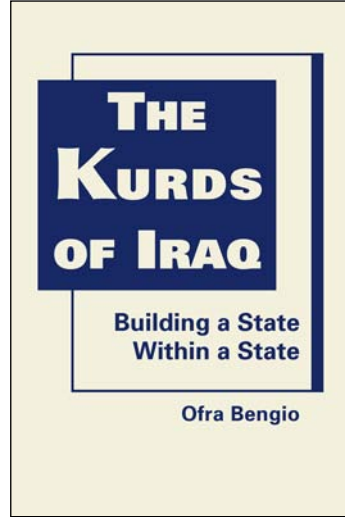


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The Kurds of Iraq:  
Building a State  
Within a State

Ofra Bengio

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# 1

## The Evolution of Kurdish Nationalism

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*I met her in a Parisian café in October 1993. She had fled sometime before from Saddam's Iraq, where she had worked as a scientist. She was very friendly but, at the same time, extremely frightened. She disclosed neither her name nor any personal details, except for the fact that she was a Kurd and had lived a nightmarish existence in Iraqi Kurdistan. The next time I met her was in May 2009, in the Iraqi Kurdistan city of Sulaymaniyya. No longer in need to protect her identity, Dr. Akhtar Najmaddin had until 2006 served as minister for higher education in the Sulaymaniyya-based Kurdistan government. These two meetings epitomize the profound vicissitudes of Kurdish fortunes over the last half-century. This book is an account of that story.*

### Who Are the Kurds?

Kurds began writing their own history only in the late sixteenth century, and very timidly at that. Hence, scholars and interested parties alike must rely on non-Kurdish sources for tracing Kurdish historical roots, which causes no end of controversy. Many researchers and a broad range of Kurdish nationalists trace the origin of the Kurds to an “Iranian” migration in the first millennium B.C.E. from an unknown eastern territory into the area where the Kurds now reside.<sup>1</sup> Referring to two Sumerian inscriptions from about 2000 B.C.E., which mentioned a country called Kar-da-ka, Vladimir Minorsky suggests that the Kurds are “an Iranian people of Nearer Asia.”<sup>2</sup> C. J. Edmonds, too, opines that “the Kurds constitute a single nation which has occupied its present habitat for at least three thousand years. They have outlived the rise and fall of many imperial races.”<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, Kurdish historians, scholars, and politicians have wholeheartedly embraced such theses.<sup>4</sup>

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There are, however, more measured and qualified approaches to the question of Kurdish origins. Maria O'Shea says, "It is impossible with the information available to achieve a reasonable understanding of either the precise origins of the Kurds, when they coalesced into such an identifiable group, or their early history, much before the Arab/Islamic invasion."<sup>5</sup> To be sure, in the sixth century C.E., the Talmud repeatedly referred to Kardu and Karduyyim.<sup>6</sup> However, the earliest known document that mentioned the word *Kurds* as a group appeared at the beginning of the Islamic era, in an exchange of letters between the imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib (d. 661) and the governor of Basra.<sup>7</sup> The term became more widespread in the tenth century among leading Muslim historians such as Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir al-Tabari and Abu al-Hasan 'Ali bin al-Husayn bin 'Ali al-Mas'udi.<sup>8</sup> Both refer to the Kurdish revolt circa 840 in the Mosul region. As to the term *Kurdistan* ("the land of the Kurds"), it was mentioned at the beginning of the twelfth century by Seljuk Turks in reference to an area extending from Azarbaijan to Luristan.<sup>9</sup> Nowadays *Kurdistan* refers to a larger region extending from the Taurus Mountains in the west to the western heights of Iran in the east, and from the Ararat Mountains in the north to the plain of Mesopotamia in the south. Apart from these bare facts, a wealth of controversy remains.

Differences over terminology reflect the larger issues of identity and sovereignty. On the whole, in modern times, official parlance in the so-called host countries in which the Kurds reside shied away from using the term *Kurdistan*. Official Turkish discourse, for example, tended to use the label *southeast Turkey* when referring to the Kurdish-populated region while successive Iraqi regimes mentioned only *northern Iraq*.<sup>10</sup> For their part, Kurdish nationalists determined to represent Kurdistan as a single ethnonational territory spoke of *Northern Kurdistan* for the Turkish, *Southern Kurdistan* for the Iraqi, *Eastern Kurdistan* for the Iranian, and *Western Kurdistan* for the Syrian part.<sup>11</sup> Jalal Talabani, head of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and president of Iraq since 2005, used the term *Kurdistan al-'Iraq* (Kurdistan of Iraq), pointing to a territory that is found in Iraq, and not *Kurdistan al-'Iraqi* (Iraqi Kurdistan), indicating a territory that belongs to Iraq. In fact, Kurdish independence of mind and power were thus foregrounded.<sup>12</sup> The Kurdish historian Mehrdad Izadi uses a different, Kurdish-centered terminology; namely, "the five sovereign states that share Kurdish land."<sup>13</sup> In that same vein, Kurds in the diaspora do not like to be referred to as Iraqi Kurds or Turkish Kurds, preferring such terms as *Kurds from Iraq* or *Kurds from Turkey*.<sup>14</sup> Nor do the Kurds accept the qualification of "ethnic minority." Asked by Osten Wahlbeck whether he felt that he belonged to such a minority, a Kurdish informant from Turkey answered, "I get really angry when they say Kurdish minority . . . how they call 20 million people a minority is just amazing."<sup>15</sup>

This more assertive language harks back to the representation of the seventeenth-century poet Ahmadi Khani, who writes in his epic *Mem û Zîn*:

Look, from the Arabs to the Georgians,  
The Kurds have become like towers.  
The Turks and Persians are surrounded by them  
The Kurds are on all four corners.<sup>16</sup>

In modern times, however, the very term *Kurd* was at risk of being obliterated by governmental policies. For example, on 3 March 1924, the same day that the caliphate was abolished in Turkey, Mustafa Kemal decreed that all Kurdish schools, associations, and publications would be banned, and that the use of the words *Kurdish* or *Kurdistan* would become a legal offense.<sup>17</sup> Henceforth, the Kurds were officially referred to as “mountain Turks” because, according to folk etymology, the snow made sounds like “kart” and “kurt” when they plodded through the mountain snow.<sup>18</sup> The use of Kurdish place names was also forbidden. The Kurdish name for Diyarbakir, for example, was “Amed.” Its use was prohibited, to the extent that one man was even prosecuted for having written it in a letter of invitation.<sup>19</sup> In Iraq, too, such policies of name suppression and replacement were recurrent. Thus, in 1999 the Iraqi minister of interior for security affairs issued instructions for preventing the use of Kurdish names on identity cards.<sup>20</sup> In Iran, a circular was issued in 1923 prohibiting the use of Kurdish in schools. At the beginning of the 1980s, the Islamic regime lifted the ban on Kurdish publications, but the teaching of Kurdish in schools remained prohibited.<sup>21</sup> Even when it was used, it could be problematic because of the social stigma attached to Kurdishness. A member of the Kurdistan Parliament in Exile complains, “Our oppressors have described us, unjustly and successively, as primitive mountain people to civilization, lawless, nomadic, tribes without any national consciousness.”<sup>22</sup> In Syria, the infamous 1963 Baathi study by Muhammad Talab Hilal calls for a “policy of making [the Kurds] ignorant” (*siyasat al-tajhil*) by preventing the establishment of schools and educational institutions in their region. Hilal justifies this approach by the failure of an earlier policy, which had been built on the premise “teach them, to Arabize them” (*‘allimuhum yasta‘ribun*).<sup>23</sup>

The questions as to who is a Kurd and what is the size of the Kurdish population are no less controversial. While governments seek to play down the numbers, Kurdish nationalists tend to inflate them. As the governments do not publish statistics on this matter, we must rely on estimates; in 2006 the number of Kurdish people in the world was considered to be 30 million, thus constituting “the largest stateless nation in the contemporary world.”<sup>24</sup>

What, and where, is Kurdistan? For maximalist Kurds, mainly those in the diaspora, the “imagined” map of Greater Kurdistan stretches “from the Caucasus to the Mediterranean and from there to the [Persian] Gulf.”<sup>25</sup> However, practically speaking, the historical record is incontestable on at least one point; namely, that the Kurds, who have populated this area from time immemorial, have never succeeded in establishing their own independent state.<sup>26</sup> Even in

#### 4 *The Kurds of Iraq*

what is considered their golden era of autonomous principalities (from the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century) the Kurdistan region was divided into two areas of influence: one under the Persian Empire and the other under the Ottoman Empire.

Whereas the question of what constitutes Greater Kurdistan is primarily academic, delineating the contours of Iraqi Kurdistan in post-Saddam Iraq has become a real bone of contention between Arabs, Turkmen, and Kurds, with the Kurds aspiring to include the Kirkuk region within its confines. For Iraqi Arabs, this is utterly unacceptable. As one commentator states:

Have you ever heard of a region that swallowed the original homeland, trampled its identity and changed it into that of the region? The answer is no, we have not heard nor have we read that a region and a small nation could become so domineering as to obliterate the unique history of the big homeland and nation, except in Iraq. . . . Arab Iraq, whose civilization is seven thousand years old, has become the Kurdish region's tail, while the Arab nation has turned into a mere servant of the Kurdish nation.<sup>27</sup>

The Kurds were also variously accused of implementing the “imperialist project for splitting Iraq”;<sup>28</sup> of attempting to deny the Islamic identity of the state; of refusing “to consider Kurdistan as part of the Arab nation”;<sup>29</sup> and, worst of all, as Israel’s agents, of seeking to establish a “second Israel.”<sup>30</sup>

What about the nature of Kurdish nationalism? Here, too, there is much controversy, stemming from the fact that there are several distinct Kurdish dialects so that speakers of different dialects do not always understand one another. Some scholars say that they are, in fact, separate languages. Those who emphasize the distinctiveness of the different dialects infer from this that the Kurds do not constitute one nation, but rather different ethnolinguistic groups.<sup>31</sup> Middle Eastern leaders say the same thing, albeit for political reasons.<sup>32</sup>

Kurdish nationalist movements, of course, reject these views and their implications. They are, “like all other nationalisms . . . eager to construct a common Kurdish history, identity, culture and language.”<sup>33</sup> Still, as Fred Halliday points out, “there is no single Kurdish nationalist movement, ideology or politics; the history of modern Kurdish nationalism is that of three distinct movements, corresponding to the different contexts of Iran, Turkey and Iraq.”<sup>34</sup> In fact, one should also include Syria in this list.

Concerning Kurdish nationalism, the Kurdish linguist Amir Hassanpour advances two notions: feudal nationalism and middle-class nationalism.<sup>35</sup> According to his thesis, feudal nationalism developed in the seventeenth century as a direct result of the wars between the Ottoman and Persian empires, amidst which the Kurds were sandwiched. Thus,

the enormous destruction and suffering caused by foreign domination resulted in the genesis of national awakening in a feudally organized society. . . . The

idea of nation and nationalism, an apparent anachronism in this part of the world in the seventeenth century, did in fact develop in the particular circumstances of Kurdistan at this time.

Hassanpour bases his thesis on sayings by poets, princes, and “the masses of the people.”<sup>36</sup>

According to Hassanpour, the second wave of middle-class nationalism began to take shape in the aftermath of World War I so that “by the 1960s, the modern nationalist ideas had developed into a coherent system of thought that was named *Kurdayeti*,” which was, he says, basically secular nationalism.<sup>37</sup>

Abbas Vali puts forward an important distinctive trait between classical nationalism in Europe and Kurdish nationalism. He explains that while classical nationalism in Europe was introduced by modernity, bringing with it democratic citizenship and a civil society, Kurdish nationalism was a response to the denial of Kurdish identity and rested on the suppression of civil society and democratic citizenship in Kurdistan.<sup>38</sup>

To examine Kurdish nationalism through a state-ethnic minority prism, other theoretical writings might be useful. Thus, the *Kurds* could be defined as “a nonstate nation with all the peculiarities of such nation.”<sup>39</sup> They may also represent what Miroslav Hroch terms a “non-dominant” ethnic group, which operated within the realm of a territorial nation-state dominated by a different ethnic group, and which was historically hostile toward alternative conceptions of political and social order. The Kurds might thus fit into Anthony D. Smith’s definition of a modern *ethnie*—a “named unit of population with common ancestry myths and historical memories, elements of shared culture, some link with a historical territory and some measure of solidarity, at least among [its] elites.”<sup>40</sup>

In trying to understand the nature of Kurdish ethnic self-assertion, I apply Frederic Barth’s notion of ethnic boundaries; that is, the perception that the major constituent of ethnicity is the maintenance of boundaries between different ethnic groups in polyethnic social systems, and that ethnicity is not simply determined by “objective” cultural determinants. According to Barth, “ethnic groups only persist as significant units if they imply marked difference in behavior, i.e., persisting cultural differences.”<sup>41</sup> This appears to complement Hroch’s notion that the “nation-forming process is a distinctively older phenomenon than the modern nation and nationalism and that any interpretation of modern national identity cannot ignore the peculiarities of pre-modern national development, or degrade it to the level of a mere myth.”<sup>42</sup>

### **State vs. Ethnicity: The Historiographical Debate**

Even a superficial comparison of the literature on the Kurds at the beginning and at the end of the twentieth century points toward dramatic changes, both quan-



titative and qualitative. Throughout most of the century, few books about the Kurds per se were written in Western languages.<sup>43</sup> As the land of the Kurds was divided up between five states (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and the Soviet Union) in the aftermath of World War I, scholars mainly treated the Kurds as an integral part of those nation-states. At times, the Kurds were ignored altogether. In fact, this was part of a larger phenomenon; namely, that “the traditional focus of international relations tended to obscure or ignore the role of nonstate actors.”<sup>44</sup> To illustrate this trend the Kurds of Iraq, who in fact represent the most active, tragic, and successful of all Kurdish nonstate actors, serve as a case study.

Until the mid-1960s reference to the Kurds of Iraq was mostly part of the general discourse on Iraq itself, as exemplified by the seminal books of Stephen H. Longrigg, Uriel Dann, and Hanna Batatu.<sup>45</sup> Although all three authors discuss various aspects of their situation in depth, they do so only in the context of the larger issues facing the state. Most startling is Majid Khadduri’s book *Independent Iraq*, which almost totally ignores the Kurds while pursuing a pure “nation-state narrative.” Covering the period from the time of independence to the overthrow of the monarchy (1932–1958), Khadduri devotes less than 1 out of 368 pages to a discussion of the Kurds.<sup>46</sup> He writes:

The Kurds, who are racially different from the Arab majority, had long complained of discrimination against them and had agitated for decentralization; but their complaint could hardly be justified, for the southern Arab areas, which were as poor and backward as the Kurdish, had been just as badly neglected and misgoverned by the central Government.

As for the Barzani clan, who led the various revolts in those years, he describes them as mere adventurers.<sup>47</sup>

*The Kurdish National Movement*, the work of another contemporary Iraqi historian, Wadie Jwaideh, proves that the general neglect of the Kurds in historical writings was due neither to a lack of developments nor to a dearth of material. Interestingly, Jwaideh completed his doctoral thesis in 1960, concurrently with the publication of Khadduri’s book, but Jwaideh’s dissertation, which epitomizes an “ethnic narrative” counterpoint to that of the nation-state, was published posthumously forty-six years later.<sup>48</sup>

Indeed, there has been a hidden debate or competition between the ethnic narrative and the nation-state narrative. This debate has colored the works of most scholars writing about the Kurds and Iraq. Both approaches are heavily influenced by political developments and personal preferences. As one scholar puts it, “Much of the literature about Kurds seems to be written by uncritical lovers or unloving critics.”<sup>49</sup> Needless to say, Kurdish writers have adopted the first approach, although many non-Kurdish scholars have done so as well.

As demonstrated by the “classic” books on modern Iraq, the nation-state narrative was the dominant one until the early 1960s. This was due to a num-

ber of factors: Iraqi Kurds, and Kurds in general, were far from the limelight of scholarship, which was focused on postcolonial state-building efforts. Their own inhibitions, caused by political or cultural shackles, prevented them from contributing significantly to the field. There was a dearth of printing presses in the Kurdish region, which remained quite acute until the late 1950s.<sup>50</sup> And, perhaps most importantly, a widely held perception prevailed among scholars and analysts that Iraq was a nation-state of which the Kurds were an integral part, and not a state in which two national movements (the Arab and the Kurdish) were vying for influence.

However, the ethnic narrative began to gain ground little by little in the aftermath of the war between the Kurds and the Iraqi ruler, Colonel ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim (1961–1963). Journalists David Adamson and Dana Adams Schmidt, intrigued by the Kurdish war in the Qasim era, each wrote a book on the subject.<sup>51</sup> This trend was subsequently reinforced, especially with the Baath rise to power in 1968. But the main boost to the ethnic-centered narrative came at the turn of the twenty-first century. The shift in focus from the state to the Kurds of Iraq reflects the changing focus of attention among scholars, which in turn reflects the sea changes in the regional and international arena that took place at the end of the twentieth century.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union brought about the rise of new states in Central Asia and in Europe, reminiscent of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 and the rise of the new states in the Middle East. The demise of the Soviet Union granted increased legitimacy to ethnic voices in the region, empowering Kurdish aspirations for self-assertion and even self-determination. Political developments in Iraq itself, which coincided with those in the international arena, contributed significantly to the new outlook. Most important of all, of course, were the 1991 Gulf War and the resulting establishment of a semiautonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in 1992.

Concurrent with these developments in Iraqi Kurdistan were a number of major socioeconomic changes: an improved economic situation, the rise of educational levels, the revival of the Kurdish language, and an active role played by the Kurdish diaspora. Increasingly, Iraqi Kurdistan seemed to be on a track distinct from the rest of the country, thus warranting new research. The growing involvement of the United States in Iraqi affairs also influenced a new generation of scholars. In essence, the voice of the Kurds is being heard more clearly thanks to the studies of a number of scholars and writers throughout the world.<sup>52</sup> One of them, Peter Galbraith, gives expression to what the Kurds themselves did not dare convey; namely, a call for the establishment of a Kurdish state in Iraq.<sup>53</sup>

Not all scholars, however, favor the ethnic narrative. In a book published in 2005 Eric Davis criticizes the ethnic narrative, which in his view is represented by Elie Kedourie, Uriel Dann, and Waldemar Gallman. He maintains

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that they “all possess a hidden text”; that is, that they are politically motivated. In his idealized conception of Iraq as a nation-state, Davis altogether ignores Kurdish ethnonationalism. He asserts,

the war effort [of the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq War] which was not hampered by ethnic or sectarian tensions demonstrated once and for all the shortcomings of viewing Iraq through the conceptual prism of ethnic cleavages. *Iraqis of all ethnicities worked together under duress to successfully prosecute what was by all accounts the largest and most brutal war of the twentieth century.* (emphasis added)

Davis further asserts that the commitment of all ethnic groups to Iraqi nationalism “should dispel the idea that Iraq is an artificial nation-state.”<sup>54</sup>

Where do the Kurds of Iraq themselves stand in terms of Kurdish historiography and their contribution to it? As mentioned earlier, due to political and cultural shackles the Kurds were quite late in presenting their own version of Kurdish history in modern times.<sup>55</sup> An important exception to this is Muhammad Amin Zaki, who served as minister in various governments in Baghdad between the years 1925 and 1936. In the two books that he published in 1931 and 1939, Zaki lays the foundations for the study of the Kurds by a Kurd and in the Kurdish language.<sup>56</sup> In his vanguard study, he explains the rationale for writing in Kurdish; namely, that the history of the Kurdish people should be written in their own language and not in Arabic or Turkish. He even goes as far as to criticize Emir Sharif Khan al Bidlisi, the author of *Sharafnameh* (1597) the first account of Kurdish history, for writing in Persian and not in Kurdish.<sup>57</sup> In fact, the first to use Kurdish in their creative work were poets in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>58</sup>

As a Kurdish nationalist, Zaki challenges some of the theories about how far back the Kurds can be traced. While some scholars claim that the Kurds were newcomers to the region, Zaki suggests that they had lived in the region from time immemorial and that they arrived in their present homeland in the seventh century B.C.E.,<sup>59</sup> but had gone by different names and appellations. Zaki rejects the notion presented by some Arab and Muslim historians, like al-Mas'udi, who claims that the Kurds were of Arab origin.<sup>60</sup> He also challenges the common estimates of the Kurdish population. Thus, for example, while the number of Kurds in Iraq in the 1920s is commonly estimated at 494,000, his own estimate is higher; namely, 600,000 or one-fifth of the Iraqi population<sup>61</sup> and the same percentage is claimed today by the Kurds of Iraq.

On the whole, there is a correlation between the political achievements on the ground of the Iraqi Kurds and their ability to present their own narrative. It is clearly demonstrated by the fact that, of all the Kurdish communities, the Kurds of Iraq have produced the most prolific historical and literary writings. By way of comparison, 2,265 Kurdish titles were published in Iraq, but only 10 in Turkey, 31 in Syria, 150 in Iran, and 377 in the Soviet Union between 1920

and 1985.<sup>62</sup> There is no doubt that this was also due to the fact that, relatively speaking, Iraqi Kurds enjoyed much greater freedom of expression. After the establishment of the KRG, the trickle became an avalanche and by 2011 printing houses in major cities in the KRG published abundantly in Kurdish.<sup>63</sup>

Among Kurdish writers themselves, a gradual change became apparent—from a tendency to glorify Kurdish history or portray the Kurds as mere victims, to a more critical approach that examines the Kurds' role in history, the causes for their failure to establish a state of their own, and the most effective ways to improve their lot in the present circumstances.<sup>64</sup> Some Kurdish writers criticize their Kurdish colleagues for overstating the role of the Kurds in history by trying to appropriate certain governments and periods so as to prove the grandeur or antiquity of their nation. Kamal Fu'ad, for example, contends that the fact that a ruler was of Kurdish origin, such as the legendary, twelfth-century sultan Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, does not mean that the state he governed was Kurdish. "The national belonging of a certain ruler is secondary in importance to such factors as the land, the people, the language and culture," he argues.<sup>65</sup>

Another critical voice is that of Nezan Kendal. In his essay "The Kurds Under the Ottoman Empire," he puts the blame for the Kurds' failure to establish a state of their own on the Kurds themselves: "Following the fall and the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire all its subject peoples were able to set up their own states. The only exception was the Kurdish people, largely because of the political incompetence and historical backwardness of its leaders."<sup>66</sup>

The debate over who is to blame, the Kurds' own weakness or outside factors, continues to reverberate. Nevertheless, it seems that, at least in the Iraqi case, the Kurds increasingly have taken responsibility for their own fate. Similarly, the quite pervasive way of thinking that one has no friends but the mountains also has changed drastically.

An interesting phenomenon that developed over the years is the crystallization of what can be called local "Kurdish Iraqi" national identity, which distinguishes it from Kurdish communities in the other states. This development mirrored the crystallization of distinct territorial-national identities in the Arab, Iranian, and Turkish states. The delineation of five different states cutting across the Kurdish-speaking lands impacted their situation in two ways. First, the dynamics of politics, culture, language, and social norms of each state left a particular, distinct imprint on each of the five Kurdish communities. Second, the interests of a particular Kurdish community collided at times with the interests of other communities, occasionally resulting in conflict between them; for example, the skirmishes between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) of Iraq and the Kurdistan Workers' Party or *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* (PKK) of Turkey, particularly in the 1990s.

However, this is not to say that there was no mutual influence. In fact, from the 1960s onward Iraqi Kurdish activism served as a model for Kurds in other

countries. Additionally, in recent decades, pan-Kurdish tendencies or movements similar to those of pan-Arabism began to develop among Kurds in the growing diasporas in the West. One of its most important expressions is the Kurdistan Parliament in Exile, established in The Hague in 1995 and now based in Brussels. Other important organizations include the Kurdistan National Congress (KNC), which was formed in London in 1989; student associations established in France; the National Union of Kurdish Students in Europe founded in Munich in 1965; and the Kurdish Academy of Science and Arts established in 1985 in Stockholm.<sup>67</sup>

### **The Kurds of Iraq and the State: Anatomy of a Changing Relationship**

Ever since its establishment, the Iraqi state has had to contend with the Kurdish issue, which has impacted all areas of its socioeconomic and political life as well as its foreign relations. The Kurds of Iraq, for their part, have fashioned a national movement whose achievements far outstrip those of all other Kurdish communities.

Several historical, geopolitical, and demographic factors may explain this phenomenon. In the immediate aftermath of World War I, the Kurds began to make rather inadequately formulated demands for Kurdish independence. They even gained a measure of international approval in the Treaty of Sèvres of 10 August 1920, which promised autonomy and the option of an independent Kurdish state in large areas of Kurdistan that were formerly under Ottoman control while excluding Kurdish Persian areas. It left an opening for the Kurds in the province (*vilayet*) of Mosul (mostly in present-day Iraqi Kurdistan) to join such an autonomy arrangement. However, the Treaty of Sèvres was rendered null and void by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which offered the Kurds nothing.

For Turkey, and in fact for the rest of the world, the Treaty of Sèvres was for all intents and purposes dead and buried. However, this has not been the case for the Kurds. Lacking any current international agreement or resolution to support their cause, Kurdish nationalists have continued to cling to this treaty as providing international legitimacy for their struggle for self-determination. According to a British official in 1943, “although the policy of Mustapha Kemal shattered their immediate hopes, the leaders of the Kurdish national movement regarded these clauses of the Treaty of Sèvres as a recognition by the Western European powers of the Kurdish question and they never ceased to work for Kurdish autonomy.”<sup>68</sup>

The fact that the province of Mosul was incorporated into the Iraqi state only in 1926 and that Iraq was ruled by a mandatory power, Great Britain, until 1932 was crucial in creating the unique character of the Kurdish region in Iraq. While post–World War I Iran and Turkey emerged as fully sovereign states and

were thus able to impose their will on the Kurdish minority, in Iraq matters were decided by Britain, whose considerations were alien to both Iraqi and Kurdish interests. In addition, Britain itself vacillated for a long time between encouraging Kurdish aspirations for autonomy—and even for the establishment of an independent state in part of the province of Mosul—and incorporating the province into Iraq. This British wavering served as a fertile ground for the development of a Kurdish national movement in Iraq. It also formed the basis for granting special rights to the Kurds there such as the Local Languages Law described later. When Iraq became an independent state, Iraqi regimes were too weak to discard this precedent. At the same time, Kurdish national sentiments grew stronger. An indirect testimony to the burgeoning Kurdish nationalism in the 1940s can be found in the correspondence of British officials. Thus, for example, a British Mandate representative in Iraq derogatorily refers to “those [Kurds] infected by the impracticable idea of Kurdish nationalism.” A more tempered British official states, “Whatever their origin, the Kurds, like the Jews, possess a national tenacity which resists any attempts to absorb them.” Others describe the developments in Iraqi Kurdistan as “Kurdish nationalism.”<sup>69</sup>

According to different estimates, the percentage of Kurds in Iraq ranged from 15.9 percent to 28.0 percent.<sup>70</sup> Such a high percentage, even if one recognizes only the lower figure, was bound to impact the balance of power between the Kurds and the central government. Equally important for the Kurds' relative success in Iraq was the tradition of foreign involvement in the Kurdish issue in Iraq, including that of Great Britain, Iran, Israel, Syria, the Soviet Union, and the United States. In the early 1970s, the dynamics of the Kurdish issue were considerably affected by the power struggles between the United States and the Soviet Union, which sought to advance their interests in an area that did not clearly fall in either's sphere of influence. Another unique feature of the Kurds of Iraq was the fact that they produced a charismatic leader, Mulla Mustafa Barzani, who headed the national movement for over thirty years and contributed greatly to the formation of a Kurdish national consciousness.<sup>71</sup>

The Kurdish case in Iraq basically entailed a clash between two national movements—the Iraqi Arab and the Kurdish—which made coexistence difficult since they were struggling over the same piece of land and the same economic and human resources. Accordingly, two visions developed. While Baghdad sought a centralized government, the Kurds strove for self-government inside Iraq. Iraq's governments were willing to recognize the Kurds as a “national minority” entitled, at the very most, to limited linguistic or cultural rights, but the Kurds demanded that they be recognized as a national movement that shares the right to the state of Iraq with its Arab population. It should be noted that the Arabs and the Kurds who lived in this area were in a similar position in that both were ruled by the Ottoman Empire until the establishment of Iraq. Moreover, until the mid-nineteenth century the Kurds had maintained three semiautonomous principalities in the area that would eventually make up Iraqi Kur-

distan. In other words, Kurdish nationalists felt that as the Arab and Kurdish national movements had emerged at the same point in time, they should have equal standing in Iraq.<sup>72</sup> The fact that Iraq was composed of different communal and ethnic groups, which the central government failed to weld into a new Iraqi national entity, exacerbated the conflict even further and made it more difficult to resolve.<sup>73</sup> The sensitivity of the central government was compounded by the fear that any concession to the Kurds would be interpreted as a sign of weakness and result in additional claims, not only on the part of the Kurds, but also by other groups that felt discriminated against such as the Shi'a. The greatest fear of any Iraqi government was that the Kurds' demands would endanger Iraq's territorial integrity and ultimately lead to the division of Iraq into three "small states" (*duwaylat*): a Kurdish state, an Arab-Sunni state, and a Shi'i state.<sup>74</sup>

These fears were not expressions of paranoia or demagoguery on the part of the central government, but had their roots in a fractured Iraqi social reality whose different components were held together by particularly weak connecting links. This was especially salient regarding the nature of the bonds between Iraqi Kurdistan and other parts of Iraq. The impregnable mountains of Kurdistan, alongside linguistic and ethnonational differences, determined the exclusive, closed nature of Iraqi Kurdistan and made it more difficult to control from the center. Difficult as such control was, conceding it was inconceivable from the authorities' viewpoint. This resolute approach was not only a function of a natural political instinct seeking to preserve the status quo. It also reflected the supreme strategic and economic importance of Kurdistan given that many valuable resources were concentrated within its territory, including oil wells—indeed, some of Iraq's and the world's largest oil reserves—dams and power stations, and rich agricultural lands that transformed the region into the state's granary. As early as 1925, King Faysal I speaks of the region's importance: "I consider that [the province of] Mosul is to Iraq as the head is to the rest of the body."<sup>75</sup>

What were the historical, geopolitical, and structural constraints under which the Kurds operated? The most salient one was geopolitical. The location of Kurdistan in a landlocked region and on a chain of rugged mountains resulted, first and foremost, in the Kurds' chronic fragmentation on the sociolinguistic, political, and economic levels. Another sociopolitical phenomenon stemmed from the fact that the Kurds maintained tribal-religious alongside national loyalties. Each of these loyalties stood in an ambiguous relationship with the others. On the one hand, the original Kurdish nationalists had arisen from a traditional leadership of agas and shaikhs, who succeeded in bringing the Kurdish masses into the movement because of their special status in Kurdish society. On the other hand, chronic conflicts between these leaders prevented the Kurds from uniting. Usually, a tribal leader's position determined whether his tribe would oppose, join, or remain neutral toward the national movement.<sup>76</sup> In

fact, Hussein Tahiri for one puts all of the blame for the Kurds' difficulties and failures on the prevalence of tribalism among the Kurds, which, he maintains, "undermined both the spirit of nationalism and the prodigal emergence of a coherent and unified national movement."<sup>77</sup>

Geographical isolation and the lack of access to the sea delayed the penetration of foreign influences and modern ideas into Kurdistan. The Kurds frequently were one step behind their neighbors, and found it difficult to catch up with political developments. This factor constrained their freedom of action and ability to exist independently. Indeed, the Kurds' dependency on foreign elements became a closed circuit from which they could not escape. Moreover, until the late twentieth century, theirs was for the most part a one-way relationship, from the outside to the inside. The Kurds were thus unable to position themselves in the international arena as an influential power capable of exerting pressure to advance Kurdish interests.

The other side of the coin was that, despite being too weak to achieve independence, the Kurds were strong enough to pose a constant threat to the central government and to force it to grant them various concessions. The Kurds' repute for being courageous and experienced fighters was put across by the nickname they gave their guerrilla army, Peshmerga (i.e., ready to die). Moreover, despite the massive resources at the disposal of the central government, the Kurds had the advantage of being in control of natural fortresses, which enabled them to fight a guerrilla war with a minimum of resources.

Roughly speaking, until the advent of the Baath to power in 1968, three main periods in the history of the Kurdish struggle in Iraq can be distinguished. The first period (1918–1946) was marked by a slow transition from uncoordinated tribal revolts, lacking a defined political direction, to more focused ones led by one accepted leader, Barzani. In 1945, the short-lived Hiva Party acted as a liaison between the political elite and the tribes that this party attempted to unite.<sup>78</sup> The second period (1946–1961) was marked by the establishment in 1946 of the KDP,<sup>79</sup> which henceforth provided the Kurds with an organizational framework, an ideological direction, and a political center. The third period (1961–1968) witnessed the emergence of a strong Kurdish national movement, which overcame—albeit temporarily—chronic divisions, and managed to merge, for the first time in modern Kurdish history, the combative element with the ideological-political one. At the same time, the politicization of Kurdish society moved the Kurds to mobilize for an all-out armed struggle. The Kurds took advantage of different transitional periods characterized by a political vacuum and of the central government's weakness to press their claims. Hence, the Kurdish struggle has been closely linked with the vicissitudes of Iraqi political life ever since its establishment.

The Kurds' demands pertained to both the national and regional spheres. Nationally, the Kurds made repeated demands for proportional representation in all state institutions (including parliament, government, and army) and the



proportional division of resources in the state.<sup>80</sup> However, no regime acceded to this demand until 2003. Over a period of eighty years, only two Kurds served as prime ministers and then only for brief periods (Nur-al-Din Mahmud, from November 1952 to January 1953, and Ahmad Mukhtar Baban, from May to July 1958). Similarly, since the early 1940s, there was a growing tendency to reduce the number of Kurds in the staff officer colleges, the air force, and the police—to the extent that by the 1970s Kurds represented only 2 percent of these units.<sup>81</sup> The reason for this was that, in times of trial, many Kurds chose loyalty to the Kurdish nation over loyalty to the state. In the rebellion of the 1940s, and later in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1991 rebellions, Kurdish officers deserted from the army and joined the Kurdish camp.

Another demand on the national level, which also went unanswered, concerned the establishment of a democratic system in Iraq. The Kurds regarded the satisfaction of this demand as a guarantee of fair Kurdish representation and the fulfillment of the regime's commitments to them.

### **What's in a Name? Kurdish Autonomy**

Kurdish demands regarding the status of the Kurdistan region were ambivalent. At times this ambivalence was tactical while at other times it reflected mere confusion and indecisiveness.<sup>82</sup> In theory, the Kurds had three options: full independence, a federation between the Arab and Kurdish parts of Iraq, or Kurdish autonomy in the framework of the Iraqi state. In actuality, the most practical alternative, which was adopted as the movement's primary objective, was autonomy. Nonetheless, independence slogans were occasionally voiced. For example, Shaikh Mahmud Barzanji, the spearhead of the Kurdish rebellions between 1918 and 1931, established a Kurdish government in the district of Sulaymaniyya in the autumn of 1922, and declared himself king of Kurdistan. In 1930, he called on the British high commissioner to establish a Kurdish entity stretching from Zakho in the north to Khanaqin in the south.<sup>83</sup>

When the KDP was established in 1946, it included in its platform the following two objectives: "complete independence for Kurdistan" and "a struggle to establish a federal state in Iraq, which will be the Federal Democratic State of Kurdistan."<sup>84</sup> There was clearly a contradiction between the goal of complete independence and the goal of a *federal state*, which is by definition "a unity and partnership based on and regulated by an agreement."<sup>85</sup> In any case, the KDP itself quickly abandoned these two objectives and adopted the goal of autonomy.<sup>86</sup> Thus, although the slogan of independence continued to linger in the Kurdish world, it never became an operative objective.

The option of autonomy chosen by the Kurds was particularly problematic<sup>87</sup> because it was not well anchored in international law<sup>88</sup> and because it was generally perceived as a purely internal matter. The two types of autonomy, per-

sonal-cultural and territorial, are open to a number of interpretations: the minimalist interpretation, which is usually that of the party granting the autonomy, and the maximalist interpretation, which is that of the party seeking the right to autonomy. The fate of autonomy is ultimately determined by the balance of power between the granter and the recipient or, as a Kurdish leader puts it, "It [the autonomy] depends on our strength and that of our enemy's [*sic*]."89

One analyst defines autonomy as an artificial, purposeless, and dubious solution, suggesting that "autonomous relations in the twentieth century have mainly been a placebo intended to thwart liberation movements and repel separatist pressures. . . . Autonomy has been granted half-heartedly and has been accepted with ingratitude."<sup>90</sup> Criticism is also heard, mainly among Kurdish exiles, to the effect that the Kurdish national movement has abandoned the goal of independence and chosen autonomy. They see this as a cul-de-sac and the movement's main weak point. One critic says, "The demand for a truly autonomous Kurdish region for the Kurdish people in Iraq is like a thoroughbred horse seeking to hitch itself with a mule."<sup>91</sup>

The main questions that come to mind in this regard are: Why did the Kurds choose this way? When did they demand autonomy? And, how did the authorities respond to them?

The main reason for the Kurds' espousal of the autonomy option was their inherent weakness, which precluded them from aspiring to full independence. Autonomy seemed less threatening to the central government; thus, its prospects of being realized were more favorable. At the same time, autonomy could serve as a base and a springboard for more far-reaching objectives. Historical experience with semiautonomous principalities from the Middle Ages to the mid-nineteenth century was part and parcel of the Kurds' collective memory, and may have contributed to their opting for this route.

There was much unrest among the Kurds between 1918 and 1925, when the fate of the province of Mosul had yet to be decided. A variety of slogans was put forth in support of independence and autonomy. After Shaikh Mahmud Barzanji established the government of Kurdistan in the autumn of 1922, the British, who were in charge of regional administration, endeavored to appease the Kurds and draw their support away from him and the Turkish government. Due to the pressure exerted by Great Britain in December 1922, a far-reaching declaration on Kurdish autonomy was issued by the British and Iraqi authorities, despite the fact that it lacked legal grounding. According to the declaration, the governments of Great Britain and Iraq "recognize the rights of the Kurds living within the boundaries of Iraq to set up a Kurdish Government within these boundaries."<sup>92</sup> A special delegation of the League of Nations, which arrived in Mosul in early 1925 to ascertain the population's wishes and to make recommendations regarding the future of the region, reached the conclusion that the "Kurdish national sentiment" was strong and that the Kurds had a genuine desire to obtain full independence.<sup>93</sup> Nonetheless, the operative conclusion was the

annexation of the province of Mosul to Iraq, with the provision of guarantees regarding the appointment of Kurds to positions in the administration and the legal and educational system of “their country” and the introduction of the Kurdish language as an official language. These promises, which were perceived by the Kurds as pledges of administrative and linguistic autonomy with international backing, were ignored after the annexation of Mosul. In addition they were not mentioned in the 1930 agreement between Britain and Iraq, which was supposed to pave the way for Iraq’s admission to the League of Nations and hence to its independence. Even the term *Kurdistan* was not mentioned. The term *northern Iraq* was used instead.

Before its admission to the League of Nations in 1932, the Iraqi government issued a written declaration on the special status of minorities. It also enacted the Local Languages Law, which stipulated that “Iraq undertakes [*sic*] that in the *liwas* [provinces] of Mosul, Arbil [Erbil], Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyya, the official language, side by side with Arabic, shall be Kurdish in the *qadhas* [district] in which the population is predominantly of Kurdish race.”<sup>94</sup> The purpose of the law was to determine the boundaries of the area in which the Kurdish language would be spoken as the language of the administration, the courts, and the elementary schools.<sup>95</sup> Although the Barzani rebellions of 1931–1932 and 1943–1945 closely followed the declaration regarding the Local Languages Law, they did not result in any concessions to the Kurds. This remained the case until the elimination of the monarchy and the ascension of ‘Abd-al-Karim Qasim to power in 1958.

Several days after Qasim’s ascent to power, a Kurdish delegation presented him with a demand for administrative autonomy. Qasim rejected this demand, but granted far-reaching concessions to the Kurds during the first two years of his rule, including permission for the KDP to operate openly. In exchange, the party was forced to remove the autonomy paragraph from its platform in 1960.<sup>96</sup> In August 1961, when relations between Qasim and the Kurds deteriorated, the Kurds presented him with an ultimatum containing a demand for autonomy. Qasim responded by declaring war. Autonomy henceforth became the declared objective of the Kurdish rebellion.<sup>97</sup> The war, which broke out in September 1961, became known as the September Revolution (*thawrat aylul*) in the Kurdish discourse, in a way mirroring Qasim’s July Revolution.<sup>98</sup>

After the first Baath regime came to power in February 1963, the Kurds presented it with a similar ultimatum. In April of the same year, the Kurdish ultimatum formulated, for the first time, a Kurdish plan that went so far as to speak, not of autonomy, but rather of federalism (*ittihad ikhtiyari*). The plan sought to include the provinces of Erbil, Sulaymaniyya, and Kirkuk in the Kurdish federative part as well as the districts and subdistricts populated by a Kurdish majority in Diyala and Mosul.<sup>99</sup> Interestingly, the demand to include Kirkuk has continued to bedevil the Iraqi state. The Baath rejected these demands immediately. It agreed only to a decentralization plan, which was actually a de-

laying tactic until the war that it had initiated in the summer of 1963 and that led to the Baath downfall in the autumn of the same year. When ‘Abd-al-Salam ‘Arif came to power and a cease-fire between ‘Arif and Barzani was announced in February 1964, Barzani brought up the demand for autonomy.<sup>100</sup> However, ‘Arif rejected these demands, and in February 1965 his interior minister declared that “Iraq does not intend to grant autonomy to the Kurds in the present or in the future.”<sup>101</sup>

The Kurds intensified the pressure. The war, which continued intermittently until June 1966, induced the government of ‘Abd-al-Rahman al-Bazzaz to agree to a cease-fire and to announce the twelve-point al-Bazzaz plan, which included the most extensive concessions to the Kurds up to then, although it still refrained from explicitly mentioning autonomy. Al-Bazzaz’s plan was later ignored. The war resumed and continued for a year and a half after the ascension of the Baath on 2 July 1968.

The turning point came in March 1970. For the first time in Iraq’s history, after a struggle that had lasted for more than fifty years, the government recognized the Kurds’ right to autonomy.

Our discussion on Kurdish autonomy begins at this point.

## Notes

1. Amir Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan 1918–1985* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), p. 49.

2. Vladimir Minorsky, “Kurds,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1st ed.

3. Quoted in Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language*, p. 62.

4. A Kurdish memorandum, presented to the UN in November 1968, maintained that “the [Kurdish] nation has been ruled for the last 25 centuries by 25 Kings of the same family.” Emir Kamuram Bedirkhan, Public Record Office, FCO17/872, 18 November 1968.

5. Maria O’Shea, “Tying Down the Territory: Conceptions and Misconceptions of Early Kurdish History,” in *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics*, eds. Faleh A. Jabar and Dawod Hosham (London: Saqi, 2006), p. 126.

6. Mordechai Zaken, *Jewish Subjects and Their Tribal Chieftains in Kurdistan* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 1.

7. Kamal Fu’ad, “Introduction,” in Muhammad Amin Zaki, *Ta’rikh al-Kurd wa Kurdistan*, vol. 1 (in Kurdish, 1931; in Arabic, Cairo: Matba’at al-Sa’ada, 1939), p. xii.

8. Abu Ja’far Muhammad bin Jarir al-Tabari, *Ta’rikh al-Umam wal-Muluk* (Beirut: Dar al-Qamus al-Hadith, 1968); Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali bin al-Husayn bin ‘Ali al-Mas’udi, *Muruj al-Dhahab*, vol. 3 (Paris: L’imprimerie Nationale, 1918), pp. 248–250. In al-Tabari, they are called Baqarda or Qarda. Muhammad Amin Zaki, *Ta’rikh al-Kurd wa Kurdistan*, vol. 1, p. 40.

9. Fu’ad, “Introduction,” pp. xii, xiii.

10. Until 1970, Iraqi governments refused to use the term *Kurdistan*. Farid Asasard, *Al-Mas’ala al-Kurdiyya ba’d Qanun Idarat al-Dawla* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 2006), p. 26. Brendan O’Leary relates an anecdote whereby, when he was about to cross the border from Iraqi Kurdistan to Turkey in 2004, a Turkish soldier forced him to erase the

word “Kurdistan” from his computer and replace it with “northern Iraq.” Brendan O’Leary, John McGarry, and Khalid Salih, eds., *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), pp. 3–4.

11. See, for example, the title of Jawad Mella’s book *Al-Siyasa al-Isti’ mariyya li-Hizb al-Ba’th al-Suri fi Gharb [Western] Kurdistan* (London: Kurdistan National Congress, 2004). A petition of 9 October 1930 from the Pizhdar to the League of Nations mentioned the term *Southern Kurdistan*. Public Record Office, CO 730/157/8, 9 October 1930.

12. *Al-Ittihad* (Baghdad, daily), 27 January 2005.

13. Mehrdad Izadi, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook* (Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis, 1992), p. 99.

14. Osten Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas: A Comparative Study of Kurdish Refugee Communities* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), p. 7.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

16. Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language*, p. 53. On this epic, see Martin van Bruinessen, “Ehmedi Xani’s Mem û Zîn and Its Role in the Emergence of Kurdish National Awareness,” in *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, ed. Abbas Vali (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2003), pp. 40–57.

17. Joyce Blau, “Refinement and Oppression of Kurdish Language,” in *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics*, eds. Faleh A. Jabar and Dawod Hosham (London: Saqi, 2006), pp. 23, 108.

18. Mücahit Bilci, “Black Turks, White Turks: On the Three Requirements of Turkish Citizenship,” *Insight Turkey* 11, no. 3 (2009): 30.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

20. Document no. 16, 21 August 1999, in Dilshad Nu’mān Farhan, *Mu’anat al-Kurd al-Izidiyyin fi Zill al-Hukumat al-‘Iraqiyya 1921–2003* (Duhok: Duhok University, 2008), p. 206.

21. Blau, “Refinement and Oppression,” p. 109.

22. Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas*, p. 41.

23. For the full text of the study, see Mella, *Al-Siyasa al-Isti’ mariyya*, pp. 94, 96.

24. Abbas Vali, “The Kurds and Their ‘Others’: Fragmented Identity and Fragmented Politics,” in *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics*, eds. Faleh A. Jabar and Dawod Hosham (London: Saqi, 2006), p. 49.

25. Jemal Nebez, *The Kurds* (London: Western Kurdistan Association, 2004), p. 7; Jawad Mella, *Kurdistan and the Kurds: A Divided Homeland and a Nation Without State* (London: Western Kurdistan Association, 2005), pp. 21–22. The term *Greater Kurdistan* was in use in the seventeenth century. Minorsky, “Kurds,” p. 1146. This notion of Greater Kurdistan was extremely controversial: one Arab commentator referred to it as indicating the Kurds’ “expansionist, racial, national approach.” Salim Matar, *Al-Dhat al-Jariha* (Beirut: al-Mu’assasa al-‘Arabiyya lil-Dirasat wal-Nashr, 1997), p. 480.

26. The short-lived Republic of Mahabad, established in Iran in 1946, was an exception to the rule that proved the rule.

27. Samir ‘Ubayd, *Al-Quds al-‘Arabi* (London, daily), 5 May 2006.

28. The raising of the Kurdish flag was considered as the beginning of such process. *Al-Musawwar* (Cairo, weekly), 8 September 2006; *Al-Hawadith* (London, weekly), 15 September 2006.

29. *Al-Mujtama’* (Kuwait, weekly), 20 August 2005.

30. ‘Abd al-Fattah ‘Ali Al-Botani, “Introduction,” in Adib Mu’awwad, *Al-Qadiyya al-Kurdiyya* (Duhok: Duhok University, 2008), p. 10.

31. For such a debate, see Martin van Bruinessen, “Kurdish Paths to Nation,” in *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics*, eds. Faleh A. Jabar and Dawod Hosham (London: Saqi, 2006), pp. 24–29.

32. One example is that in 1991 Iraqi president Saddam Hussein issued a decree changing the nationality of non-Arabs to an Arab nationality: "In order to grant the Iraqi the right to choose his nationality (*qawmiyya*) and in accordance with the Arab Ba'ath socialist party that an Arab is he who has lived in the Arab homeland, spoken its language and chosen Arabism as his nationality . . . the RCC decided that every Iraqi who has attained 18 years of age is entitled to change his nationality to Arab nationalism." The document is found in Farhan, *Mu'arat al-Kurd*, p. 203.

33. Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language*, pp. 61–62; Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas*, p. 42.

34. Fred Halliday, "Can We Write a Modernist History of Kurdish Nationalism?" in *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics*, eds. Faleh A. Jabar and Dawod Hosham (London: Saqi, 2006), p. 16.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 55–65.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 55–56.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 60–65. Among the Kurds of Iraq the term is written as *Kuradayti*. Document no. 10, in Mas'ud Barzani, *Al-Barzani wal-Haraka al-Kurdiyya al-Taharruriyya*, vol. 3: *Thawrat Aylul 1961–1975* (Erbil: 2002), p. 478.

38. Abbas Vali, "Genealogies of the Kurds: Constructions of Nation and National Identity in Kurdish Historical Writing," in *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, ed. Abbas Vali (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2003), pp. 104–105.

39. Charles Benjamin, "The Kurdish Nonstate Nation," in *Nonstate Nations in International Politics*, ed. Judy S. Bertelsen (New York: Praeger, 1977), pp. 69–97.

40. Anthony D. Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1995), pp. 65–66.

41. Fredrick Barth, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, ed. Fredrick Barth (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1998), pp. 9–37.

42. Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups Among the Smaller European Nations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 74.

43. There were of course quite a few important essays such as the vanguard one by Minorsky, "Kurds"; and Serge Gantner, "Le mouvement national kurde," *Orient*, no. 32–33 (1964/1965): 29–120. In general, French scholars and journalists are among the vanguards in Western languages of the study of Kurdish nationalism: among them are Thomas Bois, Joyce Blau, and Basile Nikitine.

44. "The nonstate nation is defined as any entity that operates in a manner normally associated with a nation-state but is *not* a generally recognized nation-state. The defining characteristic of such a nation is its assertion or action implying sovereignty, while not being generally recognized as a sovereign entity." Judy S. Bertelsen, "Introduction," in *Nonstate Nations in International Politics*, ed. Judy S. Bertelsen (New York: Praeger, 1977), p. 2.

45. Stephen H. Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900 to 1950: A Political, Social, and Economic History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953); Uriel Dann, *Iraq Under Qassem: A Political History, 1958–1963* (New York: Praeger, 1969); Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

46. Majid Khadduri, *Independent Iraq, 1932–1958: A Study in Iraqi Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 60–61. The same is true for Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 260–261. Lewis devotes less than one page to the Kurdish problem in Turkey.

47. Khadduri, *Independent Iraq*, pp. 60–61. Interestingly, in a book that he published nine years later, he devotes a large part of the book to the Kurdish national movement.

Majid Khadduri, *Republican Iraq: A Study in Iraqi Politics Since the Revolution of 1958* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

48. Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Developments* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006).

49. Abdul Aziz Said, "Perspective of Abdul Said," in *Kurdish Identity: Human Rights and Political Status*, eds. Charles G. MacDonald and Carole A. O'Leary (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), p. 30.

50. Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language*, pp. 171–175.

51. David Adamson, *The Kurdish War* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964); Dana Adams Schmidt, *Journey Among Brave Men* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1964).

52. It is not my intention to give a comprehensive list of the books here. Readers will find them in the notes and the bibliography. Some of these are: Michael Gunter (*The Kurds of Iraq: Tragedy and Hope*); Kanan Makiya (*Cruelty and Silence: War, Tyranny, Uprising, and the Arab World*); Martin van Bruinessen (*Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*); Gareth Stansfield (*Iraqi Kurdistan: Political Development and Emergent Democracy*); Jonathan Randal (*After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness? My Encounters with Kurdistan*); Susan Meiselas (*Kurdistan in the Shadow of History*); Denise Natali (*The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran*); Quil Lawrence (*Invisible Nation: How the Kurds' Quest for Statehood Is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East*); David McDowall (*A Modern History of the Kurds*); Brendan O'Leary, John McGarry, and Khalid Salih, eds. (*The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq*); Joost R. Hilterman (*A Poisonous Affair*); David Romano (*The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*); Kerim Yildiz (*The Kurds in Iraq: The Past, Present and Future*).

53. Peter W. Galbraith, *The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a War Without End* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

54. Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 11–112, 198–199.

55. Abbas Vali maintained that the absence of history writing did not mean that the past was not made use of in the production of meaning. Furthermore, the perception that they possess a common history has played a decisive role in the Kurds' struggle against the states. Abbas Vali, "Introduction: Nationalism and the Question of Origins," in *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, ed. Abbas Vali (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2003), pp. 25, 38.

56. Zaki, *Ta'rikh al-Kurd*, vol. 1, 2 (in Arabic) (Cairo: Matba'at al-Sa'ada, 1939, 1945).

57. Zaki, *Ta'rikh al-Kurd*, vol. 1, p. ya (in Arabic). This criticism was later refuted by another Kurdish author, who explained that the Kurdish language had become a language of prose writing in only the second part of the nineteenth century. Fu'ad, "Introduction," p. xiii.

58. Blau, "Refinement and Oppression," pp. 103–104.

59. Zaki, vol. 1, p. 57.

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49. Years later, Jalal Talabani ridiculed the "imaginary stories" about the Arab origins of the Kurds: *Kurdistan wal-Haraka al-Qawmiyya al-Kurdiyya* (Beirut, 1971), p. 26; Mas'udi, *Muruj al-Dhahab*, pp. 248–250.

61. Zaki, vol. 1, pp. 25–32.

62. Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language*, pp. 191, 211–218. By 1970, there were hundreds of works in Kurdish. Fu'ad, "Introduction," p. xxi.

63. The books of two leading Kurdish politicians, Jalal Talabani, *Kurdistan wal-Haraka al-Qawmiyya al-Kurdiyya*, and Mas'ud Barzani, *Al-Barzani wal-Haraka al-*

*Kurdiyya al-Taharruriyya*, should also be mentioned. It is not my intent to provide a list of Kurdish historians and analysts, but only to mention that their number is becoming larger through time.

64. This view is held, quite exceptionally, by an Arab. See Mu'awwad, *Al-Qadiyya al-Kurdiyya*, p. 39.

65. Fu'ad, "Introduction," p. v.

66. In Gérard Chaliand, ed., *A People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan*, (London: Zed Press, 1980), p. 44.

67. Nebez, *The Kurds*, p. 74.

68. "Some Notes on the Kurdish Question," Public Record Office, FO195/2477, 3 December 1943.

69. Ibid.; Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language*, p. 113.

70. This divergence is due to the absence of official statistics and to the disparate positions of various authors. For example, Mahmud al-Durra, an Iraqi officer who fought against the Kurds in the 1940s, gives their percentage in 1961 as 15.66 percent. Mahmud al-Durra, *al-Qadiyya al-Kurdiyya*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1966), p. 15. By contrast, Ismet Sheriff Vanly, a member of the Kurdish national movement, says 28 percent for 1975. Ismet Sheriff Vanly, "Kurdistan in Iraq," in *A People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan*, ed. Gérard Chaliand (London: Zed Press, 1980), p. 157. Another Kurd states their percentage as 23.5 percent in 1990. Mehrdad R. Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook* (Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis, 1992), p. 117.

71. Nechirvan Barzani, the then KRG prime minister, speaks about fifty years of Barzani leadership. Not all Kurds of Iraq subscribe to this view. Opponents of the Kurdistan Democratic Party saw him as a traitor because of the 1975 debacle. Kurdish intellectuals, interviewed by the author, Sulaymaniyya, 2 May 2009. Hussein Tahiri accused him of causing division in the Kurdish ranks. Hussein Tahiri, *The Structure of Kurdish Society and the Struggle for a Kurdish State* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2007), p. 129.

72. In an exchange between Mulla Mustafa Barzani and President 'Abd al-Salam 'Arif, the former stresses these very points. Barzani, *Al-Barzani wal-Haraka*, vol. 3, pp. 522–523.

73. For a discussion on this failure, see Khadduri, *Republican Iraq*, pp. 173–177.

74. For such fears, see *Al-Thawra* (Baghdad), 15 September 1991.

75. Cecil J. Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 398. Interestingly, in the referendum on Faysal in July 1921, the *liwa'* of Sulaymaniyya refused to participate and the *liwa'* of Kirkuk did so reluctantly, accounting (it was claimed) for the 4 percent negative vote. Significantly, neither Sulaymaniyya nor Kirkuk sent representatives to the accession ceremony held in Baghdad on 23 August 1921. Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, p. 187.

76. Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 1992), p. 10.

77. Tahiri, *The Structure of Kurdish Society*, p. 17.

78. Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, pp. 239–241.

79. Kurdish parties existed previously, but they were short-lived groups that lacked continuity and a centralized structure. The new party changed components in its name on three occasions. For simplicity's sake, I have used the name current in the period under discussion in this book.

80. Mulla Mustafa Barzani, for example, fantasized about obtaining one-third of Iraq's oil revenues, "a share proportionate to Kurdistan's population." Adamson, *The Kurdish War*, p. 147.



81. Martin Short and Anthony McDermott, "The Kurds," Minority Rights Group Paper no. 23 (London: Minority Rights Group, February 1975). The KDP claimed that Kurds were not usually admitted into Iraqi intelligence. "A Paper on the Kurdish Problem in Iraq," presented at the UN Seminar on the Rights of National, Ethnic, and Other Minorities, Ohrid, Yugoslavia, June–July 1974.

82. Sitting on the fence is not characteristic of the Kurdish national movement alone. Rather it is a phenomenon that has extended to national movements in Africa, for example. See Benjamin Neuberger, *National Self-Determination in Postcolonial Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1986), p. 63.

83. Farid Asasard, *Al-Mas'ala al-Kurdiyya ba'd Qanun Idarat al-Dawla* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 2006), p. 24. Six Kurdish members of the Iraqi parliament sent a memorandum in the same vein, adding a call to unite the Kurdish provinces into one unit. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

84. David Andrews, ed., *The Lost Peoples of the Middle East* (Salisbury: Documentary Publications, 1982), p. 134.

85. Daniel Elazar, ed., *Federalism and Political Integration* (Ramat Gan, Israel: Turtledove, 1979), p. 3.

86. The KDP's sixth congress held in 1964 adopted this goal. Ismet Sheriff Vanly, *Le Kurdistan irakien entité nationale: Étude de la révolution de 1961* (Neuchâtel, Switzerland: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1970), p. 228.

87. The meaning of the word *autonomia* in Greek is independent leadership. This concept has undergone many transformations since it was first used in Greece in the second half of the fifth century B.C.E. Its current meaning is "the right of an institution or community to conduct its affairs according to its own laws." *The Hebrew Encyclopedia* (in Hebrew, Tel Aviv: The Encyclopedia Publication Company, 1958), p. 780. "Conditional or limited independence, based on law or custom, and subject to change by the authority which grants it." Walter John Raymond, *Dictionary of Politics* (Lawrenceville, VA: Brunswick, 1992), p. 30.

88. Robert A. Friedlander, "Autonomy and the Thirteen Colonies: Was the American Revolution Really Necessary?" in *Models of Autonomy*, ed. Yoram Dinstein (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1981), p. 136.

89. Adamson, *The Kurdish War*, p. 92.

90. Friedlander, "Autonomy," p. 136.

91. Ismet Sheriff Vanly, "Hawla al-Istratijiyya al-Siyasiyya wal-'Askariyya lil-Haraka al-Wataniyya al-Kurdiyya," *Dirasat Kurdiyya*, no. 1–2 (1985): 22–23.

92. Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs*, p. 312.

93. *Ibid.*

94. Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language*, p. 111.

95. Public Record Office, FO 371/15312, 11 June 1931.

96. *Al-Minhaj wal-Nizam al-Dakhili lil-hizb al-Dimuqrati al-Kurdistani* (Min Manshurat Pareti Dimuqrati Kurdistan, 1960).

97. In November 1962 a group of plotters approached Barzani, suggesting that he participate in a coup against Qasim. Barzani's reply was that the minimum that the Kurds would demand for such cooperation would be autonomy. Documents no. 9 and 10, in Barzani, *Al-Barzani wal-Haraka*, vol. 3, pp. 474–477.

98. Barzani, *Al-Barzani wal-Haraka*, from the book's subtitle, *Thawrat aylul*.

99. Barzani, *Al-Barzani wal-Haraka*, vol. 3, Appendix 12, pp. 483–488. Nechirvan Barzani mentioned that, between 1961 and 1975, (Mustafa) Barzani "led the Aylul revolution in Iraq." See Nechirvan Barzani, "Perspective of Nechirvan Barzani, Prime Minister, Kurdistan Regional Government," in *Kurdish Identity: Human Rights and Political*

*Status*, eds. Charles G. MacDonald and Carole A. O'Leary (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), p. 16.

100. Vanly, *Le Kurdistan irakien*, p. 228.

101. Emir Kamuram Bedirkhan, Memorandum to the UN, Public Record Office, FCO17/872, 18 November 1968. Serge Gantner, *The Kurdish National Movement* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: 'Am Hasefer, 1968), p. 78.