

The Iranian Kurdish Liberation Movement: Crossborder Interaction and Mobilization (1950-2015)

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of the Iranian Kurdish movement from 1950 to 2015. This study pays particular attention to movement mobilization and different aspects of the collective actions and insurgency deployed by the actors, civil society organisations and the political parties of Iranian Kurds during different phases of the movement. The timeframe for this study is categorized into three major periods of movement mobilization and conduction: the 1960s, from 1979 to the 1980s, and the 1990s until 2015. Theories of social and political movements, combined with theories of nationalism and ethno-nationalism, provide the main theoretical framework of this thesis. The “crossborderness” of the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movement, has been highlighted and critically analysed through the different chapters of this study. The collective political movement led by the Komala and KDPI, the two mainstream political organizations of the Iranian Kurdish movement, is the focal of this study. Nevertheless, there have been periods in the Kurdish movement in which the actions of the Iranian Kurdish civil society were not limited to the activity of the KDPI and Komala. In this regard, several historical events and actions, for instance of the Kurdish peasants, students, intellectuals and others, which have high importance for the direction of the Iranian Kurdish movement, have been included in this research. While this thesis classifies the Iranian Kurdish national movement as a movement aimed at liberating the Kurdish people from authoritarian regimes, it also argues that due to the way the movement has been established, led and conducted, it has suffered from a lack of real achievement. The movement, because of its fluctuating patterns and its multifaceted challenges (elite/leadership fragmentation, collaboration, internal brutality and lack of long term and sustainable strategy), is far from achieving its ideals and ambitions.

Positionality

This study highlights two very sensitive and controversial aspects of the Kurdish struggle: crossborder interaction and movement mobilization. In addition, I, the researcher and author of this work, am also an insider, having a link to this movement. This issue has located me in a sensitive position, the readers of this study perhaps viewing my research as a political manifestation, written subjectively and aimed at judging actors of the Kurdish movement. From the initial stages of my research, I have, by my supervisors and colleagues, warned of this difficulty. Bearing this issue in mind, I have conducted this research with awareness of the importance of academic integrity and the threat of subjectivity. Without any exaggeration, through every sentence I have reminded myself of avoiding subjectivity, partiality and reductionism. The study of the crossborder interaction has resulted in some critical assumptions, yet, all claims and assertions have been underlined through referring to evidence and historical records related to this aspect of the Kurdish movement.

Furthermore, it is important to clarify that the critical claims about Kurdish crossborder interaction DO NOT include the Kurdish society and the Kurdish people in Iraqi Kurdistan. Iraqi Kurdistan has, since the collapse of the Kurdish Republic in 1947 (with some intermittency), become the home of the exiled Iranian Kurdish movement. The Kurdish people in Iraqi Kurdistan have largely acted with hospitality. With reference to my personal experience of living in Iraqi Kurdistan, the narratives of people from my generation and the previous generation of Iranian Kurds engaged in the Iranian Kurdish movement, it is noteworthy that during these different periods of crossborder interaction between the movement of Iranian and Iraqi Kurds, the majority of the Iraqi Kurdish people showed solidarity with the Kurdish movement. This hospitality has been practiced while the Iraqi Kurdish villages suffered immensely at different times from the Iranian regime's arbitrary shelling and bombardment, justified by Iran by claims that the areas were hosting the KDPI and Komala.

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Abbreviations

Gorran	Bizûtinewey Gorran (Movement for Change)
HDKA	Hizbi Dêmkraî Kurdistanî Êran (Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan)
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps
JK	Komalay Jiyanaway Kurd/Kurdistan (Society for the Revival of the Kurds/Kurdistan)
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KDPI	Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran
KDPI-RL	Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran-Revolutionary leadership
KDP-I	Kurdistan Democratic Party-Iran
KHABAT	Organization of Iranian Kurdistan Struggle
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
Komala	Komeley Şorrişgêrri Zehmatkêşani Kurdistanî Iran (Society of Revolutionary Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan)
KSU	Kurdish Student Union
PAK	Party Azadi Kurdistan/Freedom Party of Kurdistan
PJAK	Party Jeyani Azadi Kurdistan (Free Life Party of Kurdistan)
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
RMMK	Rekxerawi Mafe Mirovi Kurdistan (Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan)
RUK	Revolutionaries Union of Kurdistan

Table of Contents

Chapter 1	1
Methodology, Theoretical Framework and Literature Review	1
Introduction.....	1
Scope of the Study	11
Significance of the Study	12
Research question	13
Research sub-questions.....	13
1.1 Method and Methodological Approach	14
1.2 Theoretical Framework.....	21
1.2.1 Theories of Nationalism and Ethno-politics.....	21
1.2.2 Theories of Social and Political Movement	27
1.3 Literature review	33
Chapter Outlines	37
Chapter 2	39
Kurdish Nationalism: From Emergence to Politicization	39
2.1 Nationalism, Ethnicism and Ethnonationalism.....	41
2.1.1 Roots of Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism	42
2.1.2 The Questions of Location and Periodization.....	45
2.2 Frail and Misconducted Records of Kurdish History	47
2.3 Kurdish Nationalism Reflected in Print-Media	53
2.4 Kurdish Nationalism: A Reaction to Subjugation	57
Chapter 3	63
The Kurdish Peasant Uprising: the First Indication of Class Struggle	63
3.1 The Peasant Uprising through Theoretical Lenses	64
3.2 Patterns of the Kurdish Movement before the Peasant Uprising.....	65
3.3 Feudal Landlordism in Iran and Kurdistan	67
3.4 The Peasant Uprising in Bokeran	70
3.4.1 Peasant Uprisings and the Kurdish Liberation Struggle	72
3.4.2 The Inter/national Aspects and the Outcome of the Peasant Uprising.....	74
3.5 The KDPI's role through this Uprising.....	79
Chapter 4	85
Movement Mobilization through Crossborder Interaction, 1950-1960s	85
4.1 Different Phases of Crossborder Interaction since the 1960s	90
4.2 The Iranian Kurdish Movement, 1946-1960s.....	93
4.2.1 The 1960s Complex Crossborder Interaction and the Failed Movement.....	96

4.2.2 The 1960s Internal Dispute within the KDPI.....	99
4.3 The KDPI's Revolutionary Committee	102
4.4 Assassinations and Internal Brutality	104
4.5 Iran's Agenda in Supporting Barzani	107
Chapter 5	110
The 1979 Revolution and the Iranian Kurdish Question	110
5.1 The Islamic Regime's Approach to Ethnonational Diversity	112
5.1.1 The Islamic Regime's Failed Promise of Equality	120
5.2 The Post-Revolutionary Era's Restoration of the Kurdish Movement.....	120
5.3 Revolution in Iran, War in Kurdistan	126
5.4 <i>Khodmokhtari</i> : The Focal Point of dispute.....	129
5.4.1 War in Kurdistan; the First Sign of Regime Brutality	135
5.4.2 <i>Sepah</i> (the IRGC): the Unwanted Force in Kurdistan.....	136
5.4.3 Sanandaj, the Epicentre of the Kurdish-Regime Friction	137
5.5 The 'No Peace- No War' Kurdish Condition	142
5.5.1 Announcing <i>Shorayi Shar</i> (the City Councils)	146
5.5.2 The Meeting of Naqhadeh and Ethnic Clashes	148
5.5.3 The attack on Paweh	150
5.5.4 The Regime's Media Hostility and Propaganda	152
5.5.5 <i>Kochi Mejoyi Mariwan</i> (Mariwan's Mass Exodus)	154
5.5.7 The Exodus and its Real and Symbolic Values.....	158
Chapter 6	161
The State of Internal Disintegration	161
6.1 The Iranian Kurdish Movement, from Guest to Host.....	161
6.2 The Occurrence of the KDP-Provisional Leadership Problematic	163
6.3 The PUK's Gamble.....	169
6.4 Political Splits and the Half-Decade of Fratricide War	172
6.6 Komala's Unilateral Ceasefire; Termination of the Fratricide War	180
6.6.1 The Internal Split within Komala.....	181
6.7 ' <i>Jash</i> ' and other Internal Elements of Challenge.....	183
6.8 The Kurdish Movement in the shadow of the Iran-Iraq War.....	188
6.8.1 The Kurdish Share of the War.....	191
6.8.2 The Iranian State and the Iraqi Kurdish Movement	192
6.8.3 Iraq and the Iranian Kurdish Movement	194
Chapter 7	200
The 1990s and Onwards: Decades of Decline and Uncertainty	200

7.1 Regional Change and the Decades of Decline	200
7.1.1 Iranian Kurds' share of Regional Change	205
7.2 Iran's Strong Presence in the KRG and the KDPI and Komala Setback.....	206
7.3 The 1990s: a Deadly Decade for the KRG-Based Iranian Kurds	208
7.3.1 The Current Condition of the KRG-Based Iranian Kurdish Movement.....	211
7.3.2 The <i>Rasan</i> of Eastern Kurdistan and its Multiplicity of Challenges.....	213
7.4 The Complexity of the Proxy Issue	215
7.4.1 The Complexity of the PKK/PJAK vs. the KDPI and Komala Relationship	215
7.4.2 The background for PJAK's emergence	218
7.4.3 The Mainstream Attitude toward PJAK.....	219
7.5 Iranian Politics in the 1990s: Reform and Repression.....	223
7.5.1 Khatami, the Architect of 'Failed Reform'	223
7.6 Kurdistan and the Reform Movement	228
7.6.1 Kurdistan; the Journey and Impasse of the Reform Movement (1997-2015)	229
Democratic Union of Kurdish Students (KSU).....	232
Kurdistan Green Association (KGA)	233
The Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan (RMMK)	233
Kaboudvand, Father of Kurdish Human Rights.....	234
7.7 The Outcome of the Kurdish Reform Movement	235
Conclusion	240
Bibliography.....	247

*I dedicate this work to the memory of all those who have given
their lives to the Kurdish liberation movement*

Chapter 1

Methodology, Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Introduction

The Iranian Kurdish question – likewise the Turkish and Syrian Kurdish question – is an ongoing conflict, its historical emergence back in the early 20th century. There is an obvious nexus between the emergence of the Iranian Kurdish question and the establishment of the modern Iranian nation-state in 1925, based on the idea of a homogeneous Iranian national identity and part of a trend of nation-state building that caught the interest of elites of many Middle Eastern societies at the time. Since the establishment of the modern Iranian nation-state (1925) changing regimes in Tehran have continuously had a complex and complicated relationship with the country's ethnonational communities. Fundamental issues, such as conflict arising from the non-Persian communities' claims for access to full and equal citizenship, and socio-political self-determination, have determined this relationship.¹ In Alam Saleh's words, "in retrospect, tension between Tehran and its ethnic groups began during Reza Shah's nation-state construction process. His son Mohammad Reza Shah, however, continued the same policy when he succeeded his father in 1941".² Reza Shah's nation-building policy and his denial of the diverse nature of the multi-ethnic Iranian society, resulted in the emergence of grievance among the non-Persian ethnonational groups of Iranian.

The Iranian Kurdish struggle has, from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, entered a new stage, with politicization of the Kurdish question. Since that time, Iranian Kurds have conducted a fluctuating nationalist movement aimed at achieving the right of self-determination. It can arguably be assumed that the Iranian Kurdish movement is a product of two interlinked and simultaneously parallel socio-political phenomena. Firstly, a reaction to the exclusionary and suppressive state policies during and after the nation-state building process in Iran, referred to as *Persianization*; and secondly, the Iranian Kurdish elite's ambition of creating an autonomous Kurdish unit,³ aimed at promoting

¹ Alam Saleh, *Ethnic Identity and the State in Iran*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 2.

² Ibid, 62.

³ Gareth Stansfield, *Kurds, Persian Nationalism, and Shi'i Rule: Surviving Dominant Nationhood in Iran*, in: David Romano and Mehmet Gurses (ed.) *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 61-62.

the political and cultural rights of the Kurdish population, during an era overcast by nation-state's exclusionary policy of identity reconstruction.

Regarding the link between the nation-building policies of the Pahlavi regime and its impact on Kurdish nationalism, Gareth Stansfield stresses that "Reza Shah's policy would not only enforce upon the entirety of Iran a new model of nationalism, it would accelerate among the Kurds their own processes of cohesive national identity formation, as a response, or reaction, to the threats posed to them by the powerful centralizing forces now being deployed by the new Shah".⁴ On the one hand the Kurdish opposition to the centralization of power in Iran and their dream of achieving Kurdish national self-determination, and on the other hand the central government's aggressive reactions to this Kurdish endeavour, are among the permanent elements characterising Kurdish-state relation in Iran. Stansfield further discusses relations between states and ethnic minorities, particularly the state-Kurdish relations in Iran:

These new realities of state created a disharmonious counterpoint – one of reactivity from those not covered by the narrative of the 'dominant nation', and one that would see these peoples whose identities had been disenfranchised in the new state respond, often in a chaotic, unplanned, and disjointed fashion, at least in the first instance, by the nurturing of their own nationalist project.⁵

Consequently, it can be claimed that the Kurdish ambition of self-rule and the demarcation of Kurdish identity defined by the Kurdish people, hand-in-hand with the politicization of Kurdish grievances, have been among the common factors behind intensification of the Kurdish movement during the last century. The existence of such as motivations partly behind the emergence of the Kurdish movement in Iran, justify identifying this struggle as a 'nationalistic movement'.⁶ However, there are some implications related to the usage of this definition in this context. Uncritical deployment of this concept causes reductionism and simplification of this movement. Historical records of the evolution of the Iranian Kurdish movement reveals that this movement has accommodated a variety of socio-political, economic and ideological motivations. Even though *Kurdayêti* (Kurdishness) and Kurdish nationalism have been powerful drivers for the emergence and conduct of this movement, the occurrence or establishment of several revolts (such as peasant movements challenging socioeconomic relations within Kurdish

⁴ Ibid, 64.

⁵ Ibid, 66.

⁶ David Romano, *The Kurdish nationalist movement: opportunity, mobilization, and identity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 222.

society) and political parties and ideological trends (e.g. Komala⁷ with its focus on the class system within Kurdish society) are among phenomena that give reason to question the idea of the presence of an entirely *nationalistic* movement in Iranian Kurdistan. While recognizing nationalism as the most dominating factor, it will be argued that the Iranian Kurdish movement is a collage of a variety of elements.

Studying the Iranian Kurdish movement discloses a critical aspect of Kurdish nationalism, which is related to its' suffering from internal brutality.⁸ The way this movement has internally, and in interaction with the Kurdish movement of the other parts of Kurdistan, been mobilized and conducted, has caused several instances of internal brutality, Kurds' killing Kurds, and movement termination.

When studying internal brutality within the Kurdish movement, questioning the cohesion and consistency of Kurdish nationalism, as well as the idea of the integrity of Kurdish national movement, should be unavoidable. There are a variety of interlinked complex factors related to Kurdish nationalism and the study of the Kurdish national movement. Some of the critical aspects of Kurdish nationalism are related to its lack of national unity and the presence of strong elite fragmentation. In the case of Iranian Kurdish movement, internal brutality has mainly been a product of this movement's crossborder relation with the Iraqi Kurdish movement.

Reflecting on the long-lasting Iranian Kurdish struggle provides knowledge about its characteristics, motivations, its means of movement mobilization, and the conduction of its movement. Whilst political violence and armed insurgency have received some degree of attention in relation to the movement, its other aspects (e.g. non-violent activities of civil society and civil disobedience) have been neglected. Until the late twentieth century, this approach was also applied to the Kurdish movement in Turkey. Related to this problematic, Nicole Watts maintains that during the early 1990s, of the published English-language books on the Kurdish conflict in Turkey "very few devote more than few pages to the pro-Kurdish political parties, focusing instead on the Kurdish Workers Party [Pratiya Karkerên Kurdistan, or PKK] and its guerrilla challenges to the Turkish state".⁹ Watts explains this unbalanced focus:

Armed challengers often are the dominant actors within a movement, and may maintain considerable influence long after their initial strength has waned. But

⁷ Komeley Şorrişgêrri Zehmatkêşani Kurdistani Iran (KŞZK) (*Society of Revolutionary Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan*).

⁸ A. Manafy, *The Kurdish Political Struggles, in Iran, Iraq and Turkey, a Critical Analysis*, (Maryland: University Press of America, 2005), 50.

⁹ Nicole F. Watts, *Activists in office: Pro-Kurdish contentious politics in Turkey*(Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 5.

obscured in the drama of blood and bullet is the fact that other forms of dissent are also occurring, sometimes in unexpected places, and that they may also be important for movements.¹⁰

Studying the multilevel Iranian Kurdish struggle brings to light some important realities; for instance Kurdish nationalism has not been the only ideology of this struggle; the mainstream political parties of Iranian Kurds (the KDPI and Komala) are not the only actors in this movement; there are different motivations for actors' participation in this movement, and a variety of controversies are identifiable. An example of controversy is that the Kurdish tribal leaders have been among those actors that, during different periods, contributed massively to the Kurdish movement, yet in considering the reasons for the defeats of many Kurdish uprisings, the literature of the Kurdish movement points to tribal leadership and self-interested tribal participation, as chief reasons for these defeats.

The modern history of the Iranian Kurdish question provides a variety of examples of unrest and uprisings¹¹ initiated by the Kurds during the first half of the 20th century. These uprisings contributed to the formation and politicization of contemporary Kurdish identity and have laid the foundation of a century of ongoing conflict and demand for Kurdish self-rule in Iran. For instance, the revolts of Simko Shikak (1918) and Hama Rashid Khan Banê (1941) – taking place at different times and in geographical locations of Iranian Kurdistan – are among the most mentioned uprisings of the contemporary Kurdish movement led by Kurdish tribal leaders.¹²

In the early 20th century, a combination of weak state institutions in Iran and “lack of coercive capacity and divisions among the capital's [Tehran] elite”¹³ created a window of opportunity for emerging ethno-nationalist movements against the Iranian state. In the case of Kurds, Simko saw such weakness as a golden opportunity for starting an uprising. Simko's revolt is articulated by some elites and leading elements of the Kurdish movement, including the KPDI, as the engine of the modern occurrence of the Kurdish struggle for national self-determination. Despite these movements' tribalistic leadership

¹⁰ Ibid, 5.

¹¹ Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, 101.

¹² For more see David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, (London: I.B. Tauris 2004) & Hashem Ahmadzadeh and Gareth Stansfield, “The Political, Cultural, and Military Re-Awakening of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement in Iran”, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Winter, 2010).

¹³ Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, 222.

and their lack of cohesion, they were composed of nationalistic elements that laid the foundation of the current national struggle of the Iranian Kurds.¹⁴

The 1940s establishment of a new political organization, *Komalay Jiyawayay Kurd/Kurdistan* (the Society for the Revival of the Kurds/Kurdistan, commonly referred to as JK)¹⁵ became a turning point in the process of modernization of the Kurdish national movement. According to the KDPI,¹⁶ “in 1942, before establishing the KDPI, founding KDPI members established the *Je-Kaf* or *Komalay Jiyawayay Kurd/Kurdistan*. Creating an independent Kurdish state was set as the main goal of *Je-Kaf*[JK]”.¹⁷ The JK had a nationalistic discourse, and through its newspaper *Nishtiman* (Motherland) articulated issues such as the distinctiveness of the Kurdish ethnicity, and the wish of establishing a greater Kurdish homeland. The JK later transformed and was re-framed as the KDPI (Kurdistan Democratic Party-Iran) in 1945 under the leadership of Qazi Mohammad. The KDPI, as the only political party of the time, declared the establishment of the Republic of Kurdistan on 22 January 1946 in Mahabad.

Historical evidence related to this period’s evolution of the Kurdish movement in Iran bear witness to the fact that, despite the existence of several kinds of internal/external hindrances and difficulties, some degree of modernization within the movement has occurred. The Republic (and the pre-declaration processes) is an example of the move from a tribalistic to a semi-modern movement. It is worth noting that in the case of the Kurdish movement, each event and uprising has paved the path for subsequent developments. By establishing the Republic, the nationalist movement of Kurds in Iran reached its zenith and stepped into a new era of endeavour towards national self-determination.¹⁸ The Republic as a unique phenomenon altered remarkably Kurds’ approach to articulating their national identity. Nader Entessar emphasizes the uniqueness of the Republic as “the most serious Kurdish challenge to the Iranian government’s authority”.¹⁹ The nationalistic discourse of the Republic was produced by urban Kurdish intellectuals organized around the JK.²⁰

¹⁴ McDowall, *A Modern History of The Kurds*, & Ahmadzadeh and Stansfield, “The Political, Cultural, and Military Re-Awakening”.

¹⁵ Ahmadzadeh & Stansfield, “The Political, Cultural, and Military Re-Awakening”, 14.

¹⁶ KDPI (*Hizba Dêmokrata Kurdistanê-Îran* /Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan).

¹⁷ KDPI, Our History, <http://pdki.org/english/?p=4580> (accessed 20 August 2017).

¹⁸ Fereshteh Koochi-Kamali, *The development of nationalism in Iranian Kurdistan*, in: Philip Kreyenbroek, and Stefan Sperl, (ed.) *The Kurds A Contemporary Overview*, (London: Routledge, 2010), 135.

¹⁹ Nader Entessar, *Competing national identities: The Kurdish Conundrum in Iran*, in Charles G. MacDonald, and Carole A. O’Lear (ed.) *Kurdish Identity: Human rights and political status*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 189.

²⁰ Ahmadzadeh and Stansfield, “The Political, Cultural, and Military Re-Awakening”, 14.

The establishment and (shortly after) the collapse of the Republic in 1946, are among the major developments within the Iranian Kurdish movement. During a period of international and regional instability, when the superpowers of the time, Russia, the UK and the USA prepared for a new era of post-Second World War competition, Iran turned into a frontline for demonstrations of power and compromise by these superpowers.²¹ The occurrence of new national and regional conditions in this period, particularly the change of the Russian policy toward Reza Shah, the withdrawal of Russian support to the Democratic Republic of the People of Azerbaijan and the Kurdish Republic, resulted first in the collapse of the former, followed by the latter.

Regional and international conditions in this period did not benefit the Kurdish establishment; quite the reverse, they maintained and protected the integrity of the Iranian state, and ceasing any support for the local uprisings was the priority of the superpowers.²² The collapse of the Kurdish Republic on 5 December 1946, with the Iranian army's brutal violation of Kurdish society (e.g., the hanging of Qazi Mohammad and some leaders of the Republic), resulted in a complete deterioration of the Iranian Kurdish movement. Despite the Republic's short life, its establishment left a significant political, symbolic and psychological impact on the Kurds' collective memory and their consciousness, and its collapse resulted in deep Kurdish mistrust of the elite of the Iranian state. Abbas Vali writes:

To the Kurds [...] the collapse of the Republic offers more than just a historical lesson. For them it is not only an event that has taken place in the past, but also one that is living in the present, animating not only memories but also the discourses and practices that shape the present. Through this event they think about their past, encounter their present and imagine their future.²³

The Republic has contributed with significant symbolic value to the formation of Iranian Kurdish national identity and it has become an inseparable part of the Kurds' collective memory and the popular narrative of the contemporary Iranian Kurdish movement for liberation. The historical echoes of the Republic (even seven decades after its establishment and collapse) are still fresh within the mind of the Iranian Kurds. It has left a powerful and long-lasting effect on the cultural frames of the Kurds in Iran and

²¹ Golnaz Esfandiari, "Iran: Growing NGO Community Offers Political Activism Where Government Does Not", 2004. <https://www.rferl.org/a/1051564.html>, (accessed 18 February 2018).

²² Glenn E. Curtis and Eric Hooglund (ed.) *Iran: a country study*, Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Fifth Edition, (Baton Rouge: Claitor's, 2008), 31-32.

²³ Vali quoted in Stansfield, *Kurds, Persian Nationalism, and Shi'i Rule*, 72-73.

elsewhere. Regarding the cultural and psychological heritage of the Republic, Romano asserts that “the Mahabad [Kurdistan] Republic crystalized in the minds of Kurds their right to self-determination, as well as their ability to run their own affairs”.²⁴

Following the fall of the Republic, the Iranian Kurdish national movement experienced more than three decades of desperation and the KDPI until 1979, when Komala,²⁵ the second political party to achieve mainstream popularity in Iranian Kurdistan, announced its public political activity. Since, it played an important role in directing the content, framework, and forms of mobilization of the Kurdish movement in Iran.

Re-establishing the movement in the decades subsequent to the fall of the Republic was rendered a difficult task by conditions such as the non-existence of a safe-haven for Kurdish activists, the state’s intensive persecution of Kurdish activists, and the suffocation of any political voices in relation to Kurdish nationalism.²⁶ In the early 1960s an amalgam of factors, such as very challenging conditions characterized by the rise of persecutions and reprisals meaning the impossibility of building a movement in Iran, yet also the possibility of alignments with new crossborder actors, were the conditions the movement’s leadership operated within. Initially, making alignments and partnerships with the Iraqi Kurdish movement in the late 1950s created new opportunities for mobilizing through exiled nationalism²⁷ with geographical distance to the targeted area, Iranian Kurdistan.

I will argue that the Iranian Kurdish liberation movement, despite the huge price it has paid, is far from achieving even some of its basic sociocultural ideals and demands, and suffers from inconsistency and discontinuity. Despite the unchanging status of the Kurdish question in Iran, the movement has experienced several periods of interruption, intermittency and decline. The longstanding Kurdish movement in Iran, based on its considerable lack of achievement, is a movement suffering from the non-existence of radical ideology and flexible strategy for its conduction. In addition, I will argue that the movement has been conducted depending on the occurrence of political opportunity, without being able to create new opportunities for movement mobilization.

²⁴ Romano, *The Kurdish nationalist movement*, 245.

²⁵ Hossein Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zende: Kordestan, chap va nasiyonalism* [Living History: Kurdistan, the Left and Nationalism], (Stockholm: Nasim, 2004), 58-68.

²⁶ For more see Said Kaveh, *Awrek le Besarhati Xom u Rodawekani Naw Hezbi Demokrati Kurdistani Iran* [Looking Back in Time, Recapture Those Memories of Involvement with the K.D. P. I], (Sweden: Unspecified Publication, 1996).

²⁷ Abbas Vali, “Sekot-e Rojhelat” [The Silence of Rojhelat/the Iranian Kurdistan]. *Critical Analysis of Political Economy*, spring of 2018, Seasonal Journal, No. 6. <https://pecritique.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/pecritique-no-6.pdf>.

These assumptions have been made by referring to such examples as the uprising of Simko (1918-1930), the uprising of south Kurdistan led by Jafar Sultan of Hamadan (1931), the Republic of Kurdistan (1946) and the gaining control of large parts of Iranian Kurdistan in a short period during the 1979 popular revolution in Iran by the KDPI and Komala. Yet when the conditions were changed and the central government succeeded in re-consolidating its power, the Iranian regime's control and authority in Kurdistan was reinforced too. The uprisings and emergences mentioned provided the Iranian Kurds' movement with periodical and short-term opportunities of mass mobilization; however, with the rise of power in Tehran, these positive achievements disappeared shortly after.

Apart from regime brutality and geographical and geopolitical isolation,²⁸ some other factors such as the durability and flexibility of the deployed strategy, means of mobilization and mode of conducting collective action, internal brutality and a fragmented style of leadership, are among other issues that can be associated with the relatively unsuccessful movement led by the KDPI and Komala in Iranian Kurdistan. In addition, this study challenges the idea of crossborder cooperation/interaction between the forces of the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements through different periods, as a dysfunctional interaction that has resulted in decline and deconstruction of the Kurdish movement. Theoretically, crossborder interaction has been viewed as a powerful factor²⁹ in strengthening ethnonationalist movements. Yet reflecting on the crossborder interaction between the Iraqi and Iranian Kurdish movements in the 1960 shows that this interaction has resulted in weakening the Iranian Kurdish movement, especially when the relations between the Iraqi Kurdish movement and the Pahlavi regime intensified.³⁰

The Iranian Kurdish movement has during different periods become manipulated and misused by the leaders of the Iraqi Kurdish movement. This movement became mistreated and has been transferred into an instrument of negotiating financial, logistical and military support from the changing regimes of Iran. Individual leaders of the Iraqi Kurds (e.g., Mella Mostafa, Massoud and Idris Barzani and Jalal Talebani) have several times in return for receiving military and material support from the Iranian state caused a

²⁸ For more see Maria, T O'Shea, *Trapped Between the Map and Reality and Perceptions of Kurdistan*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 1. & Tim Marshall, *Prisoner of Geography: ten Maps That Tell You Everything You Need to Know about Global Politics*, (London: Elliott and Thompson Limited, 2016).

²⁹ Milton J. Esman, *Ethnic Politics*, (NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

³⁰ For more information on this period and the interaction between the KDPI and KDP-Iraq on one side and the KDP-Iraq and the Pahlavi regime on the other, see Sardashti (*Birewariyekani Jemil Mardokhi, Geranewayi Besarhati Besar u Shwenkrawayi Be Gelko u Mazar Sediq Anjiri Azar, Chand lapereyek le mejoyi gely kurd le Rojhelat, Jiyan u Tekoshn Siyasi Ahmad Tofiq 'Abdollah Ishaqi' & Xwendnawayeki Mejoyi bo Rudawe Newxoyekani Hezbi Demorati Kurdistanani Iran*).

decline of activity of the Iranian Kurdish movement to the lowest levels. The content of this claim will be discussed through the following chapters of this study.

Regarding the ideology and means of mobilization of the 20th century Iranian Kurdish movement, it can arguably be asserted that it has been captured by several competing factors and forces: firstly, a competition between progressive nationalists/leftists and self-interested feudal forces inside the KDPI;³¹ secondly, between the competing narratives and discourses of Komala and the KDPI;³² and thirdly, between the competing forces inside Komala. For instance, in the case of Komala, the organization in 1991 experienced its first split.³³ While some groups inside Komala acknowledged the Kurdish question as a national issue, other forces inside Komala denied and challenged the nationalist perspective.³⁴ From the latter perspective, the Kurdish question has purely been seen as a class struggle.

In considering the shifts in character and ways of conducting the movement in Iranian Kurdistan, a brief comparison between the Kurdish movements in Iran and in Turkey would be helpful. Among similarities, one can point to actors' composition within the Kurdish movement. For instance, while during the early 20th century the leadership of the Kurdish movement in Turkey was dominated by rural notables, tribal and religious leaders (sometimes in conjunction or association with the elite of urban nationalists), during the 1960s and onwards a shift in participation is noticeable. Watts describes this shift: "in the 1960s and 1970s, [...] those advocating changes in the status of Kurds were socially and politically diverse; they included many Western-educated lawyers and doctors as well as authors and intellectuals, unionists, teachers, and students".³⁵

Despite some differences, the same description (of the shift in actors' composition) can be identified within the Iranian Kurdish movement. While the ideology and content of the Kurdish nationalist movement in Iran before and during the establishment of the Republic was dominated by few urban Kurdish intellectuals and nobles, the attempt at establishing the movement in the 1960s was considerably carried by a younger generation

³¹ Abbas Vali, "The Kurds and Their 'Others': Fragmented identity and Fragmented Politics", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol XVIII No. 2, (1998).

³² Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zendeh*.

³³ Kerim Yildiz and Tanyel B Taysi, *The Kurds in Iran The Past, Present and Future* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 66-68.

³⁴ Reshad Mostafa Sultani, *Kak Fouad, Rebar, Siyasetmedar u Zanayeki siyasi* [Kak Fouad, Leader, politician and an political intellectual], (Selimani: Rojhelat Publication, 2006), 470-478.

³⁵ Watts, *Activists in Office*, 29.

of well-educated Kurdish intellectuals with ties to the leftist milieu in Tehran and Tabriz.³⁶

In the diversification of actors in the Kurdish movement in Iran, the Iranian Kurdish political parties have become the most visible actors of this movement. These parties' ideologies and discourses, and their articulations of the Kurdish question, have left a considerable impact on the way this movement has been shaped. Despite the existence of different worldviews among these parties, the realization of the national rights of Kurds has been the shared element in the activities of the political parties. For instance, the KDPI has from the early days of its establishment had an unchanged articulation of Kurdish nationalism. The KDPI has carried on its struggle inspired by the idea of *Kurdayêti* and the importance of establishing a political and administrative entity that guarantees the political, economic and cultural rights of the Kurdish people within the territorial framework and structure of the Iranian state.³⁷ The KDPI as a nationalist party has been able to recruit its members from a broad ideological spectrum (including leftist, nationalist and religious supporters)³⁸ of Iranian Kurdish society.

On the other hand, Komala started its journey as a strictly leftist political party, fighting to provide the peasants, toilers, and poor of Iranian Kurdistan with better life conditions.³⁹ This party, following its alignment with some Iranian leftist groups, experienced a drastic shift in its attitude to Kurdish nationalism, experiencing internal disputes based on the question of whether the organization should be considered an *Iranian* or a *Kurdish* leftist party. The political crisis inside Komala escalated in the early 1990s and resulted in split within this organization.⁴⁰ This split was a product of a longstanding political identity crisis inside the Komala.

Nevertheless, considering the pattern of mobilization, the major difference between the Kurdish movement in Turkey and Iran is related to the state structure and the degree of the possibility of mobilizing the movement within it. Despite the present differences

³⁶ Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zendeh & Beloriyan, Ale Kok/Brge Sabz*.

³⁷ KDPI Publishing Centre, *Korte Mejoyi Hizbi Demokrtai Kurdistan Iran ; Chel Sal Xebat le penayi Azadi u Niw sade Tekoshan* [A historical review of Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran; Forty Years Struggle for liberation and half decades effort) a collection of Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou and Abdollah Hassanzadeh Writings, 2002] http://www.peshmergekan.eu/pdki/pdki_mejui.pdf.

³⁸ Kawa Behrami, *Tafgayi Haqiqat: Bashek le Barhemekani Doctor Ghassemlou* [A Waterfall of Truth: A Collection of Dr Ghassemlou writings]. 1. Volume, (KRG: KDPI Publication, 2004), 77-78.

³⁹ Malak Mostafa Sultani, et al. *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*; [who was he, what was his mission and how he dead?] (Solaimaniye: Unspecified Publication, 2015).

⁴⁰ In the early 1980s the Komala leadership started considering alignment with other Iranian leftist forces, among them the *Itehad-e Mobarezan* (Union of the Revolutionaries) and *Wahdet-e Komonisti* (Communist Unity) *Sahand Faction*. See Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zende*, Mostafa Sultani, et al., *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*, 70 & Mostaf Sultani, *Kak Fouad, Rebar, Siyasetmedar u Zanayeki siyasi*, 476.

in the conduct of the Kurdish national movement in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, achieving the following three elements of “territorial authority (land and its resources), cultural freedom (cultural protection and perpetuation via the machine of democratization), and Kurdish nation-building”,⁴¹ have been the major goals shared by the different sections.

In Turkey, the Kurds have partially mobilized their activities through the electoral and legal system.⁴² In the 1960s and 1970s, elected politicians began publicly to criticize the poor socioeconomic condition of Kurds in Turkey, and encouraged the state to recognize the cultural rights of the Kurds, for instance by ‘calling for freedom to use the Kurdish language, recognizing Kurds as a distinct people, and initiating development initiatives and investment in order to improving the poor life condition in Kurdish areas such as the countries eastern provinces’.⁴³ However, in Iranian Kurdistan the struggle has chiefly been limited to clandestine activities, exiled nationalism⁴⁴ and the activities of the prohibited political parties (the Komala and KDPI) based outside Iranian Kurdistan.⁴⁵ Due to the political nature of the Iranian state, electoral politics framed or organized around ethnonationalist ideology, and in the case of the Kurds, Kurdish ethnonationalist activities, has been entirely abandoned. In this regard, when discussing the Iranian Kurdish national movement, the focus automatically falls upon the activity of the KDPI and Komala, and the banned political parties of Iranian Kurds based in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Scope of the Study

The periodical scope of this study spans 1950-2015. Through this thesis, three periods of the Iranian Kurdish movement, following the collapse of the Republic and with regard to the KDPI and Komala, have been identified. Due to the distinct characteristics of the Iranian Kurdish movement in the 1960s, 1979-the 1980s, and the 1990s-2015, it is possible to refer to these periods as the three major phases of the Kurdish national movement in Iran. It will be argued that through each of these three phases, despite the existence of a common narrative (providing the Kurdish people in Iran with national and class rights), the means of mobilization and the outcomes of these phases have been

⁴¹ Watts, *Activists in Office*, 21.

⁴² *Ibid*, 17.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁴ Vali, “Sekot-e Rojhelat”, 116-117.

⁴⁵ Jalil Gadani, *50 Sal Khebat, Korteyek le Mejroyi Hizbi Demokrati Kurdistanî Iran* [50 Years of Struggle, A brief History of Kurdistan democratic party of Iran], First Vol., Second Edition. (Dohuk: Xani Publication, 2008a).

different. Chiefly, the approaches of the KDPI and Komala to mobilizing their activity during the phases of the Iranian Kurdish movement will be the focus of this study, from a critical approach: where and why have these political parties failed in conducting a sustainable struggle against different Iranian regimes, and how has misconducted crossborder interaction between the movements of Iranian and Iraqi Kurds, challenged the degree of integrity of the Kurdish movement.

Significance of the Study

There are several reasons for studying the contemporary Iranian Kurdish movement. Kurds are, after the Persian and Azeris (Turks) the third largest national community in Iran, and the contemporary Kurdish question in Iran, an ongoing national conflict, has existed and been politicized for more than a century. However, despite its significance and complexity, the Iranian Kurdish question is an underexplored area of study. While for some parts of Kurdistan (for instance Turkish Kurdistan) ‘there is a gap in empirical knowledge of some matters relevant to the study of Kurdish activism’,⁴⁶ the Kurdish issue in Iran suffers from being hugely understudied. Embarking on the study of Kurds, acknowledging the existence of a large gap in the academic literature related to the Kurdish question in Iran is among the first observations and challenges one would face. Since, according to some scholars (e.g. Entessar, Saleh and Stansfield), the Kurdish question constitutes a huge potential and challenge to the domestic stability and territorial integrity of the Iranian state, its study will contribute new knowledge related to both the Iranian Kurdish question and the ethnonational issue in Iran.

There are different reasons for this neglect and lack of academic interest in the Iranian Kurdish question. Firstly, since 1979 Iranian Kurdistan has been extraordinarily militarized by Iran’s Islamic regime and, falling within a securitized region, the regime does not tolerate articulating or studying the Kurdish question at all. Secondly, reviewing the literature of the Iranian Kurdish movement exposes that the focus on the Kurdish movement has been highly narrowed to the political parties of the Iranian Kurds and their activities in the 1980s. For instance, in line with the decline of the KDPI and Komala’s insurgency from the mid-1990s onward, the volume of research on the Kurdish question in Iran declined remarkably, too.

⁴⁶ Watts, *Activists in Office*, xv.

Internal brutality, as a product of many factors, is an issue the Kurdish movement in Iran has suffered from. The intensification of the crossborder relations between the Kurdish movements in Iraq and Iran has been assumed as the catalyst of this internal brutality. Different examples of decline of the Iranian Kurdish movement can be directly linked to instances of internal brutality resulting from the Iraqi Kurdish leadership's self-centred approach to the Iranian Kurdish struggle. However, despite the suffering of the political parties of the Iranian Kurds from the human casualties due to the Iraqi Kurdish leadership's ill-treatment of the Iranian Kurdish movement, the KDPI and Komala have failed in protecting the interests of the Iranian Kurdish movement.

Research question

What have been the formative factors and dynamics which led to the establishment of an ethno-nationalist movement among the Iranian Kurds? What have been the principal methods and agencies by which the aims of the movement have been promoted and to what to degree have these aims been achieved?

Research sub-questions

- *How has the Kurdish question and politicization of Kurdish national sentiment emerged and been shaped?*
- *What was the effect, contribution and challenge of the Peasant Uprising in 1952-53 to the mainstream ideas of the Iranian Kurdish national movement?*
- *Why did the Iranian Kurds' attempt to re-establish the movement in the 1960s fail?*
- *How have the political developments in Kurdistan since the 1979 Revolution reshaped and contributed to the evolution of the ideology of the Kurdish movement in Iran, and how did Iranian Kurds during this period (1979-1980s) conduct their activities?*
- *What impact have the post-1990 regional developments had on the capability of the Iranian Kurdish movement, with focus on the capability of the KDPI and Komala's movement mobilization and conduct of insurgency?*

In the following subsections, the methodological approach to data collection and the theoretical framework of this thesis will be discussed, and the literature review presented.

1.1 Method and Methodological Approach

In this section are outlined the three main methodological elements of this study, accordingly: a) choice of theoretical framework, b) methodological approach to data gathering, and c) types, characteristics and importance of these sources through the different chapters.

A. Choice of Theoretical Framework

The adopted discipline in this study is political sociology. This approach can be justified and explained based on the following criteria. As mentioned previously, some elements of the Iranian Kurdish movement, namely the causes of its emergence, the way the movement has been conducted, and its means for and approaches to mobilization, have turned this movement into a complex case study. In order to make a multi-aspect analysis that is in accordance with the main research question of this thesis, I will argue that analysing the Iranian Kurdish movement based on a single theoretical approach would lead to simplification and reductionism. In this regard, aimed at overcoming these issues and theoretical limitation, a more flexible and integrated discipline as political sociology is adopted.

Chiefly, throughout this thesis, theoretical concepts and definitions from theories of social and political movements, nationalism and ethnopolitics have been applied. While nationalism and ethnopolitics studies are labelled as subjects within political science, studies of social movements are framed within social sciences. Although these two disciplines differ in their approaches to social and political events and phenomena, they have a variety of shared terminologies and perspectives in how to explain different socio-political issues and conflicts such as uprisings, revolutions, collective actions and insurgencies.⁴⁷ For instance despite the fact that political science has its own area of human experience to analyse, it can be allied with the disciplines of history, economics, sociology, anthropology, geography and social psychology.⁴⁸ Based on the presence of a common language/terminology, and the possibility of allying theories of political and social sciences, framed around the phrase or discipline political-sociology, this is the adopted approach through this thesis.

⁴⁷ Giovanni Sartori, "From the Sociology of Politics to Political Sociology", *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (SPRING 1969).

⁴⁸ American Political Science Association, "Political Science as a Discipline", *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (Jun 1962), 417.

In order to investigate and explain the reasons for the emergence of the Kurdish movement in Iran, as well as how this movement has through different phases of its conduction been mobilized, concepts and definitions from these two different though closely interlinked disciplines have been employed through the chapters of this study. There are a variety of contrasting definitions of the term political-sociology. The existence of this dispute discloses some ambiguities associated with this discipline. For instance Giovanni Sartori stresses that political-sociology “may be used as a synonym for ‘sociology of polities’, but may not”.⁴⁹ Yet political-sociology works as the connecting bridge for the association between sociology and politology.⁵⁰ Despite the ambiguity of the phrase political-sociology, Sartori proposes a normative definition that embraces political-sociology as an interdisciplinary hybrid, attempting to combine social and political explanatory variables. By using such a definition, Sartori highlights that the established political sociology is an interdisciplinary approach and a balanced cross-fertilization between sociology and political science.⁵¹

Inspired by the abovementioned possibility of disciplinary alignment, the use of a political-sociological approach in this thesis allows us to apply theoretical terms and concepts from both politology and sociology in analysing different aspects of the Iranian Kurdish movement. Otherwise, a single discipline (either political or social science) would suffer from limitations on providing the necessary concepts and explanation in answering the research questions and sub-questions of this thesis.

B. Methodological Approach to Data Gathering

In order to explore different stages of the Iranian Kurdish movement through the lenses of crossborder cooperation and movement mobilization, this research adopts an interdisciplinary methodological approach. An interdisciplinary method is an approach whereby the researcher(s) integrate information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, and/or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge to advance fundamental understanding or to solve problems the solutions of which are beyond the scope of a single discipline or area of research practice.

As asserted by Julia Klein, interdisciplinarity “promises to deliver us from the stagnation of limited disciplinary understanding, and usher in a new age of tolerance and

⁴⁹ Sartori, “From the Sociology of Politics to Political Sociology”, 195.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 200.

⁵¹ Ibid.

productivity” among other opportunities.⁵² The complexity of a case study can be an argument which justifies deploying an interdisciplinary methodological approach. William Newell holds that “interdisciplinarity is necessitated by complexity, specifically by the structure and behaviour of complex systems. The nature of complex systems provide a rationale for interdisciplinary study”.⁵³ The Kurdish national movement is a complex multifaceted event, with its facets possessing links between each other. This complexity of the Iranian Kurdish movement on the one hand, and the observable links between different sections of this movement on the other, together necessitate following an interdisciplinary theoretical approach.⁵⁴ This has been inspired by the definition by Julie Klein and William Newell of interdisciplinary study (IDS) as “a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or profession. IDS draws on disciplinary perspectives and integrates their insights through construction of a more comprehensive perspective”.⁵⁵ As part of the process of justifying the use of an interdisciplinary approach, other practical elements, such as defining the problem (question, topic, and issue), determining all knowledge needs, developing an integrative framework and appropriate questions to be investigated, and resolving disciplinary conflicts by working towards a common vocabulary, are among the preconditions.⁵⁶

The research method (the processes and procedures that involves the forms of data gathering and analysis) and interpretation deployed in studying Iranian Kurdish movement, constitute a mixed method⁵⁷ of research design. As emphasized by John Creswell, whilst “a study *tends* to be more qualitative than quantitative or vice versa, mixed research resides in the middle of this continuum because it incorporates elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches”.⁵⁸

Of mixed methods’ three general strategies, sequential, concurrent and transformative methods, in this research the concurrent and transformative mixed methods have been applied. Applying these approaches can be justified within any discipline as far as it is related to social and political issues, such as oppression,

⁵² Julie Klein, *Interdisciplinarity: History, theory, and practice*. (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 138.

⁵³ William H. Newell, “A Theory of Interdisciplinary Studies”, *ISSUES IN INTEGRATIVE STUDIES* No. 19 (2001), 1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 2.

⁵⁵ Klein and Newell, in Newell, “A Theory of Interdisciplinary Studies”, 13.

⁵⁶ Newell, “A Theory of Interdisciplinary Studies”, 14.

⁵⁷ John W. Creswell, *Research Design_ Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2009), 14-15.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 3.

domination, and subjugation, either in a historical or in a socio-political context. In Creswell's words, "in this design, the investigator collects both forms of data at the same time and then integrates the information in the interpretation of the overall result. Also, in this design, the researcher may embed one smaller form of data within another larger data collection in order to analyse different types of question".⁵⁹ Following these procedures I have merged qualitative and quantitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis to answer the research question of my thesis. A mixed method design shows its utility when a researcher aims to 'generalize the finding to a population as well as develop a detailed view on the meaning of a phenomenon or concept[s] for individuals'.⁶⁰

C. Types and Characteristics of the of Primary Sources

In this subsection, the categories, characteristics and importance of the different sources of primary data employed in different chapters of this thesis are discussed. Different materials, such as political and historical documents/records, audio-visual material (including materials such as photographs and video records), newspaper clippings, autobiographies and biographies, political statements and interviews with individuals committed to the Kurdish movement, are the major primary sources of information that have laid the empirical foundation of this study. The term *document* is all-inclusive, particularly regarding categorizing and defining the types of empirical sources and materials⁶¹. As will be shown, relying on these documents became vital at different points of my research.

My reliance on each of these types of sources varies through the different chapters of this thesis. Below will be highlighted how these primary sources have contributed to particular chapters and how they have together contributed to drawing a unique picture of issues such as crossborder interaction between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements, developments and events and incidents in Iranian Kurdistan, and the means and patterns deployed in mobilizing the Kurdish movement during different phases of this struggle.

Whilst in the development of the second chapter (*Periodization and Politicization of Kurdish Nationalism*) has mainly been relied on historical sources in drawing a timeline for the emergence and politicization of the Kurdish question, the use of primary sources

⁵⁹ Ibid, 14-15.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 18.

⁶¹ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design Choosing Among Five Approaches*, (California: Sage Publication, 2007), 129-130.

is evident in the third chapter (*The Peasant Uprising*). Through the third chapter, materials such as letters and narratives of the Kurdish peasants, newspaper clippings and archived documents, have been drawn upon. These primary sources have contributed data used in analysing different aspects of the peasant uprising. Reports from Iranian and foreign newspapers, as well as archived documents issued for instance by the American consulate in Tabriz, have revealed different aspects of the peasant uprising. For instance, whilst the New York Times article on this uprising exposes the international dimensions of this event, archived political documents issued by agencies such as the American consulate in Tabriz and Iranian government officials, show other reasons for the attention that was paid to this uprising. Furthermore, autobiographies of, for example, Karim Hisami and Ghani Beloriyan, contribute first-hand knowledge about how the movement was mobilized and the role played by the KDPI. These materials together provide significant data for analysing the political/ideological reasons, socioeconomic importance, and factors that caused the emergence, as well as the failure, of the peasant uprising of 1952-1953.

In addition to the secondary sources that have been employed in the fourth chapter (*Movement Mobilization through Crossborder Cooperation*), a combination of biography, autobiography and photographs have been utilised in this chapter. Autobiographies of political activists and members of the Iranian Kurdish movement such as Kawa Said, Karim Hisami and Jalil Gadani,⁶² officials of the Iranian Intelligent Service (SAVAK) such as Isaa Pejman and Hussain Fardoost,⁶³ and historical texts concerning the crossborder relations between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements as well as the content and direction of the insurgency, recorded by for instance Yasin Sardashti in several volumes,⁶⁴ have been drawn upon through this chapter. Sardashti's materials, which are the product of his in-depth historical approach to collecting data are crucial sources of data related to the Kurdish crossborder interaction of the 1960s. These materials encompass invaluable informative documents, for instance several examples of

⁶² Ghani Beloriyan, *Ale Kok/Brge Sabz* [Green Leaf], (Stockholm: Resa Service Publication, 1997), Gadani, *50 Sal Khebat* & Karim Hisami/Hussami, *Karwanêk le şehîdanî Kurdistanî Êran* [The martyrs of the Iranian Kurdistan], (Kurdistan: Benkayi Peshewa, 1971).

⁶³ Fardoost, Hussain. *Khaterate Arteshbod Sabeqh Hussain Fardoost: Zohuer ve Soqhote Saltanate Pahlavi* (Emergence and Collaps of the Pahlavi Monarch, Momomry of Hussain Fardoost, First Vol. Tehran: Center for Resewarch and Political Studies, 1990. & Pejman, Issa. *Asrar-e Bastene Paymane Aljezire 1975 – Az Parwande ye be Koli seri SAVAK* [the Secret 1975 Algiers Agreement, based on highly confidential documents of SAVAK], (Paris: Nima Publication, 1996).

⁶⁴ The following writings and historical narratives of Iranian Kurds who participated in the crossborder interaction of the 1960s, sampled by Yasin Sardashti, are rich sources of primarily data. See Sardashti (*Birewariyekani Jemil Mardokhi, Geranewayi Besarhati Besar u Shwenkrawayi Be Gelko u Mazar Sediq Anjiri Azar, Chand lapereyek le mejoyi gely kurd le Rojhelat, Jiyan u Tekoshn Siyasi Ahmad Tofiq 'Abdollah Ishaqi' & Xwendnawayeki Mejoyi bo Rudawe Newxoyekani Hezbi Demorati Kurdistanî Iran*).

Disan Barzani, a leaflet published by Abdullah Ishaqi,⁶⁵ that provide detailed data and information about the KDPI and its leader, as well as facts about the KDPI-KDP asymmetrical power relation during the 1960s.

Furthermore, the narratives of KDPI members involved in the movement of this period contain precious information deployed in analysing different aspects of the movement in Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan. Documents, historical records and autobiographies are other sources of data, useful in exploring and analysing the agenda of the Iraqi Kurdish leadership's relation to the Iranian state and the harm this relationship caused the Kurdish movement.

Through the fifth and sixth chapters (*The 1979 Revolution and the Iranian Kurdish Question* and *The state of Internal Disorder*), the use of archived materials has been considerable. This Kurdish insurgency of the period covered has shown to be one of the most complex elements of this study. The Iranian Kurdish movement in this period was ushered into a new phase of its evolution. After the occurrence of the revolution in 1979, not only the Iranian Kurdish movement, but also the Iraqi Kurdish movement, viewed this development as a beneficial circumstance. Data included in these chapters focuses on the internal relations between different forces in the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movement. Through these chapters, in order to depict a picture of this period of the Kurdish movement, a variety of primary sources are deployed as political statements, booklet and archived materials.

Among these sources can be pointed to the archive of Behzad Khoshhali and the archive of Mansoor Hekmat. The major part of Khoshhali's archived material, containing documents of the Iranian opposition, are publicly accessible at <http://www.iran-archive.com> and <http://behzadkhoshhali.com>. Other archived material, such as photographs, have been provided through my personal enquiries to Behzad Khoshhali. These materials are organized in twenty volumes. Khoshhali's archived material mainly consist of news articles and photographs covering the situation in Kurdistan, and different forms of interaction between the political parties, leaders, Kurdish activists and the Provisional Revolutionary Government during the post-revolutionary era. These materials provide different aspects of the complex relations between Kurds and Tehran, with reference to exact dates and places of events. They are considered as reliable sources of primary data about the Kurdish national movement from 1979 to the 1980s.

⁶⁵ Abdollah Ishaqi (with the nickname Ahmad Tofiq) was the leader of KDPI for most of the 1960s.

The personal archive of Mansoor Hekmat is another source of primary data, mainly used in the analysis of the sixth chapter of this thesis. Hekmat was a leading official of the Iranian Communist party and the founder of the Worker-Communist Party of Iran. Hekmat's archive is fully digitalized with public access at http://m-hekmat.com/fa/3540_.html. Hekmat's archive is well-organized, each document having a specific identification number, with the title of each document translated into several languages, including English. However, since these materials mainly represent the interests of Hekmat and his political organization, it is important to highlight the political agenda of this archive as a one-sided, rather than a representative source of information that can give a complete picture of, for instance, the Komala-KDPI tension, or the internal ideological disputes inside the Komala which have resulted in the splitting of this organization in 1991. Hekmat's archive comprises a variety of documents, political statements, minutes and exchanged letters between leading officials of Komala. This archived material can be used in different regards, for instance Komala's view on the Kurdish question and its fratricidal war with the KDPI during the 1980s.

Despite issues such as subjectivity and the unstructured organisation of these archives, they have been invaluable sources of primary data, providing information about different aspects and angles of the Kurdish movement. Archives are invaluable sources for getting insights into the past. There is an inherent value attached to the use of archives, because archives contain documents with significant historical importance that can provide a higher level of accountability to the current research. The archive's contents are highly valuable due to the fact that they allow researchers "to delve into the past, transforming historical research into up-to-date knowledge".⁶⁶ Through the seventh chapter (*The 1990s and Onwards*), dealing with the most understudied era of the Iranian Kurdish movement, in analysing the political developments and their impact on the Iranian Kurdish movement, the websites of the KDPI and Komala, these parties' internal relations reflected through their media outlets and publications, and their reactions to the emerging changes relating to the future of the Kurdish question, as well as materials concerning the emergence and deadlock of the Iranian reform movement (1997-2005), have been the major sources of primary data.

⁶⁶ Research Information, "The value of archive content in academic research", 2015 <https://www.researchinformation.info/viewpoint/value-archive-content-academic-research> (accessed May 10, 2018).

1.2 Theoretical Framework

As explained through the methodological section (*Choice of Theoretical Framework*), the adopted discipline in this study is political sociology. Adopting this approach has allowed me to deploy an integral disciplinary theoretical framework that contains elements from of ethno-politics as well as social movement theory. This interdisciplinary choice has been made in order to have access to the required theoretical terms and concepts suited to answering the research question of this thesis. The first part of this section reflects the ethnopolitical aspect of the Iranian Kurdish question, and the second part deals with the patterns and means of mobilization of this struggle since the mid-20th century and onwards. Even though through this section theories of ethno-politics and social movement have been organized separately, these two disciplines have, by providing terms and concepts, supplemented each other in drawing a picture of different angles of the Kurdish movement. The approaches of Milton Esman, Sinisa Malesevic and Rogers Brubaker⁶⁷ to ethnonational politics contribute concepts and understandings related to the causes of emergence of the Kurdish question as an ethnonationalistic movement; and theoretical approaches of Charles Tilly and Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald (McAdam, et al.)⁶⁸ to movement mobilization, contribute theoretical explanations applicable to the analysis of the patterns of mobilization of the Iranian Kurdish movement during different phases.

1.2.1 Theories of Nationalism and Ethno-politics

Theories of ethnopolitics provide concepts and explanations useful in analysing different aspects of the Iranian Kurdish national movement as the periodization and politicization of Kurdish nationalism, reasons for emergence of the Kurdish question in Iran, and the complexity of Kurdish crossborder interaction. Considering the Kurdish people's ethnic and cultural difference, their feeling of being overruled by the other, and their resilience in their struggle for self-determination, it will be argued that promoting socio-political,

⁶⁷ Milton J. Esman, *Ethnic Politics*, (NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), Sinisa Malesevic, *Identity as Ideology, Understanding Ethnicity and Nationalism*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), & Roger Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁶⁸ Tilly Charles, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, (New York: Random House, 1978), & Doug, McAdam, et al. (ed.) *Comparative perspectives on social movements Political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and cultural framings*, 8th printing, (Cambridge: University Press First published, 1996).

cultural and economic rights have been the major drives of the formation of the Kurdish question in Iran. Through this study, these issues will be underlined by applying a theoretical framework that has elements from Esman, Malesevic and Brubaker's approaches to ethnonational politics.

Ethnicity and nationalism as products of modernity have left a massive impact on shaping a new era of complex and competitive relations between (different) communities. Nationhood is a modern ideological construct that has been homogenized and enforced by institutions (e.g., education systems, mass media and culture) of the modern nation state, civil society and kinship networks.⁶⁹ Esman's focus on multifaceted aspects of ethnic conflicts and the process of politicization of ethnicity, and his conceptualization of *ethnic politics*, make him an obvious choice for this study. However, before dealing with Esman's theory, agreeing a definition for Kurds and their movement will be an essential part of this study.

Identifying the type of movement either as a reformist, revolutionary or ethnonationalistic movement, is among the first preconditions for analysing any movement. Important throughout the study of the Kurdish question is conceptually identification and definition of Kurds (either as nation or ethnic group). The Kurdish people are among the largest nations not possessing a nation-state. Kurds are a nation when nationhood is defined by criteria such as possessing a distinct language, flag, and geographical location (homeland). For instance, the distinctiveness of homeland is important because "place names reflect the people's long association with the land where generations of ancestors labored, clear the land, constructed homes and towns, and lied buried".⁷⁰ In addition, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* provide a framework that allows defining the Kurds as a nation. Yet since the Kurdish people have no independent institutions of a modern nation-state⁷¹ with the task of systematically propagating nationalism, they can be considered as ethnonational group. However, while theoretically Kurds are classified as an ethnonational group, the Kurdish people consider themselves as a nation, culturally, linguistic and geographically distinguished from the other nations that surround them. This self-understanding of *Kurdishness* has laid the foundation for the Kurdish movement through the past centuries and in the present.

Based on Esman's definition, an ethnic nation "is a politicized ethnic community which demands or actively exercises the right to self-determined political control within

⁶⁹ Malesevic, *Identity as Ideology*, 28.

⁷⁰ Esman, *Ethnic Politics*, 6.

⁷¹ This argument is mainly applicable for the Kurdish people in Iran.

their homeland”⁷². According to this definition “an ethnic community that aspires to political self-rule usually designates itself a nation”.⁷³ Related to the process of politicization of ethnic identity are some pre-conditional factors such as an underlying core of memory, experience, or meaning, which inspire people to collective action. This common foundation may include historical experiences, cultural markers, language and religion. The term ethnicity embraces any collective identity and solidarity based on inherited culture, racial differences, belief systems, sentiments or common nationality.⁷⁴

Since the early 20th century, the Kurdish people in Iran have, through their struggle, clearly emphasized the importance of self-determination as a guarantee of promoting their political and cultural rights. Despite the existence of a variety of competing actors within the Iranian Kurdish movement, promoting the socio-political, economic and cultural rights of the Kurds in Iran has been the main discourse of their movement. In this regard, inspired by Nicole Watts’s terminology of ‘national movement’,⁷⁵ I use *the Iranian Kurdish national movement* in articulating the Kurdish struggle in Iran. This choice has been made due to the fact that this movement “consists of organizations and other actors who view themselves as working on the behalf of – and for the reconstruction of – a Kurdish nation”.⁷⁶

More specifically it could be asserted that the Kurdish movement is an ethno-political movement that pursues an ethnically defined interest on the agenda of the state.⁷⁷ The Kurdish movement reflects the collective consciousness and aspirations of an entire community established in the form of politicized national mobilization. This process has resulted in the recruitment of individuals into the movement, aimed at promoting and defending the community’s collective interests. Achieving autonomy has been the main goal of this movement.

Through the Iranian Kurds’ nationalistic movement, *Khodmokhtari* (autonomy) has been the focal point. The term *Khodmokhtari* was the most referred-to concept during the intensive period of the Kurdish-government conflict in the 1979-1980s. The claim of *Khodmokhtari* is related to Kurds’ governing of territorial areas populated by Kurds. In Esman’s words, “territorial autonomy is a milder form of self-determination in a

⁷² Esman, *Ethnic Politics*, 28.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 2.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 14-16.

⁷⁵ Watts, *Activists in Office*, 21.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 21.

⁷⁷ Esman, *Ethnic Politics*, 22.

federalized relationship that preserves the boundaries of the state. Where an ethnic community is geographically concentrated [in].”⁷⁸

The crossborder cooperation between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movement has been a factor having a huge impact on the direction of this movement. Due to the importance of crossborder Kurdish nationalism, through different chapters of this study attention has been paid to this component of Kurdish nationalism and its real function. Esman views ethnic crossborder solidarity as a strong source of mobilization aimed at challenging state policies toward certain ethnic communities. Esman’s idea of ethnic political movement includes conflicts between different ethnic groups as well as interaction between organizations within the same ethnic political movement. From Esman’s perspective, crossborder ethnic interaction is equivalent to ethnic solidarity. The concept ethnic solidarity includes a combination of obligations and responsibilities of individuals to their community. The main purpose of solidarity is defending the interests and maintaining boundaries in relation to the *others*. As consequence, the greater the solidarity, the more likely the emergence of ethnic political movements.

Reflecting on the Iranian Kurdish movement reveals the existence of a strong sense of solidarity between the movement of the Iranian and Iraqi Kurds. During the KDPI’s 1960s attempt to reorganize the movement, crossborder solidarity was viewed as a powerful source of movement mobilization. In this regard it is even more interesting to investigate the critical aspect of this relation, for instance how malpractice in crossborder relations has affected the ability and outcomes of the movement of Iranian Kurds.

Due to the different cost it might have, mobilizing collective activity of an ethnic community is a risky matter. Yet despite awareness of this, ethnic groups mobilize themselves because “mobilization may be the result of events that seriously threaten the community or, alternatively, present opportunities too promising or attractive to resist. Some events may present, simultaneously, potential threats and unexpected opportunities”.⁷⁹ In the Kurdish movement, threats and opportunities have been the chief motivations for mobilizing and conducting collective actions. While the fear of subjugation and annihilation has pushed the Kurds to carry out political collective actions, the existence of crossborder solidarity, as well as domestic and regional changes, have been among the windows of opportunity⁸⁰ that have encouraged the political elites of the Kurds to mobilize and intensify their movement.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 223.

⁷⁹ Esman, *Ethnic Politics*, 30.

⁸⁰ McAdam et al., *Comparative perspectives on social movements Political opportunities*.

Another aspect of the Kurdish movement is the ideology of this movement. Ideology in this context concerns the value mechanisms and worldview that have brought the Kurds together in a collective struggle. Kurdish national identity, articulated as *Kurdayêti* (Kurdishness), has unambiguously laid the ideological foundation of the Kurdish national movement. In the case of Iranian Kurdistan, this claim is applicable until the emergence of the 1979 Revolution and the publicly-announced activity of the Komala and other political/ideological trends in the Iranian Kurdistan. While the Iranian Kurdish movement, through the first three decades after the collapse of the Kurdish Republic, has been referred to as utterly nationalistic or ethnonationalistic, following 1979 the Iranian Kurdish movement experienced a thickening and diversification⁸¹ of the numbers of actors and ideological motivation for participating in this movement. The emergence of the Komala as a Kurdish leftist political party, and some other minor political parties (e.g., Kurdish ethnoreligious parties as ‘The Revolutionary *Khabat* of Kurdistan-Iran’, commonly known as *Khabat*)⁸² and individuals (such as Ahmad Moftizadeh) with significant impact on the Kurdish movement, can be viewed as part of this trend.

Since 1979, Iranian Kurdistan has witnessed the emergence of different political parties that conducted their activities inspired by a combination of Kurdish nationalism and elements of political Islam. *Khabat* is an example of a political movement of Iranian Kurds, established in the 1980s, which has based itself on the ideology of political Islam and Kurdish nationalism. This example highlights that, due to the emergence and participation of multiple rivalling ideological trends within the Iranian Kurdish movement, the conceptualization of this movement has become a complex issue, particularly through the decades following the 1979 Revolution. A similar shift is identifiable within the Kurdish movement of other parts of Kurdistan, particularly within the Kurdish movement in Turkey. For instance, relating to this conceptualization complexity, Watts argues that “understanding how pro-Kurdish parties entered the political system [in Turkey] in the 1990s requires a shift away from categorizing them as discrete ethnonational organizations and instead seeing them in the more complicated light of their sometimes cooperative, sometimes conflicted relationship with the Turkish center-left and the Kurdish national movement”.⁸³

Nevertheless, despite this diversification, *Kurdayêti* remained a crucial ideological element of this movement. Sinisa Malesevic’s theory on ethnonationalism and identity

⁸¹ Watts, *Activists in Office*, 55.

⁸² Khabat: “The History of Khabat”, <http://www.khabat.org/farsi/f.tarikhche.pdf> (accessed May 10, 2018).

⁸³ Watts, *Activists in Office*, 73.

can explain role of *Kurdayêti* as the core element through the evolution of the Iranian Kurdish movement. Malesevic deals with ethnicity and nationalism as sources of ideology. Inspired by Anthony Smith, Malesevic defines nationalism as an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining identity, unity and autonomy of a social group some of whose members deem to constitute an actual or potential nation.⁸⁴ The term ethnic solidarity has a significant importance for the intra-relations within ethnonational groups. Spreading the message of the importance of solidarity within an ethnic/national group is carried out by ‘the educated upper strata, who can communicate it to other strata and regions in the community’.⁸⁵ In the context of the contemporary Kurdish movement, practicing solidarity has taken place through crossborder interaction, where Kurds of one part of Kurdistan have either participated in the movement of other parts of Kurdistan, provided the movement of other parts with a safe haven in exile, or/and practiced a combination of these mentioned aspects of solidarity. The Kurdish movement has enjoyed all these aspects of solidarity; however, during some periods, crossborder interaction has ended in futility and misery.⁸⁶

As mentioned, *Kurdayêti* has been a strong source of motivating the Kurdish people in participating in or supporting the Kurdish movement and collective class struggle, which was absent in the pre-1950s Kurdish movement. In this regard, at least until 1979 Kurdish nationalism was the chief ideology of the Iranian Kurdish movement, with a massive effect on the formation and facilitation of this movement. *Kurdayêti* defined the collective identity, a desired image of the movement and its demands and criteria for membership. As with any other movement, the ideology of the Kurdish movement defines its community as a subordinated and oppressed people, all members of the community being victims due to their ascribed ethnic/national status. Therefore, everyone is obliged to mobilize, resist and overcome the injustices that afflict them. In Esman’s words, “ethnic and ethnonational ideology begin by positing unity as an obligation of every individual and as a necessity dictated by common fate”.⁸⁷ Malesevic articulates ethnicity and nation-ness as a matter of ideology, and actions of individuals and groups are mainly affected by shared cultural values reflected in common cultural or political identity. Highlighting the ideological power of identity is rooted in its implicit collectivist clarion-call to group solidarity.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Malesevic, *Identity as Ideology*, 19-20.

⁸⁵ A. D. Smith quoted in Malesevic, *Identity as Ideology*, 114.

⁸⁶ Manafy, *The Kurdish Political Struggles*.

⁸⁷ Esman, *Ethnic Politics*, 34-35.

⁸⁸ Malesevic, *Identity as Ideology*, 17.

The idea of Kurdish identity has historically had a huge impact on the Kurds' articulation of their rights. Identity has been a key concept in encouraging people to join and conduct collective movements. Due to the applicability of the concept of identity as a mechanism of social and political analysis, Rogers Brubaker assumes identity as a key term in the vernacular idiom of contemporary politics. The applicability of identity in multiple purposes indicates that identity is a term that is implicated both in everyday life and in a variety of political purposes, among them identity as a collective phenomenon with importance for creating the feeling of sameness among a certain group of community. Such a sameness will “manifest and result itself in solidarity, in shared disposition/consciousness or in collective action”.⁸⁹ This approach to identity is found particularly in the literature of social movements.

1.2.2 Theories of Social and Political Movement

Below, the ideas, concepts and explanations of Tilly and McAdam et al., related to the conditions under which the Kurdish movements have been (re)established and carried out, are discussed. The theories of social and political movements are in many regards (such as terminology and focus on the process and conduction of collective action) applicable in explaining the Iranian Kurdish movement. A movement is a process structured around a ‘two-component’ interaction, consisting firstly of networks of groups and organizations prepared to mobilize collective action, and secondly individuals (actors) who attend these activities or contribute with resources to collective actions.⁹⁰ According to Gamson and Meyer, a social or political movement is a process in which actors and agents through their ‘sustained and self-conscious’ actions challenge authorities or cultural codes. Through this process, groups of actors/organizations, in order to realize their ideals, employ extra-institutional means of influence.⁹¹ In her study of the Kurdish movement in Turkey and its electoral aspect, Watts deploys theories of social movements, referring to these sorts of movement as interactive fields of actors sustaining a public and collective challenge to authorities based on common purpose and social solidarity. Movements – like the states they challenge – are not coherent or unitary, but composed of actors with competitive power and sometimes tensions in relation to

⁸⁹ Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, 31-34.

⁹⁰ Rucht in McAdam et al., *Comparative perspectives on social movements Political opportunities*, 186.

⁹¹ Gamson and S. Meyer in McAdam et al., *Comparative perspectives on social movements Political opportunities*, 283.

internal and external environmental dynamics. The web of relations has been characterized as a “flexible lattice of tension”.⁹²

The Kurdish movement has not been an exception from this theoretical generalization. In the case of the Iranian Kurdish movement, several examples of conflictual relations inside and surrounding the movement are identifiable. One of the critical aspects of the Iranian Kurdish movement is related to its inter-organizational disputes that often have resulted in splits and escalation of cross-organizational tensions even resulting in fratricidal war, e.g., the KDPI-Komala conflict in the 1980s.

Broadly speaking, a movement is a structured *triadic relationship* that includes the movement itself, its counterparts, and the communities on whose behalf they claim to operate.⁹³ These elements of movements can be related to an approach conceptualizing movements as part of a *relational dynamic*, through which their analysts can explore the variety of ways that movement activity may affect movement goals and relations. It also discourages us from the common tendency to conflate ethnic communities with ethnopolitical movements, by explicitly disentangling this relation.⁹⁴ Movement structure, as the main component of every mobilization, is “the organizational bases and mechanisms serving to collect and use the movement’s resources. [It] may also serve other such purposes as disseminating information within the movement and forging a collective identity”.⁹⁵

Tilly’s theoretical approach to collective movements focuses on how changes of conditions (re)produce political opportunities for collective action. This approach “allows us to specify political opportunity for different actors and sectors, to track its changes over time, and to place the analysis of social movements in their increasingly transnational setting”.⁹⁶ Political opportunity structure is related to the process of which ethnic movements shape their tactics, ideologies and goals. These structures impact the strategies of ethnic organizations committed to resisting or reversing changes and defending the status quo. In the Kurdish case, political opportunity mainly concerns why and how Kurdish politicians considered the idea of re-establishing their movement, and the conditions which encouraged or forced them to invent the organizational

⁹² Watts, *Activists in Office*, 27.

⁹³ Tilly in Watts, *Activists in Office*, 11.

⁹⁴ Watts, *Activists in Office*, 11.

⁹⁵ McAdam et al., *Comparative perspectives on social movements Political opportunities*, 202.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 44-45.

reestablishment.⁹⁷ A combination of domestic and regional factors might in this regard be considered when explaining the ‘pre-historical’ facts behind this decision.

Tilly states that collective action is about power and politics where there is “inevitably raise[d] the questions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, hope and hopelessness”.⁹⁸ In investigating the reasons which spark the occurrence of collective actions, one should consider the role of interest, organization, mobilization, opportunity, and collective action itself. The term *interest* concerns the outcomes (gains and/or losses) resulting from the interaction of different groups of actors. ‘Interest’ involves the idea of shared (dis)advantages to the community as consequence of various possible interactions with other communities. The term *organization* refers to the extent of ‘common identity and unifying structure’ shared between individuals as well as groups within a population. Disorganization occurs in the case of the emergence of dysfunctional relation and decline in common identity. The organizational aspects of collective action touches upon the structure of groups’ activities and the degree of organizational capability with direct influence on the success of those activities.⁹⁹

The analysis of mobilization concerns the process of gaining resources and transforming these resources into collective action. Moreover, the term mobilization is associated with the process by which a group moves from being a passive collection of individuals to a (politically) active participant in public life.¹⁰⁰ Mobilization functions as a dependent variable: for instance, a group *mobilizes* if it gains greater control over coercive (weapons, armed forces and manipulative technologies), utilitarian (goods and information services) or normative (loyalties and obligations) resources, or *demobilizes* if it loses that sort of control. The term *resource* can be linked to a variety of elements, including labour power, goods, weapons and votes. The component *collective action* includes the collective acts of people aimed at achieving their common interests. Collective action can emerge resulting from “changing combinations of interests, organization, mobilization and opportunity”.¹⁰¹

The rapid regime change in Iran in 1979 triggered change in domestic political relations and facilitated the mobilization of the Kurdistan movement. This change provided political parties of Iranian Kurds with a variety of opportunities, among them access to territorial, human and military resources. As result of these parties’ public

⁹⁷ Watts, *Activists in Office*, 27.

⁹⁸ Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 5-6.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 54-55.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 69.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*.

presence among the Kurdish population, the mobilization process accelerated swiftly. The short period of official activity of the KDPI and Komala, followed by their withdrawal from Iranian Kurdistan, discloses these parties' inexperience and unpreparedness, the revolution catching their leadership by surprise. However, despite these criticisms of the KDPI and Komala, particularly following the intense post-revolutionary days, they became invaluable parts of the leadership of the Kurdish struggle. For instance, members of the KDPI, Komala and other Kurdish political parties and organizations, either by their direct participation in the *shoray-i shar* (city councils) or contributing to the creation of these councils in different cities of Kurdistan, largely committed themselves to this period's political process and evolution. The Kurdish leaders carried out negotiations with the Iranian government's representatives on the behalf of the Kurdish people. These political parties, by controlling police stations, security and military garrisons, gained access to a variety of military equipment. In addition, the creation of self-defence forces of Kurds provided the Kurdish movement with a massive degree of self-confidence in raising their demand of *Khodmokhtari*.¹⁰²

The most important elements of the analysis of socio-political movements are governments and the populations over which they exercise or claim control. Tilly stresses that within this political analysis, "nation states are the common points of reference".¹⁰³ Political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes, are the most significant concepts in analysing movements and revolutions. According to Tilly, McAdam and Tarrow, "social movements and revolutions are shaped by the broader set of political constraints and opportunities unique to the national context in which they are embedded".¹⁰⁴

The approach to 'mobilizing structures' attempts to "break with grievance-based conceptions of social movements and to focus instead on mobilization processes and the formal organizational manifestations of these processes".¹⁰⁵ Framing processes (a mediator between different factors) are "the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action".¹⁰⁶ Framing process leave an impact on the initial period of collective setting, sustainability and development of collective action. Some

¹⁰² Hamid Gowhari, *Rojhelati Kurdistan lê 10 sal da 1978-1988* [Rojhelati/Iranian Kurdistan in 10 Years 1978-1988]. 1. and 2. Volume, (KRG: Rojhelat Publication, 2001) & Gadani, *50 Sal Khebat*.

¹⁰³ Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 9-10.

¹⁰⁴ McAdam et al., *Comparative perspectives on social movements Political opportunities*, 2-3.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 6.

dimensions of ‘political opportunity structures’ are related to the degree of relative openness or closure of institutionalised political systems, states’ capacity and propensity for repression, and the presence of an elite that can lead and establish alignments with other groups of contenders. The availability of political opportunities is a precondition for the formation, structure and timing of collective action. The relation between different elements of collective action is depicted by a mutual dependency relation. For example, while political opportunities impact the timing of collective action, “mobilizing structures and framing processes mediate the effects of political opportunities”.¹⁰⁷

A movement as a long-term process is a product of a combination of several factors which affect its emergence. Any environmental factors that facilitate movement activity can be conceptualized as political opportunities, and “movements may largely be born of environmental opportunities, but their fate is heavily shaped by their own actions. Specifically, it is the formal organizations who purport to speak for the movement, who increasingly dictate the course, content, and outcomes of the struggle”.¹⁰⁸ Opportunity structures with close relation to the timing of collective action and the outcome of movement activity, opens the way for political action, but movements also make opportunities.¹⁰⁹ While movement structure has an important role in facilitating the movement toward its goal, these structures “do not necessarily begin life as challengers but have to be converted to that purpose. It is the process of mobilization itself –as well as internal interactions between movement organizations and between these actors and external actors – that can construct or reconstruct movement and organizational culture”.¹¹⁰ In order to meet such as movement requirements, actors and organization participating in the movement have to be flexible and transformable. In the final chapter of this thesis, concerning the 1990s decline of the activities of the Komala and KDPI, it will be argued that the inability of these parties’ to react to the change of circumstances in the region around them, left them in a disadvantaged position.

The Iran-Iraq war can be identified as a change with dual effects. This war provided the Kurdish movement with challenges as well as opportunities. For instance, the Iraqi state, following the KDPI and Komala’s withdrawal from Iranian Kurdistan, allowed these parties and other Iranian opposition parties, among them the *Mojahedin-e Khalq*, to establish their military and refugee camps in the border areas between Iran and Iraq. Apart from access to a safe haven, these organizations also received access to material and

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 10-11.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 15.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 35.

¹¹⁰ Watts, *Activists in Office*, 12-13.

military resources. Yet the major challenge (for the Iranian Kurdish movement) was that the Iranian government used the Iraqi attack to intensify its accusations towards the Kurdish movement, for being disloyal to Iran's territorial integrity. Using this argument provided the Iranian regime with significant public sympathy in Iran against the Kurdish movement.

During the war, the two competing countries approached the Kurdish movement differently. While during the entire period of the eight-year war the KDPI and Komala carried a bloody fratricide war against each other, the KDI-Iraq and the PUK, which started their relations with military confrontations and a long period of bitterness, succeeded in creating a joint military front against the Iraqi regime, with participation of other Iraqi and Kurdish political parties. The Iranian state's encouragement of the different actors of the Iraqi Kurdish movement (through the critical days of the Iran-Iraq war) in creating a joint front, was a successful strategy, serving mainly Iran's interest. The Iranian regime has been very strategic and calculating in deploying the Iraqi Kurdish movement to benefit its own interests; on the other hand, the Iraqi government did not show the same capability in using the Iranian Kurdish movement. There are various reasons for these two countries' different approaches to exploiting their neighbouring country's Kurdish question; the most important is the differences of approach of the Kurdish movements in establishing relations with regimes controlling parts of Kurdistan.

The focus of McAdam et al., the 'policy-specific opportunities' model for analysing collective action and socio-political movements, touches upon the question of "how the policy and institutional environment channels collective action around particular issues and with what consequences".¹¹¹ According to McAdam et al., while political opportunities dictate the category of movement, the formal direction of movements are prone to be affected by a given organization's ideological guideline. These complexities "are largely a product of the mobilizing structures in which insurgents are embedded on the eve of the movement".¹¹² The study of political opportunity structures is a many-sided approach, for instance the *proximate opportunity structure* focuses on the signals that groups receive from their immediate policy environment or from changes in their resources or capacities. The process of expanding opportunity as a new opening up, usually emerges as the consequence of new or expanded opportunities that signal the vulnerability and weakness of the state and encourage collective action.¹¹³

¹¹¹ McAdam et al., *Comparative perspectives on social movements Political opportunities*, 42.

¹¹² Ibid, 11-12.

¹¹³ Ibid, 58-61.

1.3 Literature review

Since one of the major arguments of this study is that the emergence of events and uprisings, as well as the politicization of Kurdish nationalism, have been affected by the socio-political trends and development at the centre (i.e. in the Tehran-based politics of Iran), the studies of a variety of Iranian scholars are included in this study. Such Iranian scholars as Ahmad Kasravi¹¹⁴ and Rashid Yasemi¹¹⁵ have described Kurdish identity and the roots of the Kurdish movement in a narrow and one-sided manner. Since these works merely bypass these uprisings, rather than analysing them as part of a movement of ethnonational resistance, they have no relevance and are not included in this study. Scholars such as Abrahamian, Ansari and Katouzian¹¹⁶ deal with the historic-political aspects of the formation of the modern Iranian nation state through the early 20th century, with its development and construction in line with changes of power in Iran. The major body of the Iranian scholars, despite their awareness of the existence of the ethnonational and religious conflict and the Persian policy of exclusion, have not been able to dig deeper at the roots of the emergence of these mentioned problematics. However, these sources, despite their lack of attention and focus on the Iranian Kurdish question, can provide data that help create a picture of the centre-periphery relations in Iran. Abrahamian, and his focus on the era before and after the establishment of the contemporary Iranian nation state and Reza Shah's brutal policy of modernization, followed by the Islamic Republic's Khomainization in Iran, without dealing directly with the Kurdish question still provides some explanations for the emergence and continuation of the Kurdish question in Iran. Arguably, Nader Entessar¹¹⁷ is among the few Iranian scholars who have covered and

¹¹⁴ Ahmad Kasravi, *Tarikh-e 18-saaley-e Azerbaijan* [The History of 18 years of Azerbaijan] First and Second Volumes, (Tehran: Amir Kabir Foundation, 1978).

¹¹⁵ Rashid Yasemi, *Kurd ve Payvestekiye Tarikhi ve Nejadi* [Kurds and Their Historical and Genetic Roots], (Iran: Nasher Ketab, Version 1991).

¹¹⁶ Ervand Abrahamian, *A history of Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (Berkeley: University of California, 1993). Ali Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921, The Pahlavis and After* (Harlow: Longman, 2003), Homa. Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran; Despotism and Pseudo- Modernism, 1926-1979*, Second Edition, (London: Macmillan, 1992) & Homayoun Katouzian, *Nationalist Trends in Iran, 1921-1926*, International Journal of Middle East Studies, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1979).

¹¹⁷ Nader Entessar, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: The Kurdish Dilemma in Iran*, in David Romano and Mehmet Gurses (eds.) *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)., Nader Entessar, *Kurdish Politics in the Middle East*, (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2009), Nader Entessar, *Competing national identities: The Kurdish Conundrum in Iran*, in Charles G. MacDonald, and Carole A. O'Lear, (ed.) *Kurdish Identity: Human rights and political status*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007) & Nader Entessar, "The Kurdish Mosaic of Discord", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 4, Ethnicity in World Politics, (1989).

analysed different aspects of the Iranian Kurdish question and the Kurdish ethnonationalistic movement, during different periods until the late 1980s and from different angles. Entessar's focus is directed toward the late 1970s and the decade after the Revolution, as a period of intensive clashes between the Kurdish movement and Iran's Islamic regime.

A small number of scholars (e.g., Ahmadzadeh, Bruinessen, Ghassemlou, Hassanpour, Manafy, Romano, Sardashti, Stansfield and Vali)¹¹⁸ have from different perspectives dealt with the Iranian Kurdish nationalist movement. Some of these scholars, such as Vali, question the constituency of Kurdish nationalism, and have highlighted those issues that have challenged the process of the development of Kurdish nationalism, particularly in Iranian Kurdistan. Regarding the difficulty of articulating Kurdish nationalism, Vali holds that he "saw Kurdish nationalists, but no Kurdish nationalism".¹¹⁹ Vali's writing is a critical reflection on "the formation and development of Kurdish national identity in modern Iran, from its inception in the Constitutional era to its development under Pahlavi absolutism, and its maturation in the Kurdish Republic in Mahabad in 1946".¹²⁰ In some chapters of this study dealing with the periodization and process of politicization of Kurdish nationalism, the writings of Hassanpour and Vali can make a significant contribution. These scholars have discussed several aspects (cultural, political and linguistic) of Kurdish nationalism. Hassanpour adds a discussion of class struggle, for example the peasant-landlord conflict, to the study of Iranian Kurds. Hassanpour's focus on this period's class struggle can be viewed in context of the emergence and rise of ideologies such as 'leftism', rather than 'nationalism', and the

¹¹⁸ Hashem. Ahmadzadeh, *Nation and Novel, A Study of Persian and Kurdish Narrative Discourse*, (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Uppsaliensis, 2003). Bruinessen (*Ehmedî Xanî's Mem û Zîn, The Kurds and Islam, Agha, Shaikh and State, & Kurdish society, ethnicity, nationalism and refugee problems*), Ghassemlou (*Kurdistan and the Kurds & Chel Sal Khebat le Penawi Azadida*), Hassanpour (*The Making of Kurdish identity & Raperini Jotyarani Mokoïyan*), Manafy (*The Kurdish Political Struggles*), Romano (*The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*), Sardashti (*Birewariyekani Jemil Mardokhi, Geranewayi Besarhati Besar u Shwenkrawayi Be Gelko u Mazar Sediq Anjiri Azar, Chand lapereyek le mejoyi gely kurd le Rojhelat, Jiyan u Tekoshn Siyasi Ahmad Tofiq 'Abdollah Ishaqi' & Xwendnawayeki Mejoyi bo Rudawe Newxoyekani Hezbi Demorati Kurdistani Iran*), Stansfield (*The Political, Cultural, and Military Re-Awakening of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement in Iran & Kurds, Persian Nationalism, and Shi'i Rule*) and Vali ("Sekot-e Rojhelat", *Kurds and the State in Iran, Introduction: Nationalism and the Question of Origins*, "The Kurds and Their 'Others'" & *Pre-capitalist Iran: A Theoretical History*).

¹¹⁹ Vali in Charles MacDonald, *Kurdish Nationalism in Iran*, in MacDonald, Charles G. and O'Lear, Carole A. (ed.) *Kurdish Identity: Human rights and political status*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 181.

¹²⁰ Abbas Vali, *Kurds and the State in Iran; the Making of Kurdish Identity*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), XI.

challenge posed by the new ideological tendencies by the creation of the Komala, which challenged the KDPI's role in 1979 and onwards.

Ghassemlou's studies are applicable in a different way, providing knowledge about the geopolitics, geography and the socioeconomic development of different parts of Kurdistan. He has also analysed and problematized the peasant-landlord system of Kurdish society. Ghassemlou's *Kurdistan and the Kurds* was written in an era (the 1960s) when published academic sources on Kurds were rare. However, this book covers only the first half of the 20th century's socio-economic and political development of Kurdish society and the Kurdish movement. Kurdistan has since that time changed much, and the Kurdish movement as well has gone through a comprehensive transformation that is beyond Ghassemlou's *Kurdistan and the Kurds*.

The works in Kurdish of Yassin Sardashi's are enriched by detailed information about the period when the KDPI leadership in the 1960s attempted, in cooperation with Mella Mostafa Barzani, to re-establish the movement. Sardashti's historical description of the crossborder relations between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements assumes this relation as a failure of Kurdish crossborder solidarity, resulting in the crushing of the Iranian Kurdish movement. Sardashti has, through providing evidence (e.g., interviewing individuals involved in the 1960s movement), drawn a picture of, on the one hand, the suffering of the Iranian Kurds from internal brutality by the hand of Mella Mustafa Barzani, and on the other hand the division inside the KDPI and the general hardship the Iranian Kurdish movement experienced. These sources provide invaluable insight, into the development and termination of the movement of this period.

Ahmadzadeh and Stansfield (2010) are among scholars dealing explicitly with the contemporary political history of the emergence of different aspects of the socio-political movements of the Iranian Kurds, in line with the establishment of the modern Iranian nation-state. They identify the main political developments of the Iranian Kurds in the first half of the 20th century, and analyse the process of institutionalization of the Kurdish national liberation movement, from the revolt of Simko until the establishment of the Republic of Kurdistan (1946). In addition, Stansfield (2014) traces back the emergence of the Kurdish insurgency to the establishment of the Iranian nation state, when a new mode of state-ethnic minorities' relations became dominant. He argues that the existence of a strong and politicized sense of Kurdish identity was among the main sources for the genesis of many of the Kurdish insurgencies in the 20th century.

Despite highlighting the process of emergence of Iranian Kurdish nationalism and the Kurdish movement, almost none of these mentioned studies has covered the reasons

for the discontinuity and decline of the Iranian Kurdish movement. The crossborder character of the Kurdish movement, in the case of the Iranian Kurdish movement's relations with the Iraqi Kurdish movement, is a factor mentioned in several sources. However, while there are examples such as the works of Hawar and Shamzini¹²¹ which deal with the idea of crossborder Kurdish national identity and solidarity through the uprising of Simko, the consequences and (dis)advantages of the relations in a more contemporary era from the second half of the 20th century and beyond, is an uncovered area of study of the Iranian Kurdish movement.

Two contemporary scholars of Iranian studies, Alam Saleh and Rasmus Christian Elling,¹²² deal extensively with the domination of Persianized Iranian national identity, the challenges of national and religious diversity, and the inability of different Iranian regimes to meet the demands of the non-Persian ethnonational communities in the state's religious and national ideology. The Kurdish question in Iran, along with the ethnonational questions of other communities, has been included in the studies of Saleh and Elling. However, the Iranian Kurdish national movement, its mobilization and conduction, have not been included in the mentioned sources. David Romano's book¹²³ is a relevant source of knowledge on the Kurdish question in Turkey, Iraq and Iran and these movements' effects upon each other. Using this source can be justified by many interlinked reasons. Firstly, Romano takes a social movement approach to the ongoing Kurdish insurgency in the countries with large Kurdish populations. Even though Romano focuses on the national liberation movement of the Kurds in Turkey, it provides knowledge that highlights the differences and similarities in the patterns of mobilization and challenges, and the sources of Kurdish insurgency in different parts of Kurdistan. Secondly, and regarding the theoretical framework, Romano has approached this analysis by employing different though complementary theoretical approaches to social movements. However, regarding the Iranian Kurdish movement, this source similar to much of the other literature of Iranian Kurdish studies, covers a short period and cannot be considered as a major empirical component in my study.

Printed publications of the KDPI, Komala and other political parties, and newspapers, leaflets, magazines, political statements and documentaries are among the sources which provide detailed information and data about different aspects of the Iranian

¹²¹ Aziz Shamzini, *Jolaneweyi Rezgari Nishtemani Kurdistan* [the Libertarian Movement of Kurdistan], 4. Edition, Translated by Farid Assad Sadr, (Kurdistan: Centre of Strategic Studies of Kurdistan, 2006).

¹²² Saleh, *Ethnic Identity and the State in Iran* & Rasmus C. Elling, *Minorities in Iran Nationalism and Ethnicity after Khomeini, Publication*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

¹²³ Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*.

Kurdish movement. For instance, the *Kheyanetekani Qiyade Mowaqat* (the KDPI's reaction to the KDP-Iraq's cooperation against Iranian Kurds in the 1980s),¹²⁴ is a vital primary source, enables us to draw a picture of how the KDPI-KDP-Iraq relations in the 1960s and 1980s has been described by the KDPI.

Karim Hisami/Hussami¹²⁵ is among one of the leading individuals of the Iranian Kurdish movement and a previous member of the KDPI's Political Bureau until the late 1980s, with exhaustive experience and knowledge of different aspects of the Iranian Kurdish movement. Hisami's more than fifteen volumes of 'biography and memory' are invaluable sources of information about the internal relations between different actors and organizations of Iranian Kurds, the leadership problematic and division inside the KDPI, and the crossborder aspect of the Kurdish movement. Hisami's biography has been chronicled in a highly personalized way, and critical use of the source is required. Other biographical sources such as Ghani Beloryan's *Ale Kok* (Green Leaf)¹²⁶ are as useful as Hisami's bibliography, though *Ale Kok* has been criticised for inconsistencies. Secondary sources contribute with detailed empirical data of how the movement since the 1950s has developed and faced different challenges. Hamid Gowhari's two volumes of *Rojhelati Kurdistan lê 10 sal da* (Iranian Kurdistan in Ten Years)¹²⁷ and his other writings related to the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements, are among other useful sources drawn upon in this study. It is important to mention that Gowhari's work, similarly to many other Kurdish written sources, has the tendency of being partial; therefore, including these sources in this study has required critical judgment in accessing the credibility of the data and information contained.

Chapter Outlines

The second chapter of this thesis has been structured around the question of the periodization of the emergence of Kurdish nationalism and the Kurdish question in Iran. Raising the question of periodization of the Kurdish question and politicization of

¹²⁴ KDPI, *Kheyanetekani Qiyade Moweqat be Netewayi Kurds* [the Treacheries of the [KDP]/Provisional Leadership against the Kurdish Nation], (Kurdistan: KDPI Media Centre, 1981).

¹²⁵ Karim Hisami/Husami, *Le Bireweriyekanem, Bergi Penchim* [From My Memories 1975-1979, Fifth Volume]. (Stockholm: Mansor Grafik, 1991), *Le Bireweriyekanem, Bergi Sesem* [From My Memories 1979, Sixth Volume]. (Stockholm: Mansor Grafik, 1992), *Le penawi chi da?* [Because of what?], (Stockholm: Centre of Sara Publication, 1988) & *Karwanêk le şehîdanî Kurdistanî Êran* [The martyrs of the Iranian Kurdistan], (Kurdistan: Benkayi Peshewa, 1971).

¹²⁶ Beloriyan, *Ale Kok/Brge Sabz*.

¹²⁷ Gowhari, *Rojhelati Kurdistan lê 10 sal da 1978-1988*.

Kurdish national sentiment, has been a preconditional factor for understanding the background and reasons for the emergence of the Iranian Kurdish movement.

The third chapter highlights the ‘emergence of class-based uprising’, referring to the peasant uprising of 1952-1953. This chapter argues that this uprising is among the very early class-based collective actions taking place in Iranian Kurdistan, emerging in the 1950s.

In chapter four, light is shed on the KDPI leadership’s attempt to re-establish the Iranian Kurdish movement in the 1960s through reliance on crossborder interaction with the Iraqi Kurdish movement. In this chapter the Iranian Kurdish movement’s interaction with the Kurdish movement in Iraq, and the impact of this interaction on the content and direction of the Iranian Kurdish movement, have been highlighted.

The fifth and sixth chapters deal with the political developments in Iranian Kurdistan after the Iranian popular revolution in 1979, and the conflict, interaction and competition between different forces and actors (e.g., the emerging Iranian regime and different organizations of the Iranian Kurdish movement) from 1979 through the 1980s.

The seventh chapter discusses two major subjects: firstly, the decline of the activity of the KDPI and Komala in the 1990s as result of the emergence of a new regional agenda and the rise of Iran’s power, firstly in the KRG and then in the entirety of Iraq following the fall of Saddam in 2003; and secondly, the emergence of the reform movement in Iran as result of the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), the Kurdish participation in the reform movement, and deadlock of this movement in Kurdistan.

Chapter 2

Kurdish Nationalism: From Emergence to Politicization

Introduction

In this chapter, as a precondition for understanding the contemporary Kurdish question and the Kurdish national movement in Iran, the question of the emergence and politicization of Kurdish nationalism in Iranian Kurdistan will be explored. Understanding the roots of the ongoing Iranian Kurdish question requires reflection on the contribution and impact of political and historical events on the emergence of Kurdish nationalism in the earlier centuries. The vitality of such pre-conditional study has, for instance, been emphasized by Stansfield when he notes “how long has there been a ‘Kurdish issue’ in Iran? It is a pertinent question to pose [...]”.¹²⁸

This study will be conducted based on theoretical concepts and terms relevant to nation, nationalism and nation-building, in correspondence with the emergence of Iranian Kurdish nationalism. The study of the Iranian Kurdish movement is a relatively unexplored field of research, and the periodization and conceptualization of Kurdish nationalism and the national movement in Iran are complex issues. Reviewing and referring to historical records of the Kurdish question is an unavoidable though helpful part of this study. Historical analysis will, according to Tilly, “help us fashion more adequate models of power struggles. The historical record is rich and relevant. It permits us to follow multiple groups and their relations over substantial blocks of time”.¹²⁹

The Middle East is suffering from a variety of ongoing (ethno)nationalistic conflicts resulting in major challenges to the nation-state system in this region. The Kurdish question in Turkey, Iran, and Syria (and Iraq) features examples of nationalistic political movements which were in the 20th century. As highlighted by Nader Entessar, “the emergence and development of the modern nation-state system in the Middle East has failed to respond to the demands of ethnic nationalism in the region’s mosaic of nations”,¹³⁰ in the case of the Iranian Kurds, the emergence of a centralist and exclusionary nation-state meant that Kurds “as people with common culture and historical

¹²⁸ Stansfield, *Kurds, Persian Nationalism, and Shi’i Rule*, 62.

¹²⁹ Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 231-32.

¹³⁰ Entessar, *The Kurdish Mosaic of Discord*, 98.

experience and distinctive language [...] had long felt that without cultural autonomy, they could not attain full citizenship right in the country”.¹³¹

In this chapter, through referring to events and evidence with relevance to the Kurdish movements, it will be argued that the intensification of politicization of Kurdish nationalism in Iran has been a process taking place both parallel with the emergence of the Iranian nation-state in the early 20th century, and was a reaction and resistance to the implementation of the official nation-state policy of different ruling regimes in Iran. Kurdish nationalism awakened and diffused during establishing political parties and institutions in the mid-20th century. In addition, it will be argued that even in the earlier centuries of Kurdish political history (the 16th-17th centuries), through intellectual writings and poetry, the necessity of awareness of Kurdish unity and the need of establishing political and administrative entities for the Kurds were articulated, though this call of unity did not reach a collective level including a broad section of the Kurdish society, and so in many respects Kurdish nationalism can be seen as a recent phenomenon.¹³²

Although at least theoretically the awakening, development and politicization of Kurdish nationalism can be dealt with as products of modernity, they have consisted of two very interlinked and simultaneously parallel developments. Firstly, the emergence and politicization of Iranian Kurdish national sentiment can be regarded as a reaction to the exclusionary and repressive policies implemented by different Iranian governments, during and after the nation-state-building process in Iran, referred to as Persianization of culture and identity. In the words of Entessar:

The development of Kurdish nationalism, or at least its politicized variety in Iran, must be seen within the broader context of Iran’s journey toward modern, territory based nationalism. The Russo-Persian War of 1804 that resulted in the loss of vast tracts of land in the Caucasus to czarist Russia was a defining moment for the development of Iranian nationalism based on the ‘myth of unity’ among the county’s constituent parts and groups.¹³³

Secondly, similar to the experience of many other ethnonational communities in the Middle East, the ambitions of the elite of the Iranian Kurds, of creating a unified national unit in accordance with the modern trend of nation-building in order to improve and

¹³¹ Entessar, *Competing national identities*, 190.

¹³² Entessar, *The Kurdish Mosaic of Discord*, 84.

¹³³ Entessar, *Competing national identities*, 189.

protect the political and cultural rights of the Kurdish population, contributed to the formation and politicization of Kurdish national sentiment in Iran.

2.1 Nationalism, Ethnicism and Ethnonationalism

Through the study of the Kurdish question, it can be noted that Kurdish nationalism and the idea of *Kurdayêti* (Kurdishness)¹³⁴ have been the main sources of motivation for the Kurdish people in joining any of the sections of the Kurdish movement. In studying the rise and politicization of Kurdish nationalism (as an instrument of movement mobilization), investigating the question of how the Kurds can be identified (either as ‘nation, *ethnie* or ethnonational group’) becomes highly relevant. Employing theoretical understanding and terms of Smith, Brubaker, Esman and Malesevic, I will firstly define the Kurds, and based on this definition analyse the Kurdish movement.

The idea of Kurdish identity has historically had a huge impact on the Kurds’ articulation of their rights. *Kurdayêti*, Kurdish national identity, has been a key concept in encouraging people to join the Kurdish movement. According to Brubaker, ‘identity’ is a key term in the vernacular idiom of contemporary politics, and socio-political analysis must take account of this fact. As emphasized by Brubaker, the analysis of ethnicity “occupies a central place in the study of collective and political violence”.¹³⁵ Regarding the significance and commonality of the term ethnicity for national movements, Brubaker highlights that “the phenomena we call race, ethnicity, and nation surely count among the most significant social and cultural structures and among the most significant social and political movements of modern times”.¹³⁶

Malesevic deals with ethnicity and nationalism as a matter of ‘ideology’. He claims that historically the emergence of terms such as ethnicity and national identity, is dated back to the post-Enlightenment period, when “the post-Enlightenment era gave birth to a variety of group centric discourses of identity. Among these diverse discourses associated with the representation of cultural difference two concepts stand out in terms of their

¹³⁴ Gourlay identifies *Kurdayetî* as “a form of shared political identity that extends across borders and that does not necessarily prefigure territorial claims but may be a form of political capital with which to protect Kurdish interests and buttress political claims in the troubled strategic environment of the modern Middle East [...] *Kurdayetî*, as a form of collective identity, is not automatically immutable or universally understood. Rather, like ethnicity, nation and nationalism, it is influenced and shaped by discourses, political forces and ‘contingent events’”. William Gourlay, “*Kurdayetî: Pan-Kurdish Solidarity and CrossBorder Links in Times of War and Trauma*”, *Middle East Critique*, 27:1(2018), 26.

¹³⁵ Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, 91.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* 87.

influence on academic as well as public life – ethnic and national identity”¹³⁷. Ethnicity and nationality are assumed as a set of specific politicized cultural demands and politically motivated forms of social action, whereby different aspects of real and cultural life are politicized through intensive group interaction. Furthermore, Smith conceptualizes nations as “a named human population occupying an historic territory and sharing common myths and memories, a public culture, and common laws and customs for all members¹³⁸”. Malesevic considers nationalism as a modern ideological construct that has been homogenized and enforced by the institutions (e.g., education system, mass media and public culture) of the modern nation-state and civil society¹³⁹. According to Will Kymilca and Christine Straehle;

[...] nation-states did not come into being at the beginning of time, nor did they arise overnight: they are the product of careful nation-building politics, adopted by the state in order to diffuse and strengthen a sense of nation-hood. These policies include national educational curricula, support for national media, the adaption of national symbols and official language laws, citizenship and naturalization laws, and so on¹⁴⁰.

Ethnicity has been argued to be an outcome of a process of politicized social, cultural and political action, and a precondition to nation-building, that can be transformed to nationhood. Ethnicity, in an intensive social conflict, just as in milder forms of group competition,¹⁴¹ is a completely historical and profoundly contingent novelty, a complex process whereby a patch of relatively arbitrary territory becomes firmly demarcated, centrally organized and run while simultaneously growing into an indisputable source of authority and group loyalty for the great majority of those who inhabit it.¹⁴² The following subsections will show how the development of Kurdish nationalism has met these conditions and definitions.

2.1.1 Roots of Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism

The concept of *internal colonisation* developed by Michael Hechter, is relevant in considering the ruler-subjugated relationship across all parts of Kurdistan. Kurdish

¹³⁷ Malesevic, *Identity as Ideology*, 24-27.

¹³⁸ Anthony Smith in Malesevic, Sinisa (2006) *Identity as Ideology*, 25-26.

¹³⁹ Malesevic, *Identity as Ideology*, 5-6.

¹⁴⁰ Will Kymilca and Christine Straehle, *Cosmopolitanism, Nation-states, and Minority Nationalism*, A critical Review of Recent literature, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 73.

¹⁴¹ Malesevic, *Identity as Ideology*, 27-28.

¹⁴² Malesevic, *Identity as Ideology*, 19-20.

nationalism and the reason(s) for its emergence are in many regards products of an internal-colonial and centre-peripheral relations,¹⁴³ whereby the Kurds are at the periphery, and the Iranian, Turkish, Iraqi and Syrian regimes have occupied the centre.¹⁴⁴ The Kurdish question can be considered as a result of what Joan Nagel has identified as an unequal centre-peripheral relationship. The feeling of being deprived by the nationalist and hegemony-seeking political systems in these countries has contributed to alienating the Kurdish population, not just ethnically but also as citizens of these countries. For instance, the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11 can be regarded as the first step toward modernization, as well as the first systematic and comprehensive step toward the juridical neglect and exclusion of the non-Persian ethno-national communities from equal access to citizenship, because as Vali notes,

The Constitution specified Persian as the official language of the nation, the language of administration and education, elevating it above other local and regional languages, Kurdish included. These languages were neither recognized nor denied; and the same was true of the non-Persian ethnicities. The Constitution remained silent on the subject of ethnicity [...] Ethnic relations were subsumed under the general notion of the Iranian nation, whose identity was in part defined by the Persian language (and Twelver Shi'ism), and in part remained obscure.¹⁴⁵

Kurds have historically suffered from several kinds of discriminatory policy implemented by different regimes in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. As emphasized by Entessar,

This discrimination has contributed to the enduring quality of Kurdish ethnic consciousness. The relatively greater development of the centre vis-a-vis the periphery, the Kurdish regions, and the subsequent socio-political and economic inequality experienced by Kurds have given rise to a condition akin to internal colonialism and what Frank Young has termed as 'reactive subsystems'.¹⁴⁶

Basically, a huge part of the Kurdish discontent is a product of misconducted and discriminating state policies that have led to the emergence of reactive movements. For instance international reports of the UNPO, Amnesty International and KMMK¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Ismail Beşikçi, *International Colony Kurdistan*, (Reading: Parvana/Taderon Press, 2004). *Devletlerarası Sömürge Kürdistan* was originally published in Turkish and has been translated to English by Alan Yayincılık in 1990. The present work is an authorized translation from the Turkish original.

¹⁴⁴ Anthony H. Birch, "Minority Nationalist Movements and Theories of Political Integration", *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Apr., 1978), 332.

¹⁴⁵ Vali, *Kurds and the State in Iran*, 4-5.

¹⁴⁶ Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnionationalism*, 6-7.

¹⁴⁷ Amnesty International, *Iran: Human Rights Abuses against the Kurds*, Amnesty International Publications 2008. <http://www.crin.org/en/docs/mde130882008eng.pdf> (Accessed 15 December 2017) &

categorize the difficult conditions of Iranian Kurds as product of discriminatory state policy. According to Gurr, “the potential Relative Deprivation [RD] would be greatest in a nation most of whose citizens felt sharply deprived with respect to their most deeply valued goals, had individually and collectively exhausted the constructive means open to them to attain those goals, and lacked any nonviolent opportunity to act on their anger”.¹⁴⁸ Compared to the rest of Iran, the Kurdish region has historically suffered from an unequal share of wealth and power, and Kurdish areas have experienced less modernization and economic prosperity compared to the rest of the country. Entessar stresses that

Unequal centre-periphery relation have long characterized the Kurdish condition in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey [and Syria], although specific causes for the Kurdish predicament have different impacts in each country. In the case of Iran, ethnic inequality has been a result of uneven modernization and integration of Iranian economy into the world capitalist system, during the Pahlavi monarchy.¹⁴⁹

Esman argues that ethnonationalism, as the most significant form of nationalism, refers to nations that require political self-determination and independence based on their ethno-symbolism and popular sovereignty. In this regard ethnicity and symbols are particularly important, due to the fact that they distinguish *us*, the included national group, from the *others*, those excluded from the vision of the national community. Ethnonationalism mainly concerns self-rule, defining any community that aspires to political self-determination as a nation and entitled to independent statehood. *Nationalism* is a politicized ethnicity; meanwhile, *ethnicity* shares much with nation, except of its lack of access to self-governing entities and institutions.¹⁵⁰ Alam Saleh maintains that non-Persian ethnic communities in Iran, due to their sizable population, history, collective memories and consciousness, cultural distinctiveness, and geography, consider themselves to be nations rather than ethnic groups.¹⁵¹

The current Kurdish conflict can be classified as the result of a variety of misconducted policies and processes of nationalism and nation-building accordingly in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. These regimes went through the process of nation-state building unable in regard the Kurds’ social, political and cultural rights, but they also

KMMK, *Kurdish Human Rights Organization Monthly Report*, <http://www.kmmk.info/en/1968> (Accessed 15 December 2017).

¹⁴⁸ Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, 92.

¹⁴⁹ Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnionationalism*, 6.

¹⁵⁰ Esman Milton classifies nationalism into three categories; ethno, civic and syncretic nationalism. Esman in Saleh, *Ethnic Identity and the State in Iran*, 159.

¹⁵¹ Saleh, *Ethnic Identity and the State in Iran*, 149.

deployed their full capability in destroying Kurdish national identity.¹⁵² These nation-states' policy of systematic assimilation, and their attempts at deconstructing the Kurdish national identity, have resulted in the destruction of a large part of Kurds' cultural heritage and national symbols. Concretely, the outcome of the emergence of nationalism and the process of nation-state building can be classified into two main categories: a. successful processes (for instance resulting in secularization and access to equal citizenship), and b. processes leading to long term confrontation between an ethnonational group and the dominant ruling group. In some countries (e.g., France and Italy) this process has fulfilled its aim (relatively) successfully. However, in many countries of the Middle East, nation-building have met the extensive resistance of sizeable, territorially-concentrated minorities, as Kymilca and Straehle note,

Particularly when these minorities historically exercised some degree of self-government which was stripped from them when their homeland was involuntary incorporated into the larger state, as a result of colonialization, conquest or the ceding of territories from one imperial to another. [...] these minorities often see themselves as 'nation within', and mobilize along nationalist lines to gain or regain rights of self-government.¹⁵³

Based on the development of the Kurdish movement, it can be claimed that the ongoing struggle for Kurdish liberation is a product of the *second assumption*, (also a dissatisfied national sentiment among Kurds), and is in essence Kurdish resistance to subjugation and failed nation-state policies.

2.1.2 The Questions of Location and Periodization

Despite the fact that the Kurdish reaction to state-sponsored repression and assimilation in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria has resulted in politicization of Kurdish identity, it can be claimed that each part of Kurdistan (due to their socio-political circumstances) has gone through a different psycho-political process of development and politicization of national identity. As result, the movements which Kurds of different parts of Kurdistan have established carry different characteristics.¹⁵⁴ However, in general the time of the

¹⁵² Kymilca and Straehle, *Cosmopolitanism, Nation-states*, 73.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Abbas Vali, *Introduction: nationalism and the Question of Origins*, in: Abbas Vali (ed.), *Essays on the origins of Kurdish nationalism*, (Costa Mesa, Cal.: Mazda Publishers, 2003), 2.

formation of the contemporary Kurdish question can be traced back to the era of territorial conflict between the Safavid Dynasty and the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century.¹⁵⁵

In some regards, the Kurds of the Ottoman Empire can be considered as the pioneers of Kurdish nationalism. It can be argued that, due to the establishment of several Kurdish intellectual, political and cultural centres (for instance in Istanbul), Turkish Kurdistan is the home of the emergence of Kurdish nationalism. However, due to crossborder political and cultural exchanges, this development has followed a complex and non-institutionalized pattern, with contributions also from the Safavid side. Events and incidents in one part of Kurdistan left huge impact on the other part(s) of Kurdistan. There are several examples that underline this argument. For instance, the uprising of Simko in the 1920s was inspired by Shaikh Ubaidallah Nehri's uprising in 1880,¹⁵⁶ and Barzani's various revolts were both a source of support to the Kurdish Republic, with some of them directly inspired by the Republic (1946).

There are also examples that point to Iranian Kurdistan as "the intellectual centre of the Kurdish nationalist movement in the mid-20th century".¹⁵⁷ While during some periods the Ottoman Kurds were the source of national inspiration, Iranian Kurdistan has been identified as the ideological cradle for the emergence of Kurdish nationalism at other points. In words of Stansfield:

The modern Kurdish nationalist movement, whether in the vibrant and successful Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the tense and changeable Kurdish-dominated southeast Anatolia of Turkey, or the increasingly crystallizing Kurdish region of Syria, had its ideological roots firmly in the Kurdish territories of Iran. Long recognized as an intellectual centre of Kurdish culture, intellectualism, and Kurdism, *Rojhelat* [Iranian Kurdistan] has given the Kurdish nationalist movement a considerable legacy of national foundations; yet, it seems that this spiritual home of Kurdish nationalism is now, at a time when 'Kurdistan' may indeed be challenging the tortured state system established in the aftermath of World War I, subdued—with Kurdish self-determination aspirations firmly held in abeyance by the overwhelming weight of the Persian-dominant nationhood that stands to remain without equal in Iran.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ See Qanbery and Quraishi, *Revabete Kurdhabadawletine Safavive Osmani*, 123.

¹⁵⁶ Amir Hassanpour, *The Making of Kurdish identity: Pre-20th Century Historical and Literary Discourses*, in: Abbas Vali (ed.) *Essays on the origins of Kurdish nationalism*, (Costa Mesa, Cal.: Mazda Publishers, 2003), 147-148.

¹⁵⁷ Ahmadzadeh and Stansfield, *The Political, Cultural, and Military Re-Awakening*, 11.

¹⁵⁸ Stansfield, *Kurds, Persian Nationalism, and Shi'i Rule*, 79.

Regarding the periodization of the emergence of Kurdish nationalism, McDowall holds that “the Kurds only really began to think and act as an ethnic community from 1918 onwards”.¹⁵⁹ In response to the question of whether a Kurdish nation can be held to have previously existed, McDowall stresses that “for Kurdish nationalists there can be no question that the nation has existed from time immemorial, long asleep but finally aroused during the course of the twentieth century. Kurdish nationalism is therefore likely to see the past in particular light, with ancient myths and symbols that validate Kurdish identity”.¹⁶⁰ David Romano maintains that the time of the emergence and formation of modern nationalism in the Kurdish context can be traced back to the era of World War I and the period contemporary to the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, because this period has witnessed more than twenty Kurdish uprisings.¹⁶¹

Regarding the time of emergence of nationalism as a political/ideological means of collective action for achieving self-rule in Iranian Kurdistan, many indications point to the development of Kurdish nationalism in Ottoman Kurdistan from 1800-1850 as the main source of inspiration.¹⁶² McDowall claims that “two Kurdish dynasties feature prominently in the story, one religious and the other secular: the Sayyids of Nihri (Shamdinan) and the Badr Khans. Although it only became apparent later, one could describe them as the founders of the two broad strands of Kurdish nationalism, the autonomists and the secessionists”.¹⁶³

2.2 Frail and Misconducted Records of Kurdish History

The 16th-17th centuries’ social, political and economic structure of the Kurdish society has generally been characterised as a combination of tribal, nomadic, and pastoral, with no urban centres and the absence of or limited intellectualism. This pre-modern socioeconomic system and social structure remained until the mid-19th century, when a mosaic of principalities, tribes, town and cities re-shaped the structure of Kurdish society. This period’s uprisings of Kurdish tribal leaders and *emirs* (governors) has broadly been characterized as tribalistic movements found based on self-interested agenda of Kurdish *emirs*. The nearly entire absence of historical records of the development of the Kurdish

¹⁵⁹ McDowall, *A Modern History of The Kurds*, 4.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Romano, *The Kurdish nationalist movement*, 3-4.

¹⁶² McDowall, *A Modern History of The Kurds*, 42-45.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 89.

question from these times, has made it difficult to prove the real intentions of these leaders' challenge to the Safavid and Ottomans. In the statements and historical records of the Kurdish uprising, these revolts have mainly been articulated as acts of protecting the interest of Kurdish *Agha* and tribe leaders. Yet protesting this view, Aziz Shamzini claims that

All the sufferance of Kurds undeniably has not been only for the sake of their religion or protecting the interests of the *Agha* and tribe leaders. It is true that through this era's Kurdish movements [similarly to many movements of other nations] misconduct has taken place. However, it is unjust and untruth to label and reduce a whole nation's struggle to merely be an issue of troublemaking, tribalistic and instrumentalism.¹⁶⁴

The history of the Kurds and their homeland has been dominated by the conquerors of the Kurds. As emphasized by the legendary African civil rights activist Miriam Makeba, "the conquerors write history: they came, the conquered, they wrote. You don't expect people who came to invade us to write the truth about us. They will always write negative things about us and they have to do that because they have to justify their invasion".¹⁶⁵ From a critical perspective, it can be claimed that the major body of the political history of Kurds has been written either directly by those who ruled Kurdistan, or with the sponsorships of the ruling regimes of Kurdistan. In this regard, the history of the Kurdish movement has been misrepresented; it is a narrative produced from an intercolonial and oriental perspective. Kurdish history, particularly from the commencement of the Kurdish movement, was written by those regimes who occupied and ruled Kurdistan, or by Kurdish cosmopolitan intellectuals that either deliberately or unconsciously served pan-Turkist, pan-Arabist or pan-Iranian ideologies.¹⁶⁶

Previously, before the development of the Kurdish intelligentsia, it was mainly European orientalist, spies, diplomats and missionaries who dealt with the Kurdish question. The self-interested agenda of these groups led to the misconceptualization of the Kurdish issue, and their contribution did not draw an objective picture of the Kurdish

¹⁶⁴ Shamzini, *Jolaneweyi Rezgari Nishtemani Kurdistan*, 82-83.

¹⁶⁵ For more, see Miriam Makeba, *African Heritage: Great Quote by Miriam Makeba* <https://afrolegends.com/2017/06/16/great-quote-by-miriam-makeba/> (accessed 2 March 2017).

¹⁶⁶ Rashid Yasemi, *Kurd ve Payvestekiye Tarikhi ve Nejadi*. Yasemi is a well know Iranian historian with Kurdish origin From Kermashan. His book has by Kurdish nationalist been considered as a misrepresentation of the history of Kurds and Kurdistan, which only has served the interests of the occupying regimes of Kurdistan.

movement.¹⁶⁷ For instance, Richard W. Cottam¹⁶⁸ represents an antagonistic and orientalist attitude to the Kurds, Kurdish culture and Kurdish nationalism. Through his writing Cottam reduces the Kurdish movement and degrades the Kurdish people as morally weak, ignorant, arrogant and culturally meagre. Cottam claims that “from the sociological point of view, Kurdish nationalism is a caricature of Iranian nationalism in that it is a movement of few”.¹⁶⁹

Reducing the Kurdish question to self-interested uprisings conducted by tribal leaders, robbery, something against the wishes of the Kurdish people, or the agenda of external powers, are other examples of misleading representation of the Kurdish question. Reviewing literature related to events and development of the Kurdish question and the people who lost their lives, evidence of the existence of the Kurdish question has been established by Kurds, as a struggle conducted by Kurdish men and women, Kurdish intellectuals from different classes of Kurdish society, and patriotic youth who could not stand the oppression and unjustness of those regimes occupying the Kurdish homeland.¹⁷⁰

The concept of the pathological homogenization of people can be deployed as a useful explanation for the emergence of Kurdistan nationalism. According to Stansfield, pathological homogenization is a methods state-builders have deployed to define the state as a normative order and homogenizing identities through targeting those designated as outsiders with discriminatory and often violent treatment. Stansfield asserts that the formation of Kurdism or Kurdishness in the 19th century Ottoman Empire (and Qajar Iran to a lesser extent) was a process of “self-awareness in the face of modernization dynamics”, and functioned as foundation for the later development of Kurdish nationalist movements. Nevertheless, in Stansfield’s words, identities developed “without yet being nationalist—in terms of the politicization of these identities—and with them existing within a set of wider socio-political and political economy milieus dominated by more traditional modes of organization, usually grouped together under a broadly and ambiguously defined ‘tribal’ moniker”.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Shamzini, *JolaneweyiRezgariNishtemani Kurdistan*, 9-12.

¹⁶⁸ Richard Cottam, was an American political scientist and Iranist and spend many years in Iran during the early decades of the cold war. His research focused on Iran nationalism and the political development in Iran after the World War Two: “Cottam became a leading scholar in the field of Iranian political studies and because of his keen knowledge of Iranian politics and close observance of many of its key players, his advice was solicited by many, including members of the U.S. administration, during the revolution of 1977-79”. Richard Cottam, in *Encyclopædia Iranica* <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cottam-richard-1> (accessed 15 October 2018).

¹⁶⁹ Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*, 65-68.

¹⁷⁰ Hisami/Hussami, *Karwanêk le şehîdanê Kurdistanê Êran*, 88.

¹⁷¹ Stansfield, *Kurds, Persian Nationalism, and Shi'i Rule*, 65-66.

A large part of the literature of Kurdish nationalism points to Shaikh Ubaidallah Nehri's revolt against Turkey and Iran as the most significant sign of rise of Kurdish nationalism. This claim has been justified by referring to the Shaikh's stated goal of creating a Kurdish state. However, whilst Robert Olsen points to the 1880s as the time for the rise of Kurdish nationalism, Bruinessen points the Uprising of Shaikh Said (Piran) in 1925 as the time for emergence of Kurdish nationalism. Such controversies lead to Hassanpour's claim that "no starting point can be fixed for Kurdish nationalism, especially when its various movements are conceived as a whole".¹⁷² However, Hassanpour informs his readers that, based on his extensive evidence on the standardization of the Kurdish language, it makes sense to frame a two-stage periodization of Kurdish nationalism: *feudal nationalism* (from the 17th century) and *middle class nationalism* (from the early 1940s). It is arguable whether the 1639 formal division of Kurdistan, the Safavid and Ottoman centralization of the power in this period, and the Kurdish hardship that resulted from this, sparked the early Kurdish national movement characterized as feudal nationalism. Furthermore, the occurrence of almost three centuries later of the new model of nation states, resulting in the establishment of the Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi and Syrian states, and these states' comprehensive policy of physical, psychological, cultural and symbolic violence against the Kurds, accelerated the emergence of urban/middle class nationalism among Kurds in the early and mid-20th century. Hassanpour maintains that 'the perception of order and disorder of historical record is implicit in many accounts', and he identifies early Kurdish nationalism a sort of feudal nationalism which should be seen in a causal relationship to the past, present and future.¹⁷³

Nevertheless, Vali challenges some of the foundation of Hassanpour's argument, and he argues that the concept of feudal nationalism is inconsistent, signifying "neither a historical anomaly nor a political paradox, but a contradiction in terms".¹⁷⁴ Vali holds that the identity of the Kurds formed in the 16th and 17th centuries should not be viewed as nationalism, and neither should the Kurdish people of this era be labelled as a nation. On the theoretical level, Vali suggests that a total separation between ethnicity and nationalism is historicist, essentialist, teleological and even ineffectual in "intellectual credibility". Vali has, in overcoming the limitations of modernist essentialism, historicism and realism, distinguished between "nationalism as a discourse of origin and

¹⁷² Hassanpour, *The Making of Kurdish identity*, 147-148.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 107-109.

¹⁷⁴ Vali quoted in Hassanpour, *The Making of Kurdish identity*, 144.

nationalism as a discourse of identity”.¹⁷⁵ He highlights that “Kurdish political organizations and movements, proliferating in the divided Kurdistan since 1918, have assumed different forms and pursued different objective, but opposition to the denial of Kurdish identity and resistance to the imposed ‘national’ identities remain the fundamental cause of Kurdish rebellions”.¹⁷⁶ In this regard, according to Vali, Kurdish nationalism is framed around the idea of resistance to political regimes’ denial of Kurdish national and cultural identity, as well as the Kurdish striving to protect this national identity. Vali asserts the emergence of Kurdish nationalism as a product of modernity, correlated to the construction and emergence of modern nation states and the official national identities proclaimed and enforced by different political regimes in the multiethnic and multicultural societies of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

The Kurdish movements have shown that they are not only a dependent variable, but also a condition, and that their capability and their rise and fall are dependent on “the power and capacity of their respective central governments [...] they are strictly in line with the reactive nature and external dynamics of the ‘centre-periphery’ politics which defined the relationship between the Kurdish principalities and their Persian and Ottoman overlords”.¹⁷⁷ Vali links the origin of nationalist movements in Iranian Kurdistan back to the emergence of the political movement of Shaikh Ubaidollah (Nehri) in the late-19th century, and its spilling over Iranian Kurdistan’s border, as the main source of inspiration for the emergence of modern Kurdish nationalism in Iranian Kurdistan:

The nationalist movement then developed in a cumulative process that culminated in the events leading to the establishment of the Republic of Mahabad in 1946. The political activities of the Kurdish forces *vis-à-vis* the Iranian state during the period 1882–1946, active or reactive, are thus characterized as nationalist, irrespective of their social structure, political organization, discursive formation and strategic objective.¹⁷⁸

Vali’s study challenges the historical view of the genesis and development of Kurdish nationalism in Iranian Kurdistan, articulating this occurrence as a modern phenomenon resulting from “the socio-economic and cultural dislocations caused by the blighted and perverse modernity that followed the advent of Pahlavi absolutism after the First World War”.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 145.

¹⁷⁶ Vali, *The Kurds and Their” Others”*, 83.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 84-85.

¹⁷⁸ Vali, *Kurds and the State in Iran*, 1-2.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

These controversies and differences in identification and periodization of the emergence of Kurdish nationalism indicate the theoretical and methodological complexity linked to this issue. Related to the question of the periodization of the emergence of Kurdish nationalism, is the existence of contradictory trends and social formations Kurds; as Hassanpour writes, “feudalism, tribalism, and forms of capitalist relations coexist in unity and conflict. The fragmentation of the Kurds is all-round, from incorporation into four countries and sizeable diaspora formation to alphabetic cleavages”.¹⁸⁰ These have together affected the frames, range and capability of Kurdish nationalism.

Vali claims that while classical nationalism in Europe resulted in and was accompanied by modernity, the birth of civil society and democratic citizenship, Kurdish nationalism has resulted in the opposite trends, because it relied on subduing the development of civil society and challenging the achievement of equal citizenship in Kurdistan. The development of Kurdish nationalism has taken place in a closed circle that continually perpetuates and reproduces the fragmentation of Kurdish national identity. Consequently, Vali has a different theoretical approach to Kurdish nationalism and its journey of development: in his own words “I am in agreement with the general theoretical direction and political ethos of the constructivist conceptions of the nation and national identity, I refuse to accept the positivistic thrust of their empiricist epistemology, which appeals to the authority of the historical fact-evidence as the means of validation of historical argument”.¹⁸¹ The complex picture of the contemporary politics of Kurds brings Vali to conclude that “we have Kurdish nationalists without Kurdish nationalism, [and] modernity did not bypass Kurdish nationalism, but rather created it without affirming it in discourse or in practice”.¹⁸²

Unlike scholars who link the emergence of Kurdish nationalism to the 16th and 17th century divisions of the Kurds’ homeland (1514-1639), Vali traces the awaking of Kurdish nationalism to the period post-Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) and the time of the establishment of the modern nation state in Iran in the 1920s. The Constitutional Revolution commenced the implementation of the policy of Persian superiority and neglect of the equal rights of citizenship of non-Persian national communities in Iran. Due to the absence of a secular intelligentsia and Kurdish political institutions, and the socio-political backwardness of Kurdistan, the lack of impact of

¹⁸⁰ Hassanpour, *The Making of Kurdish identity*, 147-148.

¹⁸¹ Vali, *Kurds and the State in Iran*, xv.

¹⁸² Vali, *The Kurds and Their “Others”*, 86.

Kurds on the formulation of the content of the Constitution is obvious. The absence of a Kurdish counter-constitutional movement bears witness to the fact that the Iranian Kurds through the historical period were not in a position of oppose the denial of their identity. Evidently, such a weak position can be explained by the fact that “a Kurdish collective national consciousness, in so far as this signifies a common awareness of a common existence in history and a common end in politics, did not exist among the Kurds of Iran”.¹⁸³

Kurdish nationalism is seen as a product of a ‘relation of force’ in the political and cultural field, corresponding to strategies and policies deployed by, for instance, Iranians and Turks to ensure and enforce their assimilation of Kurds. In Vali’s terminology, Iranian Kurdistan is an “ethnic-linguistic community” under Iranian sovereignty, with a lack of specified contiguous geographical boundaries and juridical-political authority to issue uniform administrative and social and cultural processes and practices. However, Vali similar to other scholars has found the roots of this emergence as result of the path and patterns followed by the modern nation state, which caused the social, political, and economic deprivation of Kurds and territorial dispersion of Kurdistan: “the territory has been divided and subdivided into smaller and mostly unviable administrative and geographical units attached to adjacent provinces by different governments, first under the Pahlavi rule and then by the Islamic state”.¹⁸⁴ Yet this territorial division of the community has not been able to impact the ethnic and linguistic unity and cultural cohesion of Kurds. The ability of Kurdish nationalism in retaining cohesion, can be explained by the fact that

The ethnic and linguistic unity of the Kurdish community in Iran is constituted by its otherness, and hence its differences with the sovereign identity. In this sense, therefore, the sovereign identity is constitutive of the Kurdish community and the processes and practices which reproduce Kurdish otherness also at the same time define its unity and cohesion.¹⁸⁵

2.3 Kurdish Nationalism Reflected in Print-Media

Kurdish nationalism has largely developed based on the subjective element of *Kurdayêti* and the common way of life and historical experience. Among Kurds “the notion of a

¹⁸³ Ibid, 5-6.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, xii- xiv.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, xiv.

common cultural means of expression and way of life has, more than any other single factor, kept the flames of Kurdish nationalism alive and made the assimilation of Kurds into society at large more difficult".¹⁸⁶ Even during a time when promoting the idea of nationalism and ethnicity had not emerged yet, one can find evidence of some Kurdish intellectuals' awareness of the distinctiveness, and the national subjection of Kurds by the Ottomans and the Safavids. The diffusion of Kurdish national sentiment has largely been affected by mass and print media. In Bruinessen's words, "modern communications, printing, radio and the cassette recorder, contributed much to the creation of the Kurdish nation as an imagined community, that is, as a community of people whom one never meets face to face but whom one knows to exist and to be like oneself".¹⁸⁷ In the attempt at defining a relatively certain period for the awakening of Kurdish national sentiment, a brief review of scholars' attitudes to Kurdish literature's contribution to this emergence, will be the next core element of this section.

Since the previous centuries' Kurdish print literature has contributed hugely to the awakening of Kurdish nationalism, Kurdish literature and manuscripts are a rich source for defining the period of occurrence of Kurdish nationalism. Despite the challenges made by the Ottomans and Safavids, in the mid-16th century Kurdish power was growing and the Kurds were in a position of effectively governing much of their territories, and Kurdish governors contributed to the rise of intellectual and political life among Kurds.¹⁸⁸

*Sharafname*¹⁸⁹ is a source which indicates the difference between 'Kurds' and the 'others'. Sharaf Khan Betlisi has clearly distinguished Kurds from Ottomans (*Rūm*), Persians (*Ajam*), Arabs and Armenians. The deployment of such terms is clear evidence of the existence of some degree of Kurdish awareness of their distinct identity and selfhood.¹⁹⁰ Another early work of Kurdish literature considered and referred to as an indicator of the awakening of Kurdish national sentiment and the Kurds' awareness of their ethnic distinctiveness, is *Mem û Zîn* (Mem and Zin), written in 1692 by the Kurdish scholar Ehmedî Xanî (Ahmad Khani). *Mem û Zîn* is, by Kurdish nationalists, considered the epic of Kurdish nationalism. To Bruinessen, "the work owes its fame among twentieth

¹⁸⁶ Entessar, *The Kurdish Mosaic of Discord*, 86-87.

¹⁸⁷ Bruinessen, *Kurdish Society, Ethnicity, Nationalism and Refugee Problems*, 37-38.

¹⁸⁸ Hassanpour, *The Making of Kurdish Identity*, 110-11.

¹⁸⁹ The *Sharafname* is a political-historical book of Kurdistan written by Sharaf Khan Betlisi (*Şeref Xan*), the Kurdish ruler of the emirate of Bitlis, in the late 16th century. For Kurdish nationalists, *Sharafname* represents the first narrative of Kurdish nationalist sentiment. In Djene, Bajalan, R. "Şeref Xan's Sharafname: Kurdish Ethno-Politics in the Early Modern World, Its Meaning and Its Legacy", *Iranian Studies*, Volume 45, number 6 (2012), 795-796.

¹⁹⁰ Bruinessen, *Kurdish Society, Ethnicity, Nationalism and Refugee Problems*, 38.

century Kurds to yet another level that is explicitly there: it can be read as a forceful expression not only of pride in Kurdish ethnic identity but of the desire for Kurdish state”.¹⁹¹

Xanî considered the formal division of Kurdistan by the Ottomans and Safavids as degrading and discomfiting to Kurds. *Mem û Zîn* was Xani’s reaction and reflection on Kurdish deprivation and subjugation. Xanî throughout *Mem û Zîn* paid attention to the destruction of Kurdistan as a result of the perpetual and continuous Ottoman-Safavid wars. He expressed his feeling of grief in terms as subjugation (*mehkum-bun*), deprivation (*mehrum-bun*), defeat and subordination (*mexlub u muti-bun*) and being without a king (*bexudan*). In Hassanpour’s words, Xani’s work is “permeated with political consciousness about statelessness, or rather, the lack of a centralized or unified Kurdish state”.¹⁹² However, Bruinessen challenges the idea of existence of premodern Kurdish nationalism, and maintains that in this period (the 17th century) the necessary conditions for the formation of nationalist discourse were not only absent in just Kurdistan and the Middle East, but also had not yet emerged in Europe, which is considered as the locus of the emergence of classic nationalism.¹⁹³

Next to Xanî, the impact of the poetry and writings of Haji Qader Koyi on awaking of Kurdish nationalism, Hassanpour maintains, constitutes continuity and rupture in the formation of Kurdish identity. Koyi is held by Kurdish nationalists as the second apostle of *Kurdayêti* and the father of modern Kurdish nationalism.¹⁹⁴ Koyi was inspired by Xanî, and had personal experience of the glory of the rule of Mir Muhammad of Rowanduz (1814-1835).¹⁹⁵ Xanî and Koyi are considered the ‘apostle’ and ‘ideologist’ of Kurdish nationalism. Hassanpour writes:

I have tried to avoid the conceptualization of the seventeenth century identity of Kurdishness in terms of ‘nation’, ‘nationalism’, or ‘national awareness,’ however in my study of standardization of the Kurdish language, I have referred to Kurdish identity prior to Koyi as ‘feudal nationalism’ and its derivatives such as ‘national awareness’ and ‘national feeling’.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹¹ Bruinessen, *Ehmedî Xanî's Mem û Zîn*, 40-43.

¹⁹² Hassanpour, *The Making of Kurdish Identity*, 118-121.

¹⁹³ Bruinessen, *Ehmedî Xanî's Mem û Zîn*, 9.

¹⁹⁴ For instance, Mihamadi Mala Karim has entitled his book *Haji Qader Koyi: The Poet of a New Era in the Life of the Kurdish Nation*. In Hassanpour; *The Making of Kurdish Identity*, 130.

¹⁹⁵ Koyi was inspired by Mir Muhammad of Rowanduz (the ruler of a large part of Southern/Iraqi Kurdistan, and the echo of justice and power of Bedir Khan Beg of Botan, “who in the 1840s made himself almost independent of the Ottoman government and brought most western and central Kurdistan under his control. In Bruinessen, *Ehmedî Xanî's Mem û Zîn*, 40-43.

¹⁹⁶ Hassanpour, *The Making of Kurdish identity*, 138-139.

C. J. Edmond refers to Koyi as the early apostle of the modern form of Kurdish nationalism. In his words, “in the intellectual sphere perhaps the most famous of its early apostles was the poet Haji Qader of Koi [Koyi] (1815-92)”.¹⁹⁷

From orientalist and inter-colonialist points of view, a tribal and nomadic people do not constitute a nation, and cannot practice nationalism. This assumption has its roots in a perception that regards nationalism as a modern, non-tribal, urban-based, secular and highly Western phenomena. Regarding the question of whether Xanî should be counted as a Kurdish nationalist, Bruinessen argues that, since nationalism in the time of Xanî had not fully emerged, Xanî cannot be described a nationalist, “at least not in the modern sense of that term”.¹⁹⁸ However, when it comes to the legacy of *Mem û Zîn*, due to its significant impact on all phases of the development of the Kurdish movements, he deserves to be called the “father of Kurdish nationalism”.¹⁹⁹

The disagreement about defining Kurdish nationalism and its emergence can be linked to several events. For instance, in the eyes of Kurdish nationalists, the Uprising of Simko is characterized as purely nationalist, challenging the Iranian state.²⁰⁰ Yet Vali challenges this idea, framing Simko’s revolt as predominantly tribal, suffering from a dearth of defined ideology and structure, and can hardly be identified as nationalistic. However, Simko’s newspaper *Roji Kurd* and its discourse, were in accordance with some of the principles of modern democratic politics, and deployed the same discourse as Kurdish intelligentsia in the late Ottoman period. Though Simko’s uprising was against national oppression, the lack of such concepts as popular sovereignty and national rights and of secularism within his movement, strengthens the framing of Simko’s movement as not purely nationalist.²⁰¹

The emergence of Kurdish print media coincides with the emergence of the early period of Kurdish nationalism at the end of the 19th century.²⁰² Kurdish print, both as a means of information and as an instrument of the spread of the political manifestoes of Kurdish nationalism, has played a crucial role in formation and diffusion of modern Kurdish national sentiment: “the importance of a national print-language has been emphasized in Kurdish nationalist discourse during the whole 20th century and even now,

¹⁹⁷ C. J. Edmonds, “Kurdish Nationalism, Nationalism and Separatism”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 6, No. 1, (1971), 89.

¹⁹⁸ Bruinessen, *Ehmedî Xanî's Mem û Zîn*, 56.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 57.

²⁰⁰ Hawar, *Simko: Ismail Agha Shukak and the Kurdish National Movement* & Shamzini, *Jolaneweyî Rezgari Nishtemani Kurdistan*

²⁰¹ Vali, *Kurds and the State in Iran*, 12-14.

²⁰² Kurdistan Mokeryani, et al., *A Collection of Hozni Mokerayni's works*, First Volume, (Hawler: Aras Publication 2007).

in the beginning of the third millennium”.²⁰³ However, hindered by the geopolitical, social and economic conditions of Kurdistan,²⁰⁴ and the repressive nature of regimes occupying Kurdistan, this instrument failed in creating a unified and homogenized Kurdish nationalism.²⁰⁵ Another issue restricting the spread of Kurdish nationalism is the lack of a unified script (e.g. the use of the Arabic alphabet in Syrian, Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan with the Latin script in Turkish Kurdistan) which can be understood by the whole Kurdish society. Regarding the significance of print media in promoting Kurdish nationalism, Ahmadzadeh holds that “the importance of printing goes beyond its direct consequences, such as standardization and development of certain language²⁰⁶”.

As highlighted in the study of Benedict Anderson of the process of nationalism and its diffusion, print has played divisive infrastructural and facilitating role in the idea of formation of an imagined community and the emergence of the nation²⁰⁷, and so has been characterized as the ‘architect of nationalism’. Hussain Hozni Mokerayani, who had the experience of living in Europe, Istanbul and Damascus, was among the Iranian Kurds who brought printing technologies to Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan. This innovation made a huge contribution to the establishment and spread of Kurdish literature among Iranian and Iraqi Kurds:²⁰⁸ “in the early 20th century Hozni Mokerayani brought two gifts to the *Bashur* (Iraqi Kurdistan): cameras and printing machines. Mokerayani’s Publication house is the first and oldest printing institution in Kurdistan”.²⁰⁹

2.4 Kurdish Nationalism: A Reaction to Subjugation

Nader Entessar characterizes the Kurdish relationship with the ruling political systems in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria to be a dominant core and aggregation towards peripheral but large ethnic groups. In this model, the core ‘views itself as the historic, institutional and symbolic creator, and hence appropriate hegemon of the state. In the case of Iran and its relation to the country’s multiethnic community, Persian historical heritage and cultural mindset are the dominating core framework, and the others (Azari, Kurds,

²⁰³ Ahmadzadeh, *Nation and Novel*, 144-145.

²⁰⁴ O’Shea, *Trapped Between the Map and Reality*.

²⁰⁵ Ahmadzadeh, *Nation and Novel*, 144-145.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 143-145.

²⁰⁷ Anderson Benedict, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London: Verso, 2006).

²⁰⁸ Mokerayani et al. *A Collection of Hozni Mokerayni’s works*, 4.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 9.

Baluchis, Arab and Turkmen) constitute the periphery.²¹⁰ In Iran, as in many other Middle Eastern societies, the policy of aggressive assimilation of peripheral communities into the mainstream society is the main challenge to establishing stability in the country.²¹¹

The last five centuries of the Kurds' historical and political development reveal that the regimes occupying Kurdistan not only failed to protect and provide for the cultural and political rights of the Kurds, they also systematically destroyed the cultural values, denied national rights, and implemented politics of assimilation and genocide in punishing the Kurds for their movements.²¹² Following the 19th century, liberation from authoritarian regimes became the dominating slogan and ideology of the Kurdish movement.

According to Aziz Shamzini, the development of Kurdish national struggle can be categorized into three main periods: 1) from the early 19th century to the late 19th century; 2) from World War I until the emergence of the World War II; and 3) from the commencement of World War II and onward. During these three periods a variety of uprisings in different regions of Kurdistan took place. As the first era's uprisings were traditional and led by religious and tribal leaders, movements of the second era were ideologically inspired and affected by the October Revolution of Russia in 1917. This era's uprisings were more inclusive and complex, both regarding the leadership style and the ways they mobilized (an incremental institutionalization of politics and politicization of identity).²¹³ Through the third phase of the movement, Kurdish intellectuals' contribution to the movement and the mobilizing of these activities around political parties and organizations among Kurds became more apparent.²¹⁴

²¹⁰ Entessar, *The Kurdish Mosaic of Discord*, 84.

²¹¹ Ibid, 84-85.

²¹² Saleh Amin Mohammad "Kurd u Ajam", [the Kurds and the Ajam] Translated to Persian by Abdullah Ibrahim, (Tehran: Iranian Publications, 1991), 20-27.

²¹³ Shamzini, *Jolaneweyi Rezgari Nishtemani Kurdistan*, 105-106.

²¹⁴ The following are among the main uprisings initiated by Kurds during the 19th and early 20th centuries: Movement of Ahmad Pasha Baban (1812), the Uprising of Zazayis in Sivas (1820), the Movement of Mir Badr Khan of Cezire (1821-1847), the Revolt of Mohammad Pasha of Rewandoz (1826-1833), the Uprising of Mountain Shengal (1830-1833), the Movement of Mir Sharif Khan Bitlisi (1834), the Revolt of Yezdan Sher (1853), the Movements of Hussain Kanan Pash and Osman Pash (1879), the Uprising of Shaikh Ubaidollah Shamzini (1880-1881), the Uprisings of the Kurds of Mosul, Erzerum and Bitlis (1907), the Movements of MellaSelim and Shahabedin in Bitlis (1913) the Movement of Shaikh Mahmud Barzenji (1919-1932), the Uprising of Simko Shkak (1920-1930), the Movement of Shaikh Said Piran (1925), the Uprising of Mountain Aghri (1926-1934), the Movement of Shaikh Ahmad Barzani (1931-1934), the Movement of Jafar Sultan in Iranian Kurdistan (1931-1932), the Uprising of Kurds in Diyarbakir (1934), the Dersim Uprising (1937), The revolt of Mulla Mostafa Barzani (1943-1945), the Kurdish Republic in Mahabad (1946), the Peasant Uprising of Mokeryan (1953-1952), the *Raperin*/Uprising of Jwanro in Iranian Kurdistan (1956), etc., in Shamzini, *Jolaneweyi Rezgari Nishtemani Kurdistan*, 88-108.

Based on Hugh Watson's conceptualization, Kurdish nationalism and its movement are a result of *unsatisfied nationalism*.²¹⁵ Despite the Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi and Syrian states' policy of manufacturing identity, following the third era of the intensification of nationalism Kurdish national awareness and consciousness steadily increased.²¹⁶ The awakening of Kurdish nationalism in a modern form became evidently visible and effectual from the second half of the 19th century, in parallel with the similar movements of other subjugated communities in the Ottoman Empire and Iran.²¹⁷

As the history of Kurdish nationalism demonstrates, politicization of Kurdish identity coincided with the formation of the modern nation state system in the Middle East. Kurdish demands for autonomy/independence for Kurdistan (the homeland of Kurds), have been one of the most enduring source of conflict in the modern Middle East.²¹⁸ The Peace Treaties of Amasya (1555) and Zuhab (1639)²¹⁹ signed between the Ottomans and Safavids, initiated the official partition of the Kurdish homeland. As emphasized by Behzad Khoshhali, "for Kurds the Treaty of Zuhab meant partition of Kurdistan, the commencement of a period of injustice and oppression, as well as the emergence and the construction of an artificial form of Kurdish identity, where Kurds according to their location became known as either Safavid or Ottoman Kurds".²²⁰

After the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire following the World War I, Kurds intensified their struggle for self-determination.²²¹ The second partition of the Kurdish homeland (resulting in the partition of Kurds between four nation states) took place as result of the Peace Settlement of Lausanne in 1923 between Turkey and several European powers (i.e., French, the British Empire, and Italy). The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire led to a vacuum of political power in Kurdish inhabited areas in south-eastern Anatolia and northern Iraq. This condition encouraged Kurdish nationalists to attempt to establish a Kurdish state; however, British geopolitical interests in the region brought such a Kurdish aspiration of independence to an end, and as result the Treaty of Lausanne signed "formalized the de facto division of Kurdish-inhabited lands among Turkey, Iraq

²¹⁵ Watson, *Nations and States*, 1-5.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*, 7-8.

²¹⁷ Edmonds, *Kurdish Nationalism*, 89.

²¹⁸ Mujtaba Borzoi, *Awza-e Siyase-e Kurdistan 1258- 1325* [The Political Condition of Kurdistan 1880-1946], (Tehran:Fekr-e Now Publication, 1999).

²¹⁹ *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopaedia*, 687.

²²⁰ Khoshhali, *Kurdism, Theory & Concepts*, p. 18

²²¹ Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, pp.1-3

and Syria”.²²² According to Said Shams the emergence of Kurdish nationalism in this period was

A by-product of the socio-economic condition of Kurdish society and the immense impact of the new kind of politics that emerged out of the presence of the European powers in the region. The latter forced a major structural change within existing communities, and the end of World War I, and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, ensured that it was the European power who drew up and created a whole new map for the region. Although the first wave of Kurdish nationalism, in common with Iranian and Turkish nationalism emerged at the beginning of the 20th century, the nationalist ambitions of the Kurds were obstructed by external factors.²²³

In subsequent periods, some thirty million Kurds living under the national jurisdiction of the Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi and Syrian states became the subject of various forms of suppression, assimilation and denial of Kurdish national and cultural identity.²²⁴ The division of Kurdistan and rule of the Kurds’ homeland by different political and economic regimes “have deprived the Kurds of political unity and cultural cohesion”.²²⁵ In particular, each of these states went through a different process of nation-state building, and they deployed different discourses of denial and different policies of exclusion and assimilation toward their Kurdish population. According to Vali, these differences meant that “Kurdish national identity has borne the mark of this political and cultural diversity of the ‘other’; it has been deeply fragmented since its inception”.²²⁶

The transnational ethos of Kurdish national identity and its structural limitation have been products of such factors as the regional and internal conditions and diverse development of Kurdish society.²²⁷ The underdeveloped foundation of the Kurdish society and chronically weak civil society, coupled with a weak bourgeoisie in urban areas and the dominating power of landlordism and tribalism in the countryside, have meant that the transnational character and centripetal tendencies of Kurdish nationalism have developed with variety of challenges and disability. Accordingly, Kurdish nationalism and national identity has remained deeply fragmented and “deprived of its

²²² Ali, Othman. “The Kurds and the Lausanne Peace Negotiations, 1922-23”, *Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 33, No. 3 (Jul., 1997), 521.

²²³ Shams, *Nationalism, Political Islam*, 167.

²²⁴ Beşikçi, *International Colony Kurdistan*

²²⁵ Vali, *The Kurds and Their “Others”*, 83-94.

²²⁶ *Ibid*, 83.

²²⁷ O’Shea, *Trapped Between the Map and Reality*.

structural, political and cultural unity, it is reduced to local autonomist movements driven with parochial and clientelist relations”.²²⁸

The existence of an autonomist and persistently fragmented Kurdish nationalism, affected by the absence of pervasive and sustainable nationalist political culture, means that the Kurdish movements have not been able to endure the aggressively repressive official nationalism of the four states dominating the Kurds and the Kurdish homeland. The patronized and fragmented Kurdish national identity and its movements have been used by neighbouring states against their own fragmented selves. Kurdish nationalism and those movements that were inspired by it carry an ambiguous identity, with unstable character switching between nationalism and ethnicism. This characteristic of Kurdish nationalism has left huge impact on the strength, durability and direction of the Kurdish movement of the different parts of Kurdistan. A destructive combination of the ambiguous and complex relation of autonomist movements to their respective ‘other’, conflict of interests among Kurdish leadership, foreign patronage and internal clientelism, have accelerated the fragmented and differentiated nature of the Kurdish national identity.²²⁹ In Vali’s words, “driven by parochialism and clientalist interest, the autonomist movements too often awake the grotesque image of Kurdish identity turning against itself, torturing the tormented parts of its fragmented self”.²³⁰

Finally, Ahmadzadeh, with his modernist approach to Kurdish nationalism, links this emergence to the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and he identifies Iran as a ‘nation-as-state’ and Kurds as a ‘nation-as-people’.²³¹ Ahmadzadeh views the partitioned geopolitical condition of Kurdistan as the main obstacle for developing a hegemonic Kurdish nationalism. This situation has reduced political and cultural cooperation between Kurds from different parts of Kurdistan. This condition has led to emergence of different fragmented national movements, disabled in creating a Kurdish nation with defined and specific borders. In other words, “the specific historical and political condition of the Kurds, and their lack of a political and geographical unity, make it almost impossible to consider them as a united nation in the juridico-political sense”.²³² Such as development described by Ahmadzadeh has become more evident in line with the consolidation of power in the modern nation-state in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria in the hand of the elites of the superior national identities, and particularly when these states

²²⁸ Vali, *The Kurds and Their “Others”*, 83.

²²⁹ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*.

²³⁰ Vali, *The Kurds and Their “Others”*, 84.

²³¹ Ahmadzadeh, *Nation and Novel*, 14-15.

²³² *Ibid*, 129.

systematically considered how to deploy the policy of divide and rule against their Kurdish countermovement.

Summery

This chapter has shown that the periodization of the emergence of Kurdish national sentiment in Iran is a complex issue. The Iranian Kurdistan's militarized and isolated condition has made fieldwork in this region difficult, if not impossible. In addition, the international community's lack of interest and attention to the multifaceted problems of Iranian Kurds, and the fragmented and unsustainable national movement led by the mainstream political parties of Iranian Kurds, are among the reasons for the lack of attention to the socio-political and security conditions of Iranian Kurds. The results of previous and current studies of Kurdish nationalism have added new knowledge and opened up the question for more discussion and research related to national identity and the time of its emergence/awaking. However, divergences in argument calls on the need for deeper study of *Kurdism*²³³ or Kurdish nationalism. Despite the indications of the existence of Kurdish national sentiment in the 16th and 17th centuries, this sentiment (due to limited Kurdish intellectualism, fragmentation and lack of coherent political institutions of Kurds) was not strong enough to transform into a collective and broad section of the Kurdish society. Kurdish nationalism, in opposition to its counter-nationalist ideologies (pan-Persianism, Arabism and Turkism that have functioned as instruments of achieving domination), has come to the world and worked as an institution of mobilizing Kurdish resistance to states' policies of ethnic superiority of one group upon the *other*. Kurdish national sentiment, due to such challenges as lack of institutional support, experience of destruction and interruption, and continuous violation and oppression from the hands of its superior state-based counterparts, has not had the opportunity of going through coherent development. However, despite the existence of multifaceted challenges, its capability of surviving as the main source of mobilizing social and political movement among Kurds (from different parts of Kurdistan), gives reason for identifying it as a powerful ideological source fuelling the Kurdish struggle.

²³³ Behzad Khoshhali, *Kurdism, Theory & Concepts*/Translated by: Afrasiab Grami, (KRG; Kurdistan Publication, 2007).

Chapter 3

The Kurdish Peasant Uprising: the First Indication of Class Struggle

Introduction

This chapter investigates the socio-political and ideological aspects of an event named in the lexicon of the Iranian Kurdish movement as *Raperini Warzeran u Jotyareni Kurdistan* 1331-1332 (the Kurdish Peasant Uprising of 1952-53). This event took place in a period when *Kurdayêti* (Kurdishness) was the only ideological force behind mobilizing the Kurdish people in conducting collective political action. However, I will throughout this chapter argue that this uprising highlighted the issue of class conflict in the rural areas of Kurdistan, and challenged the authority of the Kurdish feudal class (as the most powerful class of the Kurdish society). In addition, the study of this uprising reveals that the Iranian Kurdish movement has not only been a movement of Kurdish nationalists, but also a movement that has embraced many elements of class struggle. This class struggle was expressed as collective action, and its ideology framed, by the announcement of the existence of Komala in 1979.

Due to the way this uprising was conducted by the Kurdish peasants, it has been argued as being the first collective class-inspired political rebellions in the Iranian Kurdistan. The Iranian Kurdish national movement has, since the politicization of the Kurdish question in the early 20th century, stepped into a new phase. The establishment of the Kurdish Republic is among the major political developments in 20th century Iranian Kurdistan, taking place during a period of international and regional instability, when the superpowers' international rivalry over the post-World War Two political settlement began to intensify. The triggering of the era of the Cold War by the USSR and the USA turned Iran into a new battleground.²³⁴ The Kurdish Republic did not benefit from this competition, and collapsed following the USSR's withdrawal from Iran and its cessation of support to the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan.²³⁵

²³⁴ F. Eshraghi, "The Immediate Aftermath of Anglo-Soviet Occupation of Iran in August 1941", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 3, (1984).

²³⁵ Curtis and Hooglund, *Iran: a country study*, 202.

3.1 The Peasant Uprising through Theoretical Lenses

To analyse and understand the Kurdish struggle, the concept of movement structure acquires considerable importance. As the main component of every mobilization, movement structure has been a crucial factor affecting the outcomes of the Kurdish struggle in Iran, which is related to the organizational bases and mechanisms which serve both the collection and deployment of resources.²³⁶ Movement structure and the organizational aspects of collective action touch upon the structure of groups' activity and the degree of organizational capability shaping the acts of actors in achieving their goals. The term mobilization is associated with the process by which a group transforms from being a passive collection of individuals to active participants in public political life.²³⁷

Theoretically, the Kurdish Peasant Uprising can potentially be explained through deploying Ted Gurr's concept of Relative Deprivation, "a perceived discrepancy between men's value expectations and their value capabilities. Value expectations are the goods and the conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled. Value capabilities are the goods and conditions they think they are capable of attaining or maintaining, given the social means available to them".²³⁸ According to this approach, discontent is only an unstructured potential for collective violence, and it will result in individuals' engagement in unrest and political violence. Gurr points to the existence of asymmetrical and dysfunctional 'political, social and economic' relations in society as the main sources of deprivation. In particular, socio-political issues are related to certain general 'economic motives' as the demands for material goods, and opposition to the economic actors and regime's values of distribution of wealth and prosperity. This interaction between different sections of society involves a three-fold value-mechanism, consisting of welfare, power, and interpersonal values. The lack of realization of these values results in the occurrence of the feeling of deprivation within different groups of the community. Consequently, in many cases, uprisings occur when "discontent leads men to political violence, when their attitudes' and beliefs' focus is on political objects, and when institutional frameworks are weak enough, or opposition organizations strong enough, to give the discontented a sense of potency".²³⁹

²³⁶ McAdam, et al., *Comparative perspectives on social movements Political opportunities*.

²³⁷ Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 54-69.

²³⁸ Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, 13.

²³⁹ *Ibid*, 155.

Amir Hassanpour defines the Kurdish Peasant Uprising as a battle between different classes with conflicting interests,²⁴⁰ with a variety of socio-economic and ideological dimensions. Hassanpour assumes that the Peasant Uprising can be considered as an unprecedented socio-political and economic innovation in Iranian Kurdistan, with many hallmarks of class struggle. He dates back the history of the contemporary class struggle to the nineteenth century, initiated by the Paris Commune (1871) and developed during the Soviet October Revolution (1917) and the Chinese Revolution (1949).²⁴¹ However this assumption can be challenged questioning the spread of intellectualism and leftism in the Kurdish society during this period. Taking into account the hardship of the Kurdish peasants, their revolt was essentially an outcome of discontent and economic disadvantage, rather than stemming from ideological inspiration from outside.²⁴²

3.2 Patterns of the Kurdish Movement before the Peasant Uprising

As mentioned previously, the Iranian Kurdish movement after the collapse of the Republic ushered into a new phase of nationalism, somewhat different from the previous style of insurgency and uprisings conducted by Iranian Kurds. The major difference is related to mode of mobilization, an incremental move from tribal-led insurgency toward an organizational-inspired mode of coordinating collective action and insurgency. During the first half of the twentieth century many other revolts and uprisings, other than Simko's Uprising, such as the Uprising of Hawramant and Mariwan (1930), the Uprising of Hama Rashid Khan Banê (1940), and the Uprising of the Kurdish people of Urumiyeh (1950), took place around Iranian Kurdistan.²⁴³ The shared characteristic of these uprisings was that they all were begun and led by powerful Kurdish tribe leaders, as reactions to Reza Shah's policies of the centralization of power and cultural homogenization. However, the characteristics and structure of the Iranian Kurdish movement from the mid-1940s went through significant alterations.

²⁴⁰ Hassanpour, Amir. "Raperini Jotyarani Mokoian 1331-1332" [The uprising of the Peasant of Mokerian 1952-1953, A Research Project], *Derwaze* 2017, No 1, https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/732738_6a3b9e10d5ee46f0b54141b55159a52a.pdf

²⁴¹ Hassanpour, "Raperini warzeran le Mukerian".

²⁴² Anwar Sultani, "Raperini Sali 1953-e Xalki Bokan u Warzerani Nawcheyi Fayzolabegi" [The Uprising of the people of Bokan and the Peasants of the Fayzolabegi region 1953]. <http://www.nnsroj.com/detiles.aspx?id=70691> (accessed 30 September 2018).

²⁴³ Shamzini, *Jolaneweyi Rezgari Nishtemani Kurdistan*.

The emergence of *Komalay Jiyaway Kurd/Kurdistan* (JK/The Society for the Revival of the Kurds/Kurdistan) established in September 1942 in Mahabad,²⁴⁴ as a relatively small and clandestine political organization of Iranian Kurds, paved the path of transition. The political rhetoric of the JK (expressed in its publication *Nishtiman*) paid attention to social and economic issues in Kurdistan. According to Abbas Vali, “*Nishtiman* contains frequent references to social inequality between ‘haves and have-nots’ in Kurdish society, and the poverty and ignorance of the Kurdish masses, especially the peasantry, contrasted with the accumulation of wealth among the landowners and merchants [...] however, the discourse of *Nishtiman* did not include class categories”.²⁴⁵ In 1945, before the establishment of the Republic, the JK transformed into the KDPI. The KDPI has, since its establishment and until 1979, played an important role in determining the narrative, framework and direction of the Iranian Kurdish movement during different stages, until the announcement of Komala’s activity.²⁴⁶

According to the literature of the Iranian Kurdish movement, following the fall of the Republic a period of silence²⁴⁷ with a relative lack of political insurgency, started and lasted in two decades. The KDPI leadership had in the 1960s attempted to re-establish the movement, and following this attempt the Iranian Kurdish movement experienced a fluctuating mobilization. Nevertheless, it is worth raising the questions of what happened during the period 1946-1960: did Iranian Kurdistan in this time undergo a period of total silence?

In fact, in the early 1950s some parts of Iranian Kurdistan experienced some middle-scale, class-inspired incidents of unrest. In the literature of the Kurdish movement, some of these uprisings have been briefly mentioned, but they are largely overlooked. One example is the Peasant Uprising (1952-1953), which occurred in the rural areas of Mukeryan, Chômi Majid Khan and Fayzolabegi, around Bukan and Mahabad. This Uprising, not only due to its contemporary importance, but also due to its demand of socioeconomic justice, was a remarkable revolt. Despite the Uprising’s short duration and extent, it resulted in some national and international media attention. However, it has despite its singularity remained understudied.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁴ Ahmadzadeh and Stansfield, “The Political, Cultural, and Military Re-Awakening”.

²⁴⁵ Vali, *Kurds and the State in Iran*, 20-21.

²⁴⁶ According to Moatadi, the initial stage of the formation of the Komala took place in 1969 with the participation of F. Shaikholislami, F. Mostafa Sultani, Mohammad Hossein Karimi, Iraj Farzad, Saaed Watandoost, Abdullah Moatadi and M. Shaikholislami. Hussain Moradbeigi joined the group later, while they throughout this period organized their activities around the *Teshkilat*.

²⁴⁷ Bozarслан, Hamit. *Violence in the Middle East, from political struggle to self-sacrifice*, (Markus Wiener Publishers Princeton, 2004), 22.

²⁴⁸ Hassanpour, “Raperini warzeran le Mukeriyân”, 102.

This Uprising took place in an era when fear of the Pahlavi regime's reprisals and suffocation dominated Iran and the Kurdish society. This chapter discusses different aspects of the Uprising, such as the reasons for its emergence and termination, its domestic and national repercussions, and not at least, its achievements. However, before shedding light on these aspects, a brief explanation of the political and historical background concerning the feudal system and the political condition of Iran during the early 1950s will help in understanding the context of the Kurdish Peasant Uprising in 1952-53. The socio-political development of Iranian Kurdistan was impacted by the socio-political situation in Tehran, as the centre of power. In this regard a brief history of feudal landlordism in Iran helps in understanding the system that sparked the Kurdish Peasant Uprising.

3.3 Feudal Landlordism in Iran and Kurdistan

According to Zia Khazaei, feudalism in Iran is among the most important political and social factors for understanding this country's development (or underdevelopment).²⁴⁹ The emergence of ideological, socio-political and economic processes in Iranian Kurdistan can be viewed in line with their emergence in the rest of Iran. In the case of the Kurdish Peasant Uprising, it will be argued that this uprising was a product of the inequality of landlord-peasant relations, emerging and developing during the 17th-20th centuries. The feudal exploitation of the peasants is held as the main reason for the Peasant Uprising in Kurdistan. The Kurdish peasants' collective action was a process that took place in the light of the opportunity that was provided through the era of Mossadeqq's Prime Ministership.²⁵⁰

As remarked in Abbas Vali's study, "the Saljuqi period [1038-1157], marked by the universalization of *iqta* [a form of land grant], witnessed the revival of the feudal mode of production proper".²⁵¹ Iranian feudalism flourished until its disruption by the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century. Even though this disruption caused the weakening of Iranian feudalism, the main elements of the property relations remained largely intact. In the feudalistic Iranian agrarian system, "the exchange of rights to land

²⁴⁹ Zia Khazaei, "Feudalism in Iran", *Life Science Journal, Islamic Azad University, Zahedan*. 9(3) (2012), 2686.

²⁵⁰ Abudlrahman Ghassemilou, *Kurdistan and the Kurds*, (Prague: Publishing House of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and London: Collet's Ltd., 1965).

²⁵¹ Abbas Vali, *Pre-capitalist Iran A Theoretical History* (New York: New York University Press, 1993).

use for a portion of the product formed the structure of the relations of production as relations of exploitation”.²⁵² Also characterized as a ‘share-cropping’ agrarian production system, feudalism dominated from the Sassanian to the Pahlavi era, with a greater intensity in grain-producing areas such as Azerbaijan, Khorasan and Kurdistan. Highlighted in Ghassemlou’s study, at the time of the Peasant Uprising in Kurdistan, the landlord-peasant relation was dominated by an unjust crop-sharing system.²⁵³

According to statistical records released in 1960s on the eve of the land reform, on 54 per cent of all cultivable land in Iran, agrarian production was based on share-cropping. Mostly, the peasants did not own agricultural land; the piece of land they worked on was owned by the landlord, and was made available following “an exchange of rights to land use in return for a portion of the product [which] was stipulated in a contract between the share-croppers and their overlords. This system was uncertain and its duration was subjected to the landlord’s whim”.²⁵⁴

This system was characterised by a “relation of exploitation and insecurity”.²⁵⁵ The landlords exercised several forms of subjection, such as monopolistic control, corporal punishment, and undermining the peasants’ right of cultivation, whereby “economic hegemony was reinforced by social dependency”.²⁵⁶ This exact relation was exercised by the landlords of Mukeriyān over the subjected peasants.²⁵⁷ The peasants had little choice but to pay starvation rents in order to secure their access to the landlord’s land. This feudalistic system was sustained by two major factors: on the one hand the growing tendency towards large land-ownership, and the underdevelopment of commodity relations on the other.²⁵⁸ Under this system the peasant was neither a free producer nor a free human being, his economic existence being dependent on the *Agha* (landlord) and the small piece of land distributed to him. He could not freely move around or travel, the *Agha* was able to punish him for any reason, or impose the ‘first night’ rights of *droit du seigneur*. This system remained strong until the 1962 land reform of Pahlavi.²⁵⁹

The land question was a focus of different political movements in the twentieth century Iran. Highlighted by Lahsaeizadeh, the emergence of political interest in reforming the land system can be dated back to the period of the Constitutional

²⁵² Ibid, 193.

²⁵³ Ghassemlou, *Kurdistan and the Kurds*, 132-139.

²⁵⁴ Behnam and Rasekh quoted in Vali, *Pre-capitalist Iran A Theoretical History*, 193-194.

²⁵⁵ Khazaei, *Feudalism in Iran*, 2686.

²⁵⁶ Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 379.

²⁵⁷ Hemen Mokeryani, *Tarik u Run* [Dark and Bright], (Kurdistan: Unspecified Publican, 1974). 35-38.

²⁵⁸ Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran*, 213-233.

²⁵⁹ The ‘first night rule’, dates back to the time of European feudalism. According to this rule when a daughter of a peasant married, the *Agha* could spend the first night with her.

Revolution (1905-1911). For the first time as a political agenda, the reform of the land system was raised by the *Jamiat-e Mojahedin-e Demokrat* (Union of Democratic Mojahedin). Other political movements such as *Jonbesh-e Jangal* (the Jungle Movement, 1918) and the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan (1946-47) raised this issue. However, none of these movements succeeded in improving conditions and the rights of the peasants. Lahsaeizadeh emphasizes this lack of achievement as occurring “because this claim was raised by political parties, which were formed by urban-based intellectuals and politicians. It was not a claim highlighted by the peasants themselves, and in addition the lack of the participation and support of the peasants to these movements were the major reasons of their lack of success”.²⁶⁰

Statistical data collected by the *Tudeh* Party estimated that in the 1950s and 1960s, 50 per cent of the cultivated land belonged to large proprietors, 25 per cent to small absentee proprietors, 20 per cent to religious foundations, and only 5 per cent to peasant cultivators. As result of the unequal ownership relations, 37 families owned over 20,000 villages, and approximately more than 60 per cent of the peasants were landless. The poor peasant was economically and socially controlled by the landlord and his representatives (the *kadkhoda* and *mobasher*), and he could not reside in a village for any length of time without the permission of the local *kadkhoda*, or obtain employment on the landlord’s estates without the goodwill of the *mobasher*. In short, “the landlord totally controlled the economic existence of the landless laborers”.²⁶¹ From the early 1950s the struggle for reforming the land system arrived in a new and complex era, with a combination of positive achievements and intensification of the historic unequal relations between peasants and their landlords.

Reforming the land system was among the main aspirations of Prime Minister Ali Razmara (1951). In order to improve the socioeconomic conditions of the peasants, Razmara, a man of leftist sympathies, introduced two major reform bills, “one for distributing state lands among the peasantry; and the other to establish the provincial assemblies promised by the constitutional laws”.²⁶² After the assassination of Razmara, his successor Mossadeqq approved several reforms bills, among them the popular ‘Act of 20 Per Cent’.²⁶³ According to this Reform Act, landlords were required to return 20 per cent of their revenues to peasants, with half of this amount being earmarked directly for

²⁶⁰ Lahsaeizadeh, Abdolali. *Jame Shenasi-e Keshavarzi-e Iran* [Sociology of Agriculture of Iran], (Tehran: Intesharat-e Islami, 2009), 52-53.

²⁶¹ Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 378-389.

²⁶² Ibid, 264.

²⁶³ Ghassemlou, *Kurdistan and the Kurds*, 177.

redistribution to the peasants and the other half to improving villages' infrastructure. Another part of this reform, under the so called 'village decree', criminalized the practices of *begari* (forced labour) and *sorusat* (illegal taxation), and established *shorayi de* (village councils). However, neither the *Agha* nor the monarchists allowed the establishment of the village councils or implementing the approved decrees.²⁶⁴ This resistance happened because enforcing the Act of 20 Per Cent would challenge directly and dramatically the interests of the landowners. According to Ghassemlou, "even not a single landowner permitted the law to be carried out".²⁶⁵

However, regarding these reforms' symbolic value, they can be held as the locomotive of the uprisings over land (including the Kurdish one) in Iran. The peasants and agrarian labourers saw this Act as the emergence of a legal opportunity for claiming some of their rights denied by the feudal system and its representatives. This Act increased the tension in the already simmering landlord-peasant relations and led to clashes between these two classes in Iranian Kurdistan. On one side, Mossadeqq and his allies' endorsement of reform, and on the other side the monarchy and its traditional supporters' resistance to reform, turned this period into an era of tumult and instability. For instance, during "the July [1952] upheaval [...] major strikes broke out in all the main towns, and over 250 demonstrators died or suffered serious injuries in Tehran, Hamadan, Ahwaz, Isfahan and Kermanshah".²⁶⁶ After acceding to power, Reza Shah, by economic initiatives such as "extracting bribes from foreign business and extorting money from tribe leaders"²⁶⁷ and confiscating land, became the country's largest landowner. The Pahlavi family benefited massively from the land ownership system in Iran. It worked both as a huge source of wealth to the monarch, when in the period of the so-called land reforms, the Shah's sale of land brought him huge revenue. In addition, the reform process served as large-scale propaganda, providing the Shah with political legitimacy.²⁶⁸

3.4 The Peasant Uprising in Bokan

The history of the struggle against feudalism in Kurdistan provides examples of a single individual challenging the authority of a landlord. The story of Haydar Goran's *Boki*

²⁶⁴ Hassanpour, "Raperini warzeran le Mukeriyani", 98.

²⁶⁵ Ghassemlou, *Kurdistan and the Kurds*, 177.

²⁶⁶ Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 171.

²⁶⁷ Stephan Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*, (Hoboken New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons Inc. 2008), 44.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

Nakam (in which a peasant challenges the feudal institutions and the Agha's authority) is one example among many.²⁶⁹ Studying events through the lenses of class struggle, similarly to the Peasant Uprising against the powerful rule of the *Darebag* (feudalists) from a sociological and historiographical perspective, has rarely been done in the domain of Kurdish studies. Hassanpour discusses *Sherafname* by Sharefakhan Badlisi (1596), *Mam u Zin* by Ahmad Xani (1695) and *Resumat Nam-ye Akradiye* of Mahmud Bayezidi (1858) as the three most important works of Kurdish literature before the spread of Kurdish nationalistic sentiments. He maintains that these sources are products of the feudalistic and tribal society of Kurdistan, and that they address different aspects of this system in Kurdistan. For instance, while *Shrafnameh* is the 'voice of *Amirs* and *Emarats* of Kurdistan', *Mam u Zin* highlights the external wars between Kurds and the Safavids/Ottomans, as well as the internal conflict of the Kurdish chieftains with each other. Alternately, Bayezidi highlights gender issues. However, the shared characteristic of these sources is that none of them deal with the asymmetrical class relations of the oppressive Kurdish landlords and the exploited peasants of Kurdistan.²⁷⁰ The absence of this subject was not due to the absence of class conflict, but can be explained by the very oppressive and isolating circumstances of the peasants. David McDowall provides data that illustrates the brutal and corrupt conditions of landlordism in Kurdistan:

In fact about 64 per cent of Kurdish cultivable land was in the hands of 0.3 per cent of the population. In Sanandaj the Asafs and Sanandajis were bitter rivals to rule the roost, each owning several villages in their entirety. In Bukan and Mahabad land had been parcelled out through the Dihbukri and other magnate families. It was reckoned that in Iran as a whole possibly 100,000 families owned whole villages or substantial parts of them.²⁷¹

This system was overshadowed by oppression and humiliation; in Hamadani's words, "the Kurdish peasant lives in extreme poverty".²⁷²

A combination of several factors, such as the 1950s socioeconomic transformation in the rural areas, the intensification of the activities of progressive ideological leftist and nationalistic groups, and more evidently the conflicting feudal-peasant relations, paved the way for the emergence of a gradual alteration of the feudal land ownership system. In Iranian Kurdistan, hostile relations heightened as a result of these factors and the rise to

²⁶⁹ Hassanpour, "Raperini warzeran le Mukeriyani", 114-115.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 95.

²⁷¹ McDowall, *A Modern History of The Kurds*, 256-257.

²⁷² Hamadani quoted in Ghassemloo, *Kurdistan and the Kurds*, 171.

power of Mossadeqq. This resulted in violent clashes between the feudal class and the peasants in Mukeriyān. Immediately after the Iranian Parliament's approval of the Reform Act, The Kurdish peasants initiated different forms of meetings and mobilization in villages around Bokan, Miandowaw, Mahabad, and Lajan in order to create councils aimed at implementing the Act of 20 Per Cent, and abolishing forced labour. In some villages the peasants intensified their actions aiming at immediate land redistribution. They created their own defence units with a recognisable uniform (scarves around their necks). They were armed with sickles, pitchfork and sticks. Through this uprising, the authority of the landlords of Bokan and Mahabad was undermined.²⁷³

As mentioned, the Peasant Uprising can be considered as among the first examples of collectively conducted class struggle in Iranian Kurdistan. Apart from the experience of suffering and exploitation, there are other factors that can be considered as driving forces for the emergence of this rebellion. The political debate on the land problem, strengthening activities of leftists, and the competition between the conservative monarchists and Mossadeqq's National Front, were among factors that helped trigger the Peasant Uprising.

3.4.1 Peasant Uprisings and the Kurdish Liberation Struggle

Ghassemlou highlights that "another feature of the Kurdish national-liberation movement is its anti-feudal character, [because] the landed proprietors constitutes the most reactionary and progress-hampering element in the Kurdish society".²⁷⁴ Historically, the feudal and notables' class of Kurdistan, due to their self-interested class nature, opposed any progressive social and democratic changes in the region. The history of the Kurdish movement provides examples in which, despite the landlords' unreliability as allies to the national struggle, their power and interests were accommodated, even during the rule of the Republic. For instance, McDowall records that "while the Azarbaijan Democratic Party advocated land reform, the Mahabad Republic eschewed it".²⁷⁵

The emergence of the Peasant Uprising signalled the need of a broader approach to the already-existing national struggle in Kurdistan. This Uprising, which was a result of the asymmetrical socioeconomic relations between two sections of Kurdish society, highlighted the necessity of a more progressive and radical movement, capable of

²⁷³ Hassanpour, "Raperini warzeran le Mukeriyān".

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ McDowall, *A Modern History of The Kurds*, 256.

representing the interests of the most oppressed classes of Kurdish society. The degree of success of any Kurdish movement has been dependent on the support and participation of the villagers and landless peasants of Kurdistan. Regarding the necessity of providing the rights of the peasants due to their significant role in the Kurdish movement, Ghassemlou maintains that “no movement, whether in Kurdistan or in any other countries in the Middle East, can attain any radical change or complete victory unless supported by mass of peasantry. And no movement can gain this support unless it sets an unambiguous anti-feudal goal, a concrete program of agrarian reform”.²⁷⁶ At the same time, the feudal system and self-interested landlords and chieftains have repeatedly been referred to as a challenge to Kurdish society and the Kurdish movement. For instance, “among the chief causes of the repeated defeats of innumerable Kurdish revolts feudal leadership and lack of vital interest in promoting the struggle of the part of peasantry”.²⁷⁷ Fighting for a just agrarian system capable of improving the rights and interests of the peasants and landless agrarians of Kurdistan to convince the peasants to participate in the Kurdish liberation movement, has been highlighted as a precondition for a successful and durable Kurdish movement. In this regard, achieving the support of the peasants requires promises for an ‘agrarian reform’ resulting in free distribution of land among landless peasants.

The peasant-landlord relationship in Kurdistan lacked any sense of group solidarity. The quality of life and freedom of mobility of the peasants was reduced to the absolute minimum. In McDowall’s words, “As recently as the 1960s an Iranian Kurdish peasant had to obtain permission from the landlord or his agent to leave the village”.²⁷⁸ The Uprising, as the reaction to the suffering and exploitation of the peasants and agrarian labourers, was a product of the oppressive rule of the landowners. The Mossadeqq government’s opposition to the corrupt land policy provided the peasants with legal opportunities to claim their legislative rights; however, the landowners’ resistance to the so-called Reform Bill meant that the peasants attempted to enforce the law by themselves. The actions of the Kurdish peasants, who were organized in different local committees, seemed novel and provocative, and evoked the landlords’ harshly violent hostility.

Hêmin Mukeryani describes the Uprising as a spontaneous, unique and genuine revolt, through which peasants of the Mukeriyani area, relying on their own resources, succeeded in liberating large areas from the authority of the Agha. This Uprising for the first time openly and collectively challenged the traditional socioeconomic system in

²⁷⁶ Ghassemlou, *Kurdistan and the Kurds*, 239.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 239.

²⁷⁸ McDowall, *A Modern History of The Kurds*, 17.

Kurdistan. Hassanpour holds that intensification and outburst of the tense peasant-Agha relations forced different classes and layers of society to take part. For instance, many lower-income middle-class groups of Bukan showed their support for the rebellion of the peasants. A similar trend took place in the same period in Iraqi Kurdistan: “in the early 1950s, Kurdish peasants rebelled against their landlords in both countries [Iran and Iraq]. The trend seemed to be towards the political integration of the Kurds into their respective states and towards class rather than ethnic confrontation”.²⁷⁹

3.4.2 The Inter/national Aspects and the Outcome of the Peasant Uprising

Considering the oppressive conditions for conducting collective action and political activity in the 1950s, the Peasant Uprising attracted some national and international resonance. On a national perspective, this Uprising has been referred to as the first foundation of establishing a (leftist) class-based movement. Iranian newspapers referred to this Uprising as the emergence of a new wave of communism in Iranian Kurdistan, challenging Pahlavi’s authority. This revolt has been reported as a communist movement. For example, an Iranian newspaper in describing the movement and its challenge to the state proclaimed that “Kurdistan has turned to communism”. Despite the Uprising’s short life, this event was featured in international and Western newspapers, referred to as the “Peasant Unrest in Iran”, and as a challenge to the authority of Mossadeqq: “Mossadegh faces revolts by Kurds”.²⁸⁰

In the New York Times, this revolt was reported as “agrarian unrest: the Bukan incident 1953”. Archived documents issued by the American Consulate in Tabriz reveal the fact that Americans in Iran paid close attention to the event and its development. It was highlighted by a secret document issued in 13 March 1953 that “an armed clash in Bukan village between the chiefs and their tenants stressed the gradual build-up of agrarian tensions during the winter [...] the tenant-landlord differences in the Kurdish area of Bukan [...] led to a three hour gun battle within Bukan village during which two persons were killed and at least six wounded”.²⁸¹ Official documents reveal that the regime observed this revolt with a combination of concern and anxiety. In these documents, the Uprising was described in the following words: “The Kurdish peasants

²⁷⁹ Martin van Bruinessen, *Kurdish society, ethnicity, nationalism and refugee problems*, in Philip Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl (ed.) *The Kurds A Contemporary Overview*, (London: Routledge, 1992), 26.

²⁸⁰ New York Times, 9 September, 1952, in Hassanpour, “Raperini warzeran le Mukeriyani”, 101.

²⁸¹ Hassanpour, “Raperini warzeran le Mukeriyani”, 100-101.

raise an alarm for the distribution of land [...] the bloody horizon of the revolution can be seen at a distance, [and] Kurdistan has turned Communist”.²⁸²

According to Hassanpour “the USA’s feared that the Soviet Union was behind the Peasant Uprising in Kurdistan”, and that following from this consideration, “the Kurdish and Iranian peasants – alike the peasants of China, Vietnam and Korea – if mobilized under the Banner of Communism, the Iranian monarchy would fall. As result Iran would join the Communist Bloc”.²⁸³ Considering the threat of the spread of Communism, the USA sponsored Mohammad Reza Shah and the Iranian Army’s support to the Kurdish feudal landlords, in crushing the Peasant Uprising and quelling any critical voices supporting this uprising. The USA through this period, as the foremost protector of capitalism after the setback to British and French power following WW2, made obstacles for any progressive and anti-imperialist movements in this period, particularly in Iran, Turkey and Greece.²⁸⁴

These reports give reason to assume that, from the Pahlavi and the American perspectives, the unrest was seen not simply as local tension between some peasants and their landlords; but that with taking into account of the processes of regime change in China, Cuba, Korea etc., any comparable movements and rebellions were considered as possessing the potential for escalation into a widespread uprising threatening the regimes in Iran and the surrounding region. The Peasant Uprising was not only considered as a domestic and local issue, but was of international significance in the eyes of America.²⁸⁵

The Peasants’ Uprising was a complex event, the emergence of which may not merely be simplified to a spontaneous rebellion and physical clashes between the peasants and landowners.²⁸⁶ In this conflict, many elements of Kurdish and Iranian politics, and even international relations, can be identified. Due to the emergence of a new class-inspired struggle, it may be argued that the events should be studied in the socioeconomic context of the entirety of Iranian society. In Kurdistan, due to such events as the Peasant Uprising and the land reform initiated by Mossadeqq, the feudal relations of production suffered major setbacks. The Uprising evoked the need for unity among the peasants, and challenging the feudal system more systematically and openly. After this event the

²⁸² Ibid, 177.

²⁸³ Ibid, 100.

²⁸⁴ Hassanpour, “Raperini warzeran le Mukeriyân”, 100-101.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 113.

²⁸⁶ Ruwange, *Raperini Jotyari Sali 1331 be bereweberayeti Hamademin Shahê* [Shahê Peasant Uprising of 1953 with the leadership of Mohammad Amin Shahê], March 2005. http://ruwange.blogspot.com/2018/09/blog-post_9.html (accessed 11 August 2018)

peasants became more organized, and they encouraged different food distributors to trade directly with them rather than through the Agha.²⁸⁷

The most obvious political development of this era relates to the power struggle between the conservative monarchists and the National Front led by Mossadeqq. During the two-year Prime Ministership of Mossadeqq, the political environment experienced some degree of liberalisation, and more than 150 major industrial strikes and political uprisings took place.²⁸⁸ Iranian Kurdistan had its share of this relative opening. In McDowall's words, "during this period the KDPI could breathe more freely. In 1951 it recruited members to create a popular following. In Mahabad it enjoyed widespread sympathy because of the bitterness felt among ordinary townsfolk over what had happened in 1947, particularly the execution of Qazi Muhammad, who had acquired the aura of a martyred saint".²⁸⁹ However, this minor political progress ended as a result of the American-inspired *coup d'etat* on 19th August 1953. Power was restored to the Shah and the monarchists, and a new wave of brutality, repression and censorship overshadowed the political landmarks in Iran.

The national focus directed toward the land problematic was another factor which accelerated the Kurdish Peasant Uprising. In this regard, the Tudeh Party played a noticeable role. Tudeh's focus on the landlord-peasant question was one of the leading ideological sources for the emergence of the Peasant Uprising.²⁹⁰ Through this era Tudeh was an influential party with offices all around Iran, especially among the ethnic minorities and in economically deprived and disadvantaged areas of Iran. Data provided by McDowall shows that when Tudeh members were arrested in their hundreds in the early 1950s, barely 3 per cent were Kurdish. The influence of Tudeh's class struggle ideology among the Kurdish toilers and peasants can be dated back to this organization's establishment of branches in cities as Urumiya and Bukan, and the recruitment of members from these areas. Tudeh succeeded in recruiting more than one thousand villagers in Bukan, and "forced landlords to increase the peasants' share of the harvested sugar beet".²⁹¹

The Mossadeqq government, in addition to the Act of 20 Per Cent, enforced a policy of the compulsory sale of agricultural land from the landlords to the state, and in return compensated the landlords by economic means. As result, "land bought by the state was

²⁸⁷ Hussami, *Peda Chunewe*, 91.

²⁸⁸ Abrahamian, *A history of Modern Iran*, 369.

²⁸⁹ McDowall, *A Modern History of The Kurds*, 251.

²⁹⁰ Ruwange, *Raperini Jotyari Sali 1331 be bereweberayeti Hamademin Shahê*.

²⁹¹ McDowall, *A Modern History of The Kurds*.

to be promptly sold to the share-croppers who worked it”.²⁹² However, different interpretations of the Mossadeqq-initiated land reform policy have been made. Critics argue that these attempts were aimed at reducing the threat of a communistic revolution among the exploited peasants and villagers all around Iran. Mohammad Mokry (a participant of the Uprising) in an interview with Susan Meiselas argues that “Mossadeqq’s Act of 20 Per Cent was initiated by his fear of the risk of establishing cooperation between the peasants and the Soviet Union Communists. Mossadeqq abolished the *sorusat* [illegal taxation] to avoid any cooperation between the peasants and the Communists”.²⁹³

The peasant Uprising failed due to a variety of factors, among which were issues related to the lack of mobilization. Due to the absence of an experienced leadership, the spontaneous movement failed to mobilize the liberated villagers in order to sustain the challenge to the landlords.²⁹⁴ Nor did the Uprising reach broader geographical areas. Due to the absence of a revolutionary political party as leadership, the spontaneous movement was unable to further mobilize the liberated villages, expand the collective action to other areas of Kurdistan, and withstand the pressure of the regime’s forces and the Agha. The rural conditions in which the Uprising took place also slowed its spread. According to Mancur Olson, “the concentration of population in cities can sometimes make agitation cheaper and the spread of new ideas faster, and [...] ‘riots and revolts are often technically easier to organize in cities’. Peasant revolts are thus less likely to succeed than urban uprisings”.²⁹⁵

The lack of experienced leadership with access to public support and experience of leading social or political action, has been broadly highlighted through the literature related to this issue. The unavoidable role of leadership in creating and extending dissident institutional support has been emphasized by Gurr. He claims that “[the] leader can articulate doctrines, justifying political violence and communicate them to (potential) followers; establish patterns modes of action and provide sanctions for those who use them; provide the means and cues for violent action”.²⁹⁶ In addition, leadership can provide a sense of security in the face of external pressure, and normative and physical support for followers, as well as to increase and enforce cohesion among the group members and organization.

²⁹² Ibid, 257.

²⁹³ Meiselas in Hassanpour, “Raperini warzeran le Mukeriyân”, 105-107.

²⁹⁴ Ruwange, *Raperini Jotyari Sali 1331 be bereweberayeti Hamademin Shahê*.

²⁹⁵ Olson quoted in Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, 265-267.

²⁹⁶ Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, 291.

The peasantry consisted of different layers, spread over large geographical areas, without central leadership and organizational connections with each other. After the actions of the peasants, the feudal forces and the army attacked the peasants; due to the unequal balance of power, the peasants could not withstand the attack.²⁹⁷ Hassanpour holds that “such an ending was not a historical unexceptional result. It was just a repetition of many other similar agrarian struggles in other countries”.²⁹⁸ Hassanpour’s claim may have its roots in aspects of the peasant society, particularly lack of access to material resources, which are crucial to the outcomes of any collective action and resistance movements.

In reaction to the rise of the activities of the peasants, the hostility of the feudal landowners of Bukan and Mahabad towards the peasants rose. During the Uprising, the cities of Bukan and Mahabad turned into the centres of meetings and mobilization of the feudal landlords. Through the period of the intensification of the uprising and clashes between peasants and landlords, in order to block popular support to the peasants from other parts of Kurdistan, Bukan was surrounded by the Iranian army.²⁹⁹ The ability of the peasants to fight the landlords was quite restricted. As explained by Beloriyan, the peasants were not armed, but merely carried ordinary farming equipment such as sickle, shovel and pitchfork. In this period, many violent and distressing episodes took place. The *Agha*, supported by the Iranian army, burned many villages. The homes and possessions of the peasants were in many cases either burned or looted by the feudalists. In order to quell the revolt and protect landowners’ interests, the Iranian army deployed tanks and heavy infantry.³⁰⁰

The regime succeeded in quelling the movement. Many peasants who had mobilized in small groups of fighters lost their lives, and some captured by the regime; a small number survived by fleeing either their village or the country. Many girls and women were raped. In Bukan, twelve girls fearful of being raped threw themselves into the River Bokeran and drowned. The landlords, by bribing the officials and army leaders, succeeded in mobilizing the whole state system against the rebellious peasants.³⁰¹ Following the crushing of the Uprising, the peasants and their families were treated cruelly. The feudal class of Fayzolla Bagi and Dêbokri (region), with the support of the

²⁹⁷ Ruwange, *Raperini Jotyari Sali 1331 be bereweberayeti Hamademin Shahê*.

²⁹⁸ Hassanpour, “Raperini warzeran le Mukeriyani”, 100.

²⁹⁹ Beloriyan, *Alê Kêk*, 148.

³⁰⁰ Ruwange, *Raperini Jotyari Sali 1331 be bereweberayeti Hamademin Shahê*.

³⁰¹ A letter from the archive of Mohammad Mukeriyani, Jin Center in Silêmani. Hassanpour, “Raperini warzeran le Mukeriyani”, 106.

army, began persecuting, beating, looting and murdering the peasants.³⁰² According to Mohammad Asengaran, following the failed Uprising and the emergence of more overt conflict between the feudal landlords and peasants, the majority of the displaced peasants were compelled to flee to different cities, and became integrated in the new low-paid urban worker class, in which some of them became more familiar with the ideology of class struggle.³⁰³

3.5 The KDPI's role through this Uprising

Regarding the role of the KDPI, as maintained by KDPI officials such as Hisami and Ghassemloo, the KDPI cadres supervised the peasants, rather than directly becoming part of the movement. The KDPI position underlines the fact that the actions of the Kurdish peasants were not ordered by a distinct political party, but the reverse; the Uprising was initiated by the poor and uneducated peasants themselves, through their collective action challenging the Kurdish landlords.³⁰⁴ The KDPI, as the only political party of Iranian Kurds at that time, was expected by the Kurdish society, particularly the peasants, to take a leading role in mobilizing this event. The general KDPI narrative on this Revolt, despite the party acknowledging some passivity, is that the KDPI contributed to the mobilization and leadership. However, critics have condemned the KDPI for its lack of contribution to this Uprising,³⁰⁵ and its inability of deploying this opportunity to transform the Peasant Uprising into a wider struggle both geographically and socially. Even those who promote the idea that the KDPI led the movement (e.g. McDowall), mention it very briefly. For instance, according to McDowall the movement was encouraged by the positive political environment provided under the premiership of Mossadeqq, and was only “fomented by KDPI”³⁰⁶.

Mukeryani holds that the KDPI's inability in leading and extending this uprising to a broader part of the Kurdish movement in Iranian Kurdistan, meant that the KDPI carries responsibility for its defeat. While the KDPI encouraged the peasants in fighting the feudal system, it never included the idea of ‘the land to those who work it’ in its ideology and party programme. The class struggle policy of the KDPI was limited to being directed

³⁰² Mukeryani, *Tarik u Run*, 38.

³⁰³ Asengaran, *Mosaheb-e ba Mohammad Asengeran*.

³⁰⁴ Ghassemloo, Abudrahman. *Chel Sal Khebat le Penawi Azadida* [Forty Years Struggle of Liberation], 2. Publication, (Kurdistan: KDPI Media Center, 1991), 65.

³⁰⁵ Ruwange, *Raperini Jotyari Sali 1331 be bereweberayeti Hamademin Shahê*.

³⁰⁶ McDowall, *A Modern History of The Kurds*, 256.

towards corrupt individual landowners, yet abolishing the socio-political system that created and empowered feudalism never became part of the KDPI's agenda. As mentioned by Hassanpour, while in 1946 the National Government in Azerbaijan attempted to abolish the feudal system and its widespread culture of forced labour (*begari*) and illegal taxation (*sorusat*) and to reform the land system, in Kurdistan the Republic did not follow a similar policy. The Kurdish peasant remained incarcerated under the authority and subjugation of the landlords. A large number of feudal landlords participated in the Republic as members of the cabinet and military officers, and "after a short period, criticism of the agha was not tolerated".³⁰⁷

Despite the KDPI's claims of leadership, it was not until 1972 (the year of the KDPI's third congress) that the KDPI mentioned the Peasant Uprising in its publication *Kurdistan* (the KDPI's newspaper). For almost two decades, there had been no mention of this uprising. This lack of attention has been described as owing to the KDPI's dilemma of its relation with the Kurdish feudal landlords. Feudalism became immune from criticism, because of the contribution that Kurdish tribal leaders made to the Kurdish nationalist movement. According to critics, even though many of the rebellious peasants were members of the KDPI, the KDPI was not able to play the required role in leading and supporting the movement.³⁰⁸ In Hisami's words, "the KDPI was unable to link this uprising (as a social struggle) to the nationalistic struggle, and failed in deploying this opportunity".³⁰⁹

The KDPI's commitment to this uprising was local. In some local areas "the council for the village and the committees of the KDPI in the regions called upon people's unity, and expelled those feudalists who tried to support the landlords from other areas".³¹⁰ Alternately, Ghassemlou holds that

Even though in this time the KDPI still was not reorganized, the KDPI members had by different ways contributed to the Peasant Uprising; KDPI cadres directly supervised the peasants in how they might through state institutions claim their rights. In addition, the KDPI attempted to reflect the Uprising and the claim of the Kurdish peasants in the national media and newspapers.³¹¹

In the KDPI's *Report of the Central Committee for the Third Congress*, it was highlighted that "during the Uprising we played a leading role, many of our members/toilers of

³⁰⁷ Hassanpour, "Raperini warzeran le Mukeriyân", 98.

³⁰⁸ Ruwange, *Raperini Jotyari Sali 1331 be bereweberayeti Hamademin Shahê*.

³⁰⁹ Hisami, *Le bireweriyekanem, bergi yekem*, 206.

³¹⁰ Hussami, *Peda Chunew*, 86.

³¹¹ Ghassemlou, *Chel Sal Khebat*, 65-66.

Kurdistan participated in this Uprising. Following the crushing of this uprising many of them were either killed, jailed or escaped the country”.³¹²

It is still unclear why the KDPI did not lead the movement as expected. To conclude on the question of the KDPI’s role, it can be argued that while the KDPI has shown capability in mobilizing collective action inspired by the idea of *Kurdayêti* and Kurdish identity, its failure in defending the rights of the peasants is a critical issue that highlights KDPI’s weak attention to the class issue in Kurdistan. Ghassemlou asserts that guaranteeing the peasants’ participation in the Kurdish movement is preconditioned by “abolishing the feudalistic system” and providing the peasants with their rights. However, the conflict between reality and ideology becomes evident when Ghassemlou on one hand assumes the peasants’ support as an unavoidable force for achieving the aim of the Kurdish movement, and on the other hand emphasizes that “under present conditions in Kurdistan (especially in the Iranian and Iraqi parts where the feudal and tribe relation is still very strong) it would be unthinkable to set forth the slogan “land to those who work it””.³¹³

The Peasant Uprising and the questions it raised, challenged the hitherto dominant national movement. This conflict became more visible, and was shaped from an ideological and systematic mode, following the 1979 Revolution, and the announcement of the official activity of Komala.³¹⁴ The peasant-landlord problematic highlighted through Komala’s absolute support to the peasants and its challenge to the authority of the traditional and oppressive feudal system in Iranian Kurdistan.³¹⁵

The Kurdish movement has experienced several occasions of betrayal and self-interested feudal behaviour during different periods of the Kurdish struggle. An example of feudal betrayal is related to the Kurdish tribal leaders’ cynical and self-interested behaviour during the Mahabad Republic, when many of them before the crushing of the Kurdish movement turned their back on the Republic and allied themselves with the Pahlavi regime.³¹⁶ The KDPI has mainly approached this problematic by dealing with individual agents of the system, rather than fighting the system itself. For instance, instead of fighting for the radical abolition of the feudal system, the fight was directed toward

³¹² Hassanpour, “Raperini warzeran le Mukeriyân”, 102.

³¹³ Ghassemlou, *Kurdistan and the Kurds*, 239.

³¹⁴ Mostafa Sultani et al., *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*.

³¹⁵ Ibid, 22-23.

³¹⁶ Vali, *Kurds and the State in Iran*, 73-74.

“the brutal elements and agents of the system”, and reprieved the sections of the feudal system that supported and collaborated with the nationalist movement.³¹⁷

According to the KDPI’s discourse, the KDPI conducts *Xebati netewayati* (national struggle) rather than *Xebati chinayeti* (class struggle). Due to the fact that the Kurdish society consists of different ideologies and classes in which all of them regardless of their ideology and class suffer from the Iranian state, there will in the KDPI be a place for everyone, including Marxists, merchants, toilers and the religious. According to Kawe Bahrami (a KDPI official), “KDPI is a democratic political party, the activities of which are not dominated by a single ideology. The members of KDPI have different ideological world-views, however they are all mobilized in the same organization, inspired by plurality and democracy”.³¹⁸ However, Komala as a leftist political organization has mobilized and conducted its struggle in Iranian Kurdistan with recruitment based on the class struggle and the promise of improving the rights of the toilers and peasants of Kurdistan.³¹⁹ Komala’s radical involvement in educating Kurdish peasants and supporting them by practical tasks, for instance through the harvesting season, meant that the KDPI through the time of fratricidal war called them ‘*pol poti*’, referring to the followers of the Pol Pot regime of Cambodia.³²⁰

Hassanpour points to examples of different peasant uprisings taking place in Iran during the 1950s; nearly all of them have been mentioned in different publications of the Tudeh Party, yet nowhere in these publications has the Peasant Uprising in Kurdistan been named.³²¹ Even in the book of Ali Gelawej (a prominent Kurdish intellectual, a member of the Tudeh and a KDPI leader), despite his comprehensive investigation of the social relations of feudalism and capitalism, Gelawej overlooked discussing or even mentioning this Uprising.³²² The issue of a lack of knowledge of the Peasant Uprising reveals the existence of a sad reality, meaning the focus in analysing the Kurdish movement and Kurdish politics has been narrowed down and mainly directed toward the Kurdish political parties and their activities. This happens despite the fact that these parties are fairly far removed from the Kurdish society, especially in periods when the

³¹⁷ Hassanpour, “Raperini warzeran le Mukeriyân”.

³¹⁸ Behrami, *Tafgayi Haqiqat*, 77.

³¹⁹ Mostafa Sultani, et al., *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*, 23.

³²⁰ Pol Pot was leader of the Khmer Rouge, a communist regime that ruled Cambodia between 1975 and 1979, and caused the deaths of more than one million people. For more information see Ben Kiernan. *How Pol Pot Came to Power, Colonialism, Nationalism, and Communism in Cambodia, 1930-1975*. 2nd edition, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

³²¹ Hassanpour, “Raperini warzeran le Mukeriyân”, 109-111.

³²² Gelawej. *Pewndiyekani Zewi le Kurdistan: halweshanewayi nizami Ashyeri*.

distance between these Kurdish political parties based in the diaspora and the Iranian Kurdish society grew bigger, since the 1990s and onwards with three decades of disconnection.³²³

The neglect of this Uprising has been in some cases systematic, for the purpose of protecting the interests and reputation of the feudalists. Some individuals, such as Naser Aliyar and Masoud Mohammad,³²⁴ have according to Hassanpour attempted to deny the Uprising as a popular uprising. They have narrowed it down and reduced it to a communist-related rebellion provoking the landlords. Aliyar has de-emphasised the oppressive reaction to the peasants, writing that “violence is identifiable among the feudalists as well as the peasants”.³²⁵

The Peasant Uprising and its termination can be viewed as an example from the many failed uprisings in Kurdistan. Through the 1980s widespread peasant discontent took place in different areas of Turkaman Sahra, Dasht-e Arzhan in Fars, Kurdistan and Kerman.³²⁶ The peasant-landlord struggle erupted once again in 1979 in line with the rise of the activity of Komala. The Komala actively supported the peasants in claiming back their rights.³²⁷ The 1979 Revolution created an opportunity for the emergence of another phase of the bad peasants-feudal landlords’ relationship; however, this period’s conflict was more organized, and was framed ideologically, mainly supported by Komala.³²⁸ Though, according to Khlikgi, Komala acted disregarding of social relations, because “Komala’s thoughtless enforcement of land redistribution between peasants caused the emergence of conflict and hostility between the powerful landlords and the poor peasants, through a sensitive period of the Kurdish struggle. This condition caused further instability and chaos in the already fragile Kurdish region”.³²⁹

³²³ Vali, “Sekot-e Rojhelat”, 116-117.

³²⁴ Naser Aliyar and Masoud Mohammad are among people dealing differently with peasants uprising, either as a normal consequence of the relation of different groups of each society. For insatnce Aliyar, describe the peasant for being unable, and “as among the peasants, you can find ‘bad and good’ Agha”. Aliyar in Hassanpour *Raperini warzeran le Mukeriyani*, p. 112. For Mohammad, “those who highlight the importance of the peasant uprising, attempt to fabricate a class struggle, in undermining and abolishing ‘National Struggle’”. Masoud Mohammad in Hassanpour, “Raperini warzeran le Mukeriyani”, 110-111.

³²⁵ Hassanpour, “Raperini warzeran le Mukeriyani”, 109-111.

³²⁶ Mehrdad Haghayeghi, “Agrarian reform problems in post- revolutionary Iran”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 26:1, (1990), 36-38.

³²⁷ Mostafa Sultani et al., *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*. Establishing the Peasants’ and Unemployed Unions of Mariwan is among the examples of Komala’s support to the peasants and lower-income sections of the Kurdish society, in Mostafa Sultani et al., *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*.

³²⁸ Mostafa Sultani et al., *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*.

³²⁹ Hossein Khlikgi, *Jan u Jiyani* [Life and suffering], Second edition 1980-1983, (Sweden, 1999), 18-19.

Summary

This chapter has stressed that Iranian Kurdistan has not been immune from political development and trends initiated in the Iranian centre. Events similar to the Peasant Uprising reveal the reality that the emergence of (almost) any ideological and socio-political phenomena has left effects, and has challenged or inspired other parts of Iran, including the Kurdistan region. It can arguably be stated that the Peasant Uprising had in some degree – despite being immediately crushed – challenged the mainstream socioeconomic relations between the peasants and landlords. It resulted in some positive improvements, as the rise of the self-confidence amongst the peasants. On the other hand, the Uprising highlighted the need for establishing a systematic and ideologically-inspired class struggle (for instance under the leadership of Komala) in Iranian Kurdistan, as this Uprising challenged the ‘broad church’ national movement conducted by the KDPI. In fact, even though the Uprising was not organized by a distinct political party or with a precise ideological direction, in addition to its socioeconomic aspects it might be remembered as the emergence of the first wave of collectively class-inspired revolts in the traditional, agrarian and feudalistic Kurdish society of the 1950s. As a new kind of event, this uprising brought the class issue into the social and political field of debate and struggle in Iranian Kurdistan.

Chapter 4

Movement Mobilization through Crossborder Interaction, 1950-1960s

Solaiman Moini is one of the symbolic figures of the resistance and the most innocent martyr of the Iranian Kurdish Movement, murdered by Kurds. His dead body was handed to the SAVAK.

Rasoul Pishnemaz³³⁰

Introduction

Kurdish patriots do not recognize the artificial borders splitting their homeland of Kurdistan; however, this does not change the reality that the partition of the Kurds' homeland and the artificial borders dividing Kurds have affected Kurdish identity, struggle and its outcomes.³³¹ Among many other characteristics, Kurdish nationalism and the Kurdish question carry strong crossborder features.³³² Crossborder interaction between the Kurds of different parts of Kurdistan has a long history, in which crossborder solidarity has worked as an invaluable source of movement mobilization.

The Kurdish national liberation movement is not limited to a single state; it spans several nation-state boundaries, and Kurds in all areas have a strong crossborder ethnic linkage. For instance, Simko following the crushing of his movement fled to Iraqi Kurdistan and sought the support of Shaikh Mahmud Barzenji.³³³ Following the Republic's fall (1946) some of the Republic's leaders took refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan, where they received the protection of Shaikh Latif, the son of Shaikh Mahmud Barzenji.³³⁴ In the early 1940s and in the time leading up to and during the Republic, crossborder Kurdish interaction accelerated. The JK invested largely in solidifying its

³³⁰ Molla Rasul Pishnemaz, among the leaders of the KDPI, participated in the Iranian Kurdish movement in the second half of the 20th century, with memories of this period. He survived this era, very displeased with the mistreatment the Iranian Kurds by the Barzani. Pishnemaz has deep knowledge about the movement and the destinies of its leaders and members, particularly the treatment the Iranian Kurds experienced from Molla Mostafa Barzani and the Barzani members of KDP-Iraq. Pishnemaz in Qazi, Hesán. *Chand Serencek le sar Cheshti meceweri Hejar Mokeryani*, Rasul Pishnemaz, 2010 [A conversation with Rasul Pishnemaz] http://ruwange.blogspot.co.uk/2010/04/blog-post_22.html (accessed 15 December 2017).

³³¹ Husami, *Le Bireweriyekanem, Bergi Penchim*, 37.

³³² Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic groups in conflict*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

³³³ See Mohammad Hawar, *Simko; Ismail Agha Shukak and the Kurdish National Movement*, (Sweden: APEC Publication, 1996).

³³⁴ Karimi in Qazi, Hesán. *Wetowejek le gal Ali Karimi* [A Conversation with Ali Karimi], 2015. http://ruwange.blogspot.co.uk/2015/08/blog-post_27.html (accessed December 10 2017).

relations with non-Iranian Kurdish nationalist groups and movements. In 1944 JK representatives met with Iraqi and Turkish Kurdish delegations at the border area of Mount Dalanpar, and signed *Paymani Sê Senor* [the Pact of the Three Borders]. This pact demonstrates the existence of a strong sense of crossborder Kurdish national sentiment and solidarity.³³⁵ This document was more a symbol of unity rather than a direct plan for cooperation. Despite this, the Pact of the Three Borders remains as an important historical occurrence and an important evidence of a formal crossborder Kurdish agreement involving the Iranian Kurds.³³⁶ Ali Karimi, referring to the activity of the JK, considers this political society as the first nationalistic organization of the Kurds,³³⁷ with major emphasis on crossborder Kurdishness in strengthening the Kurdish national movement.

Having the mid-20th century as the starting point, crossborder relations between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movement appeared strongly during the establishment of the Republic of Kurdistan. Through this era, despite the fact that manufactured nation-state boundaries resulted in the partition of the Kurdish nation, the participation of Mella Mostafa Barzani³³⁸ and his army in the Republic signalled the existence of a powerful crossborder solidarity among Kurds. Symbolically as well as militarily, Barzani's support to the Republic increased Kurdish self-confidence. Barzani's troops consisted of 2100 soldiers, and were organized under the leadership of Mella Mostafa and Shaikh Ahmad Barzani, stationed in Mahabad. In addition to Barzani, many teachers, military officers³³⁹ and other professionals from Iraqi Kurdistan joined the Republic.³⁴⁰ This event may be regarded as the stepping-stone for the emergence of a new phase of Kurdish crossborder cooperation in the mid-20th century. Yildiz and Taysi write that

The Barzani tribe provided invaluable assistance to the Iranian Kurds, mainly in the form of the impressive force of military fighters that were integral to the protection of the republic. During the time in which the Iraqi Kurds, led by Barzani, launched their insurrection against the Iraqi state, the Iranian Kurds offered their support, either by crossing the border and acting as *peshmerga*, or through the smuggling of supplies in to Iraq.³⁴¹

³³⁵ Karimi in Qazi, *wetowejek le gal Ali Karimi & Entessar, Kurdish ethnionationalism*, 17.

³³⁶ Yildiz and Taysi, *The Kurds in Iran*, 64.

³³⁷ Karimi in Qazi, *wetowejek le gal Ali Karimi*.

³³⁸ Beloriyan, *Ale Kok/Barge Sabz*, 62-68.

³³⁹ Mohammad Qudsi, Khairullah Abdulkarim, Mustafa Khoshnaw, and Izzat Abdulaziz are among the Iraqi Kurdish officers that joined the Republic. However following the collapse of the Republic and their return to Iraq, these four officers, due to their participation in the Republic, were hanged by the Iraqi regime on 31st June 1947.

³⁴⁰ Gadani, *50 Sal Khebat*, 54-62.

³⁴¹ Karimi in Qazi, *wetowejek le gal Ali Karimi*.

The crossborder character of Kurdish nationalism is a product of the complexity of Kurdish dispersal between four countries.³⁴² Such a relation appeared evidently many times during the Iranian Kurdish struggle. Yet, some Kurdish forces' collaboration with the nation-state occupiers of Kurdistan, has become a massive challenge to *positive* Kurdish crossborderness, and has affected the prospects and outcomes of the Kurdish struggle. Kristian Gleditsch identifies three sources of transnational linkages as ethnic, political, and economic links. Gleditsch argues that these factors leave different effects on the emergence, shape and features of civil and ethnic insurgency.³⁴³ Related to the Iranian Kurdish movement, the concept of trans-nation-state ethnic linkages is applicable.

Particularly following the fall of the Republic, the Iranian Kurdish movement developed a spatial dependency due to its deep reliance on its safe haven in Iraqi Kurdistan. According to Gleditsch, the more ethnic groups span international boundaries, the higher is the potential for external support for insurgencies and the risk that a country will experience a civil war.³⁴⁴ There exists strong evidence underlining the argument of transnational contagion from conflict in neighbouring states, as well as transnational ethnic, political, and economic links between states contributing to the risks of conflict. Gleditsch's study concludes that "transnational ties related to ethnicity [are] likely to influence the 'willingness' of groups to mobilize for violent conflict or respond to government repression with violence [and] groups that have transnational communities should have a generally larger pool of resources that they can draw upon in mobilizing for violent conflict".³⁴⁵

Transnational linkage provide the crossborder communities with different capabilities. Idean Salehyan argues that "the use of external sanctuaries is one of the most common strategies employed by rebel groups to evade state repression [and] external sanctuaries in neighboring countries provide an important opportunity for rebel mobilization. Further, they complicate the underlying bargain between states and rebels by exacerbating informational problems and introducing new actors into the bargaining environment".³⁴⁶ For rebel movements, having access to neighbouring territory as a facilitating factor in attacking the target state, is important. In this regard, finding a host

³⁴² Bozarslan, Hamit. *Kurds: States, Marginality and Security*, in Nolutshungu S. C. (ed.) *Margins of Insecurity: Minorities and International Security*, (Rochester: University of Rochester Press. 1996), 107.

³⁴³ Kristian S Gleditsch, "Transnational Dimensions of Civil War", *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 44, No. 3, (2007), 293-309.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 298-300.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 297-298.

³⁴⁶ Idean Salehyan, "Transnational Rebels: Neighboring States as Sanctuary for Rebel Groups", *World Politics*, Vol. 59, No. 2, (2007), 218.

state is a crucial, though in some cases costly, matter; rebel groups dependent on the foreign host would sacrifice some decision-making autonomy, in return for safe haven and security.³⁴⁷

In this chapter it will be argued that with the strength of the Iranian, Turkish, Iraqi and Syrian nation-states, Kurdish crossborder solidarity has faced several difficulties. The strength of Kurdish crossborderness has since the 1950s suffered from serious issues.³⁴⁸ The movements of each part of Kurdistan have in different ways been affected by negative aspects of their crossborderness. However, the scope of this study is the crossborder interaction between the movements of Iranian and Iraqi Kurds. Following the fall of the Republic, the contemporary national struggle of Iranian Kurds entered into a new phase of crossborder interaction.³⁴⁹ The Kurdish movement in Iran has through different periods (the 1960s, 1990s and onwards), from different aspects, been disadvantaged and suffered from its crossborder dependency. This study will argue and provide evidence showing that this relation has resulted in the nullification and diminishing of the Iranian Kurdish movement. For instance, following the establishment of the KRG in 1992, the political parties of Iranian Kurds' uncalculated dependency on the Iraqi Kurdish soil has resulted in deadlock, the drastic fall of the Iranian Kurdish movement, and eradication of crossborder solidarity.

According to McAdam et al.'s definition of a movement,³⁵⁰ a movement as a long-term process is a product of a combination of several factors affecting the emergence of collective and popular-based actions³⁵¹ and political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes, which are among the significant concepts in analysing movements and revolutions. In this chapter it will be argued that, the factor of political opportunity has played a crucial role in the formation of different stages of the Iranian Kurdish movement. Tilly deals with political opportunity (a dependent variable) as the relationship between a group and the world around it, in which changes of circumstances can result in the emergence of a new threat or change of interests.³⁵² In this regard, any physical and material factors as well as circumstances that facilitate movement mobilization can be conceptualized as political opportunity. Opportunities are expected to play major roles in influencing the fortunes of the movement: "movements may largely

³⁴⁷ Ibid, 222.

³⁴⁸ Manafy, *the Kurdish political struggles in Iran*, & Sardashti, *Jiyan u Tikoshani Siyasi Ahmad Tofiq*.

³⁴⁹ Gadani 2008a, *50 Sal Khebat*, 54-62.

³⁵⁰ McAdam et al.'s definition of 'movement' is broad and includes different forms such as reform movements, revolutionary movements, and ethno-nationalist movements.

³⁵¹ McAdam et al., *Comparative perspectives on social movements*, 25.

³⁵² Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* 1978, 7.

be born of environmental opportunities, but their fate is heavily shaped by their own actions. Specifically, it is the formal organizations who purport to speak for the movement, who increasingly dictate the course, content, and outcomes of the struggle”.³⁵³ Opportunity structure has a close relation to the timing of collective action and paves the way for political action, but movements also make opportunities.

McAdam et al. assume the study of political opportunity structures to be a many-sided debate, with a variety of different approaches towards how to conceptualize and deploy opportunities. Among many examples, one can mention analytical focus on long-scale structures; proximity to particular actors; cross-sectional variations in political opportunity; and changes in political conflict. Scholars of “proximate opportunity structure focus on the signals that groups receive from their immediate policy environment or from changes in their resources or capacities”.³⁵⁴ In considering the KDPI’s attempt of re-establishing the Iranian Kurdish movement, the emergence of the Barzani-led movement against the regime of Abdul-Karim Qasem in 1960s Iraq can arguably be referred to as an element of political opportunity. This opportunity was an opening up, resulting from the occurrence of new conditions, in which the KDPI leadership, by interacting with Barzani, were provided with spatial opportunity and a ‘safe haven’.

It will be argued that this attempt in the 1960s, due to many reasons (among them, inter-organizational factionalism and disunity, unexperienced leadership, lack of material resources and internal brutality)³⁵⁵ faced defeat, with large human casualties among the leaders and cadres of the KDPI. With relevance to the Iranian and Iraqi Kurds’ relations, Gurses holds that “the transnational dimension of ethnic conflicts can exacerbate the situation because ethnic ties across internationally recognized borders can provide increased mobilization capabilities of ethnic groups, external sanctuaries for rebels, and a larger pool of human and economic resources that rebels can draw upon in mobilizing for violent conflict”.³⁵⁶ The literature of the 1960s Iranian Kurdish movement³⁵⁷ reveals that Barzani has been personally held responsible for the assassination, disappearances

³⁵³ McAdam et al., *Comparative perspectives on social movements*, 15.

³⁵⁴ Ibid, 41-42.

³⁵⁵ Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, (London: Zed Books, 1992), 34-35.

³⁵⁶ Mehmet Gurses, *From War to Democracy: Transborder Kurdish Conflict and Democratization*, chapter 12, in: Romano, David and Gurses, Mehmet (eds.) *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 250.

³⁵⁷ For more information see: Sardashti (*Chand lapereyek le mejoyi gely kurd, Jiyan u Tikoshani Siyasi Ahmad Tofiq, Geranewayi Besarhati Besar u Shwenkrawayi, Birewariyekani Jemil Mardokhi*), Kaveh, *Awrek le Besarhati Xom*, Gadani 2008a, *50 Sal Khabat*.

and many other forms of mistreatment of KDPI members, seeking refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan. For instance, Pishnemaz³⁵⁸ blames Barzani for the massive loss of the lives of KDPI members and leaders, and encourages the KDP and KRG to initiate recognition aimed at reconciliation

Now is the time for Masoud Barzani the President of KRG, the KDP, KRG and the Kurdish Parliament, in order not to violate the feelings of the Kurds in Iran further, to officially acknowledge and condemn, the assassination and expel of Solaiman Moini and many other KDPI members. First of all, they must apologize to the family of Moini and then to the Kurdish people of Iranian Kurdistan.³⁵⁹

4.1 Different Phases of Crossborder Interaction since the 1960s

As mentioned earlier, following a tough period of reprisals and repression conducted by SAVAK,³⁶⁰ the emergence of the 1958 movement in Iraqi Kurdistan provided Iranian Kurds with the opportunity of re-establishing their political activity against the Pahlavi regime. However, considering the outcomes of this attempt, crossborder interaction resulted in unexpected adverse effects on the Iranian Kurdish movement. The refuge of a large number of KDPI cadres and leaders to Iraqi Kurdistan, resulted in the creation of a physical distance between the KDPI and its grassroots, an issue of movement mobilization; this was a critical step that made the Iranian Kurdish movement vulnerable to any change, and inflexible in conducting the struggle under the emergence of new circumstances.³⁶¹ With reference to this, it can arguably be claimed that the Iranian Kurdish movement has been shown to be a movement, relying and waiting for the emergence of new opportunities,³⁶² rather than being proactive and flexible in its strategy.

Karim Hisami argues that the nature of the crossborder interaction of Kurds has left an impact on initiating any movement of Kurds, and “the movement of the Kurds in Iraq in 1963 left direct influence on the Iranian Kurds”.³⁶³ In the early period of the 1960s, the KDPI and KDP contributed with some positive degree of crossborder solidarity, an advantage to both movements. Through this period, while the Iranian Kurdish movement accessed spatial resources and a safe haven, the Iraqi Kurdish movement received the

³⁵⁸ Pishnemaz in *Qazi Chand Serencek le sar Cheshti meceweri Hejar Mokeryani*.

³⁵⁹ Pishnemaz in *Qazi Chand Serencek le sar Cheshti meceweri Hejar Mokeryani*.

³⁶⁰ Kaveh, *Awrek le Besarhati Xom u Rodawekani Naw Hezbi*.

³⁶¹ Sardashti, *Chand lapereyek le mejoyi gely kurd*, 4-6.

³⁶² Sikirter. *Interview with Mostafa Hijri, Conducted by Walapress*, First Volume, 2013. <http://sikirter.org/Detail.aspx?id=704&Action=1&LinkID=7> (accessed 5 January 2017)

³⁶³ Hisami, *Karwanêk le şehîdanî Kurdistanî Êran*, 56.

loyalty and financial support provided by Iranian Kurds.³⁶⁴ During the early 1960s the KDPI organized logistic support for Barzani's Peshmerga, and collected money, food and clothes for them among the Iranian Kurds. One example of the KDPI's support for Barzani is the KDPI Peshmerga's participation in the *Pires Mountain Battle* of 1963 against the Iraqi regime³⁶⁵. Initially "the loyalty of the KDP-Iran to Barzani was almost unquestioning, and the party subordinated its own political activities to the interests of the Iraqi Kurdish movement".³⁶⁶ However, considering the cost of this close relationship on the Iranian Kurdish movement, Barzani's ill-treatment of the leaders and members of the KDPI, and the consequent destruction of the Iranian Kurdish attempt at reorganizing their movement, it can justifiably be argued that this phase of Iranian-Iraqi Kurdish crossborder relations had an ill-fated ending, with massive negative consequences for the Iranian Kurdish struggle.³⁶⁷ With the rise of Mohammad Reza Shah's support for Barzani, the Barzani-KDPI relationship changed drastically. As highlighted in KDPI documents,

In the beginning the Iranian Kurds were treated very well by Barzani and the movement in Iraqi Kurdistan. However, with the increase of Mohammad Reza Shah's influence on Barzani, the good relationship was replaced by mistreatment and bullying of the KDPI, and the closer the SAVAK got to Barzani, the more difficult the conditions became for the KDPI.³⁶⁸

The second phase (1979-1980s) had some more complex characteristics. With the emergence of new actors on the both sides of the border, the relations became more divergent and complex. The 1975 collapse of the Barzani-led insurgency, and the regime change in Iran following the 1979 Revolution, provided the actors of the Kurdish movement in Iranian as well as Iraqi Kurdistan with new opportunities and challenges. Following the Revolution, the Iranian Kurds stepped into a new era of their national struggle, as pointed out by Romano: "by emerging the popular revolution in 1979, the framing opportunities for Kurdish challengers had improved. The abolition of the Pahlavi dynasty by the Iranian people and the encouraging circumstances in Kurdish areas allowed Kurdish nationalist groups to frame their wishes and afterwards their opposition to Islamic regime and its value system".³⁶⁹ Through 1979 and the early 1980s, while the

³⁶⁴ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*

³⁶⁵ Sardashti, *Jiyan u Tikoshani Siyasi Ahmad Tofiq*, 117.

³⁶⁶ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 34-35.

³⁶⁷ KDPI. *Kheyantekani Qiyade Moweqat be Netewayi Kurds* [the Treacheries of the Provisional Leadership [KDP] against the Kurdish Nation], Kurdistan, KDPI Media Centre, 1981. 6-7.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 7.

³⁶⁹ Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, 109.

KDP forces under the new leadership called *Qiyadet Mowaqat*³⁷⁰ (Provisional Leadership) stood shoulder to shoulder with the Iranian Army in areas such as Piranshar, Sardasht, Banê and the Northern part of the Iranian Kurdistan, hunting the Iranian Kurdish peshmergas of the KDPI and Komala,³⁷¹ the PUK,³⁷² desperate for external support, a safe haven and allies, adopted a multi-aspect strategy. Jalal Talebani (the leader of the PUK) declared his support for the Islamic Republic as an anti-imperialist force in the region.³⁷³

As emphasized by Kreyenbroek and Sperl, “when the Shah was overthrown in 1979 both the PUK and the KDP [...] competed for the new regime’s favour. The latter was successful, partly because of the long-standing relationship with Tehran, but more practically because Masoud was willing to support Tehran against its own Kurdish insurgents led by KDPI”.³⁷⁴ However, as a component of Talebani’s strategy, when Iranian Kurdistan was under the attack of the Islamic regime and the *Qiyadet Mowaqat* the PUK in 1982-1983 sent some of its units to support Iranian Kurdish Peshmerga.³⁷⁵ In return the KDPI played a mediating role through the 1984 PUK-Iraqi government negotiation.³⁷⁶ Despite this PUK-KDPI solidarity, the relation was critical, as maintained by Khlikgi: “the PUK was by the KDPI blamed for supporting Komala, in provoking the KPDI and using Komala’s influence in expelling the KDP from Iranian Kurdistan, which was an escalation of the already critical situation in Iranian Kurdistan”.³⁷⁷

Considering the already mentioned issues and events in this period, there are remarkable differences between the first and second stages of Iranian Kurdish insurgency and its crossborder relations with the Iraqi Kurdish movement. The second period was also uneven with the existence of several rival actors and competing interests. This period’s differentiated relations peaked in line with the intensification of the KDPI-Komala’s fight against the Iranian army, and the regime’s bloody attempts to take control of Iranian Kurdistan. Despite the existence of, on one hand the KDPI and Komala’s

³⁷⁰ The Provisional Leadership (in Arabic *Qiyadet Mowaqat*): following the 1975 Algiers Agreement between Iran and Iraq, the KDP-Iraq’s activity reached its lowest point. However, the KDP after the death of its leader Mostafa Barzani, reorganized its activity under the title ‘the Provisional Leadership’. The KDP operated for nearly two years under this title, after which the name ‘KDP’ replaced the Provisional Leadership again. The name, despite its short existence, has found its place in the historical record, since during this period several important issues and conflicts can be linked to this period of the KDP’s actions.

³⁷¹ KDPI, *Kheyaneh-kani Qiyade Moweqat be Netewayi Kurds*, 9-10.

³⁷² PUK was a newly emerged political party of Iraqi Kurdistan and the arch-enemy of the KDP.

³⁷³ Archive of Behzad Khoshhali, 7. Volume. Political Parties and Kurdistan

³⁷⁴ Philip Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl, (ed.) *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview* (London: Routledge, 2010), 22.

³⁷⁵ During the strategic Battle of the Saradash-Piranshar main road Moradbeigi, *Tarikhe Zende*, 66.

³⁷⁶ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 39.

³⁷⁷ Khlikgi, *Jan u Jivan*, 13.

relation with Baghdad,³⁷⁸ and on the other side the PUK's relations with Tehran during the eight-year of Iran-Iraq War, a relatively balanced relationship between KDPI and Komala with PUK remained until the beginning of the 1990s.

During the 1980s both Komala and KDPI were considered as powerful Iranian Kurdish political organizations, in which their long-lasting and continuous activities, as well as these organizations' close ties with the Kurdish society in Iranian Kurdistan, caused significant security, economic and political challenges to the Iranian government. Compared to the first stage, these period's crossborder interaction between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish groups, despite the existence of the sensitive condition of struggle, was less critical.

The third phase of the 1990s and onwards of the Iranian Kurdish movement and the crossborder relations between the political parties of Iranian Kurdistan and the PUK and KDP in Iraqi Kurdistan, is contemporary to the establishment of the KRG in 1992. With insights into the 1960s crossborder relations – on the one hand the conditions and limited capability of the KDPI and Komala in conducting their insurgency, and on the other hand the price they paid in the form of human casualties and the decline of the Kurdish movement – it can arguably be claimed that the 1960s and the 1990s share many commonalities. While in the 1960s the Iranian Kurdish movement was captured and turned into a subject of Barzani's interest, in the 1990s the Iranian Kurdish movement and the organizations behind its conduct suffered from the very close PUK-Tehran relationship.

4.2 The Iranian Kurdish Movement, 1946-1960s

In the case of the national movements of different parts of Kurdistan, it can be claimed that the cultural and geographical proximity between them “has played an important role in the birth, evolution, and transformation of the Kurdish nationalist movement”.³⁷⁹ Mainly, the shared goal of the major Kurdish political parties, regardless of their ideological foundation, has been about either the demand for an independent Kurdish state, or achieving political and cultural autonomy. However, when it comes to the relationship of the leading political parties of different parts of Kurdistan (e.g., PUK,

³⁷⁸ Wikileaks Document, “Views of Iranian Kurdish leader Qassemlo”, 1988 February 16, Canonical ID: 88BAGHDAD_855_a, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/88BAGHDAD855_a.html (accessed 15 June 2018).

³⁷⁹ Gurses, *From War to Democracy*, 253.

KDP, PKK, Komala, KDPI etc.), their relations have often been controversial and disputed.³⁸⁰ In Manafy's words, "internal Kurdish disunity is an extremely devastating contradiction, [in which] Kurdish political history embodies the empirical evidence to support the claim of enmity of one group against another".³⁸¹

Kurdish crossborderness has been a dominating element of this relation and has functioned as a double-edged sword, with advantages as well as disadvantages. Crossborder interaction has in many cases worked as a source of inspiration and provided the national liberation movement of one part of Kurdistan with the support and solidarity of Kurds of other parts of Kurdistan. However, reflecting on the history of the Kurdish national struggle reveals several critical aspects of crossborder interaction between movements of different parts of Kurdistan.

As highlighted by Salehyan, the presence of crossborder militant groups will internationalize domestic insurgencies and lead to tacit or explicit bargains between neighbouring states over how to deal with the problem. However, throughout the modern history of Kurds, crossborder interaction has cynically been used by some sections of the Kurdish movement, leading to internal brutality. For instance, in some cases self-interested Kurdish leaders have been deployed by states controlling Kurdistan in eradicating the national movement of other parts of Kurdistan; also, the movements of one of the parts have been used as bargaining chips in negotiating support and sanctuary for the movements of other parts.³⁸² These conditions have resulted in a situation where conducting the movement of one part of Kurdistan, has been done at the cost or even crushing of another. It can be claimed that the dependency of the political parties of Iranian Kurdistan on their safe haven in Iraqi Kurdistan, has resulted in deep-rooted movement decline, and in some periods, entire termination. In what follows, I demonstrate firstly how the KDPI-KDP relations in the late 1950s evolved, and secondly, how these relations challenged the Iranian Kurdish movement.

It is arguable to claim that the Iranian Kurdish national movement, following the fall of the Republic, became largely dependent on Iraqi Kurdistan as its safe haven. Iranian Kurdistan following the collapse of the Republic underwent some difficult years with the absence of an obvious movement. The afore-mentioned "period of silence"³⁸³ ended following Mella Mustafa Barzani's re-establishment of the Iraqi Kurdish movement in the late 1950s, after his homecoming from the Soviet Union. Barzani

³⁸⁰ Salehyan, *Transnational Rebels*, 37.

³⁸¹ Manafy, *The Kurdish political struggles in Iran*, 46.

³⁸² Salehyan, *Transnational Rebels*, 8.

³⁸³ Bozarslan, *Violence in the Middle East*, 32.

encouraged the relatively disorganized KDPI leadership to re-establish their fight against the Pahlavi suppression of the Kurds in Iran.³⁸⁴ Following this call, the crossborder interaction became quite evident. It carried what Sidney Tarrow articulates as a ‘horizontal diffusion of social organizational’, or a relational diffusion, with the existence of a series of bridging relationships, links or direct ties between organizations with parallel cross-spatial collaboration.³⁸⁵ Tarrow assumes that this relation can affect the actions of non-state actors as well as state institutions.³⁸⁶

My argument in this regard is that, despite the existence of several theoretical and practical examples of positive crossborder interaction between Kurdish societies, the Kurdish movement’s crossborder interaction in the 20th century was marked by a variety of internal brutality that has challenged the general positivity which has been attached to ethnic crossborderness. Kurdish crossborderness has involved shared interests and identity. The reason for organizational interaction, according to Tilly’s theory of social movements and political collective action, can be explained as the emergence of new conditions resulting in the advent of political opportunities for collective action³⁸⁷ and existence of “common identity and unifying structure” shared between individuals and groups within a population. In the Kurdish case, the reason for the evolution of the critical crossborder relationship between the political parties of the Iranian and Iraqi Kurds, can be argued as a result of the change of interests of these actors and organizations, committed to this relation. In Tilly’s words, “disorganization would occur in the case of the emergence of incoherency in organizational relation and decline in common identity [and common interests]”.³⁸⁸ I also assume that this critical relationship reveals that the regimes controlling the Kurdish population have succeeded in the creation of different understandings of (national) interest among Kurds, and they have succeeded in dividing Kurds into different section of movements that has chiefly resulted in deep division between different Kurdish forces.

³⁸⁴ Gadani (2008b) *50 Sal Khebat*, & Beloriyan, *Ale Kok/Barge Sabz*.

³⁸⁵ Tarrow Sidney, *The New Transnational Activism*, (New York: Cambridge University Press 2005), 122 and 127.

³⁸⁶ Rebecca K. Givan, Kenneth M. Roberts and Sarah Anne Soule, *The Diffusion of Social Movements: Actors, Mechanisms, and Political Effects*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 20.

³⁸⁷ Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 5-6.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 54-55.

4.2.1 The 1960s Complex Crossborder Interaction and the Failed Movement

The KDPI-KDP relationship was based on the KDPI's spatial dependency on the Iraqi Kurds. In return, Iranian Kurds provided material support and loyalty to Barzani's movement: "in fact, until the late 1960s, the KDPI was the only major source of outside aid for the Barzani Peshmerga".³⁸⁹ This relationship was developed based on a combination of shared interests and perception of the emergence of political opportunity benefiting both movements. As held by Tilly, "the main determinants of a group's mobilization are its organization, its interest in possible interaction with other contenders, the current opportunity/threat of those interactions and the group's subjection to repression [... a] group's subjection to repression is mainly a function of the sort of interest it represents".³⁹⁰

A review of the Iranian Kurdish national movement in the 19th and 20th centuries³⁹¹ exposes the fact that this movement from the time of its emergence, intensification and politicization, has in many regards been mobilized through sources of ethnic solidarity.³⁹² Esman holds that

Ethnic solidarity with its tendency to become politicized is so palpable a reality in public affairs that many observers are inclined to regard it as an existential fact of life [...] to these observers ethnic solidarity is a pervasive consequential reality whose various manifestations deserve careful examination and analysis so that the phenomenon can be both better understood and more wisely regulated by public policy.³⁹³

Arguably, Kurdish crossborder interaction has functioned as an inherent element of Kurdish national identity. Despite the awareness of some positive aspects of such a relation, this subsection highlights some critical elements of this interaction practiced through the Iranian-Iraqi Kurdish movement since the late 1950s. Regarding transnational groups' experience of solidarity, Clive Jones stresses that "[ethnic] transnationalism refers to solidarity based on identity, linguistic and/or sectarian affiliation that extends

³⁸⁹ Yildiz and Taysi, *The Kurds in Iran*, 62-65.

³⁹⁰ Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 56.

³⁹¹ For more see: Sadeq Sharefkandi, *Tarikhcheye Jonbeshhaye miliye Kurd, Az qharne Nozdehom ta Payane Jange Jehaniye dovem* [History of the Kurdish national Movement from the 19th century until the end of the Second World War] Second edition (Erbil: Student Union of KDPI KRG, 2013); Shamzini, *Jolaneweyi Rezgari Nishtemani Kurdistan*; Hawar, *Simko: Ismail Agha Shukak and the Kurdish National Movement*; & Sardashti, *Chand lapereyek le mejoyi gely kurd*.

³⁹² Esman, *Ethnic Politics*, 1.

³⁹³ *Ibid*, 9.

across national borders. Territories are invented; national identity, however, is an attempt to identify people within a certain territorial entity”.³⁹⁴ Related to the role crossborderness as a source of inspiration in establishing and conducting insurgencies in multiethnic societies such as Iran, Alam Saleh holds that

Of course there is a great impact. Ethnic groups in Iran always compare themselves with their cross-border ethnic kin, and when they see they are much better off in many ways, they think, so why are we not better off? Tehran thus fears its prosperous and powerful neighbors, due to the fact that cross-border ethnic affiliation can provide an opportunity as well as a threat to the state.³⁹⁵

However, regarding the question of how Kurds have dealt with the values attributed to Kurdish crossborder ethnic solidarity and cooperation, Esman’s following formulation of ethnic solidarity can work as a guideline for analysing the misconducted Kurdish crossborder relations since the 1960s. Esman highlights that ethnic solidarity

Denotes obligations and responsibilities of individuals to their community. Solidarity is established and maintained by socialization processes reinforced by social controls, economic incentives, and external pressure. The constituency bases for the solidarity that is necessary to ethnic political organizations are the ethnic communities whose cohesion and sense of continuity reflect their perceptions of common peoplehood, collective interests, and destiny. Solidarity implies commitment to defending these interests and maintaining boundaries -though the definition both of boundaries and of interests may shift over time – in relation to significant others in their environment. The greater the solidarity, the more likely the emergence of ethnic political movements.³⁹⁶

In distinguishing the ways the Kurds in different parts of Kurdistan have mobilized their struggle against the occupiers of Kurdistan, the Kurdish national movements in each parts of Kurdistan display fascinating differences.³⁹⁷ Due to the existence of challenging geographical and geopolitical circumstances surrounding the Kurds, the Iranian Kurdish movement, has through the process of its mobilization and conduction, paid a huge price for being allowed to access a safe haven in the neighbouring country of Iraq. This price has been paid in many forms, for instance movement deprivation, being used as bargaining

³⁹⁴ Clive Jones quoted in Saleh, *Ethnic Identity and the State in Iran*, 154.

³⁹⁵ Saleh, *Ethnic Identity and the State in Iran*, 155.

³⁹⁶ Esman, *Ethnic Politics*, 27.

³⁹⁷ Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, 4-5.

chip, and even more costly, the massive decline and nullification of the Iranian Kurdish movement through different periods.

The Kurdish Republic declared by Qazi Mohammad (1946) refreshed the idea of crossborder solidarity. Regarding the Republic's political and psychological heritage, Romano writes that "the Mahabad Republic crystalized in the minds of Kurds their right to self-determination, as well as their ability to run their own affairs. In this sense, the mobilizing act of establishing the Republic in 1945 even if it survived only a short time, had a powerful, lasting impact on the cultural frames of Kurds in Iran and elsewhere".³⁹⁸ The attempt of re-establishing the Iranian Kurdish movement in the 1960s was mainly carried out by the relatively young generation of Kurds, personally experiencing the spirit of the Republic, aware of and inspired by the existence of crossborder Kurdish solidarity.³⁹⁹ While for most of the current generation of Kurds the Republic is history, these individuals in the 1960s suffered directly from the aftermath of the failure of the Republic. Mella Mostafa Barzani was among the influential and symbolic figures surviving the Pahlavi's attack on the Republic. Barzani's direct contribution to the Republic and his effort at establishing the Iraqi Kurdish movement provided the KDPI with hope and opportunities.⁴⁰⁰

Beloriyan states that Abdullah Ishaqi (with the nickname Ahmad Tofiq), the 1960s KDPI leader, informed his team that "Mella Mostafa Barzani has promised his support and he encourages us to re-establish our fight".⁴⁰¹ Re-mobilizing the KDPI's activity inside Iranian Kurdistan was a difficult task due to the militarized situation of the area and SAVAK's reprisals and persecution of KDPI members and sympathizers. Consequently, the KDPI leadership and activists were desperate after a safe haven. The Shah in 1959 initiated a process of reprisal aimed at destroying the KDPI's underground cells.⁴⁰² This operation was very comprehensive and extended to many cities.⁴⁰³ Many hundreds of KDPI members left the country to exile due to the fear of being captured.⁴⁰⁴

Jalil Gadani writes that "as result of SAVAK's mass imprisonment many fled from the Iranian Kurdistan. The 1959 mass imprisonment has been referred to as *Sali Qerran*

³⁹⁸ Ibid, 245.

³⁹⁹ Enthusiastic individuals such as Abdullallah Ishaqi (Ahmad Tofiq), Jalil Gadani, Karim Hisami, Abdulrahman Ghassemloo, Hassan Rastegar, Solaiman Moini, Ghani Bolurian, and many others, were aware of and inspired by the existence of crossborder Kurdish solidarity. See Hisami, *Karwanêk le şehîdanî Kurdistanî Êran* & Gadani 2008a, *50 Sal Khebat*.

⁴⁰⁰ Beloriyan, *Ale Kok/Barge Sabz*, 62-65.

⁴⁰¹ Beloriyan, *Ale Kok/Barge Sabz*.

⁴⁰² This process was led by Amjadi and Zibayi, two senior intelligence officers of the Shah.

⁴⁰³ Cities such as Sena, Saqqez, Bokeran, Sardasht, Khane (Piranshar), Mahabad, Naxeda, Shno, Uromye (wrmy), Shapor, Miyandoawaw, Sayen Qala etc.

⁴⁰⁴ Hisami, *Karwanêk le şehîdanî Kurdistanî Êran*, 49.

[the Year of Extinction]”.⁴⁰⁵ Consequently, a mass exodus of KDPI members toward Iraqi Kurdistan took place. These refugees (mostly with links to the KDPI) were resettled in Sulaymaniyah, and with the rise of their number they were accommodated in a so-called “commune”. These KDPI members were very limited in their mobility, and not allowed to move to areas with better job opportunities. Their living conditions were miserable. These conditions forced the KDPI leadership, among them Ishaqi, to appeal to Barzani for support out of desperation and hopelessness.⁴⁰⁶ Their desperation resulted in the unnecessary integration and closeness of the KDPI to the KDP, so that many believed that the KDPI was fully amalgamated to the KDP.⁴⁰⁷

4.2.2 The 1960s Internal Dispute within the KDPI

Internal disputes and brutality have been among the self-inflicted issues challenging the Kurdish movement, crossborder solidarity and *Kurdayêti*.⁴⁰⁸ Sadeq Sharefkandi claims that, regardless of any other internal and external issues behind the lack of achievement of the Kurdish movement, the main challenge is related to the disunity among Kurds themselves. “Fragmentation, division and disunity, fratricidal war and war of personal interest between different leaders and chieftains of Kurds”,⁴⁰⁹ are among some of the main reasons for the many defeats of Kurdish movements.⁴¹⁰

From the early 1960s to the 1970s, Mohammad Reza Shah provided the Iraqi Kurdish movement with a safe haven, financial and military support, and even radio and other publishing and communication technologies.⁴¹¹ The Shah’s support for Barzani was preconditioned on Barzani’s efforts to hamper the activity of the Iranian Kurds. The Shah-Barzani relationship, and its impact on the struggle of Kurds in Iran, became evident when during the 1960s several members of the KDPI, particularly those who were critical to and challenged Barzani’s self-interested agenda and his attitude toward the Iranian Kurdish struggle, either disappeared or were assassinated and their dead bodies handed

⁴⁰⁵ These mass arrests (more than 250 persons) occurred in in Mahabad, Saqqez, Bokeran, Sardasht, Shno, Piranshar, Uromiye, and Shapor in 1959. Sardashti, *Chand lapereyek le mejoyi gely Kurd*, 40-42.

⁴⁰⁶ Sardashti, *Jiyan u Tikoshani Siyasi Ahmad Tofiq*, 42-51.

⁴⁰⁷ Gadani 2008a *50 Sal Khebat*, 139-140.

⁴⁰⁸ William Gourlay, “Kurdayetî: Pan-Kurdish Solidarity and CrossBorder Links in Times of War and Trauma”, *Middle East Critique*, 27:1(2018).

⁴⁰⁹ Sharefkandi, *Tarikhcheye Jonbeshhaye miliye Kurd*, V.

⁴¹⁰ Aziz Hussein Mohammad. *Kurds, Revolution and Historic Opportunities in the Light of Strategy of the Kurdish Movement: A Historical, Political and Critical Study*, (KitabArzan Publication, Sweden, 1996), 33.

⁴¹¹ Fardoost, *Khaterate Arteshbod Sabeqh Hussain Fardoost*, 502 & Pejman, *Asrar-e Bastene Paymane Aljezire 1975*.

to the Iranian regime. It was claimed by KDPI that the main Iranian precondition for supporting Barzani was “related to Barzani’s ability in making any uprisings and movements of Iranian Kurds impossible”.⁴¹² A KDPI document reveals that, following the visit of the Iranian intelligence officer Modarasi to the KDP’s military camps in the spring of 1965, the KDP ordered the KDPI to remove all its bases from the Iran-Iraq border areas and cease its activities inside Iranian Kurdistan, and went further to ensure this was carried out: “Barzani ordered attacks on KDPI bases in the border areas, where KDPI’s library and all other publishing equipment were plundered”.⁴¹³

In this period the KDPI leadership was divided into two main fractions, the Ishaqi and the Moini fractions. The KDPI’s deep dependency on Barzani, and its (lack of) strategy for how to mobilize the movement, were the core elements of this internal dispute. The Ishaqi-led wing of KDPI was dominated and tamed by Barzani, and accepted the idea of the need to consider the interests of the Iraqi Kurdish movement. This ‘consideration’ meant that the KDPI had to cease its activity and not provoke Iran, which was sponsoring Barzani’s insurgency against the Iraqi regime. The other faction was led by Solaiman Moini, a member of KDPI’s Central Committee, who attempted to establish a proactive movement, its operations based on the interests of the Iranian Kurds.⁴¹⁴

The KDPI held Barzani and the KDP leadership responsible for the defeat of its 1967-1968 attempt to re-establish the movement, referring to the order made by Idris Barzani⁴¹⁵ in 1967 for the arrest of members of the KDPI. Barzani forces alongside the Iranian Army in areas as Piranshar, Sardash, and Banê, hunted members of the KDPI inside Iranian Kurdistan.⁴¹⁶ In the 1960s, KDPI members living in areas under Barzani’s authority suffered from persecution and assassination. For instance, Solaiman Moini on his way back to Iran was captured and disarmed by Sadiq Afandi,⁴¹⁷ accused of disobeying Barzani’s order. Barzani ordered the execution of Moini, and his dead body was handed to the SAVAK, who displayed Moini’s body in a humiliating way in cities and towns of the Iranian Kurdistan.⁴¹⁸ As argued by Kreyenbroek and Sperl,

In the late 1960s a sporadic guerrilla campaign was conducted by KDPI from Iraqi territory, but this was brought to an unhappy end by the intervention of the Iraqi KDP

⁴¹² KDPI, *Kheyantekani Qiyade Moweqat be Netewayi Kurds*.

⁴¹³ *Ibid*, 9-8.

⁴¹⁴ Ali Badaqhi, *Yadi 50 Salayi Raperini 46-47, Wetoyeji ‘Kurdistan’ le gal Ismail Bazyar* [The fifty-year anniversary of the 1967-68’s Uprising, *Kurdistan’s* Interview with Ismail Bazyar], 2017. <http://www.kurdistanukurd.com/?p=21507> (Accessed 20 February 2018).

⁴¹⁵ Idris was Mella Mostafa’s eldest son and father to Nechirvan Barzani, the current PM of KRG.

⁴¹⁶ KDPI, *Kheyantekani Qiyade Moweqat be Netewayi Kurds*, 9-10.

⁴¹⁷ Sadiq Afandi was a high official of KDP. Sardashti, *Jiyan u Tikoshani Siyasi Ahmad Tofiq*.

⁴¹⁸ KDPI, *Kheyantekani Qiyade Moweqat be Netewayi Kurds*, 12-13.

at the bidding of Tehran (which was supplying it with war materials for its own war against Baghdad), an unfortunate precedent which continued to damage relations between the Kurds of Iran and Iraq into the 1980s.⁴¹⁹

As the Barzani-Shah relationship became closer, the more isolated the KDPI became, which in turn intensified the internal KDPI dispute. As maintained by Bruinessen, some KDPI members, especially the younger ones, had second thoughts about the party's lack of independence from Barzani and its political inactivity at home: "this group felt that Barzani, in order to receive support from the Shah, deliberately kept the KDP-Iran back from political struggle in Iran".⁴²⁰

The KDPI's attempt at re-establishing its activity from Iraqi Kurdistan's soil at the beginning of the 1960s, resulted in the creation of a huge geographical distance between the KDPI and its grassroots in Iranian Kurdistan. It subjected the Iranian Kurdish movement to Barzani's interests. Sardashti holds that the KDPI's decision to re-establish its activities from its bases in Iraqi Kurdistan left an adverse impact on its inter-organizational cohesion.⁴²¹ The internal dispute between Ishaqi and Ghassemlou (from another faction within the KDPI) escalated to such a critical level that each of them attempted to expel the other from KDPI. The KDPI leadership was polarized between nationalists and *Tudayi*.⁴²² As Jalal Talebani recounts, while Ishaqi labelled Ghassemlou as disloyal and collaborating with the Tudeh party and SAVAK, Ghassemlou accused Ishaqi for being inexperienced and desperate for power.⁴²³ Ishaqi's hostility to Ghassemlou resulted in Ghassemlou's expulsion from the KDPI.⁴²⁴ According to Gadani,

At the return of Ghassemlou [from Europe] this dispute escalated further. At this time due to Ishaqi's close relation with Barzani, he [Ishaqi] played the dominating role in the KDPI. This dispute had ideological roots. Ishaqi's theory was that the Kurdish movement could achieve its aims by relying on the support of USA, and this theory met the criticism of some of the KDPI's leading figures, among them Ghassemlou.⁴²⁵

⁴¹⁹ Kreyenbroek and Sperl, *The Kurds A Contemporary Overview*, 18.

⁴²⁰ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 34-35.

⁴²¹ Sardashti, *Chand lapereyek le mejoyi gely Kurd*, 5-6.

⁴²² *Tudayi* was a negative term for those who were members of Tudeh or promoted the idea of collaborating with the Tudeh (the Iranian Communist Party). Hisami/Husami, *Le Bireweriyekanem, Bergi Sehem 1965-1970*, 65.

⁴²³ Hisami/Husami, *Le Bireweriyekanem, Bergi Sehem 1965-1970*.

⁴²⁴ For more see Yasin Sardashti, *Jiyan u Tikoshani Siyasi Ahmad Tofiq*.

⁴²⁵ Gadani (2008a), *50 Sal Khebat*, 131.

However, by having the support of Barzani and consolidating his power, Ishaqi won the leadership of KDPI. Ishaqi's hostile relationship with his opponents resulted in the expulsion of many of his critics from the party or even the Kurdish area under Barzani's authority. Apart from issues such as financial hardship, the fear of reprisal either by Barzani or SAVAK in Iraqi Kurdistan were serious concerns for the exiled KDPI.⁴²⁶ In Said Kaveh's words, "through this period only the name was left of the KDPI; the organization, the Central Committee, the publication and everything else, were gone. In line with the rise of Barzani and his total control of KDPI, the KDPI dissolved entirely".⁴²⁷ The dependency on Barzani was so extensive that Ishaqi, instead of publishing *Kurdistan*,⁴²⁸ published *Disan Barzani* (Again Barzani).⁴²⁹ Ishaqi was actively engaged in the local activity of the KDP, and can be spotted in many photos from the 1960s, always next to Barzani.

4.3 The KDPI's Revolutionary Committee

Ishaqi's opponents led by Solaiman Moini declared in the summer of 1966 (near the village Alanê)⁴³⁰ with the participation of seven members of the KDPI,⁴³¹ announced the formation of the KDPI Revolutionary Committee.⁴³² This Committee received some minor support from Jalal Talebani and Ibrahim Ahmad, the opponents of Barzani within the KDP.⁴³³ According to Gadani, "the Revolutionary Committee, which was an internal opposition to Ishaqi's mismanagement, received some support from Talebani and Ibrahim Ahmad; however, after Talebani and Ahmad's entire split from the KDP, the Committee was left isolated".⁴³⁴ The members of the Revolutionary Committee argued that they were not worth less than the Iraqi Kurds, and by maintaining their struggle they would be able to challenge the Pahlavi regime. As part of their activity they published *Tishk* (the Light [of the Sun]) magazine, which promoted the Revolutionary Committee's views on the

⁴²⁶ Kaveh, *Awrek le Besarhati Xom u Rodawekani Naw Hezb*.

⁴²⁷ Kaveh, *Awrek le Besarhati Xom u Rodawekani Naw Hezb*, & Sardashti, *Chand lapereyek le mejoyi gely Kurd*, 14.

⁴²⁸ *Kurdistan* was, since the establishment of KDPI, this party's official mouthpiece.

⁴²⁹ *Disan Barzani* was a leaflet that celebrated Barzani as a national leader of the Kurds. Sardashti *Chand lapereyek le mejoyi gely Kurd*, 10. & Sardashti *Birewariyekani Jemil Mardokhi*, 68.

⁴³⁰ Alanê is a village in Iranian Kurdistan near the city of Sardasht.

⁴³¹ With the contribution of the following seven members of KDPI, the Revolutionary Committee KDPI became a reality: Ismail Sharifzadeh, Mella Ahmadi Shalmashi (known as Mella Aware), Snar Mamendi, Hamademin Seraji, Mella Abdullah Abdullahi (Mella Abdullah Sarbaz), Salar Hayderi, Said Kaveh

⁴³² Kaveh *Awrek le Besarhati Xom u Rodawekani Naw Hezb*, 151-152.

⁴³³ Sardashti, *Chand lapereyek le mejoyi gely Kurd*, 27.

⁴³⁴ Gadani (2008a), *50 Sal Khebat*, 149-155.

Iranian Kurdish movement.⁴³⁵ The leading individuals⁴³⁶ of the Committee were influenced by the ideas of the 'Radical left', having some ties to the Revolutionary Wing of the Tudeh (a split wing of the Tudeh).⁴³⁷

Barzani gave the KDPI an ultimatum with two options: either cease activity or leave Iraqi Kurdistan.⁴³⁸ This ultimatum resulted in deep disputes within the KDPI. Ishaqi's faction accepted that without Barzani's blessing, carrying the insurgency would be impossible and consequently submitted to his ultimatum.⁴³⁹ Alternately, the Revolutionary Committee rejected Barzani's ultimatum, left Iraqi Kurdistan, and attempted to establish their activities inside the Iranian Kurdistan. Consequently, during 1967-1968, some areas of Iranian Kurdistan⁴⁴⁰ witnessed some degree of political activity led by Ismail Sharifzadeh and his comrades. The Revolutionary Committee remained isolated, with no support and no safe haven. The Committee was totally destroyed, when they became surrounded and faced the brutality of the Iranian Army in a village near Banê. Many of the leaders and members of the Revolutionary Committee lost their lives during different activities and events, for instance in mysterious disappearances, being handed over to Iran, or in clashes with the Iranian army. By losing its leadership, the Revolutionary Committee vanished totally. The Committee, after 18 months of existence, ceased in 1968.⁴⁴¹ The Iranian Kurdish movement, following the crushing of the Revolutionary Committee's attempt to remobilize the movement, experienced a new era of decline.⁴⁴²

Abdollah Hassanzadeh holds that "in fact the Iraqi Kurdish movement's close relation to the Iranian government left a direct effect on the political activities of the KDPI, and following the 1968 crushing of the Revolutionary Committee, the KDPI experienced massive repression from different sides".⁴⁴³

The years of 1967-68 were dark ones for the Kurds in Iran. The militarization of Kurdistan intensified and the Kurds suffered tremendously from the Pahlavi policies of oppression. Many lost their lives, and Iranian jails were full of Kurdish political

⁴³⁵ Sardashti, Chand *lapereyek le mejoyi gely Kurd*, 31.

⁴³⁶ Solaiman Moini, Ismail Sharifzadeh, Mohammad Amin Siraji, Salar Haydari, Mella Aware etc., were among the individuals behind the new insurgency. Hisami, *Karwanêk le şehîdanî Kurdistanî Êran*.

⁴³⁷ Kaveh, *Awrek le Besarhati Xom u Rodawekani Naw Hezb*, 151- 154; & Bazyar in Badaqhi, *The fifty-year anniversary of the 1967-68 Uprising*.

⁴³⁸ Sardashti, Chand *lapereyek le mejoyi gely Kurd*, 31.

⁴³⁹ For instance, a group of 40-50 individuals led by Amir Qazi chose to stay and live in the Sangasar area under the control of Barzani.

⁴⁴⁰ E.g., Saqqez, Banah, Sardasht, Bokeran, Piranshar, etc. in Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zende*, 26.

⁴⁴¹ Kaveh, *Awrek le Besarhati Xom u Rodawekani Naw Hezb*, 172.

⁴⁴² Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e Zende*, 28.

⁴⁴³ Hassanzadeh in Naqshsi, *A selection of the interviews with Abdollah Hassanzadeh*, 27-28.

activists.⁴⁴⁴ The Pahlavi terrorization of Kurds was not limited to the Kurds inside Iranian Kurdistan. There was a very systematic policy of reprisal outside Iranian borders initiated by SAVAK, particularly against Iranian Kurds exiled to the Iraqi Kurdistan.⁴⁴⁵

Another aspect of Barzani's impact on the Iranian Kurdish movement is related to his popularity among Iranian Kurds. This popularity meant that the KDPI-fraction which enjoyed Barzani's support, enjoyed also widespread support of the Iranian Kurdish society. Reversely, the Revolutionary Committee, which did not have the same stature, could hardly sustain their activities or receive popular support inside Iranian Kurdistan.⁴⁴⁶ The KDPI-Barzani relationship was an unequal one, resulting in deep dependency and failure of any attempt of re-establishing KDPI's activity. Conflict of interest between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements reveals that the Iranian Kurdish movement was held as a bargaining chip by the Iraqi Kurdish movement's leadership, in negotiating support from Iran. Regarding similar relationships, Amirahmadi holds that in ethnic collective movements of people from different states with overlapping, ethnic populations "the strongest segment uses the weaker one as bargaining chip".⁴⁴⁷

4.4 Assassinations and Internal Brutality

According to Manafy, "Kurdish political history contains the empirical evidence to support the claim of enmity of one group against another".⁴⁴⁸ Manfy's claim is quite applicable in describing the Iranian Kurdish movement, its relation to Barzani, and not least the fate of the movement in the 1960s. The assassination of KDPI leaders and members in the mid-1960s took place in a very comprehensive and systematic manner. SAVAK was directly involved in this process, having their operation tents within Barzani's military camps,⁴⁴⁹ in for example Haji Omran. There are several examples of disappearance and assassination of KDPI members and leaders. The mysterious disappearance of Sediq Anjiri Azar (a member of the KDPI's Central Committee) is an example among many others. Yosef Rezwani (with the nickname Abdollah Sheler) explains that SAVAK, in cooperation with some KDP officials (among them Zeki Kamil Akreyi), assassinated Anjiri.⁴⁵⁰ Similar episodes from this period show that the political

⁴⁴⁴ Hisami, *Karwanêk le şehîdanî Kurdistanî Êran*, 91.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 111-114.

⁴⁴⁶ Kaveh, *Awrek le Besarhati Xom u Rodawekani Naw Hezb*, 108-110.

⁴⁴⁷ Hooshang Amirahmadi in Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, 160.

⁴⁴⁸ Manafy, *The Kurdish Political Struggles in Iran*, 46.

⁴⁴⁹ Sardashti, *Birewariyekani Jemil Mardokhi*, 94.

⁴⁵⁰ Sardashti, *Chand lapereyek le mejoyi gely Kurd*, pp.5-6 & Karimi 1999, 394-395.

activities of the KDPI suffered from different kinds of uncertainty and insecurity. However, Kaveh highlights that Barzani should not be blamed for all the incidents taking place in this period, since many things happened without Barzani's knowledge and involvement.⁴⁵¹ Iran's security service had infiltrated the Parasten (KDP's Intelligent Service). Kaveh's claim can be understood as reflecting the existence of chaotic inter-organizational relations in the KDP, in which parallel to the Barzani leadership, people from other sections of the hierarchy collaborated with SAVAK in murdering Iranian Kurds.⁴⁵²

Described by Peshnemaz, this period was an era of hardship, uncertainty and chaos. KDPI members were under the strict surveillance of Parasten and SAVAK. Since SAVAK was KDPI's enemy, their acts were no surprise; however, the activity of the Parasten was beyond all expectations, because in the imagination of the KDPI cadres, the Iraqi Kurds, their movement and even the KDP leadership, were considered as a part of their movement. As told by Peshnemaz, "we were caught by surprise because after all we had done for the Kurdish movement in Iraqi Kurdistan, we never expected such treatment in return".⁴⁵³ Regarding hardship resulting from the crossborder KDPI-KDP interaction, Gadani highlights that

Even though the 1967-68 Uprising challenged the Shah's myth of Iran as "the Island of Stability", and brought the justness of the Kurdish claim to the surface, it was a costly step. During this insurgency, the Kurdish people in Iran lost many of their best leaders, cadres and sons. Apart from the death of many KDPI Peshmergas, a large number of the KDPI were imprisoned; these together caused the disintegration of the KDPI. The remaining KDPI members following this attack were spread to different parts of Iraqi Kurdistan, while part of them were disarmed and resettled in Hawler.⁴⁵⁴

The Student Union of Iraqi Kurdistan was among one of the first organizations that in 1968 blamed the KDP and Barzani for being responsible for the assassination of Anjiri, Moini and many other KDPI members in the 1960s. In a statement they encouraged the Kurdish society to condemn "the obscurantist action of assassination of our people in Iranian Kurdistan by the hand of the dark-minded Iranian regime and the Kurdish leadership [...] The Kurdish movement in Iraq received the unconditional support of the

⁴⁵¹ Kaveh, *Awrek le Besarhati Xom u Rodawekani Naw Hezb*, 122-123.

⁴⁵² *Ibid*, 122-148.

⁴⁵³ Peshnemaz quoted in Sardashti, *Geranewayi Besarhati Besar u Shwenkrawayi*, 64-65.

⁴⁵⁴ Gadani (2008a), *50 Sal Khebat*, 158- 173.

toiling people of Iranian Kurdistan, but the award of the support was assassination, terror and deportation to Iran”.⁴⁵⁵

This internal brutality resulting from the described KDPI-KDP relations highlights the fact that the Kurdish struggle has failed to develop an organic link between the people and its leaders, and has failed to formulate a radical revolutionary ideology with no tolerance for collaborating with the enemies of Kurds and the killing of Kurds by Kurds. In Manafy’s words, “Tribal mentality, old fashioned leadership, and corruption exercised by the notable dominating military and political structures contribute to the perpetuation of traditional realities”.⁴⁵⁶

Nevertheless, the fate of Ishaqi, despite his close ties to Barzani, was not very much different from that of his opponents within the KDPI and those who were assassinated or handed to the Pahlavi regime. The only difference was that while Moini and many other KDPI members were handed to the Pahlavi, Ishaqi ended in a jail of the Iraqi regime. With the rise of the Iranian pressure on Barzani, even Ishaqi was not saved. Barzani exiled him to Kani Masi in Badinan,⁴⁵⁷ a drastic decision. With the fear of being handed to Iran, Ishaqi escaped to Baghdad; however, in Baghdad he was imprisoned for cooperating with Barzani and met a mysterious death.⁴⁵⁸ As written by Kheder Marsan,

Each step the movement [in Iraq] took towards [collaborating with] the Iranian regime, the pressure on the KDPI increased. No one was immune from this threat, not even Ishaqi, who due to the fear of facing the same destiny as Moini and so many others, left the Barzani-controlled areas and sought for refuge in Bagdad. Ishaqi, aware of the dramatic change of Barzani’s behaviour, encouraged other KDPI members to consider their security.⁴⁵⁹

Regarding the unfortunate KDPI-Barzani relationship, Jemil Mardokhi raises the question of “how Barzani could, following the loyalty the Iranian Kurds showed to him, treat the KDPI as he did. Even Ishaqi despite all his effort and assistance to Barzani had to flee to Bagdad”.⁴⁶⁰ Ishaqi’s support and loyalty to Barzani on one hand, and his miserable destiny on the other hand, reveals the complexity of crossborder Kurdish interaction. Reflecting on many decades of Iranian-Iraqi Kurdish movement crossborder relations, it can arguably be claimed that the existence of such an interaction has furthered division

⁴⁵⁵ Sardashti, *Geranewayi Besarhati Besar u Shwenkrawayi*, 113-115.

⁴⁵⁶ Manafy, *The Kurdish political struggles in Iran*, 17.

⁴⁵⁷ Sardashti, *Chand lapereyek le mejoyi gely Kurd*, 26.

⁴⁵⁸ Sardashti, *Geranewayi Besarhati Besar u Shwenkrawayi*, 114-117.

⁴⁵⁹ Kheder Marsan quoted in Sardashti, *Geranewayi Besarhati Besar u Shwenkrawayi*, 114-117.

⁴⁶⁰ Sardashti, *Birewariyekani Jemil Mardokhi*, 130-131.

and brutality rather than solidarity and improvement of the Kurdish movement. Mainly, the KDP and PUK leaderships have been in the position of deciding the direction and content of this relation. The Iranian Kurdish political parties' style of mobilization has been shown to be unsustainable, and in line with the changes of behaviour and interests of their superior allies, the movement ended in decline and disaster. The reliance of the KDPI in the 1960s and the 1990s and onwards (along with Komala) on this kind of mobilization has resulted in profound dependency and periods of meltdown of the Iranian Kurdish movement.

4.5 Iran's Agenda in Supporting Barzani

As written by Hussain Fardoost (an Iranian senior intelligence officer), "Mansurpoor became the intermediate person in the Shah-Barzani relations. Through the whole period of Barzani's insurgency, Mansurpoor commuted between Tehran and Barzani, having his own headquarters among the Barzani forces".⁴⁶¹ The operation was led by senior military and intelligence officers of SAVAK and the Iranian Army, such as Issa Pejman, Sarhang Ayobi⁴⁶² and Sarhang Modaresi.⁴⁶³ The Pahlavi support for Barzani was initiated by Issa Pejman during the territorial disputes between Iraq and Iran of the 1960s. The Iranian regime, according to Pejman, viewed the Iraqi Kurdish movement as "a useful means with a low cost" in weakening the Iraqi regime's position in negotiating the territorial issues. In addition to the regional aspect, the Iranian regime realized that they can transform this possibility to crush the Kurdish insurgency of its Kurds, by deploying its proxy, Barzani.

Even though Mohammad Reza Shah for nearly a decade supported Barzani, reflecting on the content of the Algeria Agreement of 1975⁴⁶⁴ and the achievement of establishing its activity the KDPI in the 1960s attempt, the result of both reveals that the Iranian regime's policies were a triumph for Mohammad Reza Shah and catastrophic for the Iraqi Kurdish movement, leading to the failure of crossborder Kurdish solidarity. Fardoost considers the Barzani-led Iraqi Kurdish movement (with a direct impact on the domestic and internal security of Iran) to be among the most important issues occupying SAVAK's activities between the 1960s and 1975. Mohammad Reza Shah deployed the

⁴⁶¹ Fardoost *Khaterate Arteshbod Sabeqh Hussain Fardoost*, 502.

⁴⁶² *Sarhang* is an Iranian military rank equitable to colonel.

⁴⁶³ Pejman, *Asrar-e Bastene Paymane Aljezire 1975*; & Sardashti, *Birewariyekani Jemil Mardokhi*, 94.

⁴⁶⁴ Fardoost, *Khaterate Arteshbod Sabeqh Hussain Fardoost*, 501.

Iraqi Kurdish insurgency in order to assure its domestic and regional interests.⁴⁶⁵

According to Manafy,

Iran started supporting the Kurdish political movement in Iraq in the mid-1960s. The political objective of the Shah of Iran was to weaken Iraq's position on border disputes and navigation rights. In return, General Barzani, the leader of KDP Iraq, committed his forces to create stability in Iranian Kurdistan by executing the Kurdish rebels who had supported the rebellion against the government of Iran under the Shah. Even General Barzani extradited fellow Kurdish rebels of Iran to the Shah's government.⁴⁶⁶

The Shah's support for Barzani was preconditioned on Barzani's dismantling the Iranian Kurdish movement. The Shah was quite confident that his support for Barzani would never result in the actual rise of Kurdish nationalism: "the Shah correctly calculated that by helping Mulla Mostafa he could compel him to cease aiding the Iranian Kurds and even use him to restrain Kurdish activities inside Iran".⁴⁶⁷ Considering the tough conditions of the 1960s for the Kurdish movement, and the pressure experienced by Iranian Kurds in their search for a safe haven in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Shah was correct in his calculation.⁴⁶⁸ The Shah implemented a policy of divide and rule in order to disable the Kurdish movement in Iran and create a negative attitude towards crossborder national solidarity between Barzani and Iran's Kurdish population.⁴⁶⁹ Regarding the possibility of the spill over effect in the case of supporting Barzani, the Shah was confidently assured that "there was no real danger of an uprising among Iranian Kurds and that he could afford to play his Kurdish card against the Iraqi regime with impunity".⁴⁷⁰ Following the Algeria Agreement, Mohammad Reza Shah emphasized his relations with the Iraqi Kurdish insurgency: "the Kurdish dissatisfaction and the Kurdish Revolution [in Iraq] provided us with an opportunity and we transformed this opportunity to our benefit".⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid, 501-503.

⁴⁶⁶ Manafy, *The Kurdish political struggles in Iran*, 32-33.

⁴⁶⁷ Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, 28.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid, 28-29.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid, 119.

⁴⁷¹ Noshriwan Mostafa Amin, *Le Kenari Danube we bo Kheri Nawzang* [From the Danube to the Valley of Nawzang], (KRG: 1997), 33.

Summary

This chapter has shed light on the intensification of crossborder interaction between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements in the 1960s. Evidence related to this interaction exposes that the emergence of the KDPI-KDP relation was viewed as a powerful source of mobilization, benefiting the Kurdish movement on both sides of the Iran-Iraq border. Yet the objective of this interaction changed drastically as soon as Iran's interference in the Iraqi Kurdish movement began. The Iranian Kurdish movement, already vulnerable, suffered hugely from this Barzani-Pahlavi relationship when attempting to establish its activity in exile. Barzani's institutionalised collaboration with Iran resulted in the devastation of a new generation of post-Republic youth in the KDPI, and Iranian Kurdish intellectuals, who attempted to re-establish the movement relying on the symbolic tie between Mella Mostafa Barzani and the Republic's founder, Qazi Mohammad.

Digging deeper into the KDPI leadership's intentions and approach to movement conduction, one discovers that this attempt was about political and organizational mobilization, rather than armed insurgency. Even though a large part of the KDPI submitted to Barzani's agenda, with the intensification of Barzani's collaboration with Iran the KDPI movement suddenly became entirely sanctioned by Barzani. Some individuals and factions of the KDPI established their resistance to being subjugated to Barzani's authority and his self-interested agenda of dismantling the Iranian Kurdish movement. Nevertheless, these opponents of Barzani's policies toward the Iranian Kurdish movement were left with no choice other than going back to Iranian Kurdistan in order to re-establish the movement from the soil of Iranian Kurdistan. These attempts failed, as the leaders of the 1960s Iranian Kurdish movement were either captured by Barzani, assassinated, or, for those who succeeded in returning to Iranian Kurdistan, killed by the Iranian army in asymmetrical military clashes. Regarding this phase of Iranian Kurdish movement, one can claim that this era ended with the failure of movement re-establishment, as well as crossborder Kurdish interaction and solidarity.

Chapter 5

The 1979 Revolution and the Iranian Kurdish Question

Introduction

Through this and the following chapter, light will be shed on the different aspects of the Iranian Kurdish movement during the turbulence of the period from 1979 to the 1980s. The main argument of these chapters is that this movement in this period experienced the emergence of several new tendencies that distinguish this era from the previous period (the 1960s) considerably. The trends and tendencies which occurred through this era allow us to classify this period as an *era of diversification and thickening*⁴⁷² of the numbers, and the spectrum of ideologies of the actors and organizations, which participated in this period's movement. The movement appears not to be as homogenous as it was hitherto. While before the emergence of this phase, the Kurdish movement has been branded as an utterly nationalistic movement, following the 1979 Iranian Revolution the emergence of other political actors and ideologies represented a variety of aspects of the Kurdish movement. The most eye-catching trend is related to the Komala's announcement of its official activity and its focus on the class problematic in Kurdistan. The emergence of the Komala has from two main fronts challenged the ideas of the Kurdish national movement: firstly, challenging the hitherto hegemonic existence of the KDPI (as the only political party of the Iranian Kurds through more than three decades); and secondly, challenging *Kurdayêti* (Kurdishness) as the hitherto dominating ideological framework and discourse in mobilizing the Kurdish movement. This new emergence added new opportunities as well as challenges to the Iranian Kurdish movement.

The widening of the focus of the movement and change of the framework of the Iranian Kurdish movement⁴⁷³ with the emergence of new trends within this movement, was an opportunity for the Kurdish society toward progress and modernization. With the emergence of the Komala, the Kurdish struggle and its pattern of mobilization has turned into a complex case. As highlighted previously, the Iranian Kurdish movement in the 1960s suffered from several challenges, among which leadership fragmentation was the

⁴⁷² This terminology has been used by Nicolle F. Watts in analysing the Kurdish movement in Turkey, particularly through the 1990s and afterwards, in Watts, *Activists in office*.

⁴⁷³ Following the Revolution, the focus on class and gender relations, which were ground-breaking ideological innovations within the Kurdish movement, sharpened drastically.

most problematic. This fragmentation in the 1979-1980s period reappeared and intensified drastically. The ideological differences, in conjunction with a hostile competition for power between the Komala and KDPI, furthered this fragmentation. On one side Komala's discourse and appeal to its audience as a progressive political party,⁴⁷⁴ and on the other side the KDPI's self-image as the inheritor of the Kurdish Republic,⁴⁷⁵ has meant that these two parties from the early days of the revolution conspired and acted against each other as two hostile competitors, rather than allies fighting for the same cause.

Through different sections of this chapter, the reason(s) for the Islamic regime's rejection of the Kurdish claim of *Khodmokhtari* (autonomy), the interactions of different actors and agencies (e.g. grass-roots organizations and political parties), and these actors'/agencies' methods of challenging/interacting with the newly established regime in Tehran, will be analysed. As will be discussed, the Kurdish movement of this era contained elements of self-defence, collective defence,⁴⁷⁶ and armed insurgency, as well as grass-roots and non-violent political activism. In this regard, any single way of labelling the activities which took place after 1979, would mean the simplification and reduction of this era's Kurdish movement. The evolution of this movement has been a product of a variety of events that made this movement a unique phenomenon, in which this movement initiated several forms of collective, non-violent, civil disobedience actions. These actions aimed, for instance, at resisting the new regime's attempt of enforcing its authority through spreading the *Pasdaran* and *Komite-haye Enqelab* (Committees of Revolution) in Kurdistan, and attempting to convince the regime to recognize the role and presence of the popularly selected *shora-yi shar* (city councils). Establishing these *shora* (councils) was the first step toward creating a democratic alternative governing system that would allow local representatives of the Kurdish people to manage different Kurdish cities within the established state-controlled political and administrative entities in the Kurdistan region of Iran.

⁴⁷⁴ Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, 44-48.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid, 19-23.

⁴⁷⁶ Collective defence (*khorageri jemaweri*) means mobilizing a whole society's active participation in the defence system', in Yousef Paweh, *Le Rojhelat Tenya be yek Hizb Natwanin Welami Maselayi Netawayi Bedaynewe* [In Rojhelat only one party can meet the national question], <http://brwska.org/content-114.html>, 2018 (accessed 21 September 2018).

5.1 The Islamic Regime's Approach to Ethnonational Diversity

Analysing the Islamic Republic's approach to Iran's national/religious diversity, is a precondition for understanding the reasons for intensification of the Kurdish movement following the 1979 Revolution. The changing regimes in Tehran have had through the modern history of the country failed in providing the non-Persian national communities with their political and cultural rights. The relations of the last century between Iran's changing regimes and the non-Persian communities, contain several examples of the regime's brutal attacks on the country's Azaris, Kurds, Lurs, Baluchis, Turkemens and Arab communities. A mutually mistrusting relationship between the dominating political regime and these mentioned non-Persian societies, has shaped Iran's modern history of citizenship. These relations became systematically politicized and implemented since Reza Khan's creation of the modern Iranian nation-state in 1925. As argued by Alam Saleh, "in retrospect, tension between Tehran and its ethnic groups began during Reza Shah's nation-state construction process. His son Mohammad Reza Shah, however, continued the same policy when he succeeded his father in 1941".⁴⁷⁷ Since that period, ethnic stratification, with the presence of a dominant core and a marginalized periphery, has been revealed as evident, whereby "the dominant core consists of the Persians of the central Iranian plateau, with groups such as the Kurds, Baluchis and Turkomen constituting the periphery".⁴⁷⁸

The demographic makeup of Iranian society comprises a national and cultural pluralism, in which non-Persian national groups make up more than half of the country's population. Such national diversity has been perceived by the changing regimes in Tehran as a threat to the Iranian state's territorial integrity/security.⁴⁷⁹ As maintained by Nikke Keddie, "some in the central government continue to fear that greater freedom for Sunni worship and for uncontrolled local language use strengthen the ties of these groups with their cross-border co-ethnic group and possibly encourage separatism".⁴⁸⁰ While from the ethnonational societies' perspective their dispute with the core has been a conflict of identity and recognition, conversely the changing regimes in Tehran have viewed the ethnonational demands as representing threats to state security and territorial integrity.

⁴⁷⁷ Saleh, *Ethnic identity and the state in Iran*, 62.

⁴⁷⁸ Entessar, *The Kurdish Mosaic of Discord*, 84.

⁴⁷⁹ Saleh, *Ethnic identity and the state in Iran*, 59-60.

⁴⁸⁰ Nikke Keddie. *Modern Iran Roots and Results of Revolution* (Updated Edition with a section by Yann Richard), (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 313.

The atmosphere following the 1979 Revolution and regime change, led to a short period of intensification of political activity among Iran's ethnonational and religious communities.⁴⁸¹ Among many other non-Persian ethnonational communities, the Kurdish people viewed the Revolution as an opportunity for claiming their rights of socio-political and cultural self-determination. The Revolution provided the Kurdish movement with conditions that, for the first time since the collapse of the Kurdish Republic, allowed the mobilisation of Kurdish society in huge masses, for claiming its demands.

McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly's conception of the *movement* embraces different forms of social contention, such as social movements, revolutions, strike waves, nationalism and democratization.⁴⁸² Based on the formation of the Kurdish movement and its challenge to the changing regimes in Iran, this movement can perhaps be categorised as a *contention of nationalism*, where following the 1979 Revolution, the Kurdish movement framed its claim of national rights by referring to democracy for Iran and *khodmokhtari* (autonomy) for Kurdistan.⁴⁸³ McAdam et al. hold that "nationalism is most often analysed as a sentiment or a belief, but less often as a species of contentious politics"; alternately, they pay particular attention to nationalism as a contention between different actors and agencies within ethnically diverse nation-states.⁴⁸⁴ Chiefly the Kurdish movement following 1979, despite the occurrence of different ideological directions, was framed around national identity, and raised the demand of distinct autonomy for the Kurds. By referring to Kurdish national rights expressed as socio-political and cultural rights formulated under *khodmokhtari*, the leadership of the Kurdish movement deployed nationalism as a form of discourse.⁴⁸⁵

The Kurds took an active part in the Revolution, yet the relationship between the Kurds and the Islamic regime has shown to be challenging and complex. As argued by Entessar, the Kurdish people "saw an unrevealed window of opportunity created by the downfall of the monarchy to push for the autonomy and recognition of their cultural right by the new government in Iran".⁴⁸⁶ Nevertheless, as soon as the new regime succeeded in consolidating its power, it started following a policy of denial toward the country's non-Persian national communities, as had the Pahlavi dynasty, this time however framed

⁴⁸¹ Elling, *Minorities in Iran*, 45.

⁴⁸² McAdam, et al., *Dynamics of Contention*, 4.

⁴⁸³ Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*.

⁴⁸⁴ McAdam, et al., *Dynamics of Contention*, 228.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 229-234.

⁴⁸⁶ Entessar, *Competing national identities*, 193-194.

around a different discourse.⁴⁸⁷ The Islamic regime, like its predecessor, viewed Iran's national/religious diversity as a threat towards its ambition of creating a strong centralist theocratic political regime. Consequently, the regime has since the very early days of its establishment taken a securitized approach to the ethnonational problematic.⁴⁸⁸ By employing different means of coercion and attack on cultural identities, the Islamic regime has forced ethnonational societies to enter the mainstream of the Iranian society.⁴⁸⁹ For instance, after the Revolution, in the Turkmen Sahra region, Khuzestan, and Kurdistan, non-Persian societies raised their wish for administrative and cultural autonomy; these claims met with a harsh reaction from the regime.⁴⁹⁰ The immediate violent reaction of the regime resulted in a new era of multifaceted conflict. To the ears of the Islamic regime's leadership, the ethnonational demands of access to equal rights of citizenship and local autonomy, were provocative and unruly.

By replicating the failed discriminatory and suppressive policy of the Pahlavis, the Islamic regime's approach to this identity-related problematic resulted in furthering grievances and disillusionment among Iran's non-Persian and non-Shiite national and religious communities. Deprived and disillusioned national groups such as the Kurds, Turkmens and Arabs reacted to these conditions by setting up their movements. As explained by Ted Gurr, there is a disturbing nexus between men's reactions and political regime's policies "when men's ideational systems prove inadequate to their purposes, and particularly when they become intensely and irremediably discontented because goals are unattainable by old norms, they are susceptible to new ideas which justify different courses of action".⁴⁹¹

The occurrence and continuation of Iran's national/religious conflict can arguably be traced back to its ruling regimes' attitudes and approaches to this problematic, characterised by the policy of denial of the existence of discrimination and underdevelopment among Iran's peripheral regions. For instance, even though during the reign of the Pahlavis peripheral provinces – e.g., Kurdistan, Ilam, Khuzestan, Sistan and Baluchistan, and Turkmen Sahra – were obviously far less developed than the centre, officials of the Islamic regime have maintained that all regions and areas of the country were equally oppressed under the Pahlavis, and consequently no areas needed to receive special attention after 1979. Act of mismanagement, applying the policy of violence,

⁴⁸⁷ Kreyenbroek & Sperl, *The Kurds A Contemporary Overview*, 150.

⁴⁸⁸ Saleh, *Ethnic identity and the state in Iran*, 15.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 60.

⁴⁹⁰ Keddie, *Modern Iran Roots*, 244-245.

⁴⁹¹ Ted, *Why Men Rebel*, 194.

relying on centralist policies, and officials' deliberately over-exaggerated concerns of territorial disintegration, are among the factors resulting in grievances within the non-Persian national/religious communities, as well as the establishment of several ethnonational/religious movements in Iran.⁴⁹²

Despite the variety of differences between the Kurdish movement and Iran's other ethnonational/religious movements, the shared characteristic of all is that they can be considered products of the misconducted relationship between the central government and these ethnonational/religious communities. By reflecting on the four-decade conflict between the Islamic regime and the country's ethnonational/religious societies, it can arguably be claimed that the change of political regime after 1979 did not offer any positive changes to the status of the non-Persian ethnonational societies.⁴⁹³

The Iranian Kurdish question is an element of this problematic with specific characteristics. What distinguishes the Kurdish movement from other ethnonational movements in Iran's Islamic Republic is related to this movement's extent and degree of challenge to the regime, as well as its means of movement mobilization. Some of the specific hallmarks within the Kurdish movement are related to the intensity and degree of politicization of the Kurdish opposition to the Iranian regime, particularly in the post-revolutionary period and through the 1980s. Due to the fact that the Kurdish movement has been regarded as the greatest ethnonational challenge to the Islamic republic, the regime's securitized approach to the Kurdish region has been highly overt. As argued by Saleh, "In fact, the issue of ethnicity and religion among the Kurds is manifestly politicized. Kurds pose the greatest threat to the state and have the clearest and most valid potential for separatism".⁴⁹⁴

As the Kurds and their leadership in the aftermath of the Revolution clearly raised their claim of political and cultural autonomy, Khomeini and the religious and nationalist fundamentalist circle around him viewed the Kurdish national movement as a serious threat to their authority. Consequently, the movement has been declared as counterrevolutionary conspiracy, sponsored by foreign powers such as the USA and Israel,⁴⁹⁵ and it became subject to the Islamic regime's violent attack. As held by Elling, the Kurdish movement can be characterized as a movement containing elements of ethnic

⁴⁹² Elling, *Minorities in Iran*, 45-47.

⁴⁹³ Romano, *The Kurdish nationalist movement*.

⁴⁹⁴ Saleh, *Ethnic identity and the state in Iran*, 68.

⁴⁹⁵ Shams, *Nationalism, Political Islam and the Kurdish Question in Iran*, 158-160.

nationalist preferences and ethnic autonomy. However, even though these two concepts hold two different meanings, the officials of the Islamic regime treated the Kurdish claim of *khodmokhtari* (autonomy), and communicated it to the Iranian public, as a matter of separatism, highlighting the threat to the integrity of Iranian territory. The greater the threat to the regime represented by the interaction of the communal group's size and the reach of its objectives, the more likely it is that regime's reaction will be repressive.⁴⁹⁶

Nevertheless, what the Kurds claimed was political and cultural autonomy *within* the Iranian state, as a solution that could make peaceful coexistence and diversity possible, because as Entessar maintains, "the concept autonomy is seen as a solution to the political problem of minorities seeking socio-political and economic justice within multi ethnic societies".⁴⁹⁷ The Islamic regime's misrepresentation and twisting was affected quite deliberately by the regime to justify its attack on the Kurdish movement and the rebellion of Kurdish society. The regime has highly been successful in its strategy, because most of the Iranian population have shared the regime's view of those Kurds raising their demands "as traitors in the country's most dire moment".⁴⁹⁸ The regime's reaction to Kurdish demands was extremely violent. Ayatollah Khomeini, under the name of protecting Iran's territorial integrity, warned the Kurdish leaders that his army would use force in crushing the movement. From the early stage of the Kurdish-Tehran conflict, political leaders of the regime followed a hard power policy. The Kurdish demand was neglected, and the Kurdish movement was confronted with a massive military reaction. Khomeini declared *jihad* (a holy war) against the Kurds, and in self-defence the Kurdish political parties initiated an armed struggle against the regime.⁴⁹⁹

In the post-revolutionary period, the Provisional Revolutionary Government under the hegemony of the Khomeinists, appealed to a populist discourse. Immediately after the revolution, Khomeini and the elite around him promised a better future for the people. The high-ranking leaders of the Islamic regime (e.g. Ayatollah Taleqani) during the constitutional drafting process promised the government of the country through local participation and council-based decision-making. Taleqani blamed the Pahlavi regime for mismanaging the country by imposing an Aryan identity, and he promised that there would be no such "fascist demands in the Islamic Republic".⁵⁰⁰ However, assessing the

⁴⁹⁶ Elling, *Minorities in Iran*.

⁴⁹⁷ Entessar quoted in Riamei, *The Kurdish Question: Identity, Representation and the Struggle for Self-Determination*. Chapter 2.

⁴⁹⁸ Romano, *The Kurdish nationalist movement*, 238.

⁴⁹⁹ Saleh, *Ethnic identity and the state in Iran*, 69.

⁵⁰⁰ Elling, *Minorities in Iran*, 57-56.

evolution of the Islamic Republic, its discourse of unity under the leadership of religious jurists, has constituted a political system of *velayat faqih* which can be characterised as fascism.⁵⁰¹

The Islamic Republic has a contradictory and vague relation to nationalism as state ideology. While Khomeini has through his response to the Kurdish claim of *khodmokhtari* for Kurdistan, categorically rejected any proposal of political or cultural rights to the Kurds or any other ethnonational communities in Iran as something superfluous in an Islamic state, he pointed to ethnicism and nationalism as western-produced terms aimed at splitting the Islamic community. In Khomeini's words "they [westerners] create the issue of nationalism, of pan-Arabism, pan-Turkism, and such isms, which are contrary to Islamic doctrines. Their plan is to destroy Islam and the Islamic philosophy".⁵⁰² Based on such an approach, it might be thought that nationalism would have been entirely abandoned in Iran; however Elling holds that "nationalism as a state ideology [was] only *nominally* abandoned in the post-revolutionary political order in Iran [...] Indeed, since Khomeini's death, there has been a marked resurgence in more overtly articulated nationalism in state rhetoric, despite the castigation of exactly such nationalism by Khomeini".⁵⁰³

As an example of controversial use of nationalistic discourse by officials of the Islamic Republic, one can refer to the deployment of Iranian nationalism by Mahmud Ahmadinejad (the sixth Iranian president, 2005-2013) in conducting his populist politics. Contradicting Khomeini's declared view on nationalism, Ahmadinejad during his presidency invoked nationalist sentiments by paying homage to Iran's pre-Islamic history.⁵⁰⁴ This reveals the fact the Islamic Republic suffers from different kinds of contradictions in its relation to the ideology of nationalism. While the regime has continually rejected the claim of national self-determination to the country's non-Persian national communities, in a different context it has strongly relied on branding *Iraneyet* (being Iranian) as a state ideology in unifying the people of Iran. The eight-year Iran-Iraq War was a period of overconsumption of nationalistic discourse promoted by state sponsored media and literature, at the same time as "Iranian nation-building reached its apex".⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰¹ Farhad Khosrokhavar, "The New Intellectuals in Iran", *Social Compass*, 51(2), (2004), 191–202.

⁵⁰² Entessar, *Kurdish Politics in the Middle East*, 34 -35.

⁵⁰³ Elling, *Minorities in Iran*, 83.

⁵⁰⁴ Fozi, *Neo-Iranian Nationalism*.

⁵⁰⁵ Elling, *Minorities in Iran*, 57.

Despite the contradictory rejection and usage of nationalism as state ideology, it can arguably be assumed that the Islamic regime has appealed to an Islamo-nationalist vision⁵⁰⁶ based on a complex and contradictory discourses rooted in the pre- and post-Islamic history of Iran. In spite of the Islamic regime's denial of a nationalistic agenda, a non-secular form of Persian nationalism has been integrated into the Islamic Republic's theoretically-framed political system.⁵⁰⁷ The Islamo-nationalism of the Islamic republic became significant as a response to the profoundly changing geopolitical picture of the 1980s, and as part of the regime's attempt to muster popular support after the 1989 death of Khomeini.⁵⁰⁸ Nationalistic discourses gradually crept into state rhetoric under Ayatollah Khamenei, Rafsanjani, Khatami and Ahmadinejad.⁵⁰⁹ Nevertheless, as asserted by Elling, Khomeini himself aimed at gaining popular support by promoting Iranian nationalism, hidden under the rhetoric of creating a global Muslim community. This was

A nativist response to essentialized Western culture and politics that ultimately is bound up with a particular nation-state and its particularistic concerns, and not, as the idealist had hoped, with the global Muslim community and the universalistic concerns of Islam. In this Islamo-nationalism, the lived political experience of Iran's political isolation in the world fed into state policies of material and spiritual self-sufficiency as well as into popular traditions and histories that explain Iranian identity in exceptionalist and defensive terms.⁵¹⁰

According to Haggai Ram, the Iranian state's "simplistic dichotomies and the contraposition of Islamic identity and national identity have served to present nationalism in the Islamic Republic as a 'deviation' rather than an 'integral part' of official doctrine".⁵¹¹ The attempt of the elites of the Islamic regime to merge the ideals of theocracy and public participation into a coherent whole during their appeal to Iranian nationalism and Shiite fervor as sources of legitimacy, has resulted in the constitution of an exclusionary and discriminative political regime.⁵¹² According to Elling, the system Khomeini and his allies instituted "was in effect discriminative; to Sunni Muslim and non-Muslim communities, its Shiite nature could be perceived as a fundamental, political

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid, 84.

⁵⁰⁷ Ervand Abrahamian. *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1993).

⁵⁰⁸ Eliz Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 120-122.

⁵⁰⁹ Elling, *Minorities in Iran*, 88.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹¹ Ram quoted in Elling, *Minorities in Iran*, 88.

⁵¹² Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, 87-105.

challenge or even an existential threat. Minority proponents soon questioned whether they would fare better under an Islamic Republic than they had under Pahlavi dictatorship”.⁵¹³

Even with the existence of different religious/national minority communities, the disputes and power competition between Shiism and Sunnism, seem to pose a greater challenge to the regime’s survival. In fact the regime views the ethnonational demands as a serious threat to its power and the territorial integrity of the country. Related to this issue, Saleh argues that

The Islamic regime is rather more prepared to recognize religious minorities than ethnic groups. Given the small and fragmented nature of the population of religious minorities, the regime perceives that they do not constitute a threat to the state security, and the regime has been much less sensitive with regard to the religious minorities’ practice of their traditions, worship, customs, and languages than with regard to those of Muslim ethnic minority groups.⁵¹⁴

The explanation for such a regime attitude is that firstly, religious minority communities compose a relatively small percentage of the total population of Iran. For instance, Christians form only less than two percent of the total population, and are spread over many different regions. Secondly, religious minorities are not considered as crossborder groups – as many of the ethnonational communities are – and many members of the religious minority communities tend to migrate abroad in order to have a better life with freedom to practice their beliefs.⁵¹⁵ As the populations of the Iranian non-Muslim minority groups are far below the Muslim population, they do not pose a grave security threat to the regime and its ideology, as for instance the nationalistic demands of the Azari and Kurds would do. Consequently, the regime’s sensitivity to the religious communities is less critical, which however does not necessarily mean that the regime is more prone to allow these communities to practice their religion in the way they wish. For instance, one can refer to the Bahai, a small religious minority group suffering massively from the Islamic regime’s arbitrary violence, persecution, suppression and discrimination.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹³ Elling, *Minorities in Iran*, 45-46.

⁵¹⁴ Saleh, *Ethnic identity and the state in Iran*, 29-30.

⁵¹⁵ Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*.

⁵¹⁶ Thomas Schirrmacher, “Iran: Suppression of religious freedom and persecution of religious minorities”, *IJRF* Vol 2:1, (2009), 111-130.

5.1.1 The Islamic Regime's Failed Promise of Equality

Among many other promises, providing Iranian citizens regardless of their ethnicity and religious affiliation with their socio-political and cultural rights, was among the major promises Khomeini expressed after his return from exile in 1979: "this society, the exact opposite of Pahlavi Iran, would be free of want, hunger, unemployment, slums, inequality, illiteracy [...] It would be a society based on equality, fraternity, and social justice".⁵¹⁷ The regime has, despite its promise of providing equality and prosperity to the Iranian people, from the very first days of its establishment shown that it does not have the capacity to live up to the expectations of the non-Persian and non-Shiite/non-Muslim national and religious communities. The Khomeinists failed to build a trusting relationship between the state and ethnonational and religious minorities. For instance, the Islamic regime's militarization of Kurdistan and the poor economic conditions of the already underdeveloped region (as the most disadvantaged region of Iran), reveals the regime's promise of equality to the Kurds was replaced by the deployment of a massive military action in Kurdistan.⁵¹⁸

The Islamic regime's leaders never genuinely desired a peaceful solution for the Kurdish question, and by 1980 all dialogue had broken down due to the unwillingness of the regime. Disillusion, the need of self-defence and absence of alternative options, pushed the Kurdish movement into guerrilla warfare and armed insurgency. While the KDPI and Komala demanded political autonomy, they never championed separation from Iran. Nevertheless, Khomeini maintained throughout the crisis that he was fighting counter-revolutionary and separatist groups.⁵¹⁹

5.2 The Post-Revolutionary Era's Restoration of the Kurdish Movement

The restoration of the Kurdish movement following the Iranian Revolution can chiefly be asserted as a product of the abovementioned attitude and approach of the Islamic Republic to national and religious diversity. The presence of the identity-related problematic through the (almost) four-decade Islamic reign has deep roots in the history of nation-state building and the Iranian ruling elite's attitude towards the non-Persian ethnonational

⁵¹⁷ Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*, 32.

⁵¹⁸ Romano, *The Kurdish nationalist movement*, 241.

⁵¹⁹ Elling, *Minorities in Iran*, 47-48.

societies and their demands of equal share of power and equal access to citizenship. According to Hamit Bozarslan, “the Kurdish problem is linked, as its roots, to the legal and political of ethnic, ‘macro-ethnic’, and ‘national’ groups without a state”.⁵²⁰ As highlighted by Bozarslan, the Kurds from a demographic perspective constitute a territorial majority across the Kurdistan area, “yet they form a minority in the etymological sense of the term, for they are excluded from ‘majority statuses’”.⁵²¹

As argued by McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, in analysing any movement “understanding the mix of factors that give rise to a movement is the oldest, and arguably the most important, question in the field”.⁵²² In the case of the Iranian Kurdish struggle, the movement was an already established struggle. The Pahlavi regime’s massive militarization of the Iranian Kurdistan on one hand, and the failure of the attempt at re-establishing the movement in the 1960s (as discussed in the previous chapter) on the other, meant that the Kurdish movement led by the KDPI went into a long period of hibernation. However, the 1979 Revolution provided the Kurdish movement with new framing prospects as a spatial, political and resource opportunity. Charles Tilly’s theoretical approach to collective action, identified as ‘dynamic statism’, focuses on how changes of conditions (re)produce political opportunities for collective action.⁵²³ This approach “allows us to specify political opportunity for different actors and sectors, to track its changes over time, and to place the analysis of social movements in their increasingly transnational setting”.⁵²⁴ Tilly states that all collective action is power and politics, where there “inevitably raises questions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, hope and hopelessness”.⁵²⁵ In line with the emergence of the popular Revolution in 1979, the framing opportunities⁵²⁶ for the Kurdish challenge improved.

According to the theory of social and national movements, political opportunities, mobilizing structures and framing processes, are the most significant concepts. Argued by Tilly, McAdam and Tarrow, “social movements and revolutions are shaped by the broader set of political constraints and opportunities unique to the national context in which they are embedded”.⁵²⁷ Any environmental factor that facilitates movement activity can be conceptualized as a political opportunity. Theoretical approaches to

⁵²⁰ Bozarslan, *Kurds: states, marginality and security*, 101-102.

⁵²¹ *Ibid*, 102.

⁵²² McAdam, et al., *Comparative perspectives on social movements*, 7.

⁵²³ Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*.

⁵²⁴ McAdam et al. *Comparative perspectives on social movements*, 45-46.

⁵²⁵ Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 5-6.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid*, 7.

⁵²⁷ McAdam et al., *Comparative perspectives on social movements*, 2-3.

mobilizing structures “break with grievance-based conceptions of social movements and to focus instead on mobilization processes and the formal organizational manifestations of these processes”.⁵²⁸ The term mobilization is associated with the process by which a group moves from being a passive collection of individuals to a politically active participant in public life.⁵²⁹

The abolition of the Pahlavi dynasty and the encouraging circumstances in the Kurdish region, allowed the actors and organizations of the Kurdish movement to frame their demands and mobilize their opposition to the Islamic regime and its value system.⁵³⁰ At the beginning of the Revolution, the Iranian Kurdish movement appeared as a mature nationalistic movement with specified goals, discourse and leadership. Koohi-Kamali, referring to Miroslav Hroch’s classification of the evolution of different stages of movements, assumes the Kurdish movement to have reached to its third and final phase. In this stage, “the majority of the ethnic population come to active understanding of their national identity and participated in the national movement, thus forming a mass movement”.⁵³¹ Whether the movement was mature and nationalistic or not is debatable; however, the important element is that the movement enjoyed the massive support of Kurds, and its demands had deep roots in the Kurdish society’s desire for liberation. When applying the theory of revolution, or social or national movements onto the Iranian Kurdish national movement, it can be claimed that the Kurdish movement as a long-term process has been/is a product of a combination of several factors affecting the emergence of collective and popular-based actions.

The presence of several cultural and political opportunities increased the likelihood of movement activity among the Kurdish people. This increase was a product of a combination of factors⁵³² such as, suddenly imposed grievances, the dramatization of a system’s vulnerability/illegitimacy, and the potential for and availability of an innovative ‘master frame’ that provided the subsequent challengers with map and guidelines expressing and demonstrating their own grievances and demands.⁵³³ As highlighted by McAdam et al., opportunities are expected to play a major role in creating the ongoing fortunes of the movement: “movements may largely be born of environmental

⁵²⁸ Ibid, 3.

⁵²⁹ Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 69.

⁵³⁰ Romano, *The Kurdish nationalist movement*, 109.

⁵³¹ Farideh Koohi-Kamali, *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran Pastoral Nationalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 173.

⁵³² Keddie, *Modern Iran Roots*, 249-256.

⁵³³ McAdam et al., *Comparative perspectives on social movements*, 25.

opportunities, but their fate is heavily shaped by their own actions. Specifically, it is the formal organizations who purport to speak for the movement, who increasingly dictate the course, content, and outcomes of the struggle”.⁵³⁴ The Kurdish movement was, according to Koohi-Kamali, a product of the so-called political opportunity which emerged following the collapse of the Pahlavi monarchy:

Decades after the collapse of the Kurdish Republic, the Kurdish nationalist leaders in Iran found very little opportunity to openly express their demands for autonomy. The movement went underground. It was during the revolution of 1979 in Iran that Kurds voiced their opposition to the Shah’s system and asked for political/cultural and, to some degree, economic autonomy.⁵³⁵

Nevertheless, the direction the movement took, how it developed, and whether or not the movement has been able to transform this opportunity to further the Kurdish claim, are issues that will be highlighted through the following analysis.

The Kurdish misfortune became evidently clear short after regime change and the 1979-1980s clashes between the Kurdish movement and the Islamic regime. The complex Kurdish-regime relation shaped frames, and resulted in a wide-ranging bloody conflict in which “an estimated 50,000 Kurds lost their lives [from] 1978-88, which includes the Iran-Iraq War, and the Kurdish movement never reached its objective of autonomy”.⁵³⁶ However, the popularized discourse of the movement has succeeded in the further politicization of Kurdish nationalism whereby *Kurdayêti* and the idea of distinctiveness of the Kurdish identity, became the dominant ideology of the Kurdish struggle.

As maintained by Tilly, “the main determinants of a group's mobilization are its organization, its interest in possible interaction with other contenders the current opportunity/threat of those interactions and the group's subjection to repression [...] a group’s subjection to repression is mainly a function of the sort of interest it represents”.⁵³⁷ The return of the exiled KDPI,⁵³⁸ and the announcement of Komala’s official activity, had considerable impact in mobilizing the Kurdish discontent during and after 1979. Through the post-revolutionary days, Kurdish discontent showed itself to be intensely politicized, with dedication and strong loyalty among its members.⁵³⁹ The

⁵³⁴ Ibid, 15.

⁵³⁵ Koohi-Kamali, *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran*, 43.

⁵³⁶ Elling, *Minorities in Iran*, 48.

⁵³⁷ Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 56.

⁵³⁸ Vali, “Sekot-e Rojhelat”, 117.

⁵³⁹ Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, 276.

massive involvement of the masses in innovating resistance strategies/activities and mobilizing civil disobedience actions in Kurdistan, are examples of the presence of strong political orientation and loyalty to the Kurdish movement within Iranian Kurdish society.

Despite differences in the ideology of the leading organizations of the movement, a strong common understanding and shared goal for the movement during the early period of the dispute toward the revolutionary government in Tehran is identifiable. This goal consensus and cooperative interaction⁵⁴⁰ among members and organizations participating in the movement raised the efficiency of the movement in claiming the demand of *khodmokhtari*. The movement represented a cohesiveness of dissident groups and presence of a satisfactory level of interaction and mutual reinforcement of perceptions of deprivation and demands for action within the participants of the movement.⁵⁴¹ Nader Entessar, focusing on the general narrative behind the Kurds' participation in the 1979 Revolution, articulates this Kurdish movement as an integral part of the anti-authoritarian, anti-imperialist and pro-democratic movements initiated by different forces in Iran in the 1970s: "the Kurds of Iran have certainly been an integral part of this struggle, and they have largely framed their demands for recognition of their socio-political and cultural rights within the broader context of a democratic and decentralized Iran".⁵⁴²

However, Entessar criticizes the constructivist's approach to the Kurdish question in Iran, as a movement barely based on differences of ethnic identification. According to Entessar, while the constructivist argument provides nuanced explanation of issues that involve identity formation, they are suffering from their lack of focus on the Kurdish question from a securitization of ethnic conflict. From his perspective, the Kurdish question is a product of the Iranian state's securitization of its ethnic issues. Through this frame of securitization, the Iranian government has adopted a policy that asserts the recognition of ethnic rights or autonomy, as tantamount to secession. Consequently "the so-called Kurdish problem in the Islamic Republic of Iran has been first and foremost the product of the state's policies that have consistently securitized ethnic issues and have failed to institute a desecuritized approach to nationality issues since the Islamic revolution".⁵⁴³

Tehran's use of accusations of separatism in dealing with the ethnic issue, according to Saleh is a matter of justifying "the violent quelling of ethnic movements and [...] the

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid, 284.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid, 287.

⁵⁴² Entessar, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, 211.

⁵⁴³ Ibid, 212.

execution of those engaged in such activities”.⁵⁴⁴ The Kurdish leadership has time after time sought to emphasize that their claim has nothing to do with separatism; for instance, on several occasions Ghassemlou stated clearly “let me make one thing clear: no political forces in Iranian Kurdistan want to secede from Iran. Our demands are framed within the context of the Iranian state”.⁵⁴⁵

While the Kurdish region suffers massively from the Islamic regime’s securitization, this policy is not a new phenomenon introduced by the Islamic Republic. Through the modern history of Iran, changing regimes in Tehran have followed a militaristic approach to the Kurds, and as a result a strong feeling of injustice and discrimination among the Kurdish people has further cemented the notion of a separate Kurdish identity.⁵⁴⁶ This feeling of a distinguishing identity has meant that, from the Kurdish perspective, only achieving self-determination⁵⁴⁷ would guarantee the Kurds rights and protect the Kurdish society from the arbitrary use of power practiced by the ruling regime of Iran. The state’s securitization of ethnonational demands has one aim, yet it has been enforced through different mechanisms, as Saleh writes:

The state’s constitutional and legal control aims to prevent belligerent ethnic activities. These legal controls include the elimination of ethnic elites via the use of legal justifications. Although there is no article addressing the matter of ethnic parties, the regime bans, de facto, any ethnicity-based political parties. Ethnic elites and political activities faces arrest and execution. Ethnic groups therefore feel antagonized by the state’s ethnic policies and pursue their demands for an increase in their socioeconomic and political rights. The Islamic Republic of Iran, on the other hand, uses force to tackle such ethnic movements. Violence begets violence.⁵⁴⁸

In addition to the theoretical incompatibility of ideologies between the Islamic Republic and the nationalist movement, there are other, even stronger divisions. The root of the conflict between the Islamic regime and Kurdish nationalism is not the supposed universalism of Islam, but rather the Islamic Republic’s continued attachment (which it shares with the government of the late Shah) to the boundaries of the nation-state called Iran, and its fear of threats to the integrity of that state. It was this fear that led to the assassination of Ghassemlou in Vienna in 13 July 1989, while he and two other Kurds

⁵⁴⁴ Saleh, *Ethnic identity and the state in Iran*, 141.

⁵⁴⁵ Entessar, *Kurdish Politics in the Middle East*, 39.

⁵⁴⁶ Elling, *Minorities in Iran*, 35-36.

⁵⁴⁷ Koochi-Kamali, *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran*, 99.

⁵⁴⁸ Saleh, *Ethnic identity and the state in Iran*, 140-141.

were in the process of negotiating a peaceful solution for the Kurdish question with the Islamic Regime's so-called diplomats.⁵⁴⁹

5.3 Revolution in Iran, War in Kurdistan

Historical reflection on the short post-revolutionary period in Kurdistan provides an in-depth insight into the multiple groups' actions and their relations with each other over a substantial period of time. A historical perspective of a conflict, such as the Kurdish question in Iran, is rich and relevant for analysing movements. In Tilly's words, "historical analysis, taken seriously, will help us fashion more adequate models of power struggles [...] Collective action, contention, and struggles for political power are especially likely to leave their traces in the historian's raw materials".⁵⁵⁰

The overthrow of the Pahlavi regime was a product of the self-organized collective actions of the people of different parts of Iran, including the Kurdish people. The Kurdish people due to their history of subjugation and hardship at the hands of the Pahlavi regime, viewed regime change as an unrivalled opportunity for coming a step closer to the realization of their dream of self-determination. In Entessar's words, "after years of suppression by the Shah's regime, it was natural that the Kurds would enthusiastically support the Iranian Revolution of 1978-1979. In fact, a broad spectrum of the Kurdish population participated in the revolutionary process from the outset".⁵⁵¹ Naturally, the Kurds wished to claim their share of the political change in Iran. With such an approach to regime change, the Kurds following the immediate days of the revolution mobilized their acts of self-governance in the Kurdish-populated cities.⁵⁵² Aimed at avoiding chaos and preparing for a new era of Kurdish movement, a combination of actors from the Kurdish civil society, grassroots organizations and political parties initiated the first act of political self-rule by electing members to the *shorayi shar* (the city councils).

Apart from the regime change, the socio-political and cultural impact of which was expected for the entire country, for the Kurdish people the revolution resulted into two major developments: firstly, following the revolution the evolution of a new era of the Kurdish liberation movement; and secondly, the conflicting relations between the Kurds

⁵⁴⁹ Kreyenbroek and Sperl, *The Kurds A Contemporary Overview*, 150.

⁵⁵⁰ Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 231-232.

⁵⁵¹ Entessar, *Kurdish Politics in the Middle East*, 34-35.

⁵⁵² Encouraged by Shaikh Ezzedin Hosseini, the *shorayi shar* in Mahabad was established and initiated its activities on February 12 1979 (also the day after the official announcement for the victory of the revolution). Gowhari (2011a), *Rojhelati Kurdistan le de Sal da*, 91.

and the newly established ruling elite in Tehran which turned Kurdistan into a battlefield. Victory in this conflict became a priority for the newly-established Islamic regime with its ambition of enforcing centralization and absolute rule of religion.⁵⁵³

McAdam et al.'s policy-specific opportunity model for analysing collective action and socio-political movements, touches upon the question of "how the policy and institutional environment channels collective action around particular issues and with what consequences".⁵⁵⁴ While the Islamic regime short after its establishment succeeded in consolidating its power in the major parts of the country,⁵⁵⁵ Kurdistan was an exception. There, the regime was struggling with enforcing its authority. Controlling the situation in Kurdistan became a strategic and symbolic task, with an effect on the regime's capability of enforcement of its authority in other parts of the country. The fear that "Kurdistan would turn into a source of inspiration and a safe haven for other opposition groups",⁵⁵⁶ encouraged the regime to act immediately and aggressively. Through the following weeks and months, the revolution in Kurdistan witnessed actions and events unseen in other parts of the country. Among some of those developments were the KDPI's first official meeting in Mahabad shortly after the Revolution after decades of exile and clandestine activity;⁵⁵⁷ Komala, which before the Revolution acted as an informal political organization (*teshkilat*) announced its official activity;⁵⁵⁸ Kurds in different cities selected their *shorayi shar* (city councils); police stations and military garrisons were controlled by civilians;⁵⁵⁹ several grassroots organizations and civil society unions (e.g.

⁵⁵³ Seyedi, Hemen. *Newroz-e Khonin-e Sanandaj* [The Bloody Newruz of Sanadaj], March 23. 2018, third track. <https://soundcloud.com/hemn-seyedi/5hhbjqr4kpc> (accessed 6 June 2018).

⁵⁵⁴ McAdam et al. *Comparative perspectives on social movements*. Unlike conventional forms of participation, collective action has the unusual characteristic that it can demonstrate to others the possibilities of collective action, and offer even resource-poor groups opportunities that are not predictable from their structural positional opportunities, 42.

⁵⁵⁵ Kreyenbroek and Sperl, *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, 150.

⁵⁵⁶ Saman R. Saheb, *28 Mordad Salgard-e Hamle be Azadihay-e Mardoom-e Kurdistan* [August 19, 1979: The anniversary of the attack on the freedom of the people of Kurdistan] <http://www.komala.org/farsy/drejawtar.aspx?NusarID=4&Jmara=7> (accessed 16 April 2018).

⁵⁵⁷ During the Great Meeting in Mahabad (to an audience of 200,000), Ghassemlou announced the official activity of KDPI after decades of clandestine and exile-based activity. During this meeting, with the presence of national and international journalists, he emphasised that "freedom and democracy in Iran, without providing freedom and democracy to the Kurdish people, will not be gained. On the other hand, the Kurdish struggle will not gain any achievements, without freedom in Iran". *Ettelaat* March 3, 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 1. Volume, Volume: Doctor Abdulrahman Ghassemlou and Kurdistan, 3. https://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/gunagun-ketab-Akhbar_Kurdestan_01.pdf.

According to *Ettelaat*, this meeting was a political maneuver, showing the central government that "if it [the central government] rejects the Kurdish demand, the Kurdish people are able to react and take action". *Ettelaat* ^{March 3,} 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 1. Volume, 3.

⁵⁵⁸ Mostafa Sultani, et al. *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*, 22.

⁵⁵⁹ Gowhari (2011a), *Rojhelati Kurdistan le de Sal da*, 89.

the Unions of the Revolutionary Kurdish Women, the Teachers of Kurdistan, the Unemployed, etc.)⁵⁶⁰ were established; and a new phase of the conflict between peasants and feudal landlords opened.⁵⁶¹

These developments were together products of the opportunity resulting from the regime change in Iran. Based on Tilly's mobilization theory, it can be argued that suddenly the Kurdish society moved from a passive collection of individuals, to a politically active participant in public life.⁵⁶² The combination and correlation between the emergence of new windows of opportunity, the structure of the mobilization, and the constitution of new organizations, together increased the politicization of the Kurdish society and paved the way for Kurds to act publicly and politically.⁵⁶³ Through these chaotic days, ethnic sectarian clashes and massacres took place in different areas of Kurdistan. In cities such as Naqhadah and Uromiye which have a mixed ethnic demographic composition, mainly made up of Kurds and Azeris, fundamentalist groups of the Azaris (e.g. those under the leadership of Molla Hassani a conservative Azari clergy), in cooperation with the Iranian Army and other conservative elements of the regime (the so-called *Mojahedin*)⁵⁶⁴ conducted massacres against Kurdish civilians in different villages like Qarne and Qelatan.⁵⁶⁵

Despite this, the Kurdish region experienced a hitherto unseen trend of adopting a range of innovative acts of resistance and civil disobedience. Studying the acts of the Kurdish civil society and grassroots organizations through the short post-revolutionary period shows that, through this period, Kurdistan experienced a flourishing of civil society with many examples of collective action. An example among many others is the *kochi mejoyi Mariwan* (the exodus of Mariwan)⁵⁶⁶ and the Kurdish masses' solidarity (strikes, marches and rallies) with it.⁵⁶⁷ As held by Gamson and Meyer, "opportunities

⁵⁶⁰ Eskandari. *Didgahha Beraye Qatea Namayi 8 Madayi Mahabad*.

⁵⁶¹ Following the Revolution, many of the previous feudal lords of Kurdistan that had been forced to distribute part of their land to the peasants by the Shah, threatened the peasants to take the land back. They claimed that "since they had been forced to give the land to the peasants, the Shah's land reform was illegal and against Islamic rules". *Kayhan* April 7, 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 9. Volume, Qarne[e] and the Revolution, 2. https://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/gunagun-ketab-Akhbar_Kurdestan_09.pdf.

⁵⁶² Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 69.

⁵⁶³ McAdam et al., *Comparative perspectives on social movements*, 35.

⁵⁶⁴ This is not a reference to the *Mojahedin-e khalq*. The label *Mojadehin* was initially applied to the *Pasdaran*, today's *Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab* (Islamic Revolutionary Guard/IRGC).

⁵⁶⁵ Mahdi Behadoriyan in *Kayhan* 15 September 1979, Archive of Behzad Khoshhali, 9. Volume, 6.

⁵⁶⁶ Qazi, *Interview with Mansour Tayfuri on Kurdish exodus of 1979 in Mariwan*.

⁵⁶⁷ Kawe Quraishi, *Inqelab-e 57 ve Tejrobey-e Nehadhay-e Demokratik dar Kurdistan* [the 1979 Revolution and the Experience of Democratic Institutions in Kurdistan], 2018. <http://agora.iranacademia.com/archives/1415> (accessed 10 June 2018).

open the way for political action, but movements also make opportunities”.⁵⁶⁸ As has been highlighted throughout this chapter, the post-revolutionary phase of the Iranian Kurdish movement was first and foremost a product of the regime change in Iran.

There were two notable categories of Kurdish achievements resulting from the windows of opportunity in this period. One was the relatively short-term achievement of the flourishing civil society and establishment of different categories of collective civil disobedience activities, and the other is the long-term achievement related to the politicization and institutionalization of the Kurdish claim of *khodmokhtari*.

Referring to the Gamson and Meyer’s assumptions, one may ask whether the Kurdish movement following the Revolution capitalised on the opportunities to strengthen the Kurdish position. This is a question that will be dealt with through this and the following chapter. However, before dealing with the means of resistance and movement mobilization framed by the Kurds, it is essential to identify the roots of the emergence of the four-decade Kurdish-regime conflict.

5.4 *Khodmokhtari*: The Focal Point of dispute

The framing process, a mediator between different factors, leaves an impact on the initial period of collective setting, sustainability and development of collective action. According to McAdam et al., the framing process is “the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action”.⁵⁶⁹ The political elites of the Kurdish movement framed their demands for a future Kurdistan within a new Iranian political system around the concept of *khodmokhtari* (autonomy) for Iranian Kurdistan, and a democratic and secular political system regarding the diverse national and religious nature of Iran, as a guarantee for peace and coexistence.

Whilst following the Revolution Khomeini became a central figure for the Iranian revolutionary groups (leftist, secular, nationalists and Islamist) in Tehran, support to Khomeini and his ideological stance was absent in Kurdistan, and despite Khomeini’s uplifting promises,⁵⁷⁰ his populist discourse did not caught the Kurdish people’s attention.⁵⁷¹ Instead, in this period the Kurdish movement’s demand of *khodmokhtari*

⁵⁶⁸ McAdam et al., *Comparative perspectives on social movements*, 35.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid, 6.

⁵⁷⁰ Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*, 32.

⁵⁷¹ Seyedi, *Newroz-e Khonin-e Sanandaj*.

became the core element of the disputed Kurdish-Tehran relationship. This demand revealed a challenge to Khomeini's ambition of creating a strong centralist theocratic regime. The core values of the deeply politicized Kurdish movement were framed around the claims of access to the right of self-determination, establishing a free and secular society, and improving the living conditions of the disadvantaged people in the Kurdish region. Khomeini's ambition of creating a new political system lacked the values highlighted by the Kurdish movement. Despite the fact that the majority of Kurdish society are Sunni Muslims and the religious leaders of the Kurds (e.g. Sheikh Ezzedin Hosseini)⁵⁷² have always been crucial elements of the Kurdish movement, this movement has been relatively secular, and the Islamization of Kurdistan has not been the desire and motivation of the majority of the Kurds for their participation in and contribution to the revolution.

As a cultural toolkit, Kurdish identity has prevailed over Islam and Sunnism. The statements of Shaikh Ezzedin Hosseini bear witness to the fact that Kurds throughout the Revolution expressed and emphasized the desire for self-rule through nationalistic and secular discourses, rather than religious articulations, which were in conflict with regime's theocratic ideology. Despite Khomeini's and Sheikh Ezzedin's belief in the same religion, they deployed religion to frame contrary arguments. Shaikh Ezzedin's basic argument revolved around the contention that Ayatollah Khomeini used an Islamic veneer to pursue an Iranian nationalist state policy. Such a policy did not deviate far from the Shah's approach to the Kurds.⁵⁷³ Shaikh Ezzedin in response to the authoritarian approach deployed by the regime, claimed that *mar doom Qayom nemikhahed* (the people do not need a guardian).⁵⁷⁴ In Hemen Seyedi's words, "the Kurdish people did not join the Revolution to achieve the Islamization of the Kurdish society. For Kurdistan, the national and class issues were the main motivations for joining the revolution".⁵⁷⁵ Khomeini and the religious-nationalist fundamentalist circle around him were aware of the friction between values, and viewed the Kurdish movement as a serious threat to their

⁵⁷² Sheikh Ezzedin Hosseini (1922-2011) was a Kurdish spiritual leader and the Friday Prayer leader in Mahabad. Before the 1979 Revolution, he led protests against the Shah's government. In the early years after the Revolution, Sheikh Ezzedin was a principal Kurdish negotiator and enjoyed the support of Komala. He had a strong belief in the need for establishing a secular society and political system, in order to be able to achieve the modernization of society. He died in February 2011 in Sweden where he had spent the prior 20 years living in exile. Scribd, *Haunted Memories: The Islamic Republic's Executions of Kurds in 1979*. <https://www.scribd.com/document/194130625/Sheikh-Ezzedin-Hosseini> (accessed 25 Amy 2018).

⁵⁷³ Romano, *The Kurdish nationalist movement*, 235-236.

⁵⁷⁴ Archive of Behzad Khoshhali, 4. Volume, Shaikh Ezzadin Hossaini and Kurdistan, 31. https://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/gunagun-ketab-Akhbar_Kurdestan_04.pdf.

⁵⁷⁵ Seyedi, *Newroz-e Khonin-e Sanandaj*.

power; therefore, they used maximum violence in quelling the Kurdish demands of *khodmokhtari* and democracy.

With the Kurdish movement's autonomist demand, and the newly established regime's zero-tolerance policy of this claim, they very soon established a conflicting relationship to each other. Kurdistan became subject of the regime's heavy military attacks and events as the *Newruz-i Khwenawi Sna* (the Bloody Nowruz of Sanandaj, 18-30 March 1979)⁵⁷⁶ and the *Shari Se Mange* (the Three-Month Battle, August-December 1979)⁵⁷⁷ as examples of the regime's systematic attacks on Kurdistan, have been added to the memory of the Kurdish movement. The first attack laid the basis for subsequent Kurdish-Islamic regime relations. This attack revealed two realities at once: firstly, the brutal nature of the new Iranian regime's elite, and secondly the regime's attitude and approach to the people's claim of self-determination. Khomeini was very determined to deal harshly with any opposition groups and critical attitudes, and from the moment of his arrival he ordered his forces to turn Iran into a 'graveyard' for his opponents.⁵⁷⁸ Khomeini's rigid and reactionary attitude to criticism was a disappointment to those who had joined the Revolution to create a free and democratic society.⁵⁷⁹

The Kurdish people, similar to the Turkmens, Baluchis and Khozestanis, expressed their opposition to Khomeini's authoritarian agenda. However, the Kurdish opposition to Khomeinism resulted in a *Fatwa of Jihad*⁵⁸⁰ (an Islamic decree of a holy war against non-Muslims) issued by Khomeini against the Kurdish people.⁵⁸¹ Khomeini's hostility towards the Kurds was revealed when he cancelled the membership of Ghassemlou in the Assembly of Experts, designated Ghassemlou and Sheikh Ezzedin as enemies of the Islamic Republic and *mofised fil arz* (corrupters of the earth), and banned and denounced the KDPI as "the party of Satan".⁵⁸² While the Kurdish movement endeavoured to

⁵⁷⁶ Khoshhali, Behzad. *Joziyati derbarey-e jang-e se mahe-e Kurdistan* [some details about the three months war in Kurdistan], 2013. <http://www.kurdistanmedia.com/farsi/idame/10625> (accessed 15 March 2018).

⁵⁷⁷ Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zende*, 143.

⁵⁷⁸ Nikraftar, Kiumarc. *Jang-e Panj Roze-ye Paweh, Lashker kasha-e Khomaini be Paweh bray Tasweb-e welayet-e faqih ve Payehaye- An* [Paweh's Five-Day War, Khomeini's military campaign in Kurdistan aimed at enforcing *Velayet-e faqih*], 2017. <https://kiumarce.com/main/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/jangeh-paveh-v2-2-1.pdf>, 11.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 21-22.

⁵⁸⁰ A fatwa is any religious decision made by a mufti (Islamic scholar who is an interpreter or expounder of Islamic law). The most infamous fatwa is the one by Ruhollah Khomeini sentencing the British novelist Salman Rushdie to death, although not all fatwas are such sentences.

⁵⁸¹ Nikraftar, *Jang-e Panj Roze-ye Paweh*, 24.

⁵⁸² Romano, *The Kurdish nationalist movement*, 237 & Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, 26-27.

improve the rights of the Kurdish people, Khomeini was obsessed with a system of order that served his Islamic ideology.⁵⁸³

Khomeini adopted a strategy of destroying the Kurdish movement through creating internal division and fragmenting it into insignificant pieces, for instance when he declared a so-called amnesty in October 1979 for any leaving the Komala and KDPI, also not applying to Ghassemlou and Sheikh Ezzedin.⁵⁸⁴ This strategy of Khomeini shows that the policies of divide and rule, attacking the Kurdish leadership and excluding a whole nation from their rights, have from the early moments of the regime's establishment been calculated considerably by its elite. By reflecting on the four-decade reign of the Islamic regime, it is clear that it was not just the Kurdish demands of *khodmokhtari* and its threat to the territorial integrity that bothered the elites of the Islamic regime, but the ideology of the Kurdish movement which was framed around democratic values of secularism, considering the national and cultural diversity of the country, and decentralizing political decision-making. These were the major issues with which the Islamic regime would not compromise.

Ted Gurr's 'integrated theoretical' approach to political violence and uprisings includes psychological and societal variables with potential for conducting collection action. Gurr bases his reasoning for the emergence of conflict on the relationship between society and the regime/state authorities, in deploying the concept of Relative Deprivation (RD). In Gurr's words, RD

is a perceived discrepancy between men's value expectations and their value capabilities. Value expectations are the goods and the conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled. Value capabilities are the goods and conditions they think they are capable of attaining or maintaining, given the social means available to them [...and] the greater the extent and intensity of discontent present in a society the more likely is emerging violence.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸³ This is a reference to a conversation between Khomeini and Shaikh Ezzedin, in which Khomeini said "What I am asking from you is the security of Kurdistan", whilst Shaikh Ezzedin's responded, "What I ask from you is autonomy for Kurdistan" Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, 33-34. This conversation can be interpreted in different ways; however, it does show that there are some interdependent variables between peace and security in Kurdistan: improving/guaranteeing the security of Kurdistan, is preconditioned on providing the Kurds with the right of autonomy, a cause they have fought for a century.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ettelaat* October 12, 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 14. Volume, *Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab [IRGC] and Kurdistan*, 72. https://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/gunagun-ketab-Akhbar_Kurdestan_14.pdf

⁵⁸⁵ Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, 12-13.

Gurr's concept of RD offers an analytical explanation for why and who miscondacted state policy, which with other issues contributed to dissatisfaction that would lead to the emergence of conflict. The Kurdish movement is a result of a combination of different forms of dissatisfactions and deprivations, politicized and emphasized through a century of insurgency, civil disobedience and other forms of collective actions. The potential of RD is greatest in a nation most of whose citizens feel sharply deprived with respect to their most deeply valued goals.⁵⁸⁶ According to Gurr, the initial stage in analysing collective political discontent requires assessing the scope and the conditions under which discontent occur.⁵⁸⁷

One aspect of RD is related to value differences and value expectations within discontent groups. Gurr measures values as key factors in the occurrence of RD and its interaction with political violence. Welfare, power, and interpersonal values are the desired values for which men strive. The lack of these values are the main sources of politicized deprivation within groups, and minority communities' challenge to their superiors.⁵⁸⁸ Reflecting on the historical development of the Kurdish movement provides a picture of a deprived people which has suffered massively from state-sponsored discrimination and exclusion from access to welfare and decision-making. Yildiz and Taysi maintain that in general, due to ongoing discriminatory state activities, the Kurds of Iran have experienced a lack of representation within political and military institutions, the denial of language rights and the underdevelopment of their region leading to economic marginalisation.⁵⁸⁹ As stated by Gurr, "discontent over lack of participatory values is frequently expressed in demands for greater political participation and agitation for regional autonomy".⁵⁹⁰

The major part of the literature of the post-revolutionary Iranian Kurdish movement has recognised the contribution of *khodmokhtari* as the only reason for the lack of a settlement of the Kurdish question, and it has largely failed in analysing the other side of the coin, the nature of the Islamic regime. For instance, Entessar points to the vagueness of the term *khodmokhtari* as an issue having an effect on the direction of the national movement of Kurds: "one of the vexing problems regarding the realization of Kurdish self-determination involved the meaning of the term 'autonomy', which in Persian is referred to as *Khodmokhtari*. The Persian term has a negative connotation: it equates

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid, 92.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid, 86-87.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid, 25.

⁵⁸⁹ Yildiz and Taysi, *The Kurds in Iran*, 51.

⁵⁹⁰ Gurr, *Why men rebel*, 90.

autonomy with secession and total independence”.⁵⁹¹ Even though demarcating the border of Kurdistan is a difficult task and in this regard a challenge for deciding where the *khodmokhtar* region would cover. However, there are several factors that challenge this argument.

Firstly, the Kurdish leadership repeatedly highlighted their loyalty to the territorial integrity of the Iranian state, and several times reconceptualised and adjusted their demand and compromised on its content. As time passed, the Kurdish demand shrank to *khodgerdani*, the lowest level of regional self-rule. In addition, both Shaikh Ezzedin and Ghassemlou on several occasions rejected any attempt at separatism. In Ghassemlou’s words, “what the Kurdish people want is the provision and guarantee of their national rights in Iran, and not a separate Kurdistan”.⁵⁹² Nevertheless, the Kurdish expressions of their loyalty seemed to be vain, since the regime in Tehran was very determined in its destructive and anti-Kurdish campaign. For instance, referring to the Kurdish Republic, Khomeini claimed that “the Kurdish people once more after 29 years are whispering separatism”.⁵⁹³

As the following subsections will argue, the Revolution ended with disillusionment and further disaster for the major part of Iranian society, particularly for the Kurdish movement. The disappointing outcome of the Revolution challenged Kurdish expectations. From the early days following the fall of the Pahlavi regime, the Kurdish-Islamic Republic relationship was shaped through clashes and friction. Khomeini’s objective of establishing a strong centralized republic, meant that the Kurdish demand of autonomy was met by the newly established regime’s scepticism and brutality.

Defence, offence, and preparation are three categories of mobilization. Through the process of defensive mobilization, external threats force the members of a group to focus their resources on fighting the enemy. While through offensive mobilization resources are allocated towards achieving the goal, in the preparatory mode of mobilization resources are invested in future strategies. Tilly’s approach to mobilization is based on the idea of challenging the government in order to achieve power, their rights and interests.⁵⁹⁴ Applying this theoretical approach to the Kurdish movement in 1979 and the early 1980s, the Kurdish movement can arguably be classified as a defensive mobilization. This approach has been reflected in the way the leaders of this movement

⁵⁹¹ Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, 39.

⁵⁹² Ettelaat, 22 February 1979, *Archive of Khoshhali*, 1. Volume, 2.

⁵⁹³ Ettelaat, 22 February 1979, *Archive of Khoshhali*, 11. Volume, Ayato[llah] Khomeini and Kurdistan, 1. https://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/gunagun-ketab-Akhbar_Kurdestan_11.pdf.

⁵⁹⁴ Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 73-81.

articulated the Kurdish demands, and in the actions of the Kurdish movement. The Kurdish leadership blamed Khomeini for not being interested in a peaceful solution, and they refused any accusation of being the initiators of the conflict. For instance Shaikh Ezzedin in an Interview with *BBC Hardtalk*, highlights that “the war in Kurdistan was initiated by the regime and not by the Kurds, and while the regime attacked us, what we did was a matter of self-defence. A people who make a claim and are in a position of minority will never be interested in war, because they know that their counterpart is stronger than them, that’s what we Kurds did and considered”.⁵⁹⁵

For the Kurdish movement, the democratization of Iran was a key concept. The movement’s leadership appealed to *democracy* as the only solution for the Kurdish question; in Ghassemlou’s word “we are willing to discuss and negotiate with the Revolutionary [Provisional] Government in solving all issues and we will deploy all democratic means in gaining our rights”.⁵⁹⁶ In response to journalists’ question of whether military insurgency is an element of the means, Ghassemlou stressed that

Conducting military insurgency was imposed by the Shah, our hope is that, in such a revolutionary era, new developments would not force us to do the same. History has shown that it is the ruling regime that decide the style and actions of its opposition.⁵⁹⁷ Without granting the Kurdish people’s rights, establishing real democracy in Iran is impossible.⁵⁹⁸

5.4.1 War in Kurdistan; the First Sign of Regime Brutality

According to Gamson and Meyer, a social (national) movement is a process in which actors and agents through their ‘sustained and self-conscious’ actions challenge authorities or cultural codes. Through this process, actors and organizations aiming at realising their desires and ideals, employ extra-institutional means of influence.⁵⁹⁹ Though the Kurdish question in Iran is a conflict with its roots of emergence in the early 20th century, its reoccurrence in late 1979 was a product of the windows of opportunity which occurred following the Revolution.

⁵⁹⁵ *BBC HardTalk, Interview with Sheikh Ezzedin Hosseini, June 2015.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_o1vu3jhe5U, (accessed May 20, 2018).

⁵⁹⁶ Ettelaat, 3 March 1979, *Archive of Khoshhali, 1. Volume, 4.*

⁵⁹⁷ Ettelaat, 3 March 1979, *Archive of Khoshhali, 1. Volume, 3.*

⁵⁹⁸ Kayhan, 4 March 1979, *Archive of Khoshhali, 1. Volume, 6.*

⁵⁹⁹ Gamson and S. Meyer in McAdam et al., *Comparative perspectives on social movements*, 283.

In this regard, this phase of the Iranian Kurdish movement can be assumed as a process coincident to the establishment of the Islamic Republic, as well as this Republic's hostile approach to ethnonational communities' demands of self-determination. This phase of the movement evolved under the direct impact of a chain of political events taking place following the Kurdish-Islamic regime dispute. The emergence of dramatic micro and macro events' during a short period in Kurdistan, with these events' significance for the future Kurdish-regime relationship, turned this period into a zero point in history⁶⁰⁰ of the contemporary Kurdish movement. As hold by Bjørn Thomassen, "some '*big events*, but also the many small acts that people [...] carry out to improve their situation' are the formative elements that manage to bring about change through sensitive moments of revolution".⁶⁰¹ For instance, major events as the Bloody Nowrûz of Sanandaj, the historical exodus of Mariwan and the Three-month War of Kurdistan, have been of paramount importance to the following decades of Kurdish-Iranian regime relations.

5.4.2 *Sepah* (the IRGC): the Unwanted Force in Kurdistan

As hitherto the Revolution was articulated as a window of opportunity, it has also brought disillusionment, uncertainties, chaos, authoritarianism and institutional complexity.⁶⁰² The rapidity with which the fundamentalist elements of the Revolution established several so-called military-revolutionary organizations acting in parallel with the *Artesh* (the Iranian national army), might be a surprise for many observers of the Iranian revolution. The evolution of *Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enghab Eslami* (the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, IRGC) which very rapidly became a powerful force in post-revolutionary Iran, is one among many surprises.⁶⁰³ In Kurdistan, while the *Artesh* was viewed as the continuity of an oppressive state institution of the Pahlavis, the *Sepah* was an unwanted force that never succeeded in receiving the welcome of the Kurdish people.

Despite the opposition and protest of Kurdish society, the *Sepah* managed to establish and spread its activity in Kurdistan. *Sepah's* activities started in Kermashan, Bijar and Qorwa, and then with logistical support of the Iranian army, and by occupying

⁶⁰⁰ Thomassen, *Notes towards an Anthropology of Political Revolutions*, 702-703.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid, 682.

⁶⁰² Kingshuk Chatterjee, and Priya Singh, (ed.) *The Dilemma of Popular Sovereignty in the Middle East: Power from or to the People*, (UK: KW Publishers, 2014).

⁶⁰³ For more on the IRGC and its evolution, see Arasli, Jahangir. *Pasdaran Incorporated: Evolving from Revolutionary to Praetorian Guard*, Master in Security Studies (Civil-Military Relation), (Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, 2010).

public buildings, established their bases in Mariwan and Sanandaj. *Sepah* acted very ideologically and committed several crimes and violations in Kurdish cities and neighbourhoods. These acts resulted in widespread public protest and reaction all over Kurdistan.⁶⁰⁴ *Sepah* played a destructive role in Kurdistan; its entirely hostile attitude to the Kurdish movement has meant that its officials constantly rejected peaceful solutions or ceasefires when clashes occurred. This organization justified its activities under the mask of “establishing order in Kurdistan and disarming the Kurdish movement”.⁶⁰⁵

Sepah was Khomeini’s most trusted force, to the degree that Khomeini owed the survival of the regime to the presence of *Sepah*. In Khomeini’s own words, “if the *Sepah* did not exist, neither would the country exist”.⁶⁰⁶ However, the organization, due to its brutality and destructive role in Kurdistan during the early period of its establishment, has been by Dariush Forouhar⁶⁰⁷ blamed strongly for opposing the common interest.⁶⁰⁸ The activities of *Sepah* were not only a challenge to the Kurdish movement, but also became a source of dispute between the Provisional Government and Khomeini (and his conservative circle). In addition, the power competition between the national army (*Artesh*) and *Sepah* increased to a level that fundamentalist officials of the regime, e.g. Chamran, labelled *Artesh* as an ineffective and corrupted force, creating obstacles for the Revolution.⁶⁰⁹ An evident power struggle between *Artesh* and *Sepah* meant that the *Artesh* was accused of treachery, for instance by Khalkhali. Nevertheless, while both forces acted brutally in Kurdistan, the regime turned a blind eye to their violence in this region, and *Sepah* has since been elevated to a fundamentally holy force guarantying the regime’s survival.⁶¹⁰

5.4.3 Sanandaj, the Epicentre of the Kurdish-Regime Friction

The Kurdish city Sanandaj became the first target of the Iranian army’s attack after the Revolution. Central factors such as Sanandaj’s geopolitical location, history and place in

⁶⁰⁴ Archive of Khoshhali, 14. Volume.

⁶⁰⁵ *Kayhan*, 5 May 1980, Archive of Khoshhali, 14. Volume, 145-146.

⁶⁰⁶ *Kayhan*, 21 August 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 11. Volume, 16.

⁶⁰⁷ Dariush Forouhar was the Minister of Labour and Work in the Provisional Revolutionary Government, headed by Prime Minister Bazargan, and was a member/head of the team of negotiators with the Kurds after the Revolution in 1979.

⁶⁰⁸ *Kayhan*, 21 August 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 11. Volume, 16.

⁶⁰⁹ *Jomhury-e Islami*, 28 August 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 16. Volume, Doctor Mostafa Chamran and Kurdistan, 20. https://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/gunagun-ketab-Akhbar_Kurdestan_16.pdf.

⁶¹⁰ Archive of Khoshhali, 12. Volume, Ayato[llah] Khalkhali and Kurdistan https://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/gunagun-ketab-Akhbar_Kurdestan_12.pdf.

Kurdish identity (the home of the Emirat of Ardelan), and its position of the capital city of the Kurdistan province, meant Sanandaj was the first city that caught the attention of the regime. The Bloody Nowrûz of Sanandaj, a brutal attack of the Iranian army on civilians in Sanandaj, took place less than five weeks after the Revolution,⁶¹¹ and a few days before the Kurdish and Iranian New Year *Nowrûz* on 18th March 1979.⁶¹² This attack resulted in the death and injury of more than 220 civilians in this city.⁶¹³ With the quelling of the women's protest against the new Islamic government's compulsory hijab ruling (8th March 1979), which meant that women would henceforth be required to wear a headscarf when outside the home,⁶¹⁴ as the *first* social split between revolutionary forces in Iran, we can refer to the crisis in Sanandaj as the first political split between forces that, for several weeks before the event, had been allies.⁶¹⁵ The crisis in Sanandaj was the outcome of several issues that deserve special attention for analysing the reasons for its emergence and its real and symbolic importance for both the Kurds and the regime.

The massacre in Sanandaj took place in a sensitive period of the history of the post-revolutionary Kurdish movement. This massacre was both a signal sent by the regime aimed at making clear that its designated institutions (*Artesh*, *Sepah* and *the Revolutionary Committees*) were the only tolerated decision-making institutions and authorities, as well as highlighting that the regime, in the case of popular opposition, does not hesitate in deploying violent means.

Following the Revolution, the activities and methods of mobilizing the Kurdish civil society turned Kurdistan into a stronghold of democratization in the post-revolutionary Iran. The major innovative act of the Kurdish civil society was establishing *Shorayi Gerak u Shar* (neighbourhood and city councils). What made these councils unique was the degree of integrity, the high level of diversity, and tolerance of the cooperation between the different members (with different ideologies) of these

⁶¹¹ Seyedi, *Newroz-e Khonin-e Sanandaj*

⁶¹² Yousef Ardelan, *An Interview with Yousef Ardelan about the events of the Bloody Nowruz of Sanandaj, 2015* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVOLU08yUvM> (accessed 25 April 2018).

⁶¹³ Different sources refer to different numbers of deaths and wounded from the Bloody Nowruz of Sanandaj. The number ranges from 220-1000. For instance, Ardeshir Nesrolla Baegi, in an article published on Komala's official webpage, referring to the IRGC's internally published sources from September/October of 1979 claims that, according to IRGC's news bulletin, the civilian casualties was estimated to be between 700 and 1006, with 36 people from the Army and Pasdaran also killed in the conflict. In Nesrollabaegi, A., *Nowruz-e Khonin-e Sanandaj, Bahare 1358* [The Bloody Nowruz of Sanandaj, Spring of 1980], 2011. <http://komalah.org/Farsi/index.php/didgah/4558.html> (accessed 10 June 2018).

⁶¹⁴ Rare Historical Photos, *Women protesting forced hijab days after the Iranian Revolution, 1979*. 2016 <https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/women-protesting-hijab-1979/> (accessed 20 May 2018).

⁶¹⁵ Seyedi, *Newroz-e Khonin-e Sanandaj*.

councils.⁶¹⁶ The acts of the Kurdish civil society caught the attention of the Iranian intellectual and politician Shokrollah Paknejad to a degree that during a speech to ‘the Union for protecting Freedom and Revolution’, he stated “I feel that the heart of the Iranian Revolution is beating in Kurdistan, because Kurdistan has become the stronghold and port of democracy in Iran”.⁶¹⁷

Alternately, in the eyes of the regime the Kurdish acts of creating *shorayi shar*, opposing the spread of the *Komite-e Eqlab* and *Sepah*, and the Kurdish demand of *khodmokhtari*, were equivalent to a dichotomization of the power relations in the country, a source of inspiration for the other ethnonational groups for rising similar claims, and a serious obstacle to the Islamic regime’s realization of its policy of creating a strong centralist-theocratic political regime in Iran. Emphasized very clearly by conservative elements of the regime (such as Chamran⁶¹⁸, Bani Sadr, Rafsanjani,⁶¹⁹ Khalkhali and Ghotbzadeh), the revolutionary government would not tolerate such dichotomization, and Kurdistan would not be treated differently from the other parts of Iran. Dichotomization would undermine the regime’s ability in enforcing its authority everywhere else around the country.⁶²⁰ For instance, Bani Sadr constantly during his public speeches and TV and radio transmissions accused the Kurds for being troublemakers and acting on the behalf of foreign powers.⁶²¹ With the intensification of the Kurdish-regime clashes, he demanded to the Iranian army that “the soldiers are not allowed to take off their boots until they make this region [Kurdistan] clean from rebellions”.⁶²² During his presidential period, Bani Sadr was very hostile to the Kurdish claims, and he used populist discourse in describing the Kurdish demands as being disloyal and unpatriotic to the Iranian state, and he referred to the Kurdish initiative of proposing ceasefires and negotiations, as plots and deception.⁶²³

In line with the Revolution, different forces in Kurdistan mobilized their activities and competed with each other to gain access to as many institutional and military resources as possible. The presence of such relations has been revealed to be detrimental for the durability and outcome of the Kurdish movement through this fragile era. Islamist

⁶¹⁶ Ardelan, *An Interview with Yousef Ardelan*.

⁶¹⁷ Mostaf Sultani, *Kak Fouad, Rebar, Siyasetmedar u Zanayeki siyasi*, 241.

⁶¹⁸ *Kayhan*, 3 August 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 16. Volume, 7-8.

⁶¹⁹ Quraishi, *Saye-e Rafsanjani Bar Feraz-e Kurdistan-e Iran*.

⁶²⁰ Seyedi, *Newroz-e Khonin-e Sananda.j*

⁶²¹ *Kayhan*, 4 April 1980, Archive of Khoshhali 3. Volume, Doctor Abol Hassan Beni Sar and Kurdistan, 60-61. https://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/gunagun-ketab-Akhbar_Kurdestan_03.pdf.

⁶²² *Kayhan*, 18 April 1979, Khoshhali 3. Volume, 50.

⁶²³ *Ettelaat*, 3 May 1980, Archive of Khoshhali 3. Volume, 55.

groups were among some of these groups competing for hegemony. The Kurdish Sunni clergy Ahmad Moftizadeh (the founder of *Maktab Quran*)⁶²⁴ and the Shiite clergyman Ali Safdari, Khomeini's representative in Kurdistan (the Committee of Imam)⁶²⁵ were among some of these groups which created an odd alliance, which as time went on dissolved in disputes related to access to military resources and control of Sanandaj's radio and TV stations resulted in conflict.⁶²⁶ The conflictual relations between these groups, the city councils' protest against the army's violation of order in Sanandaj, and the opposition to the spread of the *Sepah* and the Revolutionary Committee in Sanandaj, are the main reasons behind the worsening of the situation in Sanandaj until the Iranian Army attacked civilians and conducted a massacre that later became known in the lexicon of the Kurdish movement as the Bloody Nowruz of Sanandaj.⁶²⁷

On the one side the Islamic regime's military attack on Kurdistan, and on the other side the regime's negative articulation of the Kurdish question, showed that the Kurdish movement was a target of the regime. For instance, the regime articulated the Kurdish movement and its claim as *ghaele*⁶²⁸ (a ruckus) rather than a movement with a deeply politicized and deep-rooted claim. The head of the Iranian army (General Qareni) constantly articulated Kurdish revolutionary groups as troublemakers, and stressed that he had ordered quelling the movement since "he was determined not to bribe troublemakers".⁶²⁹

Disarming military garrisons and police stations during the Revolution was a phenomena taking place all over Iran, including Kurdistan. While these actions in other parts of the country were assumed as revolutionary actions, in Kurdistan the regime articulated these actions as plundering state property. Similar statements were made in justifying the regime's attack on the civilians in Sanandaj and elsewhere in Kurdistan.⁶³⁰

The Kurdish mobilization claiming *Khodmokhtari* challenged the regime's authority and its ambition of accomplishing its mission in this part of the country. While in some other parts of Iran nationalistic rebels' demand of self-determination (as in the

⁶²⁴ Intellectual movement school of Quran found by Ahmad Moftizadeh

⁶²⁵ Gowhari (2011a), *Rojhelati Kurdistan le de Sal da*, 134.

⁶²⁶ Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zende: Kordestan*, 84-85.

⁶²⁷ Archive of Khoshhali, 19. Volume. *The Clergymen and Kurdistan* https://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/gunagun-ketab-Akhbar_Kurdestan_19.pdf

⁶²⁸ For more about the usage of this terminology, see Amini, *Ghaele Kurdistan, Az Sanandaj ta Paweh* and Quraishi, *Saye-e Rafsanjani Bar Feraz-e Kurdistan-e Iran*.

⁶²⁹ *Kayhan*, 20 March 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 13. Volume, 2.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*

Turkmen Sahra) was swiftly and violently suppressed,⁶³¹ in Kurdistan the situation was revealed to be different, and difficult for the regime. As it became clear that the Kurdish people would not give up their claim of *khodmokhtari*, the regime, regardless of the means deployed by the Kurdish opposition, became very decisive in enforcing its authority. The regime was in a complicated position and had to bring the Kurdish movement to an end as soon as possible. Yet reflecting on this period's human casualties in Kurdistan, it was not expected that such an aggressive reaction would take place.⁶³² In addition, the process of power consolidation in the rest of Iran took place surprisingly rapidly. The *Artesh*, the most violent force fighting the masses and other revolutionary groups before and during the Revolution, turned overnight into a trusted and effective force of the Islamic regime in attacking the Kurdish movement.⁶³³

The army's participation in the massacres in Naqhadah, Paweh, Qarne and Qelatan⁶³⁴ are among examples that show *Artesh*'s eradicating role in Kurdistan. A military institution that just few days before the victory of the revolution was the Army of the Pahlavis and fought against the Revolution, suddenly turned into a brutal force that served the newly-emerged regime under the leadership of Khomeini.⁶³⁵ General Qareni was among the army officers with a hostile attitude towards the Kurdish people.⁶³⁶ During this period Qareni on different occasions ordered massacres against the Kurdish people.⁶³⁷

Hemen Seyedi explains the reason for the harsh regime attack on Kurdistan: "the Islamic regime viewed the Kurdish movement as a rival power, and it needed enforce its authority in Kurdistan as soon as before the planned referendum for the Islamic Republic, on 30th March 1979".⁶³⁸ The Kurdish insistence on not giving up their demands, and the Kurdish movement's relative degree of mobilization, located the Kurds in a position of a real challenger, so that the only effective means of gaining control of the Kurdish region would be deploying force against it. This period's development exposes that enforcing authority through creating chaos was a method used by the regime, not only in the regime-

⁶³¹ Vahid Rashidvash, "Turkmen Status within Iranian Ethnic Identity (Cultural, Geographical, Political)", *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol.3, No.22, (2013), 90.

⁶³² Seyedi, *Newroz-e Khonin-e Sanandaj*.

⁶³³ Ibid.

⁶³⁴ Archive of Khoshhali. 9. Volume.

⁶³⁵ Seyedi, *Newroz-e Khonin-e Sanandaj*.

⁶³⁶ *Kayhan*, 3 and 6 August 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 16. Volume, Doctor Mostafa Chamran and Kurdistan, 7-9. https://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/gunagun-ketab-Akhbar_Kurdestan_16.pdf.

⁶³⁷ *Ayendegan*, 16 June 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 4. Volume, Shaikh Ezzadin Hossaini and Kurdistan, 47. https://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/gunagun-ketab-Akhbar_Kurdestan_04.pdf.

⁶³⁸ Seyedi, *Newroz-e Khonin-e Sanandaj*.

Kurdish movement relationship, but also to the rest of the Iranian people and opposition groups that showed resistance to the new political establishment. The reasons for regime brutality in Kurdistan and particularly during the Bloody Nowruz in Sanandaj, as maintained by Seyed, was that

The chief aim of the regime intervention was bringing an end to the dichotomized power situation in Kurdistan and enforcing its power in Kurdistan before the referendum of the Islamic Republic or any other elections later on. The selected option for the regime was use of military forces and integrating Kurdistan into the mainstream picture in Iran. For instance Mostafa Chamran [the regime's minister of defence], a hard-core conservative official of the regime, approached the Kurdish issue from a military angle, as the only option. Chamran repeatedly emphasized that deploying the Iranian army would be the only effective solution guarantying the regime's authority in Kurdistan. According to Chamran, in Kurdistan the regime wished to enforce order by deploying military forces.⁶³⁹

However, while the crisis in Kurdistan escalated each day and the Kurdish movement showed its resilience, gaining the Kurdish movement's support for the planned referendum apparently located the regime in a position of accepting temporary compromise. Following this calculation, a series⁶⁴⁰ of negotiations between the Kurds and the representatives of the Provisional Revolutionary Government (the so-called goodwill delegation) took place. As will be discussed in the following section, while the goodwill delegation tried to convince the Kurdish leadership to support and vote for the referendum, the main forces of the Kurdish movement (leftist, religious and nationalist/secular) unanimously refused to support the referendum. The Kurdish leadership declared the referendum as undemocratic, and consequently they boycotted it.⁶⁴¹

5.5 The 'No Peace- No War' Kurdish Condition

After the Revolution, the already fragile security conditions in Kurdistan worsened drastically. While before the Revolution this region was the most militarized and economically disadvantaged part of the country, following the Revolution the Kurdish-

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁰ The first round of the negotiations or visit of the Provisional Revolutionary Government's delegation to Kurdistan, took place in Mahabad on 19 February 1979, some weeks after Khomeini's return, Entessar, *Kurdish Politics in the Middle East*, 38-39.

⁶⁴¹ Nikraftar, *Jang-e Panj Roze-ye Paweh*, 35.

Tehran relationship stepped into a complex new phase. Due to the tense and fluctuating security conditions in Kurdistan, the first half year of the post-revolutionary era in this region can be characterized as a condition of no war, no peace.⁶⁴² This era was marked by events such as the Kurdish resistance to the spread of the regime's *pasdaran*, several massacres of civilians, clashes between the Kurdish 'front' against *Artesh*, the Kurdish forces' retreats and retaking of control of Kurdistan, and several rounds of negotiations and ceasefires.

Among many methods of resistance and self-defence, the Kurdish movement relied on a combination of activities such as civil disobedience and mobilizing the masses as defence forces, framed as *khoraqeri jemaweri*⁶⁴³ (collective defence). The peshmerga forces of the KDPI and Komala acted based on the principle of self-defence. The flourishing civil society and its multifaceted activities became a real challenge for the regime. Despite the presence of several hindrances such as insecurity, the army and *pasdaran*'s arbitrary attacks on cities and neighbourhoods, and logistical and communication difficulties, the Kurdish civil society acted proactively, protesting and reacting to each activity taken by the regime.

Organizing rallies, solidarity and protest actions, civil disobedience, collective strikes and mass exoduses, were among some of the means of mobilization quite common to this era of the Kurdish movement. The spread of the IRGC in Kurdistan was the major provocative step taken by the regime, which caused different reactions of the Kurdish civil society. For instance when the Iranian army attempted to enter the county of Kamyaran, the civilians of the city barricaded the main road and stopped the army's tanks from entering the city. However, in reaction the government imposed sanctions on Kurdistan and blocked any food and other vital supplies from entering Kurdistan.⁶⁴⁴ In Sanandaj a protest action against the IRGC's conduct of the second massacre (1st January 1980), under the name "move the Pasdaran out of the city", took place. The people of Sanandaj, as part of this action organized a 13-day long mass strike,⁶⁴⁵ known as Sanandaj's *roze-ye siyasi* (political hunger-strike/fasting). This action was a combination of protest and condemnation, with the act of forcing out the IRGC and the army from Sanandaj peacefully. A protester emphasized, "we are not members of any political party,

⁶⁴² *Ettelaat*, 3 March 1980, Archive of Khoshhali, 1. Volume, 54.

⁶⁴³ Paweh, *Le Rojhelat Tenya be yek Hizb Natwanin Welami*.

⁶⁴⁴ French media in *Ayandegan*, 30 July 1979, Archive of Khoshhali 4. Volume, 54.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ettelaat*, 10 January 1980, Archive of Khoshhali 8. Volume, *The Provisional Government and Kurdistan*, 211. https://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/gunagun-ketab-Akhbar_Kurdestan_08.pdf.

our hunger strikes aim to force *Sepah* out of the city. This force has come to the city for quelling the voice of the people and to work against our demands, and not for establishing order and stability”.⁶⁴⁶ The movement leadership on different occasions and through different channels expressed the militarization of Kurdistan as an element of worsening and destabilization, rather than establishing order and stability in the region, arguing that the “imposed security condition is threatening Kurdistan and the whole region”.⁶⁴⁷ For instance, Sheikh Ezzedin in a letter to Bazargan wrote:

As you know the security situation in Kurdistan has due to the occurrence of an unwished-situation escalated drastically. In Mariwan this situation has meant that a whole city, as protest against the Pasdaran, have made a mass exodus, whilst similarly to Mariwan the interference of the *Mojahid* (Pasdaran) has resulted in many difficulties and clashes in Serw [a provinces of Uromiye].⁶⁴⁸

In another conversation, Shaikh Ezzedin appealed to Forouhar to “not let Iran turn into another Lebanon”.⁶⁴⁹ The movement leadership viewed these clashes as *berader koshi* (fratricidal war), and eagerly emphasized the need of peaceful solution. However, as Shaikh Ezzedin related, in a meeting with Khomeini regarding the condition of Kurdistan he “explained that we did not initiate the critical condition, but a corrupted group from the army intentionally started the conflict. We sought to avoid them, not committing to *berader koshi*. Yet he [Khomeini] viewed our peace appeal as a matter of weakness rather than our goodwill”.⁶⁵⁰

As part of the condition of no war, no peace, the Kurdish movement and the Kurdish region came under heavy military attack from regime army and the IRGC. In order to stem the tide of armed conflict in Kurdistan, Sheikh Mohammad Sadeghi Guivi (better known as Sadegh Khalkhali) was dispatched to the region to ‘crack the whip’ against the Kurdish people and take revenge on the Kurdish movement. Khalkhali, similarly to many other fanatical elites of the regime, believed that deploying military forces was the only solution for the conflict in Kurdistan and Khuzestan.⁶⁵¹ The brutality of Khalkhali made him known among the Kurds as *Qesabe Kurdistan* (the butcher of Kurdistan). For instance, in a series of hasty trials that lacked the most basic

⁶⁴⁶ *Ettelaat*, 10 January 1980, Archive of Khoshhali 8. Volume, 214.

⁶⁴⁷ *Kayhan*, 24 July 1979, Archive of Khoshhali 4. Volume, 53.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ettelaat*, 25 July 1979, Archive of Khoshhali 4. Volume, 53.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ettelaat*, 30 July 1979, Archive of Khoshhali 4. Volume, 56.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ettelaat*, 3 May 1980, Archive of Khoshhali 3. Volume, 56.

⁶⁵¹ *Kayhan*, 25 July 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 12. Volume, 2-3.

elements of judicial integrity, Khalkhali executed hundreds of Kurdish civilian as well as political activists.⁶⁵²

Continuing armed clashes between the Kurds and the Iranian military and Revolutionary Guards led to the banning of the KDPI at the end of autumn 1979 and Ayatollah Khomeini's designation of Ghassemlou and Shaikh Ezzedin as *mofsid-e fil arz* (corrupters of the earth). However, shortly before the complete breakdown of negotiations between the Kurds and the representatives of the Iranian government, Ayatollah Khomeini issued a conciliatory message addressed to the people of Kurdistan. In his message, Khomeini, for the first time, publicly acknowledged the legitimate grievances of the Kurds and promised to continue negotiating with religious and nationalist Kurdish leaders until peace and calm was restored in Kurdistan. He further stated that the people of Iran had suffered much under the monarchy, and he asked the Kurds to join him in the name of God to "save our country and to direct our energy against the real enemies of the country led by the United States".⁶⁵³ As emphasized by Entessar, "The content and tone of Khomeini's message to the Kurds differed in his previous messages and was indicative of the Ayatollah's fear that the continuing securitization of the Kurdish issue would redound to the detriment of the Islamic Republic⁶⁵⁴".

Kurdistan in this period experienced a comprehensive reign of state terrorism. The Islamic regime's arbitrary mass executions of youths and political activists male and female, were a widespread act of punishment to scare the Kurdish society for raising of the claim of autonomy for Kurdistan. The mass executions of eleven Kurds (among them injured prisoners) in the airport of Sanandaj on 27th August 1979,⁶⁵⁵ of 47 Kurdish men and women on 2nd September 1979 in Sanandaj, and 55 youth in Mahabad⁶⁵⁶ in same period, are among examples of regime's violent repression of civilians in Kurdistan. As reaction to this brutality of the regime, the Sunni religious-intellectual Ahmad Moftizadeh in an open letter wrote:

Dear countrymen and the Islamic *Umma* [nation] of Iran, what your Kurdish brothers and sisters following the defeat of the Shah have experienced is much more than

⁶⁵² Shiwa Mahbobi, *Man ve Qesab-e Kurdistan, ve Khokhteresh Fatema Sadeqhi Kalkhali* [Me and the Butcher of Kurdistan and his daughter Fatema Sadeqhi Kalkhali], 2017. <https://rowzane.com/content/shiva/article=97950> (accessed 1 July 2018).

⁶⁵³ Entessar, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, 214.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁵ Iran Human Rights Documentation Center/Iranhrdc, *Khaterat-e Taskhir Konande; Iadam-e Kurdha tavesot-e Jomhuri-e Islami dar sal-e 1358*, 1.

⁶⁵⁶ Archive of Khoshhali, 8. Volume, 154.

what you read in the newspapers. While the rest of Iran was busy celebrating the victory of overthrowing the Shah, just few days after this victory the remaining element of the regime under the mask of ‘protecting the Revolution and bringing order’, has campaigned with a massive attack on the Kurdish people. Yet the Kurdish people disappointedly wonder why their fellow countrymen are quiet while these criminals destroy Kurdistan.⁶⁵⁷

As part of the regime’s military campaign against Kurds, hard-core Iranian officials held the KDPI and Komala responsible for the situation in Kurdistan. The Kurdish movement has been repeatedly articulated as something created and sponsored by imperialism.⁶⁵⁸ The military activity of the KDPI, Komala and Chrik Fedayi (an Iranian leftist organization) has been reflected in the national media, especially state Radio and TV.⁶⁵⁹ Reports from this period show that the Iranian army and IRGC suffered massively from their fight in Kurdistan.⁶⁶⁰ The people of Sanandaj insisted on acting based on the *shora* (council) system they had established, which from the regime perspective was viewed as parallel institution of power and decision-making.⁶⁶¹

5.5.1 Announcing *Shorayi Shar* (the City Councils)

Kurdish cities’ announcement of the so called *shorayi shar* (city councils) seemed provocative and caused the regime’s reaction. According to Hamid Gowhari, the first councils were established in Mahabad 12th February 1979.⁶⁶² However, according to Yousef Ardelan (a Kurdish politician and member of the *shora* of Sanandaj), the *shora* was a bottom-up invention starting as a neighbourhood initiative in Sanandaj in October 1978; other cities of Kurdistan found this initiative inspiring and implemented it in their areas.⁶⁶³ As the Revolution in Kurdistan was mobilized by leftist, nationalist, and secular forces, and following the Revolution these groups had the shared responsibility for

⁶⁵⁷ *Kayhan*, 21 August 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 5. Volume: Allame Ahmad Moftizadeh and Kurdistan 42-43, https://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/gunagun-ketab-Akhbar_Kurdestan_05.pdf.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ettelaat*, 25 July 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 6. Volume, *The Governors of Kurdistan*, 47. https://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/gunagun-ketab-Akhbar_Kurdestan_06.pdf

⁶⁵⁹ *Kayhan*, 9 October Archive of Khoshhali, 14. Volume, 74-78.

⁶⁶⁰ Archive of Khoshhali, 14. Volume.

⁶⁶¹ Kolaqochi, *Tarikhche-ye Shorahaye Shaheer and mohale der Sanandaj*.

⁶⁶² Gowhari (2011a), *Rojhelati Kurdistan le de Sal da*, 91.

⁶⁶³ Ardelan, *An Interview with Yousef Ardelan*.

mobilizing the cities and villages of Kurdistan,⁶⁶⁴ members of these ideological trends were identifiable within the *shora* establishment (for instance, Sediq Kamanger, a Komala official, was the spokesperson of the council of Sanandaj).⁶⁶⁵

Ayatollah Taleqani, a prominent clergyman and member of the goodwill negotiation team, inspired by the degree of integrity and cooperation within the *shora* of Sanandaj, proposed implementing the *shora* system for the rest of Iran. However, according to the autobiography of Taleqani, “under the impact of conservative forces in Tehran, some Islamic forces in Sanandaj declared that they did support the current *shora*, and demanded fully Islamic *shora*”.⁶⁶⁶ This might refer to the support of Ahmad Moftizadeh and the followers of his Makyab Quran (school of Quranic interpretation). Among the members of the goodwill delegation, Bani Sadr and Rafsanjani supported the acts of those forces that opposed the *shora*, and they disagreed with Taleqani’s proposal by questioning the *shora* and its function as an initiative subverting regime authority. A combination of ideological and self-interested reasons lay behind the Islamic hard-liners’ hostile attitude to the *shoras* in Kurdistan.

Some hard-liners such as Bani Sadr, Rafsanjani and Chamran, had strong ambitions for centralizing power in Tehran, and saw the potential for climbing to the heights of power. In fact, they were relatively correct in their calculations. As the events drew on, one of them became president (Bani Sadr), another became head of the Iranian Parliament (Rafsanjani) and the third became minister of defence (Chamran). The *shora* system was composed of individuals representing different social and ideological layers of society, yet able to work together. Such an approach was beyond the vision of Rafsanjani, Bani Sadr and Chamran for a future Iranian society.⁶⁶⁷

These *shora* had, with the direct participation of the locals, provided neighbourhoods with public security, managed market prices, and distributed essential household goods (such as petrol and flour), and supported the activities of the progressive civil society.⁶⁶⁸ These institutions functioned in Kurdistan for almost six months, until the withdrawal of the Kurdish forces from Kurdistan.⁶⁶⁹ Fati Kolaqochi points to the resilience of Kurdish civil society in enforcing the *shora* system as a unique form of resistance, and also a cause for the escalation of the hostility between the Kurds and

⁶⁶⁴ Qazi, *Interview with Mansour Tayfuri on Kurdish exodus of 1979 in Mariwan*.

⁶⁶⁵ Mostafa Sultani, et al., *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani Ke bo*, 23.

⁶⁶⁶ Seyedi, *Newroz-e Khonin-e Sanandaj*.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁸ Kolaqochi, *Tarikhche-ye Shorahaye Shaher and mohale der Sanandaj*.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid.

regime from the early stage of the Revolution. Enforcing the role of the councils was an important part of the demand of democratization and civil society engagement in Kurdistan. The claim of the people of Sanandaj that the city should be managed by the locals, challenged regime's authority in Kurdistan.⁶⁷⁰ As part of the Kurdish plan of *khodmokhtari*, the Kurds demanded that "all security institutions in Kurdistan should be run under the supervision of a joint military committee of pro-Kurdish patriotic officers and representatives of the Revolutionary Council, and the army's garrisons, due to their history of violence, should be moved out of the cities".⁶⁷¹ Since such demands were considered by the regime as a Kurdish attempt at excluding regime presence and authority in this region, the regime never accepted to deal with the Kurdish claims through peaceful means.

5.5.2 The Meeting of Naqhadeh and Ethnic Clashes

The Islamic regime has, in the attempt of enforcing its authority in Kurdistan, systematically deployed a combination of policies of creating chaos, war and crisis, as well as divide and rule.⁶⁷² In this regard, the regime, through the army's support of distinct sectarian groups (particularly within the Azari community) has on several occasions in different parts of the Kurdish region, played sectarian cards in areas inhabited by Kurds and Azaris. The tension in Naqhadeh and Uromiye, and the massacres in Qarne⁶⁷³ and Qalatan, were events which took place during the early post-revolutionary era and were sponsored by different elements of the regime. On 20th April 1979, the city of Naqhadeh (an ethnically mixed city composed of Kurds and Azaris) during a political meeting organized by the KDPI, witnessed clashes between these two groups, causing a massive loss of life, and consequently massive internal displacement among the Kurds.⁶⁷⁴ There has been controversy over this episode. The leadership of the Kurdish movement accused the Iranian army of acting provocatively and supporting some Azari groups to attack the Kurds in Naqhadeh and neighbouring areas. According to Ghassemlou, after the clash in Naqhadeh,

The Azari delegation refused to negotiate, their demand being that the army had to stay in Naqhadeh, and the Kurds had to be disarmed. Considering these issue and

⁶⁷⁰ Kolaqochi, *Tarikhche-ye Shorahaye Shaher and mohale der Sanandaj*.

⁶⁷¹ Mohajer, 28 *Mordad*.

⁶⁷² Nikraftar, *Jang-e Panj Roze-ye Paweh*, 32.

⁶⁷³ In the village ^{Qarne} on 2 September 1979, 47 civilians (elderly, women and children) were killed.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ayendegan*, 18 May 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 20. Volume, Collection of Articles, 11. https://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/gunagun-ketab-Akhbar_Kurdestan_20.pdf.

what happened in Naqhadeh now and before, we know that there are some forces which try to provoke us to create tension between us and the government. The Kurdish movement is the target of this provocation (shooting and bullying), which aims to positioning the Kurds against the government. In this regard, we are here in Tehran to warn the authorities and to overcome misunderstandings related to these issues. However, what we have realized is that the government is not paying enough attention to these matters, or maybe is deliberately ignoring these issues in Kurdistan.⁶⁷⁵

Ghassemlou highlighted that what happened in Naqhadeh was a plot, planned in advance by the army and implemented Molla Hassani. Individuals such as Molla Hassani, and the army, had in advance distributed guns to some Azaris in Naqhadeh.⁶⁷⁶

Studying incidents between the Kurds and the regime, reveals the government's partiality against the Kurds, and its lack of interest in negotiating with the Kurdish leadership. The Kurdish leadership's attempt at solving the Kurdish question through dialogue and negotiations was ignored by the regime in Tehran, as emphasized by Ghassemlou, when he lamented "now we have been here in Tehran, yet we have not succeeded in having any meeting with the authorities".⁶⁷⁷ Regarding the destructive role of the army through the ethnic disputes, Ghassemlou claimed that "we know from the record we have access to [recorded communication between different sections of the Iranian army during the attack in Naqhadeh], that the Iranian army was directly involved in Naqhadeh. The Army was not neutral, one can clearly hear that the army ordered shooting at the civilians".⁶⁷⁸

According to voice records of the communications between different army divisions, the army in cooperation with the *Mujahidin* conducted a massacre resulting in the death of 45 persons in Qarne. According to Behadoriyan, "the dead bodies have been removed outside the village to show that they have been killed through clashes with the army. The homes of the people have been burned down and their property has been looted".⁶⁷⁹ Fuelling and strengthening the anti-Kurdish atmosphere, resulted in several massacres, such as the one in Qarne. By October 1980, with the intensification of the clashes between Kurdish revolutionary forces and the Iranian army, many villages were

⁶⁷⁵ *Ayandegan*, 10 May 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 1. Volume, 18-20.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁸ *Ettelaat*, 3 March 1980, Archive of Khoshhali, 1. Volume, 54-55.

⁶⁷⁹ Behadoriyan quoted in *Kayhan*, 15 September 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 9. Volume, 6.

destroyed, and the regime, in order to spread fear, relied on strategies such as creating sectarianism, especially in areas of mixed population of Kurds and Azaris or areas of Kurdistan bordering with the Azari areas. Molla Hassani, an extremist Azeri clergyman of Uromiye, mobilized many of the militias which attacked the civilians in Kurdistan.⁶⁸⁰

In a report prepared by Mahdi Behadoriyan,⁶⁸¹ the situation in Kurdistan was described:

Twenty-five days of investigation in Naqhadeh and the surrounding areas shows that in Kurdistan and western Azerbaijan, something strange is occurring. The previous feudalists of these areas have been armed by persons such as Dr Chamran, and army officers like Zehirnejad and Shahbaziyan. These feudalists have provoked and threatened people. These groups and other similar ones, use the religious difference between the diverse people in a negative way that has resulted in deep sectarian conflict.⁶⁸²

Behadoriyan's description highlights that hidden hands in the regime were not interested in solving the situation in Kurdistan; on the reverse, they behind the scenes fuelled conservative and self-interested groups and individuals, aimed at destabilising the Kurdish region.

5.5.3 The attack on Paweh

Paweh, a small Kurdish city located in the Province of Kermashan, despite its size has played a symbolic and strategic role throughout the military clashes between the Kurdish movement and the Islamic regime. Defeating Kurdish revolutionary forces in Paweh was a mainly symbolic gain for the regime's defeat of the Kurdish movement. The continuation and success of the Kurdish movement in challenging the regime, had the potential for becoming a source of inspiration for people of other parts in Iran in resisting the Islamic regime. Khomeini, aware of this fact, could not risk the failure of the invasion of Paweh. In this regard, when he issued an order of Jihad, he very aggressively threatened the national army with strong punishment in case of its failure in providing all necessary material and logistical assistance to the IRGC.⁶⁸³ Khomeini warned the national army leaders harshly through the battle of Paweh, "you have to *serkob* (crush) the

⁶⁸⁰ Gowhari (2011b), *Rojhelati Kurdistan le de Sal da*, 180-188.

⁶⁸¹ Mahdi Behadoriyan was the representative of Khomeini and Montazeri for investigating the issue in Naqhadeh and Kurdistan.

⁶⁸² Behadoriyan, quoted in *Kayhan*, 15 September 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 9. Volume, 6.

⁶⁸³ Nikraftar, *Jang-e Panj Roze-ye Paweh*, 24.

troublemakers in Paweh as soon as possible. If you are not able to bring a new result within 24 hours, I will hold the army responsible and its leader will face revolutionary consequences. I order all military institutions to use all their resources in taking control over Paweh in 24 hours”.⁶⁸⁴

Winning the battle of Paweh was important from different aspects. This victory was a prime example of the regime’s determination and ability in controlling Kurdistan through its deployment of military forces rather than by negotiating with the Kurds. Khomeini on 19th August 1979, “issued a ‘general mobilisation decree’, known by the Kurds as ‘jihad’, ordering ‘all of Iran’s armed forces’ to attack Kurdistan and end the ‘sedition’. The ‘sedition’ was in reality nothing but the Kurdish people’s attempt at democratic self-rule within a democratised Iran, which the revolution had promised”.⁶⁸⁵ Khomeini had criticised the army’s efforts in Kurdistan as inefficient. He maintained that the *Artesh* would be held responsible for any failure in the attempt of taking control in Kurdistan. By this he put his authority to the test, both regarding the regime’s relationship to society as well as to the Army. During this phase of the attack on Kurdistan, Kurdistan came under massive attack and siege, known in the lexicon of Kurdish movement as the 28 *Mordad* (19th August 1979) attack on Kurdistan. On this day, Khomeini appointed himself as the head of the Iranian army, overruling the control of the provisional government that was led by Bazargan. According to Naser Mohajer, this happened “due to Khomeini’s lack of trust in the people in the National Front”.⁶⁸⁶

Another angle of the regime’s aggression towards the Kurds, was the matter of taking revenge for the Kurdish boycott of the referendum of the Islamic Republic. While Kurds insisted on establishing a democratic system in Iran, Khomeini exercised total rigidity relating to the content and form of the future political system in Iran.⁶⁸⁷ By the strict command of Khomeini, all branches of the military and security forces moved towards Kurdistan.⁶⁸⁸ The battle started in Paweh in August 1979, led by Mostafa Chamran as the minister of defence. The battle of Paweh, due to its importance, became a historical landmark of the contemporary Kurdish movement. In this struggle, all Kurdish revolutionary forces – the KDPI, Komala and Chrik – coordinated a joint front against the regime. The regime committed a hitherto unseen bombardment and massacre

⁶⁸⁴ *Ettelaat*, 18 August 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 11. Volume, 6.

⁶⁸⁵ Kamran Matin, *Epistemic Violence: A Tale of Two Anniversaries*, August 2018 <https://www.facebook.com/kamran.matin1/posts/10155396420627447> (Accessed 20 August 2018).

⁶⁸⁶ Mohajer, 28 *Mordad*.

⁶⁸⁷ Nikraftar, *Jang-e Panj Roze-ye Paweh*, 35.

⁶⁸⁸ Mohajer, 28 *Mordad*.

in the city, using many tricks (among them announcing ceasefire and withdrawal from the city, while it made other plans).

The battle of Paweh became a pivotal strategic frontline for both parties to the conflict.⁶⁸⁹ From the Kurdish perspective, the strategic and symbolic importance of the battle of Paweh was associated with the movement's limited access to material and military resources, and the fear of a domino effect of the fall of further areas of Kurdistan into the hands of the regime. The Kurdish movement was in a defensive position, and regardless of the extent of any regime attack, the civilians were the first and most vulnerable target of the regime's brutality. The Kurdish movement at every step considered the civilians wellbeing in any besieged cities in Kurdistan.⁶⁹⁰ The Islamic regime, aware of this vulnerability of the Kurdish position, deployed policies such as shelling cities and neighbourhoods as an effective strategy of creating fear among civilians.

Another issue was related to the isolated position of the Kurdish movement, owing to weak Kurdish diplomacy and lack of international support and attention to the Kurdish struggle. These issues benefited the regime greatly. Despite a long period of Kurdish resistance, Paweh fell into the hands of the regime forces. The loss of Paweh was a change to the *status quo* in Kurdistan, advancing the regime's position. Even though the Kurdish forces fought in each besieged city for an average of more than thirty days, Paweh became the beginning of the end. Following the crushing of the Kurdish movement in Paweh, Kurdish forces retreated from major parts of the territories that were under their control.⁶⁹¹

5.5.4 The Regime's Media Hostility and Propaganda

Another aspect of the conflicting Kurdish-regime relationship came very quickly to the surface in the representation of the Kurdish question in different Iranian media, television, radio and newspapers. The public radio and TV worked as an effective regime propaganda machine which provoked the Kurds to the extent that the Kurdish masses during this period protested and condemned the anti-Kurdish role and discourse of these channels several times. These media channels, as part of the regime's agenda, spread untruths aimed at labelling the Kurdish movement as anti-revolutionary and an instrument

⁶⁸⁹ Jalal Brayim, *Chapkek le mejoyi Komala, Iraq* [A selection of the history of Komala, Iraq], (KRG: Chowar Chera Publication, 2011), 300.

⁶⁹⁰ Gowhari (2011a), *Rojhelati Kurdistan le de Sal da*.

⁶⁹¹ *Ettelaat*, 19 April 1980, Archive of Khoshhali, 2. Volume, 79.

of the West. This was done to justify the regime's attack on Kurdistan and to prepare the public attitude for a mass mobilization against the Kurds.

For instance, these media platforms spread such lies as "the KDPI and Komala have shut down all mosques in Kurdistan and people are not allowed to pray".⁶⁹² Iranian radio and TV has been blamed by Ghassemlou for having a hostile and destructive role towards the Kurdish society. According to Ghassemlou, "there are some hands inside the regime that do not wish the existence of a good and peaceful relationship between the Kurds and the government, and they use the national radio and TV to damage this relationship".⁶⁹³ The regime's propaganda machine was strong, and spread false stories such as Israel sending Iranian Kurds weapons, or thousands of Kurds from Turkey crossing the border to support Iranian Kurds.⁶⁹⁴

The *shoras* of different cities of Kurdistan, in protest to the Iranian radio and TV's hostile representation of the Kurdish movement, invited Kurdish society to take part in mass strikes.⁶⁹⁵

Behroz Sulaimani, a Kurd living in Tehran, during a meeting approached the minister of the interior, critically saying that "the Kurdish people have been attacked on the basis on false accusations, for instance plundering and occupying military bases. The Kurdish people have become a direct target of state hostility".⁶⁹⁶ People such as Sulaimani claimed that what the government is doing is a 'plot', because instead of listening to the wishes of the Kurdish people, the government's so-called revolutionary radio and television broadcast inaccuracies, for instance that 30,000 Kurds joined a rally for separatism. For instance, Sulaimani furiously addressed the Ministry of Interior that "the previous regime called us [Kurds] criminals and traitors, is now not the time for this regime to use a different language in representing the Kurds and their claim?"⁶⁹⁷

While using the public media as channels of propaganda against the Kurdish movement, another critical aspect which caught the attention of the Kurdish leadership was the regime's monopoly over the public radio and TV was the comprehensive censorship. Shaikh Ezzedin Hosseini highlighted this issue of censorship as a real challenge to the future of democracy and freedom of speech in Iran. He held that

⁶⁹² *Kayhan*, 16 November 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 4. Volume, 67.

⁶⁹³ *Kayhan*, 11 July 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 1. Volume, 29.

⁶⁹⁴ Archive of Khoshhali 8. Volume, 65-75.

⁶⁹⁵ *Kayhan*, 11 July 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 1. Volume, 29.

⁶⁹⁶ *Kayhan*, 27 March 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 17. Volume, 1-2.

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

The radio and TV are playing a biased and partial role. They are censoring free speech evidently, it is a sign of the return of despotism and tyranny. We support the freedom of the pen and condemn any forms of censorship. We condemn despotism regardless of its cover and we support the freedom of activity of any progressive political group and parties.⁶⁹⁸

5.5.5 Kochi Mejoyi Mariwan (Mariwan's Mass Exodus)

In line with the intensification of the Kurdish-regime conflict, the means of resistance adopted within the Kurdish movement diversified. The flourishing Kurdish civil society and its multifaceted activities became a real challenge to the regime's enforcement of authority and consolidating its power in the Kurdish region. An example of politically oriented civil society activity, was the collective welcoming of the released political prisoners in Kurdistan. This method has become a very widespread tradition in different Kurdish cities. For instance in Mariwan, "celebrating political prisoners' release and holding welcoming speeches for them was a method used and promoted by Fouad Mostafa Sultani(the co-founder of Komala), as an effective means of mobilizing people in Mariwan".⁶⁹⁹

During the Revolution, different civil society organizations were established. Among many others, the Democratic Organizations of Kurdistan (an umbrella organization), the Women's Committee in Mariwan, the Union of (School Pupils and) University Students, the Union of Unemployed Labourers, and the Society of Militant Women of Saqhez, are a few examples of the established unions and organizations which worked in collaboration to solve different issues in the Kurdish society.⁷⁰⁰ For example, the objective of the Militant Women of Saqhez was the abolition of the conservatives' and reactionaries' power and influence, and liberating all toiling and oppressed classes, as well as eliminating the exploitation of women by men: "more specifically, this organisation has endeavoured to provide what it has termed as 'gender-specific' benefits

⁶⁹⁸ *Kayhan*, 13 May 1979, Archive of Khoshhali 4. Volume, 30.

⁶⁹⁹ For instance, in Mahabad following the release of Yosef Ardelan, Ghani Beloriyan and Aziz Yousefi, or Shoaib Zeakriyayi in Sanandaj, etc. In Mostaf Sultani, *Kak Fouad, Rebar, Siyasetmedar u Zanayeki siyasi*, 181.

⁷⁰⁰ Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zende: Kordestan*, 112; & Mostaf Sultani, *Kak Fouad, Rebar, Siyasetmedar u Zanayeki siyasi*, 210-238.

to Kurdish women. These include improving welfare benefits and working conditions of working Kurdish women”.⁷⁰¹

The activities of the Kurdish civil society were framed around peaceful protest actions against the acts and policies of the newly-established political regime in Tehran.⁷⁰² Civil society in Kurdistan relied largely on peaceful collective actions as strikes, hunger strikes, and shutting down the *bazars* or market places, schools and offices as a means of protest and resistance.⁷⁰³ Collective strikes were organized in many cities of Kurdistan.⁷⁰⁴ The rally of the people of Sanandaj in support of releasing the eight members of the Komala in Mariwan,⁷⁰⁵ the shutdown of the *bazaar* in the weeks aimed at expelling the Pasdaran from Kurdish cities,⁷⁰⁶ and the hunger strikes of the people of Banê and Paweh (*Qori Qela* on 13th August 1979),⁷⁰⁷ are among examples of nonviolent civilian disobedience activities of the Kurdish civil society during the post-revolutionary period.

Mariwan, as many other cities of Kurdistan, witnessed many events. The people of this city took active part in the Revolution, turning this city into a centre of activity of different political parties and civil society organizations.⁷⁰⁸ *Kochi Mejoyi Mariwan* (the historic exodus of Mariwan) is one of the most discussed events which took place in this city through the tense and chaotic post-revolutionary period. This event has left massive importance on the identity of this city. As a method of resistance, the exodus of Mariwan shows that the Kurdish people persisted in claiming their demands through peaceful collective actions. The people of Mariwan, known for their culture of peaceful civil society activity, had conducted a similar action to the 1979 exodus in 1973/4, to protest the Shah’s land policy.⁷⁰⁹

The exodus of Mariwan, as a major socio-political event of this period, was a decision made by Mariwan’s city council, received the support of the whole city, mobilized civil society, and gained the solidarity of the major parts of Iranian Kurdistan. Following an announcement made by Mariwan’s city council, the exodus started on 23rd July 1979 and lasted fourteen days. Fouad Mostafa Sultani, the cofounder of the Komala

⁷⁰¹ Entessar, *The Kurds in Post-Revolutionary Iran and Iraq*, 931.

⁷⁰² Ettelaat, 29 January 1980, *Archive of Khoshhali*, 2. Volume, 57.

⁷⁰³ *Archive of Khoshhali*, 10. Volume.

⁷⁰⁴ *Kar*, Organ of Cherek Fedayi, No.46, 13 February 1980, in Gowhari. *Rojhelati Kurdistan le de Sal da*, 407.

⁷⁰⁵ Mostafa Sultani, et al., *Kak Foaud Mostafa Sultani*, 140.

⁷⁰⁶ *Ettelaat*, 8 January 1980, *Archive of Khoshhali*, 7. Volume, 108.

⁷⁰⁷ Mostafa Sultani, et al., *Kak Foaud Mostafa Sultani*, 26.

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 22.

⁷⁰⁹ Qazi, *Interview with Mansour Tayfuri on Kurdish exodus of 1979 in Mariwan*.

and a member of Mariwan's city council, played a crucial role during the crisis in Mariwan, mobilizing the mass exodus.⁷¹⁰

Kurdish deprivation and dissatisfaction with regime policies became manifested through the mass exodus in Mariwan. The exodus started as a protest action, the culmination of a combination of different destructive regime policies in Kurdistan and particularly in Mariwan and its surrounding areas in 1979. *Sepah's* attempt of spreading its bases in Mariwan and their violent behaviour⁷¹¹, the reoccurrence of the conflict between peasants and feudal landlords, the destructive and penetrating role of the KDP-Provisional Leadership,⁷¹² and consequently the people of Mariwan's reaction to these critical conditions in their city, led to the decision to make the mass exodus.

One example of the critical relationship between the Kurdish movement and the Iranian government can be identified through regime's use of the public radio and TV in broadcasting hostile messages against the Kurdish people and their democratic claim. The Kurdish people blamed the regime for twisting the Kurdish claims, by broadcasting false program about the events in Kurdistan. For instance, a TV broadcast on 14th July 1979 caused massive protests in many Kurdish cities. In Mariwan, the Union of Peasants mobilized a mass protest, which ended in the loss of civilian lives.⁷¹³ The *pasdaran/Sepah* opened fire at the protesters gathered in the front of the *Maktab-e Quran* (Moftizadeh's headquarter in Mariwan). This resulted in thirty deaths and a hundred injuries among the protesters.⁷¹⁴

Similar violent acts of the *Pasdaran* meant that the people of Mariwan mobilized their grievances and demanded the exit of the *pasdaran* and other military forces from the city. According to the people of Mariwan, these problems were either created or sponsored by the regime, aimed at undermining civil society and the *shora*, and establishing military bases and preparing for the regime's intervention in Kurdistan. The people of Mariwan repeatedly emphasised that they had "no desire of fighting with the regime, however we are not going to surrender to the *Pasdaran*,⁷¹⁵ and the security of the city should be handed over to trusted local people".⁷¹⁶

⁷¹⁰ Sasan Amjadi, *Negahi Gozera be Koch-e Iterazi-e Mardom-e Mariwan dar 33min salgerd-e an* [A review of the historical protest exodus of the people of Mariwan on its 33rd anniversary, 2011. <http://news.gooya.com/politics/archives/2011/07/125162.php> (accessed 15 March 2018).

⁷¹¹ Mostafa Sultani, et al., *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*, 24.

⁷¹² *Ettelaat*, 29 September 1978, Archive of Khoshhali, 10. Volume.

⁷¹³ Mostaf Sultani, *Kak Fouad, Rebar, Siyasetmedar u Zanayeki siyasi*, 105.

⁷¹⁴ *Ettelaat*, 22 July 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 5. Volume, 39.

⁷¹⁵ Tehran Mossavvar, 1 July 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, volume 20, 92.

⁷¹⁶ *Ibid*, 93.

With the escalation of the conflict in Mariwan, the regime's hard-core conservative officials, such as the vice-prime minister Chamran, approached the Kurdish issue from an exclusively military angle, and he advocated the use of military force as the only means guarantying the enforcement of the regime's authority in the Kurdish region. During a meeting between Iranian officials, including Chamran, and the city council, Chamran threatened the people of Mariwan with facing punishment unless they abandoned their demands. Chamran stressed, "we are here for fighting and not celebrating".⁷¹⁷ Mostafa Sultani responded that "if you want to attack the city we will leave the city, so come and occupy an empty city".⁷¹⁸

Chamran, in justifying his approach, argued that "the reality is that transferring a huge military arsenal to Mariwan has strengthened the army in this region, and this has positioned us in a stronger situation capable to achieve order by forces".⁷¹⁹ Chamran's brutal approach was even criticized by the regime's own officials. For instance, Mehdi Behadoryan, Khomeini's representative for investigating the situation in Kurdistan, highlighted in a report that "evidence showed that the feudalists and landlord of Kurdistan were, in a 'mysterious conspiracy' led by individuals as Dr Chamran and General Zahirinejad, heavily armed, aiming at suppressing the deprived and toiling people of Kurdistan".⁷²⁰

The civil society in Mariwan, the activity of which reflected the entire political spectrum in this city and the city council, were the main organizers of the exodus. However, other forces that has played a significant role during this era are the *Yekyeti Jotyarani Mariwan* (the Union of Peasants of Mariwan) and the Peshmerga forces of this union, established on 29th May 1979.⁷²¹ This union and its small armed force provided the ideological support and educational training, and underpinned the peasants' mobilization against the landlords in the urban areas of Mariwan. From its establishment until its merger into the Komala in August, the Peshmerga of *Yekyeti Jotyarani Mariwan* were a force elevating the confidence of the civil society in Mariwan.

The integration of the Peshmerga units of *Yekyeti Jotyarani* into Komala, was explained by Mostafa Sultani: "this unit has played its role [in challenging the feudalists of Kurdistan and providing the peasants and land workers with better methods of mobilization], now is time to prepare for defending Kurdistan from the attacks of the

⁷¹⁷ Qazi, *Interview with Mansour Tayfuri on Kurdish exodus of 1979 in Mariwan*.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid.

⁷¹⁹ Kayhan, 3 August 1979, *Archive of Khoshhali*, 16. Volume, 7-8.

⁷²⁰ Amjadi, *Negahi Gozera be Koch-e Iterazi-e Mardom-e Mariwan dar 33min salgerd-e an*.

⁷²¹ Mostafa Sultani, et al., *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*, 22-23.

regime".⁷²² Following this decision, the Komala leadership met on 20th August in Bokan and made a statement titled 'the Kurdish people face the test'. This statement was proposed by Mostafa Sultani, aimed at warning the Kurdish people of the regime's non-peaceful plans for Kurdistan.⁷²³

5.5.7 The Exodus and its Real and Symbolic Values

The exodus of Mariwan is considered as a turning point for the political developments in this city during the post-revolutionary period. The exodus was at the same time a peaceful collective protest, an act of civilian disobedience and a strategy for avoiding any potential massacre of civilians, in the case of the regime's attack on Mariwan. During the exodus, almost half of Mariwan's population (between seven and eight thousand people) left the city, and set up tents in Kanimaran (an area outside the city). A large part of the remaining population moved in with family and relatives in villages neighbouring Mariwan.⁷²⁴ As result of the exodus, the city was entirely empty.

People of different parts of Kurdistan, by initiating different actions such as providing the civilian camp at Kanimaran with food and other everyday essential materials, and mobilizing protest actions and rallies, displayed collective solidarity with the mass exodus. As acts of solidarity, there were massive rallies in many cities of Kurdistan, Sanandaj, Kamyaran, Saqhez, Baneh and Bokan. The supporters marched toward Mariwan and arrived at the camp after many days.⁷²⁵ Despite several infrastructural, communication, resource and security limitations and challenges, the Kurdish society's massive support and solidarity with the exodus created a picture of a politicized community possessing a strong civil society.

Reflecting on the symbolic aspects of the mass exodus in Mariwan, reveals that the Kurdish society had developed a strong potential of mobilizing its demands through the acts of civil society and conduct of peaceful collective actions. The mass exodus was covered by some national media outlets. For instance, the newspaper *Tehran Mosavvar* covered the event with special reportages on the exodus and different aspects of life in the camp of Kanimaran. The example of the mass exodus and the Kurdish people's act

⁷²² Ibid, 23.

⁷²³ Ibid, 26.

⁷²⁴ Mostaf Sultani, *Kak Fouad, Rebar, Siyasetmedar u Zanayeki siyasi*, 374-382.

⁷²⁵ Mostafa Sultani, et al., *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani Ke bo*, 25, & Gowhari (2011a) *Rojhelati Kurdistan le de Sal da*, 405.

and expressions of solidarity, reveals that through this period, mass solidarity rallies all around Kurdistan were became an important tradition and means of political and cultural framework, that by practicing them the Kurdish people on one hand expressed their solidarity with each other and the Kurdish movement, and on the other hand condemned and resisted the regime's acts of atrocities in Kurdistan through deploying peaceful means of mobilization.

Mariwan's exodus became a source of inspiration for other cities of Kurdistan. For instance, considering similar initiative, the people of Kamyaran threatened the army with mobilizing a mass exodus "if the army did not stop its violations of the security situation in the city".⁷²⁶ Mostafa Sultani, in a speech to the masses in Kanimaran, held that "the exodus has unified the people"⁷²⁷ [...] Mariwan has become the stronghold of liberation and we will make the whole Iran as Mariwan".⁷²⁸ This event challenged many of the unpopular forces, such as the *Pasdaran*, the army, and the landlords. The *shora*, which before the exodus was declared as illegal by the regime, after the mass exodus was recognized by the regime. Even though the regime broke its promises, in the negotiations following the exodus it promised to remove all its military bases from the city, and hand over the security of Mariwan to the police and local forces.⁷²⁹

Summary

Whilst the Revolution resulted in the change of political regime in Iran, the shift from monarchism to republicanism did not bring the people of Iran, particularly the non-Persian and non-Shiite communities, closer to their dream of equal rights of citizenship or establishing a democratic political system. In this regard, the Revolution, at least for these minority communities, ended with disappointment and further deprivation. In the case of the Kurdish movement, can arguably be claimed that the current four-decade long Kurdish conflict with the Islamic regime, is a product of this disappointment and deprivation.

The 1979 Revolution resulted in the re-emergence of the Kurdish movement, and the massive thickening and diversification of the number of actors and ideologies

⁷²⁶ *Ettelaat*, 9 February 1980, Archive of Khoshhali, 2. Volume, *Kurdistan Democratic Party [of Iran] and the Revolution* 60. https://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/gunagun-ketab-Akhbar_Kurdestan_02.pdf

⁷²⁷ Mostafa Sultani, et al., *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*, 379.

⁷²⁸ Qazi, *Interview with Mansour Tayfuri on Kurdish exodus of 1979 in Mariwan*.

⁷²⁹ Mostafa Sultani, et al., *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*, 381.

participating in this movement. This emergence provided opportunities as well as challenges. While the Kurdish movement and the Kurdish society experienced a flux of new ideas and visions, the lack of a culture and strategy for managing crisis and conflict, meant that each minor or major tension between different forces had the potential to turn Kurdish society into a scene of conflict.

The sudden emergence of the multi-faceted civil society organizations and their activities in Kurdistan, revealed that the Revolution did not only provide the Kurdish movement with the opportunity of re-emergence of the national struggle, but also that Kurdistan possessed a generation of intellectuals that in the Revolution gained the opportunity to activate and put in practice their potential. The major part of the acts of civil society in Kurdistan was innovated and implemented by this new generation of Kurdish intellectuals, and not the traditional political parties of Iranian Kurdistan.

Chapter 6

The State of Internal Disintegration

Introduction

This chapter continues some of the themes of the fifth chapter, and deals with the re-formation of the Kurdish movement from 1979 to the 1980s. It sheds light on another aspect of the movement, whereby the political parties of Kurds on both sides of the Iran-Iraq border, were major actors of the developments during this period. This chapter has been structured around three sub-elements: firstly the Iranian Kurdish movement's transformation from guest to host; secondly, the Komala and KDPI's half-decade of fratricide war; and thirdly, the shadow of the eight years of the Iran-Iraq War over Kurdish movement. The analysis of these factors highlight critical aspects of the movement, such as intra-factionalism and fratricidal war, destructive competition, and unsustainable movement conduct. As the main focus of the previous chapter was on the occurrence of a wide window of opportunity following the Revolution, in this chapter the focus is directed on the question of whether the Kurdish movement has been able to transform these opportunities to come closer to its ambition of liberating the Kurdish people from national, and class, subjugation.

6.1 The Iranian Kurdish Movement, from Guest to Host

Apart from regime change, the 1979 Revolution also led to a change of the status of the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements. These movements experienced massive diversification and thickening, related to the number of actors involved and their activities. This expansion has meant that this movement been from a limited circle transformed to a mass mobilization. An additional and more drastic change, concerns the Iranian Kurdish movement, after more than three decades of exiled nationalism,⁷³⁰ once again gained the opportunity of mobilizing the Kurdish society from the soil of Iranian Kurdistan. Another characteristic of this period is that Iranian Kurdistan hosted different Iranian opposition groups, as well as the political parties of the Iraqi Kurdish movement.

⁷³⁰ Vali, "Sekot-e Rojhelat", 116-117.

Reflecting on these forces, provides a picture of a critical interaction which further complicated the already vulnerable situation of Iranian Kurdistan. The security condition of Kurdistan worsened drastically: different paramilitary and self-interested groups, organized by the remaining elements of the Pahlavi regime such as General Owaysi and Palizan, the Jaf tribe, and some other feudal groups around Kurdistan, deployed the chaotic situation in Kurdistan in attacking and looting public institutions, or conducting different anti-Kurdish movement activities.⁷³¹

Two major issues caused the occurrence of several challenges and difficulties, firstly the struggle for hegemony between Komala and the KDPI,⁷³² which from the early days after 1979 devolved into fratricidal war between these two forces, and secondly the attitudes of the two major parties of the Iraqi Kurdish movement, the KDP and PUK, to the situation in Iran and Iranian Kurdistan. This led to movement fragmentation, factionalism, and disorder within the Iranian Kurdish movement. Barzani's forces remaining after the total disintegration of the Iraqi Kurdish movement in 1975, organized under the so-called KDP-Provisional Leadership, viewed this situation as an opportunity for remobilizing their activities. Different areas of Iranian Kurdistan, bordering Turkey and Iraq, witnessed several clashes between the newly-established PUK under the leadership of Jalal Talebani, and the KDP-Provisional Leadership.⁷³³

Similar incidents which took place during this era, furthered instability in the already unpredictable and fragile Iranian Kurdish movement. The government in Tehran deployed the internal disunity within different sections of the Kurdistan movement in weakening the capability of this movement.⁷³⁴ These problematics were chiefly outcomes of the movement leadership's self-interested and self-perpetuating political agendas, with an extremely destructive effect on the objectives of Kurdish liberation. The lack of a durable and united front was revealed as a serious issue facing the already disorganized Iranian Kurdish movement.⁷³⁵ These issues, combined with the regime's brutal approach to Kurdish demands, meant that the Iranian Kurdish movement once again, following the Mahabad Republic, lost a historic golden opportunity.

⁷³¹ Archive of Khoshhali, 6. Volume, 3-5.

⁷³² Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zende*, 133.

⁷³³ Selah Rashid, *Mam Jalal, Successive Interviews; From Youth to the Presidency*, Second Volume, (Silemani: Karo Publications, 2017), 52-63.

⁷³⁴ *Ettelaat*, 4 April 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 6. Volume, 5.

⁷³⁵ Manafy, *The Kurdish Political Struggles*, 64-69 & Bruinessen, Bruinessen, Martin van "The Kurds and Islam". Working Paper no. 13, Islamic Area Studies Project, Tokyo, Japan, [this is a slightly revised version of the article in *Islam des Kurdes (Les Annales de l'Autre Islam*, No.5). Paris: INALCO, (1998/1999), 15-18.

Even though almost every Kurdish leader has highlighted the importance of unity and solidarity between movements of different parts of Kurdistan, the historical records of the contemporary Kurdish movement reveal that “sadly, unity and solidarity among the Kurdish factions remains to be seen, [and] Kurds continue to kill other Kurds”.⁷³⁶ Demobilization and fragmentation have been the most devastating results of such misconduct.

6.2 The Occurrence of the KDP-Provisional Leadership Problematic

One explanation behind different Iranian regimes’ successes in suppressing the country’s Kurdish movement, can be found in these regimes’ capability of deploying the Kurdish movements of other parts of Kurdistan, against Iran’s own Kurdish movement. As already mentioned in the previous chapters, the relationship between Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi and Mella Mostafa Barzani, and the way the Shah used Barzani in crushing the Iranian Kurdish movement in the 1960s, is an example of the occupiers of Kurdistan using Kurds for killing other Kurds. Shortly after the Revolution, the Islamic regime, familiar with Mohammad Reza Shah’s experiment in using the Iraqi Kurdish movement against the Iranian Kurdish movement, relied largely on ‘collaboration’ and repeating the Shah’s successful strategy.

The 1975 Algiers Accord between Iran and Iraq settled the borders of these two countries, but also resulted in a catastrophic meltdown of the Barzani-led Iraqi Kurdish movement.⁷³⁷ However, the 1979 Revolution was viewed by the KDP-Iraq and its arch-enemy the PUK as a golden opportunity to mobilize their fight against the Iraqi government. After the Revolution, the PUK and KDP-Iraq competed for the new Iranian regime’s favour. While the PUK was less experienced and lacked in-depth cooperation with the regime in Tehran, the KDP-Iraq’s collaboration with the Iranian state was highly institutionalized. In fact, the Islamic regime transformed its relationship very quickly by gaining the support and willingness of the KDP-Iraq against Iran’s own Kurdish movement led by the KDPI and Komala.⁷³⁸

⁷³⁶ Manafy, *The Kurdish Political Struggles*, 69.

⁷³⁷ Karwan S. Waisy, “The Iraqi Kurdish Density after the Kurdish Movement Collapsed in March 1975”, *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)*, Volume 4 Issue 2, 2015 <https://www.ijsr.net/archive/v4i2/SUB15999.pdf>

⁷³⁸ Kreyenbroek and Sperl, *The Kurds A Contemporary Overview*, 22.

The initiative of declaring the *Qiyade Mowaqat* (KDP-Provisional Leadership)⁷³⁹/KDP-Iraq) by the KDP as an attempt at re-establishing the Iraqi Kurdish movement, followed the chaotic situation of the Kurdish movement in Iraq. Following the collapse of the Barzani-led movement in 1975, many of the KDP-Iraq leaders and members, as a protest against Barzani's leadership, joined the newly-established PUK. Overall, the new form of mobilization aimed at re-establishing the movement was an encouraging step. The PUK's attempt at re-establishing the Iraqi Kurdish movement invoked massive concerns and the reaction of the KDP-Iraq and the Pahlavi regime. While for the KDP-Iraq having a political rival was intolerable, for the Iranian regime the concern was that the new movement would replace the KDP-Iraq, which would have an unpredictable impact on the domestic and regional security of Iran, and "as a result the Barzani family, in cooperation with the Iranian regime, initiated a plan that would stop or at least reduce the effect of PUK's activity".⁷⁴⁰

A more serious issue facing the Iranian Kurdish movement in this period was related to the KDP-Iraq's collaboration with the Islamic regime. After the death of Mella Mostafa Barzani (1st March 1979),⁷⁴¹ the remaining forces of the KDP-Iraq resettled in different regions of Iran under the leadership of Barzani's sons, Idris and Massoud, reorganized and deployed their forces against the Iranian Kurdish movement. The KDP-Iraq, during its collaboration with the Islamic regime, disregarded the Iranian Kurdish movement's interest.⁷⁴² The self-interested behaviour of the KDP-Iraq, once again challenged the idea of Kurdish crossborder kinship. On the one hand, the hostile relationship of the KDP-Iraq to the PUK, and on the other hand the KDP-Iraq's dependency on the Islamic regime's support, turned Iranian Kurdistan into the battlefield of different competitive political forces. While the KDP-Iraq as result of its collaboration with the Islamic regime engaged in military warfare against the Peshmerga forces of the KDPI and Komala,⁷⁴³ the PUK played a different and complex role.

⁷³⁹ Following the 1975 Algiers Agreement between Iran and Iraq, the KDP-Iraq's activity reached its lowest point. After the death of its leader Mostafa Barzani, however, the KDP-Iraq reorganized its activity under the name 'the Provisional Leadership' (in Arabic, *Qiyadet Mowaqat*). The KDP operated for nearly two years with this title, while following these two years the name 'KDP' replaced the Provisional Leadership again. Despite its short existence, several important issues and conflicts can be linked to this period of the KDP's existence. The KDP-Provisional Leadership was announced on December 10th 1975 in Iran [this is confusing because you wrote above that the KDP-PL was formed in 1979], and apart from Massoud and Idris Barzani (sons of Mostafa Barzani), the leadership board consisted of thirteen KDP officials. Rashid, *Mam Jalal, Successive Interviews*, 64 & 70.

⁷⁴⁰ Jalal, *Chapkek le mejoyi Komala (Iraq)*, 130-132.

⁷⁴¹ Waisy, *The Iraqi Kurdish Density after the Kurdish Movement Collapsed in March 1975*, 45.

⁷⁴² Khlikgi, *Jan u Jiyan*, 13.

⁷⁴³ KDPI, *Kheyantekani Qiyade Moweqat be Netewayi Kurds*, 9-10.

There are several examples of contradictory interactions in the case of the PUK. Evidence attests that the PUK leadership was desperate to gain the attention of Khomeini and his Islamic regime.⁷⁴⁴ Jalal Talebani's greetings to Khomeini, congratulating the Revolution as an anti-imperialistic victory, issuing friendly statements and offering the PUK's support and solidarity to the Islamic Revolution, when Iranian Kurdistan was under heavy attack from the Islamic army,⁷⁴⁵ are among the examples of the PUK's desperate flirtation with the Islamic regime in Tehran.

Another example of the PUK's actions during 1979 and early 1980s was the PUK's support and training of the Komala cadres and Peshmerga forces,⁷⁴⁶ and supporting individuals such as Simko Aliyar who challenged and undermined the KDPI's hegemony.⁷⁴⁷ The KDPI assumed such acts of the PUK as interference in the internal affairs of the Iranian Kurdish movement.⁷⁴⁸ Even though the relations between the PUK and KDPI never escalated to a critical level resulting in physical clashes, the KDPI observed these acts of the PUK with suspicion.⁷⁴⁹ Since the interaction between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements during the post-revolutionary era once again resulted in cynicism and brutality, these interactions should be studied with the crossborderness of the Kurdish movement, collaboration and the conflict of interests between different sections of the Kurdish movement of different parts of Kurdistan.

As mentioned in the fourth chapter, Mella Mostafa Barzani's mistreatment of the KDPI led-Kurdish movement in the 1960s profoundly damaged the relationship between the Kurdish movements of these two parts of Kurdistan. From the perspective of the Iranian Kurds, the Barzani-Iranian relationship resulted in fatalities and the collapse of the KDPI's attempt at re-establishing the movement in the 1960s.⁷⁵⁰ After the Revolution, in spite of their deep earlier relationship with the Shah and the Iranian state, the KDP-Iraq soon succeeded in establishing collaborative relations with the Islamic regime, with both having Iraq as common enemy.⁷⁵¹ Following this period, an obvious negative attitude to the KDP-Iraq came to the surface, in which progressive and leftist Kurdish

⁷⁴⁴ Talebani's letter to the Provisional Government in Ayendegan, 29 July 1979, Archive of Khoshhali 15. Volume, *Patriotic Union of Kurdistan [PUK], Kurdistan Democratic Party Iraq and the Revolution*, 40-46 https://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/gunagun-ketab-Akhbar_Kurdestan_15.pdf

⁷⁴⁵ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 39-42 & Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zende*, 66.

⁷⁴⁶ Hisami, *Le Bireweriyekanem*, Bergi Sesem, 43.

⁷⁴⁷ Hisami, *Le Bireweriyekanem*, Bergi Penchim, 136-138.

⁷⁴⁸ Gowhari (2011a), *Rojhelati Kurdistan le de Sal da*, 304-305.

⁷⁴⁹ Hisami, *Le Bireweriyekanem*, Bergi Penchim, 169-171 & 225-227.

⁷⁵⁰ KDPI, *Kheyanekekani Qiyade Moweqat be Netewayi Kurds*, 9-10.

⁷⁵¹ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 37.

groups and individuals viewed Barzani as collaborator with Iranian and international imperialism.⁷⁵² In Kurdistan, the Revolution resulted in the occurrence of a new phase of relations between the KDP-Iraq and the Iranian Kurdish movement, overshadowed by difficulty and hostility.

The Iranian Kurdish movement continuously accused the KDP-Iraq of being an ally of the corrupt Kurdish feudal class and the conservative regime in Tehran, which wanted to cynically exploit the chaotic situation in Kurdistan.⁷⁵³ The KDP-Iraq committed provocative and destructive actions in its alliance with the Iranian regime. For instance, in Sanandaj the *Pasdaran* and forces of the KDP-Iraq violated an agreement between Sanandaj's city council and regime forces, occupied the city's military garrison and started digging trenches and erecting barricades around it. When the masses in Sanandaj protested against these actions, they were met with arbitrary fire by the *Pasdaran* and the KDP-Iraq.⁷⁵⁴

The Iranian Kurdish movement's critical attitude towards the KDP-Iraq was clearly manifested through the 'Eight-Article Plan for *Khodmokhtari*', in which the leadership of Iranian Kurds in Mahabad with the participation of representatives of the Komala, KDPI and Chrik-e Fedayi, formulated the framework for negotiations with the Provisional Government in Tehran.⁷⁵⁵ The final article of this plan is the most relevant from a crossborder point of view, as shown in the following extract:

Since Mella Mostafa Barzani and the [KDP] Provisional Leadership have been and still are elements of the CIA and SAVAK, they are abandoned by the Kurdish people. In this regard the Kurdish people request that the Revolutionary Government cut any interaction with them and expel the traitor leadership of the KDP-Iraq from Iran.

⁷⁵² KDPI, *KheyaneTekani Qiyade Moweqat be Netewayi Kurds*, 9-10.

⁷⁵³ Mostaf Sultani, *Kak Fouad, Rebar, Siyasetmedar u Zanayeki siyasi*, 280.

⁷⁵⁴ Archive of Khoshhali 7. Volume, *Political Parties and Kurdistan*, 10-11. https://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/gunagun-ketab-Akhbar_Kurdestan_08.pdf

⁷⁵⁵ Briefly, the content of the eight-article plan was as follows. 1. Declaring support for the Revolution and demanding freedom for the Kurdish people. 2. Supporting the integrity of Iranian territory and considering the Kurdish wish to be based on the idea of autonomy and federalism. 3. Considering the rights and interests of the workers and disadvantaged people of the Kurdish society. 4. Developing and building the economy of the underdeveloped and neglected Kurdish region. 5. Establishing a joint council (consist of patriotic officers with sympathy with the Kurdish movement and the Revolutionary Council) in controlling military bases in Kurdistan. 6. Identifying and punishing military personnel who fire against demonstrators. 7. Appointing Shaikh Ezzedin Hosseini as the head negotiator of the Kurds. 8. Expelling the KDP-Provisional Leadership from Iran. The negotiation plan was formulated under the direction of Shaikh Ezzedin Hosseini, Dr Abdolrahman Ghassemlou, Selah Mohtadi, Ghani Beloriyan and Fouad Mostafa Sultani. Afterwards the plan passed through a bigger assembly and was read and revised with input from notables and intellectuals including Sayed Jalal Hosseini (from Banah), Molla Kheder Sardki (from Sardesh), and Snar Mamendi (from Shapor of the north Kurdistan). Eskandari, *Didgahha Beraye QateaNamayi 8 Madayi Mahabad*.

However, this request [of expulsion] should not affect the ordinary (the poor and refugees and their families) members of the KDP-Iraq.⁷⁵⁶

The Iranian Kurds' inclusion of this stipulation can be assumed as retaliation for Barzani's mistreatment of the Iranian Kurdish movement during the 1960s. Including such a demand in the negotiation plan was controversial, and none of the individual participants of the (closed) meeting in Mahabad acknowledged being behind it. This avoidance of responsibility shows the proposal was firstly contrary to the ideal of Kurdish crossborder solidarity; and secondly that it was thought morally wrong to force the expulsion of refugees while they were still under threat. It has been argued that the eighth article on the one hand provoked the Barzanis and the KDP Provisional Leadership into collaboration with the Islamic regime, and on the other hand that it was also deployed by the Islamic regime as an instrument of dividing the Kurds internally and organizing the KDP-Iraq to its own benefit. Ahmad Eskandari maintains that since the KDP-Iraq in the early days of the Revolution was not by any regards a threat to the Kurdish movement in Iran, the eighth article was a nonsensical demand, because "it just caused furthering division and antagonism among Kurds, especially during such a sensitive and historical period".⁷⁵⁷

Including the eighth article of the Plan for *Khodmokhtari* was the culmination of the Iranian Kurdish leadership's critical attitude towards Barzani and the KDP-Iraq. By referring to the KDPI's leaflet published in 1980,⁷⁵⁸ it can arguably be claimed that the eighth article was a product of the failure of crossborder Kurdish movement solidarity in this and earlier periods. The frustration and disappointment among the Iranian Kurds became included as an item of the agenda of negotiations with the central government. Eskandari holds that "this article is still an issue of discussion and dispute".⁷⁵⁹ Later the KDPI regretted the article, recognizing it as an unhelpful and potentially destructive element of the Plan for *Khodmokhtari*.⁷⁶⁰

Despite the confusion about the instigator, Selah Moatadi (one of the participants in the closed meeting in Mahabad) points to Fouad Mostafa Sultani as the one who insisted upon including the eighth article. The Komala had through the Revolution a

⁷⁵⁶ Eskandari, *Didgahha Beraye QateaNamayi 8 Madayi Mahaba*.

⁷⁵⁷ Eskandari, *Didgahha Beraye QateaNamayi 8 Madayi Mahabad*.

⁷⁵⁸ KDPI, *KheyaneTekani Qiyade Moweqat be Netewayi Kurds*.

⁷⁵⁹ Eskandari, *Didgahha Beraye QateaNamayi 8 Madayi Mahabad*.

⁷⁶⁰ Gowhari (2011a), *Rojhelati Kurdistan le de Sal da*, 108-110.

particularly close relationship to the PUK.⁷⁶¹ Critics suspect the PUK for having used its influence on Komala in including the article. In a statement, the PUK declared its support for expelling the KDP-Iraq “due to this group’s [KDP-Iraq’s] support for the feudalists and their link to the SAVAK and CIA”.⁷⁶² According to Hossein Khlikgi, the eighth article and the demand of expelling the Barzanis from Iranian Kurdistan, represented an ideology that viewed itself as the representative of a single political party and not the whole Kurdish society. Regarding the reasons for the KDP-Iraq’s support for the Islamic regime, Khlikgi claims that “such a collaboration with the enemies of the Kurds and Kurdistan was respected and adopted in the KDP-Iraq, and the existence of a powerful tribal influence inside KDP-Iraq resulted in a similar way of conducting politics”.⁷⁶³

Reshad Mostafa Sultani, the author of Fouad Mostafa Sultani’s biography, questioned Moatadi’s accusation of Fouad Mostafa Sultani as responsible for the eighth article. Nevertheless, he explains the eighth article was a form of protest towards the policies of KDP-Iraq in Iranian Kurdistan, which was during the meeting approved by every individual member of the Kurdish representatives:

The hostile actions of the KDP-Provisional Leadership, for instance their alliance with the feudalists in bullying the peasants of different parts of Kurdistan and making obstacles for Iranian Kurdish revolutionary groups, cooperating with local countermovement militias (*Jash*) supporting the Iranian regime, especially through the critical moments in Iranian Kurdistan, led to the decision made by the Kurdish leadership.⁷⁶⁴

There are several examples of the KDP-Iraq’s destructive alliance with the Kurdish feudal landlords, and their role in suppressing the voice of the Kurdish peasants.⁷⁶⁵ In the city of Shno (Ushnawiya), when people protested against the KDP-Iraq’s policy, KDP-Iraq gunmen opened fire, killing six and injuring eleven civilians.⁷⁶⁶ According to the KDPI and Komala, the KDP-Iraq encouraged the tribal leaders of Kurdistan to collaborate with the Islamic regime. The harmful role of the KDP-Iraq became more evident when its forces side-by-side with the Iranian army and the *pasdaran* during the so-called Three Months’ War fought the Peshmerga forces of the KDPI and Komala. The KDP-Iraq, with its experienced guerrilla forces and the familiarity and knowledge they had of the

⁷⁶¹ Jalal, *Chapkek le mejoyi Komala (Iraq)*, 255 & Mostafa Sultani, et al., *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani Ke bo*, 169.

⁷⁶² *Ayendegan*, July 4, 1979, in *Khoshhali 7*. Volume, 19.

⁷⁶³ Khlikgi, *Jan u Jiyani*, 13-15.

⁷⁶⁴ Mostaf Sultani, *Kak Fouad, Rebar, Siyasetmedar u Zanayeki siyasi*, 2-4 & 280.

⁷⁶⁵ Archive of *Khoshhali 7*. Volume, 35-36 & Mostafa Sultani, *Kak Fouad, Rebar, Siyasetmedar*, 280.

⁷⁶⁶ KDPI, *Khayanetekani Qiyade Moweqat be Netewayi Kurds*, 35.

geography of Iranian Kurdistan, played a significant role benefiting the Iranian army's attack on the Iranian Kurdish movement.⁷⁶⁷ As maintained by Bruinessen, "in 1983, KDP and Iranian forces succeeded in jointly expelling the Iranian Kurds from their last 'liberated areas' inside Iran".⁷⁶⁸ However, as held by Bruinessen, the KDP-Iraq could not afford to antagonize the Iranian regime because the refugees were virtually hostages, and it remains unclear to what extent they were forced to join the fight against the Iranian Kurds or did so voluntarily.⁷⁶⁹

The death of Mella Mostafa (1st March 1979 in the USA) ten days after the issuing of the Eight-Article Plan for *Khodmokhtari*, and afterwards his funeral in Shno, resulted in different incidents, furthering hostility and conflict between the KDPI and KDP-Iraq. Mella Mostafa's body was buried in Shno, though was later desecrated by unknown individuals. A KDPI official was accused by the KDP-Iraq for being behind this act, though this accusation was denied by the KDPI. Bruinessen writes, "it never became clear who was responsible, but the incident further exacerbated the conflict between the Barzanis and the Iranian Kurds".⁷⁷⁰ Massoud Barzani at the funeral of Mella Mostafa on 5th March 1979, announced that "Imam Khomeini as the great Islamic leader has promised to provide the Kurdish people with their rights [...] I promise you that the great leader under the banner of Islamic Iran would grant you *Khodmokhtari*".⁷⁷¹

6.3 The PUK's Gamble

While the position of the KDP-Iraq was quite clear, and its collaboration with the Islamic regime caused difficulties for the Iranian Kurdish movement, it is difficult to conceptualise the role of the PUK into a specific category. The PUK was founded on 21st May 1975, following the collapse of the Barzani-led Iraqi Kurdish movement,⁷⁷² aimed at re-establishing this movement. Gaining access to a safe haven and military resources were the main considerations of the PUK when the Revolution occurred. The PUK approached the revolution as an opportunity that could be deployed beneficially, which is why it attempted to establish relations with the elite of the Islamic regime. According to Jalal Talebani, leader and cofounder of the PUK, this attempt was challenged by issues

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid, 34-36.

⁷⁶⁸ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 39.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid, 37-39.

⁷⁷⁰ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 38.

⁷⁷¹ Eskandari, *Didgahha Beraye QateaNamayi 8 Madayi Mahabad*.

⁷⁷² Rashid, *Mam Jalal, Successive Interviews*, 29-55.

such as the KDP-Iraq and its already deep collaboration with the Iranian state, the internal fractioning within the PUK whereby each faction of the PUK separately attempted to receive the attention of Tehran, and the crossborder and historical relationship between the movements of these two parts of Kurdistan.⁷⁷³

There were several reports in the Iranian newspapers that the PUK forces attempted to attack Iranian military bases in Mariwan and other border areas.⁷⁷⁴ Even though the regime highlighted this issue, this should not be understood as the existence of a joint front between the KDPI and PUK against Iranian regime forces. Khoshhali argues that it was related to “the existence of different political groups viewing the situation in Kurdistan as an opportunity for their activities. However the main reason for the regime’s focus on reporting the issue was to justify its attack and invasion of Kurdistan”.⁷⁷⁵ According to Brayim Jelal, a senior official of the PUK, the PUK’s relation with the Iranian opposition groups, particularly Kurdish organizations, was based on three strategic and ideological factors: 1) the struggle in Kurdistan was an inspirable part of the struggle in the region, especially in the neighbouring country Iran, which had a large Kurdish population; 2) the importance of solidarity and support to the Kurdish movement in Iranian Kurdistan; and 3) seeing the success of the Iranian Revolution as an opportunity for improving the PUK’s position.⁷⁷⁶

These criteria can be identified within the steps the PUK took in this period. For instance the PUK’s discourse on and representation of the Revolution was highly positive and supportive. From the early moments of Khomeini’s return, Talebani welcomed and congratulated the victory of the Revolution and declared the support of his party to the Revolution as an anti-imperialist Revolution.⁷⁷⁷ For instance, Talebani as part of his flirtation with the regime, told the Iranian media that the Shah and SAVAK had plotted against him, and that “the PUK lead the Kurdish movement in the Iraqi Kurdistan as part of the movement of the people of the Middle East, that is inspired by the ideology of the Iranian Revolution and its leadership, Imam Khomeini”.⁷⁷⁸ The hostile attitude of the PUK toward KDP-Iraq became expressed through Talebani’s letters to senior Iranian officials. For instance in a letter to Bazergan, Talebani called Barzani a counter-revolutionary agent of the CIA, Mossad and SAVAK, and undeserving of the

⁷⁷³ Ibid, 138-139.

⁷⁷⁴ *Kayhan*, 24 February 1979, Khoshhali, 15. Volume, 4-5.

⁷⁷⁵ Khoshhali, *Joziyati derbarey-e jang-e se mahe-e Kurdistan*.

⁷⁷⁶ Jalal, *Chapkek le mejoyi Komala (Iraq)*, 231-232.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ettelaat*, 29 February 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 10. Volume, Kurdistan and the Revolution, 60. https://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/gunagun-ketab-Akhbar_Kurdestan_10.pdf

⁷⁷⁸ *Ettelaat*, 28 January & 19 February 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 15. Volume, 2-3.

revolutionary government's support and recognition. Talebani asked the Islamic regime to hold the Barzanis responsible for their brutal counter-revolutionary behaviour.⁷⁷⁹

Through the intensification of the clashes between the Iranian Kurdish movement and the Iranian army and IRGC, the PUK during a short period, particularly in the fighting on the main road between Sardasht and Piranshar (also during the three month war in 1980), supported the KDPI and Komala. In the lexicon of the Iranian Kurdish movement, this PUK participation became known as the *Hezi Peshtiwan* (the backing force) and the golden era of Kurdish crossborder cooperation. During this battle several leaders and Peshmerga of the PUK lost their life.⁷⁸⁰ The Kurdish defence in this battle crushed the Iranian army. This Kurdish victory forced Khomeini to restart negotiations with the Kurds.⁷⁸¹ Despite this support and solidarity, the historical records of this relationship reveal some negative aspects of these interactions. For instance Talebani highlights that the PUK was disadvantaged by its interaction with the KDPI and Komala. He blames these parties for not listening to his advice, for instance in taking control over state banks in Kurdish cities, and furthermore accuses the KDPI for not supporting the PUK in return: "the KDPI did not give the PUK access to material and military resources it captured following its control of different military garrisons in Kurdistan".⁷⁸²

The ideological aspect of the PUK's relationship to the Iranian Kurdish movement was reflected and practiced through this party's relationship to Komala, almost the PUK's sister party in Iranian Kurdistan. The history of relations of Komala and the PUK, can be traced back to the time when Komala operated as *Teshkilat*⁷⁸³ (organization) before its official announcement. The *Teshkilat*, in order to protect its members from the Pahlavis' reprisals and persecution, advised its senior members to join the PUK. For, instance until the Revolution, both Dr Jafar Shariati and Saeed Snayi were organized in the PUK.⁷⁸⁴ While before the Revolution, Komala helped the PUK with different kinds of support such as collecting medicine, following the announcement of the Komala's official activities the PUK supported the organization with political and military training.⁷⁸⁵ The close ties of these two parties meant that in internal communications, Komala was mentioned as *Komelayi amoza* (cousin Komala).⁷⁸⁶ However, this relationship has been

⁷⁷⁹ Talebani's letter to Bazergan, in Ayendegan, 29 July 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 15. Volume, 40-46.

⁷⁸⁰ Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zende: Kordestan*, 66.

⁷⁸¹ Khoshhali, *joziyati derbarey-e jang-e se mahe-e Kurdistan*.

⁷⁸² Rashid, *Mam Jalal, Successive Interviews*, 137-138.

⁷⁸³ Mostafa Sultani, et al. *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*, 120-124.

⁷⁸⁴ Jalal, *Chapkek le mejoyi Komala (Iraq)*, 132.

⁷⁸⁵ Mostafa Sultani, et al., *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*, 169.

⁷⁸⁶ Jalal, *Chapkek le mejoyi Komala (Iraq)*, 255.

criticized by Hossain Moradbeigi, a cofounder of Komala, since according to him “Komala’s strong reliance on the PUK has meant that we, an immature and unexperienced radical leftist organization, overlooked the necessity of creating ties with Iranian leftist groups”.⁷⁸⁷

6.4 Political Splits and the Half-Decade of Fratricide War

The KDPI since its establishment experienced several splits, resulting in immense damage to the Kurdish movement. The first official split of the KDPI after the 1979 Revolution took place after the KDPI’s fourth party congress (19th February 1980).⁷⁸⁸ This split is commonly referred to as *taqmi hawt kasi* (the seven person group) division. As a result of the ideological and strategic dispute between the mainstream leadership and seven officials⁷⁸⁹ of the KDPI’s political bureau and central committee, this group with a statement on 15 June 1980 announced that they were leaving the party.⁷⁹⁰ The Tudeh Party and its Kurdish sympathisers and members were blamed for this split.⁷⁹¹ Another major split in the KDPI took place following the KDPI’s Eighth party congress, resulting in the creation of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran-Revolutionary leadership (KDPI-RL).⁷⁹² This split and the creation of KDPI-RL resulted in several clashes between these two parties, and casualties. On one hand the splits reduced the capability of the movement, and on the other hand they caused disappointment within the Kurdish society towards the KDPI leadership.

One of the major diversifications trends of importance for the mobilization and content of the Iranian Kurdish movement, was the emergence of the Komala (*Komeley Şorrişgêrrî Zehmetkêşanî Kurdistanî Êran*, the Society of *Revolutionary Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan*). The ideological underpinnings of Komala as a radical leftist political organization were provided by the leftist theories of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao.⁷⁹³ Komala focused on the plight of the Kurdish masses and promoting class consciousness among workers, peasants and the disadvantaged sections of the Kurdish society.⁷⁹⁴ In

⁷⁸⁷ Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zende: Kordestan*, 59.

⁷⁸⁸ Gowhari (2011a), *Rojhelati Kurdistan le de Sal da*, 451.

⁷⁸⁹ Ghani Beloryan, Dr Rahim Sayf Qazi, Fawziye Qazi, Mamosta Hemen, Nawid Moaini, Ahmad Azizi, Farooq Kaikhosraw, in Gowhari (2011b), *Rojhelati Kurdistan le de Sal da*, 79.

⁷⁹⁰ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 37.

⁷⁹¹ Khlikgi, *Jin u Jiyan*, 40-41.

⁷⁹² Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, 41.

⁷⁹³ Mostafa Sultani Malake & Watandoost, Saad. *Mebahes-e Kognre-e Awal-e Komala 1357* [the First Congress of the Komala 1980] <http://www.komele.nu/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/kongra1komala.pdf>, 8.

⁷⁹⁴ Entessar, *Kurdish Politics in the Middle East*, p. 51 & Entessar, *the Kurdish mosaic*, 44.

Entessar's words, "unlike other Kurdish movements which have sought to strengthen Kurdish ethnicity through psychological ties to Kurdish history, Komala pays particular attention to political education; it teaches village boys and girls the principles of class and guerrilla warfare".⁷⁹⁵

It is difficult to refer to a specific date for the establishment of the Komala; however, the late 1960s, according to biographies, political narratives and other accounts, is commonly referred to as the years of its foundation. For instance, according to Reshad Mostafa Sultani, "Komala as a clandestine organization and as response to a historical need, was established in the summer of 1969".⁷⁹⁶ The original name of Komala was *Teshkilat* (organization), and the *Teshkilat* held its first meeting in Tehran in early 1971. According to Fateh Shaikhul Islami, the *Teshkilat* was later renamed Komala.⁷⁹⁷ The Komala on Azar 1357 (December 1979) in Naqhadah held a historical meeting with the participation of its ten highly profiled leader.⁷⁹⁸ This meeting was referred to as the First Congress of Komala.⁷⁹⁹ The martyrdom of Mohammad Hussain Karimi, one of the ideological leaders and co-founders of Komala, during the process of disarming Saqhez's Police Station (*shahreban*) on 15th February 1979, has been marked as the date of the announcement of the official political activity of Komala.⁸⁰⁰

The *Teshkilat* was established in an era when the KDPI had failed to re-establish the Kurdish movement in the 1960s, as well as when class consciousness in Kurdish society entered a new phase of experiences and experiments. For example, the establishment of the *Teshkilat* occurred in the aftermath of the tragic crushing of Ismail Sharifzadeh and Abdullah Moini's attempt at organizing the Kurdish movement inside Iranian Kurdistan. The significance of this can be identified in the symbolic actions taken by Komala members, such as the erection of a bronze statue in the honour of Ismail Sharifzadeh in Sanandaj.⁸⁰¹ The failure of the KDPI's attempt at re-establishing the movement triggered an alternative approach, which on the one side brought a new ideological framework into the Kurdish movement, and on the other challenged the KDPI and the nationalistic focus of the Kurdish movement in this period.

⁷⁹⁵ Entessar, *The Kurdish Mosaic*, 90.

⁷⁹⁶ Mostafa Sultani, *Kak Fouad, Rebar, Siyasetmedar u Zanayeki siyasi*, 129.

⁷⁹⁷ Mostafa Sultani, et al., *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*, 245.

⁷⁹⁸ The names of the ten participants of Komala's First Congress are as following: Foad Mostafa Sultani, Mohammad Hussain Karimi, Tayeb Roholla Abbasi, Abdollah Moatadi, Ibrahim Alizadeh, Hossain Moradbeigi, Iraj Farzad, Omar Ilkhanizadek, Mohsen Rahimi, Saad Watandoost. Mostafa Sultani, et al., *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*, 13-21.

⁷⁹⁹ Mostafa Sultani and Watandoost, *Mebahes-e Kogre-e Awal-e Komala 1357*, 10-12.

⁸⁰⁰ Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zende: Kordestan*, 79-80.

⁸⁰¹ Mostafa Sultani, *Kak Fouad, Rebar, Siyasetmedar u Zanayeki siyasi*, 183-185.

Nevertheless, there are several examples of joint defence fronts composed of the Peshmerga forces of the Komala, KDPI and *Chrik*, particularly in the Three Month-Battle of Kurdistan, when the Kurdish victory forced Khomeini to respond to the Kurdish appeal for negotiations positively.⁸⁰² While through the early post-revolutionary period the KDPI and Komala delivered a relatively satisfactory degree of cooperative interaction, in line with the escalation of the situation in Kurdistan and the rise of the question of how to deal with the Islamic regime during the 1980s, and the rise of these parties' hegemony-seeking agendas, disputed relations with harmful consequences between the KDPI and Komala became more visible, and suddenly this relationship vacillated from cooperative to conflictual.⁸⁰³

Related to the question of how to deal the Islamic regime, Komala and the KDPI had two very different approaches; while the KDPI promoted the idea that the Kurdish side should avoid any actions that could be used by the regime as provocations, Komala did not see any sign of good intentions from the regime, and blamed the KDPI as soft in its approach to the Islamic regime.⁸⁰⁴ Among many other examples, the way the KDPI dealt with the surrounded army's garrisons in areas under the control of the Kurdish movement can be referred to. To show good Kurdish intentions, and attempting despite regime aggression to deescalate the situation, the KDPI in some areas allowed the regime to bring supplies to its military bases in areas under the authority of the Kurdish movement.⁸⁰⁵ There are many examples of Kurdish forces' release of war captives and army helicopters.⁸⁰⁶ However, as mentioned, these initiatives of the KDPI resulted in the criticisms Komala and *Chrik*⁸⁰⁷.

For instance the KDPI has strongly been criticized by the Komala, when this organization in autumn 1979 allowed the regime supplies to reach to one of its strategic military garrisons in Sardesht, while this military garrison regularly shelling the city.⁸⁰⁸ On the other hand, the KDPI blamed Komala for not obeying the ceasefire, and acting provocatively.⁸⁰⁹ This interaction exposes the different approaches which the different forces of Iranian Kurds deployed through such a sensitive period, which was an era of opportunity concurrent with several complex challenges to the Iranian Kurdish

⁸⁰² *Jomhuriy-e Islami*, 4 February 1980, Archive of Khoshhali, 2. Volume, 59-60.

⁸⁰³ Entessar, *The Kurds in Post-Revolutionary Iran and Iraq*, 929.

⁸⁰⁴ Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zende: Kordestan*, 187-88.

⁸⁰⁵ KDPI statement in *Ettelaat*, 8 January 1980, Archive of Khoshhali, 2. Volume, 52-53.

⁸⁰⁶ *Kayhan*, 14 December 1979, Archive of Khoshhali, 2. Volume, 48-49.

⁸⁰⁷ KDPI statement in *Ettelaat*, 8 January 1980, Archive of Khoshhali, 2. Volume, 52-54.

⁸⁰⁸ Mostaf Sultani, *Kak Fouad, Rebar, Siyasetmedar u Zanayeki siyasi*, 206.

⁸⁰⁹ The KDPI statement in *Ettelaat*, 12 January 1980, Archive of Khoshhali, 2. Volume, 54-55.

movement. Reflecting on this period's disintegrating relation between Kurdish forces through the lenses of collective insurgency mobilization, it can be seen that these forces' inability to establish a sustainable front based on common interest and mutual understanding of the reality of this era in Kurdistan, was an issue which weakened the Kurdish position. This uneasy KDPI and Komala relationship was clearly revealed when the Komala, from different angles (ideologically and practically), challenged the KDPI's hegemony. Events escalated when these parties became committed in fratricidal wars, lasting until the late 1980s.⁸¹⁰

The other aspect of the KDPI-Komala dispute has its roots in ideological differences, highlighted chiefly by Komala. At the second congress of Komala, it was concluded that the Kurdish national question is an issue of bourgeois nationalism. Following this congress, Komala's political program emphasised that the 'national issue' was capitalistic, and the proletariat should not make any contribution to it.⁸¹¹ However, this approach was criticized by some allies of the Komala, among them *Itehad-e Mobarezan* (the Union of the Revolutionaries), which stated that "you [the Komala leadership] cannot neglect the national issue in Kurdistan".⁸¹² Another leftist group in Iran, *Wahdet-e Komonisti* (Communist Unity), blamed Komala for its approach to the Kurdish question, stating that "one of the main reasons for the high degree of the support of the Kurdish people to Komala, is that there in Kurdistan exists massive national oppression; therefore it is important that Komala acknowledges and deploys the potential of this correctly".⁸¹³ However, Komala's downplaying of the national issue, the emergence of powerful groups led by individuals such as Mansour Hekmat, resulted in several organizational disputes. The ideological approach of Komala to Kurdish nationalism and the KDPI, until the late 1990s was expressed as thus:

Nationalism in Kurdistan, similar to nationalism anywhere else, has been an instrument serving the interest of bourgeoisie. The KDPI has led this movement for decades. The KDPI belongs to the bourgeois class, and it aims to gain *khodmokhtari* for Kurdistan. For the Kurdish bourgeoisie *khodmokhtari* is about providing the bourgeois class access to capital and capital accumulation, and gaining political and governmental support, in the form of participation in local decision-making. The

⁸¹⁰ Khlikgi, *Jan u Jiyar*, 13.

⁸¹¹ Iraj Farzad in Mostafa Sultani, et al., *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*, 66-67.

⁸¹² Mostafa Sultani, et al. *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*, 29.

⁸¹³ *Ibid*, 67.

social influence and existence of the KDPI is equitable to the continuation of social injustice and traditionalism.⁸¹⁴

The KDPI, with its deep historical roots in Iranian Kurdistan, had more power and a broader public base; according to Komala, this advantage was used by the KDPI to isolate Komala.⁸¹⁵ Such an attitude contributed development of Komala-KDPI relations toward fratricidal war, which weakened the positions of both of these organizations and eradicated their capability to fight the Islamic regime.⁸¹⁶ Nevertheless, as defined by Komala, the KDPI-Komala combat was the war of the Kurdish bourgeoisie against the proletariat.⁸¹⁷ According to Bruinessen, the Komala-KDPI war had other aspects than ideological collisions. Komala proclaimed the KDPI

To be a bourgeois-feudal formation, it called for class struggle against it, even as both were being pushed across the border by Iranian forces aided by the KDP. In fact, the 'ideological' quarrels between the Komala and the KDP-Iran probably had more to do with territorial control. The KDP-Iran increasingly operated militarily in areas that were previously strongholds of Komala, and clearly intended to become the only force to be reckoned with in Kurdistan, which would significantly increase its leverage in negotiations.⁸¹⁸

Even though Iranian Kurdistan before the intensification of the KDPI-Komala conflict witnessed minor examples of conflicts between local forces of these parties, following 1982-83 this hostile relationship entered a new phase with widespread clashes and massive casualties on both sides. The southern part of Iranian Kurdistan (e.g. Sanandaj and Mariwan) was Komala's stronghold⁸¹⁹ and hosted in November and December 1983 the initial clashes between Peshmerga forces of the Komala and the KDPI. Short after these clashes on 1st January 1983, the KDPI and Komala in a joint statement announced a ceasefire and encouraged all to show responsibility and avoid the escalation of the vulnerable situation in Kurdistan. Following this ceasefire, during a nine-month period (winter 1983-summer 1984), no military clashes between these forces occurred.⁸²⁰

⁸¹⁴ Identification No. 3540: Assessment of the resolution of plenum of Komala's war with the Kurdish Democratic Party (Iran) (original title handwritten), Report of the Central Committee of Komala, 18 August 1985.

⁸¹⁵ Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zende*, 230-232.

⁸¹⁶ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 37.

⁸¹⁷ Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zende*, 229.

⁸¹⁸ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 41-42.

⁸¹⁹ Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zende*, 84.

⁸²⁰ Ahmad Eskandari, *Molahezati bar Do Ketab-e 'Hasht Sal ba Ibrahim Alizadeh ve Abdollah Moatadi'* (Some comments on two books, 'Eight Years with Ibrahim Alizadeh and Abdollah Moatadi'), 2011. www.azadi-b.com/arshiw/?p=29998 (accessed 5 January 2017).

Under the leadership of its first Secretary-General, Abdullah Moatadi, Komala after entering alliances with certain Iranian leftist groups became more assertive in challenging the hitherto dominant position of the KDPI in Kurdish affairs, and staged some of the fiercest intra-Kurdish factional attacks against the KDPI Peshmerga in recent history. In a statement, the KDPI politburo highlighted⁸²¹ that the Komala leadership had been informed that “any clashes would destabilize the entire Kurdish region, which is why the KDPI is interested in cooperation rather than conflict and clashes with Komala. However, if Komala acts provocatively and takes hostile initiatives, this would force the KDPI to respond harshly”.⁸²²

Nevertheless, the KDPI-Komala ceasefire did not last long, as the KDPI forces attacked Komala bases in Hawraman on 16th November 1984. This KDPI attack on Komala was considered a turning point for escalating the KDPI-Komala dispute further. According to Hassan Rahman Penahi, a member of Komala’s Central Committee, the KDPI attack on Komala bases in Hawraman was an “advanced planned attack” prepared by the KDPI. In this attack, three Peshmerga of Komala lost their lives, and Komala officials claimed ten “were captured and assassinated one by one in the front of the public in Nawsod”.⁸²³ Following this attack, Abdollah Moatadi in a statement of 21st December 1984, stated that “the military attack on Komala is a sign of the fear and inability of the Kurdish bourgeoisie”, and condemned and described the KDPI attack as an act of *inhesar talebi* (search for political monopoly).

The KDPI referred to Moatadi’s statement as the declaration that triggered the Komala-KDPI fratricidal war. In the Komala narrative, the so called *Fajeay-e Hawramanat* (the tragedy in Hawraman, referring to the KDPI’s attack on Komala in Hawraman region) was the KDPI’s attempt to wipe out Komala in its stronghold.⁸²⁴ In the same regions of Kurdistan, Komala on 26th January 1985 launched a chain of retaliatory attacks on the KDPI’s bases. Such acts of retaliation led the Kurdish movement into a long-term civil war, with massive consequences for the parties involved, the Kurdish people, and the prospects of the Iranian Kurdish movement. As highlighted by Eskandari,

The fratricidal Komala-KDPI war left a variety of negative effects on the Kurdish society and the durability of the Kurdish movement. It eradicated the capability of the

⁸²¹ “The KDPI’s reaction to other political parties”, Kurdistan Newspaper of KDPI, No. 99, p. 35, special issue for plenum, September 1984. This statement was made during a period in which there were no military clashes for nine months. Eskandari, *Molahezati bar Do Ketab-e*.

⁸²² Eskandari, *Molahezati bar Do Ketab-e*.

⁸²³ Rahim Rashidi, *Hawkari hez-e siyasiyekan le Kurdistan* [Cooperation between Kurdish forces, Interview of with Hassan Rahman Penah, Member of the Komala Central Committee], *Peshraw* no. 290, January 2011, 7. <http://komalah.org/peshraw/doc/peshraw290.pdf>

⁸²⁴ Kurdistan Newspaper of KDPI No. 102, winter 1984-85.

Kurdish movement and created a deep rift between these forces. It resulted in massive human causality, in which many Peshmerga's from both sides lost their life. These losses caused pain and trauma within many families in Kurdistan. In addition, villagers and communities that hosted the Peshmerga of both parties suffered massively from these clashes.⁸²⁵

As mentioned, the KDPI in several statements warned the Komala leadership of the consequences of their policy toward the KDPI. These statements disclosed two forms of KDPI considerations: on the one hand, the KDPI leadership viewed themselves as superior, since their organization was well-established whilst they viewed Komala as a minor political party; on the other hand, they considered Komala's claims about the KDPI as a threat for the KDPI's future hegemony in Iranian Kurdistan. Such considerations are identifiable in the KDPI issued-ceasefire statement, conditioned by elements such as Komala recognizing the KDPI as a revolutionary and progressive political party in Kurdistan, Komala guaranteeing not to repeat the incidents which had recently occurred (referring to the 26th January 1985 clashes), and insisting that Komala recognises its minority viewpoint and respecting the views of the KDPI as the majority standpoint.⁸²⁶

According to Komala, the KDPI's military aggression resulted in the escalation of the situation, from a propaganda war to military clashes.⁸²⁷ As emphasized by Mansoor Hekmat, "the KDPI attacked our bases and killed our comrades in a massive attack; if we had ignored this action of the KDPI that would have resulted in strengthening the KDPI position and its power consolidation in this region, thus hindering us from exercising our communistic activities".⁸²⁸ Reflecting on the incidents which took place in the 1980s, Ibrahim Alizadeh, a cofounder of Komala and current leader of the Communist Party of Iran-Komala, describes this war as one of the most tragic events in the modern history of the Iranian Kurdish movement, deserving investigation and research from different angles. Alizadeh holds the KDPI responsible for initiating the conflict, which he describes as the 'war for democracy'. He claims that the Komala-KDPI war fought over democratic principles, with KDPI as the violator of democracy and Komala its defender.⁸²⁹

KDPI by relying on aggression and use of military attempted to impose its power and hegemony. I cannot remember any political leftist and Kurdish groups in the

⁸²⁵ Eskandari, *Molahezati bar Do Ketab-e*.

⁸²⁶ Ibid.

⁸²⁷ Report of Central Committee of Komala 18 August 1985, Public Archive of Mansoor Hekmat, identification No. 3540.

⁸²⁸ Questions and answers on the KDPI's war with Komala, Public Archive of Mansoor Hekmat, Identification No. 2790.

⁸²⁹ Jahan-e-Emrouz, *Interview with Ibrahim Alizadeh*.

years following the Revolution being immune from KDPI aggression. The attack on *Paykar* (a leftist political party) is an example among many others. The KDPI viewed itself as the absolute owner of Iranian Kurdistan, inheriting the society after the Republic of Mahabad, and the other political parties and groups would only be allowed to practice their activities if they obeyed and showed loyalty to the KDPI. The KDPI did not tolerate any critics, and due to its military superiority and influence thought that it had the right to force its political opponents to remain silent.⁸³⁰

According to the Komala's discourse Komala and the KDPI represent two competing classes, the KDPI is representing the bourgeois class of Kurdistan, and Komala leading the proletariat's struggle. The Report of Komala's Central Committee identified the KDPI-Komala war as a struggle for hegemony in Kurdistan and the Kurdish revolutionary movement. The Komala leadership experienced internal disputes over how to articulate the movement in Kurdistan and how to deal with the KDPI. For instance Abdollah Moatadi, referring to Komala's challenge to the KDPI's hegemony, highlighted that "the Iranian Kurdish movement from this moment [the early 1980s] has 'two leaderships', which is why this war is decisive for the future leadership of this movement".⁸³¹ However, Hekmat challenged Moatadi's claim: "since Komala and the KDPI do not share the same ideology and they are not struggling for the same class of society, Moatadi's argument of who should lead the movement in Kurdistan is a nationalistic explanation, and therefore does not apply to Komala's role as a communist party, representing the proletarian class in the society".⁸³²

Hossain Khlikgi⁸³³ describes the Komala-KDPI conflict in the 1980s as springing from Komala's view of the KDPI as traditional and an obstacle for progress and change in the socio-political, economic and cultural structure of Iranian Kurdish society. Komala held that the KDPI was supporting the Agha, feudal and religious leaders, and did not contribute to the improvement of the poor and working class of the Kurdish society. However, Khlikgi maintains that these arguments of Komala did not justify its challenge to the KDPI, because many of the leaders of Komala, like the KDPI leadership, belonged to the feudal layer of Kurdish society, in some cases being even more feudal than the KDPI membership. In Khlikgi's words, "although a small number [of Komala leaders] –

⁸³⁰ Ibid.

⁸³¹ Assessment of the resolution of plenum on the Komala war with the Kurdish Democratic Party (Iran), Public Archive of Mansoor Hekmat, Identification No. 3540.

⁸³² Farzad, Iraj. & Hussanzadeh, Rahman. *Comments on some Important Documents*, Iskra Special issue, 27 February 2004 in Iskra Special issue, 27 February 2004. http://m-hekmat.com/fa/Iskra_IrajFarzad_RahmanHoseynzade.html

⁸³³ Dr Hossain Khlikgi is a Kurdish sociologist, also being member of the KDPI Central Committee until the mid-1990s.

for instance Abdollah Baban – devoted their fortunes and wealth to their struggle, a large part of these Komala leaders still receive advantages from their feudal background”.⁸³⁴ In this regard, Khlikgi argues “the Komala-KDPI war was not a conflict of ideological differences, but a matter of hegemony and who should control where [...] Nevertheless, their fratricidal war resulted in massive human loss and waste of military and mobilization resources”.⁸³⁵

6.6 Komala’s Unilateral Ceasefire; Termination of the Fratricide War

The Komala-KDPI war lasted almost half a decade (January 1st, 1983-April/May 1988).⁸³⁶ In an announcement, Komala once again held the KDPI responsible for the emergence of the war, and asserted that the (1988) organizational split in the KDPI (which resulted in the establishment of the KDPI-RL) resulted in the weakening of the KDPI’s position; however, despite this weakness, Komala was not interested in revenge, and wished to end the war with the KDPI. The announcement, referring to the KDPI-RL’s⁸³⁷ acceptance of Komala’s initiative, stated that “we [Komala] value the positive response of the KDPI-RL to Komala’s initiative announcing the end of the war. This termination would provide both parties of the conflict with the opportunity to improve our relationship in a peaceful manner, based on democratic values and criteria”.⁸³⁸ Mansoor Hekmat points to himself as the architecture of the unilateral ceasefire:

While many comrades in Komala promoted the idea of *war, war, until victory*, I found this slogan and strategy impossible and unrealistic. The ceasefire has been offered to KDPI, while KDPI in this period (1988) underwent a comprehensive split. While some comrades proposed that this ceasefire might just apply on the split section of KDPI (KDPI-RL), I suggested that if it apply for both the KDPI-RL and Ghassemlou’s fraction (in the moment of KDPI’s weakness), we can declare us as the winner.⁸³⁹

⁸³⁴ Khlikgi, *Jan u Jiyar*, 295.

⁸³⁵ *Ibid*, 295-296.

⁸³⁶ Farzad & Hussanzadeh, *Comments on some Important Documents*, Public Archive of Mansoor Hekmat.

⁸³⁷ The KDPI-RL (Kurdistan democratic Party of Iran- Revolutionary Leadership), the party split from the KDPI, immediately following its establishment established peaceful relations with Komala.

⁸³⁸ Identification No. 2210: Announcement of the Central Committee of the Kurdish Affiliation of Communist Party-Komala, regarding the Bilateral Ceasefire with KDPI, and the Current situation of KDPI, Komala 23 April 1988.

⁸³⁹ Questions and answers on the KDPI’s war with Komala, Public Archive of Mansoor Hekmat, Identification No. 2790.

The Komala leadership argued announcing the ceasefire as a product of the emergence of a new condition rooted mainly on the KDPI position in the late 1980s. The internal split in the KDPI was by Komala considered as a sign of weakening of the KDPI's social foundation and support, which would consequently result in the rise of revolutionary forces challenging traditionalism and nationalism in Kurdistan. In addition Komala argued that this current position of KDPI has eroded this organization's capability of conducting warfare from different fronts. This condition means that Komala has a historical responsibility to transform this opportunity to improving the situation in the advantage of the Kurdish proletariat. In addition, if any one of the fractions of the KDPI apply a peaceful approach to the Komala and respect the proletarian and democratic demands of Komala, Komala would have a more practical peaceful relation to them.⁸⁴⁰

In the early 1990s and following the ceasefire and before the division inside the Communist Party-Komala, some signs of normalization of relations between the KDPI and Komala was identifiable. Following the unilateral ceasefire, Kamala negotiators were encouraged to formulate and sign a shared protocol with the KDPI that reflected the interests of both parts. For instance, an internal document stated that "apart from initiatives aimed at normalizing relations, it is important to sign a protocol regarding *khodmokhtari* in Kurdistan".⁸⁴¹

6.6.1 The Internal Split within Komala

Similarly to the KDPI, Komala was not immune from internal disputes resulting in splits. As mentioned, Komala was founded by a group of Kurdish intellectuals in the late 1960s, and announced its official activity after the 1979 Revolution. However, the journey of Komala as an ideological rival to the KDPI began following Komala's alignment with other Iranian leftist groups, such as *Itehad-e Mobarezan* (the Union of the Revolutionaries), *Wahdet-e Komonisti* (Communist Unity), and the *Sehand* Faction. These three small Iranian leftist organizations merged officially in 1983 into Komala to form the Communist Party of Iran. The mother party, Komala, became the Kurdish branch

⁸⁴⁰ Assessment of the position of KDPI- Resolution approved by Komala's Sixth Congress, April/May 1988 (congressional resolution of sixth congress of Komala April/May 1988) in *Communist* No. 41, 15th July 1988. Identification No. 3360.

⁸⁴¹ Message from the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Iran to Ebrahim Alizadeh and Rahman Husseinzadeh on the attitude towards the KDPI, Communist Party of Iran, June 28. 1991 Identification, No. 2340.

of the Communist Party of Iran.⁸⁴² Following this transformation, Komala which was founded by individuals such as Fouad Mostafa Sultani as a protest party, became structured and organised in a hierarchical style, having a Central Committee, Secretariat and Politburo at its core.

The Komala leadership viewed the alignment with other Iranian leftist groups as a source of sustainability and survival, particularly when they compared their position with the KDPI, which was a competitor and even a threat to Komala's existence. Such an approach can be identified through the party's internal communications. For instance, Abdollah Moatadi in an internal letter to 'the Committee of Preparing for the Communist Party', expressed clearly that "the KDPI has joined the *Shoray-e Milli-e Mqhavemet* (the Council for National Defence)⁸⁴³, if we are not creating the Communist Party and ally with other forces, we will end up isolated".⁸⁴⁴

As result of merging other Iranian leftist groups into Komala and creating new framework for the activity of this organization, the *original* Komala became subjected to, for instance, the *Sahand* faction, and the ideological worldview of individuals such as Mansoor Hekmat. According to Reshad Mostafa Sultani,

Even though more than 98 per cent of the body and leadership of the Komala and the Communist Party were Iranian Kurds, the party and its politics was dominated by minority elements, with the remaining two per cent succeeding in dictating the direction and strategy of Komala in a way that did not respect the values and identity of the original Komala.⁸⁴⁵

The inter-organizational division within Komala reached a critical point at the 18th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Iran, when the participants were provided with the outlines of the plan and programme of the *fraksyon-e Komonist-e Karegeri* (the Worker-Communist faction). In a statement of 10th June 1990, the Worker-Communist faction declared its existence.⁸⁴⁶ However, Hekmat in a letter to the

⁸⁴² Questions and answers on the KDPI's war with Komala, Public Archive of Mansoor Hekmat, Identification No. 2790.

⁸⁴³ the Council for National Defence was an umbrella organization for the cooperation between different opposition groups of the Islamic regime

⁸⁴⁴ Mostafa Sultani, et al., *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*, 70.

⁸⁴⁵ Mostaf Sultani, *Kak Fouad, Rebar, Siyasetmedar u Zanayeki siyasi*, 476.

⁸⁴⁶ Based on the proposal of the 'faction', the plenum decided to appoint a Political Bureau for the party, in which Mansoor Hekmat, Korosh Modaresi, Reza Moqadam and Iraj Azerin were appointed as members. The plenum unanimously elected Mansoor Hekmat as the political leader of the party. Communique on the 18th central committee plenum of the Communist Party of Iran, September 15, 1990, printed in *Communist* No. 58, Public Archive of Mansoor Hekmat, Identification No. 3840.

20th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Iran on 1st August 1991, announced the official activity of the Worker-Communist Party. Hekmat argued that “the Worker-Communist Party aims at serving the interest of the working class in a more radical way, in accordance with the Marxist worldview”.⁸⁴⁷ This statement of Hekmat challenged the Communist Party’s ideology and practice for not being communist enough, particularly viewing elements of Kurdish nationalism as an obstacle for implementing *pure* communism in this party. Moradbeigi describes the idea behind the establishment of Komala, as well as the failure of Komala which led to the split in the early 1990s, as the following:

The process of mobilizing different sections of the working classes in cities and rural areas and integrating them into a radicalised leftist movement in Iranian Kurdistan, was a successful initiative; however, an inexperienced Komala leadership and a weak leftist consciousness in Kurdish society, coincided with other elements such as traditionalism [...] to prevent the spread of leftism as a durable social and political manifestation.⁸⁴⁸

6.7 ‘*Jash*’ and other Internal Elements of Challenge

The Islamic regime in its policy against the Kurdish movement, relied on a variety of instruments. While military aggression was most visible, creating counter-Kurdish movement forces was also a largely destructive policy deployed by the regime in targeting the Kurdish movement. In this regard, distinct religious leaders/groups, feudal landlords, and ex-agents of the SAVAK were involved in realizing the regime’s anti-Kurdish movement agenda. The regime in a calculated and systematic way deployed every aspect of life, particularly political, religious and economic elements, against the Kurdish movement. By creating and sponsoring different anti-Kurdish movement paramilitary groups, the regime succeeded in challenging the Kurdish movement from different angles.

The anti-Kurdish movement paramilitary unit the *Jash* (a donkey foal, an adverse term for a native collaborator among Kurds) was an effective force deployed by the Islamic regime in targeting the Kurdish movement, not just immediately after the Revolution but also through the whole four decades of the Kurdish-regime conflict. The

⁸⁴⁷ Identification No. 2960: [Mansoor Hekmat’s] Letter to the 20th Central Committee Plenum of the Communist Party of Iran, August 1, 1991, printed in *Communist* No. 63 September 1991, Identification No. 2960.

⁸⁴⁸ Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zende: Kordestan*, 76.

Jash paramilitary groups have been among the type of forces which not just the Iranian state, but also the other regimes occupying Kurdistan, have deployed as an effective force against the Kurdish movements across Kurdistan.

Establishing the *Jash* unit, known by the regime as *Peshmerga Mosolman* (Islamic Peshmerga),⁸⁴⁹ was an initiative taken in order to divide the Kurds and creating enemies using the Kurds themselves. Creating, funding and arming the *Jash* paramilitary forces and integrating them into the IRGC, resulted in many socio-political consequences. The word *Jash* or traitor, first described those Kurds who collaborated with the Iraqi regime in the 1960s. The Iranian Kurdish movement, particularly the Komala, deployed this word against members of the Maktab Quran,⁸⁵⁰ because Komala argued that Moftizadeh was collaborating with regime. The use of *Jash* created a deep cleft in the Kurdish society,⁸⁵¹ where individual *Jash* and their families became hatred by Kurdish society and the Kurdish movement, and became isolated from the Kurdish society. Chiefly, the *Jash* units were composed of local Kurds that have been integrated into the IRGC. As described by Bruinessen,

These forces were mockingly called by the other Kurds. In Iraq they were mostly recruited from among the large tribes, and operated under their own tribal chieftains. In Iran (where they were officially called “Muslim peshmergas”) some units were tribal, but most were apparently recruited among the polarized peasantry. They were more feared by the Kurdish insurgents than the regular army, for they knew the terrain and were experienced in mountain guerrilla warfare. The tribal *jash* had no political motivations, and several had in the past repeatedly changed sides from the government to the insurgents and vice versa. At times, there were silent informal agreements between them and the peshmergas to avoid each other; at other occasions they engaged in fierce fights.⁸⁵²

In order to divide the Kurdish society, the Islamic regime initiated a policy of retribalization of the Kurdish society, which posed a massive challenge to the Kurdish movement. This policy was implemented through sponsoring and arming the tribes and former feudalists to challenge the authority of the political parties that led the Kurdish movement, especially through the early 1980s. The feudal class of Kurdistan, following the Shah’s land reform in 1962, was weakened drastically and lost a huge portion of its

⁸⁴⁹ Manafy, *The Kurdish Political Struggles*, 48.

⁸⁵⁰ Ezzatyar, Ali. *The Last Mufti of Iranian Kurdistan Ethnic and Religious Implications in the Greater Middle East*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 173.

⁸⁵¹ Khlikgi, *Jan u Jivan*, 13.

⁸⁵² Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 39-40.

economic and political capabilities. The tribe of *Mangor* was among the tribal communities that through its collaboration with the regime caused massive headaches to the Kurdish movement. They became integrated into the regime's security forces and were trained by the IRGC.⁸⁵³

Though there is no exact statistic regarding the number of the *Jash* paramilitaries, their number did not exceed 25,000.⁸⁵⁴ The *Jash* units played an important role in serving the regime during the 1983-86 regime-Kurdish movement clashes. The *Jash* units, side-by-side with the KDP-Iraq and the IRGC, played an important role in the defeat and dispersal of the Peshmerga forces of Komala and KDPI. In the northern part of Iranian Kurdistan the tribe of Mamesh collaborated with the regime as *Jash*.⁸⁵⁵ From the military perspective, the *Jash* served the regime in controlling Kurdistan and defeating the movement; however, they never succeeded in legitimizing the military presence of the regime in Kurdistan among the people. As emphasised by Vali, "deploying this paramilitary tribal force, part of the strategy of the regime to substantiate its anti-nationalism policy, has significantly undermined the regime's legitimacy. In this regard, when this force was turned into the local face of the regime in Kurdistan, it failed to legitimize the regime's authority in Kurdistan".⁸⁵⁶

The Islamic regime's effort to spread *Jashyeti* ('being *Jash*') to many sectors, has meant that the phenomenon is not limited only to carrying the regime's gun, but that *Jash* can be found among academics, administrators, etc.⁸⁵⁷ The Iranian regime very quickly succeeded in creating and mobilizing the *Jash* forces, to the extent that these local paramilitary units became a destructive force challenging the Kurdish movement. The destructive and damaging collaboration of the *Jash* forces with the IRGC was revealed as critical in the Three-Month Battle of Kurdistan, "where, for instance, in Iranshah,⁸⁵⁸ the Bijari⁸⁵⁹ Kurdish members of the IRGC played a destructive role in fighting the

⁸⁵³ Vali, "Sekot-e Rojhelat", 191-121.

⁸⁵⁴ Wikileaks Document, "Views of Iranian Kurdish leader Qassemlo", 1988 February 16, Canonical ID: 88BAGHDAD 855_a, Available at https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/88BAGHDAD855_a.html (accessed June 15, 2018).

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid, 121-122.

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁷ The documentary *Nishtman froshekan* (those betraying their homeland) is produced by the KDPI's media centre TishkTV. The documentary provides useful information about how the Islamic regime has in a systematic way through almost four decades of its role, institutionalized, spread and supported *Jashteti* (the work of the *Jash*) in Iranian Kurdistan. KDPI Documentary. *Nishtman froshekan* (Those who are betraying their homeland), 4th season, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c93Y-v0V_18&feature=youtu.be (accessed 8 May 2018), & KDPI Documentary. *Nishtman froshekan*, 5th season. 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9G5AMXZq9Q> (accessed 8 May 2018).

⁸⁵⁸ Iranshah is a provincial town located between Saqhez and Diwandare, in the Iranian Kurdistan

⁸⁵⁹ Bijar is a Kurdish province most of its population are practicing the Shiite branch of Islam.

Peshmerga forces of the KDPI and Komala. The *Jash* units' participation in these fights led to a variety of violations of the rights of Kurdish people".⁸⁶⁰

The challenge posed by *jashayeti* to Kurdish society and the Kurdish movement, is beyond the scope of this study; however, it can be claimed that there are different negative aspects associated with the presence of *Jash* units in Kurdistan. Since *Jashayeti* has for some become a source of income, the *Jash* has turned into a deeply dependent and humiliated individual, the livelihood of them and their family based on their oppression of their fellow Kurds.⁸⁶¹

It is still unclear who proposed the creation of the *Jash* paramilitary forces following the Revolution. Some have accused Moftizadeh and his followers: "many of those executed in Sanandaj were reported to be Komala members, which automatically raised suspicion of Moftizadeh and Maktab Quran's involvement. The group [Komala] due to their conflict with Moftizadeh blamed Maktab Quran for treasonous cooperation with the regime in hunting down other Kurds, a charge that the group has continued to deny".⁸⁶² The history and issue of *jashayeti* is still a disputed and understudied area within the Kurdish movement. Regarding the theory of creation of the *Peshmarga Mosolman* by Moftizadeh, it is possible that Moftizadeh's ideological disagreements with the Komala and the KDPI, did not necessarily mean that he was hostile to the Kurdish movement. It is true that this period was overshadowed by internal disputes and competition for hegemony between different Kurdish forces and ideologies in Kurdistan. There are different indications that challenge the notion that Moftizadeh proposed the *Jash* units. Though Moftizadeh promoted the idea of an Islamic variety of *khodmokhtari*, in his writings and poems, particularly his *Mafi Nishteman* (the Right of the Homeland), his patriotism and love for Kurdistan was clearly reflected.⁸⁶³

Similar issues related to the Kurdish movement reveal that the Kurdish movement is a complex problematic, and that its counterpart the Iranian state has succeeded in manipulating and distorting different aspects of it to the regime's own benefit, and leading to division and hostility between different actors and sections within the Kurdish movement. While for Moftizadeh the wish for Kurdish autonomy (albeit in a different form) was shared with other forces affiliated to the Kurdish movement, the events during the post-revolutionary period show that Moftizadeh also found Islam to be a shared

⁸⁶⁰ Khlikgi, *Jan u Jiyar*, 93.

⁸⁶¹ *Ettelaat*, 9 February 1980, Archive of Khoshhali, 2. Volume, 61.

⁸⁶² Ezzatyar, *The Last Mufti of Iranian Kurdistan*, 142.

⁸⁶³ Ahmad Moftizadeh, *Mafi Nishteman* (the Right of the Homeland), summer 1960 <https://web.telegram.org/#/im?p=@maktabqurani> (accessed 10 April 2018).

element between his movement and the Islamic regime. This was seen during Moftizadeh's short period of alliance with Safdari, Khomeini's representative in Sanandaj. Moftizadeh's strict Islamic orientation created a complex cooperation between his movement and the Islamic regime.

It can be claimed that the ideological differences between Kurdish forces undermined the cohesion of the Kurdish movement and the claim of *khodmokhtari* in this period, the achievement of which required unity and cohesion within the Kurdish front. The regime, aware of the lack of unity and cohesion within the Kurdish movement, invested from the initial moment of its establishment in marginalizing the Kurds by using them against each other, realizing its ambition of the policy of divide and rule. Critics of Ahmad Moftizadeh assume that "Moftizadeh collaborated with the regime because he naively believed that after the defeat of the Peshmerga, he would be in the position of gaining autonomy and ruling Kurdistan".⁸⁶⁴ It should be mentioned that the friction between the Komala and Islamic movements similar to Moftizadeh's Maktab Quran, was very obvious. As emphasized by Mostafa Sultani, "the religious groups, among them Moftizadeh's followers, with their hostile attitude to leftist political ideology, has threatened the cohesion of the Kurdish society".⁸⁶⁵

The ideological disputes between secular/leftist groups and religious groups, e.g., Moftizadeh and his Maktab Quran and *Sipahi Rezagai* (the Army of Liberation),⁸⁶⁶ caused conflict and several clashes during a period where the Kurdish movement was under the regime's military attacks and the treachery of the *Jash*. In addition, there are several examples of Komala and the KPDI clashing with feudal elements. The attempts of the KDPI and Komala at disarming the feudalists armed by the army and Chamran in different parts of Kurdistan, such as Mahabad, Uromiye and Kermashan, in the most part resulted in military clashes. The Kurdish movement's conflict with the feudalists of Mangur in the post-revolutionary period, is one example among many others.⁸⁶⁷ The Kurdish feudal class attempted to use the chaotic post-revolutionary situation to reconsolidate their economic power, and retake lands previously redistributed through land reform. For Komala and the KDPI, this behaviour was a major source of internal challenge.⁸⁶⁸

⁸⁶⁴ Khlikgi, *Jan u Jiyan*, 137.

⁸⁶⁵ Mostafa Sultani et al., *Kak Faud Mostafa Sultani*, 21.

⁸⁶⁶ An Islamic group belong to the Shaikh Osman (a Shaikh of the Naqshbandi in the Iranian Kurdistan) around Mariwan and Hawraman. Archive of Khoshhali, 2. Volume, 48-49.

⁸⁶⁷ Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zende: Kordestan*, 125-130 & 161-163.

⁸⁶⁸ For instance, some of the feudalists of Diwandareh, among them Khalil Meleki, established the *Peshmerga Mosolman*. Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zende*, 175-176.

6.8 The Kurdish Movement in the shadow of the Iran-Iraq War

Among the most significant developments affecting the Kurdish movement in the 1980s, was the eight years of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), which had a massive impact on the Kurdish movements and society both in Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan. However, how each state made use of the Kurdish movement in their rival state, differed greatly.

The Islamic regime from the early days of its emergence conducted a provocative foreign and regional policy, inspired by an ideology of politicised Shiism, which was viewed by the Sunni Arab leaders of the region as a challenge to the stability of their societies. Khomeini's promotion of the idea of exporting revolution to other Muslim countries, raised the anxieties of many regimes in the Middle East. Nevertheless, the oppressed Shiite population in many of the Arab countries, inspired by Khomeini's articulation of the need for revolution, challenged the ruling Sunni authoritarians in these states. Secret documents from the American National Security Archive reveal the threat of Khomeini's exportation of Islamic revolution, as a provocative ideological act which evoked the reactions of all the Sunni Arab states on the Arabian Peninsula: "the oil-rich Arab countries worry that the recent success in the Iranian offensive will soon threaten their ability to maintain hold of their respective countries".⁸⁶⁹ For instance, in April 1982, the Saudi Arabian Interior Minister, Prince Nayef, announced that "Iran's ultimate goal is to control the Arab countries of the region by using Shiite minorities as revolutionary spearheads".⁸⁷⁰ In the case of Iraq, the idea was put into practice by Iraq's Shiite population.⁸⁷¹ Shortly after the Revolution in April 1980, the Iranian-backed Shiite militia *Al-Dawa* attempted to assassinate the Iraqi Foreign Minister and Tariq Aziz and the Minister of Culture and Information, Latif Nusseif al-Jasim. As reaction to this acts, the Iraqi government deported thousands of Iraqi Shiite members and supporters of *Al-Dawa* to Iran.⁸⁷²

The Iran-Iraq War can be considered a product of a variety of territorial and ideological disputes between the two countries, which the Revolution in 1979 brought to the fore. Iraq's relationship with Iran has been among the major challenges facing this country since the time of Iraq's foundation as a modern nation state.

⁸⁶⁹ Wilson Center, *Iran-Iraq War Timeline*, 12. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Iran-IraqWar_Part1_0.pdf

⁸⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁷¹ Efraim Karsh, *From Ideological Zeal to Geopolitical Realism: The Islamic Republic and the Gulf*, pp. 26-41, in Efraim Karsh (ed.), *The Iran-Iraq War Impact and Implications*, (USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 29-33.

⁸⁷² WilsonCenter, *Iran-Iraq War Timeline*, 1.

A combination of two factors laid the ground for the Iraqi state's attack on Iran. Firstly, the Iraqi government asserted the Algeria Agreement was a humiliation to Iraq, a policy of Mohammad Reza Shah imposed on Iraq, forcing it to hand over a large part of its territory. After signing the agreement, the Iraqis claimed that they had been forced to sign the document due to the fear of the Shah's aggression, which might have ended even in his occupation of Baghdad. As the deputy prime minister Taha Yasin Ramadan stated, "we had to decide at that time if we wanted to lose all of Iraq or half of Shatt al-Arab", and that "the foreign minister at the time, Sa'adun Hammadi, claimed that Iraq's signing of the agreement prevented it from losing Kurdistan".⁸⁷³

The territorial dispute seems to be the major issue; in the mid-1960s and 1970s, the Shah pursued Iran's claims in the Shatt (al-Arab) by using Iraq's Kurdish card.⁸⁷⁴ As highlighted by Pesach Malovany, "alongside historical, national, and religious factors, the major source of tension between the countries was a prolonged border dispute involving control of the Shatt al-'Arab River, which flowed along the southern segment of their mutual border".⁸⁷⁵ Considering the chaotic post-revolutionary situation in Iran as an opportunity for retaking control of those territories that according to the Algeria Agreement had been handed to Iran, the Iraqi leadership decided to declare war on Iran,⁸⁷⁶ and consequently the Iraqi army on 22nd September 1980 attacked and occupied a massive area of Iranian territory.⁸⁷⁷ The war caused incalculable human, material, and environmental damage, and destruction of the already underdeveloped economic infrastructure of the countries involved. Despite the populist propaganda of both states which declared themselves as the absolute winner of the war, in fact it was a war without winners.⁸⁷⁸

When the war began, the Islamic regime was facing both internal and external threats. The war had an intense impact on Iran's national security discourse, and provided the regime with a justification for the securitization of the country's socio-political issues. This war determined the regime's agenda: Iran's "ultimate goals during this era were

⁸⁷³ Pesach Malovany, *A History of the Iraqi Army from 1921 to 2003*, pp. 79-91, in Pesach Malovany (ed.) *Wars of Modern Babylon: A History of the Iraqi Army from 1921 to 2003*, (USA: The University Press of Kentucky, 2017), 81.

⁸⁷⁴ Shaul Bakhash, *The Troubled Relationship: Iran and Iraq, 1930-80*, in Potter, L. G. & Sick, G. G. (ed.) *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 11.

⁸⁷⁵ Malovany, *A History of the Iraqi Army from 1921 to 2003*, 79.

⁸⁷⁶ Bakhas, *The Troubled Relationship: Iran and Iraq*, 21-22.

⁸⁷⁷ Hassanzader in KDPI Publishing Centre, *Korte Mejoyi Hizbi Demokrtai Kurdistani Iran ; Chel Sal Xebat le penayi Azadi u Niw sade Tekoshan* [A historical review of Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran; Forty Years Struggle for liberation and half decades effort; a collection of writings by Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou and Abdollah Hassanzadeh, 2002] http://www.peshmergekan.eu/pdki/pdki_mejui.pdf, 323.

⁸⁷⁸ Potter, L. G. & Sick, G. G. (ed.) *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 6.

focused around Iran's territorial integrity and the protection of Islamic values".⁸⁷⁹ Considering the attitude of the Islamic regime to the war, it can be claimed that the elite of the newly established regime in Tehran (despite the variety of problems facing Iranian society) viewed the war as a golden opportunity to consolidate their power following the Revolution. While the war destroyed the socio-economic infrastructure of the country, it helped extend the lifetime of the regime. As held by Efraim Karsh;

The clerics in Tehran embraced the war with alacrity as an opportunity to rally the nation behind the revolution, eliminate domestic opposition, and promote Khomeini's vision of the worldwide export of Iran's Islamic message. Epitomised in the slogan 'revolution before victory', this instrumental approach made the war from the outset an extension of the domestic political struggle, to which all military and operational considerations were subordinated.⁸⁸⁰

The Islamic regime's cynical approach became more evident when Saddam Hussein's announcement of withdrawing Iraqi troops from Iran (April 1982) was rejected by Tehran.⁸⁸¹ The Islamic regime's elite were divided on the issue of peace or continuation of the war. When the Iranian president Bani Sadr requested the international community's intermediation in achieving a ceasefire, the prime minister of the time Mohammad Ali Rajayi, a hard-core Islamic conservative, rejected Bani Sadr's proposal and argued that "right now there is internal political turmoil, so we do not welcome any peace initiative".⁸⁸² The war was used by the regime to justify its quelling of opposition activities, particularly its aggressive actions in Kurdistan in the name of fighting forces that sought to violate the country's territorial integrity. According to Bani Sadr, the hard-core elements of the regime chose to continue the war because "Khomeini needed to distract the population from domestic problems and repression, [and] 'Khomeini first of all need[ed] crisis to impose his dictatorial regime".⁸⁸³ Nevertheless, the bloodshed of the eight years of Iranian-Iraqi War saw an end, when Iran formally announced its acceptance of the UN Security Council Resolution 598 on 18th July 1988, leading to a cease-fire between the two belligerents.⁸⁸⁴

⁸⁷⁹ Saleh, *Ethnic identity and the state in Iran*, 43.

⁸⁸⁰ Efraim Karsh, *Essential Histories The Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988*, Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd. 2002, 71.

⁸⁸¹ WilsonCenter, *Iran-Iraq War Timeline*, 12.

⁸⁸² Gowhari, *Rojhelati Kurdistan le de Sal da*, 79.

⁸⁸³ UPI, *Former Iranian President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr Said in an interview* <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/07/16/Former-Iranian-President-Abolhassan-Bani-Sadr-said-in-an-interview/8952395640000/> (accessed 10 July 2018).

⁸⁸⁴ Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, 136.

6.8.1 The Kurdish Share of the War

The Iranian as well as the Iraqi Kurdish movement considered the Iraqi state's surprise attack on Iran in September 1980 as an opportunity to expand their insurgency. Political parties on both sides attempted utilize this situation to the benefit of their insurgency,⁸⁸⁵ each in their own way. Yet through the war the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements faced different kinds of challenge and difficulty.⁸⁸⁶ Due to the long border shared by Iran and Iraq, running mainly through the Kurdish region, through the war Kurdish cities, town and villages were daily targets of airstrikes and shelling from both sides, and the Kurdish movement became involved in cooperation with those states occupying Kurdistan. Reviewing the relationships between the regimes occupying Kurdistan with their respective Kurdish population, and the Kurdish movement of their opposing state, reveals a high degree of complexity. This is applicable for both the Iranian and Iraqi government, which have "a long history of pitting Kurds against each other and using the Kurds to destabilise one another".⁸⁸⁷

As mentioned earlier, through the 1960s and 1970s the Iranian Shah relied heavily on deploying the Kurdish card in imposing his territorial claims on the Iraqi government. Once again, as war between these countries broke out, the old pattern repeated itself in which both states attempted to use their counterpart's Kurdish movement⁸⁸⁸ as a weapon. However, Iran and Iraq exercised different strategies in deploying the Kurds to their own benefit.

This kind of involvement of the Kurds in interstate contestation reveals a critical characteristic of the Kurdish movement, whereby the Kurds have been used as an element deployed by their superiors in realizing their political and military ends,⁸⁸⁹ whilst following the completion of their 'task' they were left behind. Mella Mostafa Barzani's collaboration with Mohammad Reza Shah, and the tragic breakdown of the Iraqi Kurdish movement after the 1975 Algeria Agreement, is only one example among many. In the following section will be described how the Iranian and Iraqi regimes' relations with the Kurdish movement of their counterpart was framed, and how these relationships impacted these countries' own Kurdish movement.

⁸⁸⁵ Kreyenbroek & StefaSperl, *Kurds A Contemporary Overview*, 22.

⁸⁸⁶ Hassanzadeh in KDPI Publishing Centre, *Korte Mejoyi Hizbi Demokrtai Kurdistani Iran*, 379.

⁸⁸⁷ Yildiz & Taysi, *The Kurds in Iran*, 66.

⁸⁸⁸ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 38.

⁸⁸⁹ Manafy, *the Kurdish Political Struggles*, 138.

6.8.2 The Iranian State and the Iraqi Kurdish Movement

As has previously been highlighted, successive Iranian regimes have during different periods used the Iraqi Kurdish movement either in order to achieve their regional goals, or to dismantle the country's own Kurdish opposition. This tactic was deeply institutionalized by Mohammad Reza Shah to a degree that, despite the change of regime in Iran in 1979, the Islamic regime succeeded in mobilizing and deploy the Barzani-led section of the Iraqi Kurdish movement against its Kurdish movement through late 1979 and the early 1980s.

When comparing the use of the two states, Iran and Iraq, of the Kurdish movement in serving their domestic and regional agendas, the history of the Kurdish movement reveals that the Iranians have had more success than the Iraqis in exploiting their Kurdish assets. This argument is also applicable in the context of the Iran-Iraq War. For instance, during the war the Iranian regime succeeded in acquiring the support of Massoud and Idris Barzani's KDP, as well as Jalal Talebani's PUK, in creating a Kurdish front against the Iraqi regime.⁸⁹⁰ An Iraqi Kurdish front with the KDP and PUK as its major actors became a reality in 1986, in which these forces (despite their historical enmity) succeeded in coming together in order to devote themselves to a common struggle against the Iraqi government. This joint front led to a number of military successes, sometimes with the cooperation of the Iranian armed forces⁸⁹¹ and sometimes alone.⁸⁹²

While both the Pahlavi and the Islamic regimes deployed the Iraqi Kurdish movement as an instrument serving their domestic and regional agenda, this kind of cooperation between these regimes and the Kurdish movement has not benefited the Kurdish movement; on the contrary, it has been detrimental to the crossborder Kurdish interaction and ultimately resulted in considerable damage to the mainstream Kurdish movement. An important outcome of the cooperation is that following each period of this cooperation/collaboration, the division within the Kurdish movement became deeper. This occurred since one element in this cooperation was used to attempt to dismantle the movement of the Iranian Kurds. The second negative aspect may be associated with the fact that when these regimes succeeded in achieving their goals, they turned their back on

⁸⁹⁰ Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, 131.

⁸⁹¹ For instance, in controlling Halabje during March 1988, the PUK forces were joined by different division of the Iranian IRGC. Judit Neurink, "The Gassing of Halabja Turned the Card on the Kurds in 1988". 2014, <http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/150320141> (accessed 10 March 2018).

⁸⁹² Charles Tripp, *The Consequences of the Iran-Iraq War for Iraqi Politics*, pp. 58-77, in Efraim Karsh (ed.) *The Iran-Iraq War: Impact and Implications*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 68.

their Kurdish collaborator(s). The third issue is the brutal regime attacks which have resulted on the Kurdish societies and movements on the pretext of those Kurdish movements' collaboration with the enemy state.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, a variety of acts of aggression by the Iraqi regime against Kurdish society occurred; the Iraqi Kurdish movement's coordinated military activity with the Iranian army was used as justification for chemical attacks against Kurdish cities.⁸⁹³ Apart from Saddam's use of different chemicals and nerve gas against the country's Kurdish population, the systematic genocide (the al-Anfal program), mass deportations, and demolition of thousands of villages and towns, was partially the result of such justification. In Efraim Karsh's words,

By the end of the Iran-Iraq War in the summer of 1988, more than half of the villages and numerous towns in Kurdistan had been razed and their populations deported. Some half a million Kurds were placed either in easily controllable settlements in the vicinity of the main towns in Kurdistan, or in concentration camps in the south-western Iraqi desert.⁸⁹⁴

During the war, the use of chemical weapon against civilians in Kurdish cities and villages on both sides of the border became a regular practise. Regarding the Iranian and Iraqi regimes' use of chemical weapons, Ghassemlou wrote "both sides tends to learn bad habits from each other [...] both sides do it [use chemical weapons], although the Iraqis much more".⁸⁹⁵ The cities Sardasht in Iranian Kurdistan, and Halabje⁸⁹⁶ in Iraqi Kurdistan, are two examples of Kurdish cities suffering hugely from these regimes' usage of chemical and nerve gas against Kurdish civilians during the war.⁸⁹⁷ Based on these examples, it can arguably be claimed that this cooperation worsened the security of the Kurdish civilians. Nevertheless, during the eight years of the Iran-Iraq War a form of

⁸⁹³ The Iraqi Kurdish city Halabja and its population were bombed with chemical and nerve gas, because the Iraqi regime claimed the Iranian army, accompanied by the PUK, has crossed the border and violated its sovereignty.

⁸⁹⁴ Karsh, *Essential Histories The Iran-Iraq*, 71.

⁸⁹⁵ Wikileaks Document; *Views of Iranian Kurdish leader Qassemlo*.

⁸⁹⁶ Ali M. Mohammad, *Omar Khawerekayi Shardasht* [Omar Khawer of Sardasht], 2018. <http://www.xendan.org/detailwtar.aspx?jimare=2196&nuser=1158> (accessed 27 June 2018). This article concerns Iraq's use of chemical weapons in Sardasht on 28 June 1987. When Sardasht was bombed the Iranian regime did not provide any help. Mohammad claims that while thousands of civilian died following the bombing, this genocide is a forgotten chapter of the suffering of the Kurdish civilians during the Iran-Iraq War. In addition, Mohammad criticizes the Iraqi Kurdish movement (the PUK and KDP) for their lack of responsibility, for as Mohammad highlights, "this city and its surrounding villages became a target of the shelling of the Iraqi army because the Iraqi Kurdish movement had established their bases in these areas".

⁸⁹⁷ Karsh, *Essential Histories: The Iran-Iraq War*, 71.

alliance between the PUK and Iran was shaped. This relationship became more obvious in 1991 and has remained until present-day.⁸⁹⁸

6.8.3 Iraq and the Iranian Kurdish Movement

The relation between the Iranian Kurdish movement and the Iraqi state can be dated back to the time when this movement came under the tough conditions as a result of the Iranian-Barzani alliance from the mid-1960s, when even the KDPI leader Abdollah Ishaqi, once a close ally of Barzani, fled the region under Barzani's control due to the threat of assassination or being handed to Iran, and asked for Iraq's protection. However, accused of cooperating with Barzani, Ishaqi ended in the Iraqi government's prison. Ishaqi was demanded to issue hostile statements against Barzani and the Iraqi Kurdish movement as a precondition for his release, yet his response was that "I am fighting the Iranian government and not Barzani, I will not write against Barzani even if you cut off my fingers".⁸⁹⁹ According to Tahir Gerdi, an inmate of Ishaqi in the Abu Ghraib prison, "despite the Iraqi government's torture, Ishaqi remained loyal to Barzani and the Iraqi Kurdish movement, until he died in the spring of 1973, in prison".⁹⁰⁰

Through this period of the Iranian Kurdish movement, the KDPI had a very limited and restricted political activity, and was sometimes even banned from any political activity. Following the 1975 Algeria Agreement, the Iraqi government as part of the agreement proposed that the KDPI politicians and activists should either leave the country, cease any political activities against Iran, or apply for political asylum in Iraq (also choosing a civil life). Karim Hisami in his autobiography explains that "we [the KDPI officials] were under huge pressure from the Iraqi government which wanted us to cooperate with them in fighting the Iraqi Kurdish movement. They wanted the KDPI to write against Barzani; however when this was rejected, the KDPI was ordered to stop publishing its newspaper *Kurdistan* on 15th January 1975".⁹⁰¹

Such a bad relation with the Iraqi government meant that in 1977 Iraq sought to expel the KDPI members from its soil because of their lack of cooperation with the Iraqi government's intelligent service, the *Istekhbarat*.⁹⁰² However, the Revolution and then the Iran-Iraq War became a turning point for the formation of a new kind of relationship

⁸⁹⁸ Moradbeigi, *Tarikh-e zende*, 66.

⁸⁹⁹ Sardashti, *Jiyan u Tekoshn Siyasi Ahmad Tofiq 'Abdollah Ishaqi*, 167.

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid, 168.

⁹⁰¹ Hisami, *Le Bireweriyekanem, Bergi Penchim*, 225-227.

⁹⁰² Ibid.

between the Iraqi regime and the Iranian Kurdish movement, entirely different from the previous phase. The Iraqi president Saddam Hussain, desiring to retake ceded territorial areas, attempted to deploy the same strategy as the Iranian Shah, allying with the Iranian Kurdish movement. However, despite the Iraqi regime's material and military support to the Iranian Kurdish movement, the relationship between the Iraqi government and the Iranian Kurdish movement was far from the relations the Iranian government had built up with the Iraqi Kurdish movement. Nevertheless, during the most of the 1980s Iraq provided the Komala and KDPI with a safe haven and military support. Entessar holds that "in January 1981, the first effective Iraqi attempt to play its Kurdish card occurred when the Ba'ath Party government established a supply route to the Peshmergas of the KDPI".⁹⁰³

From the early days of the Revolution, the Iraqi regime offered the KDPI full support if the party would allow officials of the Iraqi government's intelligence service participate in the meetings of the KDPI's politburo.⁹⁰⁴ However, this proposal was rejected by the KDPI. Neither the KDPI's nor Komala's relationship with the Iraqi government reached a level which could have posed a threat to the Iraqi Kurdish movement.⁹⁰⁵

During the Iran-Iraq War, Ghassemlou tried in December 1983 to strike a peace agreement between the PUK and Iraqi state,⁹⁰⁶ whilst the PUK leader Jalal Talebani too attempted to establish peace talks between Iran and the KDPI in 1986.⁹⁰⁷ However, none of these attempts provided the Kurdish movement with peaceful relations with the Islamic regime; the peace talks Ghassemlou initiated with the Islamic regime were a trap laid by the Islamic regime in order to assassinate him, which happened.⁹⁰⁸

Despite the regional difficulties facing the Kurdish movement in the 1980s, the KDPI and the PUK enjoyed relatively satisfactory relations.⁹⁰⁹ Leaked documents from the American Defence Intelligence Agency describes the KDPI's relationship both to the Iraqi government and the Iraqi Kurdish movement, particularly the PUK as good, because Ghassemlou practiced a "policy of strict neutrality". However, such a policy sometimes

⁹⁰³ Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, 130.

⁹⁰⁴ Gowhari, *Rojhelati Kurdistan lê 10 sal da*.

⁹⁰⁵ Mahmoud Osman, *Pêwandi HDKA u Baath le rewangayi Mahmoud Osman-ewe* [the HDKI (AKDPI) and the Ba'ath regime according to Mahmoud Osman]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJ0ui7pei68> (accessed 5 July 2018).

⁹⁰⁶ Brayim, *Chapkek le mejoyi Komala (Iraq)*, 414-415.

⁹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 460.

⁹⁰⁸ Fatih Seyhanoglu, *The Assassination of Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou in Vienna*, (London: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2018).

⁹⁰⁹ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 39.

caused friction and difficulties. An example of friction can be related to the KDPI's humanitarian treatment of injured Iraqi soldiers or Peshmerga of the PUK; for instance according to leaked documents the KDPI "had a large hospital [...] to which French doctors came every month, and often the KDPI was put in the anomalous situation of having both and Iraqi army casualties at the hospital at the same time".⁹¹⁰

Nevertheless, despite all complexities related to this era's movement conduction, the PUK and KDPI, based on Ghassemlou's description of his relationship with Talebani, enjoyed "relatively good relations". As emphasized by Ghassemlou himself, "we [Ghassemlou and Talebani] are very good friends".⁹¹¹ Through the 1980s, despite the support the KDPI received from the Iraqi government, it did not lose its integrity, and the KDPI's independence of policy and decision making has been obvious throughout.⁹¹² This argument is applicable to Komala too. Bruinessen writes, "The KDP-Iran and Komala became increasingly dependent on Iraqi logistic, financial and other support, but never cooperated militarily with the Iraqi army".⁹¹³

When the Iran-Iraq War broke out, despite the relations between the Kurdish movement and the Iraqi government, the KDPI leader Ghassemlou in an official statement stated that "whatever the reason, the Iraqi attack is a *Tejawez* [violation]. We condemn any foreign intervention in Iran, which is the common *vatan* [homeland] of all of us".⁹¹⁴ This and similar statements of the Kurdish leadership in such a critical period can be viewed as evidence of the good intentions of the Kurdish movement. Contrary to the common narrative that points to the war as an opportunity for toppling the regime, the Kurdish movement approached the war as a factor which could be channelled towards a peaceful resolution of the Kurdish question that would on the one hand guarantee Iranian territorial integrity, and on the other hand provide the Kurds with their sociocultural rights. Such an approach of the Kurdish movement can be identified when "immediately after the Iraqi attack, the KDP-Iran announced its fundamental loyalty to Iran and proposed a settlement with the central government so that the army would have its hands free to fight the Iraqi aggressor".⁹¹⁵ However, due to the Islamic regime's fundamental

⁹¹⁰ WikiLeaks Document, *Views of Iranian Kurdish leader Qassemlo*.

⁹¹¹ Ibid.

⁹¹² Hisami, *Le Bireweriyekanem, Bergi Penchim*, 8-9.

⁹¹³ Bruinessen, *Agha Shaikh and State*, 38-39.

⁹¹⁴ Ayandegan, *6 June 1980, Archive of Khoshhali, I. Volume*, 21.

⁹¹⁵ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 38-39.

enmity with the Kurdish movement “the authorities rejected the offer, and throughout the Iran-Iraq War, Iranian forces continued fighting the Iranian Kurds”.⁹¹⁶

Despite the proposal of the Kurdish movement, due to the Islamic regime’s need for a populist discourse making mobilizing the masses against the Kurdish movement easier, the Kurds were accused of being disloyal to the Iranian state. In response to these accusations, Ghassemlou commented that “loyalty is a matter of being recognized by the system”.⁹¹⁷ As the Iran-Iraq War intensified, the KDPI Central Committee in addition to condemning the Iraqi attack on Iranian territory, announced that if the Iranian government accepted the basic rights of the Kurdish people, the party was ready to deploy all its forces in fighting the Iraqi government. Moreover, the party highlighted that the Iraqi attack was in many regards a product of the Iranian regime’s provocative policy promoting the idea of exporting revolution to the neighbouring countries.⁹¹⁸ A KDPI statement reads:

Our party never compromised its patriotic values, and not even once cooperated with the Iraqi army in fighting the Iranian army. We have very openly and officially condemned the Iraqi army’s bombardment and shelling of civilians in Iran. At the same time the KDPI did not stop for one moment challenging the Iranian army, but the intentions of our fight with the regime in Iran had nothing to do the war between the Iranian and Iraqi regimes.⁹¹⁹

Some incidents during the late 1980s brought the relationship between the KDPI and Komala and the Iraqi government to a critical point. The Iraqi government’s use of nerve agent against the country’s Kurdish population, resulting in the deaths of more than eight thousand civilians in Halabje (an act that the Iraqi government consistently denied), met Ghassemlou’s official condemnation.⁹²⁰ In Entessar’s words, “throughout much of the 1980s, the KDPI received aid from the Ba’athist regime of Saddam Hussain, but, Ghassemlou broke with Baghdad in 1988 after Iraq used chemical weapons against Kurds in Halabje and then forced Kurdish villagers to resettle away from the Iranian borders”.⁹²¹

The Iranian Kurdish movement’s relations with the Iraqi regime was shown to be negative when Saddam Hussain, at the same time as the chemical attack on Halabje,

⁹¹⁶ Ibid.

⁹¹⁷ Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, 41.

⁹¹⁸ KDPI’s Report of the Central Committee for the fifth congress, January 1982, Hassanzadeh, in KDPI Publishing Centre, *Korte Mejoyi Hizbi Demokrtai Kurdistanî Iran*, 324.

⁹¹⁹ Hassanzadeh 324-325, in KDPI Publishing Centre, *Korte Mejoyi Hizbi Demokrtai Kurdistanî Iran*.

⁹²⁰ Hoshmand A. Shekhani, *Abdurrehman Ghassmlu: His Life and Role in the Kurdish Liberation Movement, 1930-1989*. A political Historical Study, (Hawler: Shehab Publication, 2007), 184.

⁹²¹ Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, 42.

bombed the bases of Komala inside Iraqi Kurdistan with nerve gas. On one occasion, in the Iraqi regime's bombing of *Gordani Showan* (the Showan unit) of Komala, at least 72 Peshmerga of the organization lost their lives.⁹²² According to Bruinessen, the Iraqi government's airstrikes and chemical bombardments of the bases of Komala was a signal sent to scare Komala off supporting the PUK during the intensive days of the war, when the Iraqi Kurdish movement was under massive attack.⁹²³

These events in different ways created the pattern for the break-up between the Kurdish movement and the Iraqi government, right before the end of the Iran-Iraq War. While Ghassemlou's condemnation of Iraq's use of chemical weapon in Halabje was considered a provocative statement by Iraq,⁹²⁴ the Iraqi regime's bombardment of the bases of Komala on different occasions can be considered as springing from the fear of the rise of Kurdish crossborder solidarity in a period when the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements and societies suffered massively from the war. The relation between the Iranian Kurdish movement and the Iraqi regime reached a critical point with the end of the Iran-Iraq war, with the KDPI and Komala being informed that they had either to cease their activities and be resettled in refugee camps, or leave Iraqi territory. The bad relationship during this period was reflected in Ghassemlou's speech when he discussed the unpredictable prospects of the Iranian Kurdish movement.⁹²⁵

As held by Gamson and Meyer, "opportunities open the way for political action, but movements also make opportunities".⁹²⁶ Referring to Gamson and Meyer's assumption one may ask, has the Iranian Kurdish movement following the Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War been capable of creating new opportunities aimed at strengthening the Kurdish position? This question can be answered from different angles. Accessing the Kurdish achievements through the war period, due to the massive human loss and destruction of the Kurdistan region both in Iran and Iraq, it can be claimed the Kurdish share of the war was nothing than the furthering of disaster, devastation and suffering. As emphasized by Koohi-Kamali "the war between Iran and Iraq was thought to provide a

⁹²² Chero, *A Political Magazin the Organization of Youht Peshraw*.

⁹²³ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 4.

⁹²⁴ Wehdat Piranjuk, *Doktor Ghassemlou Rahberi Kurdistanî ve Ikhlâqmdar Siyasi* [Doctor Ghassemlou, a Kurdish leader with ethics in politic], 2014. <http://www.kurdistanmedia.com/farsi/idame/13946> (accessed 10 March 2018). This article notes that Ghassemlou condemned the Iraqi regime's act of using chemical weapons against the Kurdish people in Halabje.

⁹²⁵ Shekhani, *Abdullrehman Ghassmlu*, pp. 182-183, & Goudarzi, *A Memory: Dr Ghassemlou before his eternal journey*.

⁹²⁶ McAdam et al., *Comparative perspectives on social movements*, 35.

golden opportunity for the Kurds of both countries. Instead, it proved to be another opportunity for repression of the Kurds in both countries”.⁹²⁷

Summary

The participation of a variety of competing actors and organizations of Kurdish society and the Kurdish political spectrum in the Iranian Kurdish movement from 1979 to the 1980s has been shown to be a bad experience of thickening and diversification of the number of actors and their ideological worldviews. This is due to the chaotic nature of this phase of the Kurdish movement, in a society with few experiences of democratic and peaceful periods of policy making. The repeatedly failing policies of the leading political parties of the Iranian Kurdish movement and their inability in finding a consensus based on shared ‘national interest’, reveals the degree of immaturity of Kurdish nationalism, or the irresponsibility of the leading actors and organizations of the Iranian Kurdish movement. The development of the contemporary Iranian Kurdish movement shows that none of the political parties of the Iranian Kurdish movement overtly collaborated with the ruling regimes in Tehran in defeating its Kurdish challenger; however, as the KDPI and Komala’s half-decade of fratricidal war eroded the capability of the Kurdish movement, it also contributed to the acceleration of regime’s consolidation of power in Kurdistan. I will argue that the existence of massive elite fragmentation, the issue of Kurdish collaboration with the occupiers of Kurdistan, and the capabilities of these regimes in deploying the divide and rule policy in their approach to the Kurdish movement, have been the major challenges facing Kurdish nationalism and Kurdish national aspiration in the 20th and 21st centuries.

⁹²⁷ Koohi Kamali, *The Political Development of the Kurds*, 195.

Chapter 7

The 1990s and Onwards: Decades of Decline and Uncertainty

Introduction

This chapter aims to shed light on the domestic and regional conditions that have shaped the framework, direction and content of different angels of mobilization of the Iranian Kurdish movement from the 1990s to 2015. This analytical focus includes the activities of the political parties of Iranian Kurds based in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) region of Iraq, and the development and consequences of activities of Kurdish civil society in Iran, framed within Iran's electoral and reform political processes. During this period, the exiled (KRG-based) Iranian Kurdish movement displayed several notable tendencies that will be dealt with in this chapter. Taking the early 1990s as the starting point for the latest period of the Iranian Kurdish movement, it can be claimed that this phase is a product of comprehensive regional shifts with impacts on Iran's domestic and regional policy. In the sections below will be highlighted movement decline, misconducted crossborder interaction, thickening and diversification within the movement, as well as the adverse consequences of Kurdish participation in the Iranian reform movement. These are some of the main characteristics of this era's development.

7.1 Regional Change and the Decades of Decline

The US-led invasions of Iraq in 1990 and again in 2003, which resulted in the fall of Saddam Hussain, initiated drastic regional change to the balance of power in the Middle Eastern region. Arguably these invasions empowered the regional position of Iran, and provided the regime in Tehran unexpected opportunities of implementing its vision of a proactive foreign policy and active nationalism.⁹²⁸ The Islamic regime's foreign policy has mainly been shaped by the views of conservative elements of the regime, such as Ali

⁹²⁸ The policy of 'active nationalism' was also an end to Reza Shah Pahlavi's so-called neutral foreign policy. An active nationalist foreign policy began in the time of Mohammad Reza Shah in the 1950s, backed by oil revenues and America's support to the Pahlavi regime in Iran. Nikolay Kozhanov, *Iran's Strategic Thinking: The Evolution of Iran's Foreign Policy*, (Germany: Gerlach Press, 2018), 6-9.

Khamenei, Morteza Mottahari, Ali Velayeti and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who viewed the Islamic Republic as a ‘besieged fortress’. Iranian conservatives formulated the concept of a chain or line of defence, including Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Iraq. These countries represent the front line of defence against the international and regional opponents of the Islamic Republic. Kozhanov notes that “the weakening of the Iranian presence in any of these four states can have far-reaching negative consequences for Tehran’s geostrategic plan”.⁹²⁹ In this chapter, the focus will be on the Iranian engagement in Iraq, and the impact of this on Iran’s regional position.

Iraq, for decades the arch enemy of the Islamic regime and Iran’s most threatening neighbour, has fallen gradually into the hands of the Islamic regime, and become the first stage for realizing Iran’s multifaceted domestic and regional agenda. Iran’s regional power was on the rise, while the USA suffered unpopularity following its post-2003 presence in Iraq. For instance, to mark the five-year anniversary of the liberation of Iraq from the rule of Saddam Hussein, both the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as well as the American Vice-President Dick Cheney visited the country in 2008, yet under different circumstance and with different receptions. On one hand, “Ahmadinejad was greeted by his Iraqi counterparts with all the elaborate pomp and circumstance associated a state visit, the first by an Iranian leader in 30 years and the first of any regional leader since the 2003 invasion”.⁹³⁰ On the other, in contradiction to the pre-war predictions in America that US forces would be greeted with ‘sweets and flowers’ by the Iraqi people, the security conditions the Americans operated under forced Cheney “to travel under a blanket of secrecy, on a plane carrying a special reinforced trailer for his sleeping accommodations in a country where 155,000 American troops patrol”.⁹³¹ While the first reception was a clear sign of the Iranian triumph in Iraq, Cheney’s cold reception was a sign of the failure of American policy. The Americans’ role in the removal of Saddam Hussein, instead improving democracy and popular sovereignty in Iraq and improving security in the region, extended Iran’s primacy among its neighbours.⁹³² The Iranian regime used these changes to fortify its ability to weaken its opposition groups and manoeuvre through the political events in this region with confidence.

Since the emergence of new regional developments in the early 1990s, the KDPI and Komala have faced conditions restricting their ability to conduct insurgency. Long

⁹²⁹ Kozhanov, *Iran’s Strategic Thinking*, 1.

⁹³⁰ Tom Lansford (ed.), *The War in Iraq*, (New York; Greenhaven press, 2009), 30.

⁹³¹ Suzanne Maloney, *How the Iraq war empowered Iran*, 2008. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/how-the-iraq-war-has-empowered-iran/> (accessed 1 June 2018).

⁹³² Maloney, *How the Iraq war empowered Iran*.

term torpor and deep dependency on their KRG-based safe haven, have been the main products of geopolitical changes which eroded the degree of capability of these parties.⁹³³ Theoretically, the correlation between Iran's rising regional power, and the effects of it on the Iranian Kurdish movement since the 1990s, will be investigated based on the paradigm of 'perennial conflict formation'.⁹³⁴ This paradigm has been developed and deployed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver in analysing a broad spectrum of regional security events and incidents taken place in the Middle East during the 1980s and 1990s.

Iran has implemented a penetrating relationship with the Kurdish establishment and its mainstream political parties in the KRG, due to its deeply institutionalized relations with the PUK and KDP, as well as the presence of geopolitical difficulties surrounding the KRG since the KRG's establishment. The KDPI's and Komala's ability to conduct activity, have since the 1990s become a central subject of the Iranian-KRG relations; the closer the KRG and Iran become, the more constrained the KDPI and Komala activity against the Iranian regime seems to be. The KDPI and Komala have explained the drastic decline of their activity in the 1990s by claiming that "they have reduced their activities because they are regarding and safeguarding the achievements of the Kurds in the KRG",⁹³⁵ also not provoking Iran in involving in subversive interferences in KRG's affairs. For instance, addressing the KDPI's cessation of its military struggle from the mid-1990s, the leader of the KDPI Mustafa Hijri explains that his party recognised the emergence of new regional reality and the importance of the protection of the achievements of the KRG. In the words of Hijri,

The PDKI has not abandoned armed struggle, but has halted guerrilla warfare because regional conditions no longer favor it. If domestic and international conditions were to change in favor of armed struggle, the PDKI will be in the forefront and make the necessary sacrifices to bring about a secular, democratic and federal government that recognizes the rights of the Kurdish nation. It is for this reason the PDKI even to this date recruits and trains Peshmergas.⁹³⁶

⁹³³ Yasin Sardashti, *Xwendnawayeki Mejoyi bo Rudawe Newxoyekani Hezbi Demorati Kurdistanî Iran (HDKA) 1967-1968* [A Historical Reading about the inter-organizational events of Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran/KDPI, 1967-1968], (KRG: Unspecified Publisher, 2002), 7-9.

⁹³⁴ Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 187-200.

⁹³⁵ Rahman Naqshî (ed.) *Beshesk le Wet-u-wejekani Mamosta Abdulla Hassanzadeh*, [A selection of interviews With Abdulla Hassanzadeh Hassanzadeh, Former General Secretary of KDPI]. (KRG: KDP-Iran Media Centre, 2016), 47.

⁹³⁶ PDKI, *Kurdish Leader Mustafa Hijri Addressed Armed Struggle in Interview*, 2013. <http://pdki.org/english/kurdish-leader-mustafa-hijri-addressed-armed-struggle-in-an-interview/> (accessed 15. February 2017).

Nevertheless, reflecting on the hostile Islamic regime's policy toward Iranian Kurdistan, the presence of several complex challenges for the political parties of Iranian Kurds, and the uncertain future of the Iranian Kurdish movement, adapting such a policy has resulted in decline of the Iranian Kurdish movement and neglect of maintaining a continuous proactive movement.

In analysing the patterns of the Iranian Kurdish movement, the change of the regional balance of power following the 1990s Gulf wars, is a crucial factor. The contemporary history of the relationship between Iran and Iraq bears witness to a conflictual and hostile neighbourliness, which "stems from a variety of border disputes, the rival power ambitions of leaders in both states, overlapping problems with Kurdish minorities, and the fate of a large Shi'ite population in the south of Iraq".⁹³⁷ Through the eight years of the bloody Iran-Iraq War, the hostile relations between these two states reached the highest level. The US-led coalition against Iraq in the early 1990s as a reaction to Saddam's aggressive annexation of Kuwait, resulted in heavy international sanctions weakening Iraq drastically. Iraq for decades worked as an instrument of regional balance, however following the change of attitude of the West and international sanctions imposed on the Ba'ath regime in Baghdad, this regional balance disappeared. These changes initiated other regional developments, in which a number of sub-state entities, e.g., the Palestinian and Kurdish organizations, have played significant roles on the regional and global levels as securitising actors.⁹³⁸

In the early 1990s, the Kurdish insurgency in Iraq was a strong challenger to the Iraqi state. The Gulf War was followed by uprisings in Kurdish areas in the north, and Shi'ite uprisings in south Iraq, both ruthlessly crushed by Saddam's forces. The 1990s Iraqi Kurdish uprising and the Iraqi regime's violent reaction, resulted in "exodus of 2 million Kurds and others, of whom 1.5 million crossed into Iran and more than 400,000 more became trapped on the mountainous border with Turkey, which refused their entry".⁹³⁹ In order to protect the Iraqi Kurds from further genocide and atrocities, the international community issued a UN-sanctioned safe haven, placed under a no-fly zone to exclude Iraqi air attacks. This international intervention has benefited Kurds, and resulted in the establishment of the KRG.⁹⁴⁰

⁹³⁷ Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, 192

⁹³⁸ Ibid.

⁹³⁹ Carl T. Dahlman, *Breaking Iraq: Reconstruction as War*, in Flint, Colin and Kirsch, Scott. *Reconstructing Conflict Integrating War and Post-War Geographies*, (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 184.

⁹⁴⁰ Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, 205.

Following the third Gulf War in 2003, sweeping changes with a significant impact on the balance of power in the strategic landscape of the Middle East took place, in which “old security paradigms have been thrown into question, and local states appear to be reaffirming, renegotiating, or rethinking their relations with one another and with outside powers”.⁹⁴¹ With relation to the Kurdish question, these regional changes located the Kurdish issue as a major concern affecting the domestic and regional policies of Turkey, Iran and Syria. For instance, after the First Gulf War and the creation of the KRG, Tehran and Ankara were in agreement on the need to prevent the emergence of an independent Kurdish state. In the Iranian context, Tehran viewed the KRG as a potential safe zone for the KDPI and Komala, and therefore a great threat to its security.⁹⁴²

During the 1980s and until 1994, the Iranian regime’s military bases inside Iranian Kurdistan in both urban and rural areas, were targets of regular guerrilla activities of the KPDI and Komala. As a response, the Iranian regime during the early 1990s (contemporary with the KRG’s establishment) intensified artillery shelling and airstrikes of the civilian and military bases of KDPI and Komala, located in the mountainous Iran-Iraq border areas.⁹⁴³

The 1990s was a chaotic decade for the Kurdish people and the KRG. The Iraqi state following the Gulf invasions was dysfunctional and unable to protect its borders or react to the violations of its sovereignty by neighbouring countries Turkey and Iran.⁹⁴⁴ Iran, through regular bombardments, and sponsoring subversive activities in the KRG, attempted to eliminate its Kurdish oppositions. With deliberate targeting of civilian areas, it created dissatisfaction, encouraging Iraqi Kurds living in these areas to blame the KPDI and Komala for putting lives in danger. This forced these parties to withdraw from their border and mountain bases. It can arguably be claimed these policies towards Iran’s Kurdish opposition, have in many regards gained results.⁹⁴⁵

⁹⁴¹ Frederic Wehrey et al., “Saudi-Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam: Rivalry, Cooperation, and Implications for U.S. Policy”, *NATIONAL SECURITY RESEARCH DIVISION*, USA: the RAND Corporation (2009), ix.

⁹⁴² Yildiz and Taysi. *The Kurds in Iran*, 74-75.

⁹⁴³ Minorities at Risk (MAR), *Chronology for Kurds in Iran*, <http://www.mar.umd.edu/chronology.asp?groupId=63007> (accessed 10 February 2017). The Minorities at Risk (MAR) Project is a university-based research project that monitors and analyses the status and conflicts of politically active communal groups in all countries with a current population of at least 500,000.

⁹⁴⁴ Yildiz and Taysi, *The Kurds in Iran*.

⁹⁴⁵ Berman, Lazar. *The Iranian Penetration of Iraqi Kurdistan*, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2016. <http://jcpa.org/article/the-iranian-penetration-of-iraqi-kurdistan/> (accessed 1 February 2017).

7.1.1 Iranian Kurds' share of Regional Change

The Iranian Kurdish movement has failed to take advantage of the opportunities occurring during the last century, and it has suffered from a trend of nationalism conceptualized by Vali as *exile Nationalism*.⁹⁴⁶ This form of nationalism was shaped following Mohammad Reza Shah's massive reprisals against the Iranian Kurds, resulting in massive emigration in the early 1960s. As mentioned in the fourth chapter, many political activists and members of the KDPI left Iranian Kurdistan for Iraq or countries of the Eastern Bloc. This process ended only with the 1979 Revolution, when a new phase of the movement in Iranian Kurdistan started.⁹⁴⁷

According to Vali, exile nationalism has left deep impact on the development of the discourse and practice of the Kurdish national movement. This form of nationalism has since the 1990s intensified once again, and dominated the character of the Iranian Kurdish movement.⁹⁴⁸ However, due to the presence of different factors, such as the rise of intellectualism within Iranian Kurdish society, the rise of activities of Kurdish civil society, and the spread of the use of social media and information technologies, the negative effects of this era's exiled nationalism has been less noticeable.

Compared to the achievements of the Iraqi Kurdish movement, the 1990s and onwards meant something quite different to the Iranian Kurdish movement. The intensification of Iran's regional engagement and ability to influence the political situation of KRG, reduced the manoeuvring capacity of KDPI and Komala.⁹⁴⁹ In the case of Komala, the organization in this period went through massive disintegration, resulting in splits and fragmentation.⁹⁵⁰ Organizational splits within Komala have been a product of the Komala leadership's disputed approach to the national issue and armed insurgency in Kurdistan.⁹⁵¹ On the other hand, the KDPI, following the assassination of two of its charismatic leaders Abdulrahman Ghassemlou (1989) and Sadeq Sharefkandi (1992), experienced huge shock and loss that have never been overcome. Ghassemlou, Sharefkandi and other senior officials of the KDPI were over a short period assassinated

⁹⁴⁶ Vali, "Sekot-e Rojhelat", 116-117

⁹⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁸ Ibid, 117.

⁹⁴⁹ Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior. *The Kurds: History - Religion - Language - Politics* (Published by Wolfgang Taucher, 2015), 169.

⁹⁵⁰ Koochi-Kamali. *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran*, 210-211

⁹⁵¹ Hakki in Mohammad Khani, Susen. Ghyaswand. *5 Sal Baad Az Insheab dar Hezb-e Demokrat-e Kurdistan-e Iran* [5 Years After the Spilt in KDPI; Interview with Majid Hakki], 2011. <http://www.akhbar-rooz.com/article.jsp?essayId=42275> (accessed 21 August 2017).

by agents of the Islamic regime, respectively in Vienna and Berlin.⁹⁵² Regarding the assassination of Sharefkandi and the so-called ‘Mykonos trail’, a German court in Berlin on 10th April 1997 ruled the Iranian government responsible for the deaths of the Kurdish political leaders and activists in Germany in 1992. As a matter of solidarity with the German Court, all EU countries except Greece temporarily recalled their ambassadors from Iran and imposed limited diplomatic sanctions on this country.⁹⁵³

7.2 Iran’s Strong Presence in the KRG and the KDPI and Komala Setback

Iran’s growing political, military and economic influence, and its evident interference in the affair of the KRG, have resulted in the drastic fall of the activity of the KDPI and Komala. It can be argued that the current condition of the Iranian Kurdish organizations is a direct product of regional changes that have empowered Iran’s domestic and regional position. The 1990s was a turbulent decade for the Kurds and their movements in all parts of Kurdistan. It was a decade of losses and achievements, the major achievement being the establishment of the KRG. This period was also an era of complexity and fratricidal wars between, for example, the PUK and the KDP, the PKK and the PUK, the PKK and the KPD, and the PUK and *Jondul-islam* (an Iranian sponsored Kurdish Islamist affiliation of Al-Qaeda).⁹⁵⁴ In addition, the conspicuous interference of the military and intelligence services of Iran and Turkey in the KRG, aimed at disabling their Kurdish movements, were the main features of Kurdish politics in Iraqi Kurdistan during this era.⁹⁵⁵

The KRG’s high level of dependency on its neighbouring countries Iran and Turkey, provided these states with massive political and economic influence on the policymakers and policymaking of this region. Since the KRG’s establishment, the influence of the Iranian regime in the region, particularly in the so-called Green Zone dominated by the PUK, has been in continuous rise: “the establishment of the KRG in 1991 benefited Tehran, as the autonomous region’s authorities clamped down on Iranian Kurdish attacks coming from northern Iraq. The period also saw a spate of Tehran-sponsored assassinations”.⁹⁵⁶ Currently, Iran has two official consulates, in Hawler and

⁹⁵² Yildiz and Taysi. *The Kurds in Iran*, 43.

⁹⁵³ Minorities at Risk, *Chronology for Kurds in Iran*.

⁹⁵⁴ Rubin, Michael. *The Islamist Threat in Iraqi Kurdistan*, 2001 https://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0112_ir1.htm (accessed 5 April 2017).

⁹⁵⁵ Human Rights News. *Background on the Crisis in Iraq, Ansar al-Islam in Iraqi Kurdistan* <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/mena/ansarbk020503.htm> (accessed 8 March 2017).

⁹⁵⁶ Nader, et al. *Regional implication of an independent Kurdistan*, 105.

Sulaymaniyah (the two main cities of KRG), and some hundreds of (unofficial) intelligence bases in and around Sulaymaniyah province, “which borders Iran and is dominated politically by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and its splinter Gorran Party. Both of those parties have closer historical and personal ties to Tehran than does the rival Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)”.⁹⁵⁷

The Iranian regime has harvested much from the chaotic condition of KRG in the 1990s, and the decade-long fratricidal war between PUK and KDP. During this civil war, these parties were dependent on the support of Iran, Turkey and even the Iraqi government. The historical tie between Iran and political forces of the Iraqi Kurds during the 1980s provided Iran with a golden opportunity of exploiting this relationship to interfere in the affairs of the KRG and establish security and intelligence bases in different regions of the KRG. These bases organized and led by the IRGC have been used in targeting the KDPI, Komala, and civilian Iranian Kurdish individuals exiled in the KRG.⁹⁵⁸ Having Iran as the main lifeline to the outside world resulted in the PUK’s long-term dependency on the Iranian regime.⁹⁵⁹ This allowed Iran to colonize the Green Zone, where for instance in the province of Sulaymaniyah “Iranian agents have 700 safe houses”.⁹⁶⁰ This huge number of Iranian present in the KRG serves two main purposes. Firstly,

Iran is exploiting these intra-Kurdish divisions in order to accomplish two related objectives: increase its own influence, through PUK-affiliated and other factional friends, as far afield as the Turkish border; and decrease the KRG’s ability to present a unified front in negotiating on behalf of its legitimate interests, whether for eventual independence or merely for more secure political and economic autonomy.⁹⁶¹

Secondly, this strong presence has been deployed in persecuting and monitoring the KDPI and Komala. Following the 2003 US-led invasion, the level of Iranian interference in the affairs of the Iraqi state grew radically. Iran has enjoyed a ruling position in the Shi’ite-dominated political system in Bagdad.⁹⁶² Such a drastic elevation of Iran’s power

⁹⁵⁷ David Pollock, *To Kurdistan and Back: Iran's Forgotten Front*, 2017. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/to-kurdistan-and-back-irans-forgotten-front> (accessed 10 April 2017).

⁹⁵⁸ LvinPress, *Ettelaat le Kurdistan, Beshi 1 & 2*, [the Iranian Intelligence service in Kurdistan]. 1. and 2. Volume, No. 59, 2007 and 2008, and No. 60, January 2008, <http://peshmergekan.eu/index.php?id=164> (accessed 9 October 2016).

⁹⁵⁹ Othman, *IRAN AND BARZANI*, 2-5.

⁹⁶⁰ Pollock, *To Kurdistan and Back: Iran's Forgotten Front*.

⁹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶² Jay Solomon, *The Iran Wars: Spy Games, Bank Battles, and the Secret Deals That Reshaped the Middle East*, (New York: Random House, 2016), 22-25.

in the KRG and Baghdad has resulted in many implications for political parties of Iranian Kurds. Iran has, through its transborder military force *Qeragah-e Ramazan* (the Ramadan Base), transformed this influence into real action against its opposition groups based in the KRG,⁹⁶³ where since the 1990s the Iranian regime has staked out the battlefield for defeating its opposition groups. Whilst after 1979 until the early 1990s the KDPI and Komala through their guerrilla insurgencies targeted Iranian military bases inside Iranian Kurdistan, from the mid-1990s this position reversed completely. The chaotic situation of the KRG meant that suddenly Iran, from being a ‘defensive actor’, became an ‘aggressive offensive’ actor capable of attacking Kurdish opposition parties and individuals, and then since 2003 also the *Mujahedin-e Khalq* (MEK/MKO), in Iraq.⁹⁶⁴

7.3 The 1990s: a Deadly Decade for the KRG-Based Iranian Kurds

As mentioned, in the 1990s, civil and military camps of the KDPI and Komala in the KRG experienced huge pressure from the IRGC and its local Iraqi Kurdish collaborators.⁹⁶⁵ Despite the difficulty of finding exact statistics for the precise number of people assassinated by IRGC in the KRG, documents show that from 1992 to 1998, more than 300 Iranian Kurds⁹⁶⁶ with links to Iranian Kurdish parties were assassinated in the KRG.⁹⁶⁷ By putting pressure on KRG, the Iranian regime forced the KDPI and Komala to cease their military activities. Yet despite the silence of the guns of the KDPI and Komala, the Iranian regime intensified its brutal attacks on these parties.⁹⁶⁸

⁹⁶³ Solomon, *The Iran Wars*.

⁹⁶⁴ Christof Lehmann, *Iranian – Kurdish Parties Form Alliance in Response to Iraqi Lawmakers’ Demand they Should Disarm or Leave*, 2017. <https://nbc.com/news/iranian-kurdish-parties-form-alliance-in-response-to-iraqi-lawmakers-demand-they-should-disarm-or-leave/> (accessed 1 May 2017).

⁹⁶⁵ Kurdistan Newspaper. “Wetari Sekirteri Geshti Hizeb be bonayi Karesati 17. Sarmawezi Regayi Dokan-Koya” [the Speech of the Party Leader Regarding the assassination between Dokan and Koye 6. January 1997]. The Kurdistan the Central Committee of the KDPI, No. 252, 1997.

⁹⁶⁶ Komala.org. *Terorism-e Jumhuriye Islami dar Kurdistan-e Iraq, Interview Radio Zemaneh ba Rehman Hussainpenahi* [Terrors conducted by the Islamic Republic in Iraqi Kurdistan; Interview with Rehman Hussainpenahi, Radio Zemaneh]. <http://komalah.org/Farsi/index.php/maqalat/11363.html> (accessed 1 February 2017).

⁹⁶⁷ Danish Immigration Service/DIS. *Iranian Kurds On Conditions for Iranian Kurdish Parties in Iran and KRI, Activities in the Kurdish Area of Iran*, Conditions in Border Area and Situation of Returnees from KRI to Iran 30 May to 9 June 2013, 5. <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-us/publications/SearchPublications.htm?SearchType=publications&SubType=Fact-Finding%20Report> (access 5 April 2017).

⁹⁶⁸ Minorities at Risk, *Chronology for Kurds in Iran*.

Iran's policy of transborder terror against its opposition, resulted in the elimination of a safe haven for Iranian Kurds in the KRG.⁹⁶⁹ In 1993 the IRGC crossed over the border into Iraqi Kurdistan several times and occupied a 'security zone' of over 100 km². Allegations have been made of Iran recruiting vulnerable young Kurds as collaborators, infiltrating them into the Peshmerga forces, and using them to poison many hundreds of KDPI and Komala Peshmerga. Iranian Kurds have accused the IRGC of being behind the poisoning 85 KDPI members in Base Bazjan/Bayinjan near Sulaymaniyah.⁹⁷⁰ The KDPI and Komala's inability to act whilst their members each day were the targets of the IRGC and its proxy groups around the KRG, resulted in massive dissatisfaction among the members of these parties.⁹⁷¹ Since the mid-1990s these organizations have suffered from members leaving them in large numbers. Despite the condition of this era's Iranian Kurdish movement, compared to other groups opposing the Islamic regime, the movement was still targeted disproportionately by the regime. In the eyes of the regime, the Kurdish people and their struggle are the main threat to Iran's territorial integrity and state security.⁹⁷²

Kurdish political parties claim that the regime has aimed at eliminating their struggle, and attacked them with all available means for this end. The assassination of the KDPI leaders, Ghassemlou and Sharafkandi, by agents of the Islamic regime, indicates the regime's determination in eliminating, rather than finding a peaceful solution for, the country's Kurdish question.⁹⁷³ From 1995 to 1997, Iran's attacks on Iranian Kurdish

⁹⁶⁹ Sikirter, *Weto-weji Rojnamayi Dastor (No 84) Legal barez Mostafa Hijri* [Dastor Newspaper: Interview with Modtafa Hijri], 2014. <http://sikirter.org/Detail.aspx?id=824&Action=1&LinkID=7> (accessed 10 February 2017).

⁹⁷⁰ Minorities at Risk, *Chronology for Kurds in Iran*.

⁹⁷¹ Menal Teyar, the wife of Mansour Naseri of the KDPI's Central Committee, in a letter entitled "You Are Responsible" to Abdullah Hassanzadeh the KDPI leader of the time, holds the KDPI leadership's lack of strategy and passivity responsible for the assassinations of her husband and the many other hundred Iranian Kurds in the KRG. In addition, this letter contains and reveals details of how the Iranian IRGC forces' surveillance of the KDPI in Suleymaniye left the bases and members of this organization with no security, and how the KDPI leadership, despite being informed by their officials in the city, neglected to act in a way to avoid the massacre of their members. During the morning hours of 8 December 1997, a KDPI convey consisting of three high ranking officials (Mansour Naseri, Mansour Fatahi and Samal Ismailzadeh) and a group of Peshmarga, was the target of PUK forces stationed at a checkpoint in the province of Koye. These persons and others were attacked, losing their lives immediately. The author of these lines was in this period an active member (Peshmarga) of the KDPI and was stationed in the KDPI headquarters in Koye, and can clearly remember the dark moment of Kurdish collaboration with the enemies of Kurds that resulted in massive Kurdish internal brutality. Peshmergekan, *Trajidyayi penaberani Rojhelat le bashuri Kurdistan* [the Tragedy of the Iranian Kurdish refugees in the Iraqi Kurdistan] http://www.peshmergekan.com/teror/shehid_mensur_skalay_mnal_xanm_.pdf (accessed 1 March 2017). The PUK never took responsibility for the action some of its military and intelligence officials were involved in, and the KDPI and Komala, unable to protect their members, have never been able to claim justice.

⁹⁷² Saleh, *Ethnic identity and the state in Iran*, 68.

⁹⁷³ Yildiz and Taysi, *The Kurds in Iran*, 43.

organizations and individuals in the KRG peaked. The direct attack on the KDPI and Komala became visible when 3000 Iranian troops equipped with artillery and with the assistance of the PUK, from the Haibat Sultan Mountain, shelled KPDI bases in Koysenjag (a city of Hawler province).⁹⁷⁴ The number of casualties following this attack remains unclear, though the shelling resulted in the displacement of more than 2000 civilian Iranian Kurds, who subsequently inhabited Camp *Azadi* (freedom). Iran in this operation surrounded KDPI's headquarters, with the intention of capturing its leadership. This operation was a clear violation of the sovereignty of Iraq, and once again indicates the elevated regional influence of Iran. The main achievement of Iran following this operation was forcing the KDPI leadership to sign an order ceasing the insurgency on 4th August 1996.⁹⁷⁵ As result of Iran's pressure, both "Komala and the KDPI have ceased all their military activities against the Iranian regime, which has been a precondition of the KRG for them being permitted to stay in and have their camps in [the KRG]".⁹⁷⁶

Michael Gunter notes that "when the Iranians sent 2-3,000 Iranian troops deep into PUK territory to pursue rebellious Iranian Kurds this move strengthened the PUK, weakened the KDP, and thereby harmed Turkish and American interests".⁹⁷⁷ The rise of Iran's regional power posed not only a challenge to Iranian Kurds and their movement, but also challenged American and Turkish interests in Iraq.

The regional changes of the 1990s meant that Iran's Islamic regime achieved many of its goals at very low cost. The pervasive Iranian presence in the KRG turned the 1990s into a bloody decade for the Iranian Kurdish movement. The actors and organizations of this movement suffered from several forms of violent attack (e.g. bomb attacks, kidnappings and other forms of terror) conducted by the IRGC in the KRG. As result of the KRG's restrictions on and monitoring of the KDPI and Komala, these parties' ties to the Kurdish people inside the Iranian Kurdistan weakened greatly. These parties' weak tie to Iranian Kurdistan (which was one of their main sources of financial support) has meant that they are currently suffering from financial difficulties.⁹⁷⁸

⁹⁷⁴ Minorities at Risk, *Chronology for Kurds in Iran*

⁹⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁷⁶ Danish Immigration Service, *Iranian Kurds On Conditions for Iranian Kurdish Parties in Iran and KRI*, 13.

⁹⁷⁷ Michael M. Gunter, "Turkey and Iran Face off in Kurdistan", *Middle East Quarterly*, 1998. <http://www.meforum.org/384/turkey-and-iran-face-off-in-kurdistan> (accessed 20 November 2016), 33-40.

⁹⁷⁸ Sikirter, *The Civilmagazin: Interview with Mostafa Hijri*, 2015. <http://sikirter.org/Detail.aspx?id=1908&Action=1&LinkID=7> (accessed 24. June 2017).

The powerful Iranian presence in Iraq, and Iran's impact on the policymakers in Iraq post-2003,⁹⁷⁹ are exemplified in the defeat and massacre against the organization *Mujahedin-e Khalq* (MEK/MKO), Iran's major armed opposition group based in Iraq. During this process, Iran forcefully deployed its influence on the Shi'ite-dominated government and the Shi'ite militias in Iraq. The MEK, since it fled into exile and re-established the organization with the huge political, material and military support of Saddam Hussein, was allied with the Iraqi regime, and on different occasions (e.g. attacking Iraqi Kurdish forces during the uprising in 1990-91, and suppressing Iraqi Shi'ite oppositions groups) performed internal security functions and assistance to Saddam's regime.⁹⁸⁰

Following the fall of Saddam Hussein, the MEK leadership in return for security for their bases in Iraq, signed an agreement with the UN. Based on this agreement, the MEK disarmed, and the organization was relocated from Camp Ashraf to Camp Liberty, near Baghdad International Airport, whilst this Camp was observed by the UNHCR. Since 2003, Shi'ite militias supported by the IRGC several times attacked the MEK's unarmed refugee camp. These attacks resulted in several fatalities and forced the MEK out of Iraq; the organization was resettled by the UN in Albania,⁹⁸¹ far from Iran's borders. This has meant minimizing the security threat of the MEK to Iran's Islamic regime to the lowest level, at least for some time.

7.3.1 The Current Condition of the KRG-Based Iranian Kurdish Movement

Iran has recently attempted to repeat the strategy it employed in dismantling the MEK. This time the target was the KRG-based political parties of Iranian Kurdistan. The essence of the campaign has been the entire disarming of the KDPI and Komala, and forcing them to leave the KRG.⁹⁸² The political parties of Iranian Kurds, aware of Iran's strong position in Iraq,⁹⁸³ in a joint statement condemned the Iraqi parliament's initiative as the directly serving the agenda of Iran.⁹⁸⁴ The proposal of Iranian-backed Shi'ite politicians shows on

⁹⁷⁹ Ehsani Kaveh, *Iran: The Populist Threat to Democracy*, MER241, <https://www.merip.org/mer/mer241/iran-populist-threat-democracy> (accessed 5 July 2018).

⁹⁸⁰ Eisenstadt, et al., "Iran's Influence in Iraq, Countering Tehran's Whole-of-Government Approach." *the Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy focus #111, (2011), 20-21.

⁹⁸¹ Reuters, *Iranian opposition group in Iraq resettled to Albania*, 2016. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-iran-idUSKCN11F2DB> (accessed 15 May 2017).

⁹⁸² Lehmann. *Iranian – Kurdish Parties Form Alliance*.

⁹⁸³ Sikriter, *Interview with Mostafa Hijri, conducted by Awene Magazin, No. 474*, 2015. <http://sikirter.org/Detail.aspx?id=927&Action=1&LinkID=7> (accessed 5 March 2017).

⁹⁸⁴ Lehmann, *Iranian – Kurdish Parties Form Alliance*.

the one hand the massive rise of Iran's power in Iraq, and on the other it reveals that the Iranian regime is determined to deal with its Kurdish question by aggressively deploying means of power. This behaviour of the Islamic regime, and its securitization of the country's ethnonational issue, demonstrate the confidence of the regime in its power, which serves its commitments in several regional conflicts.

Iran has cynically invested in many subversive regional activities in the Middle East. For instance, the KDP-I (KPDI's splinter party) in December 2016 was the target of a double bomb attack that claimed the lives of seven people.⁹⁸⁵ The KDP-I and other Iranian Kurdish organizations accused the IRGC of being the assailants. In the eyes of Iranian Kurds, attacks like this are the Iranian regime's attempt to destabilise the KRG as well as destroy the Iranian Kurdish movement.⁹⁸⁶

Nevertheless, the major obstacle to the Iranian Kurdish movement has been the negative approach of this movement's actors and organizations to internal interaction. Internal division, fragmentation and splits have become normality within these forces. The lack of a sustainable strategy for the national struggle among these organizations, has made them the subject of criticisms from Kurdish nationalists.⁹⁸⁷ Both the KDPI and Komala have suffered from inter-organizational splits resulting in the establishment of new political parties. The ideologically-inspired 1980s split in the KDPI, known as the *Payrewan-e Kongrey-e Chewar* (the followers of the fourth congress) was led by Ghani Beloriyan. According to this group, the Islamic Republic was an anti-imperialist regime, and therefore the KDPI before demanding national rights, should give support to the Islamic Republic. In 1988, the KDPI experienced another wave of internal division, resulting in the establishment of the KDPI-Revolutionary Leadership, which however merged back into the KDPI in 1997.⁹⁸⁸

Through the 2000s, inter-organizational disagreement and splits within the KDPI and Komala peaked again.⁹⁸⁹ For instance, the 2006 division inside the KDPI took place in a period, when the KDPI was still suffering from the painful split of 1988.⁹⁹⁰ On 6th December 2006, another split in the KDPI resulted in the creation of the KDP-I. Majid Hakki points to the KDPI leadership as the main source of the splits inside this organization: "inside the KDPI, the culture of managing disputes has yet not been

⁹⁸⁵ Pollock, *To Kurdistan and Back: Iran's Forgotten Front*.

⁹⁸⁶ Mira Rojkan, *Kurdish Political Parties Stand with KDP-Iran after Bombing Attack*, 2016. <http://www.basnews.com/index.php/en/news/kurdistan/320371> (accessed 2 March 2017).

⁹⁸⁷ Yildiz and Taysi, *The Kurds in Iran*, 110.

⁹⁸⁸ Hakki in Mohammad Khani, *5 Sal Baad Az Insheab dar Hezb-e Demokrat-e Kurdistan-e Iran*.

⁹⁸⁹ Yildiz and Taysi. *The Kurds in Iran*, 67.

⁹⁹⁰ The KDPI-Revolutionary Leadership merged into the KDPI once again in 1997.

institutionalized; consequently as a result of disputes and disagreements, the process of intimidation and exclusion of [the weakest] faction would take place”.⁹⁹¹ Another explanation for the emergence of regular splits within the KDPI can be related to the fact that it suffers from an internal ‘conflict of generations’. As the oldest generation of the KDPI consider themselves as the guardian of the party, they have hindered the younger generation in reaching the higher levels of the hierarchy. The fear of losing the leadership position had a huge impact on the 2006 split. The latest KDPI split can be linked to issues such as the party’s inability of exercising inter-organizational democracy, absence of conflict management strategies, and the accumulation of power in the hands of a generation with a world view unrepresentative of the younger Kurdish generation.⁹⁹²

7.3.2 The *Rasan*⁹⁹³ of Eastern Kurdistan and its Multiplicity of Challenges

In *Newroz* (the Kurdish new year) 2014, the KDPI announced a campaign of re-mobilization called *Rasan*.⁹⁹⁴ The term *Rasan* is related to rethinking the strategy of the KDPI activities.⁹⁹⁵ Inspired by the KDPI’s initiative, other political parties of Iranian Kurds have taken similar steps toward restarting mobilization. Several factors, such as an awareness of future threat and insecurity emanating from Iran,⁹⁹⁶ the faint prospect of change in Iran through reform, and the potential of benefits from recent regional changes to improve the position of the Iranian Kurdish movement, are among the reasons behind the announcement of *Rasan*. Throughout the campaign of *Rasan*, the KDPI encouraged Iranian Kurds to mobilise their resources in challenging the Islamic regime’s policy in Kurdistan.

According to KDPI officials, “*Rasan* is a distinctive stage of the Kurdish challenge to the Iranian regime. Whilst employing the Peshmerga forces is one of the aspects of the struggle, civil society resistance of the Kurdish people inside Kurdistan is another major

⁹⁹¹ Hakki in Mohammad Khani, *5 Sal Baad Az Insheab dar Hezb-e Demokrat-e Kurdistan-e Iran*.

⁹⁹² Ibid.

⁹⁹³ Kaweh Behrami, *Rasan u Drejaji Xebat* [*Rasan* and the continuation of struggle], 2016. <http://www.kurdistanmedia.com/sorani/dreje/24761> (accessed 25. March 2017).

⁹⁹⁴ Karim Parvizi, *Rasani Rojhelat* [*The Rasan* re-insurgence of Eastern Kurdistan], 2016. <http://www.kurdistanmedia.com/sorani/dreje/26440> (accessed 25 May 2017). Parvizi is a member of the KDPI’s politburo.

⁹⁹⁵ NSNBC. *Iranian Kurdish Komala party resumed armed struggle after 25 years*. 2017 <https://nsnbc.me/2017/05/01/iranian-kurdish-komala-party-resumed-armed-struggle-after-20-years/> (accessed 10 May 2017).

⁹⁹⁶ Sikriter, *Interview with Mostafa Hijri*, conducted by *Awene Magazin*, No.474

component of *Rasan*”.⁹⁹⁷ Related to the restarting of its insurgency, the KDPI for the first time after more than 20 years, in 2015 returned an unknown number of its bases to the border area of *Keleshin* (a mountainous border area shared by Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan). Following the KDPI, the KPD-Iran (KDPI’s split party) and Komala based some of their Peshmerga in the same geographical area, at relatively close distance to each other.

However, the *Rasan* campaign has been highly debated, and has critics as well as supporters. In particular, the PKK, PJAK (*Party Jeyani Azadi Kurdistan*, the Free Life Party of Kurdistan) and other observers, have criticised the idea of restarting armed struggle of the political parties of Iranian Kurds. Some question the ability of the parties to do this, as well as the timing of the campaign, with the PKK claiming these insurgencies serve the interests of Turkey and Saudi Arabia.⁹⁹⁸

There are several issues challenging this new process of re-insurgency and movement mobilization. Firstly, despite public appearances of the leaders of these parties, and their issuing joint statements aimed at sending a signal of unity to the surrounding world, a unified strategy formulated by these parties is still lacking. There is also the critically important issue of whether these forces have the capacity and capability for conducting military activities inside Iranian Kurdistan, after more than two decades of passivity and disconnect with the Kurds in Iranian Kurdistan. Financial difficulty is an issue faced these parties during the last decades. A combination of factors, such as the economic backwardness of Iranian Kurdish society, the massive militarization of the Kurdish region, and the decades of distance and disconnect of Komala and from Kurdish society, means that these parties are suffering from a lack of popular and financial support. As expressed by KDPI officials, the lack of financial sources is a huge obstacle for considering future activities. For instance the KDPI’s closure of its satellite channel *Tishk TV*⁹⁹⁹ is evidence of its tight fiscal condition. The questions of how long the KRG will remain happy for Iranian Peshmerga forces to be based in its territory, and where it will be happy for them to operate, raises doubts over the sustainability of *Rasan*. Approaching *Rasan* critically further raises the question of what would happen if the intensity of Iranian state attacks reached again the level of the 1990s policy towards the

⁹⁹⁷ Karim Parvizi, *Rasan u Shar* [*Rasan/re-insurgency and City*]. 2017, <http://www.kurdistanmedia.com/sorani/dreje/27238> (accessed 5 May 2017).

⁹⁹⁸ Murat Karayilan, *Armed insurgency of political parties of Rojhelat, is serving the interest of Turkey and Saudi Arabia*, 2016. <http://www.kurdistan24.net/so/news/37b9df79-07e7-46a9-adad-ba3f3cdad4b1> (accessed 1 May 2017).

⁹⁹⁹ Sikirter, *The Civilmagazin: Interview with Mostafa Hijri*, 2015.

KRG – what would become of Rasan when the KRG’s regional interest faces new challenges, and how would Komala and the KDPI deal with the emergence of such unpredictable challenges?

7.4 The Complexity of the Proxy Issue

Iran’s regional policy following the 1990s can be explained with Bertil Dunér’s concept of ‘Proxy Intervention in Civil Wars’. Iran’s proxy intervention have been channelled through its material, military and financial support to state and non-state actors of different parts of the Middle East. In return for such support, Iran has dominated the political and security spheres of the receivers in order to promote its agenda and interest. This approach has been an effective instrument in promoting Iran’s regional policy. Iran has, in defeating its opposition groups and strengthening its regional position, deployed a war strategy in which the use of sectarian political and military proxies is the core pillar.

Nevertheless, the current re-insurgency of the KDPI has also been questioned as serving a proxy agenda, in the interests of Saudi Arabia or with a link to the intra-Kurdish rivalry between the PUK/Gorran and PKK on one side, and Barzani’s KDP on the other. Proxy intervention has a dual meaning when linked to the Iranian Kurdish national movement. Firstly the Kurds of Iran have found themselves subject to the vagaries of politics. Not only have the Kurds been victims of Iranian proxies, they have also been subject of accusations of being the proxy of regional powers, particularly in the case of the announcement of Rasan. Even though the current regional conflict and the tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia has reached a high degree, it is hard to find evidence that supports such a claim. The leadership of the KDPI denies categorically the accusations of being a proxy of regional powers.¹⁰⁰⁰

7.4.1 The Complexity of the PKK/PJAK vs. the KDPI and Komala Relationship

Following the creation of the PJAK in 2004, the relationship between the PKK and the mainstream parties of the Iranian Kurds (the KDPI and Komala) has become complex. The PKK has by the KDPI, Komala and some nonpartisan Iranian Kurdish activists, been accused of creating the PJAK and using the Iranian Kurdish movement as bargaining

¹⁰⁰⁰ ARA News. *Iranian Kurds: We have no contacts with Saudi Arabia*, 2016. <http://aranews.net/2016/07/iranian-kurds-no-contacts-saudi-arabia/> (accessed 20 July 2017).

chips in negotiating support and a safe haven from the Iranian state, as well as securing its influence on the Iranian Kurdish movement. Sceptics of the PKK policy, blame the PKK for following a policy contradictory to its discourse of Kurdish nationalism, particularly in its claim of support to the Iranian Kurdish movement, whilst it (the PKK) has bases inside Iranian Kurdistan and receives the support of the Iranian regime.¹⁰⁰¹ In this regard, senior Turkish officials have criticised Iran for housing PKK bases near Maku (a Kurdish city in West Azerbaijan Province in Iran).¹⁰⁰²

The emergence of the PJAK and the PAK (*Parti Azadi Kurdistan*/Freedom Party of Kurdistan)¹⁰⁰³ as two insurgent groups, are examples of thickening and diversification of the number of political organizations within the Iranian Kurdish movement, which poses an additional challenge within this movement, the issue of proxy organizations created by non-state actors. The parties mentioned are by critics accused to be two proxy organizations that recruit their members from Iranian Kurdistan, but serve the agenda and interests of the PKK and the KDP-Iraq. As PJAK is viewed as the proxy and offshoot of the PKK, PAK is regarded to be a proxy organization that KDP-Iraq has massively invested in and deployed throughout the KRG war against ISIS, and is used to guarantee

¹⁰⁰¹ Jamil Kolahi, *Rojhelat Kurdistan Le Newan Dwene u Awroda* [Rojhelat/Iranian Kurdistan, Between Past and Present] 2010. <http://amrojane.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/blog-post.html> (accessed 1 March 2017).

¹⁰⁰² BBC. *Iran Az Divare Marzi-e Sakhte Turkiye 'Isteghbal' Mikoned* [Iran Welcomes Construction of Border Wall by Turkey], 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-39854925> (accessed 15 May 2017).

¹⁰⁰³ The *Yekêti Shoresherani Kurdistan* (Revolutionaries Union of Kurdistan-RUK) was a nationalistic Iranian Kurdish political party with the ambition of creating a greater Kurdistan, established by Said Yazdanpanah on 20th May 1991 in the Kurdistan. Yazdanpanah was assassinated in September 1991, though his brother Hussain Yazdanpanah inherited the RUK leadership. Until 1995 and the development of poor relations between the RUK and the PUK, the RUK had its headquarters in Suleimania. Following this period, the RUK re-established its activity and headquarters in the KDP-controlled zone of the KRG. In the summer of 1995, a team of the RUK consisting of 15-20 peshmerga, aimed at conducting political activity, entered Iranian Kurdistan, though were attacked by Iranian forces with the entire team losing their lives. This event is referred to as the operation of *Alayi shoresh* (the Flag of Revolution). In 10-12 October 2006, during a party congress, the RUK was transformed into a new political party called the PAK (*Parti Azadi Kurdistan*/Freedom Party of Kurdistan). The PAK was led by Ali Qazi, the son of Qazi Mohammad, as the symbolic leader and general secretary, and Hussain Yazdanpanah as the vice-general secretary. The PAK and its leader Hussain Yazdanpanah, particularly following this organization's participation in fighting against ISIS, enjoyed the financial and military support of the KDP. Similarly to other political parties of the Iranian Kurds, the PAK's political room of manoeuvre has been laid down by the KRG. Some dissatisfied members of the RUK, disagreeing with its transformation to the PAK, left the KRG and sought asylum in different European countries. These opponents have a very tense relation with the Yazdanpanah family and Hussain Yazdanpanah, the current political and military leader of PAK. Mansour Taha, currently living in Sweden, is among the opponents of the Yazdanpanah family and the dissolution of the RUK. Taha attempts to use social media platforms such as Facebook to re-establish the RUK's political activity and membership recruitment. *KurdistanNet, Beyanamayi Kongrayi Yekami Yekêti Shoresherani Kurdistan, Kongrayi Sqam Girkerdeni Prensipe Netewayekan* [Political statement, the first congress of the PAK: The congress of the solidification of national principals], 2006. <http://kurdistan.net/biz/arshif/biz/2006/10-2006/19-10/lepenaw.pdf>

the KDP's future influence on the Iranian Kurdish movement. The KDPI's and Komala's relation to the PJAK is much more critical than their relationship to the PAK, because the PJAK has massive popularity and a public base in some areas and among specific layers of Iranian Kurdistan. Both the PKK¹⁰⁰⁴ and the KDP¹⁰⁰⁵ have in different periods been involved in creating offshoot organizations for the Kurdish movements of other parts of Kurdistan, yet, their initiatives have furthered fragmentation and political exploitation rather than promoting the Kurdish movement.

Theoretically, the creation of proxies can be explained as a (non-)state actor's approach to furthering its hegemonic and strategic goals, without direct and costly engagement. According to Mumford, "states and sub-state groups have historically proven to be conspicuous users of proxy methods as a means of securing particular conflict outcomes".¹⁰⁰⁶ This explanation is applicable to the PKK and the KDP, particularly taking into account these parties' hegemony-seeking approaches. Reflecting on the complex internal relations within the Kurdish movement, allows us to claim that the creation of proxy groups by Kurdish parties, has had a highly detrimental impact on the prospects of the Kurdish movement. The relations between Kurdish forces has been a complex and ambiguous phenomena, "that rarely fit the descriptions of military confrontations between a government [and its counterparts]".¹⁰⁰⁷ The internal competition can be categorised as civil conflict. Fjelde and Nilsson assume that conflict between rebel groups should be understood in the context of civil conflict, as an instrument to secure material resources and political leverage that will help them in their conflict against the state(s).¹⁰⁰⁸ The conflict between Kurdish political and armed forces in the past and at the current time, have been 'distributional conflicts between rebel groups', emerging as a result of actors' competition for 'political leverage' and the claim of being the only legitimate organization.¹⁰⁰⁹

¹⁰⁰⁴ The Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party (*Parti Çareseri Demokrati Kurdistan/ PÇDK*), is a political party active in Iraqi Kurdistan, founded in 2002. The PÇDK is considered to be offshoot of the PKK. KDSP, *Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party* (KDSP) <https://dckurd.org/2018/07/26/kurdistan-democratic-solution-party-kdsp/> (accessed 30 October 2018).

¹⁰⁰⁵ Encûmena Niştimaniya Kurdî li Sûriyê (ENKS- the National Council of Kurd in Syria), in Murat Yeşiltaş and Tuncay Kardaş (eds.), *Non-State Armed Actors in the Middle East Geopolitics, Ideology, and Strategy*, (USA; Palgrave, 2018), 57.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Andrew Mumford, "Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict", *the RUSI Journal*, 158:2(2013), 41-42.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Hanne Fjelde and Desirée Nilsson, "Rebels against Rebels: Explaining Violence between Rebel Groups". *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (August 2012), 605.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Ibid, 605.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Ibid, 607-608.

7.4.2 The background for PJAK's emergence

There are many factors laying behind the creation of PJAK. Firstly, the PKK's hegemony-seeking approach, extending beyond the Kurdish movement in Turkish Kurdistan, and secondly, the vacuum which emerged following the KDPI's and Komala's cessation of their insurgency from the mid-1990s, are the two main factors behind the PKK's establishing and sponsoring the 'PJAK project' in Iranian Kurdistan. Majid Hakki notes that

The PKK in its fifth congress approved a strategy for spreading its influence into other parts of Kurdistan than Turkish Kurdistan. Abdullah Öcalan assumed that Iran, the Islamic Republic, was the only state recognizing Kurdistan, by having a province named *Kurdistan* and counting the Kurdish people as among the ancient people of Iran. In this regard, the PKK's priority is liberating the people of Iranian Kurdistan from the traditionalists, tribalist, nationalist political parties, and that solving the Iranian Kurdish question should be done by negotiations with the Islamic Republic, and according to the Iranian constitution.¹⁰¹⁰

The PKK following its fifth congress initiated the establishment of political organizations in Iraqi and Syrian Kurdistan. In the late 90s and during the presidency of Khatami, some sub-organizations of the PJAK were established inside Iranian Kurdistan and in Tehran. According to critics of the PJAK, this organization until recently conducted its activities without serious restrictions in the cities of Iranian Kurdistan, showing that PJAK before being a political project of Iranian Kurds, is a project of the PKK aimed at satisfying its agenda.¹⁰¹¹ The decline of the activity of the KDPI and Komala resulted in disappointment among many Iranian Kurds; consequently many political activists chose to join the PKK (which later encouraged their work within PJAK). Soran Palani writes that "evidence reveals that from the outset the Iranian regime feared the creation of PJAK; however, since Jamil Bayek, the architect of the PKK-Iranian relationship, guaranteed that the PKK would be able to tame the PJAK, Iran's attitude toward PJAK has softened".¹⁰¹²

Following 1992, *kampneshini* (an adverse term indicating passivity) became a new reality for the KDPI and Komala, and PJAK was a product of a vacuum created by their

¹⁰¹⁰ Hakki in Mohammadi, *Negahi be Jonbesh-e Daneshjoyi-e Kurdistan*

¹⁰¹¹ Ibid.

¹⁰¹² Soran Palani, *PJAK, Hezeki Henard-e kraw bo Amanjeki Diyarikraw* [PJAK an Exported Force for a Specific Interest], Second Vol. 2018b. <http://brwska.org/content-108.html> (accessed 10 September 2018).

absence. Whilst these organizations were busy with their inter-organizational rivalry and splits, the PKK succeeded in establishing the PJAK and recruiting among Iranian Kurds. The KDPI and Komala surrendered to a sad reality, justified by themselves as safeguarding the interests of the KRG. However, as noted by Yousef Paweh, “the KDPI and Komala fell into a trap that even the assassination of more than 500 of their members did not wake them up to” or cause them to rethink their strategy.¹⁰¹³ Paweh argues that “the KDPI and Komala, despite having their safe haven in the KRG and considering the KRG’s interests, could also have maintained their activity and not entirely give up the insurgency”.¹⁰¹⁴

7.4.3 The Mainstream Attitude toward PJAK

The mainstream Iranian Kurdish political organizations’ attitudes toward PJAK are complex. The KDPI and Komala reject dialogue or cooperation with PJAK.¹⁰¹⁵ For instance, the vice-general secretary of Komala, Abobaker Modaresi, claims that “the PJAK is a proxy and a product of the PKK that lacks any organic roots and relationship to the Iranian Kurdish movement”.¹⁰¹⁶ On the other hand, the KDP-Iran (the KDPI’s split party), particularly during the early era of its establishment, took a softer approach to PJAK, a relatively neutral relationship framed as ‘neither cooperation nor hostility’.¹⁰¹⁷ Yet as Khalid Azizi highlights, ultimately the KDP-Iran has prioritised its relationship to the PKK rather than to PJAK, because “PJAK is an organization created by PKK, and if we should have a good relationship, we should have it with the PKK and not PJAK, since all the decisions of PJAK are made by PKK”.¹⁰¹⁸

Palani labels the PJAK as a political-military organization that has been created and exported by the PKK to Iranian Kurdistan aimed at serving its interests, with the PKK directing its activities.¹⁰¹⁹ Palani describes ‘exported forces’ (*Hezi henard-e kraw*) as

¹⁰¹³ Paweh, Yousef. *Le Rojhelat Tenya be yek Hizb Natwanin Welami Maselayi Netawayi Bedaynewe* [In Rojhelat only ‘One Party’ can meet the national question], <http://brwska.org/content-114.html>, 2018 (accessed 21 September 2018).

¹⁰¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰¹⁵ *Komeley Şorrişgêrrî Zehmetkêşanî Kurdistanî Êran* (Revolutionary Organization of the Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan), under Abdullah Mohtadi, in Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, Bureau of International Relations <http://www.komalainternational.org/>

¹⁰¹⁶ Poyendeh. *Teshekol-e Kurdîy-e ‘Kodar’ Che Migoyed ve darbar-e an che migoyend?*

¹⁰¹⁷ Palani, Soran, *Khalid Aziz’s interview with Lvin*, 2008 and 2009, in Rahman Naqshsi (ed.) *Komalek Wetowej legal hawreyi tekoshar khalid Azizi* [A Selection of Interviews with Khalid Azizi], (KRG: PDK-Iran Publication, 2017), 30.

¹⁰¹⁸ Palani, *Khalid Aziz’s interview with Lvin*, 30.

¹⁰¹⁹ Ibid, 31.

“forces that serve a particular narrow agenda and ideology of their creators, and which in realizing this agenda would rely on any tricks; they have no love for the land they have based their activity on, and no deep roots in the society they operating in. They are only products of a political vacuum”.¹⁰²⁰ Critics argue that the decision of the KDPI and Komala to relocate their bases from the mountain *Qandil* to the interior of Iraqi Kurdistan (*Germên*) was a historical mistake, even ‘political suicide’. This relocation resulted in a setback to the Iranian Kurdish movement, disconnection between the Kurdish movement and Kurdish society, and providing the regime with the opportunity to continue its brutality in Kurdistan without worrying about serious insurgency and resistance.

Another challenging result of this relocation was that the border area of Iranian Kurdistan housed the PKK, which spread its bases throughout the region. At that moment, the PKK was articulating the radical nationalist slogan of creating *Kurdistani mezen* (a greater Kurdistan, embracing the four parts of Kurdistan), though subsequently to the disappointment of Kurdish nationalists, the PKK in a dramatic turnaround abandoned the idea of a Kurdish nation-state and promoted the alternative idea of *brayetiye gelan* (coexistence and brotherhood of the nations within a given nation state). For instance, Öcalan argued that “for the time being, the notion of the nation state in the case of Kurds and Kurdistan must be abandoned”.¹⁰²¹ However, Seevan Saeed argues that this idea still exists within other PKK-linked institutions of the Kurdish movement. According to Saeed,

The Kurdish movement does not totally reject the idea of a state and a greater Kurdistan. By observing the KCK [Koma Civakên Kurdistan/The Kurdistan Communities Union], it could be easily noticed that the notion of a free and independent nation and building a sovereign national state for the peoples of Kurdistan is still on the agenda. Nonetheless, in the current discourse of the KCK, manifested through the projects of a democratic autonomous Kurdistan, the KCK does not want to threaten the sovereignty of the states in which Kurdistan is situated.¹⁰²²

Iranian Kurds sceptical of PJAK, claim that the Iranian authorities have turned a blind eye to the PKK’s activity in establishing its proxy in Iranian Kurdistan. According to Palani, this policy has been adopted due to the PKK’s strategic relationship with Iran as

¹⁰²⁰ Palani, *PJAK, Hezeki Henard-e kraw bo Amanjeki Diyarikraw*.

¹⁰²¹ Seevan Saeed, “The dilemma of the Kurdish struggle in Turkey”, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, (2018), 6.

¹⁰²² Ibid.

a manageable alternative to the mainstream Kurdish movement led by the KDPI and Komala.¹⁰²³

As the development of Kurdish movement of different parts of Kurdistan reveals, each part of Kurdistan has its own distinct interests, movement discourse, patterns of development, characteristics, geographical circumstances, and relationship with its ruling nation-state. Taking this into account, it follows that political parties of one part of Kurdistan, should respect the movements of the other parts of Kurdistan, and avoid any interference in their movements. Otherwise, interference may result in undesirable outcomes, which is particularly relevant in the case of Iranian Kurdistan. The Iranian Kurdish movement has suffered from the interference of the forces of the Iraqi Kurdish movement; political activists and intellectuals of this part of Kurdistan are very sensitive to this issue, and have strongly condemned the PKK's creation of PJAK, seeing it as a ploy for the PKK's agenda, not the interest of the Iranian Kurdish movement. Another issue that puts the PKK in a critical light in its relationship to the Iranian Kurdish movement, is that the PKK has been involved in clashes costing the lives of Peshmergas of the Iranian Kurdish movement. For instance, on 6 June 1988 in clashes between the PKK and a Peshmerga unite of the RUK, nine RUK Peshmergas were killed and their dead bodies delivered to the Iranian authorities.¹⁰²⁴ In another event, resulting from border disputes between the PKK and the KDPI in the mountainous areas of *Kêleshin*, one KDPI Peshmerga was killed in 2015.¹⁰²⁵ Such behaviour of the PKK is regarded by many Iranian Kurds as a hegemony-seeking policy with adverse effect on the Iranian Kurdish movement. Similar events and incidents have meant that the Iranian Kurds view any act of creating proxy political parties in other parts of Kurdistan, as harming the Kurdish crossborder relation in the long run and reducing the trust between forces of different parts of Kurdistan. Hakki holds that

The ideology, discourse, military and organizational activity of the PJAK are in full accordance with the interests of the PKK. Based on its evolution and background, it can arguably be claimed that the PJAK is an unreliable political movement, and whether it serves the interests of the Iranian Kurds is debatable. If the PJAK was only inspired by the PKK's ideology, yet independent in its decision-making, one

¹⁰²³ Palani, Soran. *PJAK, Hezeki Henard-e kraw le Sarzamin-e Serabyekani PKK-ewe bo Rojhelat* [PJAK, an Exported Force from the Illusionary Lands of PKK to *Rojhelat* (the Iranian Kurdistan)], First Vol. 2018a. <http://brwska.org/content-98.html> (accessed 10 September 2018).

¹⁰²⁴ RUK's Central Committee's statement (3.6.1988) on this issue in Hamid Gawhari, *Parti Krekarani Kurdistan le Abdollah Ocalanewe ta Jamil Bayek* [PKK from Abdollah Ocalan to Jamil Baye], (KRG: Hawler Publication, 2016), 82 and 85.

¹⁰²⁵ Rudaw, "Two dead in PKK-KDPI clash on Iranian border", 2015. <http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/24052015> (accessed 2 April 2017).

could argue that the attitude of the KDPI and Komala to the PJAK concern's PJAK's challenge to their hegemony. However, I argue that this rejection is related to PJAK being a project of PKK.¹⁰²⁶

Leading officials of the PJAK in their latest initiative, *KODAR* (the East Kurdistan Democratic and Free Society), announced 'democratic confederalism' as a roadmap for the future of Iran, and they have invited the other political organisations of the Iranian Kurdistan to join this initiative. However, as highlighted in the issued statement

While the two mainstream political parties of Iranian Kurdistan [Komala and the KDPI] do not recognise PJAK as a political party of Iranian Kurdistan with an independent policy, but as a creation and section of the PKK, it is not realistic to believe that they would join this initiative or have a positive response to it.¹⁰²⁷

In an interview, Amir Karimi, a high ranking official of the PJAK, explains that it is not a major concern if the KDPI and Komala do not join this initiative, because these traditional parties have lost their bases in Kurdistan; the people of Kurdistan are following a different approach, and it is the task of these parties to catch up. Karimi states that "whether this traditional parties recognise us or not will leave no impact on KODAR. But KODAR prefers inclusion, involvement, and the participation of different political parties and ideological views and perspectives".¹⁰²⁸ On the other hand, Shaho Hussaini, a political observer, has labelled the KODAR vision as an imaginary ideal. In the words of Hussaini, "I do not consider KODAR as a product derived from reality. KODAR is like the Republic of Plato, a utopia with no connection to reality, an illusion regardless of time and human conditions".¹⁰²⁹ Due to the negative interactions of the different political parties of the Iranian Kurdish movement, the lack of communication for future cooperation and management of crises, the lack of durable and long-term strategy for the future of the Kurdish movement, and the existence of high risk of future clashes between these forces over territory and access to resources, the Iranian Kurdish society may, in the case of emergence of any windows of opportunity in the future, remain at a disadvantage from domestic and regional changes.

¹⁰²⁶ Hakki in Mohammad Khani, *5 Sal Baad Az Insheab dar Hezb-e Demokrat-e Kurdistan-e Iran*

¹⁰²⁷ Omid Poyنده, *Teshkoleh Kurdiy-e 'Kodar' Che Migoyed ve darbar-e an che migoyend?* [What is *Kodar* about and what do others say about it], 2014. <https://www.radiozameh.com/145452> (accessed 23 March 2017).

¹⁰²⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰²⁹ Ibid.

7.5 Iranian Politics in the 1990s: Reform and Repression

As has been discussed in the previous section, the political parties of the Iranian Kurdish movement which until the mid-1990s were the major agents of mobilizing the Kurdish movement, have suffered largely from changes that have empowered the regional position of the Iranian regime in the 1990s and afterwards. As the insurgency of the KDPI and Komala experienced massive decline in this era, a complex new trend in Iranian Kurdistan, within the legal and political frameworks of the Islamic regime, took form. This trend in Kurdistan has on the one hand gained its legitimacy from the existing political discourse, and on the other hand experienced a reaction and resistance of the judicial and security institutions of the regime, incomparable to the other parts of Iran.

It is important to highlight that this trend in Kurdistan should be seen in the light of the developments occurring in the Iranian society, a dependent variable the developments and retreats of which arise from the Iranian domestic political process commencing in the mid-1990s. Kurdish political and intellectual entrepreneurs of this trend attempted to mobilize their activities in accordance with the short-lived windows of opportunity in Iran. As will be discussed in the section below, this trend began with the hope of achieving some political and cultural rights through peaceful activism. However, due to the failure of the reform movement in Iran and the Islamic regime's institutionally militarized attitude to the Kurdish region, this movement terminated in a reign of terror and executions of Kurdish intellectuals, journalists and university students. Since the political trend in Kurdistan has mainly been a result of the developments taken place within the mainstream political system in Tehran, a brief background of the two decades reform movement, versus the resistance it encountered in Iran, is required.

7.5.1 Khatami, the Architect of 'Failed Reform'

In the 1990s, Iran's Islamic regime faced difficulties such as socioeconomic challenges and international isolation. The survival of the regime through these alarming conditions required a rescue plan. Consequently the regime showed strategic willingness to do whatever necessary to ensure its survival.¹⁰³⁰ Providing society with the hope of reform was the key method relied on. The election of Mohammad Khatami, and his two continuous terms of presidency (1997-2005) epitomised this rescue plan. Khatami

¹⁰³⁰ Maloey, *How the Iraq war empowered Iran*

succeeded in bring notions such as reform, civil society, and *mardoom salari* (the sovereignty of people) into the highest level of his political programme as the instruments that could help solve the multifaceted socio-political and economic challenges facing Iranian society. Among the reformist section of Iranian society, the day of Khatami's first election of is known as the *hamaseh-ye dovvom-e khordad* (the Epic of 23rd May 1997). This 'epic', Golnar Mehran notes, "refers to a major shift in the political discourse and an attempt to bring about tolerance and moderation in the domestic arena while improving the image of Iran abroad and ending a long period of international isolation".¹⁰³¹

The Khatami triumph was a product of the critical condition of the country. Even though Khatami enjoyed broad cross-sectional support of the society, the result show that marginalized and disadvantaged groups as women, youth and religious and ethnolnational groups such as Kurds and Baluchis, were first among those who voted for Khatami and provided him with a cast-iron victory.¹⁰³² Looking away from the subsequent unsustainability of the reform policy, it can perhaps be claimed that

The elections included greater numbers of Iranians in the political process in the Islamic Republic [... whilst Khatami's] victory also prompted the leadership of the Islamic Republic to engage in an intense debate over whether to expand its base of support by accommodating the demands of those whom Khatami brought into the political process—most notably the middle class—or to remain tied to its ideological politics and exclude those who demanded a less ideological and more open politics.¹⁰³³

The need for developing a strong civil society was the key element of Khatami's domestic political discourse; freedom of expression, tolerance and dialogue among civilizations, were frequently promoted in Khatami's communications to Iranian and global society.¹⁰³⁴ In the light of Khatami's reformist discourse, more than 8000 NGOs, civil society organizations and dozens of reformist newspapers emerged.¹⁰³⁵ Whilst Khatami's articulation of the need of empowering *jame'eh-ye madani* (civil

¹⁰³¹ Golnar Mehran, "Khatami, political reform and education in Iran". *Comparative Education*, 39:3, (2003), 312.

¹⁰³² Ali Gheissari and Vali Vali, *Democracy in Iran, History and the Quest for Liberty*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 128-131.

¹⁰³³ *Ibid*, 131.

¹⁰³⁴ UNESCO, *Dialogue among Civilizations; the Round Table on the Eve of the United Nations Millennium Summit*. (Organized by UNESCO and the United Nations with the support of the Islamic Republic of Iran. France, 2001).

¹⁰³⁵ Golnaz Esfandiari, *Iran: Growing NGO Community Offers Political Activism Where Government Does Not*, 2004. <https://www.rferl.org/a/1051564.html>, (accessed 18 February 2018).

society) and improvement of cultural freedoms¹⁰³⁶ provided him with massive public popularity, it also generated anxiety among conservative hardliners. This anxiety accelerated the friction between state institutions controlled by the conservative hardliners, and the reform-seeking sections of Iranian society. In line with the rise of the activities of civil society organizations and NGOs, the response of the conservative hardliners to reform exposed that any attempt of democratization within the framework of the Islamic regime was absolutely impossible.

There are several reasons for the failure of Khatami's attempt at reforming the regime through supporting democratic civil society in Iran. The first issue is related to the structure and values Khatami founded his initiative on. Khatami's reformist ideology was framed around an Islamic civil society, a formula mainly composed of two polar opposites, "the tenets of an Islamic order with the Western concept of a civil society".¹⁰³⁷ Khatami established this political vision on a fragile foundation, whilst his political ambition was faced from its early stages with the threat from the conservative forces within the regime. The second and most challenging factor that quelled the reform movement, was that this movement faced a measure of securitization, which resulted in several waves of terror against intellectuals, journalists and students that acted on the behalf of Iranian civil society. The growing securitization of civil society had its roots in the fear of the emergence of a 'velvet revolution'.¹⁰³⁸

The ideas and acts of the civil society were not supported by the elite of the Islamic regime. The conservative hardliners viewed reform and the involvement of civil society and NGOs in Iranian political affairs, as a serious threat to their existence. They assumed that Khatami's policy was as anti-revolutionary and destructive to their beliefs and interests as Bani Sadr's presidency had been. They viewed any civil society activities and protest actions as *fetne* (intrigue) undermining the regime's values and ideology.¹⁰³⁹

Khatami, as highlighted by the conservatives, crossed a red line, when in promoting his approach to reform, he argued that "in the competition between religion and freedom, it is religion that has to be limited and not freedom".¹⁰⁴⁰ The fear of internal revolt, hand-in-hand with issues such as external intervention aimed at removing the Ayatollahs from

¹⁰³⁶ Gheissari and Vali, *Democracy in Iran, History and the Quest for Liberty*, 133.

¹⁰³⁷ Golnar Mehran, "Khatami, political reform and education in Iran". *Comparative Education*, 39:3, (2003), 317.

¹⁰³⁸ Ibid, 317-320

¹⁰³⁹ Farhangnews, *Tevahom-e 20 Milioni-e Khatami ve Qetel hay-e Zanjirayi* [Khatami's 20 million (voters) illusion and the chain Murders], 2014 <http://www.farhangnews.ir/content/87774> (accessed 25 March 2018).

¹⁰⁴⁰ Sirius Siyasi, *A reminder of the darkest cultural era of the Islamic Revolution; the Saga of the May 23 [1997] and the lost achievements*, hafeznews.ir, 2014.

power, located the regime's hard-core elements in a critical position to the reform movement.¹⁰⁴¹ Despite Khatami's landslide victory, he was unable to transform the popular support into real change and reform of the regime, mainly because the conservative wings of the regime were in a powerful position controlling all security and executive positions, as held by Gheissari and Nasr:

Khatami's strong mandate at the polls did not translate into strong executive powers. The conservative leadership accepted the verdict of the elections but moved quickly to limit Khatami's room to manoeuvre. He was given control of certain ministries but not others. Notably, the important ministries of oil, foreign affairs and intelligence remained outside of his full control. Similarly he had very limited authority over the armed forces and the judiciary.¹⁰⁴²

As the situation of press freedom, journalism and civil society improved into a satisfactory level through the first period of Khatami's presidency, Khamenei's publicly harsh critique of the reformists, accusing them of being "slanderers and sources of anxiety, pessimism and mistrust", encouraged the hardliners to attack civil society organizations and newspapers. Subsequently, nearly 50 publications were closed and several hundred journalists and reformist intellectuals were imprisoned. The rise of this reign of terror meant that, as Freedom House highlighted, "Iran had become the country with the greatest number of imprisoned journalists in the world".¹⁰⁴³ Freedom House described human rights in this era: "the state continues to maintain control through terror: arbitrary detention, torture, disappearance, summary trial, and execution are commonplace. Security forces enter homes and offices, open mail, and monitor telephone conversations without court authorization. Prisons are substandard, seriously overcrowded, and rife with disease".¹⁰⁴⁴

By reflecting on the outcomes of Khatami's presidency regarding reform and democratization, it can be claimed that despite the civil society's massive efforts involving thousands of organizations and NGOs, Khatami's presidency merely extended the regime's lifetime. Khatami's presidency was an experimental attempt at regime

¹⁰⁴¹ Paola Rivetti and Mohsen Moheimany, *Upgrading Civil Society in Iran: Dynamics of Adaption*, 2015. <http://www.mei.edu/content/map/upgrading-civil-society-iran-dynamics-adaptation> (access 28 March 2018).

¹⁰⁴² Gheissari and Vali, *Democracy in Iran, History and the Quest for Liberty*, 136.

¹⁰⁴³ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World, Iran; Overview*, 2002. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2002/iran> (accessed 4 January 2018). Among many other reports, the Paris-based *Reporters Sans Frontières* (RSF) in its October 2000 (number 20) edition brought the critical condition of journalism and freedom of speech in Iran to international attention.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Freedom House (2002), *Freedom in the World, Iran*.

reformation, which resulted in total failure¹⁰⁴⁵ with profound consequences for those engaged in NGO and civil society activities. The so called *qatlhay-e zanjirayi*¹⁰⁴⁶ (the serial killing of Iranian intellectuals and critics of the system in 1998) and *faje-e kuye daneshgah*¹⁰⁴⁷ (the massacre in *Tehran University dormitory*) are two examples of the failure of reform. Elective patterns of switching between conservative hardliner presidents and reformist presidents in office, has provided the regime with a legal survival mechanism.

During this era, university students, journalists and intellectuals paid the price more than any other sections of the Iranian society for their resilience in pushing for democratization in Iran. The massacre in the *Tehran University dormitory*, and the terror of Iranian intellectuals and government critics, are two examples of Khatami's lack of integrity in protecting his voters. In the words of Kasra Naji, "Khatami failed to back university students against the violent physical attacks of the *Ansar-e-Hezbollah*, and when he failed to stand up for his Interior Minister, Abdullah Nouri, a champion of reform, who had been dragged to court and jailed, many finally lost faith in the president and his reform movement".¹⁰⁴⁸

Khatami's weak leadership of the movement resulted in criticism and disappointment among his supporters. He was criticized for his inability to use the first period of his presidency to push through a radical programme of reformation and opening, "and many [of his previous supporters] feared that his indecisiveness came from a reluctance to modernize the clerical caste of which he himself was a member. At the end of the day, he is nothing more than a mullah, was the oft-heard refrain".¹⁰⁴⁹

Despite all the oppressive regime policies, the number of NGOs and civil society organizations in 2004 had risen to more than 8000. Yet by the end of the second period of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency in 2013, this number had decreased to 54 active NGOs. This drastic decline was a result of Ahmadinejad's conservative policy, which started by shutting down NGOs one after another, and persecuting and jailing teachers,

¹⁰⁴⁵ Dan De Luce, *Khatami blames clerics for failure*, 2004. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/may/04/iran> (accessed 6 August 2018).

¹⁰⁴⁶ Allan Hassaniyan, *30 År, To Revolutioner; En Multidimensional Analyse af Irans Grønne Revolution 2009* [30 Years, Two Revolutions; A Multidimensional Analysis of Iran's Green Revolution 2009] 2015, (Master dissertation), <http://rudar.ruc.dk/handle/1800/17593>, 34 & 69.

¹⁰⁴⁷ The anti-establishment student protests in July 1999 resulted in the Iranian security forces' brutal massacre of university students, subsequently in the lexicon of the student and protest movements in Iran being referred to as the *Faje-e kuye daneshgah*.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Kasra Naji, *Ahmadinejad: the secret history of Iran's radical leader*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 48.

¹⁰⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 45

journalists, unionists, students and many others. As highlighted by Majid Mohammadi, the roots of these violations can be found in the regime's attitude toward NGOs and civil society associations, particularly when from the perspective of the IRGC, "every social and economic demand is a national security threat".¹⁰⁵⁰

The regime's act of pushing back all reforms started with the universities. The hardliners needed a strong shock to stop the reform-oriented universities from becoming a breeding ground for liberalism and secularism. Whilst the universities experienced the first waves of 'cultural revolution' and Islamization from 1980 to 1983 under the leadership of Khomeini,¹⁰⁵¹ Ahmadinejad is known as the president that initiated Iran's second Cultural Revolution at Tehran University. Ahmadinejad, in pursuing his ideological strategy, appointed a clergyman, Ayatollah Abbas Ali Amid Zanjani, as chancellor. Choosing Amid Zanjani for this post marked the appointment of the first ever cleric to become a chancellor of an Iranian university. However, in order to avoid massive resistance from and confrontation with these educational institutions, changes have been implemented at an incremental tempo.¹⁰⁵²

7.6 Kurdistan and the Reform Movement

Similarly to across the rest of Iranian society, Kurdish intellectuals, journalists and civil society attempted to make use of the window of opportunity which occurred following the election of Khatami, in improving socio-economic and cultural rights in Kurdistan. The engagement of the Kurdish civil society in this era's political development can be located within the framework of 'activism in office', a terminology deployed by Nicole Watts in analysing the non-violent political activities of Kurds in Turkey, where Kurdish activists organized their activities within the country's municipality and parliamentary electoral system.¹⁰⁵³

The Kurdish people have more than any other national community of Iran been the target of the Islamic regime's policies of oppression and militarisation. The pattern of the Kurdish participation in the last 25 years of presidential elections provides evidence that the Kurds have used electoral occasions to express their protest towards those officials of

¹⁰⁵⁰ Majid Mohammadi, *Iranian civil society in despair*, 2015. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/comment/2015/11/11/iranian-civil-society-in-despair> (accessed 10 April 2018).

¹⁰⁵¹ Shahrzad Mojab, "State-University Power Struggle at Times of Revolution and War in Iran", *e-journal, International Higher Education*, (2004).

¹⁰⁵² Naji, *Ahmadinejad: the secret history of Iran's radical leader*, 240.

¹⁰⁵³ Watts, *Activists in office*

the Islamic Republic they perceive as having had the most harmful attitudes towards the Kurdish people. For instance, during Rafsanjani's second term in 1993¹⁰⁵⁴ the Kurdish people symbolically voted overwhelmingly for Ahmad Tavakkoli, Rafsanjani's opponent. As a reaction to the Kurdish act, Rafsanjani in the first Friday prayer following his victory, implied that the Kurdish action was *qahr-e bachegan-e* (childish anger).¹⁰⁵⁵

This Kurdish attitude was a protest against Rafsanjani's role in the assassinations of Ghassemlou and Sharefkandi, and his destructive socio-political agenda in Kurdistan.¹⁰⁵⁶ This trend was repeated in Kurdistan, when Kurds on 23rd May 1997 voted for Khatami rather than Nateq-Nouri,¹⁰⁵⁷ because in the eyes of Kurds (as with most Iranians), Nateq-Nouri represented the status quo. Similar participatory behaviour is identifiable, particularly during the ninth presidential election when Ahmadinejad competed with the Mir Hossain Mousavi-Mehdi Karoubi front. Due to the last candidates' focus on the minority issue, for the first time since the Islamic regime's existence the KDPI encouraged the Kurdish people to vote, for Karoubi. However, this period ended with the Green Movement¹⁰⁵⁸ and the house arrests of Mousavi and Karoubi.

7.6.1 Kurdistan; the Journey and Impasse of the Reform Movement (1997-2015)

Over 70 percent of Kurdish voters casted their vote for Khatami in 1997. The Kurdish support for Khatami occurred in the hope of reforming the Islamic regime and gaining the rights of the Kurdish people. The Kurdish region very rapidly joined the reform

¹⁰⁵⁴ Chris Hedges, *Rafsanjani Re-elected in Iran, But Without a Huge Mandate*, 1993. <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/06/14/world/rafsanjani-re-elected-in-iran-but-without-a-huge-mandate.html> (accessed 10 July 2018).

¹⁰⁵⁵ Hemen Seyedi, *Kurdhaye Iran ve Entekhabate Riyaset jomhuri: Az 1358 ta konon* [Kurds of Iran and the presidential elections: from 1980 until now], 2017. https://www.radiofarda.com/a/ir-iran_kurds_president_elections/28490340.html (accessed July 18, 2019).

¹⁰⁵⁶ Rafsanjani was behind the terror of the regime towards opposition inside and outside the country. Mohammad Reza Rahimi, Rafsanjani's appointed governor of Kurdistan, ordered "*jewana-e Kurd ra be jay-e aslehe be wafur mosselah Koonid*, instead of guns, arm the Kurdish youth with opium pipes". Aliasghar Faridi writes that the use of opium in Kurdistan before the 1979 Revolution was an almost unknown phenomenon, and after the Revolution, Kurdistan was the 'cleanest' province in Iran. However, currently in Kurdistan opium is widespread, easily and cheaply available in the cities. When Abdulla Ramazanzadeh (the first Kurdish governor-general of the Kurdistan Province) replaced Mohammad Reza Rahimi, he acknowledged that "when I came to Kurdistan, I saw that the rate of drug use was very high, and the Kurdish people openly complain that the government has taken the guns from their youths and have given them opium pipes".¹⁰⁵⁶ The issue of addiction has never been addressed by the regime until the occurrence of internal rivalry within the regime, Ahmadinejad holding Rafsanjani responsible for the issue in Kurdistan and accusing Rahimi of being involved with the opium trade in Kurdistan. Aliasghar Faridi, *Qatluam-e Khamosh/e Jewanan-e Kurd tavasot-e Rafsanjani*. [Rafsanjani's silent massacre of the Kurdish youth], 2016. <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/262340> (accessed March 5, 2018).

¹⁰⁵⁷ Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri is a conservative element of the Islamic regime and was Khamenei's preferred presidential candidate in the 1997 election; however, he lost the election to Khatami.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Seyedi, *Kurdhaye Iran ve Entekhabate Riyaset jomhuri*.

movement, and over a short period this region experienced a massive establishment of NGOs, human right organizations, bilingual newspapers and other print publications. As asserted by Salah Bayaziddi,¹⁰⁵⁹ there is strong evidence “that Kurds were hoping to achieve their rights through nonviolent means, [and] there can be no doubt that the rise of the reform movement during the early stage of President Khatami’s administration had its momentum, raising some hope among Kurds for greater cultural and political rights”.¹⁰⁶⁰

Many candidates of Kurdish reformist fronts succeeded in entering the Iranian parliament (*Majlis*) in the sixth and seventh elections.¹⁰⁶¹ As his first positive step in Kurdistan, Khatami appointed Abdollah Ramezanzadeh (a Shi’ite Kurd) as the governor-general of the Kurdistan Province. Ramezanzadeh appointed a number of Sunni Kurds to important governmental positions. However, Khatami’s reformist movement proved too weak to stand up against the hard-liners. In April 2001, Ramezanzadeh was accused of libellous statements against the Council of Guardians, for objecting to the nullification of the Majlis votes in two Kurdish cities. A non-Kurd succeeded him. During the same year, several legislators from the Kurdish provinces resigned from the Majlis, accusing the government of discrimination. The situation continued to deteriorate when over half of the Kurdish members of the Majlis were prevented from running in the February 2004 elections. As a result, more than 70 percent of Kurds boycotted the election, and civil unrest occurred in several Kurdish cities. Kurdistan during the eight-year (2005-2013) presidency of Ahmadinejad, suffered from the Islamic regime’s multiple oppressive policies against Kurds. The regime’s security forces’ harsh treatment of Kurdish civil society intensified dramatically.¹⁰⁶²

The post-Khatami era, marked by executions of Kurdish journalists and civil society and human rights activists, demonstrated the failure of all attempts at reforming the regime. Ahmadinejad is among the high-ranking officials of the Islamic regime with direct responsibility for the regime brutality in Kurdistan. Ahmadinejad had a special relation to Kurdistan. His early journey as youthful conservative Khomeinist started in Kurdistan, at a period when the Kurdish movement was carrying on a fierce fight against regime forces.¹⁰⁶³ In the early 1980s he was in Kurdistan as District Governor of Maku and then

¹⁰⁵⁹ Salah Bayaziddi is the representative of the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan to the United States.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Salah Bayaziddi, *Iran’s Reform Movement and the Kurdish Dilemma*, 2013. <http://www.rudaw.net/english/opinion/01062013> (accessed 15 July 2018).

¹⁰⁶¹ Quraisih, *Estelah teleban-e Kurd miyan-e do Entekhab*.

¹⁰⁶² Milad Karimi, Mehdi Doago, Shirzad Karimi, Soran Daneshwar Khebat Arefi, Asaad Qurbani and Arman Zemani are among the Kurdish university students and active members of the Democratic Union of Kurdish Students, who faced persecution and arrest during the presidency of Ahmadinejad.

¹⁰⁶³ Naji, *Ahmadinejad: the secret history of Iran’s radical leader*, 29-30

Khoy,¹⁰⁶⁴ before moving to Sanandaj. In Sanandaj, he worked as senior advisor to Kurdistan's governor general. Naji describes Ahmadinejad's feelings towards the Kurds: "like many young pro-Khomeinists, Ahmadinejad saw the Kurds as posing the greatest danger to the Islamic regime. He felt that they were about to break up the country and declare independence. Kurdistan had become a major base against the Islamic Republic".¹⁰⁶⁵ Owing to the massive incarceration and executions of Kurdish civil society entrepreneurs and journalists during Ahmadinejad's presidency, Ramezanzadeh claims that "the Ahmadinejad era was a nightmare that will remain in Iranian history".¹⁰⁶⁶

The Kurdish region in July 2005 witnessed a chain of demonstrations, starting in Mahabad. The 9th July 2005 Kurdish students' demonstration to mark the anniversary of the 1999 student protests in Tehran was brutally violated by regime's security forces. Similarly in the 1999 student protest in Tehran, the Kurdish action was subjected to regime brutality, security forces shooting Shawaneh Ghaderi, a Kurdish activist and organizer of the demonstration, and dragging his injured body through the streets of Mahabad until his death. The death of Shawaneh and the graphic photos of his corpse circulated in Mahabad and sparked eight days of mass protest all over the Kurdish region. This unrest gave the Iranian authorities and security forces the justification to intensify their oppression of Kurdish society, closing publications and targeting journalists who covered Shawaneh's killing and the ensuing protests. The public outcry spread to almost every city of Iranian Kurdistan, protestors showing their anger against regime brutality. These uprisings were covered in international media such as the BBC, Radiofarda¹⁰⁶⁷ and other agencies. The Iran Human Rights Documentation Center¹⁰⁶⁸ describes the situation in the Kurdish cities, following the Islamist regime's security forces open killing of Shawaneh, as the following:

The macabre execution of [Shawaneh] Ghaderi and grisly pictures of his corpse distributed after the events set off a spark of anger within the local Kurdish community. Eight days of protests followed in Mahabad and other Kurdish cities.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Maku and Khoy are two Kurdish cities located in the northern part of the Iranian Kurdistan.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Naji, *Ahmadinejad: the secret history of Iran's radical leader*, 30.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Rivasjonoob, *Abdollah Ramezanzadeh: didgah, Khaterat ve Barkhi Nagofteha* [Ramezanzadeh: his views, memories and some of the untold stories from his time as spokesmen of Khatami's cabinet, and governor of the Kurdistan province], 2015. <http://rivasjonoob.ir/?p=19235> (accessed 12 April 2018).

¹⁰⁶⁷ BBC. *Na Aramiha dar Mahabad Edame dared* [the outcry continues in Mahabad], 2005. http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/story/2005/07/050717_sm-jb-mahabad.shtml (accessed 9 July 2018) & Radiofarda. *Az Sargiri-e NAatamiha dar Menateq-e Kurdneshin-e Iran* [Recurrence of the unrest in the Kurdish regions of Iran. Interview with an expert, Ahmad Eskandari], <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/307421.html> (accessed 9 July 2018).

¹⁰⁶⁸ Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. *On the Margins: Arrest, Imprisonment and Execution of Kurdish Activists in Iran Today*, New Haven, Connecticut, 2012. <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/reports/1000000089-on-the-margins-arrest-imprisonment-and-execution-of-kurdish-activists-in-iran-today.html> (accessed 10 July 2018).

The Iranian government responded with martial law and the deployment of large numbers of security forces to the area. Kurdish protesters reported many deaths. Thereafter, in October 2005, some of the Kurdish protesters were sentenced to death for their involvement in the protests. These sentences in turn provoked further protests. As the cycle of violence increased in the months following Ahmadinejad's election, it became clear that life for the country's Kurdish minority was going to become increasingly difficult.¹⁰⁶⁹

Immediately following these protests, several daily and weekly bilingual Persian-Kurdish newspapers and magazines were banned by regime courts.¹⁰⁷⁰ A massive wave of arrest of journalists, NGO activists and intellectuals took place. Kurdish journalists were the main target of the first wave of persecutions.¹⁰⁷¹ Before dealing with the fate of the 'reform movement' in Kurdistan, providing some examples of the NGOs and organizations that attempted to become part of the country's reform movement in order to contribute to the democratization of Iranian and Kurdish society and provide their communities with a civic voice, will be illustrative.

Democratic Union of Kurdish Students (KSU)

The first spark of Kurdish student activism was launched in the year 1989, related to the commemoration ceremony of Halabje. Afterwards, Kurdish students continued their activities with meetings during conferences and poetry nights, and the first Kurdish student publication was launched a decade later (1999). The establishment of the Kurdistan Democratic Student Union (Kurdish Student Union, KSU)¹⁰⁷² was a major step in the context of the Kurdish student movement. The Kurdish student movement is in many regards an inseparable element of the Iranian Kurdish movement.¹⁰⁷³ The KSU was formed in May 2005 in Sanandaj aimed at providing Kurdish students with a platform to have a civic voice. However, despite the efforts of the KSU it never succeeded in registering with the office of the governor of Sanandaj, and worse, the organization's founders and activists faced different varieties of punishment such as imprisonment,

¹⁰⁶⁹ Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. *On the Margins*, 12.

¹⁰⁷⁰ The following publications were closed by the government: *Jiwar*, *Payam-e Mardom* (People's Message), *Aшти* (Peace), *Asu* (Horizon), *Rozhe Helat*, *Didgah* (Viewpoint), and *Payam-e Kurdistan* (Kurdistan Message).

¹⁰⁷¹ John Emerson, *Iran: Freedom of Expression and Association in the Kurdish Regions*, 2008. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/01/09/iran-freedom-expression-and-association-kurdish-regions> (accessed 15 December 2017).

¹⁰⁷² The Kurdish Student Union (KSU) commonly known as Democratic Union of Kurdish Students, was formed in May 2005 in Sanandaj.

¹⁰⁷³ Hakki in Mohammadi, *Negahi be Jonbesh-e Daneshjoyi-e Kurdistan*.

expulsion from universities, and being banned from participation in civil society activity. Nonetheless, the KSU succeeded in conducting some eye-catching activities:

The KSU issued a statement condemning the killing of Shawaneh Ghaderi, and staged a sit-in in front of the Governor's office. The student organization also released a petition for public support. Some of the KSU members went to Tehran to expand the organization's activities with the Office of Consolidate Unity [*Tahkim Vahdat*]. Most notably, they held a conference in Sanandaj that hosted students from 18 universities and 42 organizations from all across Iran. During this conference Yaser Goli¹⁰⁷⁴ was elected as the Union's Secretary General.¹⁰⁷⁵

Kurdistan Green Association (KGA)¹⁰⁷⁶

This organization aimed at promoting environmental preservation through activities such as planting trees, and the protection of local historic sites such as the Hassanabad Castle. However, in 2010-2011 some of the members of the KGA were arrested. As acknowledged by Kurdpa; Kaveh Tahmasebi, Worya Khosravi, Kamran Rahimi and Akbar Gowaili, Kurdish members and activists of the Green Association in Kurdistan, were arrested on 23rd October 2011 by the plainclothes intelligence forces of Sanandaj.¹⁰⁷⁷

The Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan (RMMK)

The Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan (*Rekxerawi Mafe Mirovi Kurdistan*–RMMK) was established on 9th April 2005 in Tehran, as an independent NGO to promote human rights and record and report human rights violations against the Kurds. Mohammad Seddigh Kaboudvand, a Kurdish journalist, was RMMK's secretary. In the summer 1997, Kaboudvand in cooperation with a number of Iranian activists founded the *Sazman-e Ettehad beray-e Demokrasi dar Iran* (Organization for the Unification of Democracy in Iran).¹⁰⁷⁸ After five years of effort, in December 2003 Kaboudvand gained a licence for publishing *Payam-e Madoom* (People's Message), a weekly magazine focusing on socio-political, cultural and economic issues. *Payam-e Madoom* was a bilingual Kurdish-Persian publication. Due to *Payam-e Madoom*'s overt focus on the violation of human rights, democracy, women's rights, the rights of minorities, the

¹⁰⁷⁴ Goli along with other members of the KSU faced imprisonment, charged with distributing propaganda against the regime for his role in organizing the protests.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. *On the Margins*, 26

¹⁰⁷⁶ The KGA was a registered NGO established in 2001 by Ali Ashraf Sardari, a Kurdish artist, in Sanandaj.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Kurdistan Press Agency/Kurdpa, *One Hundred Days of Ignorance on Three Activists of the Green Population in Kurdistan*, 2010. <http://www.kurdpa.net/english/index.php?cat=more&id=2363> (accessed March 9, 2018).

¹⁰⁷⁸ Didban (2014), *Mohammad Seddigh Kaboudvand*.

Kurdish issue, and civil and citizenship matters, it was very well-received by Kurdish society. This achievements of Kurdish civil society, though minor, of this period, can be regarded as a moment when the so-called ‘activists in office’ in Kurdistan became evident. However, the Ministry of Intelligence issued an arrest order against Kaboudvand on 25th June 2004, and subsequently ordered shutting down *Payam-e Madoom*.¹⁰⁷⁹

Kaboudvand, Father of Kurdish Human Rights¹⁰⁸⁰

The RMMK initiated a variety of activities throughout Kurdistan.¹⁰⁸¹ The range of the activities of RMMK was considered by the Ministry of Intelligence as a serious issue. This sensitivity appeared clearly in the Ministry of Intelligence’s report to the prosecutor’s office:

The activity of RMMK extended from Maku at the northernmost corner of the Kurdish region, to Ilam in the southern part. It has reporters, watchdogs, active members and representatives over all in Kurdistan, so that if in a very small village, a villager falls or a woman breaks her pitcher, the organization will be informed of it.¹⁰⁸²

During the years of its activity, especially before the arrest and imprisonment of Kaboudvand, the RMMK reported executions and imprisonment of civilians, politicians, journalists, and many other violations of rights. The killings of *Kulbar* (Kurdish border carriers killed by Iranian border forces)¹⁰⁸³ were reported regularly to international human rights organizations. Furthermore, hundreds of statements, announcements, condemnations, open letters, messages etc., have been issued by the RMMK, in most cases they were calling for the judicial, governmental and state officials to improve Kurdistan’s human rights situation.¹⁰⁸⁴

¹⁰⁷⁹ Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, *On the Margins: Arrest, Imprisonment and Execution of Kurdish Activists in Iran Today*, pp. 32-34

¹⁰⁸⁰ Bazdasht, *Mohammad Seddigh Kaboudvand Pedare Hoqoq-e BaSher-e Kurdistan*

¹⁰⁸¹ Kaboudvand, *Biography and civil and social activities*

¹⁰⁸² Didban, *Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan, Mohammad Seddigh Kaboudvand* <http://didban.net/article.aspx?fld=fa/Extra&id=13> (accessed 20 April 2018).

¹⁰⁸³ Kurdistan Human Rights Network. *Annual report on violation of human rights of Kolber workers in Iran*, 2015. <http://kurdistanhumanrights.net/en/2015-annual-report-on-violation-of-human-rights-of-kolber-workers-in-iran/> (accessed 13 September 2017).

¹⁰⁸⁴ Asre-nou, *Hokm-e Zendan, mahromiyyet av Fealiyet-e Roznam-e nigari...* [Prison sentence, banning from journalism, cancellation of the license of *People’s Message*], 2005. <http://asre-nou.net/1384/mehr/24/m-kaboudvand.html> (accessed 1 May 2018).

After the rise of the RMMK and Kaboudvand's popularity, Kaboudvand was arrested and charged in 2007.¹⁰⁸⁵ He was given a sentence of 10 years and six months in prison, and on 22nd May 2017, after serving 10 years, he was released from the Evin prison. Kaboudvand is known in Iranian Kurdistan as 'the father of Kurdish Human rights', and he has among many other international prizes been the recipient of a Hellman/Hammett grant (2009) and the British Press Award for International Journalist of the Year (2009).¹⁰⁸⁶

7.7 The Outcome of the Kurdish Reform Movement

Overall, according to observers of the Kurdish reform movement, the participation of Kurdish reformists during the years of reform resulted in some progress, for instance a degree of opening of the political and cultural situation in Kurdistan. However, the performance of this groups of Kurdish reformists decreased following the 2009 election, and they lost credibility within Kurdish society.¹⁰⁸⁷

While the discourse of 'reform' is still an influential, perhaps dominant concept among the Iranian elite in and outside Iran, for the major part of political activists of Kurds, particularly those engaged in the student movement and unions, journalism, and civil society, the windows of opportunity which occurred during Khatami's presidency ended with dire consequences. Amin Sorkhabi labels this result *bon bast-e eslahteleban dar Kurdistan* (the impasse of reformists in Kurdistan). Sorkhabi explains that except for the first period of Khatami's presidency, when some Kurdish supporters of his reformist policy made their way into the Iranian parliament, the reputation of Kurdish reformists was tarnished, and those who joined the movement were mainly regarded as opportunist individuals, serving personal interests, lacking any concrete independent political strategy that could have advanced the Kurdish demand of equal citizenship in Iran. In the words

¹⁰⁸⁵ The following are the eight points on which Kaboudvand was charged: encouraging Kurdish women to join the PKK; accusing the Islamic Republic of being behind the assassination of the Kurdish political leaders; accusing the Islamic Republic of implementing a discriminatory policy towards the Kurds; accusing the Islamic Republic of spreading drugs in Kurdistan; accusing the regime of polluting the environment in Kurdistan, and comparing this with the chemical bombing of Halabja; accusing the regime of using torture and violating the rights of the Kurds; having contacts and interviews with international media; and using provocative headlines in his publication, such as "We will not allow the regime to treat the Kurds as second-class citizens", "The Peshmerga are the symbols of the nation's honour", "The federal state of Kurdistan", etc. Asre-nou, *Hokm-e Zendan, mahromiyyet av Fealiyet-e Roznam-e nigari*.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Pen International, Iran: "Kurdish journalist released on four-day furlough", 2016. <https://pen-international.org/print/4193> (accessed 5 August 2018).

¹⁰⁸⁷ Kawe Quraisih, *Estelah teleban-e Kurd miyan-e do Entekhab* [Kurdish reformists between two elections], 2013 <http://www.roozonline.com/persian/news/newsitem/article/-3680a54382.html> (accessed 8 May 2018).

of Sorkhabi, “in the public’s opinion, Kurdish reformists have advanced their personal interests and lacked a specific program with links and relevance to the Kurdish movement. On the other hand, Kurdish reformists were blamed by Iranian reform activists for being passive during the events of 2009”.¹⁰⁸⁸

Jebhay-e Mottahed-e Kurd (the United Front of Kurds)¹⁰⁸⁹ and *Shoray-e Eslahteleban Kurd* (the Coordinating Council of Kurdish Reformists)¹⁰⁹⁰ are among the political fronts in Kurdistan which announced their existence during the presidency of Khatami. Following the sweeping disqualifications of the Kurdish reformist candidates in 2016, the political makeup of the Kurdish reformist front changed drastically. Some of the reformists supported independent candidates, and some others by forming *Kampin-e Metalebat-e Kurdistani* (the Campaign for Kurdish Demands) attempted to use the election as an opportunity for highlighting Kurdish demands. Yet none of these groups succeeded in raising the socio-political and economic situation in Kurdistan with the regime’s policymakers.¹⁰⁹¹ The slow rate of the process of reforming the regime, combined with the weak position of the Kurdish reformist fronts, located the Kurdish reform movement in a position of impasse.¹⁰⁹²

Considering the fatal outcome of the reform movement in Kurdistan, in evaluating the outcome of the reform movement in Iran one should start with the Kurdish region, as the Kurdish people, according to human rights reports, more than any other nation in Iran, have paid the price for the campaign for the democratization of Iran. This argument is applicable both for the two terms of Khatami’s so-called reformist political agenda, and the presidencies of his successors Ahmadinejad and Hassan Rouhani. Executions of Kurdish civil society activists and journalists throughout Ahmadinejad’s presidency mean that the period has been defined as the second era of state terrorism in Kurdistan, since the end of the 1980s.¹⁰⁹³ The suffering of the Kurdish civil rights activist Farzad

¹⁰⁸⁸ This claim is related to the era after the 2009 election, and the Kurdish reformists dealing with the post-election events taking place mainly in Tehran. Following the disputed election, while most reformist fronts emphasized the claim of fraud, the Kurdish reformists only issued a statement, and did not join the protest actions. Sorkhabi, Amin. *Forod ve Feraz-e Mobarezay-e Moselehan-e dar Kurdistan* [Fluctuation of the armed insurgency in Iranian Kurdistan], 2016. <http://www.komala.org/farsy/dreja.aspx?=hewal&jmare=24&Jor=3> (accessed July 31, 2018).

¹⁰⁸⁹ The United Front of Kurds was established by Kurdish figures such as Behadin Adeb, Saleh Nikbakht, Abdollah Sohrabi, Bayezid Mardokhi and Hussain Shah Waysi in Sanandaj. Quraisih. *Estelah teleban-e Kurd miyan-e do Entekhab*.

¹⁰⁹⁰ The Coordinating Council of Kurdish Reformists was established by Jelal Jelalizadeh, Abdollah Ramezanzadeh, Ali Tofiqi, and Khaled Tawekoli.

¹⁰⁹¹ Quraisih, *Estelah teleban-e Kurd miyan-e do Entekhab*.

¹⁰⁹² Sorkhabi, *Forod ve Feraz-e Mobarezay-e Moselehan-e dar Kurdistan*.

¹⁰⁹³ Shirin Alamhool, Farzad Kamanger, Farhad Vakili, Ali Haidarian, Lotfollah Lotfollahpour, Hossein Khezri, Adnan Hassanpour, Hiva Boutimar, Habib Latifi, Ehsan Fattahian, and Fasih Yasamani, are

Kamanger¹⁰⁹⁴ under torture, culminating in his execution, received huge public attention and condemnation. Kamanger was arrested in July 2006 and was held for nearly four years in various detention centres. During Kamanger's detention, he endured repeated instances of severe torture. Kamanger in a prison letter, described his suffering:

They [the regime's security forces] took me to a room. When writing down my information [I had to disclose] my ethnicity, and every time I answered 'Kurdish' they beat me with a whip that looked like some kind of hose. They also insulted me and beat me because of my religion. They beat me to their heart's desire because of the Kurdish music that was on my mobile phone. They tied my hands, sat me in a chair, and put pressure on the sensitive parts of my body. They also took off my clothes and threatened me with rape by harassing me with batons and sticks. My left leg was badly damaged [while I was] there, and I passed out from simultaneous electric shocks and blows to my head. Ever since I regained consciousness, I feel like I have lost my sense of balance and I shake uncontrollably.¹⁰⁹⁵

Studying Iran Human Rights Documentation Center and other international human rights organizations records on the Islamic regime's violation of human rights in Kurdistan, reveals that Kamanger's suffering has been a painful shared experience of many executed or imprisoned Kurdish political and civil right activists. The Islamic regime's wide-scale atrocities in Kurdistan shows that the Kurdish university students, journalists and intellectuals were the most politicized sections in Kurdistan and the engine of innovation of various unions, cultural centres, and human and civil rights organizations. Therefore they paid a huge price for their democratic activities. As mentioned, the majority of these activists faced long sentences, severe torture, humiliation and execution. The common justification of the regime, referred to in all these cases, was "subversive activities and propaganda against the regime".¹⁰⁹⁶

Iranian officials and security forces in justifying their violations of people's democratic rights refer to articles in the Iranian constitution, such as Iran's Islamic Penal Code, entitled "Offenses against the National and International Security of the

among more than several hundred Iranian Kurdish civil society and human rights activists, intellectuals and journalists who were executed during the presidency of Ahmadinejad, based on accusations of actions against national security, spying, *muharibih* ("warring with God"), and being members of Kurdish political parties such as the KDPI, Komala and PJAK. Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, *On the Margins*.¹⁰⁹⁴ Farzad Kamanger was a high school teacher, poet, journalist and Kurdish civil rights activist in the city of Kamyaran, who was executed on May 9, 2010. Kurdish Rights, *The Words of Farzad Kamanger*. <https://kurdishrights.org/2013/05/11/the-words-of-farzad-kamanger/> (accessed 25 August 2018).

¹⁰⁹⁵ Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, *On the Margin*, 1.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre, *Pressures on Kurdish students and teachers in Marivan continue*, <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/news/inside-iran/1000000044-pressures-on-kurdish-students-and-teachers-in-marivan-continue.html#.T4Rg3VGLPMA> (accessed 5 August 2018).

Country”.¹⁰⁹⁷ Categorized as security laws, these laws are irregularly applied by the government in suppressing peaceful activities. The same approach has been applied in restricting press freedoms and free journalism in the country. As held by John Emerson, “Iran’s Press Law contains broadly worded articles that allow the authorities to ban or deny permits to publications they perceive as critical, bring charges against writers and journalists, and prevent writers from having their works published”.¹⁰⁹⁸

However, new studies conclude that despite the increasing repression and denial of the Kurdish identity and rights (particularly during the presidency of Ahmadinejad 2005-2013), the strengthening of national identity and rise of self-consciousness within Kurdish society has been highly notable.¹⁰⁹⁹ Kurdish newspapers have frequently, without mentioning the Iranian Kurdish movement, marked and celebrated the symbols and values of the Kurdish movement. For instance, the Kurdish-Persian quarterly *Jiwar* in its first number of 2008, very proudly celebrated Qazi Mohammad, the founder and president of the Kurdish Republic.¹¹⁰⁰ A similar style of journalism is identifiable in other Kurdish-Persian bilingual newspapers and journals from this period. For example, in an issue of *Kerafto*, another publication of this period, the author reflects critically on the emergence of the Kurdish-state relationship, and Safavids’ policy of destruction of the Kurdish tribal-federative rule of the Mukeryan in the 17th century.¹¹⁰¹

In the absence of proactive Kurdish political parties, Kurdish journalists, civil society activists and intellectuals relied heavily on the use and promotion of the Kurdish language. Despite the militarization of Kurdistan and the restrictions on freedom, these groups channelled the Kurdish feeling of national oppression and deprivation through publishing newspapers, weekly and quarterly magazines. For instance, Omid Ghaderzade and Hossein Mohammad Zadeh highlight that the politicization of national identity, reflected in the political, cultural and economic spheres, has intensified within Iranian Kurdish society. The increasing publishing of Kurdish books and children’s books, magazines and newspaper, the use of Kurdish names for children, and establishing cultural and civil society associations, demonstrations and expressions of solidarity with

¹⁰⁹⁷ Emerson, *Iran: Freedom of Expression and Association in the Kurdish Regions*

¹⁰⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Vali, “Sekot-e Rojhelat”, 122-123.

¹¹⁰⁰ *Jiwar*, *Faselnam-e Tahlili, Pajoheshi-e Jiwar, Se namayi belawnekrawayi Qazi Mohammad, Aban 1387* [Analytical and Research Quarterly: Three unpublished letters of Qazi Mohammad, October 2008], 1.

¹¹⁰¹ *Kerafto, Tarikh ve Andish-e: Tarikh-e Siyasi-e Millet-e Kurd dar Iran* [History and Reflection on the Political History of the Kurdish nation in Iran] 14 March 2007].

Kurds of other parts of Kurdistan, have been among the activities through which Iranian Kurds have expressed their attachment to Kurdish nationalism.¹¹⁰²

Summary

The Iranian Kurdish movement has followed an uneven course. Its characteristics and structure show that the Kurdish movement in Iran is a dependent variable, impacted by domestic and regional developments and events. More than two decades of decline of the activity of Komala and the KDPI, and their subjection to the interests of the PUK and KDP, give reason to argue that this period of the Iranian Kurdish movement has many similarities with the 1960s, when Iranian Kurds suffered hugely from the Iraqi Kurdish movement. Despite Kurdish nationalists' claim of the existence of a common Kurdish (national) interest, incidents of the Kurdish movement of one part of Kurdistan being used against the movement of Kurds in other parts of Kurdistan, mean that it can also be argued that the movements of each part of Kurdistan have developed their own agendas and interests.

Following the assassination of Ghassemlou and Sharefkandi, the KDPI as the leading organization of Iranian Kurdish nationalism, has suffered from internal fragmentation, lack of strong leadership capable to face unpredictable developments, and the capability of contributing a long term and sustainable strategy. For instance, as a result of the multifaceted challenges within the Iranian Kurdish movement, the emergence of the PJAK should not only and simply be reduced to viewing it as a project of the PKK, serving the PKK's interests and agenda; it should also be viewed as product of a protest and dissatisfaction against the KDPI's and Komala's policy of passivity. Decisive and determined leadership that dares to take action and flexible in dealing with unpredictable and challenging changes, is the guarantee of conducting a sustainable and forceful Kurdish movement in Iran. The geopolitics and geography of Kurdistan is a challenging, yet constant reality, and therefore it is vital that the Iranian Kurds and their political parties design and conduct a proactive struggle based on these realities and challenges.

¹¹⁰² Omid Ghaderzade & Hossein Mohammad Zadeh, "A Study of Ethnic Identity and Politicization of Kurdish Ethnicity in Iran", *Strategic Research on security and Social Order*, Seventh Year, Serial No. 20, No. 1, Spring 79, (2018), 21. http://ssoss.ui.ac.ir/article_22672_bb0c6db88234c4842bcf1f2ae45138ec.pdf

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to explore the patterns of the liberation movement of Iranian Kurds from the mid-20th century and following decades, through the lenses of movement mobilization and crossborder interaction between different armed and political organization of the Iranian, and Iraqi, Kurdish movements.

The exact periodization and politicization of the Kurdish movement has been a complex and unfinished task. Nevertheless, this thesis concludes that the establishment and conduct of the 20th century Kurdish movement has aimed at liberating the Kurdish people from the changing authoritarian regimes' neglect of the political and cultural rights of the Kurdish people. The changing Iranian regimes' continuous militarization of the Kurdish region, since the establishment of the modern Iranian nation-state in 1925, has institutionalized a deep-rooted feeling of deprivation among Iranian Kurds, and consequently a politicization of the Kurdish national identity and Kurdish national movement. The journey of the contemporary Iranian Kurdish movement started with the Uprising of Simko (1918); since that time the Kurdish national movement has, with the formation of the KDPI and the establishment of the Republic, demonstrated gradual signs of semi-modernization and institutionalization. Whilst until the end of the first half of the 20th century, the Iranian Kurdish movement had an utterly nationalistic outlook, some major developments and events, for instance the peasant movement of 1952-53 and 1979's announcement of the official activity of Komala, show the presence of diverse visions and ideologies within the Kurdish movement. The need for not only directing the challenge towards the regimes controlling Kurdistan, but also resolving the interclass relations which have resulted in backwardness and economic disadvantage for a large share of the Kurdish society (particularly in rural areas), brought to the surface the existence of this spectrum of ideas within the Iranian Kurdish movement.

As the successive regimes in Tehran have viewed the Kurdish movement as a movement of violence, studying the patterns and events of this movement (for instance those after the 1979 Revolution) show that Kurdish society has relied in the first place overwhelming on negotiation and non-violent means of resistance. Actions such as civilian disobedience, framed and channelled through collective strikes, mass-exoduses, solidarity rallies and many other means of peaceful protests of the Kurdish civil society, have been the major elements of the Kurdish movement after the 1979 Revolution.

This study concludes that armed insurgency never been the preferred option of Iranian Kurds in their endeavour for improving national and cultural rights; however, it

has been the changing regimes of Iran that have left the Kurdish movement with no choice other than taking armed insurgency. Whilst Kurdistan following the Revolution has been under massive military attack, the Kurdish leadership eagerly insisted on negotiations, and for the sake of finding a peaceful solution for the Kurdish question even the demand for *Khodmokhtari* was several times adjusted, until it has been reduced to the lowest level of cultural autonomy. However, the regime was uncompromising and showed no interest in a peaceful resolution to the country's socio-political issues. Armed insurgency has been imposed on the Iranian Kurds, because it has provided the regime with the benefit of labelling and attacking the Kurdish movement in a way that suits the regime's propaganda machine. Whilst shortly after the Revolution the majority of the Iranian people voted for a referendum that legitimized the Islamic Republic, political parties of the Iranian Kurds labelled this referendum as undemocratic, and encouraged the Kurdish society to boycott it. Similar progressive acts of the Kurdish movement turned Kurdistan into a hub for Iranian opposition parties/organizations, and in reality a stronghold of the continuing Revolution in Iran. While the Iranian people celebrated the Revolution, the Kurdish people have continuously through different means of protest challenged the Islamic regime for its undemocratic policies.

Another example of peaceful Kurdish intent, is the huge price that the Kurdish society has paid due to its contribution to the reform movement. As a result of the massive Kurdish participation in the reform movement occurring in Khatami's era, Kurdish civil society invested its resources in improving the socio-political, cultural and economic condition in Kurdistan by integration into the electoral system and establishing different newspapers and media within the framework of the regime. However, the huge price Kurdish journalists, university students and intellectuals paid for their resilience in following their reformist approach to achieve some of Kurdish society's rights, from the time of Ahmadinejad's presidency until the time of this writing, has meant that Kurdistan has been turned into a laboratory for the regime's brutal capabilities for crushing any resistance and protests against its policies.

The defeat of the reform movement, particularly in Kurdistan, underlines the reality that no matter the degree of peacefulness of the Kurdish initiative, any claim and initiative of the Kurds, raised either by Kurdish civil society or the political parties of the Kurdish movement, would face the immediate rejection of the Islamic regime. This is due to the elitist approach of the rulers of the Iranian state towards Kurds. This approach has been a product of considering the Kurds as a threat to Iranian territorial integrity, and therefore any Kurdish claim of autonomy has been met by suspicion and brutality.

Since the leadership of the Iranian Kurdish movement has time after time repeated its mistakes, the mobilization of this movement from exile (in Iraqi Kurdistan) should receive some critical attention. Whilst the isolated and surrounded geographical location of Kurdistan, and the brutal nature of the regimes occupying the Kurdish homeland, should be blamed for much of the decline within the Iranian Kurdish movement, the Kurdish leadership's weak understanding of the need for internal integrity, unity, and establishing sustainable and flexible strategy that can suit all seasons, can be held as the main reasons for the decline of the Kurdish movement during the era identified in this study.

From the 1960s, in line with the rise of intellectualism among Iranian Kurds and the attempt at re-establishing the movement in exile, the internal disputes and divisions within the KDPI began their real emergence. Komala's emergence, and its ideological vision for post-revolutionary Kurdish society, were together the major element of thickening and diversification of Iranian Kurdish movement from 1979 until the end of the 20th century. Yet this diversification was not unproblematic, because it resulted in a high degree of complexity and friction within the already politically and economically fragile, unprepared and fragmented Iranian Kurdish movement and Kurdish society.

Whilst before 1979 the internal division within KDPI was among the major obstacles for mobilizing and raising the capability of the Kurdish movement, the emergence of different forms of disputes, as competition for controlling territory and ideological differences between the KDPI, Komala and other minor forces, brought the sensitive condition of Kurdistan to a new critical level. With the growth of frustration over the loss of territory to the Iranian regime, a critical stage of KDPI-Komala relations resulted in more than half a decade of fratricidal war between these two forces.

During this era, the KDPI represented itself as the most legitimate, popular, superior political organization, and the inheritor of the Mahabad Republic; on the other side, Komala's political discourse was inspired by the dream of transforming Kurdish society entirely in accordance with its leftist ideological world view. The existence of an unexperienced culture of tolerance arose in Kurdistan shortly after the Revolution. As the Islamic regime after its establishment was unable to take immediate control over Kurdistan, a triangle of competing forces, composed of nationalistic, religious and leftist ideologies, instead of strengthening the Kurdish front highlighted its ideological differences, each trend viewing the others as threats. The lack of conflict management strategies and these organisations' hegemony-seeking behaviour, located the Kurdish

movement in a weak position during its interactions and negotiations with the newly-emerged regime in Tehran.

As has been highlighted through the different chapters of this thesis, *crossborder relations and interaction* between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements have been identified within the different phases, the 1960s, 1979s-1980s, and the 1990s until today, of the Iranian Kurdish movement. The concept of *crossborder-ness*, of substantial importance for the Iranian Kurdish movement, has been viewed through critical lenses. This study has concluded that there has been more harm than positive outcomes resulting from this interaction. This relationship has mainly been unequal, and the domination of the Iraqi Kurdish movement especially in the 1960s was evident, as was its ill-treatment of the Iranian Kurdish movement. The major forces of the Iraqi Kurdish movement, the KDP and PUK, have been held responsible for this misconduct, whilst the other Kurdish counterparts of these interactions, the KDPI and Komala have a minor share of responsibility. The KDPI and Komala, despite having their bases inside the Iraq Kurdistan and each of them having a different degree of relationship with the Iraqi regime in the 1980s and receiving the Iraqi state's support, did not impose cost on the Iraqi Kurdish movement, and they demonstrated a satisfactory degree of neutrality (if not loyalty) to crossborder kinship. According to Dr Mahmoud Osman,¹¹⁰³

The KDPI can record another glory. Even though the KDPI was driven by political circumstances and the geography and geopolitics of Kurdistan into having a relationship with the Iraqi regime, the KDPI-Iraqi regime relation was never at the cost of the Iraqi Kurdish movement. The KDPI's relation with the Iraqi regime never became a factor of threat or harm to the Iraqi Kurds. To the contrary, sometimes the KDPI in order to not cause damage to the Iraqi Kurdish movement, was the one disadvantaged by this relationship. Our [the KRG authorities'] access to the data and documents of the Iraqi Intelligence Service¹¹⁰⁴ only reveal positive things about the KDPI. The KDPI members and leadership should be proud of themselves. This result highlights the purity of their struggle and shows that the KDPI are true patriots.¹¹⁰⁵

¹¹⁰³ Dr Mahmoud Osman is a veteran Iraqi Kurdish politician who has been involved in the Iraqi Kurdish movement since the 1960s.

¹¹⁰⁴ This claim of Mahmud Osman refers to the Iraqi Kurdish authority's comprehensive access to the archives and documents of the Iraqi regime in Kurdistan. This video does not reveal whether Osman is referring to the withdrawal from Iraq Kurdistan in 1991, or the fall of the Saddam in 2003. Yet the quality of this video recording gives a reason to consider his speech in this video as taking place after 2003.

¹¹⁰⁵ Mahmoud Osman, *Pêwandi HDKA u Baath le rewangayi Mahmoud Osman-ewe* [The HDKI (KDPI) and the Ba'ath regime according to Mahmoud Osman]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJ0ui7pei68> (accessed 5 July 2018).

Despite the fluctuating insurgency of the KDPI and Komala, and the unpopular 1980s fratricidal war, these parties have been inseparable parts of the Iranian Kurdish movement and have enjoyed the Iranian Kurds' popular support. Despite their sometimes ineffective methods of mobilizing the movement, these parties should be seen as products of modernity and socio-political and intellectual development in Iranian Kurdistan. In this regard, it can be claimed that these organizations have deep historical roots with wide bases in Kurdish society. These parties have been established by intellectuals among the Iranian Kurds, and the Kurdish society has been the decisive source of human and financial means fuelling their activities and insurgencies. On the other hand, the fragmented nature of the Iranian Kurdish political parties has been the major challenge facing this movement, resulting on the one hand in the decline of the Kurdish movement, and on the other hand disappointment, dissatisfaction and anger of the Kurdish society toward these parties. Despite the KDPI's and Komala's shared responsibility for their fratricidal war in the 1980s, these parties are still trying to avoid taking any responsibility; both parties owe the Kurdish society an apology and explanation.

During different periods of the movement, mismanagement, extreme internal fragmentation, geopolitical changes and lack of sustainable strategy, have brought the movement either to an abrupt (though temporary) end or sharp decline. One factor is the strength and brutality of the counterpart (the Islamic regime); another issue is the capability of resisting subjugation, and not surrendering to what the leaders of the Iranian Kurdish movement label as 'the reality'. The way Kurds have internally treated each other, reminds me of the saying of the well-known friend of the Kurdish people, Chris Kochera, that "Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria are the minor enemies of Kurds, but Kurds are the main enemies of themselves".¹¹⁰⁶ The existence of three parties split from Komala,¹¹⁰⁷ and two parties split from the KDPI, within the Iranian Kurdish movement, is an alarming issue highlighting these parties' negative approaches to inter-organizational diversity and coexistence.

Both the KDPI and Komala are supported by their grassroots in rejecting the interference of organizations of other parts of Kurdistan, and many view the PKK's

¹¹⁰⁶ Chris Kochera, quote of Kurds <http://globalgovernment2012.blogspot.com/2014/02/blog-post.html>

¹¹⁰⁷ Today there are three factions of Komala: *Rêkxrawey Hizbê Kumunîstî Kurdistanî Êran-Komele* (Organization of the Iranian Communist Party–Komala, <http://www.komalah.org/>) under Ibrahim Alizadeh, *Komeley Şorrişgêrrî Zehmetkêşanî Kurdistanî Êran* (Revolutionary Organization of the Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan, <http://www.komalainternational.org/>) under Abdullah Mohtadi, and *Komeley Zehmetkêşanî Kurdistan* (Organization of the Toilers of Kurdistan, <http://www.komala.com/>) under Omar Ilkhanizade.

‘PJAK project’ as an act of interference, threatening the future of the cohesion of the Kurdish movement. However, concurrently the KDPI and Komala grassroots blames these parties for being absent from the political landscape for more than two decades.

Studying the internal divisions (including all aspects such as elite fragmentation, collaboration and fratricidal war) within the Kurdish movement, shows that this issue has been more challenging than any other. The existence of difficult relations between different forces in the KRG, bears witness to the fact that the KRG parties’ collaborative behaviour with their neighbouring states – Turkey and Iran – has been in contradiction with Kurdish crossborder solidarity, and broadly speaking this way of policymaking has delayed and declined the process of Kurdish nation-building.

Crossborder Kurdish interaction has many angles. Whilst in this thesis, the interaction between the Kurdish movement in Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan, with focus on its adverse effects on the Iranian Kurdish side, has been brought to light, some other angles due to the limited scope of this study were not discussed in this research. Whilst these other aspects had to be somewhat disregarded, the consciousness of their presence did exist. Taking into account the importance of some other aspects, as for instance the cultural and economic aspects of the crossborder interaction, particularly between Iranian and Iraqi Kurds, insights into these interactions would possibly provide a different understanding of Kurdish crossborderness.

Since the establishment of the KRG, the cultural exchanges between Kurdish intellectuals, artists and student organizations of Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan accelerated drastically. This culturally-based interaction has left a positive impact on the politicization of national identity in the Iranian Kurdistan, as well as it providing a secret channel for establishing connections between the organizations of the Kurdish movement and the groups of Iranian Kurdistan. The crossborder relations between Iranian and Iraqi Kurds have been an effective channel for communication, and spreading the political and ideological message of the KDPI and Komala. Traveling to the KRG, under the pretext of trade and business, has been an effective channel for meeting with the KRG-based Iranian Kurdish opposition parties. For instance, *Rêkxirawe Demokratîyekan* (the Democratic Organization), a political and cultural umbrella organization based in Suleimania (supported by Mella Bakhtyar, member of the PUK’s politburo), inviting Kurdish students and civil society activists from Iran each year, has been a secret space for Komala, the KDPI and other opposition Kurdish parties, to meet and recruit new members. The *Galawej* Festival, an annual fixture held in Suleimania, is another opportunity for KRG-based Iranian Kurdish opposition parties to establish connections

and disseminate their ideology among Kurdish students and intellectuals coming from Iran. In this regard, studying the cultural, intellectual and civil society aspects of crossborder interaction between Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan, would be a potentially fruitful subject of future research and study.

This study suggests that a durable movement in the Iranian Kurdistan requires serious dialogue and cooperation between the political parties of this part of Kurdistan. New-thinking and rethinking of the strategy for the Iranian Kurdish movement hand-in – hand with cooperation between progressive forces of the Iranian Kurds would be the guarantee for a transparent and sustainable liberation struggle in the Iranian Kurdistan.

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