Introduction

Since the early twentieth century, Kurds have challenged the borders and national identities of the states they inhabit. Nowhere is this more evident than in their promotion of the map of greater Kurdistan, a unified ideal homeland which encompasses large swathes of Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran, and a small part of Armenia, in a region with a complex history of ethnic, cultural and political background. The main Kurdish political actors in each of these states claim some ownership or control over a part of a state's territory and they are usually careful to restrict their claims to within the state they reside. All these Kurdistans have been geographically, economically and culturally marginalised in each state and have historically been buffer zones between regional and colonial powers. The idea of greater Kurdistan combines these areas and puts Kurdistan at the centre rather than in the margins.

The map of greater Kurdistan is embedded in the consciousness of the majority of Kurdish people, both within the region and, perhaps even more strongly, in the diaspora. The territory it depicts, Kurdistan, has never been a recognised state and does not have a unified political leadership. Yet the concept of Kurdistan, as a cultural and political abstract, survives the reality and exists in the minds of Kurdish nationalists, their supporters as well as those who deny it. The territory depicted on the map is a heterogeneous geography inhabited by different ethnic and religious groups such as Arabs, Turks, Persians, Assyrians, Armenians, Yazidis, Christians and others. The map projects a historical continuity of Kurdistan, overlooking historical conflicting claims, for instance between Armenians, Assyrians and Kurds. The Kurds do not constitute one group with a similar culture, language, religion and political goals. Tribal divisions are important, sometimes more so than Kurdishness. Kurdish political parties and Kurdish societies in each state face different problems that emerged as a result of distinct political, social, historical and economic circumstances of the state they are in.

The map of greater Kurdistan is frequently used in Kurdish political programmes, on political party flags, on the walls of homes and offices, and its silhouette is even used on accessories such as key rings, brooches or necklaces. What is particularly noteworthy is that it is not only Kurdish nationalists who use this map, but also outsiders use it to show the location of the Kurdish homeland or to show the Kurdish demographic presence in the area. What is interesting is the almost identical cartographic depiction of maps showing Kurdish demography and maps showing the political aspiration of Kurdistan. Indeed, non-political maps that show the demographic distribution of the Kurds have similar contours in which the silhouette that emerges from coloured parts indicating Kurdish habitation looks very similar to the political map of Kurdistan. Although maps showing Kurdish habitation through the image of Kurdistan do not seek to make a political point on the existence of a Kurdish territory, the similarity of the contours of the demographic and political maps of Kurdistan is usually overlooked by outsiders using these maps.

This raises two fundamental questions about the Kurdish political project, both of which have important implications for thinking about national self-determination and how this is pursued by non-state nationalists. Why and how has the map of greater Kurdistan become a widespread image; and what is the perceived underlying relationship between territory and people that bolsters the greater Kurdistan map? Widespread use of this map does not mean that all Kurds aim for a unified Kurdish statehood in the Middle East or those outsiders who use it to support the idea of a unified Kurdistan. Many would claim the relationship is straightforward in that such a map merely depicts a people's natural and actual homeland. For most Kurds, this is certainly the case. For its supporters, the map of greater Kurdistan makes the case that Kurds are a nation without a state whose homeland is divided by four states.

Yet it is worth pushing beyond the question of the actuality or viability of a greater Kurdistan. The focus of this book is not to establish whether such a territory actually exists or not. Clearly, imaginations of homelands are socially and politically constructed, rather than being natural and perennial, and the same can be said for state territories. The fact that states have internationally recognised boundaries does not make their territories less constructed or more natural. The aim of this book instead is to examine the imagination

and presentation of the Kurdish homeland through its cartographic depictions within the contexts of internal Kurdish dynamics and the international normative framework since the nineteenth century. Through this, it seeks to examine the resultant political, cultural and social effects of this construction and historically trace how the Kurdistan map(s) are constituted by Kurdish nationalist politics as well as international norms.

Political maps have the power to influence our imaginations about where territories and states lie in the world because maps are seen as objective and scientific, and they are powerful in making constructed ideas look natural (Agnew, Livingstone and Rogers 1996: 422). They are cultural and political discursive formations and represent perceptions, political discourses, ideologies and aspirations (Crampton 2001; Harley 1989, 2002). The narratives maps present create the lenses through which we see, understand and interpret territoriality, understood as the relationship between people and territory in this study. The power of maps derives from their embeddedness in the narratives of nation and identity. Conceptions of nation, identity and territoriality and how they define political realities and the rules of state legitimacy change over time. Their different meanings in different periods have implications for how we perceive political maps, both existing and aspirational. Kurds and outsiders imagine the Kurdish homeland through contemporary norms related to nation and territoriality, specifically self-determination. Fuzzy and changeable, this norm has influenced national politics, as well as the conception of Kurdistan and its map, in different ways over time.

The map of greater Kurdistan and the Kurds are an apt case to explore wider questions around maps, self-determination and territory. This map is a useful tool to navigate through a complex temporal and conceptual field in which ideas of self-determination and territoriality have changed and evolved, both in the case of Kurdish nationalism and internationally. Through this analysis, the book links politics around Kurdish nationalism to international-level politics and normative frameworks. The interaction of Kurdish nationalist groups, both in the region and in the diaspora, with international actors does not take place simply through the regional states they are located in. Their interactions with the international society of states, multilateral and international organisations and sub-state actors occur in a normative and political context that influences both states and non-state actors.

This book contributes to the scholarly work on self-determination, nationalism and territoriality by integrating the Kurdish case into the debates on these phenomena. The Kurdish case is underrepresented in the discipline of International Relations (IR) and in the study of Nationalism despite its potential for generating new insights and lessons. The book approaches the study of Kurds in a way that has been neglected to date by offering a new perspective to the study of territoriality and presenting an in-depth historical case study from an IR perspective. It connects the evolution of Kurdish territoriality and Kurdish politics to the international level.

The analysis developed in this book also contributes to the scholarly work on Kurdish politics. The existing work in this literature with an international angle examines the Kurds in each state and looks at how Kurdish politics influences the domestic, regional and international relations of these states (Voller 2014; Gunter 2011a; Natali 2010, 2005; Barkey and Fuller 1998; Kirişçi and Winrow 1997). The literature also offers valuable analyses with different disciplinary perspectives, such as history, politics, sociology and anthropology.[1] However, an IR analysis of Kurdish politics is missing in the literature. This book meets this gap and it looks at Kurdish politics in totality, rather than country-by-country and situates this case in an international context.

Additionally, the book's focus on Kurdish territoriality fills another gap in Kurdish studies. Even though territoriality is a significant feature of Kurdish nationalism and its politics, there is limited literature on territoriality, except social and political geographers O'Shea's (2004) and Culcasi's (2010, 2006) works that study Kurdistan from a political geography perspective. This book builds on O'Shea and Culcasi's useful insights but situates the case in an international framework. O'Shea argued that the map of greater Kurdistan does not reflect the realities of Kurdish society or the region as a whole. She defined this map as a 'propaganda map' and saw it as a symbol of the effort to construct a Kurdish nationalist myth based on historical and territorial

[1] Literature on the Kurds with historical, political, sociological and anthropological perspectives has been growing since the 2000s. Some examples are Stansfield and Shareef 2017; Eppel 2016; Galip 2015; Tezcür 2016; Allsopp 2014; Bajalan 2013; Bengio 2014; King 2013; Entessar 2009; Lowe and Stansfield 2010; Olson 2009; Tejel 2008; Heper 2007; Tahiri 2007; Jabar and Dawod 2006; Jwaideh 2006; Romano 2006; O'Leary et al. 2005; Özoğlu 2004; Vali 2003.

perceptions or imaginations (O'Shea 2004: 4). In her book, O'Shea examined the maps of Kurdistan and historical narratives about the origins of the Kurds as constructions created in order to produce a sense of unity in the minds of the people and to enable them to connect their identity to the territory they inhabit. Culcasi looked at the role of orientalist discourses in the American journalistic geography of Kurdistan in presenting the Kurds in a way that supported and verified the United States' geopolitical and ideological position. Yet what is neglected is the international dimension and the international normative context in the construction of this map and how it is perceived.

The Kurds and Their Territory

One of the most common phrases that define the Kurds is 'the largest nation without a state'[2] spread in a huge geography encompassing large swathes of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria and a small part of Armenia.[3] Even if practical support and demand among the Kurds for a unified pan-Kurdistan is low, the idea that four states (five if Armenia is included) currently exist across what is 'naturally' Kurdish territory has resonance in the minds of both Kurds and some outsiders as the continued and widespread use of the map of greater Kurdistan shows. The idea of territorial homeland played an important role in the emergence and development of Kurdish nationalism and it is central to understanding Kurdish nationalist groups' activities today. Despite this, the territorial aspect of Kurdish nationalism remains understudied and unproblematised in the academic literature. Existing studies depict the history of the region as the history of Kurdistan but fail to interrogate the basis and suppositions underpinning the assumption that a minority nationalism simply has a right to a territorial expression. In other words, most of these studies see the history of Kurdistan as identical to the history Kurdish nationalism (Hassanpour 2003),

[2] Despite the existence of possibly larger peoples without states such as the Tamils, an estimated population of 70 million spread across Sri Lanka, Mauritius, India, Malaysia and Singapore.

[3] There is also a large Kurdish diaspora in Europe and the United States, and substantial and long-standing Kurdish communities in Central Anatolia in Turkey, Khorasan in Iran, in Central Asia, Azerbaijan, Lebanon, Georgia and Armenia as a result of imperial deployments and forced deportations, and migration to escape persecution or conflict. In Turkey, a large proportion of Kurds live in big cities such as Istanbul and Izmir.

essentialising this territorial identity and underestimating the prevalence of political claims behind it.

The concept of Kurdistan refers to a space, an area or a region, but in this book, this concept is used for ease of description. Space is '*structural*' not territorial (Agnew 1994: 55, emphasis in the original). The territorial conception of space takes its representation for granted and this conception is quite dominant in the study of societies and politics. The structural conception of space, on the other hand, acknowledges its fluid and changing nature and its relationship with other social, economic and political factors (Agnew 1994: 55). The use of the concept of Kurdistan, therefore, does not imply that the region was historically defined as Kurdistan, or its inhabitants were all Kurdish, or the area had clearly demarcated borders/or its extent was clear. The concept of Kurdistan does not refer to ahistorical and ontologically permanent locations or territories but to the geographical context upon which social, economic and political interactions take place and in return, to a territory or geography shaped by these interactions (Agnew 1994: 56).

Territory is usually understood to be obvious or self-evident (Elden 2010). Mainstream perspectives in IR usually do not define territory – instead they see it as state territory defined in terms of jurisdictional control over a physical area and the people living on it (Kadercan 2015: 128). In this book, a political geography definition of territory is adopted, which connects territory directly to human agency and relations of power. In that sense, territoriality, the link between territory and society, is the primary concern here. The way Kurdistan and its map have been framed, used and interpreted throughout history have depended on how the relationship between nation and territory was understood in each period. The meaning and function of self-determination, a key international norm related to the legitimacy of political authority in international relations, had constitutive roles in shaping the relationship between the people and territory. In other words, the changes in the meaning and function of this international norm have, in turn, changed the way the relationship between a national people and 'their' territory – territoriality – is perceived.

Kurdish nationalism asserts self-determination claims to territorial autonomy or independence based on a distinct cultural and ethnic identity. Kurdish activists, especially since the second part of the twentieth century, have disseminated the idea of Kurdistan to the

international community through framing this promotion in the language of human rights, democracy and self-determination. This was done to enhance the legitimacy of their claims to democratic countries whose endorsement and support they seek. Kurds have been more successful than other smaller groups in the Middle East, such as the Assyrian Christians in Turkey, Syria and Iraq or the Turkmens and Yazidis in Iraq, in drawing attention to themselves and generating support and sympathy for the issues they have in each state and their desire to be recognised as a distinct people.

Today, Kurds in Iraq enjoy official or de jure autonomy as a region in a federal Iraq. They have their own government, parliament, administration and military forces. Meanwhile, although heavily suppressed in the past, since the onset of the war, Kurds in Syria have carved a de facto autonomy in the north of the country, labelled as Rojava by the Kurds. In Turkey, the military conflict between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK, *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*) and the state army has been ongoing since 1984, interrupted by a short period of talks between 2012 and 2015. The PKK gave up on its goal for independence since early 2000s and now seeks decentralisation within a system it calls 'democratic confederalism'. In Iran Kurdish political activists are facing a struggle to survive under an oppressive regime, but Kurds have historically benefited from some degree of cultural and linguistic rights in this country. Each of these groups faces different challenges, have different leaderships and pursue different goals. What is more, these goals and leaderships have often come into conflict with one another in the past and the war in Syria has exacerbated these divisions further in many key respects (Kaya and Whiting 2017).

Given this picture, it is a fair statement to say that each Kurdish nationalist organisation typically defines its goals and problems in a way that is limited to the country they reside in, with regional activities pursued especially by the PKK, but also by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in Iraq at a more limited level. No contemporary Kurdish nationalist party in the Middle East so far has made an explicit demand to establish a greater Kurdistan that would unite all the Kurds living in different states within a new single political entity and each Kurdish political movement has its own understanding of the boundaries of the territory they wish to have full or administrative control over. Despite this, the map of greater Kurdistan has gained resonance in both Kurdish and

international discourses and is a highly influential tool in advancing Kurdish separatist and autonomist demands.

The Map of Greater Kurdistan

Kurds have been using the map of greater Kurdistan since the early twentieth century to depict the Kurdish homeland, much to the annoyance of the states in which they are located. Kurdish nationalists see the map of greater Kurdistan as the cartographical reflection of the Kurdish territory. Kurdistan as a homeland and its maps are commonly used in the rhetoric of almost all Kurdish nationalist organisations and activist groups, both in the region and in the diaspora. Kurdish nationalist historiography claims ownership of this territory since 4,000 BCE. Like other nationalisms it has a subjective view of national existence that goes back to 'time immemorial' and deploys past geographic and administrative terms to promote the idea that a Kurdish nation existed centuries ago (Nezan 1996; Izady 1992). In so doing, Kurdish nationalist historiography associates pre-modern meanings of 'Kurdistan' or 'Kurdishness' to the contemporary uses of national, territorial and political identity (O'Shea 2004: 2–3; McDowall 1996b: 3).

Kurdish activists have produced many historical, sociological and political texts to legitimise and prove the Kurdish right to statehood and have created and distributed multiple maps of Kurdistan. Maps are useful tools for presenting nationalist views. The cartographic image of a territory with clear boundaries and a name that makes reference to a people gives the message that the territory and the people inhabiting it are related. In fact, this usage has moved beyond the discourse of Kurdish nationalists. For example, Bob Filner, Democrat Congressman for California's 51st District pleaded for the recognition of Kurdish self-determination at the United States Congress on 1 May 1997. The justification he put forth was that Kurds have been ruling the area they inhabit since 2,000 BCE and the Kurds (then Gutis) ruled today's Persia and Mesopotamia 4,000 years ago. He declared that despite this historical legacy, Kurds have been denied the right to nationhood and self-determination. Frank Pallone, Congressman for the 6th district of New Jersey, in a speech also on 1 May 1997, appealed for Kurdish self-determination and requested the United States government stop giving Turkey military support and making arms deals with it. Pallone gave another statement to the Congress on 6 April 2000, referring to his 1997

address and referring to the 'lands of Kurdistan' and calling for support for action to stop the persecution of Kurds and violation of their rights in the hands of states.

The map of greater Kurdistan has become one of the prominent features and symbols of Kurds. It has become synonymous with the idea of 'Kurdistan' in the minds of the Kurds and become a significant feature of Kurdish nationalist discourse. Kurdish parties do not promote this map or include it as a territorial goal in their party programmes, but they use it to justify the ethnic presence of Kurds on the territory the map depicts. There is a striking similarity between Kurdish nationalists' and outsiders' descriptions of Kurdistan. The idea that there is a direct link between the area represented on these maps and the people living in that area has become embedded in both Kurdish and international political discourses. As it has come to be seen as a natural territory, it has come to 'inscribe boundaries and construct objects that in turn become our realities' (Pickles 2004: 145).

The Power of Political Maps and Territoriality

The power of political maps partly comes from their perceived objectivity and naturalness. We see the world through maps. The world, from a traditional IR perspective, is composed of state territories that frame the nation and the space it controls. The world political map reifies the idea of a world divided into sovereign domestic spaces of control and political authority (Black 2000: 12). Political maps are widely used in state offices, schools, newspapers and other forms of media, internet, flags and political pamphlets, which in turn further perpetuate our image of the world (Vujakovic 2002: 377–9). In this process, particular understandings of politics, society or the world a map depicts become common sense, as if the map reflects reality in a neutral and transparent way (Weldes 1996: 303). Because of the perception that maps are scientific, the sense of territorial control and the boundaries of states appear both objective and natural.

Critical geographers challenged the idea that maps reflect objective cartographic information (Pickles 2004; Crampton 2001; Black 2000). They argued that the mapping process produces the territory and the identity of the people that live in that territory. Maps, including state maps, are social and political constructs shaped and understood through temporal, social and political contexts and discourses

(Crampton and Krygier 2006: 15–17). Social constructions are things we consider as common sense because they appear to reflect reality, like gender roles or identity. Societies usually take social constructions for granted, as something natural, and hardly question their origins (Weldes 1996: 279–80). In the case of maps, those who are inside the boundaries of a map are considered to share an identity, different from those who are outside those borders (Anderson 1991), overlooking the fact that historically boundaries change, and do so more often than assumed.

The power of political maps also derives from the discourse through which we see cartographic images. There is interplay between the map and our knowledge of shared ideas and dominant discourse (Weldes 1996: 286). The overlap between dominant narratives of national identity and territoriality, in other words the idea that the world is composed of nations and their territories, is at the source of the power of political maps. Conceptions of nation and homeland constitute the context through which we understand maps. These conceptions are underpinned by notions of nationhood and territoriality, which change over time and in turn shape the way we perceive cartographic information.

Our conceptions of national identity and territoriality not only shape how we see the maps of states but also maps of aspirational territories, claimed homelands of aspirant nations. The contemporary international system builds on territorially defined national units and nation-states represented on the world map, which are perceived to have internationally recognised sovereignty (Krasner 1999: 9–25). Separatist nationalists use the same logic; they use maps of their imagined homeland to show their location in the world and imply that they deserve sovereignty over their territory in the same way that other recognised sovereign entities have. In that sense, cartographic images can become political tools not only for recognised states but also for those who seek recognition, such as separatist and autonomist nationalists. Maps become tools for showing competing understandings of territorial reality on the same land (Culcasi 2006: 681), making maps divisive.

Separatist and autonomist nationalists aim to achieve autonomy or devolved authority within the state or to form their own state on behalf of their nation on the territory over which they claim ownership (Breuilly 2001: 32). In that sense, when demanding self-determination, they claim