurdistan’s independence referendum”, *European Parliament – Briefing October 2017*, 2017: 5, accessed April 15, 2018.

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/608752/EPRS_BRI\(2017\)608752_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/608752/EPRS_BRI(2017)608752_EN.pdf)

²⁸ David Zucchino and Margaret Coker, “Iraq Escalates Dispute With Kurds, Threatening Military Action”, *The New York Times*, September 9, 2017, accessed April 15, 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/27/world/middleeast/kurdistan-referendum-iraq.html>

²⁹ “Iraqi Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani to step down”, BBC News, October 29, 2017b, accessed April 15, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-41794083>; “Iraqi Kurdistan Profile”

will be presented here, namely the Statist Theory³⁰, the Just Cause Theory³¹, the Choice Theory³² as well as Ascriptive Theories³³, which originated in the 1990s and have identified themselves as key to the wider theoretical discussion on the topic and principles of separatism. The different academic backgrounds of the leading scholars can be clearly observed because although all four groups of theories weigh the importance of state sovereignty against a nation's or an individual's right to self-determination, they each use different angles, i.e. moral justice, stability of the state system, law or others, to defend their argument.

Part II will then introduce the most important conditions necessary for a separatist movement to arise in the first place and determine its shape and success. M. Hechter³⁴, D. Horowitz³⁵, A. Smith³⁶ and J.R. Wood³⁷ give important insights into the key conditions of geography, nationalism and group solidarity, leadership, economy, foreign intervention as well as political structure. How important are these factors and how are these interlinked? How do these factors contribute to the development of a separatist movement? Part II and Part III, however, will not only analyze each factor tentatively through the different frameworks and theories, but will also give the reader insights into the case study. Evidence is used from both the theoretical and the empirical side to explain each other. Does the historical analysis of the Kurdish independence movement comply with what International Relations theories suggested? Which importance and influence can be attributed to the individual factor in the Kurdish case? While on first sight it seems that each factor on its own could

³⁰ Margaret Moore, "Ethics of Secession and Political Mobilization in Quebec", In *Secession as an International Phenomenon: From America's Civil War to Contemporary Separatist Movements*, edited by Don H. Doyle, 77ff. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010; Stephen M. Saideman, "Explaining the International Relations of Secessionist Conflicts: Vulnerability versus Ethnic Ties", *International Organization*, 51, IV (1997): 721-753

³¹ Allen Buchanan, *Secession: The Morality of Political Divorce from Fort Sumter to Lithuania and Quebec*, Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1991; Allen Buchanan, "Secession", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2017 Edition, accessed April 23, 2018.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/secession/>

³² Harry Beran, "A Liberal Theory of Secession", *Political Studies* 32, I (1984): 21-31; Daniel Philpott, "In Defence of Self-Determination", *Ethnics* 105, II (1995): 352-385; David Copp, "International Law and Morality in the Theory of Secession", *Journal of Ethics* 2, III (1998): 1-16.

³³ David Miller, *On Nationality*, New York: Clarendon Press, 1995; David Miller, "Secession and the Principle of Nationality", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 26 (1997): 261-282

³⁴ Michael Hechter, "The Dynamics of Secession", *Acta Sociologica*, 35 (1992): 267-283

³⁵ Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, London: University of California Press, 1985; Horowitz Irredentas; et al.

³⁶ Anthony D. Smith, "Towards a theory of ethnic separatism", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2, I (1979): 21-37

³⁷ Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework

explain the development of separatism in Iraqi Kurdistan, it soon becomes apparent that all factors are closely interlinked and promote each other.

Part III will, finally, demonstrate the ambiguity of the concept of separatism, highlighting the difficulty in categorizing the Kurdish independence movement and showing the unviability of a general theory of separatism. The purpose of this thesis is to provide the reader with an in-depth understanding of the controversial topic of separatism, its complexity and the interconnectedness of all factors, assuming that no current theory is well-equipped to analyze separatism.

The timeframe researched will be limited to the era of the contemporary Iraqi nation state because the concept of separatism, as it is understood in this thesis, is based on the concept of the *modern* (multi)nation-state³⁸. Despite Iraq achieving independence from Great Britain in 1932, the state of Iraq declared itself a republic only in 1958. In addition, the focus of this thesis lies on the time since the 1970 March Agreement, as this constitutes the first Iraqi recognition of Kurdish distinctness. Nonetheless, as the origins of the movement are found over a century ago, this also implies that it will be possible to observe a change in strategy once new factors and players take the stage. The possibility to observe changes in the Kurdish movement towards independence can be regarded as an advantage to this thesis, while at the same time no causal relationship may be implied.

This thesis will benefit from the interdisciplinary approach it adopts. For the case study, this thesis will use mostly historical and historiographical analyses of the events surrounding the separatist movement in Iraqi Kurdistan. This will then be combined with political sciences when it comes to analyzing the theory about separatism. Political theory and especially theory on International Relations, seems important when it comes to explaining the influence of different factors on separatism and how these alter over time. Finally, this thesis will also contain a legal section where it will investigate whether the right to self-determination can be ascertained in a specific case. The legal argument can be especially important when it comes to the legitimacy of a movement and their unilateral claim for independence.

The bulk of research will be based on primary and secondary literature on the

³⁸ Doyle, Introduction. In addition, please refer to Chapter III.

topic. There is a large number of adequate resources available, which examine various different angles and views on separatism as well as the case study. The literature also provides large theoretical frameworks. For example, Allen Buchanan who has developed the Just Cause theory, had a large impact on development of the philosophical theories in general. Similarly, John R. Wood has presented an extensive comparative analytical framework researching the different conditions on which separatism is based. The variables tested stem from the international and national level of analysis and serve this thesis well for the selection of factors important to separatism. Finally, the theory of rational choice was adapted to the context of separatism by Hechter and serves to examine the choice individual decision-makers take.

The resources will be limited by the language in which it is available. Concerns arise particularly because Iraqi Kurdistan has very uncommon languages and dialects. However, the research will be helped by the fact that most documents have been written in English or other main European languages, as the Kurdish languages are predominantly used orally, and no standardized written version prevails³⁹. In addition, particularly in the case of Iraqi Kurdistan, the author also has good connections to the local Viennese office of the representation of the KRI and was able to conduct an interview. It goes without saying that this thesis presents a balanced view on the subject matter and tries to include as many different points of view as possible.

When reading this thesis, it is important to take the various meanings of different terms into account, along with their change of meaning over time as well as their interconnectivity. It shall also be noted that with regards to the Kurdish separatist movement it is important to distinguish the terms of Kurdistan, Iraqi Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Iraqi Kurdistan, refers to the larger area where ethnic Kurds live and predominate within Iraq⁴⁰. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), on the other hand, refers to the pre-2003 area, which was administered by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and was defined by the militarized demarcation line drawn by Saddam Hussein in 1991 and/or the “no-fly zone” and “safe haven” established by the US. The KRI is roughly half of the area of Iraqi Kurdistan. Finally, the term Kurdistan

³⁹ Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*, 37

⁴⁰ Please see Annex I.

has two meanings: first, it refers to the idea of Great Kurdistan, the entire ethnic homeland where Kurds live, i.e. in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. Second, Iraqi Kurdistan is the term often used colloquially in order to refer to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq by politicians and journalists. Depending on the context, this may include or not the “disputed territories”. This thesis uses the idea of the KRI, the boundaries of the federal region today, as its basis for analysis. This, however, does not imply that this *is* or *should be* Iraqi Kurdistan in its entirety but only that it is the area currently administered by the KRG and other Kurdish parties⁴¹.

⁴¹ The topic of geography in Iraqi Kurdistan will further be addressed in Chapter II.1. (Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan)

1. Philosophical Theories of Separatism

The following two chapters will touch upon the most important theoretical and historical arguments when researching separatism. The overview provided below cannot be regarded as extensive but rather serves as a display of the diversity of the topic and the importance of different points of views and principles concerning its evolution. The literature on the theory of separatism is limited to a few researchers, mostly in the 1990s, who focused on the topic because of the recent break-up of the Soviet Union and the end of decolonialization. Despite the numerous ongoing separatist attempts around the world, the scholarly interests had subsided until a rather recent resurgence in identity politics could be observed, following the referenda of independence in Scotland and/or Catalonia.

It quickly becomes apparent that scholars of separatist movements center their debates around similar points of argument, namely the rights of the state, state sovereignty and its inviolability of territory vs. the rights of the people of free association and self-determination, the degree of injustice suffered by them, the reaction of foreign actors and the impact of foreign involvement. Consequently, scholars from different parts of the world, with different academic backgrounds and traditions have elaborated a diverse spectrum of theories, offering different lenses to analyze the multi-faceted topic of separatism.

Two main groups of theories can be identified, namely philosophical theories and explanatory theories. Each of these groups can be further sub-divided into different argumentations, which shall be presented here on a theoretical level and in light of their relevance for the Kurdish case study. When looking into the different historical narratives of the Kurdish separatist movement, it quickly becomes apparent that it is the theoretical factors which also dominate the debate at a more practical level. For example, regardless which moment in time is analyzed, the question evolves around the right to self-determination of the people, the definition of the people as well as the necessary conditions to exercise such a right. The combination of theory and historical evidence in the following chapters give the reader an in-depth understanding not only of the theoretical difficulties of the topic but also its relevance for the development of the Kurdish case study itself.

Before looking into the different factors that influence separatist movements and which contribute significantly to the success or failure of a movement, a more philosophical discussion of the principle of the “right to secessionism” is provided. This stream of theoretical discussion pays attention to different aspects of the question whether or not a specific nation has a primary right to self-determination and therefore secession. In particular, there are four streams of philosophical thought, i.e. the Statist Theory, the Just Cause Theory, the Choice Theory and the Ascriptivist Theory⁴². Each of these different concepts contributes a different angle to the analysis, includes a varied mix of academic disciplines and ascribes different importance to state sovereignty and/or individual and group rights, which is why they have shaped the debate on separatism significantly since their evolution in the 1990s. This thesis presents each of these theories and discusses their relevance to the Kurdish separatist movement.

1.1. The Statist Theory

The principal idea of the Statist view is that any form of secession from a state is unjustified and consequently political boundaries need to be maintained and perceived as statist⁴³. Moore (2010) and Saideman (1997)⁴⁴, who have contributed significantly to the understanding of this approach, present three main lines of argumentation in order to demonstrate the inviolability of state boundaries⁴⁵.

The first argument is based on a realist perception of international relations, focusing primarily on nation-states as the principal international actors and indicating that the stability of these nation-states is key to international peace and security. Moore explicitly emphasizes the inherent destabilizing function of all separatist movements,

⁴² The main adherents to the theory are: Saideman, *Explaining the International Relations*; Moore, *Ethics of Separatism*; Buchanan, *the Morality of Political Divorce*; Buchanan, *Secession*; Beran, *A Liberal Theory of Secession*; Copp, *International Law and Morality*; Philpott, *In Defence of SelfDetermination*; Miller, *On Nationality*; Miller, *Principle of Nationality*

⁴³ Moore, *Ethics of Secession*, 77ff.

⁴⁴ Saideman, *Explaining the International Relations*, 721-753

⁴⁵ These three lines of argumentation in the Statist Theory are not exclusive. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I have decided to limit them to the most common ones.

but in particular of independence movements⁴⁶, which is why under the Statist Theory borders need to be preserved at all cost. It can be concluded that secessionist groups do not have the unilateral right to secede⁴⁷. Secondly, Statist adherents deny a primary right to secession based on the idea that the government represents and expresses the will of all people of a nation-state and benefits them equally⁴⁸. This argument is based on the idea of the modern nation-state based on the concept of territoriality, according to which all people of a specified geographical domain follow the same legal and political rules and can therefore be conceived as equal citizens. This argument also implies that the territory belongs and benefits all nations living on that land in the same way so that the scholars⁴⁹ see no reason for secession⁵⁰. Analyzed from a governmental point of view, central or federal, it seeks to represent all the people living on its land equally and expects no change of political boundaries in return. Finally, the statisticians also provide an argument based on the provision of moral goods⁵¹. Based on the idea that the modern (multi)nation-state provides its citizens with peace and security, the protection of individual rights as well as rule of law, the questioning of the underlying political order is unjustified. This argument is especially strong when the government and the state have democratic accountability⁵².

In light of the Statist Theory, the Kurdish separatist movement does not have a primary right to secede from the central Iraqi state. Regardless if looked at the movement during the times of the Iraqi monarchy, during the regime of Saddam Hussein or the current federalized Iraqi state, an independent Kurdish state would have severe impacts on the regional stability in the Middle East, not at least because Iraq' neighboring states Iran, Syria and Turkey are also the home of Kurdish minority groups⁵³. In addition, it would also set a risky precedent for other countries worldwide, finding themselves in similar situations, which would further destabilize the

⁴⁶ The destabilizing function becomes apparent not only within the state where a separatist movement takes place but, in fact, influences the entire region and the international community (Moore, *Ethics of Secession*, 78)

⁴⁷ Moore, *Ethics of Secession*

⁴⁸ Moore, *Ethics of Secession*, 78

⁴⁹ i.e. Doyle, *Introduction*; Moore, *Ethics of Secession*; Wood, *A Comparative Analytical Framework*

⁵⁰ Wood, *A Comparative Analytical Framework*

⁵¹ Moore, *Ethics of Secession*, 79

⁵² The argument hints at the idea that no democratic state would be able to operate successfully if it was constantly threatened by unviability through separatism (Doyle, *Introduction*).

⁵³ Sluglett, *Common Sense*, 320

international state system⁵⁴. It is not surprising that also the future viability of the Iraqi state itself would be questioned if the Kurdish region were to leave the federal union⁵⁵.

Today, the power is officially shared in Iraq between the two federal regions⁵⁶, with a decentralization personified by the Kurdistan region of Iraq and a more central interpretation dominating the rest of Iraq under Baghdad's command⁵⁷. The constitution also details that the government officials are elected through general, open, and fair elections and the people are the source of legitimacy and authority⁵⁸. This not only implies that all Iraqi citizens, be they ethnic Kurds or not, are officially equal but it also indicates that the Kurdish population has significant influence in the make-up of the government, making any claim to separation unjustified. According to the Statist Theory, the Iraqi territory belongs to all citizens, contributing to the view that both Shia/Sunni and Kurdish groups are increasingly regarded as Iraqi people⁵⁹.

However, the democratic argument used above also hints at various weaknesses of the Statist Theory. If the people and different nations had the right to enter the union in the first place, this must also imply that they have the power to leave it according to their free will⁶⁰. This is in fact an argument often used by the KRG today⁶¹. Based on the referendum which took place in September 2017, government representatives led by Nechirvan Barzani argue that they have a right to dissolve the union they had agreed to in 2005, not the least because the central Iraqi authorities have failed to implement the most important provisions⁶².

⁵⁴ Michael Wahid Hanna, "The Line in the Sand: Is Sykes-Picot Coming Undone?", *Journal of Middle Eastern Politics and Policy*, 2015, accessed June 6, 2018.

<http://jmepp.hkspublications.org/2015/07/13/the-line-in-the-sand-is-sykes-picot-coming-undone/>

⁵⁵ According to Wood, secession can never be justified if it leaves the remaining state unable to act and protect its citizens (Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework)

⁵⁶ See also the current Iraqi constitution. "Iraqi Constitution", 2005, accessed May 25, 2018.

http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file_id=230000

⁵⁷ "Iraq and Its Regions. Iraqi Governance Structures after the Liberation of Mosul", 2018, accessed May 25, 2018. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/middle-east-centre/research/iraq-and-its-regions>

⁵⁸ "Iraqi Constitution"

⁵⁹ Gareth Stansfield and Mohammed Shareef, *The Kurdish Question Revisited*, London: Hurst & Company, 2017.

⁶⁰ Moore, Ethics of Secession, 79

⁶¹ Masoud Barzani continuously refers to the preamble to the Iraqi constitution, which states that adherence to the text of the constitution is a precondition for Iraq to remain unified. Consequently, he argues that in the case that the central Baghdad government fails to hold up the promise, the KRG is entitled to dissolve the union ("Iraqi Constitution"; "President Barzani Delivers His Remarks Following the Independence Referendum", Kurdistan Region Presidency, September 26, 2017, accessed April 15, 2018. <http://www.presidency.krd/english/articledisplay.aspx?id=9ZbBMOVvoOU=>

⁶² Ibid.

As it is clearly visible, this problem also relates closely to the question of the level of “valid” moral goods required for a state to be legitimate. Can the Iraqi state be legitimate despite the constant prosecution of the Kurds over the course of history? While some factors are considered to be so rudimentary that any entity would need to be regarded as functioning state⁶³, Moore and Saideman disagree whether the provision of individual human rights and the provision of the rule of law can be regarded as decisive factors. There can be no doubt that Saddam Hussein has violated many of these basic provisions, e.g. under the an-Anfal campaign, leading to a mass genocide of the Kurdish population. However, even today, the fact that the articles 4 or 140⁶⁴ of the 2005 constitution have never been fully implemented, has violated the basic provisions under which the Kurds had agreed to the constitution in the first place⁶⁵.

1.2. *The Just Cause Theory*

Expanding the argument of moral goods, the Just Cause theory can be regarded as a natural result of the Statist theory. Based mostly on the work of Allen Buchanan⁶⁶, it claims that national groups have a right to secede from the state, if, and only if, that state has failed to protect the basic human rights of its citizens, or if a group has suffered certain types of serious injustices and/or grievances at the hands of the state. Violence must form a central part of the perception of separatist movements⁶⁷. The historical roots of this interpretation, can be found with John Locke and his idea of a social contract between the state and its citizens as the foundation of power⁶⁸. Thereafter, the American Revolution and the era of the Enlightenment also serve as bases to the right to revolution, fundamental to the Just Cause Theory⁶⁹.

⁶³ Moore, *Ethics of Secession*, 79

⁶⁴ Articles 4 and 140 are two of many examples, which have been not fully implemented of the central Iraqi authorities. Article 4: language. It determines both Arabic and Kurdish language as official state languages and defines where both languages are to be used. Article 140: disputed territories and period of completion.

⁶⁵ “President Barzani delivers his remarks”; Zucchini, Coker, *Iraq Escalates Dispute with Kurds*

⁶⁶ The theory is most comprehensively presented in Allen Buchanan, *Secession*, 1991.

⁶⁷ Buchanan, *Secession*

⁶⁸ Alex Tuckness, “Locke’s Political Philosophy”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified January 11, 2106, accessed May 25, 2018. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke-political/>

⁶⁹ Doyle, *Introduction*, 8

While all adherents of the Just Cause Theory agree on the significance of serious injustices for the right to self-determination and separatism, the scholarly attempts, however, differ on how to exactly define these alleged grievances. For example, some arguments include the colonization and conquer of the traditional homeland in the list of grievances suffered⁷⁰, while others restrict their analysis to the obvious cases of violation of human rights and/ or crimes against humanity⁷². Finally, there are also arguments of the Just Cause theory who opt for the inclusion of discriminatory justice, i.e. unequal distribution of resources, as sufficient to legitimize secession⁷³. Regardless of which grievances are included, all authors agree that the injustices need to be numerous and long-lasting to justify separatism and they need to be the result of underlying state structures⁷⁴ rather than the actions of one particular government. Just as with the Statist Theory in Chapter I. 1, here it is once again important to differentiate the structures of the state from those of the government in order to determine whether or not certain actions can be defined as legitimate. It can be concluded that if the injustices against a particular ethnic group are “only” committed by a single government at one specific moment in time, then the change of government, be it through new elections or revolution, is regarded as sufficient to ease the grievances and secession from the state is no longer justified⁷⁵. Independence under the Just Cause theory can only be justified if it is proven to be the only remedy to protect the fundamental rights of a specific nation⁷⁶.

⁷⁰ Grievances suffered by colonization and conquer imply the idea that a nation state had a claim over a specific homeland in the past and it has unjustly lost that claim through conquer or colonization. Buchanan argues that this type of grievances authorizes the nation to reclaim that formerly recognized land through international law as their own (Buchanan, Secession).

⁷¹ Closely related to the argument of colonization is also the argument of the artificial state. Authors such as Mayall and Simpson argue that many former colonies and developing countries actually have never achieved statehood as defined in Chapter III, as they have impeded civil society from developing and failed to protect their citizens in the first place. They argue that sovereignty is often merely juridical, i.e. the product of international recognition by other states and not developed through a process from within (James Mayall and Mark Simpson, “Ethnicity is not Enough: Reflections on Protracted Secessionism in the Third World”, *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, XXXIII (1992):8.

⁷² Wayne Norman, “Ethnics of Secession as the Regulation of Secessionist Politics”, In *National Self-Determination and Secession*, edited by Margaret Moore, 34-61. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998; Margaret Moore, “Introduction”. In *National Self-Determination and Secession*, edited by Margaret Moore, 80, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998

⁷³ Moore, Ethics of Secession, 81f. according to Buchanan, The Morality of Political Divorce

⁷⁴ Moore, Ethics of Secession

⁷⁵ Allen Buchanan, *Justice, Legitimacy, and Self-Determination: Moral Foundations for International Law*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; Moore, Ethics of Secession, 82

⁷⁶ Buchanan, Secession

Through the definition provided above it has become apparent that the Just Cause Theory accepts the moral argument that a legitimate state has a right to preserve its territorial integrity, but that such claims can be reversed once the (multi-)nation state fails to provide justice for its people⁷⁷. This means that once the state fails to provide the very reason for its existence in the first place, i.e. the social contract between the state and its people is withdrawn, separation from the state is justified⁷⁸. The Just Cause theory emphasizes that separation between the state and its people can be concluded in various ways, ranging from independence to different forms of state autonomy for nations within the existing state⁷⁹. Yet, also the Just Cause Theory fails to provide a tool with which to judge form of separatism or autonomy is best in the particular case.

Despite the clear difficulty the adherents of the theory face in defining what to include as *serious injustices suffered by the state*, this approach also struggles with other disadvantages, such as the possibilities of a nation to enforce the so-called *right to secession*⁸⁰. In fact, most groups, which suffer grievances under authoritarian rule do not have the means to enforce their right to self-determination on their own. National groups are often victims of further repression once they voice their claim to separation and central authorities use force against the separatist group which can lead to civil war⁸¹. Another key criticism of the Just Cause theory results from the little importance it accords to nationalism as it argues that the right to self-determination is merely driven by grievances rather than ideological components⁸². This deliberate exclusion of nationalism as a driver for separatism in the Just Cause Theory is striking, as nationalism is in fact often understood as an ideology declaring a group worthy of its own state⁸³. Buchanan neither takes ethnic nationalist ideology, based on a fixed myth rooted in history and memory and relying on socially, religiously and historically

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Moore, *Ethics of Secession*, 80ff.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Moore, *Ethics of Secession*, 81

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Buchanan, *Secession according to Moore*, *National Self-Determination*

⁸³ Nelson Kasfir, "Explaining Ethnic Political Participation", *World Politics* 31/3 (1979): 365 – 388.

constructed differences to be looked back at whenever needed⁸⁴, nor civic nationalism defined merely in territorial terms⁸⁵ into account.

On the other hand, there are also several advantages connected to the Just Cause Theory arguing for secession. First of all, it implies a morally strong connection between the right to revolt against political oppression and the collective right to self-determination⁸⁶. In addition, it is comparably easy to assess because it simply requires a historical analysis of the state practices and the prove of authenticity of claims made by the separatist group concerning the injustices suffered⁸⁷. This, however, does not change the fact that there might be a difference in clarity of the cases involved.

To conclude, while this theory gives certain groups the right to secede under specific circumstances and as a matter of last resort, it also limits the possibilities of separatism to those that have suffered significant grievances by state structures⁸⁸. The Just Cause theory, therefore, implies a certain weighing of rights between the separatist groups and the state⁸⁹.

The Just Cause Theory clearly seems to support the KRG's argument for self-determination. It is generally acknowledged that the Kurds suffered significant grievances over the course of history. In 1880, the first documented Kurdish uprising took place against the suppression of the Ottoman Empire with revolts quickly spreading throughout the country but eventually ending with the death of Sheik Ubaydallah Nehri in 1893⁹⁰. In 1924, Sheikh Abdul Qadir of Nehri lead another uprising, which the Turks by killing thousands⁹¹ and similarly in 1946 the Republic of Mahabad was founded for eleven months before it was bloodily crushed by Iranian forces⁹². After the end of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958, the Kurds also experienced

⁸⁴ Doyle, Introduction; Kasfir, Explaining Ethnic Political Participation

⁸⁵ Yossi Shain and Martin Sherman, "Dynamics of disintegration: diaspora, secession and the paradox of nation-states", *Nations and Nationalism*, 4/3, (1998): 323; Mayall, Simpson, Ethnicity is not Enough

⁸⁶ Buchanan, Secession

⁸⁷ Moore, Ethics of Secession

⁸⁸ Interestingly, the argument implies that the separatist group need not to suffer the injustices themselves but rather that the state from which they want to secede is the perpetrator of such injustices. Once the state has failed to protect all citizens equally it has lost the right to territorial integrity (Moore, Ethics of Secession, 82)

⁸⁹ Moore, Ethics of Secession

⁹⁰ McDowell, Modern history of the Kurds, 49ff; Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006:75ff

⁹¹ McDowell, Modern history of the Kurds, 151ff; *ibid*: 231ff; Jwaideh, the Kurdish National Movement, 207ff, "Iraqi Kurdistan Profile"

⁹² Sluglett, Common Sense, 328

increased suppression leading to the dissolution of the KDP in 1961⁹³. As the height of suppression, the an-Anfal campaigns throughout the 1980s, and in particular the attack on Halabja in 1988, needs to be mentioned. There, as a result of deportation and chemical attacks ordered by the regime of Saddam Hussein, more than 35,000 family heads died, leaving more than 100,000 widows and an even greater number of orphans⁹⁴. Once again in 1991, Saddam Hussein severely punished the Kurds for their rebellion after the Iran-Iraq war, consequently leading to the US intervention, the establishment of the no-fly zone for civilian protection and the oil-for-food program⁹⁵. However, also recent interference with the payment of salaries of Kurdish governmental employees as a punishment for the 2017 independence referendum or the non-compliance with the 2005 constitution must be regarded under the light of severe grievances suffered⁹⁶.

The list of serious injustices experienced by the Kurdish population is long and it has become apparent in different points of time that the Iraqi state has failed to treat its citizens equally. Nevertheless, the Kurds are not the only nation that has suffered serious injustices within the borders of Iraq. For example, the regime of Saddam Hussein fiercely suppressed Shia uprisings at the end of the Iran-Iraq war⁹⁷. Similarly, both the governments of Nouri al-Maliki as well as Haider al-Abadi have failed to protect the Yezidi minorities from ISIS' genocidal attacks starting in 2014⁹⁸. "The just state [...] has an obligation to protect all (existing and future) citizens' legitimate interests in the political and territorial community"⁹⁹¹⁰⁰. Therefore, the depicted historical continuous failure of the Iraqi central state to protect its citizens equally and the continuity of suppression inflicted on the Kurds lead to the conclusion that the

⁹³ McDowell, *Modern history of the Kurds*, 302ff; "Iraqi-Kurdistan Profile"

⁹⁴ McDowell, *Modern history of the Kurds*, 383; ibd: 391

⁹⁵ Gordon W. Rudd, "Humanitarian Intervention. Assisting the Iraqi Kurds in Operation Provide Comfort, 1991", 2004, accessed April 13, 2018.

https://history.army.mil/html/books/humanitarian_intervention/CMH_70-78.pdf;

Susan Meiselas, *Kurdistan. In the Shadow of History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008;

McDowell, *Modern history of the Kurds*

⁹⁶ Zucchini, Coker, Iraq Escalates Dispute With Kurds; "President Barzani Delivers his Remarks"

⁹⁷ McDowell, *Modern history of the Kurds*

⁹⁸ It is questioned where it was in fact a failure by the government to protect the Yezidis or a deliberate negligence that could qualify as further discrimination and unjust treatment ("Iraq: Protect Mass Graves. Evidence of Possible ISIS Genocide Endangered", Human Rights Watch, 2016, accessed June 5, 2018 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/30/iraq-protect-mass-graves>)

⁹⁹ Moore, *Ethics of Secession*, 81f.

¹⁰⁰ According to the structure of the argument it is not necessary that the separatists need to suffer the injustices but rather that it is the state which perpetrates the injustices to any group living under his sovereignty (Moore, *Ethics of Secession*, 82)

grievances suffered are structural rather than the mere attempt of one particular government to oppress the Kurds. It can therefore be concluded that the Iraqi central state has lost its right to territorial integrity according to the Just Cause Theory.

After having determined the clear right to secession according to the Just Cause Theory, the question, however, remains what instruments the Kurds have at their disposition to enforce this right. Indeed, neither national nor international law provide the separatist movement with a clear legal framework. With regards to domestic law, in fact, it is a question of the state's constitutional law¹⁰¹ and therefore Iraq's 2005 constitution. So far, no final legal case has been concluded on the Iraqi constitution but the current dispute between the KRG and the central government in Baghdad suggests that the Iraqi constitution does not foresee a "political divorce"¹⁰².

With regards to international law, James Crawford states that separation is in fact neither legal or illegal but a neutral act¹⁰³. Yet, while he argues that there is no right conferred by international law to unilateral secession, others disagree and outline at least a limited right to secession¹⁰⁴. This legal right to secession and self-determination can be found in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)¹⁰⁵, implying that the right to self-determination is in fact a *legal right* and not just a *political principle* and therefore can also not be restricted to people living in former colonies¹⁰⁶. Undoubtedly this right is universal. In addition, it is important to point out that the meaning of *the people* has been extremely controversial, ever since the principle of self-determination was mentioned in the United Nations (UN) Charter¹⁰⁷. Indeed, initially the UN was largely opposed to any form of secession, emphasizing the territorial integrity of a country and describing as "people" those

¹⁰¹ Aleksander Pavkovic and Peter Radan, *Creating New States. Theory and Practice of Secession*, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007, 221; "Iraqi Constitution"

¹⁰² The KRG argues that if they had the right to enter into the federal relationship with the central Iraqi authorities they also have the right to leave the union again (Doyle, Introduction: 3, "President Barzani Delivers his Remarks")

¹⁰³ James Crawford, *The Creation of States in International Law*, 2nd Edition, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006, 390

¹⁰⁴ Pavkovic, Radan, *Creating New States*, 233

¹⁰⁵ Article 1(1) states: "All people have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development".

¹⁰⁶ Pavkovic, Radan, *Creating New States*, 233

¹⁰⁷ "Charter of the United Nations and Statue of the International Court of Justice", UN, 1945, accessed June 13, 2018 <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/ctc/uncharter.pdf>

living in an independent state rather than a specific group defined by language or ethnicity¹⁰⁸. This definition was, however, reversed to a certain extent, with today the definition still being based upon territorial criteria but rather referring to the federal unit of a country than the whole of it¹⁰⁹. Furthermore, today the most expansive claim on self-determination can be found in the UN General Assembly's Declaration on Friendly Relations¹¹⁰, in particular in its principle five. Following the idea of the Just Cause Theory, it states that people's right to self-determination has to be analyzed in conjunction with the right to territorial integrity by the state. It is argued that the state's right to territorial integrity prevails as long as the state conducts itself according to the principles of equal rights and self-determination of the people¹¹¹. "The economic, social and cultural development"¹¹² of *all* peoples has further been supported by 1995 UN General Assembly Declaration on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the UN, which states that no distinction between any people shall be made¹¹³, thereby giving any group that is structurally discriminated and marginalized by the state the legal right to separate from the state¹¹⁴. According to these declarations, separatist groups do not need the consent of the state from which they want to secede¹¹⁵.

It can be concluded that although separation in the form of independence is often regarded as illegal, it may still be effective if the new country is recognized as a state by the international community¹¹⁶. Even nations which have successfully attempted secession, such as Kosovo, still struggle for the full recognition of all UN member states. It is important to take into account that although the US established a

¹⁰⁸ Pavkovic, Radan, *Creating New States*, 233 according to Higgins, *Problems and Progress*, 194.

¹⁰⁹ Ravokovic, Radan, *Creating New States*, 234

¹¹⁰ The full name of the Declaration is *United Nations General Assembly's Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation Among States in Accordance with the Charter of the UN*.

¹¹¹ "International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights", (1966), accessed June 13, 2018 <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cescr.pdf>; "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights", (1966), accessed June 13, 2018

<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/ccpr.pdf> ; "Declaration on the Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations", UN, 1970, accessed June 13, 2018 <http://www.un-documents.net/a25r2625.htm>; "Declaration on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations", UN, 1995, accessed June 13, 2018 <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/50/a50r006.htm>; Pavkovic, Radan, *Creating New States*, 235

¹¹² "International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights"

¹¹³ "Declaration on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary"

¹¹⁴ Pavkovic, Radan, *Creating New States*, 237

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Pavkovic, Radan, *Creating New States*, 221

no-fly zone in 1991 and significantly assisted the KRI as well as Iraq in drafting the 2005 federal constitution, providing the Kurds with significant autonomy and making it possible for the Kurds to govern over their region, the US has strictly opposed the independence referendum in 2017 as well as any further efforts for more independence¹¹⁷. Similarly, also Iraq's neighboring countries in the region are expected to fiercely oppose any attempt of increase Kurdish independence from the central state. Finally, the dependence on the central government in general and its payment of government salaries but also accessed to oil, remains a key concern¹¹⁸.

The Just Cause theory suggested, despite the theoretical right to revolt and the morally strong connection for self-determination that every time the Kurdish separatist group or the KRG voice their claim for more separation from Baghdad, the Iraqi central government reinforces the pressure on the region, which *de facto* decreases their autonomy¹¹⁹. This is clearly visible after the 1970 March Agreement which was followed by a period of increased suppression¹²⁰, in the aftermath of the 1991 rebellion when Saddam Hussein mobilized the remaining army to fight against the Kurds in the North. This is also visible today, in the aftermath of last year's independence referendum, to which the central Iraqi government responded with a stop in revenue transfers¹²¹.

¹¹⁷ Gareth Stansfield, "The Kurdish Experience in Post-Saddam Iraq", In *The Kurdish Question Revisited*, edited by Gareth Stansfield and Mohammed Shareef, London: Hurst & Company, 2017: 355-375

¹¹⁸ Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*, 47ff.

¹¹⁹ Moore, *Ethics of Secession*, 81

¹²⁰ The 1970 March Agreement refers to an autonomy agreement signed by Mullah Mustafa Barzani (Kurdish side) and Saddam Hussein (Baghdad side), recognizing the Kurds as a distinct group of people and introducing the Kurdish language as second official language in Iraqi Kurdistan (McDowell, *Modern history of the Kurds*). Yet, this moment of transitional agreement ended with the 1975 Algiers Agreement, crushing the Kurdish rebellion (ibid.).

¹²¹ The list provided here outlines different example in the history of Iraqi Kurdistan during which the Kurds experienced additional suppression after attempting to gain more autonomy. This list, however, is not exhaustive but rather serves as an indicator that it happened continuously throughout history. (please also see McDowell, *Modern history of the Kurds* for more examples).

1.3. *Choice Theories of Secession*

Choice theories of secession focus their argument on the people's desire for secession, expressed through a referendum or plebiscite, from which they derive the fundamental right of any ethnic group to separate¹²². The main adherents of this theory, Harry Beran, David Copp, and Daniel Philpott consider secession to be legitimate as soon as the ethnic group is able to express its desire for more autonomy towards the existing state, regardless of whether the group has also suffered injustices or not¹²³. This way, injustices shall be prevented in the first place¹²⁴.

The authors base their argument on the individual's right of political association, which is guaranteed both in national as well as international law¹²⁵ and from which a more profound right of individual autonomy but also collective right to self-determination can be derived¹²⁶. However, it is exactly this argument which also brings along various difficulties. In contrast to the peoples right to self-determination, the right to political association is disconnected from the right to territory, i.e. the right to exercise sovereign jurisdiction over the homeland¹²⁷ and, in fact, it would be precipitous to regard these rights as mutually supporting each other. The argument that an individual group can decide unilaterally about parts of a state's territory even seems to contradict the concept of popular sovereignty, in which the state is conceived as a territory of all citizens and not just of a particular part of them¹²⁸.

¹²² Moore, *Ethics of Secession*, 83

¹²³ Similar arguments like those presented in the Statist Theory also apply here. Not only Wood but also Beran and Philpott argue that secession can only be justified if it leaves the remaining state act to act and protect its citizens (Wood, *A Comparative Analytical Framework*; Moore, *Ethics of Secession*; Beran, *Liberal Theory of Secession*, 21-31; Philpott, *In Defence of Self-Determination*, 352-385; Copp, *International Law and*, 1-16.

¹²⁴ Doyle, *Introduction*, 9

¹²⁵ The right to freedom of association is guaranteed both in national law such as the European Convention on Human Rights or the United States Bill of Rights but also in international law, in conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 20 and 23).

Bill of Rights Institute, "Bill of Rights", accessed June 4, 2018 <http://billofrightsinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/BillofRights.pdf>; European Court of Human Rights, "European Convention on Human Rights", 1950, accessed June 5, 2018

https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf; "Universal Declaration of Human Rights", OHCHR, 1948, accessed June 5, 2018 http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf

¹²⁶ Moore, *Ethics of Secession*, 84; "Declaration of Friendly Principles"; Declaration on the 50th Anniversary"; "International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights"

¹²⁷ Buchanan, *Secession*

¹²⁸ The argument does, however, solve the definitional question of what a nation is, as the state can simply be defined by the vote of the people (Buchanan, *Secession*).

It has become apparent that this theory is clearly limited to states with democratic governments¹²⁹. However, even under the group of Choice Theories and with a fully functioning democratic rule, the ideas of democracy and the principle of equality of all citizens do not imply that boundaries cannot be redrawn by majority vote¹³⁰¹³¹. The problem which arises is that although the results of a referendum may represent the will of the majority, independence from a country will also deprive all others¹³² from their citizenship, just as the secession of a new state also removes part of the territory without the agreement of the people residing in the rest of the country¹³³. It is against the democratic principle that some people who represent the minority of a state should decide unilaterally on a matter which effects all citizens. A possible solution envisioned by the authors is to hold elections in the whole state. This, however, once again goes against the right to political association¹³⁴.

This overview has enumerated some of the many difficulties the group of Choice Theories entails. It implies that autonomy in the sense of institutional recognition achieved through governmental reforms will suffice to those attempting separatism and, therefore, independence will not be necessary anymore¹³⁵. This not only prevents the international system from being destabilized, but it also frees the remaining nationalities from the burden of having to reconsider their own identity¹³⁶. Moore seems to argue that the increased autonomy represents a good compromise for all but the separatists¹³⁷.

Another limit imposed by Choice theorists on their argument is that after separation, the seceding as well as the remaining state need to be left in such conditions, under which they are able to perform their duties, to provide moral goods

¹²⁹ Moore, *Ethics of Secession*, 84

¹³⁰ The democratic principle implies that all citizens shall have equal rights in determining the basic rules under which they live, i.e. the social character of their polity. However, the democratic principle is not useful to define the boundaries of the state, because in order to implement the democratic principle in the first place, the boundaries must already have been fixed (Buchanan, *Secession*).

¹³¹ Buchanan, *The Morality of Political Divorce*

¹³² Those which did not agree to the referendum in the first place.

¹³³ Buchanan, *Secession*

¹³⁴ Moore, *Ethics of Secession*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Buchanan, *Secession*

¹³⁷ Moore, *Ethics of Secession*, 84f.

towards their citizens as well as survive in the international environment¹³⁸. As most borders were not drawn based on the national groups living on a specific territory but due to power struggles, regional security needs to be taken into consideration just like the remaining economic conditions¹³⁹. While this argument seems to be less important nowadays in light of increasingly open borders¹⁴⁰, the security of the state remains an important concern, especially in the case of irredentist movements¹⁴¹.

It is important to acknowledge that the Choice theory bases its argument on the will of an ethnic group and implies that decisions for separation will be made according to the specific identities of a nation¹⁴². This stands in clear contrast to the Statist Theory, which merely recognizes the full nation-state as an actor in the international arena, overlooking any independent will coming from within that state. In addition, it also stands in clear contrast to the Just Cause Theory, which focuses its argument on the injustices suffered by people, whatever the form of organization is.

It is clear that the Choice Theory has often been used as a basis of the KRG's argument, especially in the last decade. In September 2017, the KRG organized an independence referendum where 92 % of the people living in the area of the KRI, as well as the area of Kirkuk, voted for independence¹⁴³. This result suggests that according to the Choice Theory, the KRG has a unilateral claim to independence. Yet, the question of who exactly should be entitled to vote and actually has voted, also hints at the main issue under dispute in this case. In particular, the fact that the disputed territories of Kirkuk were included in the referendum was highly contested by the central Iraqi authorities¹⁴⁴. The debate about the territories of Kirkuk dates back until the Treaty of Sykes-Picot, where the territories were excluded from the Kurdish homelands for the first time¹⁴⁵. The argument was founded on the assumption that the oilfields of Kirkuk

¹³⁸ This is also called the viability requirement (Wood, *A Comparative Analytical Framework*; Beran, *Separatist Movements*; Philpott, *In Defense of Self-Determination*; Moore, *Ethics of Secession*).

¹³⁹ Wood, *A Comparative Analytical Framework*

¹⁴⁰ See also Chapter II.3 on economic factors

¹⁴¹ Moore, *Ethics of Secession*

¹⁴² *Ibd.*

¹⁴³ With a turnout of 72% (Pichon, *Iraqi Kurdistan's independence referendum*, 5)

¹⁴⁴ Article 140 of the 2005 Iraqi Constitution outlines a transitional period during which to decide whether the territories around Kirkuk shall be part of the federal region of the KRI or rather remain with the region of central Iraq. The timeline set envisioned the matter to be concluded by December 31, 2007 but this was never achieved (Stansfield, Shareef, *the Kurdish Question Revisited*; "Iraqi Constitution").

¹⁴⁵ Sluglett, *Common Sense*, 325; Hanna, *The Line in the Sand*

are key to the economic independence of Iraq¹⁴⁶. Consequently, also the 1970 March Agreement, the 1991 *de facto* autonomy agreement and the sphere of jurisdiction determined in 2003 excluded these territories¹⁴⁷. Nevertheless, the Peshmerga took *de facto* control of the area of Kirkuk during the threat of ISIS, practically implementing article 140¹⁴⁸. It is important to take into account that not only Iraq's economic independence is under severe pressure without the oilfields of Kirkuk but also that the KRI's economic self-sufficiency seems unlikely without them¹⁴⁹. Against all presuppositions, Stansfield and Shareef have argued that many Iraqi's do not support the KRI as part of Iraq anymore and many would indeed support Kurdish independence even in a nation-wide referendum, as an attempt to create a more balanced state between Shia and Sunni Arabs¹⁵⁰. Yet, this support would vanish in case the KRI would attempt to include Kirkuk into their new state. As to any central Iraqi government since the 1970s, Kirkuk remains of utmost importance to the current government¹⁵¹.

According to the Choice Theory and based on the fact that the KRI already has achieved a significant degree of autonomy since 1991, which was formalized under the 2005 constitution, the question however remains why autonomy is not enough for the Kurds in Northern Iraq. The Choice Theory does not seem to offer any explication to this regard. Finally, it is important to add that also the Iraqi constitution guarantees the right to association¹⁵² and Iraq itself was a signing member of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948¹⁵³.

¹⁴⁶ The borders of Iraq can be regarded as a typical result of power politics at the end of World War I, with Great Britain, France, Italy, the US and the Ottoman Empire deciding on the future borders in the region. Their considerations were mostly guided by the already concluded treaty of Sykes-Picot, based on geopolitics, such as the attempt to keep Russia out of the Middle East and/or access to oil (Hanna, *The Line in the Sand*; Nick Danforth, "Forget Sykes-Picot. It's the Treaty of Sevres that Explains the Modern Middle East", *Foreign Affairs*, 2015, accessed June 4, 2018

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/10/sykes-picot-treaty-of-sevres-modern-turkey-middle-east-borders-turkey/>

¹⁴⁷ David Romano, "Iraqi Kurdistan: challenges of autonomy in the wake of US Withdrawal", *International Affairs*, 86/6 (2010): 1345-1359

¹⁴⁸ The Peshmerga and the KRG did not regard this takeover of Kirkuk to be of temporary nature (Ibd).

¹⁴⁹ Romano, *Challenges of Autonomy*

¹⁵⁰ Stansfield, *The Kurdish Question in Post-Saddam Iraq*, 373f.

¹⁵¹ Ibd.

¹⁵² "Iraqi Constitution", Article 39

¹⁵³ "Universal Declaration of Human Rights"

1.4. *Ascriptivist Theories*

The historical roots of ascriptive theories, which follow the idea that “each nation should have its own state”¹⁵⁴, can be traced back to the 19th century¹⁵⁵. This approach agrees to or even promotes a seemingly unlimited amount of unilateral border changes, as most nation-states which exist today are multi-ethnic.

Yet, also the adherents of Ascriptive Theories impose several restrictions on their argument. First, adherents such as David Miller, refer to the fact that although they generally support the idea of self-determination to all nations, the international legal system is able to impose restrictions and requires some nations to settle for autonomy arrangement instead of independence¹⁵⁶. While they, too¹⁵⁷, deliver little information on how to decide which separatist movements shall be restricted, they defend this position as an attempt to avoid unnecessary instability, especially when there are more than one secessionist movement within a state¹⁵⁸. This shall also decrease the inherent ethno-nationalist tensions, which arise out of any secessionist conflict¹⁵⁹.

While ethnic tensions remain one of the main concerns for Buchanan and Gellner in light of the unlimited possibilities for the creation of new nation-states, David Miller counters that every nation needs its state in order to be able to protect themselves from human right abuses but also from the destruction of their distinctive character¹⁶⁰. However, he does not insist on the *legally enforceable right* to self-determination for each nation but rather argues for a *morally strong claim*¹⁶¹. He is supported in his argument by John Stuart Mill’s considerations that democracies function best in mono-nation-states because only then sufficient solidarity, trust and

¹⁵⁴ Buchanan, Secession

¹⁵⁵ For example, nationalists such as Mazzini referred to the right of each nation to a state in the 19th century (Buchanan, Secession)

¹⁵⁶ Miller, On Nationality; Miller, the Principle of Nationality, 261- 282

¹⁵⁷ This is comparable to the Just Cause Theory and the Choice Theory

¹⁵⁸ Buchanan, Secession

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983; Miller, On Neutrality; Buchanan, Secession; “International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights”; “Friendly Relations Declaration”.

Please also refer to Chapter I.2.

¹⁶¹ Buchanan, Secession

values can be shared¹⁶². In addition, single nation-states find it easier to achieve distributive justice, as individuals will be more inclined to share their wealth amongst their own nationals instead of others¹⁶³. However, whether nationalism can really be strong enough to achieve large redistribution is highly contested because critics counter that an increase in nationalism would only lead towards the conquest against the other non-nationals, the creation of new identities and smaller sub-groups and nations¹⁶⁴.

It can be concluded that Ascriptive Theories offer the most comprehensive right to unilateral secession to any nation among the group of philosophical theories of separatism presented in this thesis. It states that once the legitimate interest of a specific group has been determined to be secession, it has indeed the right to separate from the central state. Without doubt, this right to separatism also applies to the case study of Iraqi Kurdistan, as the Kurds constitute a distinct group of people based on differences in culture, language and social structures¹⁶⁵. In addition, also their legitimate interest to separate seems evident in light of the major human rights abuses, the cases of systematic marginalization and suppression that the Kurds were exposed to and their wish to prevent injustices in the future¹⁶⁶. Nevertheless, it has to be taken into account that not only is the Kurdish society not homogenous but in fact many small opposition parties such as Gorran have appeared within the KRI in recent years¹⁶⁷, as a result of the current political instability.

The initial euphoria is, however, restrained by the fact that also the Choice Theory limits independence according to international law and restricts it to those cases, which do not unnecessarily produce turmoil in the region, i.e. excludes

¹⁶² John Stuart Mill expressed his ideas in the essay: *Considerations on Representative Government*. He based his argument on the historical observation that democracy is incompatible with multi-nation states, a fact which has been now reconsidered Buchanan, *Secession* according to John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, New York: Prometheus Books, 1991; Tuckness, *Locke's Political Philosophy*

¹⁶³ Miller, *On Nationality*; Miller, *Principle of Nationality – the concept of distributive (economic) justice* plays a central role in the Explanatory Theories of Secession, analyzed in Chapter II.3.

¹⁶⁴ Buchanan, *Secession*

¹⁶⁵ For more details on the Kurds as a distinct group of people please see Chapter II.2.1 and Chapter II.2.2. It suffices to mention here that their distinctive character has already been recognized by the treaty of Sevres (Danforth, *Forget Sykes-Picot*).

¹⁶⁶ "The Time of the Kurds"

¹⁶⁷ For more information on Kurdish society please see Chapter II.2. (Romano, *Challenges of Autonomy*)

irredentist cases from the right to self-determination. Miller, therefore, rather suggests a general claim to self-determination, rather than an explicit right, which can also be realized through increased autonomy¹⁶⁸. It can further be implied that Miller suggests an autonomy agreement in the Iraqi Kurdish case, not at last in light of the numerous Kurdish minority groups in neighboring countries and the high probability of resulting instability. Nevertheless, the Ascriptive Theory, too, fails to give guidance on which degree of autonomy or full-independence is recommended in each case and how to determine it¹⁶⁹.

1.5. Implications of the Philosophical Theories of Secession

The overview provided above has grouped the main philosophical arguments used by different scholars to defend or deny the legitimacy of separatist movements around the world into four distinct categories, weighing the state's right to territoriality vs. the people's claim to self-determination. This overview only included a restricted section about the legal aspects of the arguments where necessary, in order to introduce the reader to the legal arguments on behalf of which self-determination occurs¹⁷⁰.

It has further demonstrated that the theories rather argue for increased autonomy, then a right to independence. In addition, all four groups share the underlying assumption that different steps towards more autonomy, which increase the protection of human rights and/ or the distinctiveness of the ethnic group are to be regarded as positive development. Even a *strong claim* to secessionism is accorded in numerous arguments, in contrast to the explicit unilateral right to separate, which is highly disputed. Yet, none of the theories offers a compelling argument when a separatist movement shall merely strive for autonomy rather than complete independence. All groups of theories also share their concern whether a unilateral movement towards more autonomy or independence is even possible in light of missing aid and recognition from neighboring states as well as the international

¹⁶⁸ Miller, On Nationality; Miller, Principle of Nationality; Buchanan, Secession

¹⁶⁹ Buchanan, Secession

¹⁷⁰ The scope of this thesis requires to restrict the legal analysis to those cases, where presents itself as absolutely necessary.

community. As Abraham Lincoln stated: “Secession does not really solve domestic disputes; it only makes them international”¹⁷¹, underlining the impact of a separatist movement on the larger world of nations¹⁷².

All philosophical theories also neglect the discussion whether a nation striving towards separatism can actually be regarded as a like-minded community, counting with a defined territory over which to gain sovereignty. In fact, as history shows this is often not the case. Explanatory theories, expand on this issue, applying significant importance to the fact *who attempts separatism*, the characteristics of the group and its homeland. This does not imply an ethnic connection per se but rather the existence of some form of nationalism and uniting ideology. Therefore, this question will be analyzed in detail in Chapter II.2.

In the more practical discussion of the Iraqi Kurdish case study, it has become apparent that the separatist movement has used several of these theories to support their argument over the course of history, always changing and adapting the narrative to the specific historic circumstances. When looking at the modern movement since 1970 it can be concluded that representatives of the KRG based their argument on the Just Cause theory, the group of Choice Theories as well as the Ascriptive Theories. In addition, the Iraqi Kurdish separatist movement is well aware of the fact that the central Iraqi government relies its argument to a large degree on the Statist Theory of Separatism. However, it needs to be taken into account that also all other theories, even the Ascriptive Theory, support the unity of Iraq in order to prevent regional conflict and to preserve the economic self-sufficiency of the country.

This chapter leaves the question unanswered, which theory is best used to describe the Kurdish separatist movement throughout history or which philosophical argument and principle is best used by its representatives and/or the central Iraqi authorities to achieve their claims. However, I argue that reducing the case study to merely one philosophical argument is not only impossible but also counter-productive, because it constrains the richness and diversity of the topic to a single angle of observation. In fact, all these different groups of theories analyzed above have shaped the evolution of the Kurdish separatist movement and also the movement itself has

¹⁷¹ Doyle, Introduction, 11 according to Lincoln (1861)

¹⁷² Doyle, Introduction

contributed to the further development of theoretical aspects and interests in the philosophical theory of separatism. Therefore, also the following chapter on Explanatory Theories of Separatism needs to be read in light of these arguments.

2. Explanatory Theories of Separatism

After having introduced the normative and philosophical considerations of state inviolability vs. the people's right to self-determination with regards to separatism, this chapter attempts to address questions left untouched by the philosophical theories. Explanatory Theories look at the specific conditions under which separatism is likely to appear and which factors are most likely to influence separatist considerations. Thereby, it tries to determine *who exactly attempts separatism* and *under which circumstances*.

This chapter is primarily based on the work of the four theorists Michael Hechter, Donald L. Horowitz, Anthony D. Smith, and John R. Wood¹⁷³, which have mainly contributed to the theoretical understanding of the Explanatory Theories of separatism. While they all share the general assumption that there exist *factors* or *conditions*¹⁷⁴ which shape separatist movements, and in fact regard some of these factors as causally necessary for separatism to arise¹⁷⁵, they often disagree what these most important factors are and whether or not they are sufficient for separatist movements to succeed¹⁷⁶. Part of this disaccord results from different underlying definitions of separatism used by the authors and the role and importance they attribute to ethnicity as well as nationalism. For example, Smith and Horowitz¹⁷⁷ restrict their analyses to movements which are based on ethnic nationalism and are founded on the basis of a historical community who shares the same memories and culture¹⁷⁸; while Wood and Hechter included forms civic nationalism and/or all different forms of separatist groupings¹⁷⁹. Hechter, furthermore, only include separatist movements

¹⁷³ Hechter, *The Dynamics of Secession*, 267-283; Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*; Horowitz *Irredentas*; Horowitz, *Patterns of Ethnic Conflicts*; Smith, *Theory of ethnic separatism*, 21-37; Wood, *A Comparative Analytical Framework*

¹⁷⁴ The terms „factors“ and „conditions“ shall be regarded having the same meaning in this context and will be used interchangeably.

¹⁷⁵ Pavkovic, Radan, *Creating New States*, 182

¹⁷⁶ Pavkovic, Radan, *Creating New States*, 190

¹⁷⁷ Horowitz in fact provides the reader with a clear-cut definition of what he considers ethnic groups: „Ethnic groups are defined in terms of their common culture and their belief in common descent or origin“ (Horowitz, *Patterns of Ethnic Separatism*).

¹⁷⁸ Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*; Anthony D. Smith, *theory of ethnic separatism*, 21-37; Pavkovic, Radan, *Creating New States*

¹⁷⁹ Hechter, *The Dynamics of Secession*, 267-283; Pavkovic, Radan, *Creating New States*; Wood *A Comparative Analytical Framework*

which attempt to secede from a legitimate and effective central government into his theory. According to him, any state which fails to exercise control over the entire country in the first place, cannot suffer of separatist conflict but mere state fragmentation¹⁸⁰.

It shall be emphasized that for every factor named below historical examples can be found that contradict the theory which will be presented. This fact, however, does not divest these conditions from their explanatory power in a broad array of movements, such as the Kurdish case study, but rather hints at the limitations of a general theory of separatism. Not surprisingly, the historical circumstances in each separatist movement vary greatly so that only very broad theoretical observations can be made. Nevertheless, the goal of this chapter is to introduce the reader into the main recognized preconditions and components of separatist movements and to demonstrate their relevance on the Kurdish case study. This approach was chosen to determine the relevance for the Iraqi Kurdish separatist movement and not to the end to analyze each of the factors and conditions exhaustively. Generally, these conditions can be divided into the preconditions of separatism, those necessary to promote and shape a separatist movement as well as the conditions necessary for its success.

2.1. Geography

Geography is listed by John R. Wood (1981) as the first important and necessary precondition for secession, by arguing that the existence of a divisible territory¹⁸¹, which contains the majority of the separatist population and which can be detached from the state without doing significant damage to its security, economic or resource position, i.e. along regional frontiers, is central to the formation of a separatist movement¹⁸². Similarly, also Hechter adds in his article *The Dynamics of Secession*

¹⁸⁰ Hechter, *The Dynamics of Secession*, 277

¹⁸¹ Territory in this context is regarded as a piece of land with clearly defined boundaries. This does not imply that there need to be geographical barriers, although historically it can be observed that the central government has less influence on geographically remote territories (Wood, *A Comparative Analytical Framework*, 112)

¹⁸² Wood, *A Comparative Analytical Framework*, 112

that every nation that intends to split must not only share common interests¹⁸³, but also the same territory¹⁸⁴. He explains that in cases where a nation lacks a defined homeland, a separatist group can still attempt a greater degree of autonomy and recognition, although it will most likely fall short of full-scale independence¹⁸⁵.

Nevertheless, the mere existence of a defined territory cannot be regarded as a condition sufficient to trigger successful separatism. The geographical component often implies and even encourages regional competition, resentment, or a difference in economic behavior on which a group's distinctness is then based¹⁸⁶. Furthermore, the development of a specific region with its own center of power will always challenge the core of the larger state, questioning the state's legitimacy and supremacy as well as making it unable for the center to control its peripheral areas any longer, thereby triggering separatism¹⁸⁷.

The territory of Iraqi Kurdistan is landlocked, with high mountains¹⁸⁸ ranging over large parts of the territory and constituting as natural boundaries of the Northern Middle East¹⁸⁹. In fact, Brainwood and Howe argued that the mountains act as a safeguard to the Kurdish people, as they are the most influential component when it comes to shaping the people, their history and traditions¹⁹⁰. While this geographic location has facilitated the Kurds relative independent development over centuries, it also implies that they find themselves comparably isolated from trade routes. The particular geographic location makes them highly vulnerable to neighboring states, limiting the possibility of economic independence and self-sufficiency to only few export and import partners¹⁹¹.

¹⁸³ What interests Hechter is specifically referring will be elaborated more closely in Chapter II.2

¹⁸⁴ Hechter, *The Dynamics of Secession*, 267ff.

¹⁸⁵ Hechter, *The Dynamics of Secession*; Wood, *A Comparative Political Framework*, 112-113

¹⁸⁶ Pavkovic, Radan, *Creating New States*; Hechter, *The Dynamics of Secession*; Wood, *A Comparative Analytical Framework*, 113

¹⁸⁷ Wood, *A Comparative Analytical Framework*, 113

¹⁸⁸ the Zagros Mountains to the Taurus Mountains

¹⁸⁹ Peri-Khan Aqravi, "The end of empires and the beginning of nations: the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of the modern Kurdish national movement", Master thesis, University of Vienna, Vienna, 2010, 51

¹⁹⁰ Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*, 28 according to R. Braidwood and B. Howe *Prehistoric Investigations in Iraqi Kurdistan*, *Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization*, No. 31, the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press.

¹⁹¹ "The Kurds have no friends but the mountains." This is a common saying used in Iraqi Kurdistan and used in the title of a Sundance documentary film entry in 2000: *Good Kurds, Bad Kurds: No Friend but the Mountains*: Kevin McKiernan.

On first sight, the fact that separatism usually occurs along existing political borders, i.e. regional boundaries, seems to coincide with the Kurdish case study. However, it soon becomes apparent that the Kurdish homeland is not easily definable and still today the claims about what exactly comprises KRI territory remains unresolved. Territorial maps¹⁹² over the course of history vary highly with regards to the demarcation line of “Kurdistan”, ranging from the core territory of the mountainous area in today’s Northern Iraq until the Mediterranean.

In addition, “manipulation of geography has been used as a tool to pursue political ends”¹⁹³. It is no surprise that the debate what exactly can be considered as the homeland of Iraqi Kurdistan is still highly discussed today and has played a significant role at various stages of the development of the Kurdish separatist movement. The problem evolves around the fact that Turkey denies the existence of a Kurdish geographical area and Iran, Iraq and Syria remain reluctant to acknowledge its extension¹⁹⁴. Although many maps try to outline where Kurds actually live, maps remain relatively vague due to the fact that the Kurdish people have constantly migrated from their territory and married with their neighbors¹⁹⁵. Nevertheless, nowadays there remain few Kurdish politicians and representatives who realistically believe that access to the Mediterranean is still possible for a possible Kurdish state¹⁹⁶ and so the question mainly evolves around the so-called *disputed territories* of Kirkuk, including its oilfields¹⁹⁷.

The origins of this dispute on the disputed territories lie with the fact that Kirkuk was initially excluded from Kurdish “homeland” in the agreement of Sykes-

¹⁹² For all maps providing an overview of the historical development of the Kurdish homelands, please see Annex I. “The Time of the Kurds”; Cristian Ionita, “The Kurdish Question. From Paris (1919) to Erbil (2017)”, accessed June 6, 2018 https://www.edmaps.com/html/kurdistan_in_seven_maps.html; Kurdish Academy of Language, “Linguistic Composition of Kurdistan”, 2008, accessed January 16, 2018 <http://www.kurdishacademy.org/?q=node/154>; Nabaz Nawzad, “Sykes-Picot to be Blamed for the Century of Exterminations”, *The Times of Israel*, 2016, accessed June 6, 2018

<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/sykes-picot-to-be-blamed-for-the-century-of-extirminations/>; “Map of Greater Kurdistan showing claims made for an independent Kurdistan in the 20th century”, The Kurdish Lobby Australia, accessed June 6, 2018 <http://www.kurdishlobbyaustralia.com/index.php/maps/>

¹⁹³ Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*, 27

¹⁹⁴ Yilidiz, *the Kurds in Iraq*, 8

¹⁹⁵ Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*, 27f.

¹⁹⁶ This refers to the irredentist idea of a Greater Kurdistan and not to ambitions voiced by the KRG. Joost Hiltermann, “To Protect or to Project. Iraqi Kurds and Their Future”, *Middle East Research and Information Project*, 2008, accessed June 4, 2018 <https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/171/29890.html>

¹⁹⁷ Stansfield, *The Kurdish Experience Post-Saddam Iraq*

Picot¹⁹⁸. The distribution of the Kurds into four different states at the end of World War I, not only lay ground for significant sectarian violence among the different ethnic groups striving for hegemony but also left the question of the future economic viability of Iraqi Kurdistan unresolved¹⁹⁹. Since then, there have been several attempts to resolve the claims over the disputed territories of Kirkuk, such as in the 1970 March Agreement and the 2005 constitution²⁰⁰. Until today no official agreement could conclude this dispute. Nevertheless, representatives of the KRG argue that it has been settled by *force majeure* during the fall of Mosul to ISIS in 2014²⁰¹. Threatened to fall to ISIS in 2014, the Peshmerga forces took the opportunity to seize and control Kirkuk, in addition to most of the disputed territories listed in article 140, a fact which Baghdad refuses to acknowledge²⁰². This also partly explains the central Iraqi authorities' opposition on including the area of Kirkuk in the 2017 independence referendum²⁰³. Yet, even if the dispute about the Kirkuk oilfields, as well as those oil-fields located on the main territory of the region of Iraqi Kurdistan, was to be resolved, this would not imply easy export routes for Kurdish oil and gas products²⁰⁴. Furthermore, Stansfield adds that in the unlikely case that Kirkuk would be included into official KRI territory any support by the Arab population for Kurdish independence would evaporate²⁰⁵.

2.2. *Who attempts separatism?*

When talking about *who attempts separatism* there are several different aspects which need to be taken into account. First, various elements and characteristics of the group

¹⁹⁸ Hanna, *The Lind in the Sand*

¹⁹⁹ Otterman, Beehner, *Drafting a Constitution*. For more details on the economic aspects of separatism and in particular of oil please see the section on economic aspects in this chapter.

²⁰⁰ "Iraqi Constitution"; Romano, *Challenges of Autonomy*; Article 140 introduced a timeframe and itinerary until which the question of disputed territories should be mutually agreed upon by the KRG and Baghdad without success so that the issues remains unresolved

²⁰¹ Stansfield, *The Kurdish Experience in Post-Saddam Iraq*, 370

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Marina Ottaway and Ottaway, "How the Kurds Got Their Way. Economic Cooperation and the Middle East's New Borders", *Foreign Affairs*, 2014, accessed June 3, 2018 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2014-04-17/how-kurds-got-their-way>

²⁰⁴ Hiltermann, *To Protect or to Project*

²⁰⁵ Stansfield, *The Kurdish Experience in Post-Saddam Iraq*, 373f.

or nation, shall be described and presented as preconditions to separatism. This will then be followed by an in-depth analysis of the individual characteristics of the main figures as well as their leadership capacities. As will be demonstrated, the leaders have significant influence in shaping and guiding the separatist movement, though their impact on the success of a separatist attempt remains difficult to judge.

2.2.1. Cultural heterogeneity and the power of ideology

The existence of cultural heterogeneity, i.e. the presence of different ethnicities within a state does not only seem to be a central condition for separatism to occur in the first place, but it also seems to increase the consciousness of identity and/or ethnicity²⁰⁶. The increased perception of identity, whether based on racial factors such as ethnicity and historical characteristics, whether socially constructed by group leaders or even politically invented²⁰⁷, creates “a peculiar bond among persons that causes them to consider themselves a group distinguishable from others”²⁰⁸.

However, similarly to the condition of geography and unique territory, the mere existence of perceived ethnic differences is not enough for a separatist movement to occur. On the contrary, it is rather the resulting feeling of solidarity within a group, which makes the difference²⁰⁹. Due to the different *use* of identities, the relationship of various groups will be altered in times of change, modifying historic relationships of superordinate and subordinate statuses and projecting them to the center of discussion²¹⁰. The increased awareness of asymmetric historical relationships may also be exacerbated by modern technologies and other methods of communication leading to a common perception of threat and/ or opportunity between different nations within a state²¹¹. Modern technologies have not only facilitated the spread of (mis)information about other groups, but also made the direct comparison among them

²⁰⁶ Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework

²⁰⁷ Here, once again the point shall be stressed that the concept of identity and ethnicity is a very fluid concept. In fact, people may have multiple identities and change their political association regularly – Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, New York: Verso, 2006.

²⁰⁸ Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework, 114 according to Enloe C.H. (1973). *Ethnic Conflict and Political Development*. Boston: Little Brown. Pp: 15.

²⁰⁹ Mayall, Simpson, Ethnicity is not Enough; Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework, 116

²¹⁰ The relationship between specific nations may have perceived various changes over the course of history, depending on conquests, colonialization, etc.

²¹¹ Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework

easier²¹². In addition, where the group solidarity based on ethnicity²¹³, it is often supported by an underlying ideology, which in most cases manifests itself in some form of nationalism, i.e. the idea that a group declares itself to be worthy of its own state²¹⁴. Difficulties arise due to the fact that nationalism in practice it can mean “all things to all alienated people”²¹⁵ and is therefore often (mis)used by group leaders to push separatist attempts²¹⁶.

Numerous scholars around the world²¹⁷ agree on the fact that Kurds share a distinct society, culture and homeland²¹⁸. Even so, no exact beginning of their origins and history can be found as they are a product of at least four thousand years of evolution and a product of mingling of different tribes in the area²¹⁹. The name “Kurd” was first used in the 7th century AD to describe a group of nomads living in the mountainous region of Northern Iraq, while the term “Kurdistan” first appears in the 12th century, when the Turkish Seljuk prince Saandjar created a province with this specific name²²⁰. The Kurds of the 20th century differentiate themselves from the other main ethnic groups of the region, i.e. the Arabs, Persians and Turks through their language, way of life and folklore²²¹.

Especially their common language, a characteristic which can be easily observed, acts as a link bringing the group closer together and allowing them to construct a feeling of distinctness²²². Stansfield, too, underlines that the factor of language explicitly contributed to a feeling of disunity from the rest of the country²²³. Not surprisingly there have been various attempts to characterize the Kurdish language

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ As already outlined in several instances before, ethnicity is most commonly but not always the reuniting aspect for a group. However, as it is the underlying factor in the Kurdish case study I took the deliberate decision to exclude all other motivations to get together, such as network theories, et. al explicitly from the theory as it does not contribute to the understanding of the Kurdish separatist movement.

²¹⁴ Kasfir, Explaining Ethnic Political Participation; Doyle, Introduction, 2

²¹⁵ Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework, 123

²¹⁶ Anderson, Imagined Communities

²¹⁷ Amir Hassanpour, “The Kurdish Experience”, *Middle East Research and Information Project*, 189, (1994): 2-7 +23; McDowell, Modern history of the Kurds; Stansfield, Yildiz and many others

²¹⁸ Hassanpour, The Kurdish Experience: 2; McDowell, Modern history of the Kurds

²¹⁹ Yildiz, the Kurds in Iraq, 7

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Jwaideh, The Kurdish National Movement

²²² Günther Deschner, *Saladins Söhne: Die Kurden – Das betrogene Volk*, München: Droemer Knauer, 1983.

²²³ Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan, 26

as a mere dialect of Arabic, Turkish or Persian by the different central governments since the beginning²²⁴. However, various authors argue that after two centuries of international research it has been determined, without doubt, that the Kurdish language is independent and originated in the North-West of Iran²²⁵. Nevertheless, concerns arise in light of the fact that there is still not systemized written and spoken standard, which continues to make the communication among different dialectic groupings difficult²²⁶.

Just like the uniting factor of language is commonly debated in the scholarly literature, so is it with regards to religion. Just like language, the Kurds do also not have a homogenous religion which can act as a uniting factor²²⁷. The majority of Kurds are Sunni Muslims who adhere to the Shafi'i school of thought and who converted between the 12th and the 16th century²²⁸. Interestingly, although the Kurds have been described as greatly devoted to Islam, they have done so in a very personal manner, attributing it little importance in a political or socially unifying sense²²⁹. In addition, there is also a large number of other religious affiliations such as Christians, Jews, Yazidis or Alevis in Iraqi Kurdistan²³⁰. Today, the Yazidis define their identity to be Kurdish with pride despite all cultural and religious differences and having been prosecuted by their Muslim counterparts for a long time. Many of them today also occupy important government positions²³¹.

Yet, although Kurdish society itself is not homogenous and is defined by an internally complex social structure, differences in politics and a great number of dialects; today there exists widespread recognition of the fact that the Kurds constitute one of the largest stateless nations around the world²³². Not at last since the Algiers Agreement and the an-Anfal campaign, the structural discrimination and destruction of the Kurdish infrastructure has also demonstrated the Kurds their exposure and

²²⁴ Aqrabi, *The End of Empires*

²²⁵ Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iraq*; Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*

²²⁶ Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*, 37

²²⁷ Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*, 38

²²⁸ Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*, 38 according to Bruinessen: 80%; McDowell, *Modern history of the Kurds* argues for 85%

²²⁹ Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*, 38; "The Time of the Kurds"

²³⁰ Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iraq*, 8f.

²³¹ Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*, 39f.

²³² "The Time of the Kurds"

vulnerability to the central Iraqi government. These emotions experienced have, consequently, contributed to the creation of a feeling of solidarity among the Kurds²³³. Since the 19th century, have Kurdish chronicles and poems with their transmission of a perception of struggle and survival influenced the culture of the Middle East²³⁴. In addition, mainly but not exclusively because of their size²³⁵, the impact of the Kurds on the other ethnic groups in the region and the Iraqi society itself needs to be highlighted as significant and can in fact be described as a mutually reinforcing relationship constructing both Kurdish as well as Iraqi identities²³⁶.

Yet, despite this close relationship between the two nations and in light of the uncountable attempts to downplay the importance of the size and role of the Kurdish minorities²³⁷, King Faisal noted in 1932:

“With my heart filled with sadness, I have to say that it is my belief that there is no Iraqi people inside Iraq. There are only diverse groups with no national sentiments. They are filled with superstitious and false religious traditions with no common grounds between them. They easily accept rumors and are prone to chaos, prepared always to revolt against any government²³⁸.”

The early appearance of Kurdish nationalism has supported this fact. Kurdish nationalism can be traced back to the language and literature of the 17th century when the society was still largely based on agriculture and tribal structures²³⁹ and Greater Kurdistan was developing independently under the rule of Kurdish principalities²⁴⁰. This situation of relative independence changed when the land was divided under Ottoman and Persian spheres of interest, and writers such as Ahmad-e Khani, Ehmedê Xanî or Haji Qadiri Koyi reacted to the destruction and suffering of their peoples²⁴¹. For example, Khani did not categorize the Kurds as a religious community anymore

²³³ McDowell, Modern history of the Kurds; “The time of the Kurds”; Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan

²³⁴ Jwaideh, The Kurdish National Movement

²³⁵ 25% of the total Iraqi population, i.e. 4 million people, is of Kurdish origin. Yet, it is difficult to estimate how many Kurds really live in the region of Greater Kurdistan, as many countries do not allow censuses based on ethnic identity (Yildiz, the Kurds in Iraq:9).

²³⁶ Martin Bunton, “From Developmental Nationalism to the End of Nation-State in Iraq?” *Third World Quarterly*, 29/3, (2008):631-646

²³⁷ Yildiz, The Kurds in Iraq, 9

²³⁸ Ali Khedery, “Iraq in Pieces. Breaking Up to Stay Together”, *Foreign Affairs*, 2015: 34, accessed June 6, 2018. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iraq/2015-09-22/iraq-pieces>

²³⁹ The key importance of tribal structures will be explained in detail in Chapter II.5 Hassanpour, the Kurdish Experience

²⁴⁰ In fact, Sharaf Khan compiled in 1597 the first history of Kurdistan *Sharafnameh*, outlining the degree of independence by the various Kurdish states. It written in Persian. Hassanpour, the Kurdish Experience, 3.

²⁴¹ Hassanpour, the Kurdish Experience; Aqrabi, the End of Empires

but rather regarded them as an ethnic community lacking a king to form “an independent kingdom”²⁴². Also, Xanî mentions the Kurds as a distinct nation and spreads the words of national interest²⁴³. Despite the influence of Khani and Koyî, who strongly criticized those neglecting the destiny of the Kurdish people and encouraged the use of the Kurdish language, in fact social forces were not strong enough to translate these desires by the elites into political parties and platforms until the 1940s²⁴⁴.

It is this translation of a political idea and nationalist feelings into a *de facto* political movement which also Wood emphasizes as significant. Just as Friedrich Nietzsche said: “Madness is rare in individuals – but in groups, parties, nations and ages it is the rule”²⁴⁵. Ethnic heterogeneity and nationalism remain unused as long as there is no central organization of a specific group²⁴⁶. “The development of a successful secessionist movement ordinarily follows the logic of existing institutional growth and opportunity”²⁴⁷. In light of the fact that also a national group is by far not homogenous, it is extremely important that a coordinated structure be developed, which succeeds to include generational, religious, economic or other conflicts²⁴⁸. It can be argued that Wood hereby refers to what Hechter summarizes under the importance concept of “group identity”, namely the idea that an individual self-identifies with a group and recognizes itself as a member of this group²⁴⁹. A nation attempting to separate from a larger state must have common interests of production and/ or consumption as only then it will be capable of collective decision making²⁵⁰.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, the first significant organized attempt to break with the old feudal structures and the construct of the Iraqi monarchy occurred in 1942 with the formation of the Society for the Revival of Kurdistan (Komala), the foundation of the KDP in 1945 and the proclamation of the Republic of Mahabad in 1946 in Iran²⁵¹. There, the Kurdish resistance created a distinct flag, a national army, decided upon a

²⁴² Hassanpour, the Kurdish Experience, 3 according to Ahmad-e Khani (1651-1706)

²⁴³ Aqravi, the End of Empires, 55

²⁴⁴ Hassanpour, the Kurdish Experience, 4

²⁴⁵ Aphorism 56, Chapter IV, Friedrich Nietzsche

²⁴⁶ Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework, 124

²⁴⁷ Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework, 124

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Pavkoviv, Radan, Creating New States, 186

²⁵⁰ Hechter, the Dynamics of Secession

²⁵¹ Hassanpour, the Kurdish Experience

president and a cabinet, in addition to establishing Kurdish as the official language²⁵². The formation of the Republic of Mahabad demonstrated for the first time the importance of political organization, from which several political parties were also initiated in Iraq, Syria and Turkey²⁵³. This also gave the Iraqi Kurds one of the first opportunities to self-identify with the movement and the resulting nationalism would then also be used in future attempts of group organization, most significantly with the formation of the government of the Kurdistan region of Iraq, constituted for the first time in 1992.

Finally, a somewhat different attempt to explain the creation of nationalism and the importance of ideology to separatist movements is offered by Smith. He explains that the formation of narratives based on cultural distinctness used for separatism are formed by the bureaucracy of a state, its focus on education, efficiency and the use of technology²⁵⁴. As this form of state organization is based on uniformity and homogeneity, using the dominant culture to exercise power over the whole country, those stemming from a minority group are increasingly faced with discrimination²⁵⁵. It is this process in which in particular the well-educated part of the minority, will turn away from the center in an attempt to fulfil their ambitions by reorienting themselves towards their own community²⁵⁶. This reorientation is based on an ethnic revival of the past, in which the narrative of cultural distinctness and the common history is used to argue for an independent state²⁵⁷. Examples of marginalization by the central state bureaucracy in the Iraqi Kurdish case are numerous; for example, Bunton (2008) argues that during the 1960s financial credits and machinery for agricultural purposes were increasingly distributed according to client networks close to the Ba'athist regime and Saddam Hussein, increasing the material incentives wherever they sought to consolidate their alliances²⁵⁸. It can, therefore, be concluded that as a result of the policies of discrimination the Iraqi Kurds and due to the decrease of funds for redistribution policies, the Kurds organized various rebellions, especially between

²⁵² The importance of the middle class in the Kurdish separatist movement will be analyzed below.

²⁵³ Hassanpour, *The Kurdish Experience*

²⁵⁴ Smith, *Theory of Ethnic Separatism*

²⁵⁵ Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*; Smith, *Theory of Ethnic Separatism*

²⁵⁶ Pavkovic, Radan, *Creating New States*, 181f.

²⁵⁷ Smith, *Theory of Ethnic Separatism*— this is comparable to what Wood calls the creation of ideology and in particular nationalism

²⁵⁸ Bunton, *Developmental Nationalism*, 639

1961 and 1975, and continuously reoriented themselves away from Baghdad, towards Erbil ²⁵⁹.

2.2.2. Personal factors, psychology

The authors Hechter, Horowitz, Smith and Wood disagree on what exactly influences a separatist movement's decision making and whether it can be primarily based on group dynamics or on the motivation of individuals. While Smith and Horowitz base their analyses on the perception that decision making depends on economic interests of the whole group, i.e. is made according to group identities²⁶⁰, Hechter focuses on the individual's best interest²⁶¹ and Woods abstains to make any attributions²⁶². This chapter shall focus on the individual's personal components and their impact on separatism.

For this purpose, Hechter introduces the model of rational choice into the context of separatism, focusing on the private interests of each individual²⁶³. Individuals, he argues, need to believe in the relative increase of their private interests through separatism, which can be defined as a particular set of preferences in terms of economic gains. Each individual living on the designated territory, their leaders as well as the leaders of the host state, need to determine that separatism is less costly and, therefore, more beneficial than the current situation²⁶⁴. It is not enough that the cost-benefit ratio of the individuals of a specific nation, which decide to separate from the larger state, is positive, but it must also include the calculation and analysis of the leaders of the host state²⁶⁵. Serious problems arise, however, trying to gather reliable data on this issue, which makes predictions impossible²⁶⁶.

Besides the difficulty of calculating the rational factors of economic gains, also another significant criterion namely the emotions of the individuals remains largely unexplored. Wood argues that "psychological predispositions such as ethnocentrism,

²⁵⁹ In order to prevent repetition, the relationship between the state bureaucracy, i.e. the central authorities in Baghdad, and its people, especially the Kurds shall be described in Chapter II.5 as part of the political and social structure (Smith, Theory of Ethnic Separatism)

²⁶⁰ Donald L. Horowitz, "Patterns of Ethnic Separatism", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23/2 (1981): 165-195; Horowitz, Ethnic Groups in Conflict; Smith, Theory of Ethnic Separatism

²⁶¹ Hechter, the Dynamics of Secession

²⁶² Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework

²⁶³ Hechter, the Dynamics of Secession

²⁶⁴ Pavkovic, Radan, Creating New States, 187

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Hechter, the Dynamics of Secession, 267

xenophobia, the territorial imperative or other drivers which lie at the root of human conflict”²⁶⁷ also significantly impact separatism. The wish for an independent homeland is often triggered by the deep-human desire for security and self-protection, but also by possessiveness and jealousy towards other nations within the larger state²⁶⁸. The personal and almost secret aspect of these conditions complicates the assessment of individuals during the process of shaping and leading separatist movements²⁶⁹.

Finally, it is the “political entrepreneurship of secessionist leaders [...] [that] brings secessionist preconditions to life”²⁷⁰. Indeed, it is when individuals decide to take advantage of social gaps, exploit them and use them for their own means that separatism will prosper. The tools of propaganda, civil disobedience, demonstrations et. al. are used by leaders in an attempt to gain as much publicity as possible and wear down the central government²⁷¹. It is, therefore, no surprise that modern means of communications have facilitated this work widely but also further triggered free-riding²⁷². It also needs to be taken into account that modern forms of terrorism have become more and more popular amongst separatist leaders to gather support for their cause²⁷³.

Individual leaders of separatism are most likely to be supported by the middle class of an ethnic group²⁷⁴. This is due to the fact that the actions of these leaders are likely to only benefit the small number of people which has the educational skills to do the bureaucratic work²⁷⁵. It is, therefore, the middle class whose chances are the highest to improve their socio-economic status²⁷⁶. Indeed, the importance of the Kurdish middle class can be easily observed in the 1950s, when newly-freed peasants

²⁶⁷ Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework, 120

²⁶⁸ The desire for security and self-protection can be either based on historical experiences of human rights violations or the immanent fear of what might happen (Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework)

²⁶⁹ Pavkovic, Radan, Creating New States, 187 according to Hechter, the Dynamics of Secession

²⁷⁰ Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework, 123f.

²⁷¹ Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework, 123

²⁷² The idea of free-riding is often named as obstacle in this context as it appears that individuals prefer to refrain from action, knowing that others will perform for them and they can collect the benefits regardless (Hechter, the Dynamics of Secession)

²⁷³ Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework

²⁷⁴ See also Chapter II.3 and II.5 on the importance of the middle class. Smith, Theory of Ethnic Separatism

²⁷⁵ Hechter, the Dynamics of Secession

²⁷⁶ Pavkovic, Radan, Creating New States, 187

moved into Kurdish cities and a modern bourgeoisie with professionals emerged²⁷⁷. Education facilitated the incorporation into urban life, not only for men but also for women and many of the new workers joined the social bases of the KDP²⁷⁸. The importance of the middle class in the formation of the separatist movement continues to be key even today.

The importance of so-called charismatic leaders has been researched in-depth numerous times throughout history with varying results²⁷⁹. Similarly, also in the case of Iraqi Kurdistan their impact is ambiguous. Probably one of the first times that the importance of a single leader for the Kurds became apparent was in the late 17th century, when Ahmad-e Khani outlined the importance of a king in order to be able to unite all Kurds under one Kurdish kingdom²⁸⁰. The lack of such a uniting king, e.g. after the death of King Faisal, can be taken as clear example how a region can be overwhelmed by factionalism and loss of direction²⁸¹.

Two of the most prominent figures of the modern Iraqi Kurdish separatist movement, Mullah Mustafa Barzani and Masoud Barzani, have belonged to one of the most influential tribes in the region²⁸². Yet, the Barzani tribe was not a constituting tribe but composed by various different ones, who accepted the superiority of the Sheikhs of Barzan in political and religious questions²⁸³. The leadership of the Kurdish movement arose as part of the military and civil administration²⁸⁴.

The nucleus of resistance against the central Iraqi state formed immediately after the defeat experienced at Lausanne, with Mullah Mustafa Barzani, the younger brother of the Sheikh of Barzan, emerging as their principle leader²⁸⁵. Known as a traditionalist tribal leader, a powerful and charismatic politician and famous for his courageous struggles against the Iraqi army, the Kurdish middle-class trusted Barzani

²⁷⁷ Hassanpour, the Kurdish Experience

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ For example: Archie Brown, *The myth of the strong leader: political leadership in the modern age*, London: Vintage Books, 2015

²⁸⁰ Aqrawi, the End of Empires, 55 according to Ahmad-e Khani

²⁸¹ Yildiz, the Kurds in Iraq, 15

²⁸² A full list of tribes can be found in Aqrawi, the End of Empires, 63. The importance of tribal leaders for the Kurdish and Iraqi society can be found in Chapter II.5.

²⁸³ Aqrawi, the End of Empires, 63, Thomas Bois, *The Kurds*, Beirut: Khayat Book & Publishing Company S.A.L (1966): 32-37.

²⁸⁴ Hassanpour, the Kurdish Experience

²⁸⁵ Sluglett, Common Sense, 328

that he would represent their interests and would not give in to rising revolts by the peasants²⁸⁶. As a first real attempt to lead the Kurds, he initiated his political career in the beginning of the 1940s by organizing revolts in his home region of Barzan, for which he was subsequently exiled. Through rebellions like these, he contributed significantly to the establishment of a Kurdish nation²⁸⁷. In addition, despite being in exile over ten years in the Soviet Union based on his leading role during the Republic of Mahabad from 1943 to 1945, Barzani returned after the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy in 1958²⁸⁸. Yet, in light of the fact that also the new regime had no particular commitment to resolving the Kurdish question and in fact marginalized the Kurds even further, fighting once again broke out in 1961 and continued almost uninterruptedly until 1975²⁸⁹. Barzani's leadership and power was questioned more than once during this period by the politburo of the KDP, which is why Barzani mobilized the Peshmerga and replaced the leadership of the KDP with a more loyal politburo²⁹⁰. The resulting split would define the Iraqi Kurdish movement until the 1970s, when Barzani finally succeeded in negotiating the 1970 March Agreement with the Ba'ath regime. Yet, Baghdad once again failed to implement the agreement, making Barzani receptive to US, Israeli and Iranian offers to support the Kurds in their rebellion against the government²⁹¹. With Baghdad launching a military offensive against the Kurds in 1974, the foreign powers withdrew their support and the struggle collapsed. Consequently, Barzani left again for Iran and died in 1979 in the US²⁹². The impact of Mullah Mustafa Barzani's leadership is still clearly visible today, not only because he founded the KDP at the Republic of Mahabad but also because he laid the ground stone for federalism with the 1970 March Agreement²⁹³. In fact, he also first institutionalized the Iraqi Kurdish separatist movement, by employing "quasi diplomats, i.e. Kurdish students" to study in the US and in Europe and represent the rebellion²⁹⁴.

²⁸⁶ Hassanpour, *the Kurdish Experience*

²⁸⁷ It is often argued that the development of Kurdistan was only made possible due to the strong support by the Soviet Union (1981). For more information on the influence of foreign intervention please see Chapter II.3

²⁸⁸ Hassanpour, *the Kurdish Experience*

²⁸⁹ Sluglett, *Common Sense*, 329

²⁹⁰ Hassanpour, *the Kurdish Experience*, 5

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² Sluglett, *Common Sense*, 330

²⁹³ Stansfield, *the Kurdish Experience in Post-Saddam Iraq*

²⁹⁴ Renad Mansour, "In Pursuit of Friends: The Kurdish Region of Iraq's Foreign Affairs and Diplomacy", In *The Kurdish Question Revisited*, edited by Gareth Stansfield and Mohammed Shareef, London: Hurst & Company (2017): 449-463

A key result of the defeat of the Kurdish rebellion in 1974/75 and the previous struggles within the KDP was the fracturing of the party into Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and KDP in 1976, with Ibrahim Ahmad and Jalal Talabani taking over the PUK and Barzani remaining the head of the KDP²⁹⁵. With Mullah Mustafa Barzani's death only three years later, the KDP party leadership was then taken over by his son Masoud. The relative success of the split between the two parties and the resulting strength of each of them, encouraged both to soon resume the struggle²⁹⁶. The groups Barzani and Talabani presided over were largely defined by territory and ideological schools. Barzani took over the Kurmanji speaking district in the Northwest while Talabani was primarily based in the Surani speaking Northeast²⁹⁷. In addition, Barzani's leadership followed the traditional style of his father, who had symbolized the old-fashioned tribal Kurdish identity, while Talabani followed a more progressive political line²⁹⁸. In the meantime, struggles within the PUK between Ahmad and Talabani had continued until Talabani finally came to dominate over his critics: the PUK was soon to be described as "overshadowed by the personality of Talabani"²⁹⁹.

It is no surprise that both leading figures aimed for office during the first ever regional elections held in 1992. Due to the closeness of the vote (both achieved 50%), they decided to share the leadership of the KRG³⁰⁰. Since then, the rivalry between the two has more than once seriously threatened the survival of the KRG. For example, during the Kurdish civil war (1994-1997) Talabani invited Iranian troops over the border and Barzani called Baghdad for help³⁰¹. It is, therefore, almost surprising that they agreed on a seemingly fierce common position while drafting the new Iraqi 2005 constitution, as the US draft by Paul L Bremer III had envisioned a much weaker form of federalism³⁰².

²⁹⁵ Sluglett, *Common Sense*, 330; Hassanpour, *the Kurdish Experience*

²⁹⁶ With the help of foreign countries (Hassanpour, *the Kurdish Experience*)

²⁹⁷ Sluglett, *Common Sense*

²⁹⁸ *Ibd.*

²⁹⁹ Hassanpour, *the Kurdish Experience*, 6

³⁰⁰ Yet, neither of them would personally participate in the government but rather lead their parties instead (Sluglett, *Common Sense*, 332)

³⁰¹ *Ibd.*

³⁰² The initial draft envisioned even the dissolution of the Peshmerga forces. Stansfield, *the Kurdish Experience in Post-Saddam Iraq*, 359f.

It can be concluded that the design of the current constitution, with power being split between the central Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, is to a certain degree the work of Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani. As a result, Talabani became president of Iraq in 2005³⁰³. Masoud Barzani, on the other hand, remained within regional sphere of politics and became president of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Yet, under his leadership the region entered a deep political crisis³⁰⁴, based on the fact that he unilaterally extended his term in office by more than three years and there was no replacement mechanism set in place to ease the transition. The popular distrust into the KRG's democratic ambitions was further deepened on the grounds that it had been Barzani's personal decision to remain in power, leading to sharp protests against the leadership³⁰⁵³⁰⁶. Based on increased domestic pressure³⁰⁷, initiated by rising disputes and a genuine interest by large parts of the population to become independent³⁰⁸, Barzani was *forced* to deliver a referendum³⁰⁹. He had always flirted with secession³¹⁰: already in 2010 he declared that one day the Kurds might declare independence:

“This is our right on which we should always insist and give it time as well. Our generation or the next generation will probably see this wish coming true. God willing, this right should be achieved one day. But this will not happen by force, violence, gun or war. This should happen through mutual understanding and peace”³¹¹.

Yet, he had never acted on these temptations³¹². It can be further concluded that Barzani was an emotion-driven leader. He genuinely feared for the survival of his people; “The Shia fear past repressions, the Sunnis fear future repression and

³⁰³ Sluglett, *Common Sense*

³⁰⁴ Stansfield, *the Kurdish Experience in Post-Saddam Iraq*

³⁰⁵ Mansour, *In Pursuit of Friends*

³⁰⁶ The internal crisis by the KRG stands in contrast to strong foreign appearance and confidence on the international stage: as the KDP and the PUK were put on the US list for terrorist organizations, Barzani did not accept the invitation to Washington in return (Mohammed Shareef, “A Paradigm Shift in US-Kurdistan Region of Iraq Relations Post-2014: The Evolution to a Strategic Partnership” In *The Kurdish Question Revisited*, edited by Gareth Stansfield and Mohammed Shareef, London: Hurst & Company (2017): 468

³⁰⁷ Saideman argues that politicians are primarily concerned with gaining and maintaining office. This can also clearly be observed here (Saideman, *Explaining International Relations*)

³⁰⁸ Motivation for separatism is often based on emotions (Saideman, *Explaining International Relations*)

³⁰⁹ Indeed, it was his decision to include the disputed territories into the 2017 independence referendum (Stansfield, *the Kurdish Experience in Post-Saddam Iraq*).

³¹⁰ Stansfield argues that Barzani never envisioned the Kurds as loyal Iraqis alongside the Sunni and Shia Arabs (Stansfield, *the Kurdish Experience in Post-Saddam Iraq*).

³¹¹ Romano, *Challenges of Autonomy*

³¹² Stansfield, *the Kurdish Experience in Post-Saddam Iraq*

we Kurds fear both”³¹³. In addition, he was motivated by a deep-rooted desire for security: “A friend asked Barzani whether he was seeking federalism – the president of the KRG replied that it was security which he was after – federalism, he said, is just a word. It is indeed security that the Kurds need and covet”³¹⁴.

In light of the importance that can be attributed to Mullah Mustafa Barzani, Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, it is surprising that there have been hardly any structural attempts to analyze the impact of the three most important political figures of modern Kurdish politics. To conclude, it is important to point out that this analysis was focused on the psychology and motivation of those individuals that define and make up the separatist movements. This shall by no means imply that the central government might not be guided by the same human motivations, for example the desire for security, etc.³¹⁵. In fact, Hechter has emphasized this point throughout his analysis³¹⁶. This becomes clearly visible when he outlines the possibilities of suppressing separatism in the first place, which, according to him, effective leaders of the host state have every intention to do³¹⁷. It is no surprise that Saddam Hussein plays one of the most important roles in this context³¹⁸.

2.3. Economic Factors

The theoretical debate of the economic factors underlying and influencing separatist movements is to a large extent shaped by the idea or the perception of relative economic deprivation of a specific nation, i.e. the fact that one group regards itself to be relatively worse-off³¹⁹ than others within the state. This economic “worse-off”

³¹³ Khedery, *Iraqi In Pieces*, 38

³¹⁴ Hiltermann, *To Protect or to Project*

³¹⁵ Wood, *A Comparative Analytical Framework*

³¹⁶ Hechter, *the Dynamics of Secession*

³¹⁷ As has been outlined in Chapter I, Hechter argues that an effective central government of a host state is a precondition for separatism. Any other cases of the creation of new states, with no effective government left in the host state, shall therefore be regarded as state fragmentation (Hechter, *the Dynamics of Secession*, 277; Pavkovic, Radan, *Creating New States*)

³¹⁸ A full analysis of the individual of Saddam Hussein reaches beyond the scope of this thesis. Several authors, such as Efraim Karsh, Inari Rautsi, and Said Aburish have extensively researched his role in Iraqi politics.

³¹⁹ This theory also works the other way around in which a group which is relatively better-off does not want to share resources etc. with the other one.

situation is not only defined through economic numbers such as relative income, trade dependence, net inflows and outflows from the region to the host state, the level of decentralization³²⁰, the level and control over resources or access to education³²¹, but also the degree of development and in particular the *speed* of development highly depends on the relative distribution of power and resources among the various groups. Therefore, Hechter as well as other authors argue that separatism will always be attempted once the population perceives it as economically beneficial³²². In light of the fact that not all economically poor regions around the world attempt to secede from their larger state, while many economic prosperous regions do, however, also in this case it soon becomes apparent that disproportionate distribution alone does not trigger separatism.

Wood, for example, argues that it is the combination of economic deprivation together with the sudden reversal of economic expectations or the struggle over control over certain resources, which sparks separatist movements³²³. This frustration is further intensified by the perception that the core of a state is exploiting the periphery³²⁴. Horowitz, on the other hand, rather follows the argument commonly used by separatist movements, which represents the idea that economic deprivation is to a large extent the result of ethnic discrimination. “Ethnic groups within a state [...] compare themselves with other groups in terms of worth and legitimacy”³²⁵. The higher the level of education and therefore the level of income and the influence over political as well as economic resources, the higher is the status of a specific group³²⁶. In light of increased group anxiety, when the idea that available resources will be lost or that a group’s status can be enhanced through separatism, it is indeed likely to emerge³²⁷.

³²⁰ Milica Zarkovic Bookman, *The Economics of Secession*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992; Pavkovic, Radan, *Creating New States*

³²¹ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “The Political Economy of Secession” 2002, accessed April 29, 2018 <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~ball0144/self-det.pdf>

³²² Ibid.; Hechter, *The Dynamics of Secession*

³²³ Wood, *A Comparative Analytical Framework* 116

³²⁴ Hechter, *The Dynamics of Secession*; Wood, *A Comparative Analytical Framework*; Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-systems Analysis: an introduction*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2004. Note: the world-systems theory by Immanuel Wallerstein has introduced the debate of economic development between the center and the periphery into the common development discourse.

³²⁵ Horowitz, *Patterns of Ethnic Separatism*; Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*; Pavkovic, Radan, *Creating New States*, 183

³²⁶ Horowitz, *Patterns of Ethnic Separatism*; Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*

³²⁷ Ibid.

In Horowitz' article on *Patterns of Ethnic Separatism* (1981) he also distinguishes between four relative economic situations, in which separatism is likely to manifest itself. Together with prominent examples, they are displayed in table 1.

	“Backward” groups ³²⁸	“Advanced” groups ³²⁹
Economically “backward” region	Kurdistan, South Sudan, Bengalis in Pakistan, Chechens in Russia	Tamils in Sri Lanka, Ibo in Nigeria, Lozi in Zambia
Economically “advanced” Region	Bakonjo in Uganda, Lunda in Zaire	Catalans in Spain, South Tyrolese in Italy, Yoruba in Nigeria

Figure 1: Separatist movements according to economic and regional position³³⁰

Horowitz assigned the region of Iraqi Kurdistan to the category of “backward groups” in economically “backward” regions. In his analysis, he outlines that these nations³³¹ will attempt to secede *rather* early after the independence of the state³³², as the discriminated nations realize that they cannot compete with more prosperous nations in a single market, with a single currency and a single bureaucracy³³³. While this observation is restricted to the category of “backward groups” in economically “backward regions”, this assumption is also reflected in his general observations³³⁴ under which separatism is likely to arise. Particularly in his book *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* Horowitz explains the general conditions of separatism. There, he argues that separatism will take place as soon as one group is hindered from applying any sort of

³²⁸ Backward groups are defined by the lack of educational and professional achievements and the resulting relatively lower income per capita than the average of a state. They are often described as ignorant and unmotivated (Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 233).

³²⁹ Advanced groups are defined by the number of graduates from secondary schools and universities, as well as their sector of employment and the resulting relatively higher income per capita than the average of a particular state. Members of this group regard themselves as motivated and intelligent (Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 233).

³³⁰ Horowitz, *Patterns of Ethnic Separatism*, 171

³³¹ „these nations” is referring to the category of “backward groups” in economically “backward” regions. A detailed description of the other three groups can be found in Horowitz, *Patterns of Ethnic Separatism*, 170-191 and Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 141-184

³³² This refers to independence from a colonial power. This argument is also supported by Stephen M. Saideman, *Explaining the International Relations*, 729

³³³ Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*; Pavkovic, Radan, *Creating New States*, 183f.

³³⁴ The book referred to is Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 95ff.

influence on the elites of a state³³⁵. In addition, this can especially be observed when the state is ruled by dictatorial regimes or single rule by one party over the rest of the country. Separatism is then, further speed up, once violence breaks out and threatens the survival of a specific ethnic group as assimilation and large-scale migration are used to undermine the nation³³⁶. With regards to the moment in time when separatism will arise, Horowitz adds once again that the category of “backward groups” in economically “backward” regions as well as “advanced regions” will attempt to secede earlier than advanced groups and that he expects that “backward groups” in economically “backward” regions will also try to separate earlier than any other group described³³⁷.

In light of the above, it is surprising that the economic situation of Iraqi Kurdistan is described as being rather similar to the rest of the country until the 1970s, with agriculture and oil representing the backbones of the economy³³⁸. Especially before 1975, the region was economically prosperous, providing regional markets such as Turkey or the Transcaucasus with its main agricultural products wheat, barley, cotton and tobacco³³⁹. Around 50% of the population was engaged in farming, livestock and agricultural production³⁴⁰³⁴¹. Despite agriculture being of such central importance to the development of Iraqi Kurdistan³⁴², however, oil has been taking up much of the researchers’ attention not only in recent years. Since the 1970s, a certain shift in importance towards the production of oil can be observed, as it represents Iraq’s and Iraqi Kurdistan’s main produced commodity and export product³⁴³. This trend has been additionally accelerated with the government securing its dominance and control

³³⁵ This also resembles the bureaucracy argument presented by Smith, *Theory of Ethnic Separatism*

³³⁶ Horowitz, *Patterns of Ethnic Separatism*; Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*; Pavkovic, Radan, *Creating New States*. Please also refer to Chapter II.2.

³³⁷ Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*; Pavkovic, Radan, *Creating New States*

³³⁸ Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*

³³⁹ Ibid. World Bank Group, “The Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Assessing the Economic and Social Impact of the Syrian Conflict and ISIS”, (2015):66, accessed May 28, 2018

<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/579451468305943474/pdf/958080PUB0Apri0PUBLIC09781464805486.pdf>

³⁴⁰ Yildiz, *the Kurds in Iraq*, 9

³⁴¹ Horowitz’ classification of the Kurds as “backward group”, therefore, seems unjustified in the 1970s. It is likely that he based his classification as “backward group” on the early 1980s, the years of increased marginalization and suppression, when he also wrote his texts and books.

³⁴² Many of the products such as fruits and vegetables were also oriented exclusively for domestic consumption and made an important contribution to food security in the region (Yildiz, *the Kurds in Iraq*)

³⁴³ Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*, 44ff.

over the resource and converting agricultural land into oil extraction sites³⁴⁴. Furthermore, deforestation not only caused severe environmental damage but also destroyed the timber production, pushing more workers into the oil industry³⁴⁵. The fact that Iraqi Kurdistan was always financially dependent on the distribution of oil revenue by the central Iraqi government, shaped not only the economic development of the region but also its separatist attempts by successfully creating a large middle-class dependent on the central government³⁴⁶.

The economic prosperity, which had secured the Iraqis and the Kurds a high standard of social services³⁴⁷ financed by oil revenues³⁴⁸, ended in 1975 with the Iran-Iraq war, the Algiers Agreement and the establishment of a 5-to-30-kilometer-wide forbidden zone close to the Iraqi-Turkish-Iranian border, from which all people were deported³⁴⁹. The situation was intensified by the destruction of all rural infrastructure and finally culminated in the chemical attacks of the an-Anfal campaign³⁵⁰. Indeed, with September of 1980 the region had become a war zone with landmines and chemical attacks making most of the land unviable for any agricultural purposes for many years to come³⁵¹. By the end of the an-Anfal campaign, the Kurdish agricultural sector was destroyed, being unable to compete with the cheap imports from the rest of Iraq³⁵².

Before the invasion of Kuwait in 1991, Iraqi Kurdistan was part of a middle-income country³⁵³, providing social services and food subsidies to its people as well as having with a strong currency³⁵⁴. What followed was a period of relative decline, intensified by the imposition of sanction on Iraqi Kurdistan, first by the UN on Iraq as a whole, then by the central government on the region of Iraqi Kurdistan. The UN

³⁴⁴ Joe Stork estimates that around 20% of the total arable land has been comprised by the oil industry (Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan).

³⁴⁵ WB, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 51

³⁴⁶ Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan. Stansfield is here referring to importance of the middle class described in Chapter II.2. and Chapter II.5

³⁴⁷ The standard was acknowledged to be among the highest in the Middle East

³⁴⁸ Petroleum products accounted for around 90% of Iraq's exports until the imposition of sanctions. Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan, 43

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ The economic impact of over 1,5 million people deported, 3,000 villages razed and between 150,000 and 200,000 people killed was tremendous (Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan; McDowell, Modern history of the Kurds)

³⁵¹ Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan, 45

³⁵² Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan

³⁵³ The GDP was around 3,000 USD per capita in 1991 (Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan)

³⁵⁴ Thereby making imports easily available to large parts of the society (*ibid.*)

sanctions imposed under Security Council Resolution (SCR) 661 on August 6, 1991 was a very effective sanctions regime, placing a total ban on all imports and exports of Iraq³⁵⁵. The lack of oil revenues lowered industrial production by more than 80% in the following years, putting more than 20% of the population in extreme poverty³⁵⁶. While the effects on the Iraqi economy were long-lasting, Iraqi Kurdistan conversely enjoyed an economic boom and the highest level of personal freedom in 20 years³⁵⁷. The sanctions put in place by the central government on Iraqi Kurdistan in 1992, was an attempt to force the Kurds into a political settlement, an opportunity to demonstrate the UN and the Western powers that Iraq could disobey their constraints and an effective policy to retain scarce resources in the Baghdad controlled territory of the country. Yet, this situation of relative independence from the central government, protected by the US-no-fly zone, enabled the Kurds a certain degree of economic progress. This was only compromised by the unstable political situation in Iraqi Kurdistan and the civil war of the 1990s³⁵⁸. Furthermore, the embargos inhibited the population to return to their villages but forced them to remain in the collective settlements³⁵⁹. The economic situation was only stabilized once international aid effort arrived, though it was not big enough to reach the whole of the population³⁶⁰. This is why many Kurds once again left the agricultural sector and resorted to short-term activities such as smuggling, collecting scrap metal and selling capital assets. The economic recession was most felt in the middle-class, whose dependency on government salaries had reached a critical level with around 70-80% of unemployment but who did not receive any incentive to return to agriculture³⁶¹.

After the end of the Kurdish civil war, the economy in Iraqi Kurdistan once again profited from the relative political stability and the imports of the oil-for-food program³⁶². As the central Iraqi government did not recognize the KRG administering

³⁵⁵ United Nations Security Council, “The Situation between Iraq-Kuwait Resolution 661 (1990) of 6 August 1990”, August 6, 1990, accessed June 13, 2018 <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/661>

³⁵⁶ Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan, 48

³⁵⁷ Ibid.: 48 according to Lawrence, D. (2000). Iraqi Kurds Enjoy a *De Facto* State. In: The Christian Science Monitor. Pp: 1.

³⁵⁸ Rudd, Humanitarian Intervention; Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan

³⁵⁹ Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan, 50

³⁶⁰ Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan, 53f.; Rudd, Humanitarian Intervention; McDowell, Modern History of the Kurds

³⁶¹ Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan, 53f.

³⁶² “Resolution 661”; “Resolution 687 (1991) of 3 April 1991”, UNSC, April 3, 1991, accessed June 13, 2018 <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/687>; “Resolution 706 (1991) of 15 August 1991”, UNSC,

the northern provinces, the UN initially distributed the supplies. It is important to keep in mind that although the oil-for-food program prevented a humanitarian catastrophe, it also created a new dependency within the economy³⁶³.

The development of the agricultural sector since the beginning of 2000 is somehow ambiguous, often increasing and decreasing again in importance. In 2014³⁶⁴ the total economy was estimated to grow around 3%. While this growth rate is still positive and comparably well for Western standards, it represents a sharp decline in comparison to the previous years of 8% and lies below the necessary level to keep up important infrastructure investments³⁶⁵. This growth is mainly based on the exploration of oil, with today more than 47 companies from 17 different countries operating in the area³⁶⁶. Projections of production are estimated to increase from 250,000 barrels a day in 2013 to 500,000-800,000 barrels per day in 2020³⁶⁷. Approximately USD 10 billions of foreign direct investments have also been made into the oil production of the KRI. In addition, private sector investments, in particular in the sectors of construction and services have also developed as important pillars for the KRI's economy, followed by agriculture³⁶⁸. Nevertheless, the World Bank still defines the Kurdish private sector as "largely underdeveloped"³⁶⁹.

Due to the KRG's stability and security since 2005, the region has been regarded as secure gateway to the whole of Iraq and is preferred as a strategic location for investment. The KRI also outperforms the rest of the country in terms of business climate. Yet, while this growth is largely supported by public spending, the large

August 15, 1991, accessed June 13, 2018 <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/706>; "Resolution 712 (1991) of 19 September 1991", UNSC, September 19, 1991, accessed June 13, 2018

<http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/712>

³⁶³ Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan

³⁶⁴ The last substantial report on the economy in the Kurdistan region of Iraq was published in 2015 by the World Bank and contains the economic data up until 2014. Since then, general observations can be made about the development of the economy and the impact of the migrant crisis, but no official recordings are available.

³⁶⁵ WB, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 18

³⁶⁶ WB, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq; Stephen E. McAvene, "In Pawn: Kurdish Economic Development in the Context of Conflict", Master's Thesis, Clark University, Massachusetts, 2017:23, accessed May 28, 2018 http://commons.clarku.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1167&context=idce_masters_papers

³⁶⁷ WB, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 19

³⁶⁸ Ibid: 17ff.

³⁶⁹ Having started from a low base in 2005, the private sector is demonstrating huge capacities, growing from 7,440 registered companies in 2008 to 20,994 in 2014. Furthermore, it needs to be acknowledged that 86% of these private companies are locally owned and serve local private economic concerns. Yet, among the foreign owned investors are large oil companies such as ExxonMobil. Stansfield, Shareef, the Kurdish Question Revisited; WB, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq; McAvene, In Pawn

public-sector employment and its direct dependence on funds stemming from the central Iraqi government remain a main concern³⁷⁰. In fact, around 80% of the KRG's revenue and 50% of its GDP still derive from the central government funds³⁷¹.

It can be concluded that the total performance of the KRI is mixed. While it has a comparably good business climate leading to good general macroeconomic environment and market opportunities, FDI investment, tax laws, its labor market, financing conditions and infrastructure are lacking behind. In fact, electricity shortages are still common in the whole country³⁷².

In addition, new forms of economic cooperation across borders do not only contribute significantly to the region's development but also make the Sykes-Picot borders more porous³⁷³. The KRI first sought economic independence in 2002, when it signed smaller contracts with foreign energy companies³⁷⁴. This was further pushed during the constitutional negotiations and in 2007, a hydrocarbon law was passed increasing the revenue sharing among KRG and foreign investors³⁷⁵. Trade with Iran remains important, too although the black market is flourishing towards the Iranian border, making clear estimations about its size difficult³⁷⁶. The trade with Syria has largely collapsed since the beginning of the civil war³⁷⁷. This development is remarkable, in particular with regards to the improvement of the Kurdish-Turkish relationship, as Turkey had long opposed KRI's autonomy based on domestic issues³⁷⁸. However, with comparatively cheap oil resources in sight, the KRI has become Turkey's most important contact in Iraq, with more than 70% of total Iraqi trade and investment happening from within the KRI³⁷⁹. In addition, Ankara accepted to deposit the revenues stemming from the oil and gas exports directly into a Kurdish bank account in Turkey, rather than the account of the central Iraqi authorities³⁸⁰. This has sparked

³⁷⁰ Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*

³⁷¹ According the Iraqi budget law, the KRG is to receive 17%, minus sovereign expenses, from the authorities in Baghdad.

³⁷² McAvene, *In Pawn*, 13

³⁷³ Ottaway, *Ottaway, How the Kurds Got it Their Way*, 139

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*: 141

³⁷⁵ Ottaway, *Ottaway, How the Kurds Got it Their Way*, 142

³⁷⁶ WB, *the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, 29

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁸ Underlying motivations of foreign intervention is closely discussed in Chapter II. 4.

³⁷⁹ WB, *the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, 18f; McAvene, *In Pawn*

³⁸⁰ Ottaway, *Ottaway, How the Kurds Got it Their Way*

large protests in Baghdad, whose position remains unchanged. Although the KRG has promised to keep the current revenue sharing formula³⁸¹, which is based on the distribution of the population, valid, they have also made clear that this will only happen once they have regained all outstanding payments³⁸². Baghdad, therefore, continues to insist that all oil and gas revenues be paid directly to the central government and it will then redistribute it accordingly among all provinces³⁸³.

However, oil is not the only resource which has shaped the Iraqi Kurdish economy. Other minerals found in the region include iron, coal, chrome, copper and lignite³⁸⁴. Most importantly, the region is rich in water, with both the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers running through it and therefore constituting one of the few watersheds in the region³⁸⁵. They serve as main source of artificial irrigation for the Kurdish agriculture³⁸⁶. Hydro-electric power generators are constructed at each river, although just as other infrastructure installations they, too, have suffered under the destruction in the 1980s as well as the sanctions regime of the 1990s³⁸⁷. It is important to note that the KRG once again does not control the flow of these rivers nor the use of the water³⁸⁸. In addition, Izday notes that “due to the extraordinary archaeological richness of the land, almost any dam built in Kurdistan drowns a portion of Kurdish history...one can only guess the magnitude of the loss of the historical remains in sites like the Barbandi Khan Dam near Halabja”³⁸⁹. The role water plays in current geopolitics in general and the relationship between the KRG and the central Iraqi authorities in particular, can also be demonstrated through the 2000 Dokan and Darbandikhan drought, after which the central Iraqi government came close to invading the KRI in an attempt to secure the flow of water into central Iraq³⁹⁰.

While the KRI was prospering during 2003-2014, they have recently suffered significantly from the re-introduction of economic sanctions by Baghdad, the crisis

³⁸¹ According to this formula 17% of the funds (the Kurds make up 17% of the Iraqi population) shall be accorded to the KRI.

³⁸² McAvene, In Pawn

³⁸³ Ottaway, Ottaway, How the Kurds Got it Their Way

³⁸⁴ Yildiz, the Kurds in Iraq

³⁸⁵ Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan

³⁸⁶ *Ibd.*: 30

³⁸⁷ *Ibd.*

³⁸⁸ Yildiz, the Kurds in Iraq, 9

³⁸⁹ Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan, 31 according to M. Izady, *the Kurds: A Concise Handbook*, Washington DC: Crane Russak, 1992, p. 226

³⁹⁰ Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan

triggered by ISIS and the fall of the oil prices on the world market³⁹¹. Reform measures are limited and often fall short of the intended result. This is why the population is increasingly questioning the government's measures: why "suffer from austerity measures when it was the responsibility of the political elite to diversify the tax base and institute necessary reforms during the good times of economic boom?"³⁹². Yet, reforms are often simply not possible with several billion USD dollars' worth of debt³⁹³. It can be concluded that the natural resources oil, but also water, have been used by the regime in Baghdad as an instrument of systemic marginalization for a long period of time, as economic under-development was regarded as convenient tool to keep the Kurds under control, while at the same time securing the access to resources for its own people³⁹⁴.

It strikes that the theory on separatism, with its large emphasis on the economic conditions which trigger secession, follows the general capitalist world-understanding that all rational demands and decisions are influenced by economic aspects³⁹⁵. While it seems that all factors presented in this thesis are somehow related to economy, it remains important to keep in mind that there is still considerable debate about question whether or not this is actually the case³⁹⁶. Not only have Pavkovic and Radan pointed out that there are many examples which contradict Horowitz' economic assumptions but also the Kurdish case study raises many questions with regard to the theory described.

2.4. *Foreign involvement*

External intervention is relevant for separatist movements at *all* stages of their development and the historic experience shows that all separatist conflicts are

³⁹¹ Francis Owtram, "The Kurdish Region of Iraq and the Federal Constitution: A Perimeter Plinth of State Territorial Integrity or a Stepping Stone to Secession?" In *The Kurdish Question Revisited*, edited by Gareth Stansfield and Mohammed Shareef, 521-532. London: Hurst & Company, 2017; Mansour, In Pursuite of Friends; Zucchini, Coker, Iraq Escalates Dispute With Kurds

³⁹² Owtram, the Kurdish Region of Iraq and the Federal Constitution, 530

³⁹³ Stansfield, Shareef, the Kurdish Question Revisited

³⁹⁴ Hassanpour, the Kurdish Experience; Yildiz, the Kurds in Iraq, 9

³⁹⁵ Collier, Hoeffler, the Political Economy of Secession; Pavkovic, Radan, Creating New States; Zarkovic Bookman, the Economics of Secession

³⁹⁶ Collier, Hoeffler, the Political Economy of Secession; Pavkovic, Radan, Creating New States; Zarkovic Bookman, the Economics of Secession

influenced by international politics to some extent³⁹⁷. However, which role the regional context, the neighboring states or the great powers play precisely in the disintegrative process, needs to be examined for each case individually. Scholars demonstrate that the involvement varies widely, ranging from interference through diplomatic channels, economic support to military engagement, which is why also the effect of the involvement depends to a large extent on the motivation and support given³⁹⁸. Regardless of the heterogeneity of foreign involvement, in all cases the evidence shows that it makes a decisive difference to the development of separatist movements.

Following this assumption, Stephen M. Saideman, Yossi Shain and Martin Sherman have analyzed the underlying arguments states use when deciding whether or not to support separatism abroad. In detail, they researched the importance of the state's own vulnerability to separatism, i.e. whether there is a "common interest in the support of international rules and institutions and state jurisdictions in the [...] region that derives from the common vulnerability of states and the insecurity of statesmen"³⁹⁹. Saideman, however, argues that common interest is not enough to explain cooperation on the international scene but that it is rather the state's own ethnic divisions and diasporas which convince and repress a country's foreign intervention⁴⁰⁰. Domestic politics and the prospect of elections determine preferences of states, which need to be analyzed in order to determine the degree of foreign intervention⁴⁰¹. In case domestic politics are highly influenced by international organizations, non-governmental organizations and other civil society groups, these can also produce spill-overs to the state's interference in separatist movements abroad⁴⁰².

Furthermore, it is important to take into account that not only the separatists are aided by foreign powers but also that the central government's actions are highly influenced by it. In fact, Wood argues that it is the central government which receives the larger share of the assistance in an attempt to preserve the status-quo in the

³⁹⁷ Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework

³⁹⁸ Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework, 131f.

³⁹⁹ Saideman, Explaining the International Relations, 723 according to Jackson, Rosberg (1982): 18

⁴⁰⁰ Saideman, Explaining the International Relations, 726ff.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid: 727f.

⁴⁰² Clifford Bob, *The Marketing of Rebellion*, Cambridge: University Press, 2005.

international system⁴⁰³. Not only are foreign countries already familiar with the behavior of the central government, share trade and diplomatic relationships with it, but many of these foreign countries have secessionist groups themselves, which they try to oppress and/or keep calm. Therefore, all foreign influence needs to be questioned in light of a general reluctance by foreign governments to intervene in the first place⁴⁰⁴. Any engagement is expensive, needs to be supported by the electorate, is difficult to limit and the actual impact is often transitory⁴⁰⁵.

The evidence of foreign influence on the Kurdish separatist movement is abundant⁴⁰⁶. The neighboring countries Turkey, Iran and Syria, where also important Kurdish minorities live, have interfered in Iraqi-Kurdish politics since the beginning and any attempt to decipher their agendas towards the Kurds and their own national security is complex⁴⁰⁷. Their actions have been driven most importantly by domestic concerns, so that i.e. Turkey historically not only constrained their own Kurds and the Iraqi Kurds from any form of political and economic development but even denied the existence of a Kurdish nation in the first place⁴⁰⁸. It is, therefore, somewhat surprising that the situation has changed in recent years, based on Turkey's interest in Kurdish oil. The common economic interest has not only deepened the trade relationship⁴⁰⁹, but the Kurdish minorities are also used by Turkey as a bargaining chip with the European Union⁴¹⁰. For example, the Turkish government now supports the KRG's financial independence and has agreed to receive the KRG's oil revenue⁴¹¹. Some have "dubbed this policy "neo-Ottomanism", a veiled attempt by Turkey to restore its old dominance in the Middle East"⁴¹².

⁴⁰³ Mansour, *In Pursuit of Friends*, explains the difficulties established states face when a new state enters the scene without experience in diplomacy.

⁴⁰⁴ Wood, *A Comparative Political Framework*, 132

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁶ This thesis cannot present all forms of foreign intervention in detail and therefore has limited its analysis to a few selective examples. This, however, shall not imply that these are the most relevant nor the most deciding foreign interferences but rather serve to demonstrate its abundance and diversity. Examples of other states involved in the KRI and Iraq, which have not been included but are key the development are e.g. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (triggering the invasion of Kuwait), Israel or the EU, in particular Germany, arming the Kurds as a mutual effort in the fight against ISIS.

⁴⁰⁷ Stansfield, *the Kurdish Experience in Post- Saddam Iraq*, 373

⁴⁰⁸ Sluglett, *Common Sense*, 320

⁴⁰⁹ Please also see Chapter II.3

⁴¹⁰ Khedery, *Iraq in Pierces*, 41

⁴¹¹ Ottaway, *Ottaway, How the Kurds Got it Their Way*

⁴¹² Ottaway and Ottaway, *How the Kurds Got it Their Way*, 147

Another prominent and clear-cut example of the involvement of foreign powers is development of the Republic of Mahabad in 1945, during which the establishment of a Kurdish state succeeded in Iran with support of the Soviet Union⁴¹³. The importance of Soviet Union is easily discovered as the Republic's success was short-lived and immediately collapsed after the withdrawal of the Soviet forces at the beginning of the Cold War⁴¹⁴. Similarly, also the US has interfered numerous times supporting and neglecting the Kurdish claim for self-determination according to their national interests⁴¹⁵. While the US' support for the Algiers Agreement in 1970 was decisive to end the Kurdish rebellion in 1975, the US enforced a no-fly-zone over Kurdistan in 1991 in order to contain Saddam Hussein⁴¹⁶. This policy was convenient not only to secure the US' access to oil in the aftermath of the invasion of Kuwait⁴¹⁷ but was also the result of a domestic outcry when the public demanded a response to the humanitarian crisis under US supervision⁴¹⁸. In 2003, the US even partnered with the Kurds during the war against Saddam Hussein and had significant impact on the formulation of the 2005 constitution, with Bremer clearly opposing the KRG's economic independence and access to the oil-fields of Kirkuk⁴¹⁹. A window of cooperation opened once again in 2014 during the fight against ISIS⁴²⁰. Yet, the Kurds were once again disappointed by the lack of US support during their 2017 referendum, during which the US had openly opposed the further separation of the region from Iraq⁴²¹. This opposition, however, has been somewhat once again reversed in light of

⁴¹³ In fact, the Republic of Mahabad is not only an important successful example of the Kurdish separatist ambitions but constitutes a key point in time for the development of Kurdish nationalism.

⁴¹⁴ The influence Iran had, and still has, on the Iraqi Kurdish separatist movement has also been described in Chapter II.2.2. It would be too long for the purpose of this thesis to describe each and every time the Iranians have either assisted the Kurds in an attempt to harm the central Iraqi government (e.g. Iran-Iraq war), in an attempt to cooperate with Baghdad (e.g. cooperation against ISIS) or because they were called for help by the Kurds themselves (civil war). Needless to say, Iranian involvement has identified itself more than once as decisive factor during the development of the Kurdish separatist movement (Hassanpour, the Kurdish Experiences, Khedery, Iraq in Pieces, et al.).

⁴¹⁵ Geoffrey Wawro, *Quicksand: America's Pursuit of Power in the Middle East*, New York: Penguin, 2010.

⁴¹⁶ Otterman, Beehner, Drafting A Constitution; Ronald Oferinger and Ralf Bäcker, "A Republic of Statelessness. Three Years of Humanitarian Intervention in Iraqi Kurdistan", *Middle East Report*, (1994): 40-45

⁴¹⁷ Oil has been the determining factor not only for US-Kurdish and Iraqi relations but also for Soviet and now Russian involvement in the region (McAvene, In Pawn)

⁴¹⁸ Rudd, Humanitarian Intervention

⁴¹⁹ Stansfield, the Kurdish Experience in Post-Saddam Iraq, Sluglett, Common Sense, 334

⁴²⁰ Hanna, the Line in the Sand

⁴²¹ Galip Dalay, "After the Kurdish Independence Referendum. How to Prevent a Crisis in Iraq", *Foreign Affairs*, 2017, accessed May 5, 2018 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2017-10-02/after-kurdish-independence-referendum>

the recent Turkish rapprochement to the KRI⁴²². The US has been in a limbo between Ankara-Baghdad and Erbil for more than 20 years now.

The influence of international organizations and NGOs is particularly important when it comes to the humanitarian aid provided in the beginning of the 1990s, who provided most of the funding. In the period from 1991-1996, the UN Inter-Agency Humanitarian Aid Program spent more than USD 670.7 million, in addition to another USD 400 million gathered by NGOs during the same period⁴²³. This created significant dependence on the international aid program by the KRG and the Kurdish society on general and consequently increased leverage by the international community on politics in the KRI⁴²⁴. This leverage was furthered by a clear expansion of the civil society and establishment of various international and local NGOs active in the area of human rights in the area⁴²⁵. The influence international organizations and NGOs can exercise on domestic policies, also holds true for multinational corporations⁴²⁶. There is hardly any doubt on the key influence international oil corporations such as Exxon Mobil from the US or Gazprom from Russia exercise on Genel Energy (KRI) and the impact it has on their countries' relationship to the KRI⁴²⁷.

2.5. Political factors

Naturally, also the political structures of the society in Iraqi Kurdistan as well as the political framework of the central state, from which separatists try to gain more autonomy, play an important role in determining the conditions for the separatism. Smith argues that one of the key preconditions of separatism is the discrimination and increased exclusion of minorities from the main state bureaucracy ⁴²⁸. Whether the

⁴²² "The Time of the Kurds" has argued that because of the US-Turkey relationship through NATO, the US had always attempted to keep its allies close. This can now provide a window of opportunity for the Kurds.

⁴²³ Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*, 52;" Resolution 661"; "Resolution 687"; "Resolution 706"; "Resolution 712"

⁴²⁴ *Ibd.*

⁴²⁵ Romano, *Challenges of Autonomy*

⁴²⁶ Despite the fact that multinational oil companies represent the most prominent example in this context, the impact of international companies is not limited to them.

⁴²⁷ Stansfield, *the Kurdish Experience in Post-Saddam Iraq*, 365f.

⁴²⁸ Smith, *Theory of Ethnic Separatism*

government of the larger state is democratically elected or resembles a dictatorial regime, whether the country is governed by a legitimate ruler representing a (multi)nation-state or only a minority, while at the same time disregarding minority rights, has a deep impact on separatism. It has been argued that it is the decline or even complete absence of this legitimacy, which not only triggers separatism itself but also makes any claim of separatism legitimate in the first place⁴²⁹. As a result of a failure to include the demands of a particular minority, the group will reorient itself outside of the center of power⁴³⁰. This aspect, being central to the economic as well as political and social analysis, is also an important assumption when attempting to predict separatism as such, as the increase of frustration can be easily observed⁴³¹.

Iraq's social and political identity can be described as fluid and the result of large waves of emigration and forced displacement over the 20th century⁴³². In 1932, the year of Iraq's independence, neither the population nor their new king, king Faisal, had strong ties to the state. Iraq, which had been established out of three Ottoman provinces by the colonial power of Great Britain as a mandate, had indeed inherited much of the economic and administrative structures of its former rulers⁴³³. This, however, also implied that the traditional order of the society, with its communal leaders and tribal sheikhs had preserved their influence and had not been adapted to the structures of a *modern* nation-state⁴³⁴. Motivated by the prospects of increasing one's own socioeconomic status, religious, ethnic, and/or tribal leaders soon gathered around the king to prevent the establishment of a strong government⁴³⁵.

Yet, even after the revolution, the new regime of Abd al-Karim Qasim did not intend to change the remaining old structures of the colonial state, but in fact

⁴²⁹ Rather than an explanatory factor this view is represented in the philosophical analysis in Chapter I. and in particular following the argument of the Choice Theory (Chapter II.2). Hechter argues that if there is no legitimate government exercising power over the whole country no separatism can occur but mere state fragmentation (Hechter, the Dynamics of Secession).

⁴³⁰ Smith, Theory of Ethnic Separatism; Pavkovic, Radan, Creating New States; Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework

⁴³¹ Smith, Theory of Ethnic Separatism; Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework

⁴³² Bunton, Developmental Nationalism

⁴³³ Such as the state's bureaucracy and education system but also police forces

⁴³⁴ Bunton, Developmental Nationalism, 635f.

⁴³⁵ Through the strong influence of the tribal leaders on the state, the state became increasingly autonomous from its people. This also implied a significant increase in poverty and inequality between the elite and foreign (oil) companies and its people (Bunton, Developmental Nationalism).

strengthened them⁴³⁶. For example, the reform of the land tenure system during which large amount of the cultivable land was nationalized, left most of the land agriculturally unexploited, as the government lacked trained administrators and machinery to cultivate it⁴³⁷. Also, the Ba'ath party consolidated its power mostly among close networks and allies⁴³⁸ and depended almost exclusively on the revenues from oil for maintaining it. With the oil shocks in the 1970s and the consecutive drop in oil prices, the distributive ability of the regime diminished⁴³⁹. In order to maintain its status and control over the society, the regime, therefore, increasingly relied again on more religious, ethnic and cultural leaders⁴⁴⁰. The Iraqi Kurds, which had until then profited almost equally from the oil revenues, now faced increasing discrimination. Indeed, the Ba'ath the project failed as the regime's measures were not accompanied by institutional reforms that would have allowed the marginalized groups to gain any practical benefit⁴⁴¹. The resulting disappointment of the middle class gave the Kurdish separatist movement new emphasis, which culminated in the rebellion of 1975⁴⁴².

With the Iran-Iraq war, a government that was increasingly oppressive and authoritarian but that had nonetheless established a seemingly well-functioning well-fare system, faced serious political challenges⁴⁴³. In fact, most economic reforms increased the divide between the elite and more marginalized groups, the central government and the Kurds⁴⁴⁴. Though the economic impact of the sanctions was complex it can be concluded that they intensified basic family and tribal ties, underlining communal solidarities, all at the same time while increasing the dependence on state resources. As a result, *new* social classes and tribes appeared in the 1990s, based on sectarian and ethnic differences and soon conflicting with the higher authorities of the state⁴⁴⁵. It is important to take into account that those appointed as tribal leaders were often not the traditional leaders⁴⁴⁶ but were selected

⁴³⁶ Bunton, Developmental Nationalism, 638

⁴³⁷ Ibid: 638, 639

⁴³⁸ Through its better organization, it was easier for the Ba'ath party to expand its social base than it had been for the regime of Qasim or during the times of the monarchy (Bunton, Developmental Nationalism).

⁴³⁹ Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan

⁴⁴⁰ Bunton, Developmental Nationalism, 640

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan

⁴⁴³ Bunton, Developmental Nationalism, 639

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Many of them had been exiled

by the regime. People were driven to join new tribes in an attempt to escape the discrimination of the sanctions regime⁴⁴⁷.

It can be concluded that since the constitution of the modern nation-state, Iraq has been a statist regime trying to maintain control in difficult circumstances through coercion, repression and clientelism – especially of the Kurdish minorities⁴⁴⁸. It can further be concluded that in doing so, it decreased its legitimacy and forced them to reorient themselves elsewhere⁴⁴⁹. Religious and ethnic differences have always played an important role in Iraqi politics, a fact which was further deepened in the 1990s and remains valid until today. Yet, when useful, these differences have been concealed by the people and the central government in the prospect of increasing one's own material status⁴⁵⁰. The recent inability of the KRG and the Baghdad government to agree and implement the 2005 constitution, however, has spiked discontent once again, leading to the 2017 independence referendum⁴⁵¹.

In light of the above, it has become apparent that the political environment is one of the most effective ways of influencing the way of life of the Kurds, regardless whether it is on purpose or not⁴⁵². In contrast to this observation of discrimination stand many historical examples, where separatist movements were successful because of their wide public support and visibility rather than the central government's failure to accommodate their demands⁴⁵³. This observation implies that separatism cannot be prevented in an attempt to accommodate minority demands but also largely depends on the political and social organization of the society in the first place⁴⁵⁴.

The Iraqi Kurdish society has traditionally been organized in clan with over 800 tribes⁴⁵⁵. The origin of this tribal structure is believed to be rooted in the lifestyle of semi-nomadic farmers, establishing also the first form of tribal political structure⁴⁵⁶.

⁴⁴⁷ Bunton, *Developmental Nationalism*, 642

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: 644

⁴⁴⁹ Therefore, the Kurds increasingly reoriented themselves towards Erbil and sought support for their cause abroad, e.g. in the US. (Smith, *Theory of Ethnic Separatism*)

⁴⁵⁰ This example clearly shows how identities can be used by politicians and are indeed often constructed (Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Wood, *A Comparative Analytical Framework*)

⁴⁵¹ "President Barzani Delivers his Remarks"

⁴⁵² Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*

⁴⁵³ Pavkovic, Radan, *Creating New States*, 186 according to Hechter, *The Dynamics of Secession*

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁵ Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iraq*

⁴⁵⁶ Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*, 40 according to Dziegiel

These social, i.e. tribal, relationships have been propagated by the traditional modes of production, impacting the political system of today⁴⁵⁷. Separatism, therefore, is not only the result of economic discrimination and foreign intervention, but also the result of a setback in feudal relations and land reforms⁴⁵⁸. The agrarian foundations of the Kurdish society encouraged a certain type of social infrastructure and patterns of interpersonal relationships, on which political activity and decision-making still rely today⁴⁵⁹. Also, the agrarian mode of production was influenced by the hierarchical relationships common to tribes⁴⁶⁰. Hassanpour argues that the decline of agricultural production in the 1950s, which lead to a structural change of the Kurdish society in the context of urbanization, has also impacted the Kurdish separatist movement by providing the KDP its main social base in the urban centers⁴⁶¹.

Not surprisingly the social and political structure of Iraqi Kurdistan has been largely influenced by the exodus of the people from the region at the same time that it was confronted with immigration towards the region⁴⁶². There has been a constant movement of people leaving the region for refuge in times of the Iran-Iraq war, the an-Anfal campaigns and even throughout the 1990s while at the same time people always attempted to return whenever possible⁴⁶³. This happened at a time when the Kurdish society depended to a large degree on the central Iraqi government for revenue distribution. The distribution formula of 17% as well as the administrative organization of Iraqi Kurdistan, which was prescribed by the central Iraqi government through the Governate Law of 1969, has had a great impact on the political development of the region⁴⁶⁴. The governorates were a mix of vilayets⁴⁶⁵ of the Ottoman Empire and new constructions, differed greatly in size and forced the resettlement of large parts of the society, making it possible for the central government once again to reinforce dependency on the Kurds⁴⁶⁶.

⁴⁵⁷ Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*, 40f.

⁴⁵⁸ Hassanpour, *the Kurdish Experience*

⁴⁵⁹ Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*

⁴⁶⁰ As could be observed in Chapter II.3., the economic analysis of the agrarian Kurdish society has a big explanatory value when it comes to analyzing the motivations and political behavior of the Kurds.

⁴⁶¹ Hassanpour, *the Kurdish Experience*

⁴⁶² Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁴ Pichon, *Iraqi Kurdistan's independence referendum*

⁴⁶⁵ Vilayet means district

⁴⁶⁶ Bunton, *Developmental Nationalism*; Hassanpour, *the Kurdish Experience*

2.6. *Lessons learned from Explanatory Theories*

The factors presented above give valuable insight into the Kurdish separatist movement through the explanations of the factors geography, group ideology, individual leadership, economy, foreign intervention and political structure. Though formally the factors were attributed the same level of influence, it is important to stress that not all of the factors presented above have the same value in explaining the historical developments of separatist movements, and neither does the importance they occupy in the Kurdish movement compare to other movements around the world.

The factors presented were chosen because of their global frequent occurrence, which allowed scholars to deduct their importance for separatist movements in general, and their meaning in the case of Iraqi Kurdistan in particular. Indeed, they have been especially helpful to understand the complexity of separatist movements by underlining their deep interconnectedness. This chapter has demonstrated that tracing back separatism to less factors would be too simplistic and would compromise the reader's understanding of separatism, as each movement has its unique interplay of conditions.

It further needs to be restated that this chapter only introduced the different factors and did not analyze them exhaustively. The importance of each of the condition, i.e. geography, group solidarity, leaders, economy, foreign intervention, social and political structure has been determined though the scope of this thesis, which does not call for an in-depth analysis of each one of them⁴⁶⁷. The goal of this chapter was rather to provide the reader with an overview of major factors that influence separatism⁴⁶⁸, in order to make apparent the intertwined relationship between them as well as the complexity of the issue.

Finally, it is important to stress that the mere availability of one or some of these factors does not necessarily lead to separatism but barely indicates potential for disintegration. All four models by Hechter, Horowitz, Smith and Wood fail to offer a coherent explanation of why secessions happen even in the few cases it actually does.

⁴⁶⁷ I.e. there has been extensive research on the impact of resources such as oil on the possible economic independence of a separatist country. For more information please see Chapter II.3.

⁴⁶⁸ To this end also less researched factors such as the impact of NGOs or the so-called global civil societies have been included in order to highlight the extent of foreign influence on the separatist movement, be it clearly visible or hidden local civil societies.

Similarly, all frameworks lack compelling tools to determine when exactly separatism will take place. Wood stated:

“Predicting secession is like predicting the moves of gamblers; even if one is familiar with their predispositions, understands their rules, and knows the cards they hold, one still cannot foretell the outcome of their game. Much less can one project on the basis of a previous game what will happen with different gamblers at another time and place”⁴⁶⁹.

⁴⁶⁹ Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework, 133

3. What does Separatism in Iraqi Kurdistan *really* mean?

It can be concluded that the number of factors that influence the development of a separatist movement are diverse and interconnected. The analysis has demonstrated that there are numerous key elements to separatism, from the normative and philosophical considerations of the movement (and the central state), to existing national and international law, to the general conditions that determine the framework of disintegration. In addition, it has been assessed that all these factors lie on the three levels of analysis, depending on individuals, the social and cultural parameters within a state but also on its relationship to other international actors. To provide an example: many ethnic conflicts tempt external parties, be it states, multinational companies or NGOs, to intervene or to use the movements for proxy wars. On the other hand, they also try to limit these movements, being afraid of their own internal uprisings, domino effects or the loss of revenue and reputation. Yet also, the leader of a separatist movement may himself seek to provoke external involvement, in hoping for greater success with foreign support. What exactly contributes to the success of a movement is difficult to establish and highly depends on the specific case, as the different conditions vary in their importance over time.

The analysis above was based on the common understanding of key concepts which lie at the heart of separatism, such as nation and nationalism, in addition to the movement of independence and irredentism. Indeed, the analysis implied that all scholars share the same baseline of definitions when talking about a specific subject matter. However, this is not the case. On the contrary, almost every scholar uses his own definition of nationalism or underlying guiding ideology, utilizing different uniting factors on which the group will form its solidarity. Many even analyze separatism to a different end, with some aiming at more autonomy vs. full-scale independence.

This chapter will demonstrate the ambiguities that are inherent in the seemingly standard separatist narrative by tackling the question of what separatism in Iraqi Kurdistan *really* means. Can it be classified as a movement towards more autonomy, towards independence or rather as an irredentist movement? What drives Iraqi Kurdish nationalism and on what is it based?

3.1. *The Nation-state*

The focus of this thesis, the Kurdish separatist movement from 1991 – 2017, founded its analysis on the concept of the modern nation-state from which the Iraqi Kurds intend to split. Yet, despite the popular use of the concept of nation-state in all types of media, its origins and characteristics are highly disputed and difficult to define. The attempts extend from primordial claims to the Peace of Westphalia, to the ideas of the French Revolution, to the birth of England⁴⁷⁰ as the prototype of the modern nation-state. Since the 1980s, more modernist ideas of Imagined Communities⁴⁷¹ have prevailed, which regard the nation-state as an invention rather than the product of a collection of identities with historical roots and traditions in their territory⁴⁷². However, regardless of which approach is followed, the underlying question always remains the same: How and why exactly is it that a nation comes into being and what exactly are the conditions for its existence?

The modern nation-state of Iraq, just as Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine, is a result of the partition of the Ottoman Empire and the settlement of the European powers⁴⁷³. Based on three former Ottoman provinces, Iraq was established as an independent protectorate by Great Britain, thereby restructuring a region that was still based on a tribal social structure according to a European design of countries⁴⁷⁴. Great Britain and France had secured large parts of the Middle East in an attempt to limit Russia's influence in the area, thus splitting the sphere of influence between themselves. The treaty of Sevres, which had envisioned the creation of an independent Kurdistan, was reversed by treaty of Lausanne, which had followed the armistice between Turkey and the Allies in 1922 and the creation of the modern state of Turkey.

It is important to take into account that the definition of the nation-state primarily refers to the modern nation-state, whose borders and citizens are more precisely

⁴⁷⁰ Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood, Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1997):1ff.

⁴⁷¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*

⁴⁷² Doyle, Introduction, 4

⁴⁷³ Aqrawi, *the End of Empires*, 101f.

⁴⁷⁴ This restructuring of the (Iraqi) society according to European interests rather than local realities, which had been already sketched out in the treaty of Sykes-Picot (1916), is often referred to as being the root cause of unrest in the Middle East (Bunton, *Developmental Nationalism*).

defined than the one of its predecessors⁴⁷⁵. The origin of this modern version of the nation-state is traditionally found in a “struggle to liberate *the people* from unjust and often foreign rule”⁴⁷⁶ and an attempt to unify the territory. In addition, three factors prevail in forming a modern nation-state: First, it is based on the ethnic parameters of *the people* living in a specific territory or homeland⁴⁷⁷. This idea follows the belief that a nation is founded on a distinct group of people with a shared history, language, customs and maybe even artistic tradition, which makes it different from other groups⁴⁷⁸. It also relies on the assumption that “the state embodies the will of the people”⁴⁷⁹. Secondly, the nation is described as the result of a long-lasting struggle against an external threat, with members of the inner-group creating greater self-consciousness⁴⁸⁰. Finally, the nation-state is seen as a structure of enduring institutions with political powers over its people, filling its structural roles through members of its government⁴⁸¹. The government in this aspect can be regarded as *human agency* employing the resources of the country, enforcing taxes etc. – competences which have increased significantly in the modern era⁴⁸².

The current international system is based on the idea of these triple-defined nation-states. While the second criteria, the struggle against other nations, can generally be traced back for centuries, it was in particular the ideal of self-determination that gave the first criteria a new and fresh emphasis. Rooted in the 18th century and based on the belief of popular sovereignty (as well as (re)introduced by Woodrow Wilson after World War I), it provided the archetype of a nation-state by becoming a coherent political and cultural community⁴⁸³. However, when looking at the composition of the current 193 United Nations member states, it quickly becomes apparent that many nations today actually do not live in their own nation-state but form part of another political entity, in which they usually play a minority role⁴⁸⁴. Kymlicka therefore argues that most present-day countries, are actually not nation-states but

⁴⁷⁵ Doyle, Introduction, 2

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship

⁴⁷⁸ Roth, Let’s Split; Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship

⁴⁷⁹ Doyle, Introduction, 2

⁴⁸⁰ Hastings, The Construction of Nationhood; Aqrabi, the End of Empires

⁴⁸¹ Moore, Ethics of Secession, 82; Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship, 26f.

⁴⁸² Moore Ethics of Secession, 82

⁴⁸³ Hastings, The Construction of Nationhood

⁴⁸⁴ Roth, Let’s Split

rather multi-nation-states, as they consist of more than a single national group⁴⁸⁵. Furthermore, the incorporation into this common federation may have happened involuntarily through invasion, secession or colonization, but it may also have been concluded voluntarily when different nations agree to get together in light of a mutual advantage⁴⁸⁶. To conclude, the concept of the nation-state as it is commonly used today, is much more than a simple ethnicity and rather needs to be regarded as based on a strong sense of self-consciousness, grounded on the claim and the right to possess a political identity and autonomy as people, as well as control over a specific territory⁴⁸⁷.

Legally speaking, the nation-state is defined according to the four criteria of the Montevideo Convention (1933), which states that the state must consist of a permanent population, a defined territory, a government that exercises control over the territory and its population as well as the capacity to enter into relations with other states⁴⁸⁸. However, when looking closer at this definition, it becomes apparent that not only the sovereign chooses its people but it is also the society which determines the sovereign by “owning the country” in the first place⁴⁸⁹.

Finally, it needs to be mentioned that the outward struggle of nations to define themselves against others, as highlighted above, also implies that states do not develop as autonomous entities since they form part of and evolve in the surrounding international system. They are constantly in contact with each other. State building and nationalism always had - and still have- direct effect on neighboring countries so that the state cannot be regarded solely as a product of its society but also of outside forces.

After defining the nation as a territory on which people share a common language, a mutual sense of history and destiny as well as an intertwined connection between their state and the nation, it becomes apparent that most modern nation-states do not align with these criteria and many even struggle to fulfill all legal criteria as stated in the

⁴⁸⁵ Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, 13.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*: 11.

⁴⁸⁷ Horowitz, *Patterns of Ethnic Separatism*; Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*; Christopher Hewitt and Tom Cheetham, *Encyclopedia of Modern Separatist Movements*, Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2000.

⁴⁸⁸ “Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States”, December 25, 1933, article 1, accessed January 17, 2018 <https://www.ilsa.org/jessup/jessup15/Montevideo%20Convention.pdf>

⁴⁸⁹ Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*

Montevideo Convention. This is also the case of Iraq. Indeed, it is questionable whether or not Iraq really constitutes a modern nation-state from which the Kurds intend to split. Rather than through the struggle by the people to liberate themselves from foreign rule, Iraq is the result of colonial ambitions by European powers⁴⁹⁰. In addition, the people living in the area do not share one single language or the same culture and tradition. Indeed, Iraqi people do not constitute one homogenous group of people, but rather are made up Arabs and Kurds, Sunni, Shi'as and Christians; a mix of people which resembling the heterogeneity of the Ottoman empire yet appears controversial in the modern nation-state⁴⁹¹. Consequently, the process by which the inhabitants included in the three Ottoman provinces came to identify with the state was complex⁴⁹².

The struggle against external enemies, be it the colonial powers or their regional neighbors, has most decisively facilitated the evolution of an Iraqi identity since the state's beginning. For example, the Iran-Iraq war represented an attempt to assert Iraq's national identity, by settling the enduring dispute along the Shatt al-Arab waterway⁴⁹³. Similarly, the invasion of Kuwait was justified in the name of anti-imperialism, with Saddam Hussein trying to reverse the *undeserved* separation of Kuwait from Iraq undertaken by the colonial powers⁴⁹⁴. In addition, although Iraq was established by foreign rule, the 1958 revolution can be regarded as a certain attempt to free the Iraqi people and alleviate the social inequality⁴⁹⁵. Finally, the state of Iraq represents a *structure enduring institution* in the sense that the monarchy, the Ba'athist regime, or the government of today, were able to exercise clear power over its people and developed a social welfare system, in which they redistributed the resources of the state to its population⁴⁹⁶. Moreover, with the introduction of the 2005 constitution and the power being shared between the central government and the Kurdish federalized region, it can be assumed that the current government represents the whole of the people of Iraq, also implying a certain state legitimacy in contrast to previous regimes.

⁴⁹⁰ Aqrawi, *The End of Empires*

⁴⁹¹ To name only some of the various religious and ethnic groups

⁴⁹² For a detailed description above the development of the social and political structure of Iraq please refer to Chapter II.5.

⁴⁹³ Bunton, *Developmental Nationalism*, 641

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*: 642

⁴⁹⁵ Khedery, *Iraq in Pieces*; Bunton, *Developmental Nationalism*

⁴⁹⁶ Bunton, *Developmental Nationalism*; Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*

This view is further underlined by the fact that the Kurds often emphasize the fact that they entered a voluntary union with the central Iraqi government in 2005⁴⁹⁷.

It can be concluded that Iraq was formed on the foundation of the Ottoman Empire, based on the idea of an invented community, whose identity and self-consciousness needs to be understood as a bargaining situation between the communal and tribal leaders, be they Arab or Kurds, with the central authorities in Baghdad⁴⁹⁸. This process was slow in Iraq, due to the high influence of these tribal leaders and the fact that there was no “universal belief that those bodies [sic] that call themselves countries, or the people who have established themselves as rulers, deserve universal recognition”⁴⁹⁹. Between struggling to find a common sense of history and destiny and lacking an intertwined connection between their state and the nation it is no surprise that the disunity was deepened by the emergence of both Kurdish and pan-Arab nationalism. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that today Iraq is self-conscious about his multi-ethnic identity and can be defined as a multination-state.

3.2. *Nationalism*

Like many other challenges of modern nation-states, inter-ethnic tensions have accompanied the multination-state of Iraq since its independence in 1932. Conflicts were common not only between the Iraqi Kurds in the North and the Arabs in the South of the country. Indeed, as a result of a Sunni government ruling over a majority Shia populated country during the Ba’ath regime⁵⁰⁰, conflicts arose numerous times between the Shia and the Sunni religious groups⁵⁰¹. Therefore, it is unsurprising that in light of the above-mentioned struggle to find a common link with the Iraqi state in the first place, this disunity within the country led to the emergence of pan-Arab as well as Kurdish nationalism.

⁴⁹⁷ Arguing that therefore they also have the right to leave that union again (“President Barzani Delivers his Remarks”)

⁴⁹⁸ Bunton, Developmental Nationalism

⁴⁹⁹ David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*, New York: Henry Holt and Company (1989): 564-567

⁵⁰⁰ Owtram states that approximately 65% of the Iraqi population are Shia and 35% are Sunni (Owtram, *The Kurdish Region of Iraq and the Federal Constitution*, 526)

⁵⁰¹ Most common are the Shia uprisings in the South during the 1990s (Wawro, Quicksand).

This thesis has referred to nationalism as a “political movement of a group that perceives itself different from others, especially with regards to its language, culture and political identity”⁵⁰². Through defending the particular heritage, nationalist narratives see the creation of the nation-state as the result of a historic struggle for more self-determination, either through an independent state or by the increase of rights within an already existing one⁵⁰³. Nationalism is an ideology declaring a group to be worthy of its own state⁵⁰⁴, based on a fixed myth rooted in history and memory, to be looked back at whenever needed⁵⁰⁵. Nationalists are also frequently described as utopians, trying to legitimize “their” vision of the past⁵⁰⁶. While commonly this process has relied on socially, religiously and historically constructed ethnic differences and even clear political inventions, it can also be merely defined territorially in a form of civic nationalism⁵⁰⁷. Whichever approach is chosen, nationalism relies on the fluid and intermittent creation and recreation of identity according to changing goals⁵⁰⁸.

In sum, nationalism is a political movement of a group that perceives itself as different from others, while especially believing in possessing a distinct culture and autonomy. Moreover, nationalism often presents itself as necessary for a modern nation-state to functionally survive⁵⁰⁹. Nationalism, as it is understood in this thesis, develops from a mere political movement to a nationalist movement when it expresses its goals of autonomy or secession explicitly with regards to the historic homeland. Undeniably, nationalism and separatism have been presented as closely related in this thesis, but it is important to notice that generally speaking not all separatist movements are nationalist movements nor do all movements refer to ethnicity as the common denominator⁵¹⁰. While the latter implies that the distinct feature is culture, non-nationalist separatist movements only share the will to gain or retain the right of self-ruling within their own community, rather than the right to rule exclusively over the

⁵⁰² Wood, *A Comparative Analytical Framework*, 114; Doyle, *Introduction*, 2

⁵⁰³ Doyle, *Introduction*, 4

⁵⁰⁴ Kasfir, *Explaining Ethnic Political Participation*; Doyle, *Introduction*

⁵⁰⁵ Mayall and Simpson argue in *Ethnicity is not Enough* that in this context the educated elite and their followers often rather identify with the “half-savage” past than accept the privileges of assimilation (Mayall, Simpson, *Ethnicity is not Enough*, 7).

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*: 10, Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*

⁵⁰⁷ Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*

⁵⁰⁸ Kasfir, *Explaining Ethnic Political Participation*

⁵⁰⁹ Mayall, Simpson, *Ethnicity is not Enough*, 10 according to Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*

⁵¹⁰ Shain, Sherman, *Dynamics of Disintegration*, 323; Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, 18f.

entire territory. In addition, this thesis followed the assumption that nationalism is prior to and separate from interstate relations to the extent that it develops and appears, regardless if it eventually results in a national movement or not.

The Kurdistan separatist movement has been formed and propagated on the basis of (Iraqi) Kurdish nationalism. It has been demonstrated numerous times that the Kurds share a distinct language, culture and tradition⁵¹¹, which they have used to differentiate themselves from the other main ethnic groups in Iraq. The first traces of Kurdish nationalism can already be found in the 17th century, with important writers such as Ahmad-e Khani, Ehmedê Xanî or Haji Qadiri Koyi outlining the struggle of the Kurds against increasing discrimination and marginalization⁵¹². This historical struggle for survival has since then shaped the Kurdish myth and serves as basis for their identity.

In addition, it can be said that although the Iraqi Kurdish movement has started as a merely political movement, it has transformed into a nationalist and separatist movement by explicitly claiming to be “worthy of its own state”. Indeed, driven by this ideology they have achieved not only recognition for their distinctness⁵¹³ but also autonomy⁵¹⁴ and soon maybe even independence⁵¹⁵.

It can be concluded that it is exactly the development of this (Iraqi) Kurdish nationalism and, in fact, the development of a separate pan-Arabism, instead of a united Iraqi nationalism, which inhibits the Iraqi state to prosper. Iraq’s recognition of the Kurds as a distinct group of people and inclusion of this difference in the 2005 constitution (through the establishment of a federal union) could have served as an attempt to overcome the differences and focus on more civic criteria instead. Yet, with increasing Arab sectarian violence in Baghdad and the central government’s failure to uphold the promises made to the Kurds, the 2005 constitution in reality did not encourage the country’s unity but rather deepened the support for Kurdish nationalistic moves⁵¹⁶. Therefore, it can be concluded that nationalism as defined in the literature is a key element to the Kurdish separatist movement and is in fact central to the understanding of historical developments.

⁵¹¹ Hassanpour, the Kurdish Experience; McDowell, Modern history of the Kurds

⁵¹² Hassanpour, the Kurdish Experience 3; Aqrabi, the End of Empires, 55

⁵¹³ Achieved in the March Agreement 1970.

⁵¹⁴ Achieved under the establishment of the KRI in 1991.

⁵¹⁵ Explicitly claimed since 2017.

⁵¹⁶ Stansfield, the Kurdish Experience in Post-Saddam Iraq

3.3. *Separatism*

From the introduction of this thesis, the term separatism has been used to describe the Iraqi Kurdish ambitions for more autonomy and even independence. Certainly, the concepts of separatism and secession have been used as the most neutral and all-encompassing ways to describe different forms of devolution in this thesis. Yet even these terms are highly contested and are not easy to define, as most researchers apply their own definitions, using the terms separatism and secession often interchangeably⁵¹⁷. For example, Doyle (2010) argues that secession is “an attempt by an ethnic group to withdraw with its territory (or homeland) from the authority of a larger state which it is a part of”⁵¹⁸. On the other hand, Wood (1981) describes it as “political disintegration, wherein political actors in one or more subsystems withdraw their loyalties, expectations, and political activities from a jurisdictional centre and focus them on a centre of their own”⁵¹⁹. While these definitions are unbiased and do not imply the reaction of the former state, other definitions add that secession can only occur under the resistance of the original state⁵²⁰, which implies the threat or the use of force to split away against the sovereign’s will⁵²¹. It can be concluded that the meaning extends from the peaceful and legitimate attainment of more autonomy or withdrawal from a state, to rebellion and the use of force, thereby referring to various forms of state federalization, independence and even civil war⁵²².

In addition, the meaning of the term has developed historically, referring to different forms of disintegration according to the political and social structure of the underlying system. This diminishes the chances of a clear-cut definition and universal

⁵¹⁷ This thesis follows this tradition.

⁵¹⁸ Many authors just refer to ethnic groups when analyzing secession. This, however, does not imply that secession cannot be based on other group formations too and in fact is (Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*; Doyle, *Introduction*, 2

⁵¹⁹ Wood, *A Comparative Analytical Framework*, 111

⁵²⁰ Armitage, *Secession and Civil War*, 39 according to James Crawford. *The Creation of States in International Law*. 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 375.

⁵²¹ Armitage, *Secession and Civil War*, 39 according to Marcelo G. Kohen (2006). *Introduction*, in *Secession: International Law Perspectives*, ed. Marcelo G. Kohen, 3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

⁵²² One of the few authors who makes a distinction between separatism and secession is Wood (1981) who argues that the term separatism is more encompassing than secessionism: while separatism only implies resistance to the further subordination within an existing state and increased political rights, secessionism refers to the withdrawal from former political authority, i.e. independence (Wood, *A Comparative Analytical Framework*, 110).

understanding of the term⁵²³. Indeed, the term was first found in ancient Rome, where it referred to the temporary migration of people outside of the city⁵²⁴ and only acquired its current meaning of “splitting from a political organization or church” during the 19th century⁵²⁵. The only common denominator is the implication of a certain rebellion of the people against grievances committed by the ruler since the beginning⁵²⁶. It is this common denominator which many (nationalist) groups today still refer to today, in the hope that one day they, too, will form their own nation.

On first sight, using the term *separatism* or *secession* when describing the Iraqi Kurdish movement seems appropriate as it succinctly describes the various attempts of political disintegration, efforts to withdraw their ethnic homeland from the larger Iraqi state and the construction of a center of its own in Erbil. The broad meaning of the term has facilitated its utilization throughout history, describing equally the attempts to gain recognition, autonomy, and/or independence. This approach is further supported by the fact that each attempt has been guided by increased discrimination from the central state⁵²⁷.

Yet, it is exactly this all-encompassing meaning of the term separatism which also represents its main disadvantage. It falls short of describing the changing ambitions within the movement as it does not define the characteristics nor the end goal of a movement⁵²⁸. In this context, the rebellions in the beginning of the 1960s needs to be regarded as comparable to the 2017 independence referendum⁵²⁹. The term separatism often fails to acknowledge the difference in starting points and the implications of disintegration within an empire or modern nation state⁵³⁰. In addition, using the term *separatist movement* throughout the historical development of the Iraqi

⁵²³ This is why it is so important to restrict the analysis to the modern nation-state

⁵²⁴ Doyle, Introduction

⁵²⁵ With the development of the modern nation-state (Doyle, Introduction, 1-2)

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ McDowell, Modern history of the Kurds; Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan

⁵²⁸ The end goal reaches from the for more autonomy, be it the mere recognition of their distinctiveness to the goal to split from the original nation state.

⁵²⁹ Point of information: the revolts by the religious leader Sheikh Ubaydallah of Nehri in 1880 are usually part of the Iraqi Kurdish struggle, they were against the *Ottoman Empire* to establish an independent Kurdistan. The Sheikh was described as somebody who spoke out “in the name of the prophet, with the authority of a prince and in favour of their needs”. Yet, because it was a revolt against the Ottoman Empire it cannot be considered here as it was not a revolt against the modern Iraqi state (Aqrawi, the End of Empires, 76f).

⁵³⁰ Doyle, Introduction; Wood, A Comparative Analytical Framework

Kurdish case study does not acknowledge the high and lows which led to the autonomy agreement in 1970, the de-facto autonomy achieved in 1991, and/or the attempts towards independence, which were denied in 2017. By simply striving for self-rule, it blurs the process of negotiation which was and is on-going between the KRG and the central government in Baghdad.

Finally, calling the Iraqi Kurdish movement a separatist movement would imply its *de facto* success numerous times, especially since 1970, lacking explanation for why the Iraqi Kurds are continuing to strive for more. As a matter of fact, recognition of Kurdish distinctness and introduction of the Kurdish language as a second language in schools, were already achieved in 1970⁵³¹. In addition, *de facto* autonomy was reached in 1991 through the establishment of the no-fly zone and deepened by achieving the status of a federalized region in Iraq in 2005. This question: *at what point in time can separatism be regarded successful and settled?* is also raised in most of the normative theories⁵³². In addition, while they all have in common that they regard increased protection of minority rights as positive, none of them advocate for a full unilateral right to self-determination. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Just Cause Theory, the Choice Theories as well as the Ascriptive Theories would disavow the continuing attempt by the Iraqi Kurdish movement for independence, as it was primarily initiated upon the idea to redeem discrimination against the Kurds. This approach is further supported by international law, which states the people's right to self-determination needs to be analyzed together with the state's right to territorial integrity and in fact the state's right prevails as long as the state ensures equal rights to its people⁵³³. Hence, from a legal perspective the continuous Iraqi Kurdish continuous effort to attain independence must be rejected in light of the fact that they live in a federal region and have decisive decision-making power over their own policies⁵³⁴.

⁵³¹ Sluglett, Common Sense

⁵³² Only the Statist Theory does not pose itself the question as it regards any kind of separatism or secession as illegitimate in the first place (Moore, Ethics of Secession, 77ff).

⁵³³ "Declaration of Friendly Relations"; Pavkovic, Radan, Creating New States, 235

⁵³⁴ "Iraqi Constitution", article 121 et al.

3.4. *Independence Movement*

While the term separatism is used to describe movements generally aiming at greater autonomy, be it the mere recognition of their distinctiveness or to split from the original nation-state, independence movements clearly have the creation of a new nation in mind⁵³⁵. This implies that the group will not accept anything less than full independence, as this would imply the failure of its movement⁵³⁶. On the other hand, the definition of independence movement hints at the fact that as soon as a new state is accepted to legitimately occupy a certain territory which previously belonged to another state, the process of separation or in fact independence can be regarded as successfully concluded⁵³⁷. It results that the former nation cedes territory to a new entity, surrenders all claims over the land and its people and also the inhabitants formally withdraw their allegiance to the former government by setting up a new (multi)nation-state⁵³⁸. In addition, the official recognition by other states is still regarded to be of major importance to achieve independence.

Calling the Iraqi Kurdish movement an independence movement applies a narrower definition when analyzing historical developments and resolves many of the disadvantages highlighted with regard to separatism. Undeniably, it implies the clear goal of an independent Kurdish nation-state, be it independence from Iraq or implying a Greater Kurdistan uniting all four Kurdish territories. Promised for the first time under the treaty of Sevres in 1920 and finally re-stated in 2017 during the independence referendum, the Iraqi Kurdish movement needs to be analyzed as a persistent effort to self-rule the Kurdish homeland. The movement argues that they do not need the consent of the state from which they want to secede, citing structural discrimination and marginalization by the Iraqi state. In addition, also international law and in particular the UN General Assembly Declaration on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the UN support the Iraqi Kurdish claim⁵³⁹.

Finally, calling the Iraqi Kurdish movement an independence movement facilitates

⁵³⁵ Armitage, Secession and Civil War, 37

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Armitage, Secession and Civil War, 37

⁵³⁸ Doyle, Introduction, 2

⁵³⁹ “Declaration on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary”; Pavkovic, Radan, Creating New States, 237

the assessment of its failure or success, as this feature can be easily observed. Yet, appearances can be deceptive as it is important to keep in mind that aiming for independence is often a tactical question with regards to how other nation-states in the region might react. Sometimes it makes more sense to remain an autonomous region within the “old” state until the time is right, instead of splitting and then being incorporated into a “new” one. Indeed, as it stands today, neither Turkey nor the US would accept Iraqi Kurdish independence and would refuse to give the region its international recognition to become a fully functional state⁵⁴⁰. It can be assumed that this is one of the reasons why the KRI was willing to enter into a federal union with the central Iraqi region in 2003, instead of pressing for independence⁵⁴¹.

Finally, it needs to be taken into account that calling the Iraqi Kurdish movement an independence movement also runs the risk of omitting its highly diverse development and the numerous successes achieved since their first uprising in 1880. It limits the scope under scrutiny and thereby is likely to leave out facts which are key to understanding the historical movement.

3.5. *Irredentism*

In contrast to separatist movements aiming at full independence and state sovereignty, irredentist movements are secessionist movements aimed at joining other states or ethnic groups⁵⁴². Irredentism is exclusively led by ethnic groups in one state looking to unite with kindred people and their territory across borders⁵⁴³. Irredentist movements can take up two different kinds of forms: first, by detaching land in order to join it with an already existing state or second, by uniting kindred people among than more than one state in order to create a single new one⁵⁴⁴.

⁵⁴⁰ For example, to become a member of the UN, none of the five Security Council Countries may abstain or vote negatively. In light of Turkey’s strict opposition to Iraqi Kurdistan and the close ties between Turkey and the US, an affirmative US vote in the UN Security Council is highly unlikely. “About UN Membership”, UN, 2018, accessed June 10, 2018

<http://www.un.org/en/sections/member-states/about-un-membership/index.html>

⁵⁴¹ Turkey has always looked at the Iraqi Kurdish attempts to independence with fear as it could become a dangerous precedent for the Kurds in Turkey (Stansfield, *the Kurdish Experience in Post-Saddam Iraq*, 362).

⁵⁴² Horowitz, *Irredentas*

⁵⁴³ Horowitz, *Irredentas*, 119

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibd.*

Irredentism definitively lies at the bottom of the Iraqi Kurdish movement, as all Kurds collectively represent one of the largest nations globally without a state⁵⁴⁵. Initially bound together in the Ottoman Empire, attempts for reunification started since the initial divide into the countries of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey through the treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Sluglett (2010), however, argues that attempts to create a Greater Kurdistan need to be regarded as rather rhetorical gestures as all movement differ widely with regards to the aims the political parties are pursuing⁵⁴⁶. In addition, the choice not to pursue irredentism by the Iraqi Kurdish movement and its leaders needs to be regarded as a calculated decision, as also all other three Kurdish host nations have strictly opposed any development towards independence by the Kurds⁵⁴⁷. For example, Turkey even denied the existence of cultural distinctness of the Kurds until recently, describing them as *Mountain Turks*⁵⁴⁸. While this uncompromising standpoint has been weakened in recent years through the economic benefit Turkey receiving in trading with the KRI, a new state joining Turkish and Iraqi Kurds remains highly unrealistic⁵⁴⁹. Furthermore, Iran also supplied the Iraqi Kurds with substantial financial aid that would have immediately ceased in case irredentist claims are voiced⁵⁵⁰.

However, also the annexation of the region of Iraqi Kurdistan to Turkey, Iran or Iraq is not desired by the KRG, because Kurds would still constitute the minority of the country and therefore their status would remain *unchanged*⁵⁵¹. Not only have the Iraqi Kurds have suffered structural marginalization and discrimination by the central government but also the Kurds in Turkey, Iran and Syria have been suppressed by their governments⁵⁵². In comparison to their Iranian and Turkish counterparts, the Iraqi Kurds have long enjoyed basic freedoms and recognition of their separate ethnic

⁵⁴⁵ “The Time of the Kurds”

⁵⁴⁶ Sluglett, *Common Sense*, 319

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁸ Meiselas, *Kurdistan*, 118ff.; McDowell, *Modern history of the Kurds*

⁵⁴⁹ Stansfield, *the Kurdish Experience in Post-Saddam Iraq*

⁵⁵⁰ Horowitz argues that there is an inverse relationship between irredentism and international aid. Horowitz, *Irredentas*, 122

⁵⁵¹ For example, in 1992 10,8000,000 Kurds lived in Turkey constituting 19% of the population, while 4,1000,000 lived in Iraq constituting 23% of the Iraqi population. If the 4,1 million Iraqi Kurds were to join Turkey, the Kurdish population in Turkey would be 14,9 million (i.e. 24,4%). Stansfield (2003): 33, McDowell, *Modern history of the Kurds*

⁵⁵² Sluglett, *Common Sense*, 328

status⁵⁵³. In addition, Horowitz argues that the middle-class often does not want to join another country in the first place, as this would reduce their influence in the undivided state. Similarly, the individual leaders prefer the socio-economic worse off position of a new independent state to the idea of joining another state in order to still be able to compete for leadership positions⁵⁵⁴.

3.6. *Civil War*

Comparable to the terms nation-state and separatism, the phrase civil war carries with it significant political and symbolic weight⁵⁵⁵. This thesis has abstained from using the term civil war to describe the Iraqi Kurdish separatist movement in line with the literature reviewed on the topic. The only time the phrase has been used, is in reference to the internal Iraqi Kurdish conflict from 1994 to 1997⁵⁵⁶.

The origins of the term *civil war* are often traced back to the Lieber Code during the American Civil War by either conferring or denying legitimacy to one of the contesting parties⁵⁵⁷. When a group revolts against the oppression of its right to self-determination and intends to separate from the former state but the existing nation-state⁵⁵⁸ enforces its right to territorial integrity and authority with violence, secession can lead to civil war. This implies the armed conflict within a country of two nationally organized groups against each other to acquire political power⁵⁵⁹. John Keegan and Bartle Bull add that for any separatist movement to be called a civil war, “the violence must be civil, it must be war and its aim must be either the exercise or the acquisition of national authority”⁵⁶⁰. Other definitions add that the resulting death rate must lie at

⁵⁵³ This attitude of providing the Kurds with certain freedoms was only changed by the an-Anfal campaign and in particular the attack on Halabja in 1988 (ibd.).

⁵⁵⁴ Horowitz, *Irredentas*, 124

⁵⁵⁵ Armitrage, *Secession and Civil War*

⁵⁵⁶ The civil war has not been part of this thesis due to the fact that it represents an internal struggle and is not directly linked to the separatist movement itself. Naturally, the internal fight has influenced both the KDP's and the PUK's relationship with Baghdad, thereby influencing the separatist movement indirectly.

⁵⁵⁷ Armitrage, *Secession and Civil War*, 38f.

⁵⁵⁸ Or multi-nation-state

⁵⁵⁹ Armitrage, *Secession and Civil War*, 38f.

⁵⁶⁰ Armitrage, *Secession and Civil War*, 40 according to Keegan; Bull. “What is Civil War? Are We Witnessing One in Iraq?” *Prospect* (2006):18-19.

around 1000 deaths combatants per year and insurgents have the ability to inflict at least 5% of these fatalities upon the government forces⁵⁶¹. Furthermore, also others insert the necessity of foreign recognition of the civil war⁵⁶². It is important to mention that no group can ever declare a civil war, but it seems that it rather happens by accident, as one group leads a revolt against the authorities.

Looking at the history of separatist struggle between Iraqi Kurds and the central government in Baghdad, multiple armed conflicts can be identified, often inflicting much more than 100,000 civilian deaths within a single year⁵⁶³. Yet, at no point has the leadership of the Iraqi Kurdish separatist movement or the KRI attempted to acquire or exercise control over the whole country. Undoubtedly their aims have always been restricted towards self-rule and self-determination of their Kurdish homeland.

⁵⁶¹ Armitrage, *Secession and Civil War*, 40 according to Small, M.; Singer, J.D. *Resort to Arms: International and Civil Wars 1816-1980*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1982: 210-220

⁵⁶² Armitrage, *Secession and Civil War*, 41

⁵⁶³ McDowell, *Modern history of the Kurds*; Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*

Conclusion

In the last decade, the concept of separatism has been commonly used in the global media to describe autonomy aspirations and movements of independence. Although highly heterogeneous, the separatist efforts in Catalonia, Kurdistan and Scotland have been depicted as easily comparable, sharing a desire for increased self-rule and autonomy. This thesis has demonstrated that the analyses fail to take the diversity and complexity of the topic into account; they fall short of analyzing the various intertwined variables on which each movement is based. Therefore, this thesis has aimed to close this gap between theory and practice and sought to demonstrate the ambiguity of the concept of separatism, its seemingly contradictory definitions and the interconnectedness of the variables that influence both separatist movements and theories of separatism.

Through the application of a mutually reinforcing approach of International Relations Theory and historiographical analysis, with evidence taken both from the case study of Iraqi Kurdistan as well as the theories on separatism to explain each other, the first two chapters have examined theories central to the topic of separatism. Outlining the most important principles and normative arguments which guide separatist aspirations, Chapter I provided an overview of the four most important philosophical groups of theories, namely the Statist Theory, the Just Cause Theory, the Choice Theory and the Ascriptive Theory. All theories assessed arguments to defend or deny the legitimacy of separatist movements, weighing the state's right to territoriality versus the people's claim to self-determination. It has been shown that the Iraqi Kurdish case has taken up several of these theories to support its claim over the course of history, shifting and adapting the narrative to the specific historic circumstances. In addition, it has also been demonstrated that many of the theories actually represent the claims made by the Iraqi Kurdish movement in the first place.

On the other hand, Chapter II chose and presented six explanatory factors for separatism based on their frequent usage in theoretical analyses and the particular importance they occupy in case study of Iraqi Kurdistan. These factors analyze

geography, group identity and ideology, individual leaders, economic factors, foreign intervention, and political structure. It has been demonstrated that not only are all explanatory factors highly interconnected with one another and cannot be analyzed in isolation, but also that these factors closely relate to the normative principles presented in Chapter I. Two examples have been selected to demonstrate how the movement in Iraqi Kurdistan relates to the general theories of separatism and how relevant the theory is to explain the case itself.

One of the biggest overarching questions, shared by all theories, is whether a nation striving towards autonomy or independence can actually be regarded as a like-minded community and how such a community would be defined. Indeed, both the Choice Theory and the Ascriptive Theory base their arguments on the idea that an ethnic group can voice its own will, implying that decisions will be made according to the specific identity of a nation⁵⁶⁴. Similarly, the Explanatory Theories also discuss the perception of identity within a multi-nation-state, be that identity based on ethnicity and historical characteristics, or based on civic characteristic or socially constructed. They argue that identity creates a bond among the members of a group and inspires them to distinguish themselves from others through nationalism. The increased awareness of asymmetric historical relationships between the different nations, often based on threat and the struggle of survival, consequently triggers a feeling of solidarity among members of the group and may even result in the nation declaring itself worthy of its own state. This process of disintegration is frequently even encouraged by the normative separatist theories, encouraging nations to protect themselves from human rights abuses and/or from the destruction of their distinctive character.

Numerous scholars around the world have presented the Kurds as possessing a distinct identity, based on language, culture and traditions. In addition, it was particularly the early development of Kurdish nationalism and the increased resulting degree of organization by the Iraqi Kurdish separatist movement which could be capitalized on by its leaders. Mullah Mustafa and Masoud Barzani as well as Jalal Talabani have maneuvered the Iraqi Kurdish movement through almost 80 years of

⁵⁶⁴ Moore, *Ethics of Secession*

separatist efforts, weighing the economic viability of an independent Iraqi Kurdish state, the possibilities to present their citizens with a functioning democracy, rule of law and a welfare state. In light of the long list of severe injustices suffered by the Iraqi Kurds, the continuous efforts to pursue more autonomy can not only be regarded as necessary but also as a form of identity building and society consolidation. Yet, the fact that the Kurds do not speak one single dialect, do not share one single religion and are divided based on their tribal structure, made many scholars question the unity of the movement. This division was further accentuated by the split between KDP and PUK in the 1970s, as well as the many small opposition parties such as Gorran that appeared recently as a result of political instability. Therefore, this leaves the question unanswered whether a like-minded community of the Iraqi Kurds actually exists. It can be concluded that although both Philosophical and Explanatory Theories have emphasized the importance of a distinct character of a group and have attempted to provide a tool for its analysis, there is no way to exhaustively assess whether such a thing like *a like-minded community* actually exists or what its implications are. However, it is clear that the Iraqi Kurds have successfully gained not only recognition for their nation but also achieved *de facto* and *de jure* autonomy, despite not being an entirely homogenous group of people.

Secondly, this thesis has shown that the character of the group which intends to split, as well as its leading individuals, are highly influenced by the social, political, economic and geographical circumstances they encounter. For example, while the Just Cause Theory has provided the Iraqi Kurds with a legitimate argument to secede from the state if that state failed to protect the basic human rights of its citizens, it is the underlying social and political (tribal) structures which have been used and misused by the various central Iraqi regimes to systematically exclude large parts of the society from political participation and prosperity. Indeed, the modern Iraqi nation state has been described as a “statist regime trying to maintain control in difficult circumstances through coercion, repression and clientelism”⁵⁶⁵.

Similarly, economic deprivation in combination with the reversal of economic expectations and the struggle over the control of certain resources has been used by

⁵⁶⁵ Bunton, Developmental Nationalism, 642

the regimes to govern their people⁵⁶⁶. Redistribution of oil revenue within the society was aimed for, as long as it was useful to maintain the regime in power, quickly turning away from other ethnic groups in times of economic crisis. Moreover, resources are presented as a convenient tool to compel the KRG to remain within Iraq, as both regions need access to the Kirkuk oil fields in order to remain in such conditions under which they are able to survive in the future and perform their duties. As has been demonstrated, there have been multiple crises in the recent Iraqi history and they have been exaggerated by the overwhelming oil dependence, which remains a major concern, especially in light of the constant fluctuation in oil prices and the dependence of both the KRI and Iraq on the exports to its regional neighbors.

In addition to the economic dependence on other states, both the Iraqi and especially the Iraqi Kurdish society have been largely influenced by the constant movement of people leaving and entering the region for refuge. This further underlines the constant influence foreign powers have on the development of a separatist movement. The question remains unanswered whether separatism can even be successful in a case of clear international opposition aid and no aid from abroad. Be it the US or Russia attempting to secure access to oil, or Iran, Syria or Turkey trying to diminish irredentist claims, they all constantly pressurize the KRG and the central government in Baghdad to remain united. Separatism, especially in the form of independence movements, is a highly destabilizing factor in international relations. In light of the fact that also Iran, Syria and Turkey are home to significant Kurdish minorities, the interest of the neighboring countries in the development of Iraqi Kurdistan appears self-explanatory.

Yet, it is exactly their geographical location in the North of Iraq, dominated by the Zagros and Taurus mountains, which has also served as natural boundary and refuge for the Iraqi Kurds. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that “manipulation of geography has been used as a tool to pursue political ends”⁵⁶⁷. Finally, it is important to consider that while the geographic location limited the influence of the authorities on the development of the Iraqi Kurds, it encouraged a difference in economic behavior on which the distinctness of the group was then based.

⁵⁶⁶ Wood, *A Comparative Analytical Framework*, 116f.

⁵⁶⁷ Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan*, 27

So, what does separatism in the case of Iraqi Kurdistan *really* mean? While the theory points out the most important preconditions of separatism⁵⁶⁸, outlines the factors that shape a movement and lead to its success, as well as describes the normative principles by which a movement is guided, it fails to take their interrelatedness into account. As each movement has a unique interplay of conditions, this thesis has demonstrated that the current theory on separatism falls short of explaining the multifaceted reality of Iraqi Kurdistan. The analysis has further demonstrated that the Kurdish nationalist, separatist and/or independence movement highly varies over time and is the result of uncountable factors unique to the history and the conditions of a given region. Indeed, even labeling the movement separatist movement, independence movement or irredentist movement has important consequences with regards to its aim, legitimacy and its foreign perception.

Most theories presented in this thesis, just as international law, agree on a general unilateral claim for more autonomy, while being wary of attempts to become fully independent. Therefore, promoting a movement as separatist, irredentist or independence-oriented will have significant impacts on the support it can expect, not only by foreign countries but also the central government. Incorrect labels can harm the movement's aspirations and deceive its identity. Keeping in mind that *theory* and *reality* must always be kept apart, it is nevertheless surprising that none of the theoretical frameworks can provide a tool to determine how far a movement shall actually aim. Are the Iraqi Kurds allowed to strive for full-scale independence or is autonomy ensuring the protection of human rights as well as free economic and political development the final destination?

The fact that scholars use their own definitions on separatism and/or nationalism immensely complicates the general understanding of the underlying issue at stake. In many cases, it appears in fact unclear which degree of autonomy one authors actually supports in their analyses. Therefore, the elaboration of common acceptable definitions presents itself as central to further research on the topic. The importance of updated definitions and concepts on the topic is then further underlined by the fact that most research dates to the 1990s, failing to account for new developments. In particular information technology, social media and cyberspace

⁵⁶⁸ It is important to repeat that these factors not necessarily lead to separatism but only demonstrate potential for disintegration.

impact the development of separatist movements, a fact which needs greater consideration.

This thesis has demonstrated that there is no single existing framework that can exhaustively analyze and explain separatism in the case of Iraqi Kurdistan. They all are too general and all-encompassing. Reducing any case study to merely one philosophical argument or one condition is not only impossible but also counter-productive, because it constrains the richness and diversity of the topic to a single angle of observation. The academic discussion has become isolated from the reality and currently seems to continue this approach. Although no causal relationship between theory and reality can ever be proven, this thesis claims that the different groups of theories analyzed above indeed have shaped the evolution of the Kurdish separatist movement and also the movement itself has contributed to the further development of theoretical aspects and interests in the philosophical theory of separatism.

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Annex

Annex I: Maps of the Historical Region of Kurdistan

Map 1: Kurdistan according to population distribution⁵⁶⁹



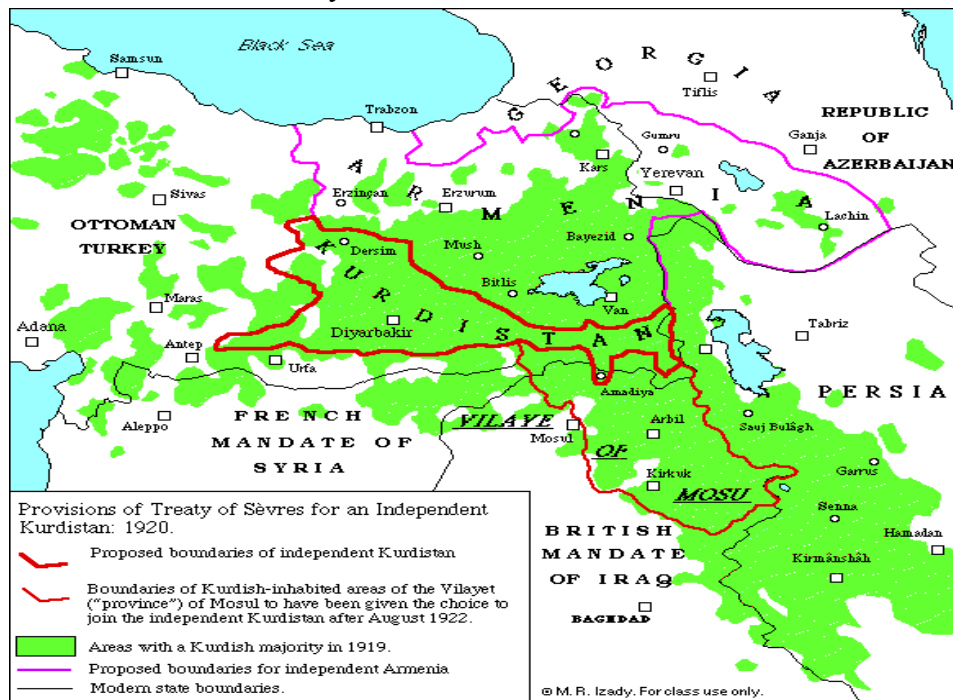
Map 2: Area claimed by the KRI. Dark green: area accorded to the KRI by the Iraqi constitution. Light green: disputed territories: maximum area claimed by the KRI but not recognized as such by the Iraqi central government⁵⁷⁰.



⁵⁶⁹ COFR, “The Time of the Kurds”, 2017, Downloaded https://www.cfr.org/interactives/time-kurds#!/?cid=soc-at-the_time_of_the_kurds-infoguide [accessed: June 6, 2018]

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

Map 3: Provisions of the Treaty of Sevres 1920⁵⁷¹



Map 4: San Francisco Conference 1945 – the idea of a greater Kurdistan⁵⁷² (source: Ionita (w.d.))



⁵⁷¹ Nabaz Nawzad, "Sykes-Picot to be Blamed for the Century of Exterminations", *The Times of Israel*, 2016, Downloaded <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/sykes-picot-to-be-blamed-for-the-century-of-extirminations/> [accessed: June 6, 2018].

⁵⁷² Cristian Ionita, "The Kurdish Question. From Paris (1919) to Erbil (2017)", Downloaded https://www.edmaps.com/html/kurdistan_in_seven_maps.html [accessed: June 6, 2018].

Annex II: Detailed Chronology of the Kurdish National Movement and Recent Historical Events⁵⁷⁵

- 1880: Sheikh Ubaydallah of Nehri revolts against the Ottoman Empire in an attempt to liberate Kurdistan. The revolts spread quickly but he is captured in battle and dies in 1893 in Hijaz, Arabia.
- 1903: Sheikh Abdul Salam Barzani revolts against the Ottoman Empire to liberate the Kurds. He gets captured in battle and executed thereafter.
- 1916: Agreement of Sykes-Picot
- 1918: Paris Peace treaty at the end of World War I. The treaty constitutes the end of Ottoman rule in the Middle East. The territory of Iraq becomes a British protectorate.
- Sheikh Ahmad Barzani revolts against British occupation and successfully gains control over the Kurdish-Iraqi territory. He maintains control until 1932. Afterwards, Barzani leaders need to flee to Soviet exile, where they stay until 1943.
- 1919: The area of Mosul becomes part of the new Iraqi state. Sheikh Mahmud Hafeed revolts against Britain over the Sulaymania region. He is captured and exiled.
- 1920: The treaty of Sevres is signed by the Ottoman empire to establish a Kurdish state, subject to the agreement of the League of Nations. Article 64 gives the Kurds living in Mosul the possibility to join independent Kurdistan.
- 1921: Ismail Agha of Shekak revolts against Reza Shah in Persia. He successfully gains control over the entire Kurdish territory (including Iran). He is assassinated by Irani forces.
- Emir Faysal is crowned king of Iraq, including the city of Mosul.
- 1923: Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Sheikh Mahmud Barzani rebels against British rule and declares a Kurdish kingdom in Northern Iraq.
- The new Turkish government does not ratify the Treaty of Sevres but signs the treaty of Lausanne (without a provision about Kurdistan) instead.
- 1924: Sheikh Abdul Qadir of Nehri rises up to a revolt against the Turkish state. The uprising lasts until 1930.

⁵⁷⁵ Sources for the entire timeline: Aqrawi (2010), BBC (2017a), BBC (2017b), Briefcani (2010), Brunner (w.d.), CNN (2018), COFR (2018), Timelines of History (w.d.)

- 1932: Uprising in the Barzan region to protest Iraq being admitted to the League of Nations. Any Kurdish demand for autonomy is continuously ignored.
- 1943: The liberation movement of Barzan fights for the implementation of an organized free and democratic administration within Iraqi Kurdistan. The region remains autonomous until 1945 when British and Iraqi forces end the status.
- The Republic of Mahabad is founded as Soviet forces liberate Irani-Kurdistan from occupation. This republic is led by Qazi Mohammad with important support by Mullah Mustafa Barzani.
- 1946: British forces bomb Kurdish rebels over the border to Iran, which had joined the Republic of Mahabad. The Republic of Mahabad is terminated after 11 months by Iranian reactionary forces and Mullah Mustafa Barzani flees to the Soviet Union.
- 1951: A new generation of nationalists revives the KDP. Despite still being in exile, Mullah Mustafa Barzani is nominated as their president.
- 1958: The Iraqi monarchy is overthrown by revolution. The new Iraqi constitution allows Kurdish national rights and Mullah Mustafa Barzani returns from exile.
- 1960: The relationship between the Iraqi government and the Kurds deteriorates, leading to increasing marginalization of the Iraqi Kurds.
- 1961: The KDP is dissolved by the Iraqi government after a Kurdish rebellion in Northern Iraq.
- 1968: The Ba'ath regime comes to power.
- 1970: The central government in Iraq and the Kurdish parties agree on a peace accord, which grants the Kurds autonomy. This agreement recognizes "Kurdish" as an official language as well as states that the Iraqi people "are made up of two nationalities".
- 1971: The relations between the Kurds and the central government once again deteriorate.
- 1974: A draft of the autonomy agreement is drafted by the Iraqi government, which is consequently rejected by Mullah Mustafa Barzani. Issue of disagreement are the oilfields of Kirkuk.

- 1975: The so-called Algiers Accord between Iran and Iraq ends Iranian support of the Kurdish uprising, which collapses soon thereafter. Barzani withdraws from political life.
- 1976: Jalal Talabani, a former leading member of the KDP announces the establishment of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).
- 1978: Internal clashes between the KDP and PUK inflicts numerous casualties.
- 1979: Mullah Mustafa Barzani dies and his son, Masoud Barzani takes over the leadership of the KDP.
- 1980: Outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war.
- 1983: KDP forces work closely with Iran, while the PUK remains hostile until in 1983 a ceasefire with Iran is agreed and new negotiations on Kurdish autonomy are commenced.
- 1985: The ceasefire is beginning to break down under the pressure of the central Iraqi forces.
- 1986: Both major Kurdish parties, the KDP and PUK, receive support from Tehran.
- 1988: End of the Iran-Iraq war.
The “Anfal Campaign” against the Kurds reach their peak with the chemical attacks in Halabja.
- 1990: Invasion of Kuwait
- 1991: Beginning of the Gulf War.
- 1992: After the end of the Gulf War, the central government of Iraq refocuses its forces towards Kurdistan to put down a Kurdish rebellion. Turkey closes its borders, not allowing the refugees to pass. Peshmerga forces take control of Irbil and Sulaymaniyah and Saddam Hussein finally imposes a blockade on the region.
Elections are held in the areas under Kurdish control, in which the KDP candidates receive 50.8% of the vote (PUK 49.2%). Also, the Iraqi National Congress brings together a wide-range of Iraqi opposition groups.
- 1994: Being of the Kurdish Civil War, involving KDP and PUK forces.
- 1996: Start of UN Oil-for-Food program with Baghdad.
- 1998: Jalal Talabani and Massoud Barzani sign a peace agreement in Washington.
- 2001: Fighting breaks out between the PUK and the Islamic fundamentalist group Jund al-Islam.

- 2002: The Kurdish Parliament convenes in Erbil to agree to work together until new elections can be held.
- 2003: US Secretary of State Powell accuses the Kurdish group Ansar al-Islam of playing an important role in linking al-Qaeda to the Iraqi regime. Consequently, the Kurdish leaders reject Turkish troops as part of a US-led military campaign against Saddam Hussein.
- US-led coalition forces invade Iraq and begin bombing the major Iraqi cities. In April, the US, together with Kurdish Peshmerga take control of the Northern cities of Kirkuk and Mosul. Jalal Talabani is elected interim Iraqi president by the members of parliament.
- 2005: An alliance of Kurdish political parties is voted on the second place in Iraq's national election. Consequently, 77 deputies are sent to the interim parliament and PUK's leader.
- In June, also, the first session of the Kurdish parliament is held in Erbil. KDP's leader, Barzani, is president of the autonomous region.
- Oil drillings start in the Kurdish Region of Iraq and major resources are discovered in December 2005.
- 2006: Barzani orders to replace the Iraqi flag with the Kurdish one and immediately encounters opposition from Baghdad.
- 2007: Despite all the terrorist attacks, the Kurdish regional government takes over responsibility for security in three Kurdish provinces from US forces.
- The Turkish Parliament gives the "go" for military operations in Iraq in pursuit of Kurdish rebels. International pressure tries to prevent the implicit Turkish invasion into Iraq.
- A referendum on whether to include Kirkuk into the region of Iraqi Kurdistan is due to be held but is postponed indefinitely.
- 2008: The Iraqi parliament holds provincial elections. As the status of Kirkuk is still unsettled, it is generally excluded.
- 2009: The Kurdish government begins to export oil to foreign markets, mainly to Turkey. The central government allows the use of its pipeline, for a share in revenue.
- Masoud Barzani is re-elected as president of the autonomous region of Kurdistan. The ruling two-party coalition wins the parliamentary majority.

- 2011: Protests start against corruption and power held by the KDP and PUK.
- 2012: Oil exports are stopped as a result of disagreement with the central government.
- 2013: The Iraqi cabinet holds a meeting in Kurdistan in an effort to reduce tensions. President Barzani secures a 2-year extension of his second term of office. Also, the first flood of refugees from Syria flow into the region, leading to the temporary closure of the borders.
- 2014: The Iraqi government, led by prime minister Nuri al-Maliki blocks the transfer of revenues to the Kurdish authorities as Kurdistan officially markets its first pipeline oil at the same time that Peshmerga forces capture Kirkuk. Mass atrocities are committed against the Yezidi by ISIS. The US and the Iraqi government, start to supply the Kurds with weapons in their fight against ISIS. New plans for an independence referendum are announced by Barzani and soon put on a hold.
- 2015: Elections of the Kurdish parliament are supposed to be held in August but are postponed. In October, the Kurdish parliament is finally suspended. A US court rules in favor to support the Iraqi government to block Kurdish oil sales to a US buyer.
- 2016: The central government refuses to pay the salaries of Kurdish officials. In its place, the US begins paying the salaries of Kurdish Peshmerga fighters. The Kurdish regional government threatens to cut the water supply to the rest of Iraq, as the central government buys smaller quantities of wheat products than expected. The Kurdistan region refuses to reduce oil production, but the US oil company Exxon Mobil pulls out of half of its local operations.
- 2017: The Russian company Gazprom Neft plans to increase its oil extraction in the region. The Kurdish flag is once again raised over government buildings instead of the Iraqi one causing condemnation not only from the central government but also from Iran and Turkey. An Independence Referendum is held on September 25, despite international opposition. The central government moves to assert its authority and sends troops. President Barzani resigns in October 2017.

Annex III: Biographies

Mullah Mustafa Barzani (March 14, 1903 – March 1, 1979)⁵⁷⁶

1903	Mullah Mustafa Barzani is born into a ruling clan family in the region of Iraqi Kurdistan.
1931	First important contribution to the 1931 Kurdish rebellion. After the defeat of the movement he was exiled to the Soviet Union.
1943	Return from exile
1945	Foundation of the Republic of Mahabad with Mullah Mustafa Barzani's contribution. There he was appointed defense minister and commander of the Kurdish army by the republic's president Qazi Mohammad.
1945/1946	Foundation of the Iraqi KDP. The party's first Congress was held 1946 in Baghdad electing Barzani as its president.
1948	Reunification of exiled Kurdish fighters in the Soviet Union by Barzani.
1951	Movement to Tashkent by the Kurdish resistance under the leadership of Barzani
1958	Mullah Mustafa Barzani returns from exile to Iraq
1959	Barzani assists the Communists in a national uprising against the Ba'ath regime
1961	Central Iraqi plans start bombing the Kurdish inhabited areas and Qasim dissolves the KDP. Barzani turns to the US for help. In November 1961 and March 1962 peace deals are offered by the central Iraqi authorities, which he rejects.
1963	Barzani defeats Jalal Talabani within the KDP.
1970	Barzani concludes the 1970 March Agreement with the central Iraqi government. The Agreement recognizes the Kurdish people as distinct group of people and considers the Kurdish language as a second language in schools.
1974	The Iraqi government passes the Iraqi Kurdish autonomy law, not including Kirkuk into the autonomous area. Consequently, Barzani once again rejects the agreement.
1975	After the conclusion of the Algiers Agreement, Barzani and more than 100,000 followers leave for Iran ending a Kurdish uprising against the central Iraqi regime.
1979	Barzani dies in Iran

⁵⁷⁶ Aqravi (2010); Hassanpour (1994); Manour (2017); Sluglett (2010)

Massoud Barzani (August 16, 1946 – today)⁵⁷⁷

- 1946 Massoud Barzani is born as the son of Mullah Mustafa Barzani, one of the ruling clan families during the Republic of Mahabad in Iran.
- 1979 He takes over the leadership of the KDP after his father's death.
- 1992 First elections were held in Iraqi Kurdistan with the KDP and the PUK receiving around 50% of the votes. Consequently, a government is established as a cooperation between Barzani and Talabani.
- 1995-1998 Civil war breaks out in Iraqi Kurdistan. Barzani leads the KDP, increasingly cooperating with the central authorities in Baghdad.
- 1996 Barzani appeals to Saddam Hussein and his forces to assist in the Kurdish civil war.
- 1998 Conclusion of the US mediated Peace Agreement in Washington between Barzani and Talabani.
- 2003 US invasion of Iraq. The KDP and the PUK gradually merge into a KRG, with Massoud Barzani as their leader.
- 2003 Barzani is elected member of the Iraqi Council
- 2004 Barzani is elected president of the Iraqi Council
- 2005 Barzani is elected president of the Kurdish Parliament in Iraq. As president he concluded many international official visits to the US, the UK or Italy.
- 2009 Barzani is re-elected president of the Kurdish Parliament in Iraq
- 2011 Barzani receives the Atlantic Award from the Italian Delegation to NATO Parliamentary Assembly for his contributions to peace in Iraq
- 2013 Barzani's presidency ends officially. Yet, his mandate is extended by the parliament for another two years.
- 2014 One of the eight shortlisted candidates of Time's magazine "Person of the Year 2014"
- 2016 As Barzani still does not vacate the position extensive allegations of corruptions become well-known to the public. He promises not to re-run for the position of president at the next elections.
- 2017 Massoud Barzani calls for the independence referendum to be held on September 25, 2017. After its success he renounced his position and handed over the power to the legislature, the judiciary and his nephew Nerchirvan Barzani.

⁵⁷⁷ Hassanpour, the Kurdish Experience; Khedery, Iraq in Pieces; Mansour, In Pursuit of Friends; Romano, Challenges of Autonomy; Saideman, Explaining the International Relations; Shareef, A Paradigm Shift; Sluglett, Common Sense; Stansfield, the Kurdish Experience in Post-Saddam Iraq; „Masoud Barzani“, accessed June 14, 2018 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masoud_Barzani#Personal_life

Jalal Talabani (1933 – October 3, 2017)⁵⁷⁸

1961/1962	Talabani joined the Kurdish uprising as part of the KDP, where he leads rebellions against the regime of Qasim.
1960s/1970s	He travelled to numerous diplomatic missions abroad, lobbying for the Kurdish cause .
1975	Foundation of the PUK by Talabani and Ibrahim Ahmad.
1976	Talabani organizes the first of various campaigns aimed to achieve Kurdish independence.
1980s	Talabani sides with Iran, leading a Kurdish struggle for autonomy from inside Iraq. These attempts where crushed in 1987.
1991	Ceasefire negotiations between the Iraqi Kurds and the central Iraqi regime are highly influenced by Talabani.
1992	First regional elections of the KRI. The PUK under Talabani's leadership gains 50%, and the leadership of the KRG as well as all governmental offices are split equally between the KRG and the PUK.
1994	Begin of the Kurdish Civil War. Talabani fiercely fights the KDP.
1996	Talabani invites Iranian forces over the border to help him fight the KDP.
1998	Washington Peace Accords are signed by Talabani and Barzani, ending the Kurdish Civil War.
2003	Talabani partners with the US during the Gulf War.
2003	Talabani is elected president of Iraq by the Iraqi National Assembly. He is greatly invested in writing the new 2005 Iraqi constitution.
2006 - 2014	Talabani is re-elected president of Iraq by the Governing Council of Iraq, becoming the first president under the new 2005 Iraqi constitution.
2017	Talabani dies on October 3, 2017.

⁵⁷⁸ Hassanpour, the Kurdish Experience; Khedery, Iraq in Pieces; Mansour, In Pursuit of Friends; Romano, Challenges of Autonomy; Saideman, Explaining the International Relations; Shareef, A Paradigm Shift; Sluglett, Common Sense; Stansfield, the Kurdish Experience in Post-Saddam Iraq; „Jalal Talabani“, accessed June 14, 2018 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jalal_Talabani

Pledge of Honesty

„On my honour as a student of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it“

Vita

Kristina Amerhauser was born and raised in Salzburg, Austria. She successfully completed her undergraduate in Development Studies at the University of Vienna and thereafter continued for a BSc in International Business at the Vienna University of Business and Economics. Working in Asia, Latin America and Europe, Kristina gained practical and academic experience in international business and development as well as developed a keen interest in the impact of governance on security issues, in addition to matters of economic development. During her Master's at the Diplomatic Academy she participated in an exchange with Stanford University's IPS Program, where she deepened her knowledge on issues of national security. Outside her academic pursuits Kristina enjoys traveling, sailing and skiing.