

*“The Kurds are alive and their flag  
will never fall”*

Nationalism and Internal National Dynamics in Kurdistan  
Regional Government



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# Abstract

Nationalism and the urge for independency have increased since the development of a Kurdish autonomous region in Iraq. The purpose of this study is to further our understanding of the internal national dynamics in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and describe the political parties' perspective on independency in relation to tribalism and national identity. The main empirical material has been collected through interviews with representatives of the three largest political parties in KRG. The theories "imagined community" and "modernist nationalism" have been used to contribute to the understanding of nationalism in KRG. The method used in this study, the functional idea analysis, aims to look at the function of ideas in a political context. The political ideas of independency, tribalism and national identities have hence been selected and constitute the foundation of the analysis. The results show that the nationalist movement taking place in Iraqi Kurdistan is based on an imagined community shared with Pan-Kurdistan, where they, as the largest stateless people in the world, claim to be entitled to self-determination. However, the nationalist aspirations of the political parties aim at Iraqi Kurdistan exclusively. Political modernism explains this by contending that nationalism is foremost about politics and power.

Keywords: independency, nationalism, tribalism, national identity, KRG, Kurdistan

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# List of Abbreviations

Gorran	Gorran – Gorran Movement for Change
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

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# 1 Introduction

When visiting countries in the Middle East, one is likely to see pictures of the King, President or the Prime Minister in hotels, roadsides, and on government buildings. But while traveling around Iraqi Kurdistan, pictures of one of the political leaders, Barzani, are put up everywhere around Erbil while pictures of the other main political leader, Talabani, are all over Suleimaniya. This does raise the question, how come? What does it mean that there are such differences in the views of leadership between the two cities and surrounding regions in Iraqi Kurdistan? What does it mean there are two different cherished icons and not one?

The Kurds claim to be the world's largest group of people without a state of their own and the Kurdish question has been a debated subject for over a century. Several efforts of nationalist struggles have taken place since the end of the Ottoman Empire. Still today, there exists no internationally recognized independent Kurdish state (Aziz, 2011:6). After decades of disputes with the central government, the Kurds of Iraq managed to, establish a regional government and become an autonomous federal part of Iraq (Aziz, 2011:87). The Kurdistan Regional Government, KRG have currently got their own official language, institutions, foreign relations and armies. KRG can from the outside, easily be perceived as a unity, ready and equipped for independency, which according to John Breuilly is the ultimate goal for all national movements (Özkirimli, 2010:84). However, the views of the three political parties' KDP, PUK and Gorran's on *how* ready and equipped KRG is for independency differs. The nationalist movement taking place during the last century is based on the Kurdish common ethnicity, language and culture. It is based on the entitlement of millions of Kurds rights to self-determination, but the nationalist movements taking place in KRG are conducted and aimed at the Iraqi part of Kurdistan exclusively. Several minority groups live in the area and are not part of the Kurdish ethnicity, language and culture. Will they be included in a potential Kurdish state, or a Kurdistan state? Soon after the establishment of KRG in 1992, a civil war broke out between the two biggest political parties, and the region was administratively divided for a decade. Tribalism has historically been an obstacle slowing down the nationalist process. Is it still an obstacle today? Does it contribute to divisions? How these questions can be answered, will be presented in the following chapters.

## 1.1 Disposition

Following the introduction, I will introduce nationalism in Kurdistan as well as the claim for an independent state. I will do this by sketching a brief background on the history of Iraqi Kurdistan. I will continue by presenting the purpose of this thesis as well as the research questions. In chapter two, I will present the theories that will be used in the analysis of this paper. Further in chapter three, I will present the functional idea analysis, i.e. the method I have used for this study. In chapter four, I will present the empirical material. Finally, in chapter five, I will present the results and analyze the material and round up with a summary in chapter six.

## 1.2 Background

Originating from Western Europe, nationalism is a fairly new phenomenon that has revolutionized the discourse of modern politics. Even though Kurdish nationalist aspirations began to develop during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Kurdish peoples' history can be traced back 3000 years. The people who called themselves Kurds, have lived under numerous religiously bound territories and under several empires (Bengio, 2012:1). Most of the territorial parts of Kurdistan belonged to the Ottoman Empire from the 13<sup>th</sup> century until 1918, when the empire fell and was divided by the secret Sykes Picot agreement. The treaty of Sevres in 1920 claimed that Kurdistan would be an independent state but was later rejected by the treaty of Lausanne that distributed the Kurdistan region in to four parts, between Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria (Aziz, 2011:61).

Three main periods can be recognized by Kurdish nationalist movements in Iraq until 1968 when the Bath party took power. Between 1918 and 1946, the nationalist movement was in slow transition and tribal revolts were common. No strong political direction occurred, but Mustafa Barzani was seen as the most prominent Kurdish leader. In these days, Kurdish nationalism consisted of a combination of tribal and national devotions. Not all tribal leaders were positive to the general nationalist aspirations and conflicts between tribal leaders, prevented the Kurds in Iraq from fully uniting. The Kurdistan Democratic Party, KDP was established in 1946 and the period until 1961 was marked by organizational improvements and a given political direction with Mustafa Barzani as the political leader. (Bengio, 2012:12ff). In 1958, the Iraqi monarchy was overthrown and number of regimes followed until 1968 when the Bath Party took power (Azim, 2011:65ff). From 1961 until 1968, Kurdistan endorsed a strong nationalist movement which essentially overcame most internal divisions (Bengio, 2012:13). The Bath party in Iraq was driven by the pan-Arabism ideology and there was no room for other national claims. Iraq extended control of Kurdistan

and implemented an Arabization program, moving Arabs to oil rich Kurdish areas (Bengio, 2012:30ff).

Barzani and KDP went through several internal disputes, mainly due to critique of Barzani's operations along the lines of authoritarian and tribal tendencies. The Kurdish national struggle which had been dominated by the KDP party for years, was split in 1975 when Jalal Talabani established PUK. Talabani disagreed with Barzani's inefficient continuous resistance against Baghdad and blamed Barzani of being too tribal (Azim, 2001:76). The militant guerilla organizations that served as the national military was called Peshmerga. These guerillas who were often bound to tribes, was by majority connected to Mustafa Barzani until the creation of PUK when the armies were divided between PUK and KDP (Bruinessen, 1992:30-43). Tribalism continued to be an influential structure in the Kurdish society and tribal political and military units occurred even beside the main parties. During the many conflicts with Iraq, numerous tribal leaders supported the Iraqi government, rather than seeing Barzani win control over Kurdistan. Talabani and Barzani were at times on different sides of the Kurdish nationalist struggle and had different approaches towards Baghdad (Ciment, 1996:86).

During the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, the Iraqi government further applied anti-Kurdish politics. An ethnic cleansing took place in Kirkuk under the name "nationality correction". In 1988, Iraq launched chemical attacks where over 100 000 civilians were killed. Despite internal disagreements within Iraqi Kurdistan, differences were often set aside at times when the oppression of the Kurds was too unbearable. In 1988, a united umbrella organization representing the Kurdish national movement was created with aims of self-determination. (Aziz, 2011:76-79). The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait caused a regional crisis and the international attention on Kurdistan increased. A United States led coalition created a safe-haven in Kurdistan. New national aspirations appeared which led to a great transformation in Iraqi Kurdistan's political society. Kurds in Erbil, Suleimaniya and Dohuk established democratically elected administrations and a National Assembly was legally implemented in 1992. It was named Kurdistan Regional Government, KRG. KDP and PUK were the two main political parties, holding the balance of power between them. The newly established parliament proclaimed Kurdistan to be a federal state within Iraq. Iraq however, recognized neither the federalism nor the electoral system (Azim, 2001:86ff). Internal differences between KDP and PUK developed into violent conflicts shortly after the establishment of KRG. The conflict that arose because of disputes about revenue sharing and territorial control, lasted for three years. KDP and PUK had separate Peshmerga armies which had never been unified and who answered to their respective leaders. A root cause of the conflict was the lack of a strong enough national movement that could override tribal and local loyalties (Bengio, 2012:213). KRG was divided into two administrative regions, with KDP in control over the Erbil area and PUK in control over the Suleimaniya area. This division created two separate political powers and was re-unification in 2006 (Azim, 2001:86ff).



A new era arose after the removal of Saddam Hussein and the Bath regime. In 2005, it became legally binding that Kurdistan was a federal part of Iraq and KRG remained autonomous. The rights of the Kurds were constitutionalized which made it legal for KRG to govern over the region and have armies.

KRG has currently been autonomous and self-governing for 25 years. Talks about an independency have been common and referendums have been proposed, but without success. Kurdish is the dominant language and the new generation has barely any affiliation with Iraq. Schools and universities have been built, the health sector has improved and Kurdish culture has flourished. KRG governs their own foreign relations and has own armies. These socio-political transformations in KRG have strengthened the national identity among the citizens (Azim, 2011:91). In 2009, 'the Gorran Movement for Change' was established who called to end monopoly power, to uproot corruption and to challenge the tribal structures they argued still existed (Gorran, 2017). In the election of 2013, Gorran received the second most votes, 24 %, followed by PUK who got 18% and KDP 38 % (NDI, 2013:2). This year (2017), the question about a referendum is on the table again in KRG.

### 1.3 Purpose and Problem

The purpose of this study is to further our understanding of the internal national dynamics of the political culture in KRG. The study aims to describe the main parties' perspectives on independency, tribalism and national identity as well as to question the national unitedness in KRG.

What I call "internal national dynamics" are in this study aimed to illustrate the political atmosphere in KRG in terms of the national unity. The concepts of *independency*, *tribalism* and *national identity* are used as aspects to further understanding of the internal national dynamics in KRG. Furthermore, they are used to investigate the claimed unity of KRG. Other concepts could have been chosen to understand the internal national dynamics and to investigate the unity. But these three are chosen since they appear frequently in the previous research on Kurdistan. *Internal national dynamics* is then a concept constructed by me for this study. It serves to bring the three earlier mentioned concepts together in a way that has not been done in previous research.

Through this study, I wish to contribute with new perspectives of the current national situation in KRG. By applying a functional idea analysis, a description of the KRG political nationalist standpoint will be presented where the focus will be on how the political representatives view the central concepts, which will constitute the base of the analysis. I will discuss how these concepts affect the Kurdistan national internal dynamics. The research questions of this study are hence;

*How can we understand the internal national dynamics of Kurdistan regional Government?*

*What are the parties' perspectives on independency tribalism and national identity?*

This study has interdisciplinary relevance because it aims to further develop the understanding of the nationalist theories, and to broaden their utility to the case of autonomous regions with nationalist claims. It has outer disciplinary relevance because it gives readers better understanding of key components of the political culture in Kurdistan through the insight of the national internal dynamics and enriches discussions with prospects of Kurdistani identity politics (Teorell & Svensson 2013:18).

## 1.4 Limitations

My political science interest essentially concerns questions about human statelessness, nations without international state recognition and minorities. My regional interest in the Middle East and previous lack of knowledge of Kurdistan, led me to write this bachelor thesis about KRG and their position as an autonomous region in Iraq. The contemporaneity of the situation in KRG is additionally a reason for the choice of subject where ISIS has led world attention to the Kurdish resistance and talks about referendum about independency from Iraq is currently on the agenda again. The national unitedness is in focus in this study as well as possible obstacles for an independent Kurdistan. This essay's intention is not to focus on the practical parts of what would be needed to reach independency, nor Baghdad's standpoint on the question. To limit my research, I have chosen to look at theories about constructive nationalism and focus on a few central concepts. 1992, is an essential year for this study and I will refer to Kurdish and Iraqi Kurdistan when writing about events taking place before 1992, and mainly refer to Kurdistani and KRG when discussing topics taking place after 1992 due to the 1992 transformation in the Kurdistan political society.

## 1.5 Previous Research

This study is a case study of national aspirations of a people without international state recognition. It represents a case of nationalist movements in modern time. Numerous scholars have studied the subject and a wide range of different perspectives have been applied. Benedick Anderson's theory about imagined communities emphasizes the construction of nations and identities that have been used to examine nationalist movements. John Breuilly claims that nationalist movements can take place by separation, reform or unification. The nationalist movement in Kurdistan is a separation, which indicates that the purpose is to break away from a present state (Özirimli, 2011:87). Several

authors have written about nationalism in statelessness, where numerous books are focused on specific nations' such as Palestine, Scotland and Kosovo.

In terms of previous research on Kurdistan, I want to bring forward Mino Alina's doctoral thesis; *Spaces of diasporas, Kurdish identities, experiences of otherness and politics of belonging*, where the Kurdish identity and politics of belonging are discussed. Michael Rubin is another scholar who has written publications about Iraqi Kurdistan, among others *Kurdistan rising? Considerations for Kurds, their neighbors and the region*. Other readings focused on the nationalism and statelessness in Iraqi Kurdistan are *The Kurds of Iraq – Building a state within a state* and *The Kurds of Iraq – ethno nationalism and national identity in Iraqi Kurdistan*. This study's cumulativeness is mainly based on these books. The latter has a deep focus on national identity in KRG. The topics of Kurdish and Kurdistani identity are discussed, which is accurate in today's KRG and constitutes with essential empirics for the independency question and hence for my study. What can be noticed, is however, that there is a gap in the research concerning the links between the matter of independency and the effects of tribalism and national identity, and the understanding of the unity in Iraqi Kurdistan. This paper aims to fill this gap.

## 2 Theory

*Oh foes who watch us, the nation whose language is Kurdish is alive, it cannot be defeated by makers of weapons of any time, let no one say the Kurds are dead, the Kurds are alive, the Kurds are alive and their flag will never fall.* – Kurdish national anthem

### 2.1 Choice of Theories

The theoretical part of this study will highlight political modernism and imagined community. Political modernism is part of the broader nationalist theory that Umut Özkirimli has described as modernism in his book *Theories of nationalism, a critical introduction*, where I focus on the political section. John Breuilly and Paul Brass are the two modernist writers I concentrate on. Imagined Communities is a theory introduced by Benedict Anderson that emphasizes culture and the nation's visualized community. I will end this chapter by defining three theoretical central concepts which will be further operationalized. With awareness of the fact that nationalism can be manifested in several different ways, this study focuses on Breuilly's definition of nationalism that is interpreted as a political movement that concerns politics and power. I presuppose in this research that nationalism is a procedure and that national movements are processes which are occurring in Kurdistan and is used to pursue state power.

### 2.2 Political Modernism

According to John Breuilly (1993), nationalism refers to “political movements seeking or exercising state power and justifying such action with nationalist arguments”. A nationalist argument is hence a political doctrine built upon three basic statements: There exists a nation with an explicit and peculiar character, the interest and values of this nation take priority over all other interests and values and that the nation must be as independent as possible. This modernist theory of nationalism claims that nationalism is above all about politics and politics is about power. In the modern world, power is primarily about control over the state and nationalism is a form of politics. Nationalism often occurs in movements and the goals of nationalist movements can either be to separate from a present state, reform the state in a nationalistic direction or to unite the state with other states (Özkirimli, 2010:87). Additionally, Paul Brass agrees that nationalism per

definition is a political movement and claims that national and ethnical identities are used by political and competitive elites to gain support in the struggle for power and prestige. It is in the best interests of the elites within ethnic groups to select characteristics from the certain groups' culture and use them to for political purposes, to compete with other groups and attach new or reconstructs old values (Özkirimli, 2010:88). Brass argues that ethnic conflicts do not result from cultural differences but from political and economic competitiveness between elite groups. Elites may choose to downplay differences of ethnicity and seek collaboration with other groups varying of the political circumstances. Brass argues that if a nationalist movement should be successful, one political organization must be dominant in representing the interest of the ethnic group against its rivals. He argues that national identities are not fixed and that the objective cultural criteria of an identity are possible to change over time. The cultural marks that are selected and used for differentiating the group from others and to enhance internal solidarity, can by elites become utilized in the way that suits their political interest best (Özkirimli, 2010:88ff).

## 2.3 Imagined Community

Benedict Anderson argues that nationality and nationalism are cultural artefacts of a particular kind and argues that nationalism should be seen as an imagined political community. The imagination comes from the fact that one will never know nor meet most of one's fellow citizens, even though they all belong to the same communion. It is imagined as a community because, 'regardless of the inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship'. It is imagined as limited because each community has defined boundaries towards other communities. This sense of belonging constructs a fraternity that generates millions of members of the nation sacrifice their lives for the imagined community. However, it is important to notice that the imagination is not equal to falsity or genuineness (Özkirimli, 201:105-108).

## 2.4 Central Concepts

To further strengthen the coherence of the study some central concepts are important to theoretically define before being operationalized.

### 2.4.1 Independency

Independence refers to a territory, not under control of any other power. It is a condition of a state in which population exercise governance and sovereignty over under international law. Recognition of a state as independent implies that no other state has authority over the independent state. (West's Encyclopedia of American Law, 2008) Autonomy on the other hand, refers to when a region still legally belongs to a country but has been granted by an overseeing authority a degree of self-governance (West's Encyclopedia of American Law, 2008).

### 2.4.2 Tribalism

“A tribe is a community or a federation of communities which exists for the protection of its members against external aggression and for the maintenance of the old racial customs and standards of life.” (Bruinessen, 1992:63). It is “a small world, inward looking; an organism of defense; a traditional and conservative institution; a community which, with regards to groups that do not have the same character, has feelings of superiority” (Bruinessen, 1992:64). A tribal society is hence a constructed community that represents the ideal expectable behavior of all members of a small, self-contained and homogenous society. Shared behavior is emphasized in the concept of tribal cultures where tribes are often territory-bound. Tribalism refers to a social structure of a nation where tribes occur (Manners & Kaplan, 2009:12). Tribes have often functioned as political and military unites in Kurdistan during empire collapses, economic transformation and periods of varied nationalism (Ciment, 1996:79).

### 2.4.3 National Identity

National Identity is “a sense of a nation as cohesive whole, as represented by distinctive traditions, culture and language” (Oxford dictionary, 2017). Anthony Smith (1991) argues that the concept of national identity embodies common myths and culture, a historic territory referred to as a homeland and common historical memories. The national identity relies on a layer of common assumptions and people who share these characteristics are entitled to form a national identity (Smith, 1991:29ff). In many nations, minorities, whom do not share all the mentioned aspects of the common national identity live under the same territories. A minority is “a small group of people within a community or country, differing from the main population in race, religion, language or political persuasion” (Oxford dictionary, 2017).

# 3 Research Design

## 3.1 Method

This study is a qualitative case study using a methodological approach called 'functional idea analysis'. Ludvig Beckman (2005) expresses the 'idea analysis' as the scientific study of political message which implies that highlighted ideas, constitutes ingredients in political ideology (Beckman, 2007:12).

The functional idea analysis aims to look at the function of ideas in a broader sociological, political or historical context. The main concern being the study of causal relationships between political ideas and its surrounding in a contemporary or historical context. The functional idea analysis can be defined as systematic stage of political ideas origin, spread and consequences (Vedung, 1974:9). This method is chosen since it contributes with a suitable approach to understand the political parties' ideas, their meaning and origin. This study is an actor-oriented study where the actors are the parties and their ideological standpoints are in focus (Beckman, 2007:13).

As mentioned above, three central concepts: independency, tribalism and national identity have been selected as political ideas to further the analysis. These concepts are useful in the description of KRG:s internal national dynamics but also to contribute to understanding about the parties' similarities and differences. The functional idea analysis includes asking questions to the material, in this case the informants, in order to look at the ideas function in the political context. The material can be reduced into smaller fragments where patterns can be identified. It additionally creates space for interpretations of what is 'hidden' behind the informant's statements (Esaiasson et al. 2012:210).

Some aspects related to nationalism has motivated the studied political ideas. By studying nationalism, one becomes aware of its inclusiveness and exclusiveness. I composed questions about who is included in the nationalist aims and in a potential state. I further asked about national identity and religious and ethnic minorities. When reading about the history of Kurdistan, one understands that tribal unities have played important roles in society. I therefore included tribalism as one of the political ideas for this study. The national struggle and the current matter of independency referendum, determined me to ask about their standpoints towards the question of independency. Since my interviews were semi-structured, and since I had the opportunity to meet the informants in person, I asked supplementary questions when appropriate.

To further capture the broader picture, the concepts, i.e. the political ideas are relatively open and general. The independence concept constitutes the main question in my research and is presented first in the analysis. More focus is emphasized on independency since tribalism and national identity is directly linked to the political parties' views on independency. The purpose of displaying these concepts and operational questions is to introduce how the analysis will perform around the internal national dynamics in KRG and to outline differences and similarities between the three political parties. The outline also aims to present the operationalization of the study and to comprise a framework that increases the reproducibility of the study and promotes intersubjectivity (Teorell & Svensson, 2013:18).

The analysis builds on the following general questions;

<b>Central Concepts</b>	<b>Operational Questions</b>
Independence	How important is independency for your party?
Tribalism	Does tribalism affect the political society? Is tribalism or the Peshmergas obstacles for independence?
National Identity	To who does your party believe to share culture and tradition with?? Who are included in your parties' political aims? The minorities?

In terms of nationalist aims, there are a thousand questions that could be relevant to ask the people in the forefront of nationalist movements. Because of time and space in this study, I had to limit the number of questions and focus on concepts I considered to be interesting and relevant to the case. I argue that it is also beneficial to limit the number conceptual focuses and that it does not necessary decrease the validity of the study. It makes it more available to present the results, to narrow the focus and to draw conclusions (Esaiasson et al. 2012:177).



## 4 Material

The primary empirical material consists of interviews with representatives from the three main parties; KDP, PUK and Gorran in Erbil and Suleimaniya. Conducting interviews is an efficient way to gather material for this kind of research. Interviews enrich the literary material by enabling the collection of material that is otherwise not available to the public. The informants are party representatives with knowledge about the current situation and the motives behind their parties' aims. However, it is important to recognize that they are politicians whose aims are to answer my questions in their party's best interest and to convey information, favorable for them. Sensitive questions can easily be avoided or chosen to be answered with a different agenda. I am therefore using secondary material to strengthen the validity of the research and to support the empirical facts. My main secondary material consists of literature about Kurdistan, national identity, and tribalism. *The Kurds of Iraq – ethno nationalism and national identity in Iraqi Kurdistan*, *The Kurds of Iraq – Building a state within a state* and *Agha, Shaikh and State* are the main books I have used to strengthen the empirical claims. As additional secondary material, I am using statistics from a survey, articles and a documentary. A combination of primary material and secondary material is the most suitable combination for this study.

### 4.1 The Informants

I have interviewed two to four representatives from each of the three main political parties. I made contact with the representatives' through the KRG representative in Stockholm and through a family contact, Dr. Bahram Resul. They put me in contact with politicians in Erbil and Suleimaniya and the representatives have similar positions within their parties. From KDP I met with Hoshyan Siwaily, the head of the foreign relations office and with Basam Ali, the head of KDP youth union. From PUK I met with Sadi Pira, the secretary of International sector and with Dr. Asalaam Baiz, member of the political bureau of PUK. From Gorran, I met with Saed Kakie, head of the political sector, Heme Tofik, member of the national council and head of foreign relations, Dr. Muhammed Ali, member of the political research bureau and Anwar Karim, head of the economic sector.

Since I chose to interview political representatives to represent the general view of the political parties in KRG, I specifically asked them to not speak from their own point of view, but to speak from the general view of their party. Certainly, it is not possible to completely demolish the informants own personal

opinions. I have therefore additionally studied party programs and extracts from their websites to reduce the politicians' subjectivity which increases the reliability of the research (Esaiasson et al. 2012:63).

#### 4.1.1 Conduction of Interviews

In terms of the interviews, I used Stienar Kvaales framework presented in his book; "An introduction to qualitative research interviewing". My interviews had a phenomenological approach which implies understanding of specific social phenomena based on the informants' perspective, but also to describe the world view of the political parties through the representatives. My interviews were semi-structured, which implies that I had a prepared manuscript and asked supplementary questions when suitable (Kvale, 2015:45ff). By meeting the informants in person and conducting the interviews through direct dialog, I got the opportunity to clarify the purpose and ask follow-up questions. Additionally, meeting the informants' in person gave me the benefits of making interpretations not only from the transcripts, but also through face-to-face dialogue gain further understanding. It has been beneficial and interesting to meet with the informants at the parties' headquarters and get an impression of their everyday work. To spend time in Kurdistan and to experience the beautiful and hospitable region has also been a valuable experience.

#### 4.1.2 Ethical Considerations

It is important to recognize moral and ethical considerations, when conducting interviews. The human interaction in the interview effects the interviewee and the knowledge that produces effects our understanding of the person's perceptions. One is faced with the ethical dilemma of being as intrusive as possible to gather the most information possible at the same time as respectfulness is highly important (Kvale 2015:98). The specific ethical guidelines I have followed are:

- The requirement of information: the participants in the interview is informed about the purpose of the thesis and what the information they contribute with will be used for.
- The requirement of consent: the participants in the interview have the right to decide by them self over their involvement
- The Requirement of utility: the collected material about the participants can only be used for this research (Teorell & Svensson 2012:21).

It is relevant to emphasize the matter of hermeneutic, questions regarding interpretations. The matter of hermeneutic, comprises the cultural and social circumstances and surroundings that differ between me and, the informants. Words and concepts can have different meaning in different environments, and it is hence important to understand the content of a word and take the whole context

into account. (Esaiasson et al. 2012:221). This implies that it is important to do well-founded assessments and seek to avoid bias (Kvale, 2015:292).

Steinar Kvale claims that it is important to understand the role of the interviewer to further understand the informants. During the interviews I aimed at taking a position where I focused on the informants' opinions and attitudes and tried to keep an objective affiliation towards their views (Kvale, 2015:125). The interviews I conducted can be labeled as interviews with elites. Kvale further emphasizes that it may occur asymmetric power relations due to the informants' high positions. Better symmetry can be achieved by being well prepared with knowledge about the informants'. I hence made sure to be well prepared for the interviews which I perceived was profitable during the interviews (Kvale, 2015:187).

# 5 Analysis

In this chapter, the results of my interviews will be analyzed and discussed through the three concepts outlined above. The political parties' perceptions of independency, tribalism and national identity will be presented together with empirical essentials where similarities' and differences will be highlighted. An analyze will follow, where I discuss the material through the nationalist theories. This will make it possible to further understand and describe the internal national dynamic in KRG.

## 5.1 Interview Results

### 5.1.1 Independency

It is stated in the Iraqi constitution from 2005 that KRG is an autonomous federal part of Iraq and that the Kurdistan region should extract equal rights (Aziz 2011:89). The informants of this study claim that Iraq is not implementing the constitution as it is written. During the last two decades, there has been a discussion of holding an independency referendum. Attempts have been made to embrace this, but without success. This year, the question of independency is high on the agenda again.

I asked the informants about the question of independency and how important it is for their party?

KDP:

“KDP is trying to bring all the other parties on board regarding the issue on independence. We say, we have tried every other peaceful arrangement with the Iraqi government and none have succeeded. We demanded everything in a peaceful way. But Iraq has answered with arms and fire. So now we have come to the conclusion of, the Kurdish people and the Kurdistan people to have a chance to express their will and opinion about their future. We have entered negotiation with Iraq to persuade and allow the Kurds and the people of Kurdistan their legal and national rights.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hoshyan Siwaily 2017-04-04

PUK:

“The other nationalities surrounding us, they all have their country, Turks, Persians, Arabs. The population of the Kurds are 45 million. We just want to live as any human in our country and area and let the world know we want our country, which is our right. It’s a right for every nationality. The Kurdish part in Iraq should be a separate country.”<sup>2</sup>

Gorran:

“We believe unless you have a stable society, then you cannot work to achieve an identity, which is independency. We believe that before binding the horse we have to have the course for it. In this case, we need to change the political system and economic and cultural system and change the political life in Kurdistan region. Unless all of these come together, we believe that we are not capable to call for independence.”<sup>3</sup>

“The main problem is that they [PUK and KDP] don’t care about society, only independency. We are not opposing the referendum, we are saying that they are not carrying out the referendum, they are only using it as a slogan to divert the tension of the people.”<sup>4</sup>

As seen from the quotes, the internal national dynamic in KRG is not united in terms of the understanding of the government’s approach towards the kind of state KRG should be. PUK and KDP want to enter referendum and become independent urgently, while Gorran claims that they are not capable and ready to call for independency yet.

### 5.1.2 Tribalism

Tribes have historically risen around powerful families because of its’ joint military and political success, and tribal disputes have frequently occurred in Kurdistan (Bruinessen, 1992:64). Mustafa Barzani, recognized himself as the leader of the Barzani tribe and the leader of KDP in 1947 (Farkas, 2003:19). Jalal Talabani, with heritage from the Talabani tribe left KDP and established PUK in 1975 because of conflict of interest (Izady 1992:213). Even though tribalism is less important in the Kurdistan society today than it was decades ago, the two parties are still led by ancestors of tribal leaders. Massoud Barzani is currently the president of KRG and the leader of KDP, Necherevan Barzani is the prime minister. The deputy prime minister from PUK is Qubab Talabani, Jalal Talabani’s son (KDP 2017; PUK 2017).

I asked if tribalism affects the political society and if it is an issue for independency.

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<sup>2</sup> Asalaam Baiz 2017-04-05

<sup>3</sup> Saed Kakie 2017-04-06

<sup>4</sup> Heme Tofik 2017-04-06

#### KDP:

“We have to recognize the fabric of our societies. Our societies are not as advanced as the European societies. We have our own values and way of living. Tribalism is part of the social fabric of the Kurdish society. But it is not an obstacle for our political aims as it has been in the past. It is now the political parties who decide and mobilize people to create that social movement achieving our goals. Tribalism in the past was a problem, because the Kurdish society was divided and was organized with tribal basis. Nowadays is different. We don't say tribalism doesn't exist. It exists. But it's not an influential force in the political society.”<sup>5</sup>

“We are passed those steps. That was before in history. Tribes are available in all parties. We are working on how we get independence for Kurdistan, based on parties not based on tribes.”<sup>6</sup>

#### PUK:

“That is the social structure of our society. We are in a transition face from tribe and farmer mentality. From rural to urbanizing. We have two schools here, Talabani and Barzani School. They separated because of the position to other Kurds and progressivity and non-progressivity to tribes.”<sup>7</sup>

#### Gorran:

“Tribalism is very connected to the two parties. So, you cannot make a differentiation from Barzani and the KDP. You cannot make a differencing between Talabani and PUK.”<sup>8</sup>

“Yes, tribalism still exists and is bad for the national movement. Because people should not identify themselves as first belonging to this tribe or this tribe, they have to define themselves as Kurds. For Gorran we think that Kurdish national feelings must dominant, and people should not identify themselves as belonging to a tribe. It's bad for the national movement. That will give a chance for outside power to divide and rule.”<sup>9</sup>

I bring forward these statements since they show that there are wide differences between the parties' views on tribalism. The divisions that occur in the tribalism context are in line with the divisions on opinions about independency, where the views of Gorran differs substantially. The three parties acknowledged tribalism in the social structure but their views differed when it came to how influential tribalism is. KDP and PUK have agreed on that national independence and a united region is currently the priority, and it can thus be argued that, they at least rhetorically, have overcome their previous tribal differences. However, Gorran argued that tribalism still is part of the party structure and impacts negatively on the nationalist movement. The parties do not agree on how the

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<sup>5</sup> Hoshyan Siwaily 2017-04-04

<sup>6</sup> Basam Ali 2017-04-05

<sup>7</sup> Asalaam Baiz 2017-04-05

<sup>8</sup> Dr Muhammed Ali 2017-04-06

<sup>9</sup> Heme Tofik 2017-04-06

national internal dynamics prevail where Gorran opposes KDP:s and PUK:s more optimist view of claimed unity.

These disagreements made me ask supplementary questions on how they viewed the fact that the two biggest parties have their own Peshmerga armies, originating from tribes, and if this can cause problems after a potential independency.

**KDP:**

“Part of the Peshmerga forces are part of the ministry of Peshmerga formation, a KRG ministry. Part belongs still to the KDP and to PUK. But these three different formations come under one commanding chief, Barzani. And according to the laws, he is the commander in chief. When Kurdistan becomes independent we will create and form a unified military force. It doesn't create a problem. It hasn't created a problem during this huge fight against ISIS. So, we don't think that will create any problem in the future.”<sup>10</sup>

**PUK:**

“We have a mix and a separate for both. We are trying to make them one union. We have good steps for that. But it needs more time to unite them. We have too many enemies. Our enemies, the countries surrounding us, and Peshmerga will keep Kurdistan safe. Until now, Peshmerga, they don't mix the political with the army. We as political members, we have problems. But from Hanakin to the end of the Kurdish borders, the Peshmerga are together. Our duty is to defend Kurdistan.”<sup>11</sup>

**Gorran:**

“In terms of Peshmerga, we don't have a national army, we have got Peshmerga who belongs to the political parties and within the political parties to the individuals. They are claiming they are united, but they are not. And we are asking for unification, now. They were fighting Saddam for 50-60 years in the mountains. We have all the respect for that. But we have problem of how they are running it now.”<sup>12</sup>

“There will be a problem because these forces will be used at anytime and anywhere by PUK and KDP by their officials. The problem is we don't want to establish a failed or fragile state. 20 years ago, there was a big war between these two rivals. The reason was because of money, the conflict of interest. It might happen in Kirkuk where KDP is controlling the oil fields right now. If they don't give the shares and the revenues, of course there will be wars. Because the militias belong to them.”<sup>13</sup>

As we can understand from the quotes, there is an agreement among the representatives that the Peshmergas are not fully united and that unity is necessary. Gorran is once again in opposition and argues that the divided armies

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<sup>10</sup> Hoshyan Siwaily 2017-04-04

<sup>11</sup> Asalaam Baiz 2017-04-05

<sup>12</sup> Dr Muhammed Ali 2017-04-06

<sup>13</sup> Anwar Karim 2017-04-07

could be problematic after a potential independency, like it did after the establishment of the autonomous KRG. Gorran argued that the unification must happen before independency while PUK and KDP implied that the unification will come, and that the Peshmerga won't cause any complications until then.

### 5.1.3 National Identity

Shared culture, language and bloodlines, have historically been important aspects of the Kurdish national identity. But what has been even more important is the 'sense of place'. Territory is the most important aspect for Kurdish-ness and is central for their imagined national community (Aziz, 2011:46). The concept of *Kurdistani*, derived from *Kurdistaniyeti* appeared after the foundation of KRG and is an alternative to 'Iraqi Kurd'. It refers to the promotion of Kurdistan in its traditional ethnic and civic conceptions and captures the territorial and political imagination of the national identity. It also refers to an inclusive shared identity with all inhabitants in the KRG territorial region, while the *Kurdish identity* refers to the people of Kurdish ethnicity. *Kurdistani* is more frequently being used today and is mostly adopted by the younger generation, who have grown up with only little or no affiliation with Iraq (Aziz, 2011:81). A survey from 2011 showed that 73% of university students, growing up under KRG, viewed themselves as *Kurdistani* and only 17% viewed themselves as Kurds, while the absolute majority (87%) felt closely attached or loyal to Pan-Kurdistan (Aziz, 2011:118).

The question of minorities is directly linked to the matter of national identity as well as nationalism. It affects the discourse of the development of Kurdistan from an autonomous region to an independent state. Should it be a Kurdish state or a *Kurdistani* state? Who will be citizens in the state and are all people living in the region currently perceived as equal?

I asked the politicians who their parties believe to share culture history and tradition with, who is included in their party's aims and ambitions, and how they view the minorities?

#### KDP:

"The name is not the Kurdish Democratic Party, it is Kurdistan Democratic Party. Which means that it has an inclusive policy to include all the habitants of Kurdistan. Whoever lives here is covered by our aims and goals, regardless of ethnic and religious background. Within Kurdistan, there are different ethnic and religious minorities which co-exist with the Kurdish people in the region."<sup>14</sup>

"The Kurdish society have one culture. All though their own diversity. But we share many things within the culture. We are working in Kurdistan regional government and working to get independence for Kurdistan not just for Kurdish people."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Hoshyan Siwaily 2017-04-04

<sup>15</sup> Basam Ali 2017-04-05



### PUK:

“Nationality comes first. We were Kurds before we were Muslims. The Christians are all with us, and want freedom. Yazidis, a little part doesn’t want Kurdish independence and the Turkmen are all under the effects of Turkey. They say we don’t need Kurdistan, half of them. The other half understand what we did. The rights of Christian and Turkmen, have been defended by Kurds, not just now. Also under Saddam. They say that Kurdish people are respecting them and giving them the same rights as Kurdish people.”<sup>16</sup>

### Gorran:

“We believe that we have neglected the rights of the minorities for so long in Kurdistan. Iraq neglected our rights and we are neglecting other minorities’ rights. Yazidis have five members of parliament but they have no ministry of cabinet and no ministry of their own. The Assyrians of the Ninema valley are demanding an autonomous ground of their own. The one thing that we Kurds are good at is to make no differences socially. Socially we are good but politically... that has to change.”<sup>17</sup>

The discourse differs slightly between the politicians on how they address the people they are representing. Some of them say Kurdistan while others say Kurdish or Kurds. They agreed that culture and tradition are shared with Kurds everywhere. The New Year celebration, Nowruz, is celebrated in all parts of Kurdistan as well as Kurdish music, food, clothing and dance. Even the national anthem is shared by Pan-Kurdistan. The representatives stated that most of the Kurds identify themselves as Kurdish or Kurdistan before they identify themselves as belonging to any religion or tribe (Interviews 4-6/04/2017).

However, this is not the case for the minorities. Saed Kakie claimed that the Christian Assyrians in KRG have experienced oppression from the KRG government. Villages have been confiscated by Kurdish groups and Peshmerga forces. ISIS is an immense threat to the Assyrians, but because of lack of trust in the Peshmerga and in the KRG government, the Assyrians have established an army of their own. In a similar way that Kurds are claiming the right to their historic homeland, Assyrians are stating that the area they inhabit, belongs to them without connection to Kurdistan (SVT, 2017).

The Sheikhan district in KRG used to be inhabited by Yazidis, but since the fall of the Bath regime a demographic change has taken place. This involves Kurds settling in the area, in order to strengthen the claim that it should belong to an independent KRG, a program not too different from Saddam’s Arabization program. During the Yazidi genocide in Shingal, 2014 executed by ISIS, the Peshmerga withdrew its armies from the Yazidi populated areas and left the Yazidi population emptyhanded. Even though all parties claim to represent them (Barber, 2017).

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<sup>16</sup> Asalaam Baiz 2017-04-05

<sup>17</sup> Saed Kakie 2017-04-06

## 5.2 Analysis

Through decades of victimization and denial of the Kurdish peoples' culture and social rights, the identity in Kurdistan has developed into a strong political force. The party representatives are united on the fact that the Kurds and the people of KRG are entitled to have their own independent state, that culture is shared with all of Kurdistan and that the political achievements pertain KRG exclusively. The internal divisions KRG face are however difficult to ignore. In the following section, the analysis is structured around the nationalist theories to further our understanding of the internal national dynamics, where the central concepts are emphasized.

The imagined community-theory highlights that nationality is a cultural artefact and implies that nations should be seen as imagined political communities. The nationalist movement taking place in Kurdistan builds on the idea that Kurds are the largest stateless group of people in the world and are entitled to a state of their own. They base the nationalist argument on an imagined community constructed of Kurdish ethnicity, culture and national identity, shared with Pan-Kurdistan. This was, as showed above, emphasized by PUK by claims that every other ethnicity in the region, Arabs, Turks and Persians have a country of their own. The imaginary bonds that are occurring are drawn to a large group of people whom they will never know nor meet. They feel belonging to the same communion and share culture with all of Kurdistan, even though decades of foreign control have divided them. But although one imagined community is shared with pan-Kurdistan, they share another imagined community where their nationalist movements take place.

The political representatives were all determined that their politics were aimed at KRG exclusively. According to the political modernist theory, nationalism is first and foremost linked to politics and power. Nationalism is hence being used as a political tool to exercise state power, where the nationalist goal is to separate from a present state. National and ethnical identities are used as tools by elites to gain support in the struggle for power and prestige. The Kurdish history is often cherished and the national identity is valued. But what differs from other nationalist movements is that KRG:s aims, does not include everyone in their shared cherished history and identity. Only the Iraqi part of Kurdistan is included in the nationalist aims. The survey from 2011 showed that the majority of students feel loyal and closely attached to Pan-Kurdistan, even though the majority have left the Kurdish identity and entered the Kurdistani identity. This confirms that it is possible for a defined people to feel entitled to more than one community even though their communities aim and commitments are completely different.

According to Brass, unity is necessary if a nationalist movement is to be successful. The modernist theory points out that nationalist movements use the cultures and practices of ethnic groups as political resources for power struggle. Elites in the political sphere may choose to downplay differences of ethnicity or religion to seek collaboration, which arguably is currently happening in KRG. The representatives all argued that all people living in Kurdistan will be included in a

potential independent state and that territorial bonds are more important than ethnicity. The imagined community decreases to only involving the Kurds of Iraq for the political purposes and for better odds in the strive for power. At the same time, KRG deliberately increases the imagined community to include the non-Kurdish minorities living in the same territories, for political purposes and to appear united. It is effective to emerge as unified as possible to achieve independence, and hence talk about a common Kurdistan identity instead of a Kurdish identity. Paul Brass states that objective cultural criteria and national identity formation are not forever fixed, and are possible to adjust. This argument is in good relation to the situation in KRG, where the national identity in Kurdistan is in a gradual transition towards a more inclusive conception.

The question however, if the meaning behind the Kurdistan identity has been embraced by the political parties, remains. KRG has failed to make the Assyrians feel protected by Peshmerga and an army of their own has been created. In contradiction to the meaning of the Kurdistan identity which aims to include everyone in the given region, the Assyrians indicate that they do not belong to Kurdistan. The Yazidis who were not protected by KRG during the ISIS offensive are in a similar situation. PUK and KDP expressed their gratitude towards Peshmerga and stated that they are keeping Kurdistan safe. This is definitely true to a certain extent, and one should not diminish the resistance and bravery the Peshmerga show against ISIS. But one can also argue that their defense does not cover the imagined community the parties claim to represent. It is possible to argue that KRG is still more Kurdish-oriented than Kurdistan-oriented in their political actions. When minorities experience that they are not part of the Kurdistan identity but rather a non-Kurdish identity, the political nationalism and imagined community in KRG fails to assimilate. This indicates that the internal national dynamics are divided regarding the national identity because of the incapacity to endorse the non-Kurdish population.

Regarding the parties' standpoints towards independency, which according to the theory of political modernism is the ultimate goal for every nationalist movement, one can distinguish a clear difference between the parties. KDP which is the largest party, is the most eager one to obtain independence. Breuilly emphasized that nationalism is above all about politics which in turn is about power. This is in good agreement with KRG, where after a potential independency, KDP is likely to hold more power than the other parties and has hence the most incentive to strive for independence. PUK, who historically have held balanced power in the region with KDP and are still in power over Peshmerga armies, also agreed that the time for independency is now. My impression was however, that they were not as much in haste. Asalaam Baiz expressed this by emphasizing, that the unification of the Peshmergas can take time, which is important in the process towards independency. Gorran expressed that they do believe that Kurdistan deserves to be independent one day but empathized the importance of unification and stronger state functions before KRG would be ready. They argued that KDP and PUK care more about independency than society and that their focus is to obtain power. In line with the modernist nationalist theory, one could argue that Gorran is worried that KDP will misuse

their position to gain power. They believed that the different Peshmerga armies could cause a problem that would lead the new state into a fragile position if conflicts of interest over power occurs between KDP and PUK. The interest of the nation must take priority, as emphasized by Breuilly.

Paul Brass recognizes that for a nationalist movement to be successful, a political organization must be dominant when representing the group against rivals. As earlier emphasized, the Kurdish nationalist struggle has historically been dominated by tribal mobilization and by national divisions. Since the founding in 1992, KRG has been the official organization pushing for self-determination. KRG has since then, appeared as a united force against outside rivals but has not remained a united entity within. KDP and PUK stated that tribalism is the social fabric of the society and that its effects on politics belonged to the past. Gorran, however, who's ideological standpoints are based on anti-tribalism and anti-nepotism (Gorran, 2017) were deeply concerned about KDP:s and PUK:s tribal influences which they argue still exists. While PUK and KDP are confident that the region is in a better position to handle challenges. Even though unity efforts have been made, Gorran is still concerned about aspects such as that the Peshmerga armies are partly responding to their different leaderships.

KDP and PUK argue that the Peshmerga is doing a remarkable job keeping Kurdistan from external threats and outside rivals. The risk is however, that the threat from outside rivals might no longer pose the primary danger after gaining independence with own recognized sovereign rights. As seen in Kurdistan's history, it is easier to be united when you have a common enemy, but more difficult to get along when conflicts of power arise within. This bothers Gorran who are afraid of creating a fragile state due to lack of unification. Brass further recognizes that the conflicts of different ethnicity, or in this case tribal heritage, is not a product of cultural difference but rather a result of political and economic competitiveness between elite groups. Hence, one could argue that it is not the tribalism per se that causes disputes, but rather how elites in KRG uses different groups culture and practices as political resources for power struggle. This is in line with what Gorran is worried about, who implied that the 1990s violence was because of disagreement over resources and power. The fact that Gorran, and supposedly their voters who counts for 38%, do not trust that the divided Peshmerga can avoid causing problems because of conflict of interest. This is an illustration of the lack of unity in the national internal dynamics.

The political modernism implies, that unity among leaders is a must for a nationalist movement to be successful. The regional divisions that appeared during the civil war between Erbil and Suleimaniya have been reunited. But as introduced in the introduction, there are visible differences remaining in the region in terms of leadership where two different icons are equally cherished. One can argue that the national identity can perceive as fragmented, since the territory constitutes such an important part of the national identity in Kurdistan. KDP and PUK have historically been based on tribal unities which are often linked to regions. One can therefore argue that tribalism, whether it affects Kurdish politics, and whether it still exists today, has created regional distinctions. And this can be a large barrier in the nationalist unification.

## 6 Conclusion

In this study, the national internal dynamics of KRG has been analyzed by looking at the political parties' standpoints towards independency. The political modernism theory indicates that independency is the ultimate goal for every nationalist movement and is hence the next step for the currently autonomous KRG. What has emerged from my material about the internal national dynamics is that the political parties in KRG have different opinions and standpoints on whether *how* ready and prepared KRG is to become a recognized independent state. Through the functional idea analysis, I have looked at political ideas' functions in a political context and studied the concept of independency's relationship with tribalism and national identities. While PUK and KDP agree that it is about time KRG became independent from Iraq, Gorran argues that the risks of creating a fragile state are currently too high. The latter states that the institutions are too weak, the nepotism too rooted and that the tribalism still exists within the other parties.

I have illustrated the internal national dynamics by observing the situation through two nationalist perspectives. Anderson's theory on imagined community has made us understand how the Kurdish people share an imagined community with Pan-Kurdistan based on culture, language and ethnicity. They base the ongoing nationalist movements on these aspects but are not conducting nationalist aspirations for everyone carrying them. The people in KRG can be understood to share another imagined community, based on, what can be explained by the political modernism theory as, political and power struggle aspects. The political modernist theory furthers our understanding on how KRG's nationalist movement strives for politics and power. Cultural and ethnical differences are downplayed to seek collaboration as well as to manifest unified within the territory. The imagined community is hence decreased for the political purposes from Pan-Kurdistan to only involve Iraqi Kurdistan, at the same time as the imagined community increases to further include the non-Kurdish inhabitants in KRG.

The Kurdish identity is at present in a transition phase, moving towards the Kurdistan identity. The Kurdistan imagined community has enlarged its boundaries to include the non-Kurdish inhabitants of the region. The concept of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan identity is constructed in an inclusive and moral approach. One can argue that the fact that such a high percentage of the young generation identify themselves as Kurdistan rather than Kurdish shows that the future of KRG will be more inclusive and engaged in a nationalism that contains all the people KRG currently is claiming to represent. My results however, conclude that the internal national dynamics regarding the national identity and the Kurdistan unitedness, is not as prominent as the Kurdistan concept aims to be. The minorities in the area do not share the same view on their national identity

as PUK and KDP want them to do. Given the reports' demonstration on how the Yazidis and Assyrians at times have been treated, their lack of trust in what the Kurdistan identity is essentially providing them, is not unexpected.

Furthermore, when it comes to the unitedness in the region, the internal national dynamics of KRG are viewed very differently by the parties. The regional differences that occur may affect the unity of KRG. PUK and KDP claim that tribalism is a social structure in Kurdistan that does not influence the political sphere. They argue that tribalism is not an obstacle for their political aims and nor are the separate party-bound Peshmerga armies' obstacles for independency. Gorran on the other hand condemns these statements and argues that tribalism is deeply rooted in the political sphere which leads to corruption and nepotism. Gorran claims that conflict of interest and revenues can cause internal disputes where the Peshmergas are acting on behalf of politicians and political parties, and not as a united organ.

The immense victimization the Kurds of Iraq have experienced for decades has left marks on the political culture in Kurdistan. KDP and PUK are the parties who historically have strived for freedom and humanity for the Kurds and have carried on the nationalist movement. One could argue that their continuous nationalist struggle, encountered by oppression and denial of Kurdish cultural and political rights, have made them less observant that similar circumstances the Kurds experienced by the Bath regime, are the minorities facing today. The representatives I met with during my visit to KRG were all determined to stress the importance of inclusiveness of all people living in the region, and I don't doubt the politicians' good intentions. However, their politics have not yet accomplished their ambitions. This is in line with what Kakie stated; "The one thing that we Kurds are good at is to make no differences socially. Socially we are good but politically... that has to change" Gorran's aspirations for change is a reminder for the Kurdistan society to not repeat history.

Internal national dynamics among autonomous regions are complex elements to study and there are certainly other aspects to look at when searching for understanding of the political culture in Kurdistan. The theories I have used have put perspective on the study and have further described the situation through nationalist observations. By using other theories, such as feminism or post-colonialism as well as other central concepts, one would draw further conclusions and would perhaps understand the internal national dynamics of KRG in a different way.

This thesis has aimed to study the political parties' perceptions and standpoints on the internal national dynamics. The parties' perceptions on the political situation did in this case aim to represent the general view of the political internal national dynamics of KRG. The study was not aimed to explain how the people of Kurdistan experience these dynamics which would be a suitable subject to study in another research and would hence give a different perspective to the situation in Kurdistan. Nevertheless, I consider the views of the political parties to be sufficiently interesting to study. I believe that this study has interdisciplinary relevance and can contribute to further understanding of the political situation in Kurdistan. The interview results are not generalizable for other studies, but the

method and the theoretical framework are possible to use when studying similar cases of nationalist movements and stateless groups' internal differences. In such cases, my construction of *internal national dynamics* to bring together tribalism, independency and national identity could be helpful to use and bring new perspectives.

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