Introduction

Standing before the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 1960, Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president and one of the leading figures in the African liberation struggle in the 1950s, delivered a speech about colonialism, imperialism and the right to liberty of African peoples. In this speech, which celebrated the admission of sixteen new African members to the UNGA, Nkrumah declared, 'now I, an African, stand before this august Assembly of the United Nations and speak with a voice of peace and freedom, proclaiming to the world the dawn of a new era . . .. There are now twenty-two of us and there are yet more to come.'[1] For Nkrumah, the dawn of a new era symbolised independence, freedom from oppression and dignity for the colonised subjects – a dignity that their colonisers, the British, French, Belgian and Portuguese empires, among others, had deprived them of. His speech symbolised the liberated nations' enthusiasm about the possibilities awaiting them in their new states. The decolonisation of states in sub-Saharan Africa was the peak of the gradual collapse of the European empires and their withdrawal from their colonial possessions in Asia, Africa and the Middle East.[2]

However, already at this stage of decolonisation, groups and individuals within the newly independent (or about to become independent) states were becoming concerned about the emerging order and their place in it. As more and more colonies were granted their independence, in Iraq, Sudan, Nigeria, the Republic of Congo and the Spanish Sahara (later to become Western Sahara), to name but a few, communities and ethnic groups believed that their national and cultural rights were in jeopardy. The

[1] Text appears at United Nations Association–UK, '10 Quotes on Race and Colonialism', 19 October 2018. Available at www.una.org.uk/magazine/2018-1/10-quotes-race-and-colonialism (accessed 2 August 2019).

[2] Some of Nkrumah's contemporaries, such as the Bissau-Guinean Amilcar Cabral, have begun at this stage identifying the looming threat of neo-colonialism in the form of American and Western European capitalist ventures into the continent. Jock McCulloch, 'Amilcar Cabral: A Theory of Imperialism', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 19, 3 (1981), pp. 503–11. But this realisation did not undermine the excitement of the victims of colonisation about the forthcoming opportunities.

Kurds in Iraq and Iran, for instance, had already experienced periods of autonomy and expressed their desire to expand it, even to the level of independence. In the southern provinces of Sudan, the Black African majority was becoming disillusioned with the hope that the predominantly Arab-Muslim elites in Khartoum would meet their commitments to respect the Southern culture(s) and religious freedoms and include Southerners on an equal basis in the newly founded state institutions. In Nigeria, members of the Igbo people in the country's Eastern Region were growing concerned about tensions with other groups in the country.

The response of these movements to what they perceived as persecution, exploitation and injustice by the governments in their new states was in the spirit of the time – they demanded the right to form their own states, which would represent their national aspirations, identities and cultures. However, such demands stood no chance in the postcolonial environment. The postcolonial ruling elites, themselves emanating from the movements that had fought for the liberation of their countries from European imperialism, could not afford to justify the European empires' predictions about their inability to govern their affairs and administer their countries. And the governments could not afford losing regions often rich with natural resources. The international community, too, was openly antagonistic towards any change to the status quo, fearing instability and spiralling violence that would damage their interests in the former colonies. Soon enough, these tensions between the new order and the demands of these disenfranchised groups escalated into violence. The first of these struggles broke out in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In Southern Sudan, a mutiny of Southern soldiers marked the beginning of the conflict, which quickly evolved into a full-scale civil war. In Iraq, Kurdish nationalists launched a rebellion against the central government in Baghdad. In Congo (formerly Belgian Congo), rebels established the State of Katanga in 1960, while in Nigeria, Igbo military officers formed the Republic of Biafra in 1967. In Morocco, Western Sahrawi nationalists formed the POLISARIO liberation front to fight Moroccan forced annexation of the former Spanish colony. These are just a few examples of the wave of secessionist wars that broke out in former colonies in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

To say that secessionist struggles did not attract enough attention would be incorrect. Separatist violence has gained tremendous interest from scholars and policymakers alike.[3] Secessionist wars, particularly in the context of postcolonial states in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, have

[3] For an overview of the study of secession, see Bridget Coggins, 'The History of Secession: An Overview', in Peter Radan (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Secession* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2011), pp. 23–44.

been seen as causes of regional and global instability and as black holes of extreme violence, including ethnic cleansing and genocide. Many studies have focused on particular episodes or cases of postcolonial secessionist violence, with the aim of grasping the particularities of each conflict.[4] Other works have sought to theorise and explore the causes of violence in postcolonial settings. Some have linked the conflicts to prevailing ethnic tensions.[5] Others have emphasised competition over sources of income, chiefly from natural resources, as the main cause of conflict.[6] More recent works on ethnic conflict have applied the logic of international politics, pointing out the rise of security dilemmas in multi-ethnic, 'artificially created' states, leading to mutual distrust as the background to escalation in civil wars.[7] Other students of secession have shifted their focus from the sources of conflicts to their consequences. One edited volume, for instance, used the case of Biafra to explore genocide within the framework of postcolonial conflict.[8] A broad body of literature on postcolonial secession and separatism has concentrated the legal dimensions and implications of the phenomenon, their impact on international order and their relevance to international law.[9]

[4] Examples include Michael Gould, *The Biafran War: The Struggle for Modern Nigeria* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013); Christopher Othen, *Katanga 1960–63: Mercenaries, Spies and the African Nation That Waged War on the World* (London: The History Press, 2015); David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004); Douglas H. Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Stephen Zunes and Jacob Mundy, *Western Sahara: War, Nationalism, and Conflict Irresolution* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010). This list relates only to the examples mentioned earlier, and even in these cases it represents a sample of the existing vast literature.

[5] Donald Rothchild, 'Ethnic Bargaining and State Breakdown in Africa', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 1, 1 (1995), pp. 54–72; Kal J. Holsti, 'War, Peace, and the State of the State', *International Political Science Review* 16, 4 (1995), pp. 319–39.

[6] Andreas Wimmer, 'Who Owns the State? Understanding Ethnic Conflict in Post-Colonial Societies', *Nations and Nationalism* 3, 4 (1997), pp. 631–66; Pierre Englebert and Rebecca Hummel, 'Let's Stick Together: Understanding Africa's Secessionist Deficit', *African Affairs* 104, 416 (2005), pp. 399–427; Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, 'The Political Economy of Secession', in Hurst Hannum and Eileen Babbitt (eds.), *Negotiating Self-Determination* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), pp. 37–59.

[7] Barry R. Posen, 'The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict', *Survival* 35, 1 (1993), pp. 27–47; Shiping Tang, 'The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict: Toward a Dynamic and Integrative Theory of Ethnic Conflict', *Review of International Studies* 37, 2 (2011), pp. 511–36.

[8] A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten (eds.), *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide: The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967–1970* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018); see also Thandika Mkandawire, 'The Terrible Toll of Postcolonial "Rebel Movements" in Africa: Towards an Explanation of the Violence Against the Peasantry', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 40, 2 (2002), pp. 181–215.

[9] Lea Brilmayer, 'Secession and Self-Determination: A Territorial Interpretation', *Yale Journal of International Law* 16, 1 (1991), pp. 171–202; Gerry S. Simpson, 'The Diffusion of Sovereignty: Self-Determination in the Postcolonial Age', *Stanford Journal*

The purpose of this brief overview is to establish that the topic of postcolonial secession and separatist conflicts has gained a degree of significance in different fields of study. This book seeks to complement these existing studies by offering a new perspective to exploring postcolonial separatist violence. Rather than asking *why* postcolonial violence has erupted or *what consequences* postcolonial separatist violence has had, this book concentrates on the *how* questions. How did postcolonial separatist violence evolve? And, related to that, why did it take the form that it did throughout the years of conflict? Addressing these questions, the book offers an alternative perception of separatist violence and secessionist wars in postcolonial settings. It approaches these conflicts as *second-generation liberation wars*. The premise of this approach is that to a great extent, the separatist conflicts and civil wars in former colonies reflect the realities, norms, practices and roles that emerged in the anti-colonial struggle against European imperialism in previous decades, or the *first-generation liberation wars*.

To put it more broadly, the main argument here is that the conflicts that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century between postcolonial secessionist movements and their governments ended up reviving some of the realities of the struggle between national liberation movements and the European empires in the colonies in previous (and at some point overlapping) decades. This description is true for both the governments and the liberation movements involved in the conflict. Amid the growing challenge set by separatist movements in their peripheries, postcolonial governments often resorted to employing the same mechanisms, methods and practices that their predecessors, namely the colonial empires and their local representatives, had used against them in their effort to suppress rebellion and defiance at the edges of empire. Similarly, and in response to this oppression, the separatist movements in the postcolonial states, in their claim to represent persecuted, neglected and marginalised populations, gradually embraced the same justifications, ideas, practices and strategies that their predecessors (and now enemies) had used against European imperialism. In other words, these movements came to perceive themselves as anti-colonial liberation movements, fighting not a new form of colonialism but the same old colonialism – only this time exercised by their compatriots in the new states. This self-perception of the liberation movement members was manifested in both their discourse aimed at their and outside audiences and their insurgency tactics. They

of International Law 32, 2 (1996), pp. 255–86; Ved P. Nanda, 'Self-Determination in International Law: The Tragic Tale of Two Cities – Islamabad (West Pakistan) and Dacca (East Pakistan)', *American Journal of International Law* 66, 2 (1972), pp. 321–36.

began describing their struggles as anti-colonial liberation and their adversaries, namely the postcolonial governments, as colonialists and imperialists. And they also embraced the same fighting techniques and diplomatic mechanisms that their predecessors had used against the European imperialists. This resort of both governments and rebels to the discourse, practices and roles that characterised the first-generation liberation wars turns them into second-generation colonialist and anti-colonial movements.To support my argument and answer the key questions, this book examines two case studies. The first case is that of the war in Iraq between the central governments in Baghdad and Kurdish nationalists in the predominantly Kurdish provinces in the north of the country. The armed conflict in Iraq took place between 1961 and 1991 and ended with the formation of the de facto autonomous Kurdish administration in the Kurdistan Region.[10] The second case study is that of the civil war in Sudan between the governments in Khartoum and the Southern Sudanese liberation movement in the predominantly Black African provinces in the south.[11] Here, much of the attention is paid to what is often described as the First Sudanese Civil War, which lasted from 1955 to 1972.[12] Chapter 5 serves to explore the evolution of these conflicts in the 1990s because the transformation of the liberation struggles in the 1990s, especially on the side of the liberation movements, sheds light on the

[10] The end of the violent episode in Baghdad-Kurdish relations did not mean that the Kurdish liberation struggle subsided. As the final chapter of this book demonstrates, state building and governance have become a liberation strategy.

[11] Throughout the book, I use the term 'Southern Sudan' in reference to what is now the Republic of South Sudan because the book deals with the period before independence, when the Southern provinces were still part of a unified Sudan. In this I follow Matthew LeRiche and Matthew Arnold, *South Sudan: From Revolution to Independence* (London and New York: Hurst/Oxford University Press, 2012).

[12] Here a historiographical debate must be addressed: the prevalent perception of the Sudanese civil war is that it started in August 1955, with the outbreak of the Equatoria Corps' mutiny in Torit. See for example Johnson, *The Root Causes*; Scopas S. Poggo, *The First Sudanese Civil War: Africans, Arabs and Israelis in Southern Sudan, 1955–1972* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). More recent studies of the conflict have challenged this view. Øystein Rolandsen maintains that the war only broke out at full scale in 1963 and that the preceding period witnessed low-intensity violence and disturbances, but not a war. The period 1956–62, Rolandsen maintains, was a period of low-intensity violence and disturbances, but not war. Therefore, had Khartoum addressed the grievances of the Southern population, the war might have been prevented. Rolandsen, 'A False Start: Between War and Peace in the Southern Sudan, 1956–62', *Journal of African History* 52, 1 (2011), pp. 105–23. See also Rolandsen and Cherry Leonardi, 'Discourses of Violence in the Transition from Colonialism to Independence in Southern Sudan, 1955–1960', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 8, 4 (2014), pp. 609–25. While this is a persuasive case, this article follows the assertion that the Southern Sudanese liberation struggle could be traced to 1955 because ideas about self-determination had already become more popular among Southern Sudanese in the second half of the 1950s. The violence in 1963 was a culmination of this process.

adaptable and complex nature of postcolonial liberation struggles. I elaborate more on the case selection, methodology and research design in the section 'Iraq and Sudan: Representatives Cases of Postcolonial Separatist Violence'. But before proceeding to this discussion, a background is necessary, to underline the importance and contribution of this book.

Why Is Postcolonial Violence Still a Relevant Topic?

The idea for the research leading to this book was born when I was completing my previous book on policymaking in unrecognised de facto states.[13] In this previous work, I examined the manner in which de facto states' contested sovereignty and their quest for international legitimacy has affected the conduct of these actors both domestically and internationally. The book used the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq (KRG) as a case study of de facto statehood. It contained a brief chapter on the history of the Kurdish liberation struggle before the formation of the KRG in 1991. This part of the book had a secondary significance, serving as the background to its primary subject of interest, namely the KRG's policymaking. Upon the completion of the book, it became clear to me that this chapter in the history of the Kurdish struggle in Iraq has more to offer in understanding not only the Kurdish movement but also separatism in former colonies in general. A number of items that I encountered during my investigation, such as old pamphlets and party journals, made me realise that the Kurdish liberation movement was part of a broader phenomenon. References that these pamphlets and writings made to other contemporary liberation struggles, including in Southern Sudan, led me to identify the commonalities between these movements. It also made me see the potential comparison with the rise of the anti-colonial movements and their struggle against European imperialism. It was not simply the nature of violence or the demand for self-determination that led me to this realisation. Rather, the more I delved into the history of these movements, it became apparent that much like their predecessors, postcolonial liberation movements were involved in argumentation and debate relating to ideas about liberation and the rights of people to self-determination.[14] And much like the previous generation of anti-colonial movements, the postcolonial separatists sought to

[13] Yaniv Voller, *The Kurdish Liberation Movement in Iraq: From Insurgency to Statehood* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2014).
[14] Neta C. Crawford, Argument and Change in World Politics: Ethics, Decolonization, and Humanitarian Intervention (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

integrate into a global movement to justify their cause.[15] Led by this interest in postcolonial liberation struggles, I moved to investigate further the different cases, including those of Southern Sudan, Eritrea, the Western Sahara and Biafra. All along, my readings into these conflicts was framed by my background and interest in International Relations (IR) theory, especially the importance of ideas, conceptions and norms in international politics. It was this reading of these conflicts that inspired me to begin an enquiry into postcolonial separatist wars as second-generation liberation struggles.

One of the first questions that crossed my mind when I began this investigation, and which I assumed will come across to many readers regarding the pertinence of the subject in question: why are postcolonial liberation struggles still a relevant topic in the study of international politics? After all, the world has gone through major transformations in past decades, experiencing dramatic events that affected the lives of people in almost every corner of the globe. The response to this question is multifaceted. The most immediate answer is that a number of the violent conflicts that broke out in the early days of decolonisation continue to affect contemporary international politics. The case studies in this research are good examples. The Kurdish struggle for liberation is ongoing in all parts of historical Kurdistan, having significant consequence for the politics of Iraq, Turkey, Syria and to a lesser extent Iran, as well a spillover into other regional countries.[16] In South Sudan, although the violent conflict has been brought to an end with the formation of the Republic of South Sudan, tensions over oil income and the outbreak of the South Sudanese civil war in 2013 have affected regional geopolitics in East Africa and among its northern neighbours, Sudan and Egypt.[17] The phenomenon of unrecognised states can be linked directly with the outcomes of postcolonial secessionist wars. Fully comprehending the roots of these conflicts and their evolution is necessary for better understanding their contemporary consequences.

This, nonetheless, is only a partial response to the previous question. Developing a new approach to examining postcolonial secessionist wars also necessitates applying a novel theoretical framework to the subject. Philip Roessler and Harry Verhoeven, studying the link between liberation ideologies and the eruption of Africa's Great War, have noted that

[15] Vrushali Patil, *Negotiating Decolonization in the United Nations Politics of Space, Identity, and International Community* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2014).
[16] Michael M. Gunter, 'The Kurdish Spring', *Third World Quarterly* 34, 3 (2013), pp. 441–57.
[17] Samson S. Wassara, 'South Sudan: State Sovereignty Challenged at Infancy', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 9, 4 (2015), pp. 634–49.

'Liberation movements in Africa have been extensively studied, but mostly through a case-specific or strictly historical approach. Few analyses have provided a general framework to account for the causes and consequences of liberation change in post–Second World War Africa.'[18] The few works that have sought to offer a broader theoretical framework to study postcolonial secessionist violence have mainly placed it within the framework of ethnic violence or resource conflicts.[19] IR literature in general has paid relatively little attention to this phenomenon. Roessler and Verhoeven's work, as well as that of several other recent authors, has pioneered in positioning liberation wars in broader theoretical frameworks, predominantly concentrating on civil wars in sub-Saharan Africa.[20] Building on this growing trend, this book contributes further to this endeavour to highlight the relevance of IR theories to the study of postcolonial conflict. Moreover, it demonstrates that this effort has value not only to Africa but also across the postcolonial sphere. And if we accept the idea that the violence in the postcolonial space can indeed be understood as second-generation liberation wars, then the growing literature in IR on roles, practices and norms serves as a useful lens through which to understand these struggles and their evolution. I elaborate on this further in the following chapter, which frames this study. But to put it briefly, works in the field of IR have become increasingly conscious of the importance not only of material considerations but also of the ways in which actors perceives themselves and others and the appropriate way to operate internationally. This logic, this book argues, can shed more light on postcolonial separatist violence.

The book's focus on communications, persuasion and legitimation in conflict also engages with the literature about rebel diplomacy and propaganda. The very few works to have investigated rebel diplomacy have

[18] Philip Roessler and Harry Verhoeven, *Why Comrades Go to War: Liberation Politics and the Outbreak of Africa's Deadliest Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 44–5.

[19] Collier and Hoeffler, 'The Political Economy'; Luc van de Goor, Kumar Rupesinghe and Paul Sciarone (eds.), *Between Development and Destruction: An Enquiry into the Causes of Conflict in Postcolonial States* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996); James D. Fearon, 'Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer than Others?' *Journal of Peace Research* 41, 3 (2004), pp. 275–301; Robert Blanton, T. David Mason and Brian Athow, 'Colonial Style and Postcolonial Ethnic Conflict in Africa', *Journal of Peace Research* 38, 4 (2001): pp. 437–91.

[20] See also Jonathan Fisher, East Africa after Liberation: Conflict, Security and the State since the 1980s (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Michael Woldemariam, Insurgent Fragmentation in the Horn of Africa: Rebellion and Its Discontents (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); William Reno, Warfare in Independent Africa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

a more utilitarian stand, highlighting insurgents' strategic use of discourse. Bridget Coggins, for example, has sought to theorise rebels' usage of international diplomacy, arguing that 'external engagement is elemental to the strategy of guerrilla war and serves a variety of instrumental, short-term purposes'.[21] Clifford Bob, in his inquiry into which rebel movements are successful in attaining international support, has maintained that for rebel groups, 'to lift themselves above the voiceless mass of the world's poor and oppressed ... they tap the media to raise international awareness and lobby potential patrons directly'. To achieve this, Bob demonstrates, 'insurgent groups magnify their appeal by framing parochial demands, provincial conflicts, and particularistic identities to match the interests and agendas of distant audiences. In this global morality market, challengers must publicize their plights, portray their conflicts as righteous struggles, and craft their messages to resonate abroad.'[22] These accounts of rebels' interaction with the international community have paved the way towards a more comprehensive understanding of rebels' aspiration to affect the system.

Nevertheless, there is a risk in highlighting the rebels' use of discourse from an entirely utilitarian perspective – and this book aims to mitigate this risk. When liberation movements resorted to the same tactics, strategies and practices that had been used by their predecessors, they did not just imitate them. They did not simply choose this label of anti-colonial liberation movements as a public relations campaign. These movements emerged after years of close interaction with the previous generation of liberation movements and struggles. They witnessed the arguments that the first generation of liberation movements made against European imperialism and colonialism. They experienced the enthusiasm about the right to self-determination. They were, sometimes, part of the effort to legitimise the use of violence against the colonial authorities and their collaborators. Through this close interaction and engagement between these two generations of sociopolitical movements, the second-generation absorbed the practices, role conceptions and norms that dominated the first one. When violence appeared inevitable or at least desirable, these movements in Iraq, Sudan and other postcolonial states had this set of practices and roles to resort to. And this was not always a conscious process. The idea that these movements saw anti-colonialism as no more than a brand overlooks the process that had led

[21] Bridget Coggins, 'Rebel Diplomacy: Theorizing Violent Non-State Actors' Strategic Use of Talk', in Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir and Zachariah Mampilly (eds.), *Rebel Governance in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 115.

[22] Clifford Bob, *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgents, Media and International Activism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 5.

to their self-perception as anti-colonial liberation movements. This is where theories about roles and conflict in IR become applicable, which corresponds with Jonathan Fisher's perception of ideology in liberation wars as often serving 'a practical, social purpose', of enabling collective action. Beyond being 'bodies of theory', they are 'also articulated, deployed and negotiated in practical settings – as a form of argumentation and identity-marker'.[23]

The study of postcolonial separatist conflicts as second-generation liberation wars, and subsequently the secessionist insurgents as actors in second-generation anti-colonial movements, helps us rethink established conventions in international politics. Perhaps the most important of these are the definitions of decolonisation and subsequently of colonialism. Throughout most of the period that followed the collapse of the European empires and the independence of the new states in the former colonies, the definition of decolonisation overlapped with this process. In other words, decolonisation has come to mean almost exclusively a single linear historical process: the decline of the European empires and the independence of the former colonies in Africa.[24] This has correlated with the triumphant association of colonialism and imperialism with Western Europe, which ignored the calls by peoples and nations suffering from the domination of other powers to expand the definition to include, and therefore condemn, other actors. For them, colonialism was not about the colour, religion, or culture of the oppressor. The usurpers of their right to self-determination could be Black or Arab, Christian or Muslim. It was about the act, rather than the actor. Documenting and examining the second-generation liberation movements' pleas, demands and struggle means accepting their call to rethink these key concepts in our politics, culture and scholarship.

In this respect, this book joins the bourgeoning scholarly efforts to question and revise existing definitions of colonialism.[25] Challenging

[23] Fisher, *East Africa after Liberation*, p. 12.

[24] On this point, too, I elaborate in the following chapter. However, a few noteworthy examples of key academic texts that have contributed to this understanding of decolonisation include Prasenjit Duara, 'Introduction', in Dura (ed.), *Decolonization: Rewriting Histories* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1–18; Raymond F. Betts, *Decolonization* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2004); Bryan Urquhart, *Decolonization and World Peace* (Dallas: Texas University Press, 1989).

[25] See for example Eve M. Toutt Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Awet Tewelde Weldemichael, *Third World Colonialism and Strategies of Liberation: Eritrea and East Timor Compared* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).