Iraqi Kurdistan, the PKK and International Relations

Theory and Ethnic Conflict

Hannes Černy

Hannes Černy's book provides a deeply thoughtful, extremely well-written and meticulously sourced analysis of international relations theories' problems when it comes to talking about 'ethnic conflict'. His case study on relations between Kurdish groups in Syria, Turkey and Iraq neatly demonstrates how the 'ethnic group' or 'nation' cannot serve as a static stand-in for states, whose treatment as unitary actors in much of IR theory is already problematic. Readers interested in either IR theory or the Kurdish issue should find this work very refreshing and rewarding.

David Romano, *Thomas G. Strong Chair in Middle East Politics at Missouri State University; author of* The Kurdish Nationalist Movement *and co-editor of* Conflict, Democratization and the Kurds in the Middle East

Theoretically grounded and empirically detailed, Hannes Černy's book makes an insightful contribution to the study of Kurdish ethno-nationalism in the Middle East.

Stefan Wolff, *Professor of International Security, University of Birmingham; author of* Ethnic Conflict *and co-editor of* The Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict

Hannes Černy brilliantly deconstructs ethno-nationalism in international relations theory. While explaining the motives and behavior shaping the strained relations between the Kurdish political parties KDP, PUK and PKK, he delivers a compelling critique of state-centrist and essentialist ontologies in explanatory theory.

Joost Jongerden, *Assistant Professor in Sociology at Wageningen University and Endowed Professor at the Asian Platform for Global Sustainability and Transcultural Studies at Kyoto University; associate editor of* Kurdish Studies

Hannes Černy provides insight on the growing importance of Kurds in the Middle East. He has a deep understanding of the balance of power and the role of Iraqi Kurds as security partners and a positive force for democratization and stability.

David L. Phillips, *Director, Program on Peace-building and Rights, Columbia University; author of* Losing Iraq and The Kurdish Spring

Iraqi Kurdistan, the PKK and International Relations

Due to its primacy in explaining issues of war and peace in the international arena, the discipline of International Relations (IR) looms large in analyses of and responses to ethnic conflict in academia, politics and popular media – in particular with respect to contemporary conflicts in the Middle East.

Grounded in constitutive theory, this book challenges how ethnic/ethno-nationalist conflict is represented in explanatory IR by deconstructing its most prominent state-centric models, frameworks and analytical concepts. As much a critique of contemporary scholarship on Kurdish ethno-nationalism as a detailed analysis of the most prominent Kurdish ethno-nationalist actors, the book provides the first in-depth investigation into the relations between the PKK and the main Iraqi Kurdish political parties from the 1980s to the present. It situates this inquiry within the wider context of the ambiguous political status of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, its relations with Turkey, and the role Kurdish parties and insurgencies play in the war against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Appreciating these complex dynamics and how they are portrayed in Western scholarship is essential for understanding current developments in the Iraqi and Syrian theatres of war, and for making sense of discussions about a potential independent Kurdish state to emerge in Iraq.

Iraqi Kurdistan, the PKK and International Relations provides a comprehensive and critical discussion of the state-centric and essentializing epistemologies, ontologies and methodologies of the three main paradigms of explanatory IR, as well as their analytical models and frameworks on ethnic identity and conflict in the Middle East and beyond. It will therefore be a valuable resource for anyone studying ethnicity and nationalism, International Relations or Middle East Politics.

Hannes Černy is Visiting Professor at the Department of International Relations, Central European University, and he previously taught at the universities of Hull, Exeter and Passau. His research focuses on issues of identity and sovereignty and their representation in IR scholarship.

Exeter Studies in Ethno Politics
Series Editor: Gareth Stansfield
University of Exeter, UK

For a full list of titles in the series: www.routledge.com/middleeaststudies/series/EAES

Unrecognized States in the International System
Edited by Nina Caspersen and Gareth Stansfield

The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey
From Protest to Resistance
Cengiz Gunes

Memory and Conflict in Lebanon
Remembering and Forgetting the Past
Craig Larkin

The Alevis in Turkey and Europe
Identity and Managing Territorial Diversity
Elise Massicard

Federal Solutions to Ethnic Problems
Accommodating Diversity
Liam Anderson

The Kurdish Question in Turkey
New Perspectives on Violence, Representation, and Reconciliation
Cengiz Gunes and Welat Zeydanlioglu

The Challenge of Ethnic Democracy
The State and Minority Groups in Israel, Poland and Northern Ireland
Yoav Peled

Education and Ethno Politics
Defending Identity in Iraq
Kelsey Shanks

Decentralisation and the Management of Ethnic Conflict
Lessons from the Republic of Macedonia
Aisling Lyon

The Iraqi Federation
Origin, Operation and Significance
Farah Shakir

Iraqi Kurdistan, the PKK and International Relations
Theory and Ethnic Conflict
Hannes Černy

Iraqi Kurdistan, the PKK and International Relations

Theory and Ethnic Conflict

Hannes Černy

For Sarah,
my partner in everything

Contents

Preface and acknowledgements

The comedian Stephen Colbert once said of President George W. Bush:

> The greatest thing about this man is he's steady. You know where he stands. He believes the same thing Wednesday that he believed on Monday, no matter what happened on Tuesday. Events can change; this man's beliefs never will.[1]

While steadiness of character and conviction in principle are no doubt admirable qualities, I believe that, as in life in general, for intellectual enquiry the opposite of what Colbert mockingly lauded in Bush should be the case. Solid scholarly research should be distinguished by the very fact that there are no irrefutable truths, that there is a vast multiplicity of realities out there, that one's beliefs should be a reflection of the natural volatility of events, that our investigations should yield more questions than answers, and certainly challenge pre-conceived notions about the social world we inhabit and take part in shaping every day.

A certain kind of intellectual conversion then surely happened to me between the time I first developed an interest in the historic struggle of the Kurdish people in Iraq and Turkey for national self-determination and today, as I write these lines. My first inroads into the subject were inspired by the many talks I had with Kurdish friends in the smoky cafés of Vienna in 2004 and my travels in south-eastern Anatolia in the following year. Most Kurds I encountered had become enthralled by the exalting experience of Iraqi Kurds gaining the freest political entity in Kurdish history enshrined in the Iraqi Constitution, and hoped for this entity and its leaders to become champions of Kurdish cultural rights, freedoms and national self-determination in all parts of what is called wider Kurdistan. For a people who had suffered so much throughout the twentieth century it was an exhilarating image, one I adopted without much questioning for my political novel, *The Writing on the Wall*, published in 2007. Only once I looked into the relations between the various Kurdish ethno-nationalist parties more critically in the context of having started my PhD studies at the University of Exeter, UK, and had conducted actual field research in Iraqi Kurdistan, did I realize that matters are more complex, ambiguous, and contradictory, and that the pre-conceived notions I had held on Monday were soundly challenged on Tuesday.

In this respect then, this study is, if you like, a roundup of the way I interpret, on Wednesday, the various forms of Kurdish identity that are enacted in the political space of Iraqi Kurdistan and beyond, as well as a roundup of the role of explanatory IR theory in shaping ethnic conflicts, issues of sovereignty and national self-determination. As much as a snapshot of my thinking or beliefs, I would like this study to be understood then as an invitation for reflection and dialogue on the issues addressed herein, in the hope that these exchanges will lead to an even more matured position on Thursday.

One person, more than any other, has inspired and challenged me to think more critically about the social world we all inhabit and take part in shaping every day, my wife and partner in everything, Sarah Keeler. With her crucial aid in facilitating contacts in Iraqi Kurdistan, intellectual input, encouragement in difficult times, tireless support, and keen eye as well as sharp mind improving countless earlier drafts of this book, it is only natural that I dedicate the fruits of what is essentially our combined efforts to her. I also owe a big hug to our baby-daughter, Tikva, who has shown a level of tolerance and support remarkable for a two-year-old during her dad's countless hours at the computer when all she wanted was to play. My profound appreciation goes to my supervisor at Exeter, Gareth Stansfield, as well as to Brendan O'Leary at UPenn, where I had the unique opportunity to spend a doctoral fellowship – while I may differ with them on opinions of the nature of IR scholarship in general, and in my interpretations of Kurdish identity and the political space in Iraqi Kurdistan in particular, I always valued our discussions on these matters, and their support of my research was crucial to its success. The fact that Gareth has encouraged me to publish this study as part of his *Exeter Series in Ethno Politics* is testimony to his open-mindedness to diversities of opinion and his promotion of critical scholarship, even where it directly challenges his own positions. I am as appreciative of his receptiveness towards my heterodoxies as I am grateful for the many opportunities he has given me to intellectually and practically pursue them during all these years.

Outside Iraqi Kurdistan, I want to thank Selahettin Çelik, Abbas Vali, Bob Olson, Michael Gunter, Denise Natali, Nina Caspersen, Hugh Pope, Doğu Ergil, Siamend Hajo, and James Harvey for sharing their personal insights and expertise with me. In Iraqi Kurdistan, without the help of Omar Sheikhmous, who generously facilitated a great number of my contacts there, my field research would never have got off the ground. I also want to acknowledge the services of the Department of Foreign Relations of the KRG, and in particular its head, Falah Mustafa Bakir, who opened many doors for me during my stays there. Likewise, I am indebted to my tireless 'fixer' and translator during my research in Iraqi Kurdistan, Niaz Zangana, as well as to several journalists there who, due to the rapidly deteriorating human rights situation and for their own safety, I have decided not to name in this study. Ample thanks are also due to the editorial team at Routledge, first and foremost Joe Whiting and Emma Tyce; one cannot wish for a more helpful team of editors during the publication process. Finally, I want to thank my parents and Jane Keeler for the countless ways in

which they have supported me personally, my family, and my research during all these years.

For the sake of full disclosure I want to record that my research has been partly funded by a Centre for Kurdish Studies Scholarship of the University of Exeter. I received further funding from a research grant from *the British Institute for the Study of Iraq*, and a Marie Curie doctoral fellowship in Sustainable Peacebuilding as part of the VII EU Marie Curie framework that allowed me to continue my field research in Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey as well as to spend a year as a doctoral fellow at the University of Coimbra in Portugal. While all these institutions and individuals have contributed to my research in many ways, it goes without saying that all errors and omissions in this study are entirely mine.

<div align="right">
Hannes Černy
Budapest, Hungary
December 2016
</div>

Note

1 Comedy routine at the annual White House Correspondents' Dinner 2006.

Abbreviations

ADYÖD	Ankara Democratic Higher Education Association (*Ankara Demokratik Yüksek Öğretim Derneği*)
AKP	Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*)
ARGK	People's Liberation Army of Kurdistan (*Arteşa Rizgariya Netewa Kurdistan*)
BDP	Peace and Democracy Party (*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*)
BISA	British International Studies Association
CENTCOM	United States Central Command
CHP	Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*)
CJCS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
CUP	Committee for Union and Progress (*İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*)
DEP	Democracy Party (*Demokrasi Partisi*)
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
DP	Democratic Party (*Demokrat Parti*)
DTP	Democratic Society Party (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*)
GAP	South-eastern Anatolia Project (*Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi*)
HADEP	People's Democracy Party (*Halkın Demokrasi Partisi*)
HDP	Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*)
HEP	People's Labour Party (*Halkın Emek Partisi*)
HRK	Kurdistan Freedom Unit (*Hezen Rizgariya Kurdistan*)
ICP	Iraqi Communist Party
IKF	Iraqi Kurdistan Front
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (*ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah fī'l-ʿIrāq wa-sh-Shām*)
ITF	Iraqi Turkmen Front (*Irak Türkmen Cephesi*)
JİTEM	Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Organisation (*Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele*)
KADEK	Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (*Kongreya Azadî û Demokrasiya Kurdistanê*)
KCK	Kurdistan Democratic Confederation (*Koma Civaken Kurdistan*)
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party (*Partîya Demokrata Kurdistan*)
KDP-I	Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran

KDP-T	Democratic Party of Turkish Kurdistan
KNC	Kurdish National Council
Kongra-Gel	People's Congress of Kurdistan (*Kongra Gelê Kurdistan*)
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
MEK	People's Mujahideen of Iran (*Mojahedin-e-Khalq*)
MERIP	Middle East Research and Information Project
MHP	Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*)
MIT	National Intelligence Agency (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*)
NLM	National Liberation Movement
NSC	National Security Council
PAK	Kurdistan Liberation Party (*Partiya Azadiya Kurdistan*)
PCDK	Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party (*Partiya Careseriya Demokratik a Kurdistane*)
PJAK	Kurdistan Free Life Party (*Partiya Jiyani Azadi Kurdistan*)
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*)
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (*Yeketî Niştîmanî Kurdistan*)
PWD	Patriotic and Democratic Party of Kurdistan (*Partîya Welatparêzên Demokratên Kuristan*)
PYD	Democratic Union Party (*Partiya Yekita ya Demokratik*)
RCT	Rational Choice Theory
SCIRI	Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq
SHP	Social Democratic Populist Party (*Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti*)
TAK	Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (*Teyrêbazên Azadiya Kurdistan*)
TAL	Transitional Administrative Law
TESEV	Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (*Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı*)
TKSP	Socialist Party of Turkish Kurdistan (*Türkiye Kürdistan Sosyalist Partisi*)
TWP	Workers Party of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*)
YPG	Peoples' Protection Units (*Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*)

Introduction

Constitutive versus explanatory theory

In one of the most widely used primers on International Relations (IR), Colin Wight (2010) discusses the epistemological debates preoccupying the discipline, first and foremost the rift between explanatory and constitutive theory, a schism that, according to Milja Kurki (2008), divides contemporary IR like no other. Already, back in 1995, when the post-positivist challenge to traditional theories of IR was in full vogue, Steve Smith wrote:

> In my view this is the main meta-theoretical issue facing international theory today. The emerging fundamental division in the discipline is between those theories that seek to offer explanatory accounts of international relations, and those that see theory as constitutive of that reality. At base this boils down to a difference over what the social world is like; is it to be seen as scientists think of the 'natural' world, that is to say as something outside of our theories, or is the social world what we make it? Radically different types of theory are needed to deal with each of these cases, and these theories are not combinable so as to form one overarching theory of the social world … In my judgement this really is a fundamental divide within social theory.
>
> (Smith 1995: 26–27)[1]

In response to this assessment Wight retorts:

> But just whom does the 'we' refer to here? Setting this distinction in opposition to explanatory theory that attempts to explain international relations, we can presume that Smith means 'we' IR theorists, not 'we' members of society. But this seems implausible. It seems to suggest that 'we' IR theorists make the world of international relations.
>
> (Wight 2010: 43)

To me Smith's argument is not implausible. On the contrary, not only is it the central distinguishing feature of constitutive theory, it is also the key argument of this study that we IR theorists as categorizers and analysts, are co-protagonists of the social phenomena and processes we set out to describe; we do not 'make'

the world of international relations, but, like the actors that are the subject of our analysis, we take part in influencing and shaping it. In clear rejection of the scientific objectivism and rational positivism of explanatory theories, this study commits to a constitutive theory of IR that renders us analysts as much part of social discourse on the issue to be analysed, and therefore the subject of analysis, as the social groups and actors we categorize and examine. We all are part of the social world we analysts try to understand and explain, and, in my opinion, what would be implausible is to assume that our explanations have no impact on the processes and discourses we study, that we can remain objective, neutral and detached to them, while in fact we arguably can be as subjective, involved, biased, prejudiced and party to them as our subjects of analysis.

The social phenomenon that is the object of analysis of this study is ethnic and ethno-nationalist conflict, and its subject of analysis are those ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs that engage in an ethnicized discourse, advance and thrive on it, as well as we IR theorists that seek to understand and explain their actions alike. While it would be implausible to argue that ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs, be it in reference to our case study, Kurdish nationalist leaders or members of the Turkish military-intelligence apparatus, have read either Smith or any other IR theorist for that matter, to let highly theoretical deliberations guide their thinking and policies, it would be equally implausible to posit that our thought processes occur in a social vacuum, are not filtered down through the media, the advocacy of think tanks via political decision makers, and the exchange in personnel between the scientific community and public servants, to name just a few, until they reach, in a more accessible form, politicians and the general public. Ironically, on the contrary, academia in the twenty-first century is mostly concerned with proving the impact factor of its deliberations to business, philanthropic donors, the ministers holding the purses of the higher education budgets, students expected to pay ever higher tuition fees, and the general public. How can we IR theorists proudly demonstrate these impact factors in every grant proposal we pen, yet at the same time cling to the fallacy of a detached scientific objectivism that posits us outside the social discourse we seek to explain?

As far as IR scholars' impact on the understanding of, and policies adopted in response to ethnic conflict by decision makers is concerned, one does not have to belabour the prominent example of President Clinton, allegedly declaring Robert Kaplan's infamous *Balkan Ghosts* (1994) required reading for members of his administration in dealing with the conflicts of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s (Joras & Schetter 2004); the very *Balkan Ghosts* that is often said to have established the unfortunate and fallacious narrative of 'ancient ethnic hatreds' dominating Western representations of the wars in Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo. What is one of the subjects of this study, the Iraq War and the ethno-sectarian conflicts it triggered, offers a plethora of examples of IR scholars influencing the positions and policies of regional and international actors – from the 'Six Wise Men', British academics that counselled Tony Blair against invading Iraq in 2003 (Moreton 2015), to countless neo-conservative scholars in the US, Francis

Fukuyama and Bernard Lewis among them, doing the opposite with the Bush administration. What is more, in the decade since the invasion of Iraq hardly a week has passed without academics being questioned on developments in the war-torn country by journalists, in expert testimonials before parliamentary inquiries or, on their own accord, penning another op-ed to gain a wider audience for their analyses.

The prominence of IR in accounts of ethnic conflict, I would argue, stems from the widely held perception of the discipline to be most qualified to explain issues of war and peace in the international arena. 'The study of international relations can tell us much about ethnic conflict,' argue Jesse and Williams (2011: 15) in advocating for a primacy of IR and its 'theories and approaches to explain ethnic conflict'. In another primer on ethnic conflict Cordell and Wolff (2009: 14) take the same line when observing, 'theories of international relations offer useful tools and insights in the study of ethnic conflict and conflict settlement'.[2] More than any other discipline, they continue, 'IR theory is primarily concerned with issues of war and peace' in world politics, and state behaviour has a significant impact on the origins, development and duration of ethnic conflicts – whether causal, escalating or mitigating – as do norms, values, practices, institutions, legislations and forms of governance at the local, regional and international level. Although the reasons they offer for IR's primacy in explaining the complex dynamics of ethnic conflict appear compelling, others would argue that IR is not particularly well equipped for the analysis of identity conflicts. IR is a notorious latecomer to debates on questions of identity – the concept did not feature prominently as an eminent category in IR-specific approaches until the so-called 'fourth great debate' and the post-positivist challenge of the early 1990s (Zalewski & Enloe 1995). One would not have to go so far as John Stack's observations that, 'ethnicity is as alien to the study of international relations as would be Sigmund Freud's musings in *Civilization and Its Discontents*' (Stack 1997: 11), to ascertain that explanatory IR's theoretical approaches to identity are epistemologically grossly underdeveloped. Zalewski and Enloe sum it up aptly when concluding, 'all three paradigms [neo-realism, neo-liberalism, structuralism] are too restricted ontologically, methodologically, and epistemologically, and in ways which ultimately render them unable to theorize or think adequately about identity' (Zalewski & Enloe 1995: 297).

The main argumentative thrust of this study is to take up this critique of the approach to ethnic conflict of the three major explanatory theories of IR – (neo-)realism, (neo-)liberalism and systemic constructivism – and to provide a detailed critical examination of the epistemologies, ontologies, models, and frameworks they employ in their analysis of ethnic conflict.[3] The epistemological and ontological point of departure here is this: as will be shown, in the late 1980s/early 1990s, constitutive theorists such as Richard Ashley, Rob Walker, David Campbell and others led the charge in deconstructing the sovereign state in IR theory both by discussing the sovereign state as a discursive formation rather than a factual, clearly bounded, timeless and ontologically unproblematic, i.e. taken-for-granted, entity in global politics and by exposing explanatory IR's

role in contributing to its reproduction as a unitary actor and as supreme in the international system by virtue of these essentialized properties. At the same time, Craig Calhoun also argued for the nation, and by implication the ethnic group, to be understood as a discursive formation rather than the factual precursor of the state, as modernist theory would have it. What I intend to do in this study, inspired by these pioneers of constitutive theory and after adopting their conceptualization of ethnic group, nation, and state as discursive formations, is to show how explanatory IR has contributed to the essentialization of the former two (that is, ethnic group and nation) by analytically equating them with the latter (that is, the state) and how this has in turn led to the reproduction and substantialization of the lines of division between self and other that form the basis of an ethnicized discourse – a theme David Campbell has already touched on in his seminal *National Deconstruction* (1998a), yet which I intend to problematize in greater depth. In fact, it is the ontological, methodological, and epistemological restrictions cursorily identified by Zalewski and Enloe above that are the main focus of this study. In this sense then, the conception of this study as a contribution to a constitutive IR theory of ethnic conflict, first and foremost, is an epistemological and ontological critique of how explanatory theories of IR perceive of, explain, and deal with ethnic conflict. This will be done, after outlining explanatory IR's approach to ethnic identity, ethnic conflict, and nationalism in general terms, by deconstructing the main concepts and frameworks, explanatory IR has contributed to or utilizes in the analysis of ethnic conflict: state-centrism, the 'ethnic security dilemma', the 'ethnic alliance model'[4] and, drawing on other disciplines, instrumentalism.

To be clear about this study's ambition, though, not only would it be impossible to show how certain texts of explanatory IR theory shape the world views and actions of individual ethnic entrepreneurs, ethno-nationalist leaders or decision makers engaging in and advancing an ethnicized discourse, but to do so would run counter to the self-perception of this study as constitutive theory, which is defined precisely by eschewing and confuting universal claims to causality; it would become guilty of the very attempt to harness constitutive theory for causal or explanatory theory that Smith (2000) criticizes in Wendt's work. On this distinction Lene Hansen elaborates:

> Mainstream approaches [i.e. explanatory theories] adopt a positivist epistemology. They strive to find the causal relations that 'rule' world politics, working with dependent and independent variables … [Constitutive theories], by contrast, embrace a post-positivist epistemology as they argue that the social world is so far removed from the hard sciences where causal epistemologies originate that we cannot understand world politics through causal cause-effect relationships … Constitutive theories are still theories, not just descriptions or stories about the world, because they define theoretical concepts, explain how they hang together, and instruct us on how to use them in analysis of world politics.
>
> (Hansen 2013: 171)

With that aspiration in mind, I argue that IR, more than any other discipline, is prone to what Rogers Brubaker (2004) calls 'groupism' and a 'clichéd constructivism' when dealing with identity politics in the social sciences, a constructivism in name only – limited to the introductory section or expressed in customary yet seemingly perfunctory disclaimers – but the main analysis, at large, continues to be done under essentialist and substantialist presumptions of ethnic identities, often bordering a primordialism slipping in through the backdoor. Despite advances to the contrary in sociology and anthropology, and two generations of critical theory scholarship, the three dominant schools of thought in IR still tend to treat ethnic groups as organic, static, substantive, distinct, homogeneous and bounded units and largely equate conflicts between said groups with conflicts between states. The essentialist and substantialist presumptions of groupism in how explanatory IR approaches ethnicity and ethnic conflict, I hypothesize in what is the core argument of this study, manifest themselves on three levels: (1) operationalizing ethnicity as either the dependent variable, that is perceiving it as exogenous to the social phenomena studied and reducing it to merely a political tool, or the independent variable and therewith according it with pre-eminent explanatory power; (2) equating ethnic groups with states; and (3) as a consequence thereof, all too often equating ethnic conflict with ethno-nationalist conflict by postulating that a disenfranchised group's desire for the control of territory and in the long run sovereign statehood is the prime cause of the conflict at hand.

To *herausarbeiten* – in the sense of elaborating an argument by teasing out information, by chipping away the surfaces like a carver who reveals the features and contours of a statue cut-by-cut – the workings, effects and rationale behind such groupism in the discourses on ethnic conflict and sovereignty of explanatory IR is the prime objective of this study. While these are discussed in great depth in theory in Part I, such a debate cannot and should never remain at the theoretical level since the essentialist practices criticized here have very direct and often dramatic implications on the conflicts we analysts set out to study and for the people who are its main protagonists and victims. For this reason, and in order to substantiate and illustrate the arguments made here by way of the example of one of the most widely analysed ethnic and ethno-nationalist conflicts of our times, ample room is given to the empirical case study. As elaborated below, the case of the relations between the *Kurdistan Workers' Party* (PKK, *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*) and the Iraqi Kurdish ethno-nationalist parties, the *Kurdistan Democratic Party* (KDP, *Partîya Demokrata Kurdistan*) and the *Patriotic Union of Kurdistan* (PUK, *Yeketî Niştîmanî Kurdistan*), as well as on the political identity cum current status of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, constitute an ideal case with which to examine the workings and effects of groupism in explanatory IR discourses on ethnic conflict and sovereignty. As a matter of fact, it very well has the potential to serve as the cautionary tale par excellence about the epistemological, ontological and methodological flaws of such essentialist approaches in explanatory IR scholarship.

The above three contentions of the key argument of this study, put differently, encompass the two main points of critique herein levelled at how explanatory IR

perceives and explains ethnicity and ethnic conflict. First, that in its epistemology, ontology and methodology when dealing with ethnic identity and ethnic conflict, explanatory IR is guilty of reification, and second, that its system-immanent normative determinism of state-centrism creates a reality that, intentionally or not, accentuates the ethnicized discourse and exacerbates the ethnic lines of division it originally set out to study. Reification, one of the cardinal errors in social research, can be defined as 'the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things, that is, in non-human or possible supra terms' (Berger & Luckmann 1991: 106); or in the words of Anthony Giddens (1984: 180), the 'reified discourse refers the "facticity" with which social phenomena confront individual actors in such a way as to ignore how they are produced and reproduced through human agency'. For the tendency to reify ethnic groups in particular, Craig Calhoun remarks:

> We habitually refer to ethnic groups, races, tribes, and languages as though they were clearly unities, only occasionally recalling to ourselves the ambiguity of their definitions, the porousness of their boundaries, and the situational dependency of their use in practice. The point is not that such categorical identities are not real, any more than the nations are not real, it is, rather, that they are not fixed but both fluid and manipulatable. Cultural and physical differences exist, but their discreetness, their identification, and their invocation are all variable.[5]

The primary site of reification in explanatory IR's dealing with ethnic conflict I identify is state-centrism. While explanatory IR's state-centric ontology will be discussed in great detail in the theory section,[6] suffice it to say for now that 'state-centric theories of international relations assume that states are the primary actors in world politics … the claim is that states … are sufficiently important actors that any positive theory of international relations must place them at its core' (Lake 2008: 42). Yet this assumption about the primacy of the state in IR theory comes with considerable epistemological and ontological baggage. First and foremost, state-centrism in mainstream IR 'reduce[s] the essence of international relations to state-centred interpretations' (Youngs 1999: 34). State-centrism thus explains international relations almost exclusively – at best it inserts the above mentioned clichéd constructivist caveats – through the prism of the state, a state whose existence ontologically predates the system of which it is part; in other words,

> as an ontologically abstract category, the state, through the state-centric prism, becomes also a static category. International relations is reduced via the state-centric prism to an individualistically conceived collection of its parts – that is states – and thus as a collection of static entities.
>
> (Youngs 1999: 35)

I argue in this study that explanatory IR – for reasons that will be elaborated in detail – by equating the ethnic group with the state, has translated from the

state onto the ethnic group this static conceptualization of social units as clearly bounded, organic, substantive, distinct, homogeneous and static categories endowed with social agency, whose properties and genesis are not problematized but treated as given – or to be more precise, by doing so, as with the state, it has contributed to reifying the ethnic group through its narratives. This equation of state with ethnic or ethno-nationalist group that was made possible, in modernist fashion, by ascribing the nation with the defining objective of becoming a state, brings with it then for the study of ethnic or ethno-nationalist conflict the same epistemological and ontological fallacies of reification as state-centrism does in general for the study of the state and international relations at large.

Given the centrality of the state in explanatory IR's analysis of ethnic and ethno-nationalist conflict, both as the social unit with which explanatory IR equates the ethnic group as a unitary actor and as the ultimate objective to be attained, therewith defining the ethno-nationalist group, it becomes imperative to dedicate ample room to a critical analysis of the concept of sovereign statehood in explanatory IR. Yet, it is a conjuncture dictated by the representation of both concepts and categories in explanatory IR which establishes this linkage in the first place. Consequently, I argue, any deconstruction of how explanatory IR explains ethnic and ethno-nationalist conflict would be wholly incomplete if not accompanied by a deconstruction of sovereign statehood, which, allegedly, the former is all about.

Some may argue that by denouncing explanatory IR's approach to ethnic conflict as groupist, essentialist and state-centric, this study is also guilty of reification and groupism. After all, when identifying explanatory IR scholars as co-protagonists of the ethnic conflicts they set out to describe who unquestioningly adopt the strategic essentialisms of ethno-nationalist elites as factual for their analysis, which can lead to a reification, substantialization and legitimization of those elites' claims to leadership and territory as well as to deepening the ethnic lines of division on which they strive, it may appear as if here a social group, namely explanatory IR, gets essentialized and wrongly ascribed with social agency. Anticipating this potential critique, I feel it necessary to clarify the following: International Relations theory, for the purposes of this study and drawing on Hamati-Attaya (2012), is conceptualized as a social field in the Bourdieuian sense. While a Coxian cum Bourdieuian conceptualization of explanatory IR will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 3, suffice it to say for the moment that a field, according to Bourdieu, is a two-dimensional social space,

> both as a field of forces, whose necessity is imposed on agents who are engaged in it, and as a field of struggles within which agents confront each other with differentiated means and ends according to their position within the structure of the field of forces, thus contributing to conserving or transforming its structure.
>
> (Bourdieu 1998a: 32)

Any society consists of multiple sets of fields that can overlap and complement each other; yet, as will be elaborated later, all fields are subordinated to the field of power – material and symbolic – within the Foucauldian power-knowledge nexus. From the above definition it is clear that the field itself, of course, has no agency, nor is it clearly bound, fixed or homogeneous. Within the field of International Relations theory, for example, that can be understood as a subfield of the field of science in general, the field of education or, when focusing on how theory informs political decision making, the political field, social agency rests with individual scholars, their habitus (see below) and social capital. All those fields and their sub-units are conditioned by the specific norms and culture inherent to each field – thus emphasizing the individual and collective dimension of the Bourdieuian social field (Bourdieu 1977, 1990, 1998a, 1998b; Bigo 2011; Jenkins 2002; Thomson 2014). Likewise, the above quote specifies that any field features a considerable degree of diversity, illustrated, for example, by the divide between explanatory and constitutive theory within the field of International Relations theory. As will be shown, the former contributes to conserving the dominant structure, while the latter seeks to transform it. Their relations within the field are thus defined by the above identified struggle, a 'struggle for the power to impose universalist claims' (Bourdieu 2000: 181) of what is 'the legitimate vision of the social world which has on its side all the collective … common sense' (Bourdieu 1991: 239) and the refutation of universalist claims to knowledge. Indeed, even within explanatory IR – given that it is constituted by the often contradictory paradigms of (neo-)realism, (neo-)liberalism and systemic constructivism – there is appreciable difference, exemplified, for example, by the fact that some approaches treat ethnic identity as the dependent, while others operationalize it as the independent variable. Yet, what unites and distinguishes explanatory IR within the field of International Relations theory is its epistemological, ontological, and methodological adherence to groupism, state-centrism and positivism.

In sum then, this study can be understood as a critical reading and deconstruction of ethnic identity (and consequently ethnic and ethno-nationalist conflict), together with the interrelated concept of the sovereign nation state in explanatory IR. The main thrust of critique centres on the argument that by portraying ethnic conflict in a groupist and deterministic way – that is, by depicting ethnic groups as organic, static, substantive, distinct, homogeneous and bounded units with social agency, as unitary or unitarily acting doers that can be equated with states whose defining objective is to become a state, to acquire exclusive control, i.e. sovereignty over a territory and population – explanatory IR scholars in their state-centrist ontology and through the practice of reification contribute to creating the very reality they set out to describe. In other words, I argue explicitly here that explanatory IR scholars as co-protagonists of ethnic conflict not only play into the hands of ethnic elites by unquestioningly adopting their 'strategic essentialisms' (Spivak 1987) as factual for their analysis, but that they often take part, through their scholarship, in writing into existence in the first place the ethnic lines of division, the 'us' versus 'them' worldview that constitutes them, on which these ethnic elites thrive. These theoretical deliberations are then taken

up in the empirical section of the study where, in order to substantiate them, I will deconstruct the (strategic) essentialisms of ethnic elites by way of the case of relations between the PKK and the Iraqi Kurdish ethno-nationalist parties, the KDP and the PUK, as well as on the political identity cum current status of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, illustrating why the previously deconstructed frameworks of explanatory IR – ethnic security dilemma, ethnic alliance model, instrumentalism – not only fail to explain their relations and ethnic conflict in general but, what is more, substantially misrepresent and distort realities on the ground. Instead, drawing on Karin Fierke (2005, 2007), it will be shown why and how a fluid matrix of identities and interests, that acknowledges both as socially constructed and explicitly does not operationalize ethnic identity as either dependent or independent variables, better captures the parties' relations and, I would argue, ethnic identity and conflict in general.

Methodology and case study

These ambitions necessitate a brief clarification of what is meant here by discourse and deconstruction. Norman Fairclough (2010: 3) reminds us that 'discourse is not simply an entity we can define independently: we can only arrive at an understanding of it by analysing sets of relations'. He continues:

> Discourse is itself a complex set of relations including relations of communication between people who talk, write, and in other ways communicate with each other, but also … describe relations between concrete communicative events (conversations, newspaper articles etc.) and more abstract and enduring complex discursive 'objects' (with their own complex relations) like languages, discourses and genres. But there are also relations between discourse and other such complex 'objects' including objects in the physical world, persons, power relations and institutions, which are interconnected elements in social activity or praxis.
>
> (Fairclough 2010: 3)

Michel Foucault bases his assessment of knowledge production on how he conceptualizes discourse, in particular that 'nothing has any meaning outside discourse' (Foucault 1972: 132), that matters in the social world only gain meaning through discourse, or in the words of Laclau and Mouffe, 'we use discourse to emphasize the fact that every social configuration is *meaningful*' (1990: 100, emphasis in original). Discourse therefore may be understood as 'a specific series of representations and practices through which meanings are produced, identities constituted, social relations established and political and ethical outcomes made more or less possible' (Campbell 2009: 166). In *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) Foucault further developed the concept of 'discursive formations' that not only included the objects under discussion but also demarcated how these discussions were structured, who was seen as in a position to discuss these objects authoritatively, and ultimately the value that individual statements

within the discussion were given. 'The types of objects in their domains were not already demarcated, but came into existence only contemporaneous with the discursive formations that made it possible to talk about them' (Rouse 2005: 96); in fact, discourses 'shape the contours of the taken-for-granted world, naturalizing and universalizing a particular subject formation and view of the world' (Campbell 2009: 167). Since, for Foucault, power and knowledge are closely interconnected in all social interactions and relations expressed through discourse, a comprehensive understanding of discourse therefore must not only capture the 'systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak' (Lessa 2006: 285) but also ought to address questions of structure and agency that form the basis of every discursive relation, formation and field together with the systems of power and knowledge by which they are constituted. Of equal importance though, as Iver Neumann reminds us, is that discourse should not be seen as distinct from practice. Neumann, in his work on narratives and practices in the field of international diplomacy (2002, 2007, 2012), admits to having grown impatient

> with what could, perhaps unkindly, be called 'armchair analysis' … text-based analysis of global politics that are not complemented by different kinds of contextual data from the field, data that may illuminate how foreign policy and global politics are experienced as lived practices.
>
> (Neumann 2002: 628)

Neumann draws a wide argumentative arc from Emile Durkheim to Marcel Mauss, to Claude Lévi-Strauss, to Michel Foucault to argue why the so-called 'linguistic turn' in IR is mistaken in all too often reducing discourse analysis to mere textual analysis. Discourse cannot and should never be understood as independent from practice. For Neumann (2012: 57),

> at any one time, discourse is the precondition for action. Discourses offer a distinct set of socially recognised actions, as well as means of recognising when they are appropriate and how they should be performed. The concept that captures actions so patterned by discourse is practice.

Thus, since 'practices are discursive, both in the sense that some practices involve speech-acts and in the sense that practices cannot be thought of "outside" of discourse' (Neumann 2012: 58), by extrapolation, if one wants to understand a given discourse, it would not make sense to study it as separate from the action that 'embodies, enacts, and reifies [that knowledge] all at once' (Adler & Pouliot 2011: 8), the very practice that is an expression of this discourse.[7] In this vein then, this study, logically, has both discourse and practice as its objects of analysis, with a focus in the theory section on how explanatory IR reifies an ethnicized discourse, and in the empirical section on how an ethnicized discourse is lived as practice by the ethno-nationalist elites in their relations with each other.

What has been said here should also make clear that to recognize identities as social constructs and discursive formations is not to say that they are not real. On the contrary, they are very real, but only insofar as they are constituted by discourse; they have no meaning prior and exogenous to discourse as this widely quoted analogy from Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 108) illustrates:

> The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought … An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independent of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of natural phenomena or expressions of the wrath of God depends upon the structuring of a discursive field.

Much has been written on whether deconstruction can be understood as method or not.[8] Jaques Derrida (2004: 78) himself has described it as '*pas de methode*', yet as Martin McQuillan (2009: 5) reminds us,

> the word *pas* in French means both 'not' and 'step', so this ambiguous phrase can be translated as either 'not a method' or 'a methodological step'. Thus, deconstruction is simultaneously … not a method and a step in, or towards, a methodology

If it is already a challenge to consummately capture the essence of discourse, to put deconstruction in a nutshell becomes even more toilsome, all the more since 'one might even say that cracking nutshells is what deconstruction is' (Caputo 1997: 32). Originating in the structuralist theory of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, the notion that Western philosophy and with it most of our discursive objects are structured along a series of binary opposites in a hierarchical relationship with each other – in which 'the second term in each pair is considered the negative, corrupt, undesirable version of the first' (Johnson 1981: VIII) – such as presence/absence, inside/outside, speech/writing, identity/difference, domestic/foreign, hierarchy/anarchy, order/chaos, is the basis of Jaques Derrida's deconstructive approach (Derrida 1978, 1981a, 1981b, 1982, 1998, 2004; Edkins 1999; McQuillan 2009; Norris 2002; Hansen 2006; Fagan *et al.* 2007; Zehfuss 2009). Each element of these dichotomies is co-constitutive of the other; that is, one cannot make sense of what presence means without having an understanding of absence and vice versa. One cannot conceptualize the self of one's identity without reference to the other, from who the self is set apart. Yet, these 'binary opposites are not the way things really are but the way they are represented by Western thought and through the habitualization and sedimentation of this thought are presented as natural' (McQuillan 2009: 9). In an attempted nutshell then – if it has to be put into one – a 'deconstructive approach' for the purpose of this study means 'critically examining the discursive processes of materialization that produce settlements; such as the idea of pre-given subjects – upon which the criteria for judgement are based' (Campbell 1998a: 30), or to put

into question what is presented in discourses as natural by scrutinizing the binary opposites on which this representation is based. In this study then, when analysing the strategic essentialisms of ethnic elites or the writings of explanatory IR scholars on ethnic conflict as texts within a wider discourse 'the question asked is not, "what does [the text] mean?" but "what does it presuppose?"' (Edkins 1999: 74). By *herausarbeiten* that a representation in a certain text as part of a wider discourse does not reflect natural facts but is based on ideologized presumptions, by showing that it depicts not reality but *one particular* reality, and by examining the systems of power and knowledge that constitute the wider discourse of which it is part, that text becomes deconstructed. And what explanatory IR presupposes in how it makes sense of ethnic conflict is groupness, for ethnicity to be either exogenous or the pre-eminent, determining variable in relations between and within assumed ethnic groups, and to ontologically equate those presupposed ethnic groups with states in their analyses of ethnic and ethno-nationalist conflicts.

This deconstructive approach highlights why certain key concepts – in this case groupness or state-centrism – are no longer serviceable within the paradigms in which they were originally developed, yet at the same time, somewhat paradoxically, instead of being replaced, their use is continued in their now deconstructed form (Hall 1995, 1996). 'By means of this double, stratified, dislodged and dislodging writing', in the words of Derrida (1981b: 42), 'we must also mark the interval between inversion, which brings low what was high, and the eruptive emergence of a new "concept", a concept that can no longer be and never could be, included in the previous regime'. Consequently, the aim of deconstruction is never to develop new meta-theories, models or frameworks that replace the ones that have been identified as no longer serviceable, that is 'the production of [truer] positive knowledge' (Hall 1996: 1), but, after *herausarbeiten* the social context and discourse in which they were generated, to continue operationalizing them with the caveat of the insights deconstruction has yielded with regard to their production and utilization. In other words, deconstruction should be understood as a moment of passage from one concept to another, in which, in lieu of a 'better' concept, the concept is still used 'under erasure' (Derrida 1981b) until a new one has been developed – which cannot be the task of deconstruction, since to do so would violate its very principles, that is its inherently critical attitude to any kind of meta-theory.

While committed to a constitutive epistemology and applying deconstruction as a 'step towards a methodology', and while heeding Fierke's call for a 'constitutive discourse analysis' that requires for us to '"look and see" the matrix of identities and interests and the process by which they are gradually transformed through historical interactions' (Fierke 2007: 81), this study makes no pretence of comprehensively adopting discourse analysis for its methodology.[9] To make such a claim I would have had to apply the same degree of textual analysis to the empirical case study as to the theory section. While for the theory section the objective is to show how closely aligned the narratives of ethnic conflict of explanatory IR and ethnic entrepreneurs are, for which textual analysis and

discourse analysis appear appropriate, they would not fit the empirical case study, where I illustrate why a matrix of identities and interests better captures the realities of relations between Kurdish ethno-nationalist parties and to explain ethnic conflict in general than operationalizing ethnic identities as dependent or independent variables, and by doing so seek to substantiate the argument made in the theory section.

As far as the role of ethnic elites is concerned, in simplified terms, there are two ways to go about empirically deconstructing an ethnicized discourse of supposed ethnic groups in conflict. One could demonstrate that the binary opposites, the 'us' versus 'them' dichotomies that constitute this discourse are constructed by questioning the fixedness of purportedly impermeable, unalterable, and inveterate ideational boundaries and divides between groups, thus disputing at large the categorization into groups based on these boundaries and divides. This, what is often misleadingly called an 'inter-group' approach, has, for example, been masterfully deconstructed for the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s by Gagnon (2004). Alternately, one could focus on the so-called 'intra-group' dimension, the supposed coherence of, and solidarity among, an assumed group in face of an alleged common enemy. It is the latter approach that has been chosen for the empirical section of this study, which sets out to analyse the relations between the PKK and the Iraqi Kurdish ethno-nationalist parties, the KDP and the PUK, in particular in light of the sanctuary the former enjoys on the territory of the latter since the early 1980s. At each stage of their relations I show the social constructedness of Kurdish ethno-nationalist identity by *herausarbeiten* that, rather than a clear sequence of identities and interests as explanatory IR wants to make us believe, they constitute a complex, ever-shifting and non-sequential matrix of identities and interests. By illustrating the ambiguities and complexities of relations between these three parties that were more often outright antagonistic than they were showing solidarity and that do not fit the simplistic explananda of either instrumentalism or of taking 'common' ethnicity as the independent variable in analysing 'intra-group' relations, I intend not only to draw into question the portrayal of Kurdish groupness in the literature but also to challenge at large the categorization in explanatory IR texts of the Kurds as one ethnic group or nation. This segment of the case study constitutes the as-of-yet most detailed analysis of relations between KDP/PUK and the PKK available in the extant literature. It goes without saying, though, that the picture would ultimately not be complete without bringing Turkey into the equation, which is why also Turkish–Iraqi Kurdish relations are given ample room for analysis in the case study.

The case study of their relations in the wider context of the status and identity of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq was chosen for three reasons. First, the so called 'Kurdish Question' constitutes the most internationalized ethnic conflict in the Middle East, affecting four nationalizing states[10] – Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria – in one of the world's most strategically and economically important regions. Also, and for the purposes of this study most significantly, the PKK sanctuary in Iraqi Kurdistan is routinely referred to in the literature as a textbook example of

common ethnicity determining the conflict behaviour of actors in the internationalization of an ethnic conflict, that is parties or *National Liberation Movements* (NLMs) of supposedly the same ethnic group forming a so-called 'ethnic alliance' against a 'common' enemy or, less explicitly, collaborating across borders against the 'mutual' foe with their behaviour and actions being predominantly rooted in group cohesion and solidarity. This prominence in the literature then renders it a case study ideally suited to deconstructing models that take ethnicity as the independent, if not determining variable to explain social agents' behaviour in ethnic conflicts and to empirically illustrate the theoretical flaws in this approach.

Second, the rapidly shifting fortunes of the Iraqi Kurdish NLMs from ragtag guerrilla to presiding over the so-called Kurdish de facto state, to governing the freest political entity in Kurdish history as part of federally structured Iraq, to playing the role of kingmaker in inner-Iraqi power struggles during and after the US occupation, all over the course of a mere 15 years, allows us to study the transformative processes of ethno-nationalism, the fluctuations in the ethnicized discourse and how the gaining of political status affects not only a nation's self-perception but also how these shifts in political identity alter its relations to its supposed ethnic kin during a relatively short and thus more easily observable period of time. Third, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq with its ambiguous political status and contested sovereignty provides a better study subject than so-called 'established' states to examine state sovereignty as a historical process, as socially constructed, situational and never fully completed. By the same token, with its status in permanent flux, one can also better relate to the processual interplay of identities, interests and political status that are co-constitutive of each other than in 'established' and recognized states, where these developments are often wrongly seen as having reached some form of (at least temporary) completion.

At this point readers may interject that a single case study is hardly sufficient to disprove an entire set of established theories. Bearing these limitations in mind, I understand the case study of PKK-KDP/PUK relations together with the political status cum identity of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq as an 'extroverted case study with generic concepts', an approach introduced by Richard Rose, who, referring to Toqueville's *Democracy in America* as a classic example, calls it 'the most frequent form of analysis in comparative politics' (Rose 1991: 454). The crucial point here is that such a case study 'is not explicitly comparative, but comparable' (ibid.), if it is intended and possible to come to theoretical or conceptual generalizations from the single case study that can be applied to other cases. Or in the words of Peters (1998: 62), 'the purpose of the extroverted case-study then becomes to explore fully this one case with the existing theory in mind, with the expectation of elaborating or expanding that body of theory with the resulting data'. What I set out to achieve with this study, though, is to go beyond just expanding a body of theory but, after first having applied a deconstructive reading of the theories in question, to use the extroverted case study to empirically substantiate this deconstruction of the theory in question.

Ultimately, all theory should be a function of the empirical data, though. The data for the empirical part of this study, the extroverted case study on the relations between the PKK and the Iraqi Kurdish nationalist movements from the late 1970s until the present and on the current status cum political identity of the Kurdistan Region, was assembled over the course of five years. In line with the research foci of this study, equal emphasis is given to a critical reading of the actions, declarations, motives, and writings by Kurdish ethno-nationalist elites and scholars analysing the subject alike, both employed as expressions of the ethnicized discourse studied here. This results in a limited applicability of the customary distinction between primary and secondary sources in this study, since secondary sources by scholars or journalists on Kurdish ethno-nationalism constitute primary sources for this study's purpose of critically examining the role of these scholars as co-protagonists of the ethnicized discourse and conflict under investigation. Thus, in addition to already published material, ranging from monographs to the output of research institutes and think tanks to media coverage in print, radio and film, including interviews with decision makers, the nucleus of the qualitative, empirical research are interviews conducted in the field between 2010 and 2012. In all, I have conducted approximately 40 interviews with former and active decision makers of the three Kurdish NLMs in question, scholars, and journalists across Iraqi Kurdistan, Turkey, Europe and the United States. Due to the rapidly deteriorating human rights situation and for their own safety, I decided not to disclose the identity of those journalists and NGO workers interviewed in Iraqi Kurdistan. The method employed for the selection and recruitment of the interview participants is 'snowball sampling', widely-used in:

> sociological studies into hidden populations who may be involved in sensitive issues or illegal activities … Yet the method is also used in political science and the study of elites, where the most influential political actors are not always those whose identities are publicly known.
>
> (Tansey 2009: 492)

Originally, a representative number of 'gatekeepers' were identified, whose accessibility as well as their extensive networks and reputations in the respective organization or among the diaspora showed great promise for making inroads into often particularly occlusive and close-mouthed groups. These 'gatekeepers', after having established a requisite level of trust, suggested a number of interviewees from within the organization they represented who then, upon having been approached and interviewed, indicated a third level of possible participants, and so on (Goodman 1961). The problem with this method is that the participants themselves determine the sample and thus have a disproportional influence on the data collected, which in the worst case could lead to an unwholesome bias of the study at large. I tried to counter this tendency by including as many and, often, as diametrically opposed groups as possible, such as current KDP/PUK members versus former members who had renounced their parties, and by then

collating the data from one party with the other as well as secondary sources whenever available. Where applicable, these data are enriched by personal ethnographic observations from the field research in Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey.

As, alas, with most works in political science, this analysis too focuses primarily on elites. This fact is particularly deplorable for the studies of nationalism and ethnic conflict, where pretence dictates for any 'adequate theory of ethnic conflict [to] be able to explain both elite and mass behaviour' (Horowitz 2001: 226), yet execution routinely focuses on the former to the detriment of a thorough analysis of the latter – despite the fact that, in line with what is being said in Chapter 1, a nation or ethnic group is first of all constituted by the people's belief in it. Yet this study, although well aware of this shortcoming, cannot be the place to comprehensively make up for this deficit, and, as with additional case studies substantiating the findings made here, it remains to be hoped that future research will give a more comprehensive account of all strata of Kurdish society in the present ethnicized discourse in Iraq and Turkey.

Chapter outline

The book is divided into three parts, of which the first (Chapters 1 to 3) is a theoretical analysis of how explanatory IR conceptualizes ethnic conflict, the motives behind its reifying, state-centric and essentializing representation of ethnic identity, ethnic conflict and sovereignty, together with an introduction into alternative modes of representation from critical theory and post-structuralist approaches. The second part (Chapters 4 and 5) is mostly descriptive, while in the third, empirical section (Chapters 6 to 10) the themes examined in Part I are again taken up and put in the context of the empirical case study.

Chapter 1, drawing on the classics from sociology and anthropology, such as Max Weber and Frederick Barth, but also contemporary theories such as Craig Calhoun's conceptualization of the nation as a discursive formation, gives a definition of what is meant in this study by ethnicity and nation, highlights differences between essentialism/primordialism and modernism, delineates ethnic elites' strategic essentialisms and characterizes in greater detail the concept of groupism in order to then demonstrate how it manifests itself in the approaches to ethnic conflict of neo-realism, neo-liberalism, and systemic constructivism. This problematization of these paradigms' inherent essentialism is augmented in Chapter 2 by a comprehensive overview of the concepts, models, and frameworks that the three paradigms employ in analysing and explaining ethnic and ethno-nationalist conflict together with the latter's supposed objective of acquiring and maintaining statehood by critically examining and double-reading explanatory frameworks, such as the 'ethnic security dilemma', the 'ethnic alliance model', and instrumentalism as well as the concept at the core of explanatory IR, state-centrism. Chapter 3 summarizes the effects of groupism, and drawing on the writings of Robert Cox, Michel Foucault, Jaques Derrida and Pierre Bourdieu hypothesizes on the motives behind it, and ultimately tries to suggest an alternative reading of ethnic identity as a fluid matrix of identities and

interests, introducing the theoretical lens under which the case study will be examined.

The second part commences with critical reflections on the origins, nature, and inherent tendencies to 'pathological homogenisation' (Rae 2002) of the two nationalizing states in question in this study, Turkey and Iraq, and juxtaposes their nationalist discourses with each other as well as with the evolution of Kurdish ethno-nationalism in both countries up to the 1970s. This admittedly cursory review of the nationalist state discourses and of those supposedly pitted against them in pursuit of national self-determination allows us to re-examine the modernist definitions of ethnic and ethno-nationalist conflict given in Chapter 1 and to dispel some common myths about Kurdish ethno-nationalism that are routinely employed by the nationalizing states as well as some scholars directly or indirectly legitimizing these misconceptions and prejudices. Chapter 6 is then dedicated to an introduction of the main social agents discussed in this study, the most prominent Kurdish ethno-nationalist parties in Iraq and Turkey, the KDP, PUK and PKK.

Part III constitutes the main body of the extroverted case study on the relations between the PKK and KDP/PUK and the status as well as identity of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, with Chapter 6 focusing on the origins of relations between the three Kurdish ethno-nationalist parties up to the *Anfal* campaign during the Iran–Iraq War. Here, it already becomes apparent that the strict hierarchical causality of identity and interests that explanatory IR purports in the study of the behaviour and actions of parties in ethnic conflicts is not tenable, and that the relations between the three parties are better conceived of as a complex matrix of identities and interests without a hierarchical sequence or the one generating the other. The workings and dynamics of this matrix are further illustrated in Chapter 7, which discusses their relations during the 1990s, with the birth hour of the so-called Kurdish de facto state in Iraq and the Kurdish civil war as the most prominent themes under investigation. Chapter 8 critically examines US-imposed nation- cum state-building in Iraq after the 2003 invasion and during the occupation, how Iraqi Kurdistan came to benefit from a state-centric reading of Iraq's post-Saddam political landscape, and the influence of explanatory IR scholars' essentialist representations on this process, culminating in the principle of regional federalism – a mere euphemism for ethnic partition while keeping the territorial integrity of Iraq intact. A second strand of inquiry is dedicated to a discussion of the sea change in the nationalist discourse of the PKK after the capture of Abdullah Öcalan. Chapter 9 shifts focus to problematizing the origins of the rapprochement between the *Kurdistan Regional Government* (KRG) and the *Justice and Development Party* (AKP, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) government in Turkey after the US invasion of Iraq, and to how the emerging strategic alliance between the KRG and Turkey affected relations between the PKK and the Iraqi Kurdish ethno-nationalist parties. With Chapter 10, we reach the present and the role of Iraqi Kurdistan and, indirectly, the PKK, via its regional affiliate, the *Democratic Union Party* (PYD, *Partiya Yekita ya Demokratik*), as key allies in the international coalition's war against the Islamist

insurgency of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS, *ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah fī'l-ʿIrāq wa-sh-Shām*). The implosion of both states as a result of the ISIS assault on Mosul and central Iraq, together with the civil war in neighbouring Syria, propels us to revisit and re-evaluate the political status of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the discourses on national self-determination there as well as their representation in international scholarship and the media, to critically examine the struggle for autonomy within the wider doctrine of democratic confederalism of the PYD in Syria, and how these discourses and resulting practices have been affected by Turkey.

The book concludes with deliberations on what this study's portrayal of the Kurdistan Region's status and identity can tell us about ethnicity, nationhood and sovereign statehood as socio-political constructs and discursive formations at large, about the nature of ethno-nationalist conflict in general, and recapitulates the major findings of the deconstruction of explanatory IR's groupist, essentialist and state-centric representation of ethnic groups and nations, now enhanced by the insights gained from the empirical case study. It closes with the hope that the contribution to the discussion of these subjects made here will trigger a rethink in our discipline of its epistemologies, ontologies and methodologies, ideally leading to us categorizers and analysts, while always remaining co-protagonists of the social world we describe, at least refraining from exacerbating its deepest divisions and most violent expressions.

A study this wide in scope and ambition with such complex themes as ethnic identity and conflict and state sovereignty, together with a wide host of subthemes, will, by its very nature, always remain incomplete. Some of the subthemes, while of evident relevance, are touched upon here only cursorily, and references are made to the extensive array of contributions in the literature on topics such as, for example, the nuances of the post-structuralist body of thought in relation to social identities, the legal aspects of national self-determination, strategies and tools of state-building, or on the complexities of the socio-political composition of Iraq beyond the Kurdistan Region. These limitations, like the restriction to a single significant case study, were necessary in order to remain focused on the core arguments of the inquiry, yet, in the spirit of the study as a whole, should be understood as possible points of departure for future research.

Notes

 1 He further expands his thoughts on this epistemological division in his reply to Alexander Wendt's (1999) *Social Theory of International Politics*, in Smith (2000).
 2 Another example for a distinct IR approach to a primer on ethnic conflict would be Taras and Ganguly (2006). In this instance, one of the authors, Rajat Ganguly, professes to an openly primordialist understanding of ethnicity and nationalism (Ganguly 1998).
 3 Some of the arguments here, in particular pertaining to neo-realism and neo-liberalism, can already be found in Cederman (1997); as I will demonstrate, though, Cederman's constructivism itself features some of the shortcomings and fallacies he criticizes in neo-realist and neo-liberal approaches to nationalism, ethnicity and ethno-nationalist conflict.

4 The ethnic alliance model in particular has already been deconstructed in Černy (2014a).
5 Calhoun (1992) quoted in Cederman (1997: 21).
6 For a detailed overview on the various state-centric versus non state-centric debates in IR see, for example, Hobson (2000).
7 See also Pouliot (2008).
8 For a consummate analysis of this debate, see Hansen (2006).
9 On Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), see van Dijk (1993, 2008), Fairclough (2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2010), Fairclough and Wodak (1997), Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), Wodak (2001), Locke (2004), Blommaert (2005), Simpson and Mayr (2010), Egan-Sjölander and Gunnarsson-Payne (2011). For excellent applications of CDA in the context of ethnic conflict, see Campbell (1998a) and Hansen (2006).
10 Echoing Hutchinson (2004), here, rather than 'nation state', I use the term 'nationalizing state', not only to indicate that the four states in the context of this article – Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria – are home to more than one nation, but also to allude to the often brutal process of assimilation during their ongoing state formation.