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Nationalism and Diaspora in Cyberspace:

The case of the Kurdish diaspora on social media

by

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Table of Contents

List of Acronyms

AKP	Justice and development Party
Bakur	North Kurdistan (Kurdistan of Turkey)
Bashur	South Kurdistan (Kurdistan of Iraq)
Gorran	Change Movement
HDP	People's Democratic Party
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JK	Society for the Revival of Kurds
KCK	Kurdistan Communities Union
KDP	Democratic Part of Kurdistan/Iraq
Komala	Society of Revolutionary Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan
KRG	Kurdistan regional Government
PDKI	Democratic Party of Kurdistan-Iran
Peshmarga	Kurdish Guerrillas
PJAK	Kurdistan's Free Life Party
PKK	Kurdistan Workers Party
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
PYD	Democratic Union Party
Rojava	West Kurdistan (Kurdistan of Syria)
Rojhelt	East Kurdistan (Kurdistan of Iran
YPG	People's Protection Unit

Table of Figure & Photos

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Abstract

Kurds in the diaspora have attempted to achieve nationalist aspirations: to build, activate, define, and redefine their national identity in new social media spaces. Kurdish symbols, nationalistic discourses and interactions used in the social media are deployed to disseminate and define a specific identity for the Kurds, and thereby distinguish themselves as a stateless nation. In doing so, they have moved beyond the features of a dormant diaspora towards becoming an active stateless diaspora. They have exploited a variety of media –satellite TV channels, journals and internet resources, etc. – to represent their collective identity, and have endeavoured to move forward in their articulation of Kurdish national identity as a stateless nation.

Using the lens of a theoretical approach to nationalism that is primarily ethno-symbolist, but also draws on some selected elements of modernism, this PhD dissertation examines the distinctive roles that social media play for the diasporic Kurds in attempting to articulate the concept of a distinct stateless nation and engage in a nationhood process. Analysing data through online ethnographic content analysis, the dissertation attempts to understand not only how social media have influenced the discourse of Kurdish nationalism in the diaspora, but also how the totality of the notion of *Kurdayeti* [Kurdish national identity] has been affected by the growth of Kurdish social media. It claims that the interactions and connections between nodes within Kurds have been accelerated by the rise of social media and ethnic identity discussions have become much more visible. However, the idea of a unified imagined Kurdish nation has been affected by the existing socio-political fragmentations among the Kurds and transformed into a participatory and pluralistic imagined community by embracing further democratic elements.

Key Words: Kurdish Nationalism, Diaspora, Stateless Nations, Social Media, Imagined Community, Ethnie

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Research Statement

Forced migration, and other political, social, cultural and economic factors have resulted in the dispersion, spreading or scattering of members of many nations from their original homeland. The spreading of people has given rise to a new form of nationalism that operates outside of a particular country that is called diaspora nationalism and it has attracted the interest of scholars from several disciplines. In other words, the experiences of forced migration and displacement comprise a considerable narrative of many of those in diaspora communities scattered throughout the world (Brubaker, 2005). These experiences also make the issues of original homeland, culture, society and politics more meaningful and visible for the diasporic groups.

Whilst diaspora is comprised of a number of people who have emigrated to another country, they still maintain their contacts and feel as if they still belong to their homeland. In this regard, they express their collective identity and become active in social and political issues in the homeland and in the host land. The shared experience of exile and dislocation as well as the desire for the homeland serve as the influential symbols in mobilising people and the concept that is referred to as the 'popular politics of place' which aims at the articulation and building of collective identities(Gupta & Ferguson, 1992, p. 12). This brings about questions related to spatial importance, including why and how they are created, and how isomorphic relations to culture, identity, place, and nation are imagined.

Because of their ethnic background that differs from the Arabs, the Turks and the Persians, and also due to all the sufferings they have experienced as a result of subordination by the old empires and the new states extending along and over their land, the Kurds have developed a clear sense of collective Kurdish identity that is synonymous with an ethno-national identity referred to as *Kurdayeti*. Today, there are an estimated 30 to 40 million Kurds located in the territory called Kurdistan or scattered in the diaspora. Apart from political recognition, Kurds possess almost all of the characteristics to be called a nation, including their own language, a specific geography, history, common origin, culture, religion and the feeling of oneness. There is a famous saying about the Kurds that says 'they belong

to four countries, but they do not have a country themselves.' This is the reason the Kurds are referred to as the 'largest stateless nation' in the world.

There is a close relationship between Kurdish nationalism and exile in the modern period. Diaspora and separation from their homeland have been inseparable parts of the Kurdish collective and individual life (Van Bruinessen, 2000). Similarly, it has significantly influenced Kurdish history and more specifically, aspects related to the development of Kurdish national cohesion (McDowall 2004). The Kurds, voluntarily or forcefully, have been displaced from their homeland throughout history. In the modern era, the most significant wave of 'forced migration' of the Kurds happened at the end of the Cold War. Since then, various kinds of forced migration, such as, refugee streams, displacement and asylum seekers, have increased significantly (Ayata, 2011; Bruinessen, 2000; Khayati, 2008).

Likewise, the size of the Kurdish diaspora in Western countries has considerably augmented since the 1960s and they have gradually become more aware of their national identity, especially after the 1980s. They became involved in cultural, social and political activities, and steadily became politicised. This resulted in establishing several unions and organisations attached to the concept of Kurdistan as their homeland and as an independent country in the future. The exiled Kurds have preserved or restored a sense of Kurdish identity, and have collectively organised into a variety of associations and networks. Within the constraints and possibilities of exile, the Kurds have strengthened their networks through various means of communication throughout the diaspora, which has made it possible for them to become (re-) oriented toward Kurdistan, and their place of origin (Khayati, 2008, p. 85). This is important because, for example, during the first wave of migration to Europe as international labour, the Kurds of Turkey introduced themselves as Turkish while in Western countries. Gradually, however they have shifted to describing themselves as Kurds not explicitly identified with Turkey or other nation-states that have encompassed Kurdistan (Baser, 2013; Bruinessen 2000; Eliassi, 2016).

As a 'stateless diaspora' (Eliassi, 2016, 2016a), the Kurds in exile have taken advantage of new technologies, such as, print, broadcasting and the Internet media in order to 'propagate a specifically Kurdish view of the world' (Romano, 2006, p. 151). The advent of media technology has greatly influenced the articulation of identities and the 'politics of recognition' (Diamandaki, 2003) for the Kurdish diaspora as the 'largest stateless diaspora'

in the world. With the first Kurdish newspaper, Kurdistan, published in 1898, Kurdish print media started to advance (Hassanpour, 1998). Since that time, many Kurds have taken advantage of media technologies (including print and broadcasting) in order to reproduce and develop their own political discourses and also to promote their national demands.

As a result of the emergence of Kurdish satellite TV stations, the Kurds throughout their troubled and 'divided history' were able to "see their own lives, their own reality, reflected on the television screens across the world"(Romano, 2006, p. 153). The Kurds were the first stateless nation in the world to set up a separate satellite TV network, MED-TV, in 1994 (p. 153). The TV was mainly organised and broadcasted by the Kurdish political activists in Europe. Moreover, one of the first influences of the Kurds 'on air' was the challenging of the dominant sovereignty of the states over the land of the Kurds, Kurdistan. The Kurdish MED-TV addressed the subject of clashes between the Kurds and the Middle Eastern states that ruled over the Kurdistan, and "this changed the theatre of war in favour of the Kurds… and the Kurds felt that they have achieved sovereignty in the sky" (Hassanpour, 1998, p. 53). But the most important influence of the emergence of Kurdish satellite and visual media has been empowering and promoting Kurdish ethnic/national consciousness among the Kurds themselves both in the homeland and in the diaspora (Hassanpour 1998; Khayati 2008; Romano 2006; Sheyholislami, 2011).

Another turning point in the history of the Kurdish national movement has to do with the introduction of the Internet and the social media platform. The advent and rapid improvement in online communication technologies coincided with several changes both in Kurdistan and in the diaspora, including the emergence of the Kurdistan Regional Governments in Iraq, and the mobilisation of the Kurds in Europe. The Kurdish symbols, nationalistic discourses and interactions used in social media are viewed as the best way to disseminate and define a specific identity for the Kurds, and thereby distinguish themselves as a stateless nation online. In so doing, they have moved beyond the features of 'dormant' diaspora toward an 'active diaspora'(Sheffer, 2003).

In regard to a basic definition, social media platforms are a cluster of 'internet-based applications' (Kaplan, 2010) which have enabled the dispersed diasporic groups and communities to pursue opportunities to hold, express, and share their identities, views, and aims without some of the restrictions that exist in traditional, official or mainstream media.

Social media have contributed to the realisation of the previously theorised 'death of distance' (Saunders 2011) for the Kurdish diaspora. Critically, these new media platforms have reduced the hardships of face to face communication and emerged as a communicative-interactive medium and serve as tools with the capability of influencing almost all aspects of human social, cultural and political activities. The Kurds in the diaspora are easily connected to their fellows, both in the Kurdish homeland and in other places in throughout the world. They *find* their old friends, and they also make new friends; *upload* and *post* their own words, and *share, like and comment* on each other's social media presences. The activities on social media area are not limited to only friendship and family issues, as for example, there are numbers of pages on Facebook with a high number of Kurdish fans addressing everything from traditional bread to politics (Wood, 2013). These new sort of interactions provide an interesting and necessary subject of research to look more closely at how issues of political and national identity and social media are conceptualised in the academic literature.

By accessing the new technologies, especially the Internet, the Kurdish diaspora, as claimed by Keles (2015), has been able to form many 'ties and social connectedness' and contribute to the political and cultural development in their homeland and their residing countries. The Kurdish diaspora is actively using social media to interact with other fellows throughout the world. Learning, introducing and promoting language, identity, history, literature, and most importantly politics, are some other important subjects of concern for a high number of the Kurds on social media, although the representation of this concerns is different among the generations of Kurdish diaspora. Since Kurdistan is not officially recognised as a state, many members of Kurdish diaspora have chosen to express their national aspirations through discussions about the Kurdish nation and state or nation-state building on the Internet, social media and other new communication technologies.

This PhD dissertation examines the distinctive roles that social media can play for the diasporic Kurds in terms of articulating and constructing the narrative of Kurdish national identity in the diaspora. It mainly looks at the question through the lens of the theories of nationalism and national identity as they relate to the political and sociological implications of the Kurdish diaspora's collective discourses, and also in relation to their actions on the Internet and through social media. As has been shown in previous studies (Eliassi, 2013,

2016; Jacob, 2013; Keles, 2015; Mahmod, 2016; Sheyholislami, 2011), the Kurdish diaspora searches for the significance and meaning of their national identity in elements such as ethnicity, culture, gender, religion, and so on in order to 'remember' and 'forget' in the way of their formation of an 'imagined community' or beyond. By adopting an online ethnographical approach, the research attempts to understand the effect of social media and how social media have influenced the discourse of Kurdish nationalism in the diaspora, in addition to the way the totality of the notion of *Kurdayeti* [Kurdish national identity] has been affected by the growth of Kurdish social media.

1.2 The research question(s):

Today, social media have become the most popular media among the Kurds, especially for those living in the diaspora. The interactions and connections between the nodes within the Kurdish diaspora raise many questions and bring them to the fore, the most important of which, for this research is: *What roles do social media play in the construction and articulation of national identity among the Kurdish diaspora?*

And there are two secondary questions as well: *What are the distinctive elements of Kurdish national identity construction through social media in comparison to the process as it takes place in the mainstream media*? And, *how do the Kurds in the diaspora imagine their nation and national identity in social media?*

1.3 Hypothesis

The Kurds in the diaspora have exploited a variety of media –satellite TV channels, journals and Internet resources, and so forth – to represent their collective identity, and have endeavoured to articulate Kurdish national identity as a *stateless nation*. Diaspora has been a key factor in the development of Kurdish nationalism and national identity especially, by using and promoting media technologies.

The main hypothesis of this research study is: Since the interactions and connections between the nodes within the Kurdish diaspora have been accelerated by the rise of social media, national identity discussions have become much more visible. Concurrently, social media have enabled the Kurdish diaspora to overcome geographical barriers and have offered them, especially the younger generation of diasporic Kurds, a safe haven for the

expression of the diverse aspects of their culture, politics and identity. This was not so effortlessly achieved via Kurdish mainstream media. Moreover, it is the pluralist nature of social media that has transformed the Kurdish diaspora nationalism into an inclusive, critical, and participatory arena in which their national identity is constructed through the activities of ordinary users of the social media, and not the few educated and politically well-connected nationalist elites.

1.4 Personal Journey

Although the analysis of this research is based on an ethnographic review of Facebook pages and groups conducted for almost one year, my personal background has considerably informed and motivated the current research. Having experienced and participated in the online arena and social media for about 12 years as a Kurdish activist and scholar and then moving to the diaspora during the second half of my twenties, I gained a deep personal experience and understanding of the Kurdish national movement as well as the Kurdish diaspora. This in depth experience afforded me with an insider perspective to the discourse of Kurdish nationalism and the diaspora, and now I have combined this perspective with the research skills and added knowledge of social sciences.

There are aspects of my life in which I have been influenced by the Kurdish media, both broadcast and Internet media. I grew up in Iranian Kurdistan (Eastern Kurdistan) and I remember my childhood life when the voice of Kurdish radios were echoing in our house every morning and night and it became the reason for families and friends gathering to discuss *Kurdayeti* and the political struggles of Kurds. I can recall the early days during the time Kurdish satellite TVs started broadcasting from the diaspora and how influential they were in raising political and national awareness among the Kurds in the homeland. Likewise, I myself was actually one of the first users of online chatrooms in a small Kurdish town in Iranian Kurdistan; I clearly remember how important the Internet and social media were in facilitating communication between myself and the other Kurds in Europe and around the world. When I signed up for a Yahoo email account and then joined some Chatrooms on Yahoo Messenger, MSN and Paltak, I was amazed at how easily I could speak about Kurdayeti with Kurds from all over the world. It cannot be disregarded that I always had concerns about my security while I was living inside Iran and if my online involvements in the Kurdish cause had been discovered by the Iranian authorities I could have been

prosecuted and could have had to cope with many serious consequences. Despite the likely dangers, I can still remember how happy I was at the time I first joined Facebook, became reconnected with old friends and found new friends especially those Kurdish activists and groups in the diaspora. The feeling of preserving and continuing these connections with Kurds across the world was empowering for me because I felt I was not alone. I felt I was surrounded and supported by a large circle of other Kurds who were also speaking about and supporting the Kurdish nation. Moreover, through posting statuses, comments and photos on my Facebook page, I felt that I had access to a massive global medium so that I could perform and articulate my Kurdish identity as well as my cosmopolitan identity. It helped me to understand and discuss my Kurdish identity through several facets of my life. So at the time I relocated to New Zealand to undertake my PhD studies in politics and international relations at the University of Auckland, I started thinking about how I could relate these personal online media experiences to a solid research question. This past experience has played a part as one of the most important motivators that has ignited and fuelled my PhD research.

This research adopts an ethnography method online combined with a qualitative content analysis as a suitable method for exploring the role of the media in mediating and as platforms for the discursive building of national identity among the Kurdish diaspora. The use of such a method in this study indicates that the areas of Kurdish social media can benefit from a researcher who has a deep understanding of the Kurds as the subject of the study. Although this study has reviewed and observed many social media platforms, including Twitter, YouTube, and various forms of online newspapers as sites of mediating Kurdish national identity, Facebook still remains the main site that has been observed consistently and thoroughly. Since I have had experience using this site for several years I wanted to explore it in a systematic way to understand how other Kurds may have experienced it. Therefore, I am both unavoidably a 'participant' and committed to rigorous investigation that is also reflexive (self-reflective). Accordingly, as I will be discussing this in the next chapter, this thesis worked best by relating it to my past experiences. However, I have always remembered my commitment to the methods as a social science scholar and I have scrupulously tried to avoid any personal or nationalist-biased judgments.

1.5 Importance of the research

The discussions of the relationship of exile and nationalism are closely related to the research on Kurdish nationalism due to the fact that the Kurds in exile and those in the homeland have had very close connections together, and Kurdish nationalist performances in the diaspora have considerably affected the notion of the Kurdish nation, nationalism and the aspirations for an independent state. In general, there exist three main standpoints in diaspora studies: emigration, homeland and immigration perspectives. The first approach views diaspora from an emigrant angle that is involved in the issues of the homeland and the ways emigrants are uprooted from their original homeland to the diaspora. The second approach considers the mutual relationships between nationalist movements in the homeland and diaspora and the ways nationalism in the homeland becomes a source of meaning for further mobilisation of diaspora. Finally, the immigration perspective concentrates on the issues within the host societies which the members of diaspora communities are faced with in their everyday life, including integration and citizenship, and so on. The current study contributes to the literature related to the first two approaches by looking at the diaspora from the perspective of the broader theories of nationalism, nation-building and national identity.

Furthermore, the case of the Kurds appears to encompass many issues of importance. This demands broadening our understanding of the Kurdish diaspora that is in a complex relationship with the host countries and the transformations within the homeland, i.e. a territory ruled by the four states. Over the last decade, certain changes occurred in their region of origin; the Kurdish issue has been internationalised and the Kurds have been increasingly recognised as 'Kurds' in the diaspora countries where they reside. The number of Kurds in the diaspora has increased and they are in closer contacts with Kurds in the four parts of Kurdistan, especially with the Kurdish autonomous governments in both Iraq and Syria and both have become influential players in the regional interactions of the Middle East today.

As Marshall McLuhan (1967, 2008) said, media is an 'extension of man.' This basic idea is true while speaking about the Kurdish diaspora who have dispersed either voluntarily or forcefully. The nature and capabilities of social media allowed the Kurdish diaspora to organise, recruit, and communicate information in a way that has never been available

before. Up to now, there has been some outstanding research on the role of the media in the development of Kurdish national identity in which the diaspora play a key role. Furthermore, scholars have cast light on the role of the mainstream media and the Kurdish diaspora in Kurdish nationalism (Hassanpour, 1998; Romano, 2002; Sheyholislami, 2011). However, there have been very few efforts to study the Kurdish online media and diaspora. The focus of the work that is available about online Kurdish nationalism has been on the Kurdish diasporic media in general, not on the development and transformation of nationalism. In 2016, during the time my research reached the final stage, Jowan Mahmod published her book, *Kurdish Diaspora Online* (2016) in which she argues that new media, contrary to print and broadcasting media, have functioned against national unity and weakened the notion of imagined community: "Online activities and communications between people and across borders suggest that digital media has strong implications for different articulations of identity and belongingness, which open new ways of thinking about the imagined community" (p. 207). Although the arguments of this book will also be subjects for the discussions in the final chapters of this study, as our studies have some overlap, I will be arguing in a rather different way by focusing on the developments in the Kurdish national identity process in which the Kurdish diaspora plays a key role. Instead of a focus on imagined communities as weaker or stronger, my study looks at the transformations in terms of the articulation of Kurdish national identity in the diaspora and its differences with the previous print and broadcasting media.

In this sense, this research contributes to a better understanding of Kurdish nationalism online, especially amongst the Kurdish diaspora on social media and the roles these media play in the articulation, construction or transformation of Kurdish nationalism. In addition to exploring the role of both the mainstream and the online media in the construction of diasporic Kurdish identities, this research would probably be one of the few studies that reveal how national identity is employed and continued in the everyday life of the diasporic Kurds through social media. It seeks to contribute to the literature of online nationalism and diaspora in order to address a number of questions arising from the ways in which new technologies, especially Internet/social media, pose for the Kurdish diaspora and Kurdish national identity. The distinguishing point of my work from others of the sort is that I will be focusing on the nationalism of social media practised by the Kurdish diaspora specifically,

which provides a closer and more detailed understanding of the Kurdish diaspora's nationalist practices online. Moreover, my use of ethnographic content analysis (as discussed in the methodology chapter) is a new method in the area of diaspora research in general, and in the Kurdish diaspora, in particular.

Beyond the Kurdish case and diaspora and nationalism literature, I believe this research will make a significant contribution to the study of identity politics and media. It provides a closer reading and analysis of nationalism and politics by examining the role of social media in public political and in social life. Also, this study contributes to the literature about the social and discursive construction and development of national identities, including stateless national identity. It enriches the arguments that national identity is constructed from below and not only by the elite few, as modernist theorists have argued. What makes this study unique is its examination of the complex interconnection between online social media / new media, diaspora and homeland, in terms of the construction of Kurdish national identity. Finally, these arguments have resulted in asking if and under which conditions there has been an effective Kurdish national identity that has been constructed? Will the Kurdish diaspora's transnationalism and interconnectedness online forge a path for the transformation of the Kurdish public sphere and nationalist discourse?

1.6 Structure of the thesis

This research is divided into two parts. The first part (Chapters Two to Five) comprises the methodology overview, the historical background, the relevant literature review, and the dominant narratives on the theories of nationalism, national identity and the diaspora in general and in the Kurdish case, in particular. The second part (Chapters Six to Nine) of the thesis deals with the discussions of the Kurdish media and presents the findings of the observation, analysis and the conclusion.

Chapter Two introduces the methodological considerations and the primary research plan in further detail. At the beginning, it classifies the literature related to nationalism, national identity, diaspora, the Internet and social media as well as the literature about the Kurds, Kurdistan and the Kurdish diaspora. Later, it presents the research design and methodological positioning of the research, by explaining the reasoning for the selection of the qualitative research and ethnographic content analysis (ECA) as the most suitable

approach to investigate the Kurdish diaspora's nationalist activities on the social media, in particular, on Facebook.

Chapter Three presents an introduction to the historical, social, cultural and political background of the Kurds in the homeland(s) and in the diaspora. In addition to a discussion on the origin and history of the Kurds, this chapter discusses the existing fragmentations within the Kurdish societies and positions it as a base for later discussions on the issues and problems on the way of Kurdish national identity. Thus, this chapter sets the scene for the discussion of Kurdish nationalism and diaspora in later chapters. It argues that Kurdish political movements in the 20th century developed as a reaction to the unwilling division of Kurdish territories and formation of unitary states in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Since then, nationalism has acted as a political movement, adopting and evolving as a minority within one of the newly founded states.

As a conceptual and theoretical base, chapter Four deals with contesting theories and ideas regarding the concepts of *nationalism*, *diaspora nationalism,* and *nation building*, and online nationalism as well their development in the context of globalisation. Through exploring the three dominant approaches to nationalism, including primordialism, modernism and ethno-symbolism, the first part of the chapter focuses on the strategic role the nationalist historical writings play in discursive constructions of the nation and national identity. The second part of the chapter focuses on the literature on diaspora and transnationalism, especially, the stateless diasporas. The third part of the chapter is to establish an appropriate theoretical background for the subject of national identity or nation-state formation and its evolution in the social media and online arena.

Relying on the theories of nationalism discussed in chapter Four, the first part of chapter Five discusses the Kurdish nationalism and Kurdish national identity narratives and the first development of Kurds as a collective political identity. This part seeks to understand the theories behind the origin and the development of Kurdish nationalism both in the homeland and in the diaspora. It provides an intermediary approach to the emergence and development of Kurdish nationalism that is more aligned with the ethno-symbolist perspective yet has some elements of modernist theory too. The Second part of chapter Five provides an overview of the formation and development of Kurdish diaspora and the ways those in the diaspora have contributed to the Kurdish movements in the homeland

through various organisational, financial, personal and intellectual forms in their host countries. The third part of this chapter discusses the notion of Kurdish nationalism in the diaspora and presents some theoretical arguments regarding how the Kurdish diasporic discourses support collective actions and political belonging that endeavours to maintain or change the political or geopolitical status quo. It also discusses how the statelessness of the Kurds has caused political inequalities in the countries encompassing Kurdistan and how their statelessness has influenced the Kurdish nationalist narratives. Later, it argues that the diaspora has offered the Kurds a good opportunity to organise and be culturally and politically involved in Kurdish nationalism far away from the homeland.

Chapter Six considers the role of the Kurdish diaspora and its contribution to the development of the Kurdish national identity through print, broadcast and the Internet media. It discusses the emergence of print technology up until the Internet and social media era, as well as the role of Kurdish diaspora in these developments. It argues that through the introduction of media, the Kurdish diaspora has contributed to the construction, and articulation of Kurdish national identity. It also claims that the Internet has provided a different opportunity for the Kurdish diaspora by way of identity discussions, which will become the base for the later discussions on social media in the chapters that follow.

As the longest chapter of the thesis, chapter Seven reports the finding of the study's ethnography and the observation of the collected data that contains the Kurdish diaspora's involvement in Facebook as the leading social network site. It results in the description and analysis of the posts, comments, and all forms of audio-visual communications on the 100 selected pages and groups on Facebook. Through the categorisation of the discussion of the national identity into the four dominant themes (ethnicity, culture, religion, and politics), and several sub-themes, the chapter discusses and analyses the Facebook usage by the Kurdish diasporas.

In Chapter Eight an interpretation of the findings and their analysis is presented, in relation to the previous literature and to the theories of nationalism presented earlier. This chapter elaborates on the significance of social media as complimentary and the new opportunities through which the Kurdish national identity has been presented, expressed and constructed in a different and new way by incorporating many more people. It argues that social media have enabled the Kurdish diaspora to voice their issues, including their fragmented identity

questions that were not possible to be articulated so easily. In this sense, it argues that social media have decentralised the arena of Kurdish national identity and thus resulted in further pluralisation, democratisation, criticism, and glocalisation of the Kurdish nationalism in the diaspora.

In Chapter Nine, the dissertation finishes with a consideration of the study and its findings, as well as presenting suggestions and questions in regard to approaching new issues related to the Kurdish diaspora on social media. It will also consider the relevance of this case study to broader debates and questions on the study of national identity, diaspora and online political identity.

Chapter Two: Research Methodology and technical terminology

2.1 Introduction

The methodology that has been created here has emerged from the practical and theoretical interpretations of the Kurdish diaspora communities that are online. This chapter begins with the methodological considerations from the literature of nationalism, national identity, diaspora, the Internet and social media as well as from the literature about the Kurds, Kurdistan and the Kurdish diaspora. By investigating the role of social media, with a special focus on Facebook as the world's leading social media and social networking site, this research discusses and analyses the dynamics involved in the construction of the Kurdish diaspora and the articulation of the Kurdish national identity. The discussion will include the problems encountered in researching social media, as well as the techniques utilised to point out the issues and the methodological considerations that emerged from the techniques that were selected for the data collection and the analysis. The research applies ethnographic content analysis (ECA), a mixed-method containing elements from both ethnography and qualitative content analysis. Since ECA is not discussed as much compared to the conventional quantitative analysis of media, it is important to clearly explain this type of qualitative methodology.

2.2 Exploring the literature

In general, the studies on diaspora, including Kurdish diaspora studies, view diaspora identity and nationalism from a sociological and purely anthropological perspective. In addition, this thesis provides a political exploration of the national identity as it relates to the Kurdish online diaspora from the point of view that takes into account the theories of nationalism and national identity. In this sense there will be a greater emphasis on media, culture, ethnic ties, politics and conflict-related phenomena that have resulted in the articulation of nationalism and national identity among the Kurdish diaspora. This research is built on a theoretical and empirical foundation to show how the existing data has been reviewed as it relates to a wide range of literature on Kurdish nationalism and diaspora.

This study utilises and discusses the literature from three fields. The first and the most dominant area of the literature relates to nationalism and national identity. As such, it engages in the historical, socio-cultural and political debates on the notion of nation, ethnicity, nationalism and diaspora. Since the literature on nationalism is often classified into three areas that include *primordialism* (Armstrong, 1982, 2004; Hastings (1997), *modernism* or *constructivism* (Anderson, 1992. 2006; Gellner, 1983, 1997; Hobsbawm, 1992) and *ethno-symbolism* (Smith, 1987, 2009, 2010), the current study sets forth and explains each approach and finally adopts an ethno-symbolist approach as the main theoretical base for the research with a selective focus on some elements of modernist approach. Moreover, since diaspora communities represent and practise nationalism, the literature on nationalism and national identity can also be extended to the area of diaspora and transnationalism (Anderson, 1991; Brubaker, 2005; Bulmer, 2009; Cohen, 1997; Dufoix, 2008; Gilory, 1994; Safran, 1991; Sheffer, 2003; Skrbis, 1999). The main aim for delving into this literature is to conceptualise and understand the identity subjects of 'we" and 'other' that are produced and negotiated by the members of ethnic groups and diasporas. This dissertation will discuss, apply and relate these notions to the question of Kurdish nationalism in the diaspora and on social media.

The second part of the literature reviewed for this study has to do with the debates on the Kurds and Kurdistan, including their origin, history, and society as well as the politics (Becikci, 2004; Bengio, 2005; Bozarsalan, 2000; Ghassemlou, 1965; Gunter, 2008, 2011;

Hassanpour, 1992; Izady, 1992; McDowall, 1994, 1996; Natali, 2004; Romano, 2006; Tahiri, 2007; Vali, 2003; 2011; Van Bruinessen, 1992, 1999, 2003). In regard to the aim of reviewing this literature, it is to provide a broader understanding of some parts of Kurdish history that have paved the way for the construction of Kurdish national identity, nationalism and more specifically, the Kurdish diaspora which has been discussed and informed by scholars including Alinia (2004), Baser (2011, 2013), Curtis (2005), Eliassi, (2013, 2016), Hashemi (2013), Hassanpour (2005), Khayati (2008), Qane (2005), Sheikhmous (2000), Tas (2016), Wahlbeck (1998), and Van Bruinessen (2000). While sharing the general characteristics of the diasporic identity, the Kurdish diaspora has distinctive features. The most notable difference is statelessness that has been brought about and defined by specific goals, roles, activities and types of collective activities. This feature will be the focus while applying the theories of diaspora and nationalism to the Kurdish cause.

The third section of the literature that has been reviewed discusses the representation of national identity and diaspora through media (Diamankaki, 2013; Bernal, 2006; Brinkerhoff, 2012; Christiansen, 2004; Georgiou, 2011, Hiller & Franz, 2004). This part occupies a major part of the literature that has been considered because the research intends to realise the notions and impact of utilising media, especially social media as it relates to the articulation and construction of the Kurdish national identity in the diaspora. Thus, certain concepts such as imagined communities, glocalisation and online social capital, will be re-framed and discussed in detail since they are noticeably related to this study. To be concise, this area of literature reflects upon Christiansen's (2004) assertion that "media consumption is a social practice in which a complex problem area, such as, multiculturalism and the social integration of immigrants appears in concrete forms, and in that this practice reveals the cultural-geographic orientation among individual consumers" (p.186). Some of the studies in this section as they relate to the Kurdish case include research by Hassanpour (1998), Keles (2015), Mahmod (2016), Mutlu (2010), and Sheyholislami (2011). This dissertation applies this literature as well as notions and media choices to the Kurdish diaspora as it relates to social media. It will reveal the way the Kurdish diaspora interacts with the online social media representation with respect to building identity and diaspora awareness.

2.3 Fieldwork research methodology

As indicated, the primary research for the thesis is centred on the analysis of the dynamics involved in the construction of the Kurdish diaspora and the articulation of the Kurdish national identity on social media, with a focus on Facebook. Reviewing the research methodologies that have taken Facebook, and other social media platforms (Aguirre, 2014; Jacob, 2013; Mahmod, 2011; Nuermaimaiti, 2012) into account and because the nature of this study involves researching the online community of Kurdish diaspora, the qualitative research method is the most relevant approach. Also, as mentioned previously, compared to the conventional quantitative analysis of media, ECA (ethnographic content analysis) is important and a clear explanation of this type of qualitative methodology is essential to justify the way it is applied in the study. Hence, this section provides a thorough explanation of qualitative research, qualitative content analysis, and ethnography (including the Internet or virtual ethnography) that comprise the components of ECA (ethnographic content analysis). Later, this chapter explains the steps taken in the research process, including the data collection process, the timing, the techniques for analysis and the issues and challenges.

2.3.1 Qualitative research

There are various ways to conduct media analysis, from a quantitative content analysis that counts the incidents and frequency of words, phrases or topics, to a discursive, qualitative analysis that seeks to identify the underlying themes from the contents of the media (Parker, 2011). Since the choice of observation of this researcher includes the area of social network sites site, the research has required a methodology that is thorough in its data collection, and one that considers cultural, social and political settings and one that could be appropriate in terms of a mixture of interactions and modes of communication on social media or social network sites. For these reasons, the researcher chose a qualitative approach for this research.

As it compares with quantitative research, qualitative research has more to do with interpretation than numbers and allows for a greater engagement on the part of the researcher. In other words, the background of the researcher and the engagement with the participants of the study may have an influence on the interpretation of the data (Daymon

& Holloway, 2002, p. 6). A qualitative methodology includes, and is not limited to, the methods, such as, *discourse analysis*, (Van Dijk, 1997), *Rhetorical analysis* (Jamieson, 1984; Harris, 1996), *conversation analysis* (Goodwin 1981; Sacks 1974) and *ethnographic content analysis* (Altheide, 1987, 2013). Despite the different names and the techniques for conducting the research, the various qualitative approaches share the following features:

1. *They require a close reading of relatively small amounts of textual matter.*

2. *They involve the re-articulation (interpretation) of given texts into new narratives accepted within particular scholarly communities that are sometimes opposed to positivist traditions of inquiry.*

3. *The analysts acknowledge working within hermeneutic circles in which their own socially or culturally conditioned understandings constitutively participate* (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 23).

Ethnographic Content Analysis

Taking into account the domain of qualitative approaches, the current research employs Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) (Altheide, 1987, 2013) in order to cast light on both the national identity and media aspects of the research. It focuses on documenting and understanding the communication of meanings. The investigator plays a central role in ECA so that it is different from quantitative content analysis in which the protocol (data collection sheet) is the instrument (Altheide, 2013, p. 26). Thus, an obvious identification with the researcher is a significant factor that might not exist in quantitative research.

This method is a mixed approach and includes qualitative content analysis and ethnography. I argue that ECA is a creative and inductive approach which applies qualitative content analysis to explain the 'reading of texts'. ECA fits well with thematic analysis and narrative discourses, although it "focuses more on situations, settings, styles, images, meaning, and nuances presumed to be recognizable by the human actors/speakers involved" (Krippendorff, 2013, p.23). Since ECA contains both elements of qualitative content analysis and ethnography, it is essential to explain each part of the term separately.

Ethnography

As pointed out (2000), "ethnography is a way of seeing through the participants eyes: a grounded approach that aims for a deep understanding of the cultural foundations of the

group" (p.21). Ethnography has been utilised by many researchers involved in online studies to consider and understand human practices and behaviours and to answer the questions regarding how and why people communicate (Rubin & Piele, 2005). However, the subject of ethnography or participant observation on social media is still new and not very standardised, hence everyone is inclined to name it as s/he desires, creating some confusion and contradictory terminology (Caliandro, 2012). In this respect, research methods concerning the Internet and social media domains have been referred to in various terms including Netography (Kozinets, 2002), 'Internet-mediated Research' (Mathy, Kerr & Haydin, 2003), 'Internet-based Research' (Battles, 2010), 'Cyber-ethnography' (Rybas & Gajjala, 2007); 'Cyber-research' (Tulbure, 2011), and 'Social media ethnography' (Postill & Pink, 2012).

Ethnography can be conducted through the participant observation of the fields, groups and people. In general, the different types of participant observation include 1.) Non-participant observation (researcher observes the activities outside of the study environment), 2.) Passive participation (researcher observes the activities in the setting without participation in activities), 3.) Moderate participation (researcher observes the activities in the setting with nearly full participation), and 4.) Full participation (researcher observes activities with full participation in the setting and culture (Bryman, 2012; Janetzko, 2008; Kawulich, 2005). The type of ethnography used in the current research is the passive participation which I will return to it following in this chapter.

Qualitative Content Analysis

As the name ECA indicates, ethnography is conducted and analysed via a qualitative content analysis (QUALCA) which is one of the many qualitative approaches for analysing data and interpreting its meaning (Elo et al., 2014). QUALCA is an empirical research technique that relies on interpretation rather than quantification and includes subjectivity, flexibility in the process of conducting research plus an orientation towards process and not outcome (Bryman, 2008; Krippendorff, 2004; Patton, 2002; Rudd, 2013). QUALCA has become an important method in social sciences and been used for "the subjective interpretation of text and data through systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns"(Hsieh, 2005, p. 1278).

Whereas many consistent techniques exist for conducting conventional quantitative content analysis (Baxter, 2009, cited in Elo et al., 2014) qualitative content analysis is rather new. As an inductive, constructionist, and interpretive research strategy, the qualitative content analysis research focuses less on numeric data measurements and more on the meaning embedded in the data (Bryman, 2008, p. 366; Neal, 2013, p. 515). As a qualitative analysis, it is "systematic, reliable, and valid" (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 17) and can be used as a complementary technique via social media, i.e., Facebook for a longitudinal study (Kavoura and Tomaras, 2014).

According to Zhang and Wildenmuth (2009) the goal of QUALCA is to categorise the important themes and discover the meanings behind the physical messages to easily describe the social and political realities in a subjective and scientific way (p.1). QUALCA is mostly used for analysing content in various formats (e.g., Internet, television, newspapers, and books) to understand the patterns of the messages (Mangello, 2009). Through this method the researcher plays a key role in the interpretation of the data and the focus of analysis is on the latent or underlying themes that are embedded in the text (Rudd, 2013, p. 154).

2.3.2 Researching virtual spaces through cyber-ethnography

Virtual communities are defined as online social networks in which individuals with common aims and interests or practices share data and information, and participate in social communications (Chiu, Hsu & Wang, 2006). Likewise, owing to the increasing use of the Internet and social media, the research approaches related to the spatially and ideologically marginalised groups have becoming more popular (Ashford, 2009). These developments have contributed to the idea that the Internet itself is a rich source of information as well as being an instrument to investigate 'real' and 'virtual' sites (Ashford, 2009; Hine, 2000), Thus, many have paid close attention to the data collection approaches that can be enriched and developed by the virtual world (Dholakia & Zhang, 2004).

Located within an 'interpretive research paradigm', virtual or cyber-ethnography provides the appearance of a 'reflexive methodology,' hence is gaining momentum in use and credibility in interruption (Keeley-Brown, 2011) and is allowing the members of virtual groups to express their own reality and boundaries (Ward, 2010). Kozinets (1998, 2002,

2010) described cyber-ethnography as "a new qualitative research methodology that adopts ethnographic research techniques to study cultures and communities that are emerging through computer-mediated communications" (Kozinets, 2002, p. 62). The significance of online research for understanding the socio-cultural and social-political phenomena has been well mentioned by Carverlee and Webb (2008):

> *There is a growing demand for understanding this new social phenomenon, understanding the processes by which communities come together, how virtual communities attract new members and develop over time, and understanding what it takes to empower the online communities with the ability to attract and retain a core of members who participate actively* (p. 1).

Similar to real ethnography, cyberspace ethnographers observe the online social media communities in various ways, including active or passive participant or lurking observation (Kozinets, 2010). They explore how users create online social networks which lead to the construction of identity, including cultural and national identity. Cyber-ethnography allows the researcher to explore the way in which social media contribute to the articulation of identities among the ethnic, minority and diaspora communities. Owing to the rapid growth of social media and virtual spaces, the communication will be transformed and this will have a significant impact on the diaspora groups as well. Today, the meaning of community is different from the meaning of five decades ago. Consequently, online media have produced and realised new requirements and facilities for the national identities. Through this possibility, it is supposed that cyber-ethnographic investigations will create valued information regarding the social, cultural, political and national practices of online communities.

2.3.3 The justification of ECA to the current research

Although there are still trends in media studies to use the quantification of contents, this thesis adopts a qualitative, rather than a quantitative approach. Likewise, the way that this dissertation addresses the case study of the Kurdish diaspora online communities places a comprehensive emphasis on issues related to the discursive formation of national identity through social media. This concentration is on the values, experiences, and interconnectedness of people in relation to their economic, social and political and ethnic backgrounds (Daymon & Holloway, 2002).

The intention of the study determines whether the researcher utilises an inductive or deductive analysis method. An inductive methodology is reasonable where there is no previous learning about the phenomenon or when the 'knowledge is fragmented'. A deductive methodology can be utilised if the structure of investigation is operationalised on the premise of past knowledge and the aim of the study is theory testing (Elo & Kygäs 2007, pp.107-108). The ethnographers often write and speak within a specific background which has been produced and influenced by their personal experience, history and culture (Hall, 1990). As discussed in the introduction chapter, my personal involvement in the social media of the Kurdish diaspora inspired me to pursue this research.

While exploring the discussions of identities by the Kurdish diaspora through Facebook pages and groups, ethnographic examination is the suitable approach for understanding "the social conditions and experiences which play a role in constituting [users'] subjectivities and identities" (McRobbie 1994, p.193). The ethnographic observation helped me considerably to frame ideas in a better way and I was always learning and re-learning from the themes, discussions and observations. A qualitative analysis of social media provided me with a deeper understanding of the Kurdish diaspora's social and political frameworks. As Hancock (2001) has pointed out, qualitative research is suitable "to produce subjective data concerning opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals, describes social phenomena as they occur naturally" (p.2). Regarding social media, which are multi-media in scope, the messages are transmitted via diverse sorts of information. To this end, an ethnographic research is pertinent as the meaning of a message is presumed to be embedded in various kinds of information exchange, formats, rhythm, and style. Likewise, the qualitative analysis of the data sets forth a general picture of the context and nature of the Kurdish diaspora. A combination of ethnography and qualitative content analysis provides a suitable way to understand the themes and contexts of national identity represented by the Kurdish diaspora on Facebook.

With respect to the Kurds in the diaspora, they are articulating and practising their ethnic and national identities. Examining this more closely demands a method to fully address and observe their ethnic, cultural and political activities. The method should allow the researcher to make certain observations about the significance of the linguistic, semiotic and political aspects of their activities on social media. Likewise, it allows the researcher to

understand the discursive nature of the online activities that is centred on the 'actuality' and 'textuality' of the discussions and subjects. In this sense, the 'textuality' denotes the specific and important quality of the media production available via social media as well as on the web. It can also relate to the 'virtuality' of these activities, since they are formed via a non-real or web base. The postings by the Kurdish diaspora on social media are partly a reflection of their understanding, feeling, and looking to Kurdistan, their homeland, and in this sense, a qualitative content analysis more often emphasises the intent of a communication or the effect on the audience. The discussions and discursive events of the Kurdish diaspora's social media world serve as reflections and characteristics of their whole online-offline dynamics that a qualitative analysis aims to explore. The actuality of online events is the fact that they are real creations of a real person that are transmitted into social media.

In fact, virtual and social media platforms are not entirely abstracted from the real world. Although this researcher has observed Facebook pages, groups and online communities, the sites are operated and managed by individuals and they have their own experiences and the researcher has knowledge of them, and the discussions and events that arise offline and in the real world. Likewise, social phenomena which are observed on social media are not only limited to cyberspace, rather they are formed by, and contribute to forming, a particular social reality offline and online (Rogers 2009; Jurgenson 2011). As Bruckman (2002) mentioned, "it's important to remember that all 'Internet research' takes place in an embedded social context. To understand Internet-based phenomena, it is important to understand that in a broader context. Consequently, most of the 'online research' should have an offline component" (p.3). Here one finds the real world dynamics that empower online communities. This is mostly correct if the aim of an online platform or community is concerned about identity issues or has a goal to cause some degree and/or form of social, cultural and/or political change.

 In this sense, it is necessary to understand the whole online milieu from the standpoint of 'real persons' as doing so makes online (cyber) ethnography a relevant method. In general, cyber-ethnography includes the description of people/users and their culture. The subject matter of human beings engaged in meaningful behaviour leads the way of inquiry and orientation of the investigator. Moreover, in order to become familiar with the users and

the pages, the researcher has had to investigate not only what is discussed on Facebook as the foundation of the themes and subjects, it is also important to understand the real life context of the those in the Kurdish diaspora who as users originated the messages and discussions on social media. What the researcher mainly wanted to achieve in this sense was the comprehension of the construction of national identity online by reviewing the discussions and activities of those users on Facebook. Thus, it was inevitable to rely on an approach through which their concerns are made clear. One of the most significant assumptions in this regard is that the construction of identity through online media is different from that of the traditional media, as the former present a distinct way of meaning in terms of construction and representation. This will be discussed further in the chapter related to Kurdish diaspora and new media.

Through this thesis, national identity includes broader areas of culture, ethnicity, religion, society, and so on. It focuses particularly on those in the Kurdish diaspora who although they are living far away from Kurdistan are actively involved in social media and activities associated with the homeland. Since this research explores the online impressions, activities and interactions of a specific group, it is very fitting to utilise a cyber-ethnographic methodology. Likewise, my previous personal engagements (as discussed in the introduction chapter) in Kurdish activities both online and offline as well as having first-hand experience associating with Kurds in the diaspora make this research more apt for an ethnographic method in which the investigator ought to have a good understanding of the study setting and culture.

2.4 Definition of social media terminology:

The following terms are utilised as a part of this research and characterised in order to furnish the reader with a full comprehension of this study. In terms of these vital terms, they include the following: Web 2.0, social media, and Facebook.

2.4.1 Social media and social networks

In recent years the association between cultural, social and technological development has been further changed by the rise and influence of so-called 'social media.' The emergence of social media is a very significant point in the age of the Internet. Although the term is publically used, there is not an agreed-upon and formal definition to describe them.

Therefore the terms 'social media' has different meanings and different connotations according to people, purposes and contexts. In a widely agreed description, social media can be considered as 'Internet-based applications' that carry 'consumer-generated' content which encompasses ''media impressions created by consumers, typically informed by relevant experience, and archived or shared online for easy access by other impressionable consumers'' (Blackshaw, 2006). Whereas web 1.0 was static and functioned more as a room to find information (Lincoln, 2009), social media platforms are places for participation, feedback and encourage contributions from everybody. As Mayfield (2008) defined, social media are "best understood as a group of new kinds of online media, which share most or all of the following characteristics: participation, openness, conversation, community, connectedness" (p. 5). Therefore, they vitiate the lines between audience and producers (Lincoln 2009). They can also become a place for conversation, by means of two-way communication between participants instead of a broadcasting method (O'Connor, 2011). Through new media technology, social media may facilitate online functionality and monitoring standpoints in which the information collected can be used to develop political and identity discourses.

Social media, which are presently dominating World Wide Web usage in nearly all countries throughout the world, are distinguished from other sorts of mainstream media in that they are less expensive than traditional media and are simple to access. In addition, everyone is allowed to access the information on social media and the users do not require high skills and professional training for utilisation. They are web-based with the lowest degree of hierarchy which enables manipulating text, images, videos and so forth (Zappavigna, 2012, p. 7).

There are various kinds of social media which are sometimes referred to as the social *media landscape*. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classify them into six categories as follows: *collaborative projects* (e.g., Wikipedia), *blogs*[1] and *microblog*[2] (e.g., Twitter), *content communities* (e.g., YouTube[3]), *social networking* sites (e.g., Facebook[4]), *virtual game world*s (e.g., World of Warcraft), and *virtual social world*s (e.g. Second Life). Among today's popular

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[1] Blogs (Weblogs) offer and facilitate space for authors to conveniently produce and continue their attendance on the Web

[2] Microblogging services, such as Twitter, focus on real-time updates of small messages.

[3] YouTube is called a media-sharing SNS which let users produce and dispense multi-media productions online

[4] Like Facebook, LinkedIn concentrate on helping and expediting connections and relationships among users.

social media, websites, such as, Facebook, YouTube or Wikipedia are among the most notable examples. They can be considered part of the continuing socialisation in cyberspace populated by human communication.

One of the most significant functions of social media is online social networking among the users. The term social networking is widely used in the online world to refer to the methods that users use to interact with other individuals or businesses friends or how they form and develop online networks of contacts in a safe milieu. As a 'social structure', social networks are framed by a number of 'social actors', such as, people or institutes, 'dyadic ties', and 'social interaction' among users. Social network users are able to share pictures, videos, and words to connect people together through the use of new technologies. The main functions of social networks include creating a web presence, facilitating relationships and sharing content. However, among all of the functions, constructing an identity (individuals constructing their profiles) continues to be a 'core' function in most of the social media platforms (Kietzmann et al., 2011, p. 244). Moreover, social networks avoid the "hierarchies of design, production and consumption. This allows the users and gives them more power and support to articulate and construct their identities. In this regard, people are more than the 'audience' (Rosen, 2006) and become the sender/producer and receiver/consumer of messages.

2.4.2 Facebook

Today, Facebook is the leading and most popular social network platform worldwide with more than 1.71 billion monthly active users as of the second quarter of 2016.[5] According to Zuckerberg, "Facebook will treble in size to 5 billion members by 2030 (The Telegraph, 5 February 2016). It is said that more than half of the users log into the system every day and users typically spend an average of 19 minutes a day on the site (The Statistics Portal, 2016). Facebook's remarkable growth has steadfastly positioned it as a key influencer globally. On average, the *Like* and *share* buttons on Facebook are used across almost 10 million websites daily.[6] Every 60 seconds 293,000 statuses are updated, 510,000 comments are posted and 136,000 photos are uploaded on Facebook[7]. Considering the mentioned features, it can

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[5] The Statistics Portal, 7 August 2016
[6] Facebook, as of 7 August 2016
[7] Facebook, as of 7 August 2016

undoubtedly be argued that Facebook is the leading virtual online community in the world. This prevalence indicates that Facebook pages[8] and groups[9] will be an ideal source for investigating those in the Kurdish diaspora who are actively involved.

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[8] A Facebook page is a public profile that anyone can generate for any purpose. The users who choose to 'like' a page become 'fans' of that page. On many Facebook pages everyone is able to post comments however the administrator of the page can upload or modify the postings or comments.

[9] Facebook Group is a specific apportioned space where Facebook users are allowed to send messages to other members, and make comments on their postings, as well as share or update videos, and photos. The primary aim of creating groups is to connect with particular circles of people, such as, classmates, teammates, family, co-workers and so on. In Facebook groups, each user including the admin(s) is allowed to make comments, and upload postings. In this sense, every user has an equal chance in terms of activities to upload postings. Considering these functions, Facebook groups provide a more appropriate and free space for investigating the communications of Facebook users compared with a public page or personal profile of a Facebook member.

2.5 Summary

In this chapter, the structural design for the thesis and for conducting the online fieldwork by explaining the several approaches utilised in the research has been discussed. In the first section, the research method has been explained by discussing ECA (ethnographic content analysis) and the various approaches that exist for conducting research related to diaspora, ethnic and national groups online. Following a comprehensive overview of qualitative research approaches, the researcher has argued that ECA ethnographic content analysis, as a mixed method, can provide the best ground for the current research since it specifically focuses on the role of investigator and activates a content analysis to appear from a review of the texts and audio-visual materials. ECA is a creative and inductive approach that allows categorisation and narrative descriptions, although it places more emphasis on settings, pictures, meaning, styles and subtleties supposed to be identifiable by the involved speakers or actors. The chapter finally closes with enlightening some of the terminology related to social media networks, especially Facebook related terms, in order to present a clear idea of the online field that is going to be observed. Later, while reporting the ethnography(chapter seven), I will be discussing the process involved in conducting the online fieldwork through some stages including familiarisation with the data and the field as well as sampling, collecting, and thematic coding of the collected data

Chapter three: The historical, social and political biography of the Kurds

3.1 Introduction

Since the actual reality of a nation or national identity is highly reliant on the understanding and discovery of the historical roots of the place, the search for ancestors and origin plays a key role in the formation of collective memories (Smith, 1999). Moreover, in order to construct a genealogy grounded in the political and biological heritage of the place, the continuous past history of this mythical lineage must also be located. As McDowall (2004) points out, these myths "are valuable tools in nation building, however dubious historically, because they offer a common mystical identity, exclusive to the Kurdish people" (p.4). This can give legitimacy and prestige to the modern nations, at least according to primordialists and ethno-symbolists whom I will be discussing in the chapters that follow.

This chapter highlights some of the elements of Kurdish history, politics and identity that are significant for this study. It begins by presenting an introduction to the Kurds and their homeland, especially for readers who are not familiar with the history of the Kurds, along with information about Kurdish society, culture and politics. Later, the chapter casts further lights on the reasons for the failure of Kurds to establish a state. In addition to the external factors such as the role international treaties and the hostile policies of the states encompassing Kurdistan, the chapter considers the existing social, religious, geographical and most importantly political divisions among the Kurds as the main causes which hampered Kurds from achieving their national aims.

3.2 Kurds, debates over origins

The exact origin and the name 'Kurd' is the subject of many historical and academic arguments. Although the Kurds are the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East, there is not much known about them and their history has usually been narrated and written by historians in the context of the nationalist discourses of the countries they are divided among, including Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria (Tahiri, 2007). On the other side, Kurdish history has been written and discussed by the Western orientalists who have provided different views about the Kurds. As a result, there are varying and sometimes contrasting views about the history and origin of the Kurds[10].

There are both mythical and historical accounts about the origin of the Kurds. On the mythical side, one account which is more common and theatrical through the Iranian scholarship, describes Kurds as the people who survived the viciousness of King Zahhak[11]. David McDowall (2004) summarised the myths about the origin of the Kurds as follows:

> *The myths that the Kurds are descended from children hidden in the mountains to escape Zahhak, a child-eating giant, links them mystically with 'the mountain' and also implies, since the myth refers to children rather than one couple, that they may not all be of one origin. A similar story suggests that they are descended from the children of slave girls of King Solomon, sired by a demon named Jasad, and driven by the angry king into the mountains. Another myth claims that Prophet Abraham's wife Sarah was a Kurd, a native of Harran, and thus validates Kurdish identity within the mainstream of monotheism* (p. 4).

Although there is no actual historical evidence to substantiate such claims, they imply that the Kurds have been viewed as a 'distinct people', by their neighbours including Turks, Persian or Arabs (Tahiri 2007, p.3). The Zahhak account even associates the myth with *Newroz/Nowruz*, the Kurdish/Iranian New Year. This means that some Kurds and Persians celebrate this day as the day of victory over a tyrant king, Zahhak[12]. This has given a political

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[10] Among the literature on the historical development of Kurds, some of the most notable are the work of Martin Van Bruinessen (1992; 2003), David McDowall (1994; 1996), Denise Natali (2004), Michael Gunter (2008; 2011), Mehrdad Izady (1992), and Hussein Tahiri (2007).

[11] According to Iranian and Armenian mythology, Zahhak (Aži-Dahāka or Azhdehak) had two snakes on his shoulders. Every day these serpents needed to be fed by the brain of two young persons. The King's chefs would replace a sheep's brain with one of the persons' and then sent him/her out to the mountains. Those who survived are said to be the ancestors of Kurds.

[12] In fact, the myth of Newroz (Noruz in Persian) or Zahhak is not exclusive to the Kurds and many ethnic groups that once were part of Persian Empire (e.g. Persians, Tajiks, Azerbaijanis, etc.) have the same myth,

meaning to Newroz which is a cultural festival by nature. As I will discuss in the ethnography chapters of the current research, there have been hundreds of examples in which the cultural festival of Newroz is notably politicised and viewed as a way of showing the passion and support for the Kurdish national cause, especially in Turkey.

Based on some historical and linguistic accounts, the Kurds are related to those people of Indo-European origin who settled in Kurdistan about 4000 years ago (cited in Izady 1992, pp.32-34). The Russian historian, Vladimir Minorsky connected the 'ethno-geographical identification' of the Kurds to the Medes who established one of the most powerful empires in 612 BC, that conquered Assyria and extended its dominance through the entire region of Persia, as well as central Anatolia (cited in Özoğlu 2004 p. 23). This view has been accepted by many Kurdish nationalists, especially primordialists who consider the date 700 BC as the symbolic beginning of the Kurdish calendar.

Although the Median origin of Kurds is agreed by Kurdish nationalists, there is very little evidence to prove this assertion and most scholars, particularly the constructivists, deny it. For example, Van Bruinessen (1989) disputes the tendency to trace the origin of the Kurds back to the Medes and contends that there is insufficient proof to allow such an assertion since there was an extensive gap in time between the political predominance of the Medes and the primary confirmation of the evidence of the presence of the Kurds. Likewise, Hassanpour (1992) claims that the evidence on the Median language is limited to only few words and we cannot accept the similarities between the Kurdish language and the Median's as a proven fact.

Despite all the differences in opinions about the origins of the Kurdish people before the emergence of Islam, Kurds are clearly recognised and known after this emergence. The most widely accepted account arose from the mid-seventeenth century and mentions that the Kurds are the ethnic group who lived on both sides of the Zagros Mountains and the eastern parts of the Taurus Mountains (Edmonds, 1971). According to this account, Kurds are of heterogeneous origin (Van Bruinessen, 1992) and are comprised of many tribes and

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with some variations. For the Kurds and especially those in Turkey and in the diaspora, Newroz has turned to have a special meaning. (Eliassi, 2013; Khayati, 2008) As it is symbolically remembered and celebrated as the liberation of over a tyrant, it has largely been associated with the expression and resurrection of the modern Kurdish identity.

groups, their land has been always a troublesome zone because of the rivalries between ancient polities (Edmonds 1971; Izady 1992; Van Bruinessen 1992).

Whatever their origins, the Kurdish people have had their own identity which is believed to be different from their neighbours. The historical origin of Kurds may be concisely represented in Edmonds' argument (1971) claiming that the Kurds, as a distinct ethnic group, are represented by those people who:

> have outlived the rise and fall of many imperial races: Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Mongols, [and] Turks. They have their own history, language, and culture. Their country has been unjustly partitioned. But they are the original owners, not strangers to be tolerated as minorities with limited concessions granted at the whim of the usurpers *(p. 88)*.

Almost until the modern era, the Kurds traditionally were organised into an active hierarchical tribal system which was subdivided into many smaller tribes and circles with strong primordial loyalties (Alinia, 2004, p. 43). The Kurdish areas constituted (and were divided among) parts of many ruling dynasties and empires, such as, Achaemenid (6-4th century B.C.), Sassanian (3-7th Centuries A.D.), and the Mongols (13-16th centuries A.D). From the tenth century to the first World War a number of Kurdish Emirates (Kingdoms), or principalities existed in which 'Emir' or 'Pashas (Ruler/King) ruled the geographic area of Kurdistan autonomously (McDowall, 2004 pp. 21-29). Despite having considerable autonomy, the Kurdish local and self-ruled principalities never formed a 'united Kurdistan' under the rule of a Kurdish king. This is despite the fact that the idea of unification of Kurdish sects and groups was not unfamiliar to some members of the Kurdish literati at the time, for example, Ahmadi Khani. There will be a discussion about Khani later in the chapter on Kurdish nationalism.

3.3 The geography and demography of Kurdistan

The Kurdish territory, known as 'Kurdistan' today, is mainly scattered among four countries: Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Situated among the four modern states and the two ancient empires (the Ottomans and the Persians), Kurdistan has been a strategic region in south Eurasia, isolated by its mountainous territory. There is a saying that 'Kurds have no friends, but the mountains' (Glavin, 2015). The mountainous terrain of Kurdish territory has helped Kurds to preserve their language, culture and identity against external influence and incursions.

Kurdistan is estimated to extend to about 200,000 to 230,000 square miles (Dahlman, 2002; Tahiri, 2007). In general it could be compared to the country of France or the states of California and New York combined together (Izady, 1992). The main cities in Kurdistan with the majority of Kurdish population include Amed (Diyarbakir), Betlîs (Bitlis) and Van (Wan) in Turkey, Kirmanşan (Kermanshah), Sine (Sanandaj) , and Mahabad in Iran, Hewlêr (Erbil), Slêmani (Sulaimaniyah) and Kirkuk in Iraq, and Qamishli (Qamishlu) and Kobane in Syria[13].

Regarding estimates of the Kurdish population, they are usually the subject of debate and differ depending on the source, country or political orientation. The states occupying Kurdistan give lower figures, while the Kurds and their nationalist activists typically depict a higher and more ambitious number. In any event, these numbers usually range from 30 to 40 million people (see, Alinia, 2004; Ghassemlou, 1956; Tahiri, 2007; Vali, 1998; Van Bruinessen, 1992; Wahlbeck, 1999). However all sides, generally agree that the Kurds are the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East after the Arabs, Turks and Persians (Ghassemlou, 1965, Tahiri, 2007).

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[13] Most Kurdish cities and places usually have two or more names. One is the official name and the other is the Kurdish name for the place. Throughout this thesis, I will be using the names which are internationally known.

Figure 1: Distribution of Kurdish population in the Middle East (Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica)[14]

3.3.1 The imposed divisions

First division

Prior to the 20th century, the Kurdish territory was situated between two powerful and rival empires, the Ottomans (Turkish) and the Safavids (Persian). It became the arena of their rivalries (Edmonds, 1971; McDowall, 2004; Van Bruinessen, 1989). In 1639, following the Battle of Chaldiran between the two empires, they agreed to draw the official border between them across the territory occupied by Kurds. This resulted in the first division of Kurdish territory into Safavid Kurdistan and Ottoman Kurdistan.

Second Division

The second division of Kurdistan occurred following the First World War when the Ottoman Empire collapsed. The fall of the empire resulted in the process in which the intelligentsia of

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[14] Retrieved on 10 January 2015, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kurd

the ethnic groups who were previously part of the empire, which included the Greeks, Slavs and the Armenians, led popular movements for independence and the creation of their own nation states from the remnants of the collapsed empire. At the end of the war, the British troops occupied the province of Mosul, which was later called Iraqi Kurdistan (Southern Kurdistan). In 1916 they signed the clandestine agreement of Sykes-Picot with France to decide control over the collapsed part of the Ottoman Empire. The Sykes-Picot agreement brought about the division of Turkish-held Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine into different British and French-managed territories (mandates). According to the Sykes-Picot, France was to take half of the province of Mosul, and Britain was to take the other half which included Kirkuk, but Britain demanded the other half as well, because both parts were oil-rich regions[15].

In 1920, the treaty of Sèvres that was signed by the allies provided for the creation of the countries of Kurdistan and Armenia, as well as Hijaz (later occupied by Saudi Arabia in 1925), Syria and Iraq (Brown, 1924)[16]. Article 64 of the treaty of Sèvres states the following:

> If within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty the Kurdish peoples within the areas defined in Article 62 shall address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population of these areas desires independence from Turkey, and if the Council then considers that these peoples are capable of such independence and recommends that it should be granted to them, Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation, and to renounce all rights and title over these areas (McDowall, 2004).

The treaty of Sèvres was never ratified by the Turkish national assembly. In November 1922 the Sultanate was abolished in new Turkey. In the meantime, the subsequent military campaigns of Mustafa Kamal Atatürk violently put down the Kurdish revolt of Sheikh Saeed in the new Turkey and effectively ended the attempts for a Kurdish state. Then, the treaty of Lausanne which was negotiated by the Allies in 1923 following their victory over Turkey, confirmed the creation of three Arab states, yet made no mention of either Kurdistan or

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[15] The Sykes-Picot agreement also brought about the division of Turkish-held Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine into different British and French-managed territories (mandates).
[16] Eventually, a Kurdish administration (known as Kingdom of Kurdistan) was established in Sulaimanyah in the current Iraqi Kurdistan by Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji. At the same time in the Persian part of Kurdistan, Simko Shikak (1887-1930) proclaimed independence and declared a self-ruling government controlling in a large part of Kurdistan.

Armenia (Cited in, Brown 1924; McDowall 2004; Vali 2011). Even so, the entire Ottoman Kurdistan did not remain within the new state of Turkey after the First World War. It was divided among three countries (the new Republic of Turkey, Iraq and Syria). The Iranian part remained unchanged (Hassanpour, 1992, p 59). Since then, the Kurds in the region have been divided and assigned to different countries. These divisions and the fact that they have become part of unitary states with different social and political systems have also led to further cultural, linguistic, social, religious and political divisions among the Kurds (Sheyholislami, 2011, p. 51).

3.5 Religion

The overwhelming majority of Kurds are Sunni Muslims (approximately 75%) who follow the *Shafii* (Shafi'i) *school*. This differentiates them from the Sunni Turks and Arabs who are, mostly, of the *Hanafi or Hanbali* schools (Chaliand, 1994, p. 16). However, there is also a notable minority (about 15-20%) of Shiite Kurds (McDowall, 1996) who live in parts of Iranian Kurdistan, Iraqi Kurdistan and in the central parts of Iraq (Some of them are also known as *Fayli Kurds*). In Turkey, especially in Eastern Anatolia, there are also the Kurds who are considered part of a 'non-orthodox school of *Shi'ism*, *Alevism* (Alavism). Additionally, there are abundant numbers of other religious minorities among the Kurds, such as, *Yezidi*[17], *Yarsan*, *Zoroastrians*, *Chaldean* and *Christians*[18]. Thus, the Kurds form possibly one of the most religiously varied societies of West Asia. According to Van Bruinessen (1992, pp. 15-25), the geopolitical location of Kurdistan, the historical changes in the region, and the structure of Kurdistan paved the way for the foundation and evolution of a particularly heterogeneous society which inclined the Kurds and their political movement not to be religiously fundamentalist.

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[17] Although some of the Islamic and European researchers assign the Yezidi to Islam, the Yezidi believers do not accept this classification and argue that they are of the distinct religion preceding Islam. (For more information on the origin and history of Yezidi religion, see Guest, 1993).

[18] Although these minority religions have been practised throughout Kurdish society for a long time, there are still some discussions on whether some, e.g. Alavism and Yarsan, are separate religions or only sects of Islam. See, Van Bruinessen, M. (2000). Mullas, Sufis and Heretics: The Role of religion in Kurdish Society. Turkey: Istanbul, ISIS Press.

3.6 Language

The Kurds speak Kurdish, a north-western sub-branch (Iranian branch) of the Indo-European family of languages. Kurdish is broadly close to Persian, and is fundamentally different from Semitic Arabic and Altaic Turkish (Yavuz, 1998, p.9). Thus, Kurdish is commonly categorised as a north-western Iranian language (Van Bruinessen, 1994), and, according to some scholars (Paul, 2008), it is an intermediate language between south-western and north-western Iranian languages.

Contemporary Kurdish is divided into the two major dialects that of *Kurmanji* (North Kurmanji) and *Sorani* (South Kurmanji), as well as some other dialects or sub-dialects, for example, *Zaza/Dimili*, *Gorani/Hawrami*, and *Kalhori/Kirmashani* (Hassanpour, 1992, Sheyholislami 2011). Apart from Kurmanji which is spoken in the Kurdistan of Turkey and is written in the Latin alphabet, other Kurdish dialects are written in the Perso-Arabic alphabet. Despite the differing phonological and morphological differences in Kurdish, some scholars still tend to refer to Kurdish as one language with several 'dialects' (Hassanpour, 1992; McDowall 2004; Nabaz 2002; Van Bruinessen 1992), while some others do not refer to Kurdish as one language, rather as Kurdish 'languages' (Jenkins, 2001; Kreyenbroek, 1992), or 'Kurdish varieties' (Sheyholislami, 2011). This research adopts the view of Kurdish as one language consisting of dialects or varieties.

Nevertheless, because Kurdistan is a mountainous region, with barriers to travel, communication was very difficult before the emergence of modern communication technology and transportation (Tahiri, 2007, p. 4). Also, due to the lack of a single Kurdish political state it has been impossible for Kurds to have a standard language understood straightforwardly throughout all parts of Kurdistan. Thus, as will be discussed in later chapters, language has played both a unifying as well as a divisive role during the Kurdish national awakening process (Hassanpour, 1992; Sheyholislami, 2011; Vali 2011).

Figure 2: Linguistic composition of Kurdistan. Source: (Izady 1992, 2012), published in the website of Kurdish Academy of Language (2016)[19]

3.6.1 Kurdish language and the language policy within the countries overlapping Kurdistan

The four states that encompass Kurdistan have historically applied several policies to marginalise Kurdish language or coerce the Kurds to abandon their own language and become native speakers of Turkish, Persian or Arabic (Hassanpour, 1992). Kurdish was completely banned in Turkey until 1991 (Olson, 2009). Despite legalisation at the beginning of the decade, in the 1990s Kurdish still remained marginal and under threat throughout Turkey (Sheyholislami, 2011). Amir Hassanpour (1992) called the policies of the Turkish state towards Kurdish 'linguicide' or linguistic genocide which lasted up to the early years of the 21st century, during the time the pro-Islamic government of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) attempted to bring about some limited reforms to the situation of the Kurds in Turkey. Since 2010 the Turkish government has shown a commitment to implement several reforms allowing the Kurdish language into the public sphere. For example, certain restrictions related to the use of Kurdish in political campaigns were removed, and Turkish courts began allowing testimony in the Kurdish language (Cagpaty, 2013).

In Syria, apart from a short period between 1920 and 1937 under the French mandate, when Kurds could publish in their language and use it in broadcasting (Hassanpour, 1992;

[19] http://www.kurdishacademy.org/?q=node/154

Sheyholislami, 2011), the Kurds experienced a comparatively similar 'linguicide' policy by the Syrian governments. As of January 2014, this policy is no longer applied, following the establishment of the semi-autonomous Kurdish government in the Kurdish parts of Syria known as Rojava or West Kurdistan. Despite all the challenges resulting from the current war against ISIS, the autonomous government of Rojava provides funding for publishing books to both teach Kurdish and develop it as a professional language of teaching in schools and universities. Now, Kurdish is being taught in schools and is recognised as an official language of the autonomous governments. In order to officialise Kurdish language, Article 9 of the Rojava Canton's Social Contract reads as follows: "The official languages of the Canton of Jazira are Kurdish, Arabic and Syriac. All communities have the right to teach and be taught in their native language" (cited in Omrani, 2016).

In Iran, Persian (Farsi) became the official language in 1906, and the situation of the Kurdish language has remained unchanged and isolated under various governments and regimes (Hassanpour, 1992). This is despite the fact that Iran's current constitution concedes cultural and linguistic rights for the Kurds within the context of 'the universality and expansion of Islam' (Kreyenbroek, 1992, p. 190). Although Kurdish has never been officially banned in Iran, during both the monarchy and the Islamic regimes the language policy makers in Iran considered multilingualism as a threat to the territorial integrity of Iran. Thus, they tried to restrict the use of Kurdish and encourage the 'supremacy of Persian' as a mechanism to unite the ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous country (Sheyholislami, 2012, p.21). And following the Iranian revolution in 1979, the new constitution (Article 15) stated some basic cultural and language rights for non-Persian languages, although they were never implemented. During the presidencies of the Islamic 'reformist' Mohammad Khatami and recently the 'moderate' Hassan Rouhani, there were some promises that non-Persian languages would be taught through schools, yet these promises, to date, have remained unfulfilled and the domination of the Persian language or the 'Persianization of non-Persian languages' (Sheyholislami, 2012, p.1) continues to be the driving force of the Islamic regime's language policy.

Despite the intermittent bloody clashes between Kurds and Iraqi governments, especially during the Ba'ath regime, the Kurdish language has remained in a much better position than in other parts of Kurdistan. In 1932, during the time the modern state of Iraq was formed, it

legally promised its responsibility to assure the autonomy and the rights of the Kurds. In contrary to other parts of Kurdistan, Kurdish has never been forbidden from public or private domains in Iraqi Kurdistan. In 1970, following an agreement between the Iraqi Ba'athist government and the Kurdish political parties (KDP), Sorani Kurdish was recognised as the second official language of Iraq. Later, Sorani Kurdish became a developed standard language, and used in media, education, and the public institutions in most of the Kurdish region of Iraq. Also, following the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, and with the establishment of the Kurdish autonomous Region, Kurdish became the main language of the Kurdistan Region and it also became one of the official languages in Iraq.

3.7 The social and political divisions in Kurdistan

The division of Kurdistan has not been limited only by the fact that its territory is divided between four countries. Kurdistan has also remained a fragmented society socially and politically due to the fragmented geography of the area, the variety of dialects and the historical rivalries of the regional powers. Until the end of the 20th century the major social structure of Kurdistan was based on segmentary lineage (Tahiri, 2007). Each tribe was divided into families, lineages and clans. According to Van Bruinessen (1992, p. 51) a Kurdish tribe was a 'social organisation' which was generally occupying a territorial unit by having its own socio-political structure based on kinship and descent. Tribes were the cultural and social units and were not likely to be transformed easily as within them their collective identity and decision-making structure played an indispensable role. They made decisions collectively, and individual opinions were often ignored or compromised for the sake of the collective decisions within the structure of the tribes (Nerwy, 2012, p. 40).

Rivalries between the Kurdish tribes resulted in what could be considered the most divisive consequences for modern Kurdish national identity. According to Tahiri (2007) the internal clashes and disagreements between the Kurdish tribal leaders prevented the Kurds from establishing an independent state. Since the Kurdish tribal leaders were separated, this resulted in a major clashes with each other over grazing lands, and supremacy. Likewise, although the Kurdish tribal leaders would come to an agreement for a short time, later the old hostilities would re-appear and break down the delicate cooperation (p.26). Although some Kurds had no tribal affiliations because they were living in cities and some were peasants who were not part of tribal systems, the majority of the Kurds were still affiliated

with a tribe or a clan. Today, although the social structure of Kurdistan has considerably transformed into a post-tribal era, Kurdish society, especially in Iraqi Kurdistan, still suffers from the divergence and fragmentation caused by the past tribal culture.

Since the mid-20th century tribes have mostly disappeared or declined in importance in Kurdish society. While the Kurds were aware of their common history in terms of being divided, oppressed and denied entitlement to the rights of a nation-state, they have never been practically involved in a common political project to found Kurdish states within all parts of Kurdistan and for all Kurds (Khayati, 2008, p. 67). Instead of tribes, in the modern era, political parties have represented Kurdish social and political demands. However, the political party structure in each part of Kurdistan has reproduced many of the fragmentations and problems similar to those experienced by tribes. There have been many examples of disastrous conflicts between the Kurdish political parties (to be discussed in the following sections on each part of Kurdistan) which have significantly hampered the progression of the Kurdish national cause and statehood.

3.8 Political status of Kurds in the four parts of Kurdistan

3.8.1 Kurds in Iraq

The modern state of Iraq was created by Britain in 1918. It encompassed three Ottoman *Vilayet* (provinces), including Mosul, Baghdad and Basra. The Vilayet of Mosul was mostly populated by the Kurds during the time it was occupied by the British forces and then became a British mandate from 1918 to 1930. Although there were some disputes between the Kurds and the British, they (the British) were mostly sympathetic to the Kurdish national demands, allowing them to found one or more autonomous Kurdish administration(s) within the new country of Iraq (Meiselas & van Bruinessen, 2008). For example, the British even encouraged Sheikh Mahmud to set up a Kurdish administration and "hoped to use his unique societal status to legitimize their rule" (Chorev, 2007, p.26). However, according to Meiselas and van Bruinessen (2008) Sheikh Mahmud "nonetheless, had a different conception of the nature of his office than the British high commissioner in Baghdad, and set up his own, traditional style administration" (p.64). This meant, in practice, the discontents of the Kurds with the British authorities of Iraq, which resulted in escalating confrontations between the two sides.

Although the Kurds in Iraq have periodically been granted autonomy, the Kurdish aspiration for a state has remained a dilemma that until today has resulted in bloody conflicts between the Kurds and several Arab governments in Iraq. Anderson and Stansfield (2004) mention political, military and economic reasons for the deprivation of the Kurds in Iraq to gain a state. Initially, politically, the British desired Iraq to be controlled by Sunni Arabs, and therefore they amalgamated Sunni Kurds into Iraq to improve the situation of Sunni Arabs to the disadvantage of the Shiite Arabs. Secondly, in regard to the strategic and military importance of the Kurds, the use of the Kurdish mountainous region was realised as an advantageous natural wall to any imminent threats to Iraq from neighbouring countries. Thirdly, the discovery of large oil reserves in the Kurdish regions was a great economic asset and the British were keen to annex them to the new Iraq (cited in Mohamed, 2013, p.99).

In July 1958, a military coup run by leftist generals toppled the Iraqi monarchy and set up a republic (Meiselas & Van Bruinessen, 2008). The constitution of Iraq recognised for the first time that the country is comprised of two main nations, namely, the Arabs and the Kurds. The Iraqi regime at that time under the leadership of Abd al-Karim Qasim took positive steps towards granting Kurdish cultural and political rights. Qasim invited the Kurdish leader, Mustafa Barzani with the intention of reaching a reconciliation of the hostilities by promising to grant cultural and political rights to the Kurds (Bengio, 2005). Consequently, publications in Kurdish and the use of Kurdish language in schools and public places were officially allowed. The new government recognised Kurdish ethnic identity and proclaimed partnership between the two nations of Iraq, the Kurds and the Arabs (Eppel 2004, cited in Mohammed, 2013, pp. 99-100). Article III of the Qasim's government's interim constitution specified that, "Arabs and Kurds are partners in the Homeland, and their national rights are recognised within the Iraqi entity" (McDowall, 2004, p.302). Yet, relations worsened while Qasim deported the Kurds from the Kurdish oil rich region of Kirkuk and under the influence of some Arab groups the government withdrew rights from the Kurds. Then in September 1961 the Iraqi army launched a full scale attack against Kurdistan. By 1960, the honeymoon of the Kurds and Qasim ended, as Qasim feared that the Kurdish claim for autonomy would result in secession (Eppel, 2004, quoted in Mohammed, 2013). In response, the Kurds

reorganised their movement and collected about ten thousand Peshmarga[20] around the movement that was led by the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq under Mustafa Barzani.

Another turning point in the relations of Kurds and Arabs in Iraq was after the Ba'ath Party's coup d'état against the regime of Abdul-Rahman Aref in July 1968 through which Hassan-Al-Bakr took power. Bakr recognised Kurdish national rights within a unified area in the north of Iraq and declared autonomy for the Kurds (Schmidt, 1970). Although it was a very positive step towards ending decades of animosity between the Kurds and Arabs in Iraq, some scholars consider it as initiative by Ba'ath party to strengthen its status in Iraq following the coup. For example, Stansfield (2003) pointed out that Al-Bakr's declaration was "probably more of an expression of the party's oppositions to the previous regime rather than attempting to reach a peaceful solution to the Kurdish issue" (p.74). Moreover, there was a lack of trust between the two sides, especially as Barzani had helped Aref against Ba'ath regime in 1963.

In general, during the Ba'ath party's control over Iraq, the Kurds experienced both reconciliation and periods of hostility with the ruling Arabs. In 1970, Saddam Hussein proposed local autonomy to the Kurds, mainly as a response to the regional rivalries of the Ba'ath regime and Saddam with the neighbouring countries, such as, Iran which had a considerable number of Kurdish people in their populations. According to Bengio (2005), "this daring move shocked neighbouring Syria, Turkey and Iran which feared spill-over effects on their own Kurdish populations" (p. 174). This agreement, also identified as the manifesto of March 11th, paved the way for autonomy in the Kurdish regions of Iraq to be brought into effect within four years (Mohammed, 2013, p. 117). It also assured a number of seats for the Kurds in the Iraqi National Assembly and a portion of Iraq's oil profits based on the size of the Kurdish population (Kirmanj, 2010). However, these promising times did not last long and as McDowall (2004) mentions, "the Ba'ath wanted Kurdish co-operation yet was unwilling to share control" (p.332). The Kurds rejected the terms of the agreement

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[20] Literally, the Kurdish word Peshmarga (پێشمەرگە; Pêşmerge) is applied to those who confront death. Although it has received high attention throughout international media these days during the ISIS war, the word and the existence of Peshmarga are not recent. The word was added to the Kurdish resistance literature amid the brief period of the Kurdistan Republic of Mahabad in 1945-46. While the leaders of the republic were discussing a word for Kurdish soldier at a local café, a waiter surprisingly proposed *Peshmarga*, a slang term from his neighbouring village. From that time, Peshmarga has come to signify 'freedom fighter' and is regularly used as honorific term for Kurdish guerrilla warriors (for more information see, Gunter, 2011; McDowall 2004).

as the Iraqi government ousted many Kurdish residents from the oil-rich cities of Kirkuk and Khanaqin districts to keep them outside of the autonomous region (Meiselas and van Bruinessen, 2008). In addition, the Ba'ath administration breached several other terms of the agreement and this ended in an outbreak of another bloody war between the two sides in 1974 (Bengio, 2005; McDowall 2004).

Despite the hostile policies of Ba'ath party against the Kurds, the neighbouring countries and the Iraqi Kurdish political parties should be also blamed for escalating the Kurdish problems with the Iraqi central governments. For example, the Shah of Iran directly supported the Iraqi Kurds against the Iraqi central government until 1975. However, in 1975 Iran and Iraq settled their border disputes and ended up with the 1975 Algiers Agreement. In addition to settling the border skirmishes between the two countries, the Kurdish question was the most important subject of the agreement. Consequently, Iran withdrew its support for the Iraqi Kurds and this caused the Iraqi Army to violently crush the Kurdish riots quickly (McDowall, 2004). Also, the Kurdish political parties of Iraqi Kurdistan were close allies to the Iranian new Islamic regime during its war with Iraq between 1980 and 1988. The Kurds justified this as the only possible means of maintaining their existence against the attacks of Ba'ath regime (Kirmanj, 2014). Yet, their seeking of help from an external country further escalated the problems and resulted in further mistrust between the Kurds and Ba'ath party which was in an unfriendly or hostile relationship with Iranian regimes both before after the revolution of 1979.

Recent genocidal campaigns

The relation between Kurds and Arabs in Iraq is more complicated than other parts. Although the Kurds in Iraq have the advantage of many more cultural and political rights compared with the Kurds in Turkey and Iran or Syria, they have concurrently undergone hostile policies, such as, armed struggles, chemical bombardment, deportations, human rights violations and the most notorious one, the genocide campaign[21] in in the 1980s (Alinia 2004, p. 54).

The Halabja massacre was part of the Iraqi Ba'ath party's long term and systematic genocidal process of policies against the Iraqi Kurds called the Anfal Campaign. Through this

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[21] *Human Rights Watch (1993) 'Genocide in Iraq - The Anfal Campaign against the Kurds.' Available at: http://www.hrw.org/legacy/english/docs/2006/08/14/iraq13979_txt.htm*

organised operation, some Kurdish towns and about 4,500 villages were entirely devastated. The campaign also implemented the Arabisation of the oil-rich Kurdish city of Kirkuk by replacing the Kurdish inhabitants with Arab settlers from the Arab parts of Iraq (Randal 1998, p.231). As a result of the Anfal Campaign, Kurdish uprisings broke down and the influx of Iraqi Kurdish refugees increased[22]. According to some sources, this number was estimated to be between 250,000 and 400,000 (Alinia, 2004). The Iraqi officials of the post-Saddam era and the Kurdish authorities noted that as many as 182,000 persons were killed during the campaign (see Human Right Watch, 2016).[23]

The Political structure of Kurdistan Region in Iraq

In Iraqi Kurdistan, the Democratic Party of Kurdistan-Iraq (PDK-Iraq), headed by the incumbent president of Kurdistan Region Massoud Barzani and the patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by the former president of Iraq Jalal Talabani (died on 3 October 2017) have been the two dominant political parties which considerably influenced the social, economic and political structure of this part of Kurdistan[24]. The relationship between the two parties has been usually unstable, as they suffered through many challenging and bloody times in the 1990s, although there has been a friendly yet fragile coexistence in the early decade of the 2000s (Alinia, 2004; Tahiri, 2011). In fact, both parties claim for nationalist aspirations and there are not visible ideological differences in terms of their positions towards *Kurdayeti* between them. However, their diverse tribal and social backgrounds, the economic interests, the geo-strategic domain of each party, and the role of rival external countries (Iran and Turkey) in supporting each side have had a considerable influence on the disparity between these parties. In 2003, after a decade of armed conflict,

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[22] The stages of Kurdish migration and refugees will be discussed later in a separate chapter

23 In recent years, the Anfal Campaign has officially been recognised as genocide by the parliaments of Sweden, Norway, and the United Kingdom, as well as Iraq. Following the dramatic changes by the end of Iran-Iraq war and the first Gulf war, the U.S and the Allies pursued efforts to safeguard the three Kurdish provinces which later made up the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in 1991 (For more information on Anfal campaign, see Stansfield, 2003; Mansfield, 2014)

[24] There are plenty of other political parties on the ground in Iraqi Kurdistan. However, one of the most notable players the Bizûtinewey Gorran (the Movement for Change) emerged in 2009 in the form of an opposition group to counter the two ruling parties. Goran grew so fast that it was able to win 24 seats out of 111 in the Kurdistan's parliamentary general election in 2013. It beat the PUK and came in second following the PDK.

they ended, (or were forced by the U.S to end) their old animosity and shared the economic and social benefits of power that resulted from the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime.

Since 1990, three regional events considerably affected the Kurdish case in Iraq. First, in 1990 Saddam Hussein invasion of Kuwait provided the Kurds with an opportunity to revolt against the Ba'ath regime and create their own government, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). This was a very significant change in the political arena of Iraqi Kurdistan as the KRG became one of the important players not only in Iraq but in the Middle East. The establishment of KRG, according to Bengio (2005) gave the Kurds in Iraq the feeling that they were masters of their house.

The US invasion of Iraq by the US in 2003 was another turning point in the history of Iraqi Kurds. Although the Kurds were enjoying the same autonomy before 2003, the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime and the emergence of a new regime in Iraq gave the Kurdish political groups the chance to be present in Baghdad and they were officially recognised as an autonomous region in a new federal Iraq. However, the tensions between Kurds and Arabs in Iraq did not end by the new regime and the political and economic relations between Baghdad and Erbil continued to be tense throughout the post-Saddam era. One of the most challenging questions has been the Iraqi constitution's Article 140 which provides for a referendum on the future status of oil rich city of Kirkuk which is claimed by Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen.

In June 2014, the emergence of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (known as ISIS, or ISIL, or IS) in the Middle East significantly changed the dynamics of politics and power in the region, which influenced the Kurds as well. In a short time, this 'terrorist' group was able to challenge the conventional borders (Sykes-Picot borders) between Iraq and Syria and claimed to establish Caliphate. Although the rise and growth of ISIS has been accompanied by many negative consequences for the Kurds both in Iraq and Syria as well as for Arabs and many other groups, it seems that the dynamics of power in the region resulting from the rise of ISIS will be in favour of Kurds. Today the long disputed city of Kirkuk is mostly controlled by Peshmarga and the Kurdish authorities announced they have no intention of leaving Kirkuk and returning to the borderlines before the emergence of ISIS. The KRG's

president Massoud Barzani has called a referendum on the independence of Kurdistan[25] to be held on 25 September 2017 (The guardian, 24 June 2017). Whether the referendum will be successful or not, it is assumable that the post-ISIS vacuum will mark a potentially important moment for the Kurdish national cause in Iraq.[26]

The Kurdistan Region has accommodated, if imperfectly, a notable ethno-cultural, linguistic and religious pluralism (Stansfield, 2003) The Kurdistan Region has formally recognised the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, such as, the Turkmen, Assyrians, Arabs, Armenians, Shabaks, Mandeans and the Yezidis. They have their own fixed quota in the parliament regardless of the numbers of votes they attain during the elections (see Stansfield, 2003, pp.39-40). South Kurdistan's Parliament went through several developments since February 2009, including the election law of Kurdistan which was raised in order to encompass all groups. The minimum age for parliamentary candidates was dropped from 30 to 25. Likewise, there is a legal minimum quota for women in the parliament which was augmented from 25 percent to 30 percent of the seats. While reserved seats for minority groups were already provided, for the Turkmen and Christian minorities this was raised to five seats each. The existing political pluralism and religious tolerance (Van Bruinessen,

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[25]. The proposal of Kurdistan's independence referendum became a much more serious and pressing issue because, in March 2012 in a public speech, Masoud Barzani, president of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region threatened the Iraqi central government with separation from Iraq, if it continues its unilateral and 'unfair' manners to the KRG, the manners that remind them of Saddam Hussein's rule. The idea of the referendum was side-lined by the emergence of ISIS as the Kurds also became involved in the ISIS War. The tensions between the Kurdistan region and the central government of Bagdad did not ease during the ISIS war although they were fighting in a line against ISIS. On 7 June 2017, Masoud Barzani held a meeting with the political parties of the Iraqi Kurdistan to discuss the Iraqi Kurdistan's referendum on independence. Through that meeting, the referendum was confirmed (by the majority of the political parties) to be held on 25 September 2017. On 15 September, the parliament of Iraqi Kurdistan also voted to go ahead with the referendum. The referendum means that the Iraqi Kurds will vote if they support separating from Iraq and creating and independent Kurdish state. The Referendum was finally held on the due time and the 92.73% people of Iraqi Kurdistan (out of 3.3 million votes including Kurds and non-Kurds in the provinces of Erbil, Sulaimanyah, Kirkuk, Duhok and Halabja) voted in favoure of independence. This YES answer will give mandate to the Iraqi Kurdish leaders to start negotiating an exit from Iraq. The Iraqi government, the United States, Turkey and Iran have been opposing the referendum. Iraq considers Kurdistan as an inseparable part of its territory; Turkey and Iran fear Kurdish independence spills over to their own Kurdish population; the U.S (and to some extent, the UK) concerns this referendum distracts the focus from the ISIS war and creates instability in the region (http://www.politico.com/story/2017/09/15/us-demands-iraqi-kurds-cancel-independence-vote-242789).However, Israel has clearly supported the Kurdistan's referendum and, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Jordan have not opposed it, although they have not declared any direct support.

[26] At the time of writing these notes, there is an ongoing war in and around the city of Kirkuk and other disputed territories between the KRG forces and the Iraqi army backed by Shiite Militia, Hashd-Al-Shabi. This conflict began on 15 October 2017, and it is an Iraqi government's reaction to Iraqi Kurdistan's referendum on independence on 25 September.

1992; Yildiz, 2012) of the Kurdish society are the key initiatives for the ethnic and religious minorities to live under the authority of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq.

3.8.2 Kurds in Iran

The Iranian Kurdistan, or 'Eastern Kurdistan' or 'East Kurdistan' encompasses the same Kurdish regions that were previously under the rule of the Safavid dynasty and were part of the Persian Empire. The area includes four provinces in the west of Iran, and a province in the north-east of the country, North Khorasan, where there is a large Kurdish population. Kurds of Iran are estimated to be 9 to 10 million which comprise about 11 percent of the population of Iran (Izady, 1992).

In general, in modern times, the relationship between the Persians and the Kurds has usually been ambiguous (Tahiri, 2007). In the beginning of the 20th century during the two decades of Reza Shah's reign, the non-Persian (non-Fars) ethnic groups were oppressed without precedent, and the Persian new nationalism and autocracy constituted the formal political organisation of Pahlavi's regime. According to Ghassemlou (1988, p.23), the Persian/Fars ethnic group became the dominant group by exercising exclusive political power. In an effort to eliminate the history and culture of all ethnicities rather than Persians, Reza Shah prevented any and all forms of local cultural practice in Kurdish areas and even gave Persian names to the villages and cities, forbade ethnic cultural rites, and prohibited traditional attire (such as that of the Kurds, the Arabs and the Baluchis). He aimed at the abolition of the tribal system, the obliteration of tribal militaries, and the formation of army bases in the territories of ethnic minorities including Kurdistan (Nerwy, 2012, p.84; see also Vali, 2011).

From 1920 to 1924 the widespread rebellions organised by Simko Shikak were the first Kurdish reactions to the dominant Persian nationalism and Reza Shah's policies (Ciment, 1996, pp.63-64). Moreover, as a result of the interim power vacuum in the Kurdish areas of Iran in the mid-1940s, the Kurds in Iran were able to organise a modern political movement under the name of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan-Iran, PDK-Iran.[27] And on 22 January

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[27] The PDKI is the first modern Kurdish political party established in Mahabad in the Iranian part of Kurdistan on the 16th of August 1945. The PDKI was formed by Qazi Mohammad following the abolishment of another organization named JK- *Komala Jiyanaway Kurd* (The Society for Kurdish Revival). The new PDKI was to substitute *JK* aiming at "creating a modern, well-organized and popular political party with an explicit

1945, Qazi Mohammad, the leader of the PDK-Iran, declared the Republic of Kurdistan in the city of Mahabad. The republic encompassed some other Kurdish regions in addition to Mahabad (Nerwy, 2012). Some of the aims noted within the manifesto of the republic were those of the PDKI which included:

1. *Autonomy for the Iranian Kurds within the Iranian state*
2. *The use of Kurdish as the medium of education and administration*
3. *The election of a provincial council for Kurdistan to supervise state and social matters.*
4. *All state officials were to be of local origin.*
5. *Unity and fraternity with the Azerbaijani people*
6. *The establishment of a single law for both peasants and notables* (McDowall, 2004. pp244-5).

The republic lasted only for 11 months. It was suddenly crushed by the new Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1919-1980), the elder son of Reza Shah, who was crowned with the help of the British and the Allies. To a large extent, the rise and fall of the republic was related to regional and global changes following the Second World War. The expansionist policies of the Soviets and its policies of national minorities[28] provided the Kurdish political and nationalist elites the best opportunity to declare a self-rule government. In a sense, the republic was the product of an alignment between Soviet's nationalities policy and the Kurdish nationalist aspirations. However, neither Qazi Mohammad nor any other leaders of the republic became communist and the communist ideology never became PDKI's dominant discourse. The Kurdish political leaders claimed that the affiliation of Kurds to the Soviet Union was a geopolitical necessity and being a 'soviet puppet' is an accusation invented by the Iranian authorities in order to delegitimise the republic and the Kurdish demands (Meiselas & Van Bruinessen, 2008, p.182).

Notwithstanding the strategic value of the republic for the Soviet Union, its formation resulted in the strengthening of nationalist sentiment amongs Iranian Kurds. Due to the influence of the republic on the Kurdish movement, some scholars (e.g., Vali, 2003, 2011) regard the republic as the birth place of modern Kurdish nationalism. The rise of Kurds in

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commitment to democracy, liberty, social justice and gender equality." Six months following the formation of the PDK the party formed the Republic of Kurdistan (see, PDKI's official website: http://pdki.org/english/).

[28] The Soviet policy on national minorities was centred on Lenin's views that not all nationalism are 'bad' and colonial, yet there exist good nationalism of the oppressed nations that demand self-determination and salvation (see, Lenin's opinion on The Right of Nations to Self-determination, excerpted in Dahbour & Ishay 1995, pp. 208-214).

Iran following the Iranian revolution of 1979 was considerably influenced by the republic's aims. The republic even became a national symbol for the Kurdish movements in the other three parts of Kurdistan, as well as for the Kurds in the diaspora (Ciment, 1996, pp.63-64; see also, Vali, 2003, 2011). For example, Mustafa Barzani who later became one of the iconic leaders in Iraqi Kurdistan was the commander general of the republic and formed the KDP in Iraq by copying many symbols and element from the republic and the PDK-Iran. The current flag of Kurdistan is said to be the flag (with some alteration) that Qazi Mohammad delivered to Mustafa Barzani before his execution. The current Kurdish national anthem is the one which was announced on the day of the declaration of the republic. The current KRG leaders have repeatedly acknowledged the pioneer role of the republic in the Kurdish national movement in the Iraqi Kurdistan. Masoud Barzani, the current president of Kurdistan Region has repetitively declared his and his father's allegiance to the Republic and Qazi Mohammad (Barzani, 2003)

Kurds of Iran after the Iranian revolution of 1979

As a result of their history of marginalisation under the Pahlavi regimes, the Kurds were enthusiastic in their backing of the 1979 revolution, which resulted in bringing the Islamic Republic to power in February 1979 (McDowall, 2004). After the revolution, the KDP-Iran, led by Abdulrahman Ghasemlou, and Komala[29] were the two influential political players in Iranian Kurdistan. And since the new Islamic regime was preoccupied with the collapse of the Shah's regime and the revolution, the two political parties took the opportunity to rule over a majority of Kurdish areas in Iran (McDowall, 2004). This did not last long because a war broke out between the Kurdish political parties and Iranian Islamic Army and finally the army took control of all the Kurdish cities. The Kurdish political organisations were prohibited and many prominent Kurdish leaders, including Abdulrahman Ghassemlou and Sadegh Sharafkandi, were assassinated in Europe by Iranian agents (Khayati, 2008, p. 152).

In the mid-1980s, political and strategic disparities between the KDP-I and Komala resulted in an internecine conflict which caused hundreds of casualties on both sides, a phenomenon

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[29] In 1969, a group of leftist Kurds announced the establishment of the Revolutionary Organization of Toilers of Kurdistan, identified as Komala. This group tended to be pro-Soviet and emphasised the urban guerrilla movement along with some other Iranian revolutionary organisations. Komala started its activities among peasant unions before and during the Islamic Revolution of 1970 and later attained enough popular support among Kurdish working class and youth (Wahlbeck, 1999, p.57).

Kurds named the brother-killing war. Afterwards, both groups were split into smaller parties. Today there are two groups claiming to be the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, and three groups referred to as Komala. And since these groups are outlawed by the Iranian government, their activities are directed mainly from Iraqi Kurdistan and the diaspora.

Although the Kurds of Iran were involved in national activities even before the other parts of Kurdistan, the Kurdish national cause and issues in Iran seem to be less pronounced in public and academic arenas and the main focus is on the Kurds in Iraq, Syria and Turkey. This lack of external attention along with the mentioned internal divisions have prevented the Kurds in Iran from being in the spotlight. This is despite the fact that Iran has often been opposed to any Kurdish national and political activities which suggest Kurdish separatism (kreybnerk, 1992, p.21). The central question between the Iranian state and Kurdish nationalism is not "the supposed universalism of Islam, but rather…the boundaries of the nation-state called Iran" (p.190). Since the Islamic revolution of 1979, clashes between the Kurds and Iranian authorities and the discriminatory policies of the central government towards the Kurds have resulted in the lack of development and in high unemployment in the Kurdish areas and in tens of thousands of casualties on both sides.

The armed conflicts between the Kurdish guerrillas and Iranian regime has been in a state of unofficial ceasefire for almost twenty years. However, since March 2016, there have been some changes in the policies of Kurdish political parties, especially PDKI. This party has resumed a set of armed conflicts against the Iranian regime which resulted in several casualties from both sides. Due to the complexity of the Kurdish question, the importance of Iran, the role of the regional powers and superpowers in the game of the Middle East, it is very difficult to predict an autonomous Iranian Kurdistan similar to the autonomous Kurdish regions in Iraq and Syria. However, the considerable number of educated Kurds the rising Kurdish middle class in this part of Kurdistan are signs for future changes in relation to the cultural and civil rights. As I will discuss in the fieldwork chapters, the Iranian Kurds have organised several rallies demanding economic prosperity, ethno-cultural Kurdish rights, and in some cases in support for Kurds in other parts of Kurdistan.

3.8.3 Kurds in Turkey

The modern state of Turkey was established on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire which dissolved in the aftermath of the Word War I. In contrast to the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish Republic was shaped upon the Western form of nation-states specifically France. It was directed by six principles pronounced by its founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk: republicanism, nationalism, secularism, populism, statism, and reformism. These pillars were to be the foundation of the new republic. Even though Turkey was no democratic system during Atatürk's era, the doctrines of populism and republicanism indicate the aspiration for a democratic political regime. The secularism pillar required a separation from the Islamic character of the state. Although religion was to be kept out of political life, this is not to infer that Kemalists aspired for an atheist Turkey. In fact, the new regime's approach towards religion had two main parts. First, Atatürk wanted to detach the new state from religion, and the new regime clearly attempted to abolish the Caliphate, regardless of its consequences. Secondly, as Doğu Ergil (2003) mentioned, Atatürk hoped for the nationalisation of Islam in Turkey and the translation of the Quran from Arabic into Turkish. In other word the new Turkish regime aimed to "teach religion in Turkish to a people who had been practicing Islam without understanding it for centuries" (p.147).

However, Atatürk's concept of the 'new', 'secular' and 'democratic' nation-state started with the assimilation of the Kurds and other ethnic and religious groups, including the massacre of Armenians[30]. Since the very beginning of the Kemalist government in the Republic of Turkey, rigid rules were followed against non-Turkish peoples. Since this research is focused on the Kurds, it discusses the Kemalists' policies specifically in relation to the Kurds rather than other religious and ethnic groups in the older Ottoman territories, such as the Armenians, Assyrians, etc.

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[30] The Kurdish political groups and Kurdish nationalists do not deny the role of some Kurdish tribes in the massacre of Armenians. For example, the PKK as the main Kurdish political party in Turkey has formally apologised the Armenians for to involvement of some Kurds in the genocide. However, the involvement of these tribes in the genocide was not a systematic Kurdish act against the Armenians. In fact, both Kurds and Armenians had the same experience of oppression under the rule of the Ottomans. Some Kurdish tribes participated in the massacre along with the Ottoman army, not as representatives of a Kurdish political group. Despite the participation of some tribes, many Kurds opposed the genocide. As Riggs (1997, p.158) pointed out, many Kurds were hiding and adopting Armenian refugees. Also, in many cases the participation of both Kurds and Turks in the genocide was because of the Ottomans' pressure not a Kurdish or a Turkish will. As Dadrian (1986, p.333) mentioned, "inmates in Ottoman prisons, including Kurds and Turks, were given amnesty and released from prison if they would massacre the Armenians."

The Kurds, who had been part of the leading Muslim majority, were relegated to minority status and were denied cultural and political rights (Bozarslan, 2000, p.20). Substantial parts of the cultural and symbolic practices of the Kurds were banned, such that they were not even allowed to speak in their own language in public and at the governmental institutes, and they were not recognised as either a different nation or an ethnic community inside the country (Gunter, 1990, 2008; McDowall, 2004).

To create the modern 'nation state' of Turkey, the Kemalists propagated fundamental radical reform policies which included officialisation of Turkish language, compulsory relocation of people and tribes, and the banning of public expression of Kurdish identity. Through an identity-wiping process, almost all the titles and names of Kurdish rivers, mountains, springs, lakes, villages, towns and cities were changed to the Turkish language through legal mechanisms (Bozarsalan, 2000, p.23). In order to indoctrinate the Kemalist nationalist agenda, the Turkish governmental institutions planned and facilitated the schooling curricula based on the Kemalist/nationalist interpretations of Turkish culture and identity and considerably ignored the Kurds who comprised a large number of the country's population (Keles, 2015).

This obtrusive and assimilating agenda was not easily applicable to the diversified and multi-cultural society of the Middle East and Anatolia (Wahlbeck, 1999, p.44). Such an uncooperative ideological environment, according to Khayati (2008), left no space for the 'others' to exhibit their cultural or political presence in the public sphere, and furthermore, as Van Bruinessen (2000) argues, had the effect of disintegrating traditional administrative organisations in Anatolia as well as exacerbating ethnic, cultural, and religious differences. As mentioned, one goal of the founders of new Turkey was the modernisation of the state. However, this modernisation and economic development were not implemented equally in all areas of the country. In addition to political and social oppressions, the Kurdish regions in Turkey have remained economically in poor condition compared with other parts of the country. According to any economic measurement, the area of Kurdistan of Turkey has remained behind the rest of Turkey and represents what could be said to be an 'interstate colony' (Besikci, 2004) with its natural wealth having been looted by Turkish and foreign businesses that have been financed in return. Likewise, the Kurdish areas are suffering from a relatively high degree of illiteracy, high death rate, and comparatively poor health

facilities. According to 'a Kurdish-Swedish politician' (cited in Khayati, 2008, p.71), the difference between the development of the Turkish and Kurdish regions in Turkey is as clear as the difference between first world and third world countries.

To give an overall picture of new Turkey's policies towards the Kurds, I rephrase Gunter (2000) who writes that apart from some periods in the last two decades, the Turkish government has repeatedly and legislatively forced the Kurds to assimilate into the Turkish language, culture, and identity and denied any existence of the Kurds in Turkey, calling them 'the mountain Turks'(p.54). The scale of the oppression was so intense that, in an overall picture, any Kurdish activities or expression of Kurdish identity was referred to and brutally suppressed as an act of 'separatism' and as a threat to the national and territorial integrity of the country (Wahlbeck, 1999, p.45). In such a suppressive socio-political, economic and cultural environment, it is likely that a reactionary and revolutionary reactionary project can grow considerably.

The Kurds found the new policies to be threats to their own ethno-national identity and started to resist (Gunter, 2000; Olson, 2013). The predominant motivating reason for the Kurdish rebellions was the Kurds' desire to protect their cultural, political, and national rights and keep their identity. They organised several rebellions, such as, Sheikh Saeed's rebellion in 1925, Ihsan Nuri Pasha's upheaval in 1932, and Seyd Reza Dersim's revolt from 1936 to 1938 (see, McDowall, 1996; Olson, 2013; Tahiri, 2007). Almost all of these rebellions were violently suppressed by the Turkish government[31]. In one example, and as a response to a Kurdish uprising in the town of Dersim, the Kemalist nationalists alongside with the government massacred about 40,000 Kurds and expelled 3000 Kurdish families between 1936 and 1938 (Entesar, 1992, pp.104-107).

In the 1980s, with the emergence of the PKK, the Turkish Army's violation came into another stage; it usually did not differentiate 'terrorists' (the term that the government is using for the Kurdish guerrilla fighters) from civilian Kurdish people. Under the name of

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[31] There were several reasons behind rebellions and not all of them followed nationalist aspirations. Many of the rebellions' leaders only rebelled to protect their land, to control of the markets for their livestock, and to keep their domination of the legal system. Some of them were afraid of the secularisation and centralisation. However, the Sheikh Saeid's upraising was a significant point in the Kurdish history as it employed nationalist symbols and propaganda. His rebellion obviously implied the path that Kurdish nationalism was to take: the formation of an independent states for the Kurds (see, Gunter, 1990)

attacking 'terrorism', the Turkish military has reacted harshly to the Kurdish revolts and the PKK. However, their response has not been restricted to the PKK fighters alone since they extended their attacks on the civilian Kurds as well. The residents of the countryside were forced by the Turkish government to declare their faithfulness and join the 'Village Guards'[32]. If villages refuse to send volunteers to the Guard, they face the dangerous and risky position of being regarded as PKK supporters and could likely be tortured or killed by the Turkish military (Yildiz, 2005, p.105). There have been numerous documented violations of human rights against the Kurds by the Turkish government referring to various abuses, massacre, mass deportations, and abundant custodies.[33] In fact, the Kurdish human rights issue was one of the primary obstacles facing Turkey in its bid to access the EU (Yildiz, 2005). And when Turkey desired to be a part of the EU, there was a requirement that the country modify its domestic rules and political strategies and address several human rights issues (Zettervall, 2013). In 2012, the announcement of 'peace negotiation' by the Turkish AKP government was an indication of hopeful reforms in solving the Kurdish question in Turkey[34]. Following this announcement, the government started the negotiation process the PKK and specifically its imprisoned leader Abdullah Öcalan[35].

Kurdish political parties in Turkey

Kurdish nationalist groups became more radical following the key social and political changes in Turkey in the 1960s and the 70s. The PKK was one of many groups that were established in 1978 in the Kurdish part of Turkey and as a reaction to the repression of the Kurds by the government. According to Gunter (2011, p. 119), the party flourished fuelled by two sources, the Kurdish nationalist movement and Marxist ideology. In the beginning, it was much inclined to Marxist political thought, which focused on the necessity for a

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[32] Initially, the Village Guards were formed and sponsored by the Turkish government in the mid-1980s under the government of Turgut Özal. They are aimed to perform as an indigenous paramilitaries in villages and towns to guard against revenges and attacks from the rebels of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). The Village guards have been regularly targeted by the PKK. They are mostly disreputable among the Kurds and are seen as betrayers (See, Yildiz, 2005)

[33] For more information, see Human Rights Watch's World Report 2015:Turkey, available at: https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/turkey

[34] In December 2012, in a televised talk on the question of whether or not the government desired to solve the Kurdish problem, Erdogan, the previous prime minister and current president of Turkey, specified that his administration was in dialogue with the captive PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. This is regarded as the start of the 'solutions' or 'negotiations' process.

[35] Abdullah Öcalan is the founding leader of the party. He was arrested later in 1999 by Turkish security agents in Kenya and has been kept in solitary confinement in a Turkish prison.

fundamental change in the social and political structure of Kurdistan. However, its nationalist side became more dominant and the PKK focused on the foundation of an independent state for the Kurds by unifying all of the divided parts of Kurdistan (p. 120)[36]. Over the years there have been many changes in the ideology of the PKK and even though it is still a leading Kurdish political organisation, it has changed its strategy of establishing an independent Kurdistan towards 'democratic autonomy' in Turkey (Yegen, 2016).

The PKK has become the most influential of the Kurdish political and armed groups in the Kurdistan of Turkey and one of the leading political groups throughout Kurdistan and the Middle East (see Gunter, 2008, 2011). It has not only influenced the political environment of Turkey, but has expanded to other parts of Kurdistan by founding affiliated parties. Today, the PKK is capable of organising a considerable and dynamic political mobilisation among the Kurds both in Turkey and Syria. This party has been able to form a substantial social base comprised of a significant number of women, workers, peasants and middle-class students and intellectuals. Moreover, it is the most active Kurdish party among the Kurds in the diaspora (Khayati, 2008, p.71).

In addition to the PKK which is still regarded as an illegal organisation under Turkish law, there are other Kurdish groups and parties that are legally active in Turkey. Among them, the most notable is the People's Democratic Party (Halklarin Demokratik Partisi-HDP). It was founded in 2012 as a democratic socialist and pro-Kurdish party which included a combination of other groups and minorities in addition to the Kurds. The party runs through a co-presidential organisation of leadership, with one chairman (Selahattin Demirtash) and one chairwoman (Figan Yuksedag) who are both in the Turkish prison at the time of writing these notes.

As a social democratic party, essentially the HDP aim is to address the current inequalities and conflicts, as well as the split between the Kurds and Turks in the country. The focus of the party programme is on femisnism, environmentalism, minority rights and egalitarianism[37].In a sense, the aims of this party are more aligned with western

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[36] For more information of the formation and development of the PKK, see "Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)." *Encyclopaedia Britannica. Britannica Academic*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2015. Web. 24 Oct. 2015, and Yegen (2016).

[37] "Who are we?" People's Democratic Party, https://hdpenglish.wordpress.com/about/ . Retrieved on 24 October 2015.

pluralistic liberalism than other Kurdish and non-Kurdish political parties in the region. While recruiting members and candidates mostly from the younger generation, it reserves a 50% quota for women and a 10% quota for the LGBT groups in Turkey. In June 2015, the HPD was able to bypass the 10% election threshold by polling 13.12% of the ballot, winning 80 MPs and as such, it is now one of the main political parties in the Parliament in Turkey[38]. Although the HDP states that it is a nationwide party and represents the entire country of Turkey, opponents have alleged that it is allied with the so-called 'terrorist' organisation of the PKK and largely represents the interests of the Kurds in Turkey, where the party wins the highest votes in elections. From 2013 to 2015, the HDP mediated a 'peace negotiation' between the Turkish AKP government and the Kurdish PKK organisation. Even though the peace negotiations were almost halted after the recent changes in the Middle East by the emergence of the ISIS, it   is likely that the HDP will contribute to resume the negotiations and ensure that the Kurdish question is raised in parliament and in official talks with other countries.

3.8.4 Kurds in Syria

The Kurds in Syria comprise approximately 2 million people, which is about 10 percent of the Syrian population (Catar, 2015). Following the formation of the new state of Syria in 1921, three Kurdish districts were attached to this new country. Yet, the Kurds in Syria remained isolated by the Syrian Arab population. The Kurds have had to cope with various forms of exclusion from participating in political power and they have suffered from restrictions placed on Kurdish culture and these national elements have become part of Kurdish life in Syria (Catar, 2015). Apart from a period during the time Syria was a French mandate (1923-1943), Syrian pan-Arab nationalism often denied the recognition and existence of the Kurdish people in the country (Alinia, 2004, p.60). Nevertheless, despite examples of ethnic cleansing (e.g., Arabisation campaign, lack of citizenship and declining to recognise the existence of Kurds in the country), and high levels of violence, jail, and torture, there have not been any open guerrilla wars between Kurdish organisations and government forces in Syria, compared to the armed movements in the other parts of Kurdistan (Catar, 2015).

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[38] http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32950750

In 1957, the Kurdish Democratic party of Syria (KDP-Syria) was the first Kurdish organised group in the country which was founded with the aim of attaining citizenship for and recognition of the rights of Kurds within Syria (Nazdar, 1980, p.198). Later in 2003, a group of Kurdish activists who were mostly affiliated with the PKK founded a new Kurdish party, the PYD (Partiya Yekitiya Democrat - Democratic Union Party, led by a chairman (Saleh Muslim and a chairwoman (Asiyeh Abdullah) which became the most important Kurdish opposition party in Syria, and controlled a large number of Kurdish territories in Syria after the outbreak of anti-government demonstrations and conflict in the country in 2011. Although the PYD and the Kurdish self-rule authorities are acting independently, they have strong ideological sympathy with the PKK in Turkey. The relationship between the PKK and PYD has been the subject of debates among analysts and in most of the cases this affiliation has led the PYD to challenge or disqualify other Kurdish parties which do not conform to the views of the PKK/ PYD front.

The Kurds in Syria, under the control of the PYD, declared autonomy in November 2013 as part of the ongoing revolution in Syria, also referred to as Rojava or Western, which encompasses the three cantons (provinces) of Jazira, Kobane, and Efrin. The aims of Rojava self-governing cantons are to create a society based upon the values of direct democracy, gender equality and sustainability (Gunes & Lowe, 2015). Although Rojava is not formally acknowledged by the government of Syria, it is openly welcomed in the international community and it is one of the main fronts of the fight against ISIS. Following the battle and assault of the Kobane town by ISIS, the Kurds in Syria gained remarkable international attention and sympathy.

At present, the PYD collaborates with other Kurdish groups and international alliances that similarly combat ISIS. This has paved the way for the Kurds in Syria and particularly the PYD to define their aims and strategies within the new international alliances and advance their political and economic interests in a broader context. Although the resistance of the Kurds in Syria started later than the Kurds in the other parts of Kurdistan, their situation and their claims are discussed more by international media. Since they represent one of the most important regional players, it is an indication with respect to the way the current rise of the Kurds may change the geopolitical map which was brought about following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the wake of the First World War (Bengio, 2014).

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter offered a brief historical overview of Kurdish society and politics. Accordingly, it can be argued that in addition to the role of regional and international politics, the most significant barrier to the formation of a Kurdish state or the development of Kurdish national identity is related to several internal social and political divisions among the Kurds themselves. These include the lack of a distinct standard language, the absence of common religious grounds, the affiliation of each of the Kurdish tribes or political parties to a neighbouring country, and the fragmented geography of Kurdistan.

The Kurds have attracted international attention following the genocide of the Iraqi Kurds in 1988, and the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq served as a platform for the Kurds in this part of Kurdistan to promote their ethnic and political identity. With the emergence of ISIS and the changes that followed in the Middle East, the Kurds in Iraq and Syria have attracted a high degree of attention from the international community because they are effectively involved in fighting against the fundamental Islamic groups in the region. Kurds have also played a decisive role in the ongoing political process in Turkey. The recent results of two Turkish parliamentary elections in 2015 indicate that it will not be possible at all to ignore Kurdish rights and demands within Turkey any longer. In Iran, although the government has not recognised any 'national' or 'ethnic' rights under the name of 'Kurdish nation', it allowed some cultural and language activities in some Kurdish cities, including offering limited Kurdish language courses at the University of Kurdistan.

In the context of current massive changes in the Middle East in the 21 century, the question arises regarding whether Kurdish nationalism can still serve as a mobilising force for unifying Kurdish diverse groups and ideas around a discourse of a Kurdish nation? And a further question is will communication technologies be able to help the Kurds, those in the homeland and in the diaspora, overcome the social, geographical, religious, linguistic and political barriers? These questions will be discussed further in the later chapters on the theoretical discussions on Kurdish nationalism and Kurdish media.

Chapter Four: Nationalism, national identity and diaspora: the conceptual framework

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the dominant discourses around nationalism in general in order to apply them to the question of the Kurdish nationalism and diaspora on social media. It first explains the concepts of identity, nationalism, and national identity. There follows a discussion of the three dominant approaches to nationalism and national identity: primordialism, modernism and ethno-symbolism.

The second part of the chapter provides a brief review of transnationalism, diaspora, and stateless diaspora. In this regard, Anderson's concept of 'long distance nationalism' will be further discussed to emphasise online national identity building with a particular focus on the Kurdish diaspora's activities

The third part of the chapter discusses the vital role the Internet plays as a vehicle for nations and for constructing their national identity. It argues that online media offer the ground and the platform for the discussion and articulation of national identities in the best ways. Relying on the literature of transnationalism and new media, this chapter argues that diaspora nationalism has benefited from recent available online space in overcoming the physical distance between the homeland and host societies. Most importantly, the opportunities provided by new communication technology, especially the Internet media, 'ethnies', stateless diasporas and marginalised groups can relocate their identity discourse to a new era.

4.2 Identity

Since the focus of this study is social, national and collective identity, it is necessary to define identity and distinguish the types at the beginning. Identity, a complex and ambiguous concept, is not something tangible and observable, yet it prevails in all aspects of everyday life (Malešević, 2006, p. 13). In its basic sense, identity indicates knowing self (who am I, or who are we, and how we think?) and knowing others (who is s/he, or who are they?). It is characterisation and understanding of the self that forms what and where the person is in both social and psychological terms (Guibernau, 2007, p. 10). Jenkins (2008, p.

5) refers to identity as a process of identification and, as such, it is not a 'thing' that one can or cannot have. Identity indicates both similarities to someone or a group of people and differences from others. It takes into account two main notions, the relational character of identity and its nature as a process, rather than a property. According to Huntington (2004), identity is the self-image of an individual or a group. It is an outcome of self-consciousness, anywhere I or we have the disposal of certain qualities which distinguish 'me' from 'you' and 'us' from 'them.'

Individual identity represents the self-concept by which an individual makes a distinction between himself/herself and other individuals (cited in Ashton et al. 2004). It is understood as a process of 'being' or 'becoming'. One's identity – one's identities, indeed, for 'who we are' is always multi-dimensional, singular and plural – is never a final or settled matter (Jenkins, 2008, p. 17). However, collective identity indicates the specific characteristics assigned to an individual, which defines the collective existence of the person in relation to other individuals and other groups or communities. Gilroy (2006) indicates that 'analysis of communal and collective identity' results in 'the question of solidarity,' which "asks us to comprehend identity as an effect mediated by historical and economic structures, instantiated in the signifying practices through which they operate and arising in contingent institutional settings that both regulate and express the coming together of individuals in patterned social processes" (p.386).

Identity can be also interpreted as the systematic establishment of meanings between individuals, between communities, and between individuals and communities. In the context of social identity, I adopt Castells (1997, p.6)'s description of identity which is 'people's source of meaning and experience.' In other words, identity is a combination of people's names, languages, cultures, behaviours, ways of living, and ways of relating to others.

Modern human identity has been influenced by new technologies, particularly communication technologies. Modern media and communication devices have detached humans from their closed local environments and introduced them to a virtual global journey. Communication media as a tool can serve to construct meanings of identity. This has led social identities to become much broader and more complex. Castells (2009) believes in the establishment of specific societies around the pivot of media in our current

times. In analysing identity in a networked society, he emphasises the construction of new meaning sources as a result of a networked society. Castells (2010, p. 362) in particular, sees local and ethnic boundaries, religious belongings, gender orientations, ethnic and national identities as new sources of meanings, because they were not necessarily defining the meaning of one's identity in pre-modern time. This subject will be referred to further in the next chapters as it relates to the Kurdish media and national identity.

4.3 Nationalism

In an inclusive definition, Louise L. Snyder (1990) defines nationalism as a force for many purposes. It is a 'force for unity' in which politically separated nations and ethnic groups seek to create a single state. It is considered to be a 'force of disruption' in which a single state that includes diverse ethnic and national groups breaks apart in to smaller units. Nationalism is also a 'force of independence' in which the groups or nations aspire to self-determination. Nationalism can also be considered as a 'force of colonial expansion' by which the imperialist states seek to boost their power and influence on others. Furthermore, nationalism is considered as a 'force of aggregation to obtain greater territory, capital, power and entourage. Finally, nationalism can be a 'force for anti-colonialism,' and a 'force for economic expansion.

As a political doctrine, nationalism claims that each nation should have substantial self-government, often involving a claim that each nation should have its own state, a doctrine that has inspired many nationalists or politicians. It includes the belief that one's own ethnic or national tradition is especially valuable and needs to be defended at almost any cost through the creation or extension of its nation-state (Hastings, 1997, p. 4). Rather than a single passion for a nation, ethnic group or place of birth, the main focus of nationalism has become the formation and development of nation-state which is a symbol of a national power in nationalistic discourses (Gellner, 1983).

Likewise, nationalism relates the boundaries of a nation (including common historical background, language, culture, and land, and so on) to the boundaries of a state (Gellner 1997). It advocates that each nation should determine its political and territorial decisions, and recognises the nation-state as the highest political organisation. That is, the boundaries between nations are not necessarily the same as linguistic, religious, and geographic

boundaries. Instead, national boundaries and national essences are typically "imagined in the sense that they are social constructions which involve, inter alia, the naturalization of nation as a primordial and pure community, foundational myths and the invention of traditions, symbols, and rituals" (Hall, 1992; cited in Simon, 2003, p. 16).

4.3.1 The significance of nationalism

The role of nationalism in shaping history and politics is pivotal. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, another wave of nationalism which has immersed the previous socialist world, has spread out into Western Europe, and is heightening in the Developing World. The revival and development of nationalist oriented sentiments in several parts of the world has been one of the most important intellectual debates and pressing phenomena in recent decades. Some scholars (Appadurai, 1996; Hobsbawm, 1992) expect the weakening or end of the nationalism or nation-state era. However, the increase of ethnic related tensions and secessionist movements subsequent to the Cold War has convinced others to recognise the re-emergence of nationalism and see it as one of the most significant driving forces in the contemporary world (Anderson, 2006; Billig, 1995, Gellner, 1983; Hutchinson & Smith, 1994; Smith, 1995, 2010). Nationalism, either as a 'theoretical framework', an 'ideology' or a 'social movement' (Smits, 2016) has been attacked by several theoretical and political perspectives. It has often been viewed as a force for bias, animosity and war. Despite all the criticism, nationalism remains a phenomenon shaping global politics today and the new century is still influenced by the issues concerned with it.

Even in Europe which was planned to be the location for the realisation of internationalist dreams through the unification trends in the EU, there are still active nationalistic movements. For example, nationalist discourses re-emerged considerably in Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union, which led to the emergence of some new nation-states. Some of these emergences have caused vehement and bloody wars, such as, in the collapse of Yugoslavia. However some others, such as, in Scotland in the United Kingdom have influenced democratic institutions which resulted in holding a referendum of independence for Scotland in 2014. *Brexit*[39] is one of the most recent examples of the re-

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[39] The expression Brexit is the common term for the United Kingdom's proposed withdrawal from the European Union. To many scholars, Brexit is regarded as a powerful revival of nationalism in a major western European country.

emergence of nationalism within the EU countries, which has brought a thorny question to the durability of the EU. Likewise, in many other parts of the world certain recent wars and clashes have been, more or less, oriented around nationalism, and nationalism is still a powerful driving force that serves to define the national interests and the social and political landscape, as well as influencing the everyday lives of the citizenry.

Moreover, as a result of nationalist practices, migrants and diasporas have produced economic, cultural, and social networks. They are increasingly involved in and aware of their ethnic and national identities through 'rediscovering national histories,' disseminating their culture and politics, and 'pressing for recognition of their distinctness', as well as bringing about and reconsidering new demands under the name of self-determination, independence, autonomy and sovereignty in an increasingly interconnected world (McKim, 1997). Moreover, the development of the Internet and social media has given a stronger voice to nationalist discourses. In this regard, diasporic, marginalised and ethnic groups have been most advantaged by the advancement of these technologies in building and articulating their nationalist discourse. Studies on the effect of the new media on nationalism indicate that communication media have helped ethnic and diaspora nationalism campaigns fight against states' hegemonies and information monopolies.

4.3.2 Civic nationalism versus Ethno-cultural nationalism

Civic nationalism or liberal nationalism are the terms given to a kind of nationalism which describes a nation as an association of people who consider themselves as one nation in which they enjoy shared and equal political rights, and loyalty to the political system (Nash, 2000, p. 391). It aims to encompass people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This theory derives from Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his social contract theory (Rousseau, 1993) and was later developed by Renan (1996), Mill (1995), and Gellner (1983, 2006).

Civic nationalism characterises the nations in terms of shared political rights, and a commitment to this political entity. Civic nationalism is claimed to be inclusive, rational integrative, and democratic. It assumes that the membership of such political community is voluntary and everyone can join it regardless of their race, colour, language, religion or ethnic backgrounds. This type of nationalism, according to Ignatieff (1993) "envisages the nation as a community of equal, rights-bearing citizens, united in patriotic attachment to a

shared set of political practices and values" (p.3). Civic nationalism is characterised by formation of British nation-state in the 18th century consisting the English, the Welsh and the Scots. Also French and American revolutions are also exemplified as civic national movements which created French and American republics.

Conversely, ethno-cultural/ethnic nationalism defines nationhood based on language, religion, customs and most importantly ethnicity. This type of nationalism claims that the nation create the state not the other way. In this regard, these are the pre-existing ethnic elements that function as the glue and hold people together, not shared political rights. Ethno-cultural nationalism assumes that a people's deepest attachments are hereditary, not chosen. It is the ethnic community which defines the individual, not the individuals who define the national community (pp. 3-5). Ethno-cultural nationalism is usually characterised by German nationalism and Germans' reactions to the invasion of Napoleon in 1806 which is supposed to be a 'romantic' reaction against the French ideal of nationhood. According to Smith (1998), it has been the most common type of nationalism around the world (p. 213).

This opposition between civic versus ethnic nationalism is problematic from several aspects. First, it provides a rosy, rational and democratic picture of the states which adopt a civic nationalism despite the existence of many ethno-national issues within these states. However, this is not always true and there are examples to refute such claims and as Smith (1998) mentions, "even the most civic nationalism (such as France), often turn out on a closer inspection to be also 'ethnic' and 'linguistic'" (p. 126). For instance, the French revolution was highly dependent on French language and banned the use of English and German as well as other minority languages including Breton and Basque (Dalby, 2002, pp.133-5). As pointed out by Dalby (2002), the minority and regional languages were not permitted to be taught in schools until the beginning of 1950s when the government was convinced that speakers of every region in France had enough knowledge of French to educate their children in the dominant and official language of the nation-state of France (p.136). Similarly, in Britain which was supposed to be a pioneer of civic nationalism, English was the only 'official/standard' language in the eighteenth century while even singing in Gaelic was prohibited in Scotland (Kilborn, 1993, p.164). And Welsh and Lowland Scottish languages were officially prohibited in British schools throughout the nineteenth century (Billig, 1995, p.27).

Furthermore, the proponents of civic nationalism over ethnic nationalism ignore the fact that civic nationalism is a state ideology and thus it can justify homogenisation and often assimilation policies of the states towards national minorities in order to establish legal rights and equal citizenship. They avoid discussing the impact of these homogenisation and assimilation policies on the minority ethnic groups.

Last but not the least, the categorisation of civic vs. ethnic nationalism is not likely to be applied to stateless nations such as Basques, Catalans or Kurds (Sheyholislami, 2011, p.211). Civic nationalism is supposed to support the equal citizenship rights, yet, stateless nations, even those with a notable amount of autonomy (e.g. Catalans in Spain or Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan) do not have the institutional power to bestow citizenship to their members. The authority for issuing the citizenship document is still the states. Thus, it is not very appropriate to apply the dichotomy of civil versus ethnic to the area of stateless nationalist movements which include Kurdish nationalism as well.

A different mode of categorising nationalisms focuses on how the nation emerges historically, and how it is legitimised. Following this approach explanations of nationalism can be classified into three groups including primordialist, modernist and ethno-symbolist, which are discussed in the following sections.

4.3.3 Primordialism

Primordialism, also referred to as *perennialism*, is the approach to nations and national identity which argues that a nation is a natural phenomenon. This type of argument can be found throughout the views of German Romanticism, in writers reflecting on history, environment and national character, especially in the writings of Johann von Herder (1776), and Johann Fichte (1798). Some other primordialist theorists include Burke (1758) and De Maistre (1852), or more recent scholars, such as, Shils (1957), Armstrong (1982, 2004), Llobera (1994), and Hastings (1997).

To this group, nationalism is the specific cultural effect of the nation, a vehicle for the realisation of its essential rights to a national identity. Likewise, nations have an unchangeable and continual nature rooted in the history of human beings. According to Armstrong (2004) 'perennialism' or primordialism is the notion that some of the modern nations have revived following an old presence in the Middle Ages or before. Similarly,

Storey (2001) asserts that nations have past origins that may date back hundreds of years or to the beginning of human civilisation:

> All nations require a past to justify their current existence and to provide a rationale for territorial claims. Fact, folklore and fiction combine to produce and reproduce a sense of nationhood; myths and legends are an important part of nation-building *(p. 77).*

According to this view, nations have been a constant structure surviving around kinship relationships. Accordingly, the depictions of national identities emphasise the role of territorial origin, common lineage, and shared language. According to Hearn (2006), the primordialist perspective indicates the natural development of ethnic communities into nations. Similarly, Connor (1994) describes nation as 'a group of people who believe they are ancestrally related' (21). He also notes that ethnic factors have complicated the classification of human groups as nations. For example, can the Dutch be considered a different nation or part of the greater German nation? Would the Kurds in Iran be considered as a separate nation or part of the larger Iranian nation? This is the same question for the relationships between the Azeri versus the Turks and Scott, and Celtic versus Angola-Saxon.

4.3.4 Modernist/constructivist approach

The second and the most often cited perspective on nationalism is the *modernist or constructivist* approach which considers nationalism itself as the base and the 'prima causa' of a nation or national identity rather than the other way around. It argues that nationalism is a modern political and social construct which has the potential to change the territorial borders and create a modern nation-state. Thus, the nation is a modern phenomenon since it an outcome of nationalist politics and political invention. Accordingly, ethnic or national ties are constructed and shaped by nationalism as it gives access to a national culture which is "a way of constructing meanings which influences and organizes both our actions and our conception of ourselves" (Hall, 1992, p. 293, cited in Simon, 2003, p. 16). Although 'objective' criteria, such as, language, religion, and geography play a role in the definition of nationality and national culture, nations are to a large extent 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 2006). The best known modernist theorists in this group include Benedict

Anderson (1992, 2001, 2006), John Breuilly (1982), Eric Hobsbawm (1990), Elie Kedourie (1993) and Ernest Gellner (1998)[40].

This approach traces the origins of nationalism and national identity to the end of the 18th century (Breuilly, 1994; Guibernau, 2007). For example, Hobsbawm (1992) argues that nations were formed essentially from the second half of the 18th and 19th centuries. He settles on the position that there are certain political, technical, administrative and economic conditions necessary for the emergence and development of nations. Among them the existence of an administrative and educational infrastructure represent the two most important requirements. Similarly, for Gellner (1983), the genealogy of nations is rooted in modern times. He argues that nations are well defined in terms of the two aspects of 'will' (voluntary aspect) and 'culture', and have no 'navel,' no ancestors and parents.

Modernists do not consider nationalism as the product of pre-existing nations or ethnic groups. Quite the opposite, they regard the nation as an outcome of nationalism. They argue that it is not the nation that comprises nationalism, rather "it is nationalism which engenders nations" (Gellner, 1983, p.55). First, there are self-consciously national movements, which, then, result in building a nation. In Gellner's words, "nations maketh man; nations are the artefacts of men's convictions and loyalties and solidarity" (p.7). Gellner (1983) defines nationalism as "a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent" (p.1). He perceives nationalism as a political movement which is 'rooted in modernity' and relates its final end to establishing an independent state and sovereignty for a specific culture or nation. In this view, nationalism is a collective ideology which asserts a united and common political system for a common land and a united nation.

With respect to the existential nature of nations, modernists do not tend to label the dominant kingdoms, multi-cultural empires and city-states which predate modernity as nations. They are rather the common elements that the nationalist elites recognise and which become the fundamentals for the creation of a nation. They do not consider nation as a 'primary' and 'unchanging social entity', rather, "it belongs exclusively to a particular, and

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[40] With respect to the literature on Kurdish nationalism, the most notable modernist theorists include Abbas Vali (2003, 2011), David McDowall (1996, 2006), and Martin Van Bruinessen (1992, 2003). They will be discussed later in this chapter on the section of Kurdish nationalism.

historically a recent, period. It is a social entity only insofar as it relates to a certain kind of modern territorial state, and it is pointless to discuss nation and nationality except insofar as both relate to it" (Hobsbawm, 1992, p.10).

Print technology and media

Nationalism and printing as 'mass' phenomena coincided historically, leading the modernists to attend to the relationship. The modernists have emphasised the role of media technology in the construction and development of nationalism and nations. They consider print media as a factor that serves as a catalyst or source for nation building. Hobsbawm (1992) argues that "most students today will agree that standard national languages, spoken or written, cannot emerge as such, before printing, mass literacy and hence, mass schooling… it is necessary therefore to analyse nations and their associated phenomena in terms of their political, technical, administrative, economic and other conditions and requirements" (p. 10). Similarly, according to Anderson (2006), media act as significant institutions in producing the discourse of national identity. So, nations characterise and redefine themselves through media. Anderson (2006) argues that the creation of nations in Western Europe countries was inseparably connected to the development of communication technology, a phenomenon he calls print capitalism. This indicates the role of media, especially newspapers in bringing common ground for understanding a nation and consequently a unified nation. Through the reading of same newspapers and books about local and global issues, the people of these colonial societies developed a common awareness of themselves and other, a sense of 'us' against 'them' (p. 62-3). Anderson claims that modern nationalism, first evolving out of Europe after the Reformation, is a product of print technology in which language was at the core of the awakening of national consciousness. Print capitalism and mass basic education created connectivity and solidarity since people were able to read the same vernacular texts and publications, they did not know or were not aware of others who spoke the same language. Anderson sees the post-Reformation Protestant emphasis on the use of vernacular language (rather than Latin) and extending reading/literacy as widening the audience, though not to everyone and not immediately.

Similar to Hobsbawm and Gellner, Anderson points out that languages used by communities of elites and its expansion among masses became vital to the nation building process. He wrote that language played a role in three different ways:

First, they [print technologies] created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars [French, English, or Spanish]...In the process, they [the towns people who started reading books and newspapers] gradually became aware of hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language-field, and at the same time that only those hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged. These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed... the embryo of the nationally imagined community. Second, print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation. Third, print-capitalism created languages-of-power of a kind different from the older administrative vernaculars (Anderson, 2006, pp. 44-45).

Nations as imagined communities

Anderson argues thus that nationalism is based on neither political ideology alone, nor ethnicity, rather on class politics, anti-colonialism, and the role of technology in the formation of nations and culture is used to create a sense of authentic national identity. Anderson sees 'print capitalism' as combining political-cultural messages and material interests (printing as a growing industry based on a new technology) which thus links the rise of nationalism and capitalism. And the parts of his theory that relate to framing the culture and history in line with nationalism and hence creating the 'imagined community' of the nation are the parts that are related to this dissertation. He asserts that nations, like individuals, attain their identity through the recitation of their biography or history (p.4). Therefore, communities can imagine themselves as nations through framing historical narratives.

Anderson connects nation-state building in Europe to the response to nationalism across the ocean, in colonies and in the European diaspora. Elements, such as common language, history, myths and collective symbols publicised through print media among members of an ethnic community became the 'raw materials of nationalism' and the basis of the 'imagined' nation that is going to be built. He offers an anthropological alternative by defining nations as 'cultural artefacts' and 'political imagined communities'

which are going to be constructed in the minds and hearts of its members. In this respect, all communities and groups that are larger than primordial villages are to be called imagined. This is because if communities are too large or widespread, face-to-face communications become too difficult or impossible for people.

Further, Anderson points out that the rise and publication of the regular newspapers indicated the role of print capitalism in the historical composition of nations as 'imagined communities.' He considers the rising popularity of print and newspaper as another reason for the early expansion of nationalist aspirations. Regarding the role of print, especially newspapers, in formation of an imagined community, Anderson (2006) mentions:

> *Particular morning and evening editions will overwhelmingly be consumed between this hour and that, only on this day, not that…It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands … of others of whose existent he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion* (p. 35).

From Anderson's perspective, nation is both 'inherently limited' and 'sovereign' (P.49). In other words, the boundaries upon which nation is formed are limited to geographic and political sovereignties; "nations are imagined because the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the images of their communication" (p.49). Even the most ambitious nationalists understand the reality of nation that is limited to certain geography, people and time; 'no nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind'. It is not the same as for Christians to dream of a wholly Christian planet (2006, p. 50). Secondly, nation is imagined as sovereign because it emerged during and following the Age of Enlightenment and revolutions in Europe during the time the legitimacy of 'the divinely-ordained hierarchical dynastic realm' had been destroyed. The nationalist movements came to the stage while the religious political ideas were being challenged by the plural and pro-secular thoughts alongside the sovereign state. Lastly, nation is imagined as a community, because it is always pictured as a very 'horizontal comradeship' despite the existent 'inequality and exploitation'. Thus, nation is realised through 'fraternity' that makes it possible to die willingly or even kill for such a limited imagining (p.50).

While framing Anderson's idea of 'imagined communities' in the modern era of online media, Jones (1997) points out that the new online media offer an 'imagined and imaginary space' wherein the physicality is not a matter, yet there exist narrative and the media become "an area of discursive interaction and because it contends, often very successfully, for our imagination" (P.5). I will argue in this thesis that the basic features of print and broadcasting media's influence on national identity can also be applied to the age of new media, the Internet and social media. Indeed, they offer the same opportunities, although in different ways, in the new era as print media offered two and three centuries ago, at the peak of nationalist aspirations in Europe, and at the end of 19th and early 20th centuries in the Middle East. Within this dissertation I will argue that electronic social media allow for a more inclusive construction of national identity than print and broadcast media dia.

Anderson's view of the role of communication technologies in distributing national identity sentiments is important to this research project. Although I do not limit the research to one specific theoretical framework, the notions of 'imagined communities' and 'long-distance nationalism' are helpful in investigating the relationship between ethnic/national connections and feelings, and online media technology in the diasporic communities. Since the Kurds, as stateless people, had very little or no access to the official/state modes of communications to disseminate their culture and ethnic symbols, they actively endeavoured in establishing new media (including print, broadcasting and online) in order to reproduce and articulate culture and ethnic elements both in the homeland and in diaspora. I will have more to say on the concept of 'imagined communities' in the following chapters on Kurdish media and Kurdish diaspora. However, at this stage, if is sufficient to say that Anderson's theory has been referred (with some modifications) in this dissertation in two ways: First, Anderson has made perhaps the strongest point for the significant role of communication technologies in the building or emergence of nation-states. Second, as discussed earlier, his viewing of nations and nationalism as 'modern' and 'cultural artefacts' is relatively plausible when it comes to the formation and growth Kurdish nationalism in the modern era.

4.3.5 Ethno-symbolism

Another approach to nation and nationalism is ethno-symbolism which attests that the nations are extensions or developed forms of ethnic communities and hence they have ethnic origins. This arguments have been mingled with some elements of modernist

approach which believes that nations are modern social constructs. Anthony Smith (1995, 1998, 1999, 2010) is the main proponent of this approach. He argues that the modern trend of nationalism discourse can be traced back in a historical process which attests to an ongoing and continuing notion of nationalism. Whilst Smith does not reject the fact that nationalism can be considered as a modern phenomenon, he maintains that crucially, the origin of nations pre-dates modern nationalism and modernity.

Through his ethno-symbolist perspective, Smith emphasises the ethnic and cultural features of nation and nationalism. His works which focus on symbols, values, traditions, memories and myths, as influential elements of an ethnic community, is critical to his understanding and study of nationalism and national identity. He relates the origin of nations to ethnic or kinship communities and this becomes the key point of his theory of "why and where particular nations are formed, and why nationalisms, although formally alike, possess such distinctive features and contents" (Smith, 1998, p. 191).

This approach considers objective factors, but pays more attention to subjective factors including memories, values, feelings, myths, and symbols (Smith, 1995, p.211). It claims that the modern development of nationalism has pre-modern roots and must be traced back in a historical process which attests to the continual nature of nation and nationalism. According to this view, the cultural and ethnic motifs and symbols are the main characteristics of modern nations and nationalism since they result from a "reinterpretation of pre-existing cultural motifs and reconstruction of earlier ethnic ties and sentiments" (Smith, 2010, p. 39). This relates the origin of nations to ethnic or kinship communities and addresses the question: "why and where particular nations are formed, and why nationalisms, although formally alike, possess such distinctive features and contents" (Smith, 1998, p. 191).

While both ethnicity and nationalism involve devotion and commitment to a group, 'ethnie' or a nation, Smith (1995) and some other ethno-nationalists scholars, such as, Bradatan, Popon and Melton (2010) assert that the way loyalty is expressed and understood differs substantially in various cultures. Smith emphasises that in many Western countries national identity is grounded on history, folklore, traditions, symbols, and common historical memory, while in non-Western countries national identity is more often founded upon an 'ethnic model,' that a nation is assumed as a "community of common descent with people being related by birth/blood" who reside in an 'historic land' (Smith, 1991, p. 11). Smith

states that in a 'non-Western' environment an historic birthplace is often associated with powerful emotional connections because it is the representation of the place as the home where the group's ancestors, saints and heroes lived, worked, prayed and fought (p. 9). This strong emotional attachment to homeland often leads the co-ethnics to claim that homeland as "exclusively theirs, consigning all non-members to the status of foreigners or outsiders who do not properly belong" (Kaiser, 2004, p. 230).

Following the emergence of modernity, religion has lost its dominant role for bringing social cohesion in society. As ethno-nationalists argue, new modern nations required a new driving force to bind people together. In the absence of religion, many nation states relied on ethnicity that might bring a shared sense of cultural and historical community as well as common memories and myths. In this regard, this research borrows the concept of 'ethno-nationalism,' generally in line with Smith's definition. It accepts that ethno-nationalism is a type of nationalism, often practised in non-Western areas, which includes faithfulness to an ethnic group supposed as having a common blood or birth origin. According to this perspective, the people who are part of ethnic groups, for example, the Kurds, are strongly attached to a land (whether they are living there or not) and believe they are the 'rightful owners' of an alleged historic territory (Martin, 2013). Thus, this loyalty functions as the main driver of collective acts which commonly appear in various forms of political actions with particular emphasis on their imagined homeland. Later in this chapter, I will further discuss Kurdish nationalism from an ethno-symbolist perspective.

Because of Smith's emphasis on the role of ethnicity and historical roots, his views might be confused with primordialism - he has sometimes been labelled a primodialist by some scholars (Madianou, 2005, p. 9). However, this is an inaccurate interpretation and his views are different from the primordialist approach. As discussed above, unlike primordialists, Smith does not see the nation as natural and perennial as primordialists claim. Secondly, primordialists did not differentiate between ethnic groups and nations. However, Smith clearly does make this distinction and defines nations "a group of human beings, possessing common and distinctive elements of culture, a unified economic system, citizenship rights for all members, a sentiment of solidarity arising out of common experience, and occupying a common territory" (1998, p. 188). While nations possess characteristics such as "a clearly delimited territory or 'homeland', a public culture, economic unity and legal rights and

duties for everyone" (p. 196), ethnic groups, according to Smith lack those characteristics. He defines ethnic groups as "named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity" (p. 191).

Although Smith acknowledges the ethnic roots of nations, he does not mean that all ethnic groups are likely to become nations. Yet, he considers some conditions and points out that in order to become a nation, an ethnic group needs to possess the three ethno-symbolic resources which are a golden age, ethnic election and an ancestral homeland alongside with shared ethnic values, myth, and memories (Smith 1999; see also Connor, 1994)

Despite the importance of these ethnic symbols and resources, they are not still guarantees for an ethnic group to become a nation. There are still other important factors which determine the timing of the transformation. These important factors are geopolitical transformations and the existence of a strong and active intelligentsia to translate ethnic resources and traditions into modern nationalism and thus construct a modern nation. The realisation of the intelligentsia's nationalist plans depends considerably on the active employment of cultural institutions including schools and the media like newspapers and television (Smith, 1999, p. 593). In considering the importance of the media, I will be adopting Anderson's theory of 'imagined communities' and the ways that media can construct such nations. Media become particularly important for stateless groups such as Kurds who do not have their own public educational institutions.

4.4 Transnationalism and the practice of nationalism in the diaspora

According to Arjun Appadurai (1996) a nation spreads its existence and limitations beyond state borders which results in the development of new communal entities. He calls these new entities 'trans-nations' which includes a transformation of the definition of nation and nationality among the citizens in exile and the former citizens or descendants of former citizens who all believe they belong to their home nation. Transnationalism also refers to several sorts of cross-border links and networks among individuals, organisations, genders, careers, organisations, groups and nations which are not indeed restricted to the territory of nation-states (see, Sheffer, 2003; Vertovec, 2003; Wahlbeck, 1999).

Transnationalism is one outcome of the development of globalisation. The notions of transport networks, integration and communication development serve as some of the defining points of this transnational era, that is sometimes called 'world without distance' in which geography comes to the end (Brien, 1992). Technological developments have hastened the emergence and development of different global, transnational and de-territorialised social relations (Wahlbeck, 1999). The key causes of transnationalism are found in the development of communication technologies and transport facilitation between individuals, places, groups and organisations that make it possible to have closer and everyday contact with the homeland as the greatest possibility in today's world.

Glick Schiller et al. (1992) defined transnationalism as "the process by which immigrants build social fields that links together their country of origin and their country of settlement" (p.1). It is usually practised more when immigrants participate in political and cultural activities. The emergence of 'transnational social fields' is the result of a number of intersecting economic, socio-cultural and political activities which link and situate immigrants and refugees in more than one country (Vertovec, 2003). Within this 'complex web of social relations' produced as the results of 'social fields,' trans-migrants form instantaneously a 'double sided' kind of identity that is rooted in both their original land and the host country (Glick Schiller et. al., 1992). Although transnationalism has been principally considered as a 'site for political engagement' (Vertovec & Cohen, 1999), it is hard not to get lost in the domain of transnationalism and its 'terminological jungle' (Portes, 2001, cited in

Khayati 2008, p. 28). Thus, it is essential, while referring to transnationalism, to differentiate between various sorts of cross-border arrangements and human classifications that have been brought about by social scientists since 1970. In other words, the transnationalism literature includes various terms including transnational community and networks, transnational spaces or fields, transmigration, diaspora, internet (cyber) and social media groups or communities, as well as transnational cultural and political interactions.

4.4.1 Diaspora

Diaspora is an ancient Greek term that was first applied in the Greek translation called the 'Septuagint' of the Hebrew Bible in the third Century BC, in which it described the divine punishment the Jews would endure throughout the world if they would not respect the Law of God (Dufoix, 2008). In practice, the term was originally applied to the groups of Jewish people who had experienced a harrowing history of dispersion from their homeland, alienation in their host lands, and maintained a desire to return (Safran, 1991). Until the first half of the twentieth century, this word was still limited to the religious areas. It was particularly applied to Jews as a religious minority and connoted the weight of a negative reputation: " 'diaspora' meant exile and persecution" (Dufoix, 2008).

The first serious scholarly writings on 'diaspora', beyond a religiously-defined community, date back to 1976 when Jon Armstrong published his article titled 'Mobilized and Proletarian Diasporas' in the American Political Science Review. He defined diaspora as "any ethnic collectivity that lacks a territorial base within a given polity, a relatively small minority throughout all portions of the polity" (Armstrong 1976, p.393). This has encompassed a various range of writings on diaspora, nationalism and transnationalism which focused on immigrants, refugees, guest workers, asylum seekers, and other ethnic or cultural groups. As a result of the development of the process of scholarly works on diaspora the concept has been well recognised in many academic disciplines especially, in sociology, international relations, and anthropology. However, the concept has become much more universal outside of the academic domain, including the media in which diasporic groups have constantly been involved in activities regarding the issues of their homeland or the countries in which they are current residing in (Brubaker, 2005).

From the 1960s, diaspora has referred to a group of people who leave their homeland, cross borders, and settle in locations different from their original homeland, while still maintaining social connections and elements of their shared culture. Today, diaspora is an 'outernational term' (Gilory, 1994) and the concept has become much broader. According to the Encyclopaedia of Diaspora (2005), the term applies to people scattered by whatsoever reason to more than one place. It is also applied to the movements, migrations, or dispersion of people away from a conventional or inherited homeland (Dufoix 2008). Tölölyan (Tölölyan, 1991) views diasporas as "the exemplary communities of the transnational moment" (p.5) because they represent the 'question of borders' (p.6), differently from nation states. While "[t]he [nation state] always imagines and represents itself as a land, a territory, a place that functions as the site of homogeneity, equilibrium, integration" (p.6), diasporas have a "heightened awareness of both the perils and rewards of multiple belonging" (pp.7-8) .

In this research, I apply the concept of 'diaspora' as it was defined by Brubaker (2005) who suggests that it can be described through three main features: a) a scattering in place (dispersion); b) an orientation towards the 'homeland, either real or imagined; and c) boundary-maintenance regarding a host country. Dispersion is the most common meaning of diaspora which indicates a network, group or community of people scattered from homeland to a foreign country. Homeland orientation connotes or indicates that the creation of diaspora is connected to a 'real' or 'imagined' homeland and the concerns and issues of homeland are represented in the diaspora too. However, boundary maintenance involves "preservation of a distinctive identity vis-a-vis a host society" (p.5) or a process in which the diaspora communities voluntarily or unintendedly continue their cross-border relationships between state boundaries depending on the circumstances. Thus, from Brubaker's perspective, it is safe to mention that diasporas are direct and natural outcomes of mass relocations, and that they should be studied differently from other sorts of migrant groups due to the three previously mentioned specific characteristics they have.

The notion of diaspora implies several interactions, connections, flows of information, and ideas, which shape the identity of a particular ethnic group. By exchanging information the development of communication networks across various locations, diaspora also "presents an exceptional case of intense mediation" and follows different directions (Georgiou, 2011).

These developments have strongly influenced the construction or re-construction of identity. In other words, diaspora involves political mobilisation and diasporic identities are representative of the main practices of 'long-distance nationalism' (Anderson, 1992) which can be observed amongst or in connection to the various transnational cultural, political, social and economic performances that the immigrants and refugees maintain across the frontiers of nation-states. In this sense, the majority of meanings associated with diaspora discuss the groups in relation to those groups that are detached from their homelands. Thus, dispersion from a home contains many social, political, cultural and transnational implications (Wahlbeck, 1999).

4.4.2 Stateless diaspora

Because of the ambiguities in the meaning and also the existence of several types of diaspora it is important to differentiate and specify different categories of diaspora. According to this framework, Gabriel Sheffer (2003) classifies diasporas into the categories of 'state-based diasporas' and 'stateless diasporas.' There are two implications associated with the term 'statelessness'. The first defining category applies statelessness to the individuals who do not have any official or legal documents to prove or demonstrate their citizenship of a country. This can happen for several political or personal reasons. As indicated by Article 1 of the 1954 United Nations Convention identifying with the status of stateless people, 'a person who is not considered as a national by any state under the operation of its law' is recognised as a stateless person. Up until now, the literature on statelessness has so far concentrated on securing citizenship/nationality as an answer for the political and existential powerlessness of stateless people and collectivities (Blitz & Lynch, 2009). Considering this definition, it can be stated that statelessness includes many Palestinians who are scattered in other Arab states without having citizenship or nationality. Many Kurds in Syria were also of such a status for several years under the reign of both Hafez Assad and his son, Bashar Assad. Some other groups that may have stateless population include the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Biharis in Bangladesh, the Bidun in Kuwait, the Haitians in the Dominican Republic, the Roma in central and south-east Europe and some social or ethnic communities in the former Soviet bloc, e.g., the Russian minority in the Baltic states (Lynch 2005; Southwick & Lynch 2009; Molnar 2012; cited in Tas, 2016, p.6). It is estimated that the number of stateless people, according to the legal definition, is

about 12 to 15 million in the world, a number that excludes many people who might hold formal nationality yet are prohibited from enjoying citizenship rights (Redclift, 2013; Staples, 2012).

However, statelessness is not and should not be limited only to a legal or an individual phenomenon. For people from some ethnic minority communities, particularly the individuals who see or *imagine* themselves as stateless, even legal attachments with a state and formal citizenship may not be sufficient to feel part of that state, with secure nationality. For these individuals, statelessness is a social, political or national reality which connotes a 'collective community problem' (Tas, 2016, p. 10). Since diverse ways to encounter statelessness exist because of several reasons, including political and historical ones, it is necessary to emphasise that there is a particular difference between statelessness as a legal issue of individual and statelessness in relation to nations who do not have states and are questing to achieve it (Eliassi, 2016a). This is not the same as looking at the legal citizenship status of individual members of a diaspora. For example, the Kurds in New Zealand might hold citizenship in New Zealand, Iran, Turkey or elsewhere, yet they are stateless in the sense that they do not have citizenship in their own Kurdish nation-state. Thus, this notion of statelessness is the one I am referring to throughout this project.

4.4.3 Long-distance nationalism

Nationalism is not restricted to the interior geography of a specific county or a region. The trend of globalisation has spread people and nations, which has resulted in voluntarily or forced relocations of people, ideas, goods and services (Appadurai, 2002, Castells 2010). This considerable dispersion consequently has led to the formation of another type of nationalism named long distance nationalism, or diaspora nationalism, which functions outside of homeland territories. It is commonly applied to a set of nationalist sensations among exiled people or diaspora groups, who desire to experience some national ties with their homeland, yet do not wish to leave their diaspora country. The concept of *long-distance nationalism* presented by Benedict Anderson (1992) has been used later by many other scholars, for example, Skrbiš (1999) and Glick Schiller and Fouron (2001). Long distance nationalism is formed in the diaspora and developed around the desire to return and imagined concerns regarding origin, ancestors, birth, and homeland territory. Anderson (2001) defines long distance nationalism as a nationalism that does not depend any longer

as it once did on territorial place in a home country. He applies the term to the political life of those nationalists who have migrated from their own country and participated in the political events and national movements of the homeland from exile. This political life in Anderson's view is long distance nationalism, which has been achieved and empowered by print media as well as electronic media, such as, 'E-mail', and so on (Anderson, 1992, p.11).

In order to cast more light on long distance nationalism, Anderson provides the example of a middle-aged Punjabi businessman who is a Canadian citizen and financially supports the movement for Khalistan. He is "enthusiastic about the sacrifices of young Sikh activists as well as their terroristic campaign against non-Sikhs in the Punjab" (p. 11) But he lives in Toronto to be ensured that his children are living in quiet and invulnerable circumstances, and they have a bright commercial future life and he most likely does not contribute to the political life of Canada. In Anderson's description, "his political participation is directed towards an imagined heimat [home] in which he does not intend to live, where he pays no taxes, where he cannot be arrested, where he will not be brought before the courts, and where he does not vote" (p. 11). This man not only does not intend to directly enter the troubled situation of the his home country, but has also kept his family miles away from the fire of wars and troubles, which Anderson calls 'a politics without responsibility or accountability' (p.11).

There is a solid reciprocal relationship between diaspora and homeland, and diasporic communities may practice nationalist goals (Clifford, 1994). Hobsbawm (1992) also acknowledges a special relationship between the exile and nationalism and mentions the German emigrants as an example of those who inspired nationalist seeds inside Germany. He believes that those German emigrants who migrated from the eleventh to the eighteenth century from the Eastern Europe to lower Volga had highly influenced the strengthening of German nationalism. He names the trend 'proto-nationalism' by which "states and national movements could mobilise certain variants of feelings or collective belonging which already existed and which could operate, as it were, potentially on the macro-political scale which could fit in with modern states and nations" (p.46). He further distinguishes two clusters of bonds: supra-local bonds, which go beyond restricting the real spaces in which people experience in their life, that go wider than the everyday life and the town; and political bonds that make people think through institutions and states (p. 47).

This results in a set of transnational procedures which connect the migrant's earlier homelands to their existing diasporic countries (Glick Schiller, 2005, p.66). Through this interconnectedness, homeland becomes a key symbol for all diasporic and transnational activities. In this way, refugees and migrants in the diaspora perform as long-distance nationalists: they identify with their previous homeland and organise their everyday activities in support of that land (p.58).

The research on diaspora nationalism and long-distance nationalism has advanced rapidly during the past decades. This indicates that the particular conditions of exiled communities have given rise to the appearance and development of nationalist orientations among social and political groups, as well as ethnicities and nations living in the diaspora. The historiographical literature of nationalism indicates that the growth of nationalism and identity building in exile (as well as in the homeland) in Western Europe from the end of the nineteenth to the early twentieth century was considerably stronger than in the period of the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries (Gellner, 1991; Gingrich & Banks, 2006; Woolf, 1996). Long distance nationalism will be further discussed and modified later in the Kurdish case and throughout the dissertation.

4.5 National identities and Diasporas in the age of Internet and new media

There is a growing body of research related to globalisation, the advent of cyberspace and their implications for diaspora groups and national identities. Technological development is noticeably influential in transforming practical and theoretical areas of studying social, political, economic and cultural phenomena. The contemporary period is an era in which information is being loaded and processed very fast and in massive volumes. Rarely, since the emergence of print technology, has history been so popular, so abundantly documented, so easy and accessible, as it is right now (Arthur, 2011, p. 175). Electronic media and internet have proved to be important tools for this rapid transformation. The Internet has served as a tool that possesses the capability for influencing almost all aspects of human life. And while it has fundamentally expanded local, national, and global communication capabilities, it has also changed the media environment for the 'creation and maintenance of national identity'(Saunders, 2011, p. 58). As Castells (2001) briefly summarised, "the Internet is a communication medium that allows, for the first time, the

communication of many to many, in chosen time, on a global scale" (p. 2). This is a very significant point which I will refer to further in chapters six and eight.

According to Connor (1994), communication technology has been a 'catalyst' for ethnic nationalist movements: "the spreading of effective communications has had an evident impact upon ethnic consciousness, but the full impact of the communications media did not precede the message of self-determination" (p. 39). Likewise, electronic media, as Anthony Smith (1995) argues, help to activate and strengthen national/ethnic ties among ethnic groups and encourage them to recreate and redefine new ones. Smith goes on to claim that media are capable of reinforcing transnational loyalties among national and ethnic identities and fill the gaps that separated people of the same kind from their symbolic brothers and sisters (Smith, 1995). Moreover, Smith asserts that these practices [media practice] are constructive encouragers for smaller social and political groups and ethnic/linguistic communities to institute and maintain their own solid social and cultural networks. This is in opposition to the more dominating influence of nation-states, and the wider continental or global culture (p. 17).

Besides, the internet is reshaping virtual ethnic communities in the world and virtual ethnic groups are now globalised groups who have their own local origins and characteristics. They express and promulgate their specific and local views and national aspirations in the context of a global medium easily and freely. In this sense, we see the dual face of postmodernism, globally scattered but bounded by locality, the phenomenon that Robertson (1995) termed 'glocality.' The concept speaks to the importance of the social and cultural aspects of globalisation whereby it is regarded as mixing the idea of globalisation with that of local considerations. Robertson argues that globalisation has created a situation in which civilisations, regions, nation-states, nations within the states, or other ethnic groups, try to either build their own new identity, or preserve their own traditions. In regard to issues of ethnicity/nationality and the way they interact in a global world, Robertson reiterates Handler's (1994) view that the modern articulation of ethnicity and/or nationality is achieved inside the global context of identity and particularity (p. 26). Overall, the leading argument of this 'pragmatic' theory is that 'diversity' is the heart of social life, and globalisation does not necessarily obliterate all differences. Thus, it gives a sense of

'uniqueness' and 'autonomy' to the experience of groups of people whenever they characterise themselves as 'cultures,' 'societies' or 'nations' (Robertson, 1995, p. 26).

During the last two decades, the emergence and rise of locally-centred diasporic and ethno-national media appeared to become part of globally connected media, as indicated by Wilson and Stewart (cited in Kelley, 2012). Since the emergence of print media, diaspora groups (including the Kurds who will be discussed) have attempted to set up newspapers, radio, TV, and so on in order to communicate with other members of their community as well as to discuss their identity issues. However, since the mid-1990s online technological developments have empowered the marginalised groups to extend their activities to a broader worldwide domain (Karim, 2003). Therefore, the development of technologies has significantly helped the construction of 'on air' and 'online' virtual imagined communities that encompass transnational social cyber spaces wherein people speak with and see each other face-to-face (Gajjala, 1999, cited in Khayati 2008, p.36).

According to Saunders (2011, p. 58) computer-mediated-communication has facilitated the grounds for ethnic groups and diaspora to maintain, and reinforce their identity, as well as make efforts to revive their flag in the 'cyberspace.' He continues that cyberspace, due to its global structure, anonymity, and functionality, enables the diverse and dispersed digital duplication of all pre-existing media platforms including texts, newspapers, motion pictures, radio, and television (p.3). He also mentions some dispersed nations, such as, the Ruthenians, Kurds and Armenians, who are using media to meet the 'challenges of distance and politics' that once "prevented them from communicating across state borders" (p.60). By the development of new virtual relationships, these challenges have almost transformed to new arenas, since the new spheres are uninhibited by the traditional barriers of political territory and national sovereignty.

The relationship between media and migrants has also been emphasised by Appadurai (1996). Through the 'theory of rapture', he explores the ways the new media offer everyday disciplines and opportunities for imagining self and the world. Appadurai presents an outlook on how electronic mediation change previous forms of communication and everyday discourse: "They are resources for experiments with self-making in all sorts of societies [and] provide resources for self-imagining as an everyday social project" (1996, p. 3-4). Similarly, the development of advanced mobile technologies and digital

communications has made it possible for diasporic communications to grow faster and this has resulted in the reproduction of the concepts, such as, nation, home, community, self, and so forth. For ethnic minorities and dispersed diaspora, the Internet offers many possibilities, from text-based email to the transmission of videos, photos and sound. As Callister et al. (2009) maintain, the technological development in communication has broadened the ways wherein ethnic, cultural and human information is being shared and sustained. In this regard, "cyberspace is increasingly used as a space for individuals and groups to actively express, and hypothetically create, identities including perhaps new 'ethnic' [or national] identities" (cited in Smith, P., 2012, p. 33).

Diamandaki (2003) considers the Internet as a hybrid communication medium which enables three different sorts of communication including communication with people who are not temporally or physically in attendance, communication through generating and receiving media content and communication with interactive technical systems. By focusing on the role of digital diaspora in building the identities, Diamandaki (2003) claims that the diasporic communities without a nation-state can be immensely advantaged by the Internet and what it offers them.

Additionally, the Internet provides various forms of 'textuality' and 'interactivity' (Aouragh, 2011), such as, reading, writing, looking at pictures, watching films, listening to music and live radio programs, talking with others, using a webcam to see each other while talking, downloading archived material, and so on. These functions, according to Chayko (2002), have brought *simultaneity* to communication across distances. In this regard, the people who are spatially distanced have the opportunity to be connected virtually, and "share an experience at the same time which makes the connection even more direct, more vivid, and more resonant" (p.14).

Furthermore, the Internet is considered as an 'independent' and 'democratic' space where individuals can gain access and participate regardless of barriers related to sex, creed, class, ethnicity or nationality that exist in the real world. It is a "world that is both everywhere and nowhere" (Barlow, 1996). Through this independent and democratic space, marginalised groups have found the possibility of telling their own story and affecting political conditions in a less restricted way. This has enabled these groups to have their own voice in cyberspace wherein they freely "express themselves and engage in dialog with the global audience of

cyberspace" (Mitra & Watts, 2002, p. 488, cited in Smith P., 2012, p. 47). The democratic aspect of the Internet and social media is one of the important pillars of this project which I will be discussing in further detail in chapter Eight.

Consequently, the development of communication technology provides marginalised groups, such as, ethnic groups with a chance to examine or correct the biases which have existed against them due to the lack of independent and free media. The Internet has already been an exceptional product for the development of the 'electronic revolution' and has restructured the meaning of time, space, and place, and the 'public sphere'(Habermas, 1989), which is now shaped and developed by the collective discourses and ideas that the members of an online community possess. In this sense, mass media and mass communication are important, in that while they can transmit shared symbols they shape a sense of national community (Aouragh, 2011, p. 24).

4.5.1 Imagined communities online

As discussed above, many scholars (Elias & Lemish, 2009; Eriksen, 2007; Diamandaki, 2003; Kadende-Kaiser 2000; Kissau & Hunger, 2008; Miller & Slatter, 2000; Mills, 2002; Georgiou, 2001; Karim, 2003)   indicate that the Internet, as a product of the communication revolution, has contributed to the articulation and imagination of the homeland. Moreover, many others, such as Georgiou & Silverstone (2007), have argued that the Internet functions as an online forum to challenge "national and transnational political ideologies and cultural expressions, or counter - expressions of identity" (p.34). Related terms, for example, email nationalism and 'Internet nationalism' (Eriksen, 2007), also indicate the vital role of online technology in the development of nationalism and imagining communities. These are similar concepts remembering the way print media prepared for the 'imagined communities' and the development of nationalism.

Building upon Anderson's argument concerning the print media, the Internet and the social media are also likely to provide fast and accessible abilities for the Kurdish diaspora to communicate with their Kurdish fellows in the diaspora and in their homeland, which reinforces both the notions of 'imagined communities' and 'long distance nationalism' (Anderson, 1992). Social media make a strong showing as a communicative and interactive place of nationalism. At the same time, by their written-based and multi-media nature they

play a different role compared with the other forms of traditional media. They provide a better chance of interaction among the diaspora users and this would result in more discussions regarding identity questions, ideologies and the articulation and imagination of homelands. This has opened a new horizon for the diasporic communities to articulate its nationalistic aspirations and raises not just the question of *what* national identity is, it also raises the question of *who* is undertaking the articulation of national identity within the online imagined community.

Although imagined communities online have not been studied as often as offline imagined communities by referring to Anderson's definition, they could also be created by the Internet and social media among diasporas and several other groups (Kavoura, 2014). This asserts that the creation of imagined communities is possible on the Internet and social media wherein the users communicate and exchange information globally. However, the kinds and qualities of online imagined communities can be different from the Anderson's 'imagined communities'. This is the subject this research aims to explore, which will be discussed further in chapter Seven in general and in chapter Eight, in particular.

This interconnectedness may result in the rising of shared sentiments and imagination (Bountouri, & Giannakopoulos, 2014). For example, the provided active platform of Facebook paves the way for discussions among common historical, cultural and political themes among the users who have never met and are scattered throughout the world. Similar to Anderson's imagined communities, the users of social media communities' utilise written language and audio-visual as well as symbols. They share common interests and extend friendship. They allow users to share their own experience with other users and create a strong feeling of belonging to a community (Hays et. al., 2013). Bountouri, & Giannakopoulos, (2014) claim that the sharing functions of social media, e.g., re-sharing in Facebook or retweeting in twitter, is another way through which 'participants can be in a conversation.' Likewise, all other functions, such as, likes, comments, pokes, hashtags, and so on serve as raw material for the formation of a community online.

Nevertheless, new types of media and communication, for example, social media networks, are partially different from print media in terms of their representational and distributive capabilities. In comparison with the conventional offline imagined communities, social media users construct a sense of community that can cross the borders of the nation states.

Also, the low cost of using social media facilitates more interactivity. Users have more choices of communities through online media. In this sense, the membership and participation in social media is more voluntary, i.e., social media users feel no compulsion or commitment to stay in a community for a long time. Thus the nature of their relationship with a page or a group is unconditional and users change the page or group easily and quickly and they can be a member of several different pages at the same time.

While interpreting Anderson's 'metaphor of imagined communities' as it relates to the recent Internet and social media era, I will propose that in the absence of a feasible nation, the social media offer an 'imagined' and imaginary space. These are appropriate spaces for discursive interaction and imagination. Likewise, these spaces become new sources of expressing nationalism which are encouraged and empowered by cultural and political activism. In addition, the online networking environment provides diaspora communities, especially stateless diaspora, such as, the Kurds, some other layers of identity and relationships. Through social media, the Kurds are not just reconstructing Kurdish ethnic and national imagined community, they are also articulating and constructing individual or specific communities based on regions, cities, dialects, religions, political parties and attitudes. This issue will be discussed further while framing 'imagined communities' and comparing it with the online Kurdish diaspora community.

Chapter Five: Kurdish nationalism, the formation of the Kurdish diaspora, and the practice of Kurdish nationalism in the diaspora

5.1 Introduction

This first part of this chapter will provide a theoretical discussion on the emergence and development of the Kurdish national identity and nationalism in detail and in relation to the theories of nationalism mentioned in the previous chapter. It presents a rather intermediary approach to the emergence and development of Kurdish nationalism which is more aligned with the ethno-symbolist perspective. This is since cultural and ethnic motifs have been some of the most important sources of Kurdish nationalism for the mobilisation of the people. However, due to its media focus, the dissertation also barrows some elements of modernist approach. In this regard, Anderson's theory of 'imagined communities' and 'long distance nationalism' the modernist approaches to nationalism have been discussed throughout the research (with some modifications while applying them to the Kurdish case).

The second part of the chapter presents some information on the historical trajectories of formation and development of the Kurdish diaspora. It will provide a broader understanding of some parts of Kurdish history that have paved the way for the construction of Kurdish national identity, nationalism and the Kurdish diaspora. Although the history of Kurdish dispersion can be traced back to the pre-modern times (Hassanpour & Mojab, 2005, p. 215), the main focus of this chapter is on the Kurdish migration in the 20th century that can be classified into two eras, specifically, the labour (1900-1975) and the refugee/political (1975-present) era.

The third part of this chapter discusses Kurdish nationalism in the diaspora. It provides some theoretical arguments on Kurdish long-distance nationalism and the way it adheres to the concept of a unified Kurdish nation that is the essential claim of Kurdish nationalists. Later, it argues that the diaspora has offered the Kurds a good opportunity to organise themselves and be culturally and politically involved in Kurdish nationalism distant from the homeland.

The chapter finally casts light on the phenomenon of the statelessness of the Kurds and the way it has influenced the Kurdish nationalist narrative in the diaspora.

5.2 Kurdish nationalism and national identity

Kurdish national identity demonstrates itself not only in Kurds' attitudes to Kurdish race, language, Kurdistan as a birth place, religion, and other roots, but specifically lies within the set of relationships between how Kurds are viewed by others (their neighbours) and how they perceive or 'imagine' themselves. The following verses written by a Kurdish nationalist Ibrahim Ahmed (1914-2000), which has been turned into one of the famous Kurdish national songs, clearly reflect the perception that Kurds recognise their identity differently from others, for example, Arabs, Turks and Persians. It concisely represents a perception of Kurdish national identity:

> Neither an Arab, nor a Persian I am.
> I am not a mountain Turk either.
> This is not me who only claims this, the history attests
> That I have always been a Kurd and a Kurdistani,
> We have always been Kurds and we will remain so. *[my translation]*

The notion of Kurdayeti [Kurdish national identity] could simply denote a group of people who are differently defined (van Bruinessen 1992, p. 268). Based on this explanation, the sentiment of identifying as a Kurd determines the meaning of *Kurdayeti*. Once a French correspondent had asked the iconic Kurdish leader Mustapha Barzani about the identity of the Kurds, and moreover, who is a Kurd? "He replied: anyone who considers himself a Kurd"(cited in Resool 2012, p.60)..

The question of origin is a vital part of Kurdish nationalist discourse. Thus many Kurdish nationalists tried to relate the modern Kurds to an ancient origin or even create an origin, although there are strategic arguments regarding the identity of the nation and the way they legitimise their claims (Vali 2003). A glance at the literature of Kurdish nationalism indicates a diversity of argument, as the origin of Kurdish nationalism might date back to ancient times (Izady, 1992), the sixteenth century (Hassanpour 1992, 2003; Kirmanj 2014), the late Ottoman Period (Olson, 2013), the First World War and the early Turkish Republic (Gunter, 2007; Özoğlu 2011), or the Republic of Kurdistan in Mahabad (Vali 1998, 2011). For example, Aron (1997) argued that the Kurds pioneered nationalism "a century earlier

than Europeans" (*cited in*, Maxwell & Smith, 2015), or, according to Hassanpour (1992) Kurdish nationalism is probably the oldest nationalist ideology in the Muslim world.

Accordingly, there are a number of arguments that explicate Kurdish identity, ethnicity and nationalism in relation to kinship, power, class struggle, history and culture. The discussion of these topics raises questions related to the historic nature of Kurdish nationalism and the ethno-national awakening process: Is Kurdish identity perceived as ethnic? Does the Kurdish nation have an ancient navel? Although several arguments have been brought out in order to answer these questions, the literature around the emergence and development of Kurdish nationalism is not exempt from the dominant Western paradigms of nationalism, which explains the causality of nation and national identity

5.2.1 The territorial dimension of Kurdish nationalism

Speaking of the perception of their own land, the Kurds, as a nation without a state, regard Kurdistan as the national territory of the Kurds who have been scattered among the four countries by the rise of new nation states in the beginning of the 19th century. As Guibernau (2007, p. 157) states, "for [nations without a country], territory is becoming a quasi-sacred component of their identity." Similarly, there is a substantial relationship between territory and Kurdish national identity as Kurdish nationalism is formed by the "problematic character of the concept of Kurdistan"(Kaya 2012, p.132). For centuries, the Kurdish people have been the inhabitants of a specific geography (McDowall, 2006, p. 2) and the life of the Kurdish people developed around the territory called Kurdistan where work, family, and all religious and administrative structures were constructed.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Kurdistan has always been a place of resistance against various empire and state building policies during the last five centuries, according to van Bruinessen (1992), "the inaccessibility of Kurdistan and the fierce warring capacities of its inhabitants have always made it a natural frontier of the empires that emerged around it. In the same way, McDowall (2004, p.151) notes that 'trying to master Kurdistan and its inhabitants has never been easy for outsiders.' As a result of this geopolitical game, resistance and struggle against 'enemies' have become inseparable components of the Kurdish identity, a phenomenon which continued through history, but has been even more strongly politicised during the modern time (Khayati, 2008).

The notion of an 'imagined' homeland denotes a political claim over a territory in the name of the Kurdish nation. Thus, as Gellner (1983) points out, nationalism attempts to tie the national group together and describe its people as citizens within a defined territory. In this respect, strong affection for their place of origin and, predominantly, to the notion of Kurdistan has also become an inseparable part of the Kurdish national identity. The concept of an imagined homeland has functioned as a mobilising factor for the Kurdish nationalist discourse. They relate their past existence of Kurdish ethnic groups to this concept "in a way that applies to a wide territory and to a very long and continuous Kurdish habitation in this area" (Kaya, p. 95).

5.2.2 The political dimension of Kurdish national identity

The geopolitical developments following the First World War resulted in the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, and the creation of a number of new political entities and nation-states. These transitions brought about many other changes, including the redrawing of borders and the domination of some ethnic groups in these new states. Also, the discourse of nationalism and nation-state building became one of the most all-powerful and prevailing discourses throughout the Middle East. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire almost all of the new states mobilised nationalism in order to reinforce their legitimacy in terms of their power and their status as 'nation-states.' In this context, the Kurds who were deprived of the opportunity of creating a country of their own during the geopolitical changes in the aftermath of the First World War, tried to achieve their own autonomous state through several social, political and armed movements. They contested both mandatory powers (Syria/France and Iraq/Great Britain), and the newly established states (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria).

The nationalist discourse of the new states disclaimed the existence of the Kurdish ethno-national identity in violent ways. Furthermore, they attempted to prevent the Kurds from developing or building a collective awareness through various ways, such as, assimilation policies and compulsory removals. On the other hand, as discussed in an earlier chapter, the Kurds have resisted, as almost all of the Kurdish struggles have been reactions to the prevailing nationalism of the states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria in which the ethnic groups of Turks, Persian (Fars) and Arabs were mostly dominant. Thus, in such a violent landscape,

nationalism has had a complex effect on the Kurds, helping propel their own political claims, and also driving their reactions to neighbouring states.

Thus, the political dimension of Kurdish identity stems from its relationship with, and, as a reaction to the establishment of modern states in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Thus, the common meaning of *Kurdayeti* which could be outlined as a common culture, language, territory, set of symbols, memory and experience (Sheyholislami, 2011) has been added to by future political aspirations which make the Kurdish national identity a modern phenomenon. Kurds believe that establishing their own independent state, or access to their ethnic/national rights through various forms of self-determination, such as, federalism or autonomy are the basic rights which they have been deprived of (Ghassemlou 1965; Van Bruinessen 1989, Kreyenbroek 1992, Van Bruinessen 1992, Vali 2011).

5.2.3 Kurdish nationalism from a primordial perspective

Considering the discussions of the previous chapter regarding the ancient history of nations, a primordialist perspective considers the Kurds as an ancient nation with respect to possessing specific traits, specifically, distinct language, race, ethnicity, religion, literature, culture, and territory) that has been continual (Joireman, 2003, p. 20). This perspective affirms that Kurdish ethnicity or nationalism is a continuation of kinship which is the normal drive for the quest of collective objectives in the struggle for survival (Nerwy, 2012, p.71). Primordialists also consider the Kurds as an uninterrupted nation through history who have always settled in their homeland, Kurdistan (Nabaz, 2002).

This perspective advocates that the contemporary Kurds are the representatives and descendants of the ancient Medes or even long before that time. To some Kurdish nationalists, the Kurdish lineage even goes beyond the Medes and claims that the Ancient Guti and the Lullubi are also ancestors of the modern Kurds (Izady, 1992). The Kurdish historian and linguist Jamal Nabaz (2002) is one of the Kurdish primordial nationalists who, by '*Kurdayeti*' [Kurdish national identity], refers to a perpetual, dynamic and natural movement. His definition of the Kurds is based on the different characteristics that they possess. He noted that when we speak about the Kurds we refer to a group of people who have distinct characteristics. The effects of his objective uniqueness make them unique and different from the others"(Nabaz 2002, p. 10). In line with this approach, the Kurdish nation

is made up of one ethnic group who have one language, one history and one geography, but without an independent political structure (cited in Sheyholislami, 2011, p. 52). In this sense, the Kurdish struggle for independence is intrinsic (and inevitable) to the modern Kurds, as they desire to reproduce and 're-establish' their glorious history in the form of a Greater [Independent] Kurdistan. Here, nationalism becomes a specific political effect of the nation, a vehicle for the realisation of its historical rights to a national identity (Nabaz, 2002).

Although the Kurdish territories have been divided and occupied, the primordialist discourse of Kurdish nationalism is still driven by the notion of the homogeneity of a Kurdish nation which is supposed to be joined ethnically, territorially, linguistically, culturally, and politically— in the sense of having common aspirations and the long-term goal of establishing a unified and independent Kurdistan (Shakely, 2009). According to this understanding, the existence of internal conflicts and divisions in Kurdistan is mostly related to the external reasons such as suffering occupation by other dominant nations (Nabaz 2002). Thus, this perception that Kurdistan is the ethnic and historical land of Kurds adds further credibility to the Kurdish national cause.

In order to support their position, the Kurdish primordialists relate the emergence of Kurdish nationalism to a number of historical texts through which the Kurdish identity has been articulated, or the Kurds have been distinguished from other people (ethnic groups). Among these texts, Sharfname is the earliest known text written in 1596 by a Kurdish prince, Sharaf-Khan Bidlisi (1543-1603, that exclusively discusses the history of the administrative systems maintained by the Kurdish princes and the realm of each Kurdish kingdom. It is "an erudite history of the semi-independent Kurdish emirates, some of whom continued to exist into the middle of the nineteenth century" (Gunter 2007, p.4). Sharaf-Khan wrote the book during the prosperous era of the Kurdish principalities and emirates as 'a history of the Kurdish rulers of the Kurdish territories, in which he tried to demonstrate that the Kurdish people are a distinct group with an experience of governing. As discussed in the earlier historical chapter of the thesis, the name 'Kurd', as a group identity, had been used 900 years before Sharaf-khan. However, there is no evidence that before the sixteenth century this represented the 'Kurds' as we consider them to be a distinct ethnic group beyond the tribal level (Özoğlu 2011, p. 205).

Another text, probably the one most often referred to, that has also become a holy book for Kurdish primordialist nationalists to locate the origin of the Kurdish nationalism is the epopee of *Mem u Zin* [Mam and Zin], and was composed by the Kurdish poet Ahmadi Khani (1650–1707). To many Kurds, Khani propagated a Kurdish nationalist agenda. Mem u Zin was composed in verse, which was easy to remember and recite. In an epic story, Khani wished for the Kurds to have their own king (master) who has his own sovereignty and crown, a Kurdish master who recognises the value of science, art and poetry, and scholarly books (dîwân). Khani also demonstrated obvious collective (group) awareness while he differentiated the Kurds from Arabs, Turks, and Iranians.

One main criticism against the primordialist approach is that it appeals to history in having a conception of fixed identity. This does not allow any change, though, nationalism and identity are dynamic and flexible phenomena (Joireman 2003, p. 31). It fails to clarify the evolution of Kurdish nations throughout history or why people accept a specific identity, for example, Kurdish rather than Persian. None of the Kurdish primordialists identify the several linguistic, social or political differences that exist among the Kurdish people or 'multi-ethnicity' since a Kurd may have both Kurdish and Turkish or Persian or Arab identity (Joireman, 2003, Hassan, 2013). Besides, this approach neither presented a convincing answer for the historical relationship between the Kurds and other ethnic groups nor did it sufficiently explain the existence of many religious, linguistic, tribal, and geo-political gaps among the Kurds and how a Kurdish homogenous identity has been formed (as they argue) despite the existing splits. Moreover, this approach has not considered any role for the media in the development of Kurdish national identity.

5.2.4 Kurdish nation as a constructed/modern concept

Referring to the detailed discussions on the classification of nationalism's theorists in the previous section on nationalism, the other group, known as constructivists or modernists, considered nationalism as the base and the '*prima causa'* of a nation or national identity – rather than the other way around. In this view, the nation is a result of nationalist politics, a political creation and hence a modern phenomenon. The modernist account has been commonly applied in discussing the origin of Kurdish nationalism and national identity as most of the theoretical writings related to Kurdish nationalism have followed this approach (McDowall 1996; Vali 2003; Van Bruinessen 2003; Gunter 2008).

The constructivists do not perceive Kurdish nationalism as an ancient and continual phenomenon, they perceive it as a Western-derived phenomenon created as a result of European industrialisation, and introduced to the people throughout the Middle East in the early twentieth century (Gunter, 2007). Furthermore, they relate the appearance of Kurdish nationalism to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and as a reaction to the political change that followed that breakdown (van Bruinessen 1992; Vali 2003). Thus, from this point of time, the Kurdish nationalists encouraged literacy among the Kurdish people by promoting Kurdish literature and folklore, particularly the early writings of Sharaf-Khan Bitlisi and Ahmadi Khani (Hassan, 2013).

Whilst the emergence and development of Kurdish nationalism was not the consequence of a direct war against the occupation or the resistance to a colonial power, it was highly influenced by the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, Kurdish nationalism developed as a reaction to the unwilling division of Kurdish territories and formation of unitary states in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Since then this nationalism has acted as a political movement, adopting and evolving as a minority within one of the newly founded states. In this respect, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire following the First World War, the ratification of the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920, as well as some other factors, such as, the twelve articles of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points paved the way for the growth of Kurdish nationalism which represented itself in the form of autonomy requests, self-determination and the Kurd's desire for an independent state.

Abbas Vali, as one of the best-known Kurdish scholars advocating a constructivist approach, argues that identities, including national identity, are always constructed and situational. In this sense, his views are in line with other modernist scholars, such as, Anderson (2006), Billig (1995), Hall, (2006), Heller (1999), and Wodak et al. (2009). According to Vali (2003, 2011) Kurdish national identity is obviously 'modern' and is defined in terms of differences and is marked with 'otherness' (Vali, 1998, p. 83). Its origins are dependent on "the relationship of the self and other with the emergent Turkish, Persian and Arab identities in the early decades of present centuries" (Vali, 2003, p.104). He relates the emergence of Kurdish national identity and nationalism to the reaction to the discursive constructions of national identity which has accompanied the structural process of formation and

consolidation of the modern nation states of Turkey, Iraq and Iran in which a distinctive Kurdish national identity was being denied (Vali, 2003, p.104).

Vali also stresses that the emerging Kurdish identity should not be imagined in terms of a unified origin as it has never been fixed or continual. Rather, it should be regarded instead as the "divided relationship of self and other, ever-present in every instance of recognition/denial, rebellion/suppression." (Vali, 2003, p.104). In this sense, Kurdish national identity is defined in terms of differences from other co-located ethnic groups. He continues by explaining that the Kurdish national identity arose as a response to the expansion of official national identities in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria which were reliant on "the denial of Kurdish ethnicity and ethnic and national identities" (1998, p. 82; see also Vali, 2003). Even though Vali's understanding of Kurdish nationalism is closer to the political realities of the Middle East and Kurdistan in the beginning of the twentieth century, his definition of the Kurdish national identity is completely in the context of modernism and in terms of otherness. He leaves little or no space for the ethnic and historical, cultural and ethnic readings of Kurdish nationalism.

David McDowall (1996) is another advocate for a modernist reading of Kurdish nationalism and claims that during modern history Kurdish national feeling has been defined by opposition to 'political control by outsiders'. Regarding the Kurdish history of the 20th century he emphasises "the struggle between the Kurdish people and the governments to which they are subject" (P. 1). From this perspective, the exclusive, aggressive, biased policies of the countries which dominated Kurdistan have been influential in the construction of modern Kurdish nationalism. On a parallel line, Martin van Bruinessen (2003) also argues that state suppression in those countries essentially helped to consolidate 'the strength of what it tried to destroy, Kurdish culture' (p. 57). Furthermore, almost all of the theorists of this school agree that the drawing of the involuntary borders following the First World War prevented the Kurds from establishing a state, and that Kurdish nationalism has developed as a reaction to the 'official state nationalisms' (Gunter, 2008) of Turkey, Iran Iraq, and Syria. On the same track of thought, Gunter (2007) also refutes the primordial or essentialist suggestions on the origin of Kurdish nationalism or any other nationalism in the region and states:

Turkish, Iranian, and even Arab nationalism largely emerged only after World War I following the demise of the Ottoman Empire and its emphasis on Islam as the supreme focus of one's loyalty (p.7).

The main cause for the politicisation of Kurdish cultural identity is the change from the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural realities of the Ottoman (Yavuz, 2001) and Persian Empires (Vali, 2011) to the nation-state model. After World War I, Kurdish nationalism arose as a wide-ranging political movement described by political loyalties with the essential aim of creating a homogeneous nation-state (Nerwy, 2012, p.96). Thus, the centralisation, assimilation or exclusion policies of the new nation states led Kurdish movements to react against those states (Kaya, 2012, p.17). Finally, these reactions fed the durability of Kurdish nationalism. The political arrangement of the new nation states and their policy of the homogenisation in regard to the cultural differences of the ethnic groups apparently influenced the Kurds.

From a modernist perspective, it is questionable, though, if the Kurdish movements prior to the First World War could be regarded as nationalist movements, since during that period, religion and religious identity were more important in the region than a Kurdish national identity (Nerwy, 2012, p.96). Moreover, while the construction of Kurdish nationalism has been developed and completed by the Kurdish intelligentsia through an imagined construction called Kurdistan, media has played the most important role (Hassanpour, 1992; Romano 2006; Sheyholislami, 2011). The emergence of the first Kurdish newspaper, *Kurdistan*, is considered a turning point in the history of Kurdish media. Since then, the Kurds, more or less, have been taking advantage of media technology (including print and broadcast) in order to reproduce and develop their own nationalistic discourse and appeals. In addition to print media, today's online technology, particularly social media, has made the modernist arguments more applicable to Kurdish nationalism than primordialism. This topic will be discussed further in a later chapter.

5.2.5 An intermediate approach toward Kurdish nation and national identity

Nationalism, whether it is by way of a collective consciousness , or a political doctrine, or a cultural phenomenon, is used in building nations or nation-states which are associated with a specific geography, culture, history and sovereignty. In illustrating the roots, definitions, and notions of nations and nationalism, this dissertation rejects a primordial and essentialist interpretation of nation and nationalism, the perspective that views nations as

natural groups of human beings and that they have always existed. I also reject the extreme modernist view that argues that nations are only political or cultural creations. Despite rejecting an extreme version of modernism, this school of thought on nationalism cannot be considered as a unitary approach and as discussed above it includes a range of ideas. Thus, there are some facts about the modernist approach which have informed this research.

The first fact is that this approach provides a reasonable understanding of nation and national identity when they argue that nations are not god-given or natural, but historical constructs and social phenomena, which are also achieved symbolically and discursively. Secondly, from the modernist literature, this research has been informed noticeably by Anderson's concepts of 'long distance nationalism' and 'imagined communities', which I have explained throughout the thesis thoroughly. However, the application of these terms to the area of Kurdish diaspora as a 'stateless nation' should be regarded with several considerations and modifications, which I have discussed and will be discussing more in chapters on diaspora and media. In the case of Kurdish nations, the modernist view disregards the fact that Kurdish nationalism and national identity should be evaluated within the framework of stateless nations, not the nations who have established formal state institutions, such as the first European nation-states which arose at the end of the eighteenth century. Finally, modernist theory tends to under-emphasise the influence of ethnic ties and history in the mobilisation and shaping of the political behaviours of mass modern national movements. This is significant because cultural and ethnic motifs have been some of the most important sources of Kurdish nationalism for the mobilisation of the people.

In this regard, my own position is very close to the ethno-symbolist perspective and I, following Smith's (1998, 1999) definition of a nation, argue that the idea of a Kurdish nation is a social creation and is not constructed ex nihilo. It has historical and ethnic origins even if these roots are 'fictive.' If nations do not have ethnic and historical roots, they are not able to reverberate with people's sentiments and memoirs and accordingly they cannot gain the loyalty and commitment of their community members. As David McDowall (2006) indicates, Kurds as an ethnic group possess their own history, language, culture, and geography, which have refused to be assimilated within the dominant cultures ruling over Kurdistan (p. 4). Kurdish national identity could signify an identity which includes a shared territory,

language, symbols, culture, memory and experience, and future political ambitions (Sheyholislami 2011, p.47). Thus, considering such ethnic and historical component, an intermediary or an ethno-symbolist approach to Kurdish nationalism can provide a better reading of Kurdish nation and nationalism in the modern era.

It is difficult to find a scholar who has discussed Kurdish nationalism specifically from an ethno-symbolist perspective. The only scholar whose views on Kurdish nationalism have some similarities with this approach is Amir Hassanpour (2003). However, since his approach contains elements of the Marxist analysis of nationalism, we cannot simply call him an ethno-symbolist. Hassanpour (2003) provides an explanation of Kurdish nationalism which is neither primordialist nor can it be categorised as a modernist perspective. He argues that Kurdish nationalism appeared in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries at the time of the rise of the Kurdish semi-autonomous principalities: the period of the formation of the political organisation known as *dewlati Kurdi* (Kurdish government). This process continued and reached a turning point following the consolidation of power in their bordering areas by both the Safavids and Ottomans as they increasingly attempted to control the autonomous Kurdish principalities and nomads. These centralisation strategies were accomplished by the end of the 19th century and at this stage Kurdish nationalism was complete.

Despite acknowledging the modern elements in awakening the Kurdish national identity, Hassanpour largely focuses on the antiquity of the Kurdish language, and written literature as the most essential element of nationhood. Furthermore, through a historical cultural approach he tries to consider a periodic classification for Kurdish nationalism and believes that Kurdish nationalism starts with Khani's epopee in the last decades of seventeenth century, not from the ancient ages. The use of Hassanpour's views on Kurdish national identity throughout the current research is mostly related to his ethno-national reading of Kurdish movements and the emphasis on language as a significant component of Kurdish national identity, rather than his Marxist Leninist interpretations.

A limitation within Hassanpour's argument which also relates him to primordialists is that he identify Ahmadi Khani and the 17th century as the beginning of Kurdish nationalism. Although Khani recognised and referred to himself as a Kurd and boasted Kurdish unification, it does not denote that he was a nationalist by the modern meaning. In the

section 'Our Wills', Khani did not distinguish Kurmanji (see chapter three) from 'Kurd' and uses them interchangeably. His usage of 'Kurd' was only to mention a group of people who were different from other groups including Turks, Persians and Arabs. This obviously affirms that he perceived Kurmanji people as Kurds, and there is no mentioning whether he considered other groups, such as, the Sorani, Kalhur, Lur or Zaza as Kurds. The application of the word Kurmaji to all the Kurds has been undeniably an incorrect perception of the Kurds in the twentieth century, as assumed in the Kurdish nationalist context. (Van Bruinessen 2003; Özoğlu 2004; Hassan 2013). Also, in contrast to Shaf-khan who clearly speaks about the territorial boundaries of Kurdistan, Khani's definition of the geography of 'Kurdistan' is unknown (Özoğlu 2004) and he indirectly refers to it as a region located amongst the terrains of the Ottomans (Rum), Persians (Ajam), Arabs, and Georgians (Gürcü) (Ahmed-i Khani 1975, p. 56). So, his resentment of the Ottoman and Safavid empires and his wishes for a 'Kurmanji' King cannot be translated into the existence of a 'political movement' or a desire for a nation-state.

According to Bruinessen (1992) the number of remaining copies of Mem u Zin indicates that it was read commonly in Kurdistan later in the 19th century, and the manuscripts were mostly duplicated by local religious leaders (mullahs or imams of Kurmanji descent) and the Sufi Tariqas (p. 267). There is no verified evidence, though, on how popular and inspiring Mem u Zin was among Kurdish readers before the late 19th century. Furthermore, almost all of the Kurdish national and political movements arose after the dissemination of the Western notion of national identity and nationalism in Kurdish areas at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. It was around this time that the epic of *Mem u Zin* was to become the guide book of the Kurdish nationalists in order to mobilise the political and intellectual movements in Kurdistan (Özoğlu, ibid).

To sum up the theoretical perspective of this dissertation, if we consider Smith's definition and take it for granted that *ethnie* (collective name, a common myth of descent, a shared history and culture, a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity) is essential for the creation of a nation (Smith 1987), all the historical and cultural traits and evidence lead us to consider Kurds as an 'ethnie' or a historical community which includes folklores, ethnic origins and collective reminiscences and values. For Kurds, collective memories and shared history reinforce a sense of common identity among those who think they belong to that

nation. Applying an ethno-symbolist approach to Kurdish nationalism and nation, it can be argued that the concept of modern Kurdish nation is not constructed but, rather, results from a 'reinterpretation' of pre-existing Kurdish cultural motifs and of 'reconstruction' of earlier ethnic ties and sentiments.

Although the concepts of Kurdish nation and nationalism are, by large the result of modern geopolitical developments in the Kurdish territories, the roots of modern Kurdish nation lies outside the modernist historical framework. In other words, I consider the concept of Kurdistan and Kurdish nationalism as a modern phenomenon, through an amalgamation of various factors including history, language and ethnic ties, as well as the geopolitical developments in the region in the beginning the 20th century. Here, I agree with the arguments that the assimilation policies of the new states encompassing Kurdistan intensified Kurdish national awakening and Kurdish nationalism. The policies of citizen building within the new states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria resulted in extensive demographic engineering including displacing a great number of Kurds. In order to assimilate the minority populations, modern states have applied various institutional mechanisms, such as enforcing the nationalisation (officialisation) of language, art, literature, education, and media, together with the army and other coercive measures.

Finally, the term intermediate approach should not be confused with the specific meaning of eclecticism in research methodology. To understand the origins of Kurdish nationalism this dissertation mainly relies on ethno-symbolism theory as it draws attention to the ways in which ancient and traditional aspects of Kurdish culture and identity are drawn on in modern nationalism. However, as the media context of the research demands, I include some selective elements of modernist theory in order analyse and explain the activities of the Kurdish diaspora on social media. The most important elements of modernism theory used in this research are Anderson's theory of 'imagined communities' and 'long distance nationalism' which have been thoroughly discussed and adjusted to the context of Kurdish diaspora and social media.

A nation-state, a nation or an ethnic group

Since this dissertation adopts an approach close to ethno-symbolist, it is important to further clarify the distinction and relationship between a nation and an ethnic group. In the

line with an intermediate approach between the extreme modernist and primordialist positions, for defining the nation I mostly agree with Guibernau's (1996) definition of nation which is "a human group conscious of forming a community, sharing a common culture, attached to a clearly demarcated territory, having a common past and a common project for the future and claiming the right to rule itself (p. 47). This understanding of nation, first, rejects an essentialist interpretation of the nation as fixed, primordial and natural phenomenon, and secondly, it admits the existence of nations without states. Moreover, through this research, I distinguish between a nation and a nation-states. Guibernau (1996) explains this distinction as the follow:

The main differences between a nation and a nation-state … are that, while the members of a nation are conscious of forming a community, the nation-state seeks to create a nation and develop a sense of community stemming from it. While the nation has a common culture, values and symbols, the nation-state has as an objective of the creation of a common culture, symbols and values, (p. 47)

Based on this definition, it is plausible to speak about the nations that do not have their own states or 'did not reach modern nation-statehood,' such as Kurdistan, Catalonia, Palestine or Scotland. These stateless nations have shown or are showing a durable and strong territorial and cultural identity that articulates itself as a 'national character' (Castells, 2010, pp. 29-30). Accordingly, for these nations the questions of origin, homeland, and territorial belongings are obviously present in their nationalist discourse. For example, in the case of Kurdish nationalism, the concepts of homeland and territory are the core signifiers and have influenced Kurdish politics and culture in several ways. This is similar for both Kurds in the homeland and in diaspora.

It is important to clarify the position of this research towards the ethnic group. An ethnic group is described as a specific community with "a high degree of trust and similar values, whose members speak the same language, respect the same norms and are involved in a network of primary relationships that are governed by the same values and the same patterns of symbolic behaviour" (Cohen 1974, p.99). In this sense, the 'self-identification' of a community as an ethnic element in a given location motivates the perception of its identity as distinct from others (Fishman, 1980). Thus, ethnicity can become "a particular form of political organisation where cultural boundaries are invoked so that the group's resources can be secured" (Eriksen, 2010, p.53)

It should be mentioned that the naming or categorisation of people, concepts, or places is not politically and ideologically neutral (Sheyholislami, 2011). It is the discourse, expressing style and the emphasising of an ideological viewpoint which demonstrates the presenter's position in relation to political or social phenomena (Fowler, 1979, cited in Sheyholislami 2011, p.9). For instance, the categorisation/dichotomy of the concepts of ethnic groups or nation may signify if a group of people should have the right to independence or not. One clear example of this non-neutrality of usage is in Iran when the Iranian/Persian nationalist discourse and Iranian authorities call Kurds an 'ethnic group' which belongs to the Iranian nation. This expression and categorisation indicates that Kurds should stay within a nation/nation-state of Iran without having rights to political autonomy. But naming a group of people a 'nation' recognises their rights to rule themselves culturally and politically (Calhoun, 1993, 1997; Sheyholislami 2011).

5.3 The formation and development of Kurdish diaspora

As discussed previously, Kurdistan has been the subject of numerous 'empire-building' and 'state building' plans throughout history (Hassanpour & Mojab, 2005). As a result of the political conditions of the homeland, a   number of Kurds have voluntarily or unwillingly made their residence outside the territory of Kurdistan, so now there are Kurds living around the world in Western Europe, Australasia, North America, the Caucasus, the Middle East and many metropolitan cities in the countries occupying Kurdistan, including Tehran, Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara and Baghdad (Van Bruinessen, 1999, 2000). Accordingly, forcefully migration from the homeland and settling in exile has been an inseparable part of Kurdish history.

5.3.1 Kurdish Exile during the 17th and 18th century

The first wave of Kurdish deportation from Kurdistan emerged through a process in the early decade of the 17th century under the reign of Safavid Persia's Shah Abbas (Madih, 2007) who killed a considerable number of Kurdish tribes and removed the left-over people (about 15,000) to the north-eastern province of Khorasan in Iran (Hassanpour & Mojab, 2005). This was in response to and as a consequence of the hostile conflicts between the Shiite Safavid and the Sunni Ottoman empires in which the Kurds were being victimised as a result of their religious and power-seeking rivalries and confrontations. The Shah Abbas relocated a large number of Kurds (mostly those from the Sunni sect) from Kurdistan to the north east of Persia, the Khorasan region, in order to stop them supporting the Sunni Ottoman Empire during the wars. Moreover, he aimed to use them as a safeguard in the north-east of Persia against the Turkoman and Uzbek nomads who were attacking the country commonly (Tavahhodi, 1992, cited in Hassanpour & Mojab 2005). Those displaced Kurds, finally, settled in exile in the Khorasan region and played a crucial role in defending the border regions of the Persian Empire, even though they sometimes rebelled against the central governments (Madih, 2007). Although separated from the homeland for over three centuries, the diasporic Kurds of Khorasan mostly preserved their Kurdish culture, identity and language and they have always been known as Kurds by their neighbours (Hassanpour & Mojab, 2005; Madih 2007).

The trend of Kurdish exile continued throughout the 18th century while thousands of Yezidi Kurds took refuge in Czarist Russia due to the oppression and persecution by the Ottoman and Persian powers or by their Muslim Kurdish fellows (Alinia, 2004). And the process of Kurdish forceful exile and deportation from their homeland continued throughout the entire reign of both the Safavid and the Ottoman empires. As a response to the casual revolts in Kurdistan, both empires were commonly enacting policies to relocate the Kurds to distant places and to have them serve as border guards (Hassanpour & Mojab, 2005).

5.3.2 Kurdish exile in the modern era

The twentieth century represented a century of trauma, separation and exile for the Kurds. It started with the mass relocation of the Kurds in Iran such that "entire tribes had been relocated outside Kurdistan in Iranian provinces or regions including Baluchistan, Fars, Guilan, Kashan, Khorasan, Mazandaran and Qazvin" (Bahtuyi, 1998, cited in Hassanpour & Mojab 2005, p. 215). Moreover, during the massacre of the Armenians performed by the Ottoman Turkey from 1915 to 1923, about 700,000 Kurds were required to move to western Turkey. In other words, owing to working migration and escaping from war, a great number of Kurds travelled to other parts of the states of which they were already citizens (Hassanpour & Mojab, 2005, p. 217).

There have been various other social, political, economic, religious, cultural and individual reasons for the Kurdish mass migrations from their homeland territories. Also, the times of mass or individual migrations can be traced throughout the entire twentieth century. According to Khayati (2008), the new Kurdish diaspora and its consequent displacement and relocation was created mainly as a result of two economic and political reasons as follows.

> *First, the economic boom of Western Europe in the 1960s recruited a large number of Kurds as 'guest workers' to work mainly in Germany and in other western European countries. Second, the ongoing coercive assimilationist project that led to the increasing Kurdish resistance, including the armed conflict in Iraq (intermittently from 1961 to 2003), Iran (1967 to 1968 and 1979 to the present), and Turkey (1984 to the present), the involvement of Western powers in these conflicts and finally the interstate conflicts (Iran–Iraq from 1980 to 1988, and Iraq–Kuwait from 1990 to 1991) which turned the area into an active and enduring war zone, are among the other events that produced the huge refugee and migratory movements among the Kurds"*(p.82).

David McDowall (2004) also classifies the Kurdish modern exile experience into three historical stages: *post-1945*, *economic immigrants*, and *the refugee eras between 1980 and 2000*. However, since there are very close proximities between the first two periods, this

research classifies the Kurdish migration throughout the 20th century within the two dominant stages of the *economic migration* period and the *refugee/political era*. This classification does not completely represent the nature of each era, since there have been considerable numbers of forced politically motivated migration within the economic era, or many examples of economic, intellectual, and skilled migrations of Kurds within the refugee/political era. Even so, it seems to be the most pertinent classification, as the dominant trends of Kurdish migration and the incentives for migration have been for economic and political reasons.

The first stage of Kurdish migration in the twentieth century (1900-1975): labour migration

During the first stage of Kurdish modern migration, some Kurds, individually or collectively, moved to other Middle Eastern countries that were more tolerant of expatriate Kurds than the countries overlapping Kurdistan. Moreover, the migration of Kurds from their homeland at the beginning of and throughout this era happened more voluntarily either for business, education or work purposes. And there have also been minor groups of people mainly from Kurdish aristocratic families and a few Kurdish intellectuals who emigrated to Europe before the Second World War(Royan, 2012).[41]

These groups were partially involved in raising Kurdish ethno-national awareness and conducting cultural and political activities (Khayati, 2008). Later, in the 1950s a number of students, mostly from Iraqi Kurdistan were sent to several eastern and western European universities, consequently, a Kurdish Student Union (KSSE) was established in Wiesbaden (West Germany) in 1956 which played an important role in bringing Kurdish intellectuals together in the diaspora. It firstly started its activities with eighteen members who were from all parts of Kurdistan. In two decades, the members increased to almost three thousand, on both sides of the iron curtain (Bruinessen, 2000). Later, in the mid-1960s, several other Kurdish students from Turkey formed another organisation that was mostly concerned with the developments in Turkish Kurdistan. According to Bruinessen (2000), this

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[41] Kurds have lived in Europe since the 19th century, when, for the first time the male members of aristocratic families went to Europe to study (Hassanpour & Mojab, 2005). For example, Mirza Saeed is the first Kurdish physician documented to arrive in Sweden from Kurdistan (Persia's part) in 1893. Then, in 1898, Şerif Pasha, the Ottoman ambassador to Sweden, was the second Kurd who arrived in Sweden. He later became one of the leading Kurdish nationalist figures at the time (see Royan, 2012)

student organisation was the first Kurdish association that tried to reach out to Kurdish migrant workers who were arriving in Western Europe from Turkey. They were the former and new students who, in the 1970s, established the first Kurdish workers' society, KOMKAR, which gradually grew into a group of lots of local associations, at first in Germany only and later on in the Netherlands, France and in other countries (Bruinessen, 2000). Although, in the 1960s, some young Kurdish intellectuals fled to Europe for their education, this form of Kurdish migration happened in limited numbers from the end of the Second World War until 1965 (Hassanpour & Mojab, 2005; Sheikhmous, 2000; see also Alinia, 2004; Khayati, 2008; Van Bruinessen 1999, 2000).

Although economic and educational reasons are the dominant reasons Kurds chose to migrate from Kurdistan, this period also included many examples of forced migration, nevertheless, the destinations were mostly the neighbouring countries around Kurdistan or within the territories of the countries overlapping Kurdistan. For instance, the large displacement of the Kurds to the north-eastern part of Syria happened following the suppression that resulted from the Kurdish uprisings of the 1920s (Khayati, 2008, p. 81). Another example of displacement at this stage is signified by the migration of the Yezidi Kurds to the Russian-controlled Transcaucasia. They were extradited in great numbers to central Asia and Siberia under the reign of Stalin (Van Bruinessen, 2000, p.3). The Soviet census of 1979 verified that at least 150,000 Kurds were in the USSR (van Bruinessen 1995). However, this number has been overstated by some Kurdish sources. For example, Ismet Chérif Vanly (1990), a Kurdish nationalist scholar, argues the number of Kurds in the former Soviet Union in 1990 was around 450,000, of which 270,000 lived in the three Transcaucasian Republics (cited in Khayati 2008). According to various Kurdish sources, there were more than 250,000 Kurds only in Azerbaijan in 1988, about 50,000 in Armenia, and 34,000 in Georgia (cf., Hassanpour & Mojab 2005; Khayati 2008; Müller 2000; Van Bruinessen 1995; Vanly 1992). In some of these newly independent states, including Kazakhstan, the Kurds have already achieved the right to practise their languages in schools.

For a limited time between 1923 and 1929 there was a an administrative unit called *Kurdistana Sor* [Red Kurdistan or Kurdistan Uezd in Russian] in Azerbaijan territory which was part of the Soviet Union. The unit included four running regions; Lachin, Kelbajar, Gubadly, Zangilan and a section of Jabrial (Müller, 2000). The town of Lachin was the centre

of this administrative unit. Despite the wish of the Kurds for having an autonomous region, the rise of this unit was mostly related to the Soviet's policy on national minorities that aimed at granting cultural rights to the national minorities (Yilmaz, 2014). In fact, the Kurds of Azerbaijan were the only nation (except Armenians) that had an administrative territorial unit bearing their name[42]. In April 1929, the Sixth Azerbaijani Congress of Soviets ratified a reform policy that abolished the all uezds, including the Kurdistan uezd. The abolishment of the Red Kurdistan was part of Soviet's All-Union policy that aimed at dissolving all uezds in the Soviet Union.   Later, the former regions of the Red Kurdistan were placed within Nagorno-Karabakh Okrug.

Although scattered among different areas, the Soviet Kurds, according to van Bruinessen (2000), have contributed an important role in the spreading of modern Kurdish culture and national awareness in both their diasporic country and in Kurdistan through their print and broadcast media. In one example, the Kurdish radio from the Armenian capital Yerevan is one of the first established Kurdish radio stations which has played an important role in disseminating Kurdish culture (the role of the diaspora in bringing communication technologies to the Kurds will be discussed further in a separate chapter).

The second stage of Kurdish migration (1975-present: refugee era)

The new surge of the Kurdish diaspora that started in the 1970s was as a result of the bloody clashes over Kurdistan (Hassanpour & Mojab, 2005). At this stage, which is also called the Kurdish refugee migration era (Alinia, 2004), hundreds of thousands of Kurds mostly involuntarily left their homes in the hope of a safer and better life in other places and Western European countries became one of their first destinations. While most of the Kurds from Turkey migrated to Germany, Kurds from Iraq settled in Britain and Kurds from Iran moved to France (Khayati, 2008). And as a result of the violations performed by the Iraqi Army while more than 100,000 Kurds took refuge in the countries of Iran and Turkey, many fled to European countries. This is regarded as the first largest collective forced migration of the Kurds in the modern era (Van Bruinessen, 2000).

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[42] On the political side, the Soviet wanted that the Red Kurdistan becomes and a model for the Kurds of other countries, a provocative example of Soviet's policy on national minorities. In this sense, the Kurdish population of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq would compare their ideal situation with the Soviet's Kurds. This would guarantee their loyalty to the Soviet Union (Yilmaz, 2014)

Another influx of Kurdish refugees occurred as a consequence of two major events. The military coup d'état in Turkey in 1980 and the Iraq-Iran war (1980-88). During and after the coup, Turkey's military authorities imprisoned and tortured a vast number of Kurdish intellectuals, activists, writers and journalists. Those who were not detained or later released escaped to adjacent countries first, and some also managed to arrive in Western Europe later on (Van Bruinessen, 2000). Because of the harsh suppression by the military regime, almost all Kurdish intellectuals and activists from Turkey finally sought asylum in Europe. Likewise, as discussed, during the first years following the 1979 revolution in Iran, the Kurds in this country were enjoying a limited degree of *de facto* self-rule, exercised by Kurdish political parties. Once the central government took control of the Kurdish regions, almost everybody who was closely related with the Kurdish political organisations sought to escape the country. Since none of the neighbouring countries seemed safe, many fled to Europe, and later to North America and Australia.

Additionally, during the Iraqi government's genocidal campaigns of 1987–88, thousands of Kurds from Iraqi Kurdistan escaped to other parts of Kurdistan in Iran and Turkey. According to Van Bruinessen (2000) the Kurdish cross-border movement is related to the particular geography of Kurdistan and the trans-state nature of the Kurdish political movement. Although throughout the 1970s, while many working migrants, Kurds and non-Kurds, especially from Turkey, moved to Europe, the collective migration during this period still occurred mostly for political reasons, due to the clashes that existed in Iran, Iraq and in Turkey. This trend increased Kurdish refugee migration further.

The violent struggles, deportation, and the socio-political oppression have been the main reasons for the Kurdish migration and since these challenges still exist in the Kurdish region, the Kurdish refugee era has been ongoing, even continuing to a higher degree, up to today. The recent ISIS crisis in Iraqi and Syrian Kurdistan, the constant clashes of Kurds with the Turkish authorities and the continuous persecutions and executions of the Kurdish activists in Iran have been the reasons that the Kurdish refugee era has not stopped.

It was in August 2014 that ISIS captured the Kurdish city of Shingal in Iraqi Kurdistan. Thousands of Kurdish Yezidi believers were murdered, died of hunger, or were sexually abused or sold into slavery. A great number of those who survived fled to the mountains

trying to save their lives[43]. Only a month later, in September 2014, ISIS attacked several Kurdish towns in Syrian Kurdistan, which resulted in yet another heart-breaking disaster. Thousands of Kurds were killed and over 200,000 were displaced from their homes and forced to find shelter and security. ISIS took over most of the city of Kobane for a considerable length of time before being freed by Kurdish guerrillas and Peshmarga forces alongside their international allies in January 2015. The city, almost completely destroyed as a result of the attacks from ISIS and airstrikes from the coalition, was left without any basic welfare services, such as, power, water, sanitation, and so forth so residents had to either move to other neighbouring countries or join the influx of refugees seeking legal or illegal asylums in a secure place somewhere around the world. Similar to the massacres and genocide throughout the twentieth century, the ongoing changes and killing in the 21st century also caused a huge number of displacements and refugees among the Kurds, as well as other groups in Iraq and Syria.

5.3.3 The population of Kurds in the diaspora

If we consider diaspora populations, while the Kurdish people are one of the largest diaspora populations especially in West Europe (Curtis, 2005) yet as discussed previously, owing to the dispersed and stateless nature of the Kurdish people, there are no clear and reliable official statistics relating to the Kurdish population in the diaspora. Moreover, many Kurds in the diaspora have not been documented yet (Baser, 2013) and there has been not a reliable organisation that has conducted a comprehensive survey of the Kurdish population in the diaspora. As Ayata (2011) points out, although academics and researchers who generate data on the Kurdish diaspora usually highlight the fact that the data is unreliable, they tend to replicate the past approximations. Thus, the existing estimations are not at all reliable, unless a solid, unbiased and realistic investigation is conducted to produce a true survey of the Kurdish diaspora population.

Almost all Kurds in the diaspora initially hold the citizenship of countries of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria and hence they are not recorded as 'Kurd' in the statistics of the diaspora countries (Alinia, 2004; Khayati, 2008). Many Kurds have not identified themselves (or are not identified) as Kurds due to the legal, bureaucratic, technical, political or other reasons in

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[43] For more information on the ISIS assaults against Kurdish Yezidi people see Yezidi Human Rights Organisation-International, http://www.yezidihumanrights.org/news.php

the diaspora countries. For example, *Statistics New Zealand*, as an official governmental source, indicates that as of 2016 there are 717 Kurds living in New Zealand[44]. However, these are only the Kurds who identified themselves as Kurds when they were asked about their ethnicity. So, when they are not asked about their ethnicity they have to identify themselves as Iranian, Turkish, Iraqi, and so on. In terms of the researcher's experience living in New Zealand and a close empirical observation of the New Zealand Kurdish Community it is possible to estimate that that there are more than 2500 Kurds living in New Zealand. For instance, in regard to attending a Kurdish New Year festival in New Lynn's community centre in Auckland, there were about 1300 Kurdish attendees, according to the organisers of the event and it is possible that not all the Kurds residing in Auckland attended. Considering the fact that Kurds also live in other cities of New Zealand, including Christchurch, Hamilton and Dunedin, it can possibly be argued that the number of ethnic Kurds residing in New Zealand may be more than mentioned data by Statistics New Zealand. Generalising these examples to other countries, it can be argued that the numbers of Kurdish diaspora in the world in 2016 has grown, and the actual number of Kurds living in the diaspora may be much more than the figures recorded in the statistics in many of the host countries. It is interesting to mention that the indiscernibility of Kurds in the domestic data of the host countries has ironically contributed to reinforcement of the self-confidence and distinct diasporic identity since they do not wish to be recognised with the Turks (Turkey), Persians (Iran) or Arabs of Iraq and Syria (Alinia, 2004). In other words, although the Kurds are not recorded or officially recognised as 'Kurd' in their original countries, "the diaspora is the first place that Kurds want to be themselves, namely 'Kurds'" (Royan, 2012, p. 23).

The Kurdish Institute of Paris is one of the only recognised institutes that attempted to conduct a census of the Kurdish population in diaspora in 1995. According to their estimate the number of Kurds in the diaspora is about one million Kurds in Europe (mostly in West Europe), 22,000-26,000 in North America, and 18,000-21,000 in Australasia. This reflects the forced migration of the Kurds in the recent three decades and does not include the old waves of Kurdish migration to the neighbouring countries, such as, Turkmenistan with 40,000 Kurds, Azerbaijan with 150,000, Armenia with 45,000, Georgia 60,000, Afghanistan

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[44] http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/ethnic-profiles.aspx?request_value=24770&parent_id=24761&tabname=

200,000, and Lebanon 80,000. Moreover, inside the city of Istanbul there are about 1,000,000 Kurds whereas in the north east of Iran there are more than 1,000,000 Kurds who were moved there by the Safavid Kings since the 17th century (see above). There are also many Kurds living in the capital cities of Istanbul, Tehran, Baghdad and Damascus.[45]

In 2017, twenty-two years after the estimation of the Kurdish Institute of Paris, the number of Kurds in the diaspora has grown considerably. In regard to the census of the individual countries regarding the numbers of different ethnic groups including Kurds, for one example, in the United Kingdom there exists as many as 200-250,000 Kurds, and in Germany they reach to one million (Baser, 2013). Some other sources, for example, the Council of Europe, estimate the population of Kurds in Europe to be around or even more than one million (Russell-Johnson, 2006, cited in Baser, 2013). Nonetheless, some German and Swedish based Kurdish institutions suggest a much bigger statistic as they claim there are at least two million Kurds living in Europe. For example, KOMKAR[46] estimated that there are 900,000 Kurds living only in Germany (cited in Baser, 2013).

5.3.4 The social origins of the Kurdish diaspora

The Kurdish diaspora has consisted of various social backgrounds during each stage. The majority of Kurdish migrants pre-1975 were basically young, and single men from an urban middle class, who were mostly educated or had aristocratic backgrounds. They were not necessarily religiously committed yet they were politically active (Sheikhmous, 1990, pp.88-91). Due to the ever increasing number of Kurdish refugees since 1975, the social background of Kurdish migrants has been mixed together and today the Kurdish diaspora includes different social, educational, political, economic and religious backgrounds (Alinia, 2004, p.31). Concurrent with this diversity, there are fragmentations in the expression of Kurdish nationalism in the diaspora. For instance, the same political and religious divisions

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[45] The numbers and data are for the *Institute Kurde de Paris*, retrieved at:
http://www.institutkurde.org/en/kurdorama/ , January 29, 2014.
[46] KOMKAR was one of the first and most important Kurdish organisations in diaspora. Its first branch was established in Germany in 1979 by Kurdish guest workers (mainly from Turkey) followed by a branch in the Netherlands in 1982. KOMKAR then extended to most of the European countries. KOMKAR and some other Kurdish organisations of the diaspora later fuelled the expansion of the PKK among the Kurds in Europe (See Van Bruinessen 2000 & Mügge 2010, p.115)

that exist among the Kurdish communities in the homeland can be clearly observed among the Kurdish diaspora (Baser, 2013, p.8). They are from various backgrounds and comprise a heterogeneous diaspora which includes a blend of different classes, ideas, and religious orientations. However, there are Kurdish migrants from all classes who might all have emigrated for political reasons only. In general, the Kurdish diaspora's collective memories consist of stories of "oppression, labour migration, earthquakes, exile, poverty, torture, forced displacement, conscientious objection, discrimination, and xenophobia, essentially, a constant struggle for survival and identity preservation and reformulation"(Baser, 2013, p.4).

5.4 Kurdish nationalism in the diaspora

In the late nineteenth century, Lord Acton claimed that 'exile is mother of nationalism', a statement which has been re-emphasised by Benedict Anderson (1992; see the chapter on theories of nationalism) and placed as the basis of his theory of diaspora and long distance nationalism. Thus, exile is a centre where nationalism develops and where the dreams and the vision of the homeland function as unifying forces. The Kurdish communities in the diaspora have continuously produced and reproduced homeland identity through various cultural and political activities. They have constructed a modern social network to their homeland through long-distance practices and relations (Royan, 2012, p.26). In this regard, the mainstream discourse of the Kurdish diaspora depicts a homeland orientation (Khayati, 2008, p.4) that is mostly represented in the narrating and remembering of the experience of trauma, oppression, division and homesickness (Alinia, 2004; Khayati 2008). In other words, as Khayati (2008, p.4) points out the Kurdish diaspora's prevalent discourse of 'Kurdistan' as the 'homeland' is profoundly imbedded in the belief that the Kurds as an 'oppressed nation', are and have been systematically exposed to the politics of suppression, mistreatment and displacement. This subject has been also discussed by Alinia, 2004; Berruti et al., 2002; Emanuelsson, 2005; Hassanpour & Mojab, 2004; Wahlbeck 1999. Thus, by narrating and retaining the phenomena of *Kurdayeti*, oppression, and statelessness, they portray themselves as a diasporic 'homogenous community', who perform the social, cultural and political activities for the good of the Kurdish homeland in order to make it prepared for the 'reception of its returnees' (Khayati 2008, p.5).

Likewise, the Kurdish diaspora is characterised by a strong feeling of belonging on the part of Kurds in exile, to the people in their homelands, Kurdistan. These feelings have been best performed through what Brubaker (Brubaker, 2005) calls 'communications and connections', which they establish in order to keep their social and cultural ties (p. 5). In other words, in terms of their collective memory and myth about the homeland, the Kurdish diaspora's desire to return to Kurdistan sometime in the future is a significant characteristic of their diaspora (Alinia, 2004). Accordingly, Kurdish migrant communities have preserved their connections to their Kurdish fellows in the homeland in all parts of Kurdistan. The sense of *Kurdayeti* has been the main subject regularly discussed among the Kurdish diaspora with their fellow Kurds in Kurdistan. From the Kurdish displacement perspective, a homeland from which they have been separated is the idea of a collective memory, history and heritage of a nation originating from the particular territory of Kurdistan. In many of the accounts the notion of a common land of origin has been an essential feature 'characterizing Kurds' (Zetterval, 2013).

Thus, the Kurdish diaspora, as Khayati (2008, p.79) argues, has preserved and continued an imagined and symbolic and political connection with its homeland through the transnational political, social, economic and cultural practices that they maintain across the borders of many nation-states. Additionally, the development of Kurdish communication technology (discussed in the next chapter) has paved the way for better and easier connections and contacts of the Kurdish migrants to their fellows in the homeland (Hassanpour, 1998; Sheyholislami 2011). Through the communication media they become mostly up-to date regarding the political, social, economic and cultural changes in the homeland. In this sense, the homeland is not an unreachable place, since it is brought into the homes of the immigrants through the electronic media. These are all the influencing factors which make the concept and practice of long distance nationalism.

5.4.1 The Kurdish diaspora and its ethnic and national articulations

The Kurds in the diaspora have found many better opportunities to discuss and reproduce their identity, heritage and politics within the liberal democratic societies of the Western countries than in their homeland (Hassanpour & Mojab, 2005; Eliassi, 2015). Moreover, the political and social milieu of the Western countries provided separated and exiled Kurds the opportunity to become more involved in and connected with each other from all parts of

Kurdistan and throughout the world who may contribute pointedly to the formation of a unified 'Kurdish identity and culture', bringing together the total numbers of Kurds in all four parts (Baser, 2013). Consequently, the diaspora has considerably served as a sphere for the Kurds to build the concept of imagined Kurdistan or the unification and declaration of the Greater Kurdistan. Based on the conducted ethnography of this research, I will return to the type of imagination in the diaspora as it relates to social media and compare and contrast it with conventional mainstream media.

The diasporic Kurds in western liberal states have not only been freely involved in 'identity-making' processes, they have also found adequate space to "actualize its boundary-making and sustain its boundary-maintenance vis-à-vis other ethnic groups such as Arabs and Turks" (Baser, 2013, p.27). According to Baser (2013), the Kurds [Kurds of Turkey], specifically in the Scandinavian countries, are more associated with Kurdish groups from Iran, Iraq, and Syria than with Turkish people. Sweden hosts a large number of Kurds in which the majority of the second generation Kurds do not have any attachments or very little to any Turkish institutes (Baser, 2011; Eliassi 2013), since they created their organisations in a Kurdish nationalist way. For instance, one of the most important Kurdish student associations in Sweden, KSAF, serves as an organisation promoting Kurdish culture and identity (Baser, 2013). This association is free of the interventions by the Kurdish political parties and aims to unify Kurdish students and youth from all parts of Kurdistan regardless of their political party, religious, or dialectical orientations. Baser (2013) points out that "rather than forming four separate diaspora groups (i.e., Iranian, Iraqi, Syrian, and Turkish Kurd groups), the Kurdish youth from these different countries have tended to join all-Kurdish associations, which has contributed to the ideological construction of a pan-Kurdish unity" (p.27).

According to McDowall (2004) the structure and prominence of the Kurdish diaspora has considerably changed since the last decades of the twentieth century, as "the Kurdish diaspora has become a key instrument for the advancement of Kurdish national identity and for its internationalization" (p. 455). In fact, the Kurdish diaspora's nationalistic aspiration is essentially affected by the homeland. As Khayati (2008) argues that the conventional Kurdish victim diaspora discourse, although affected by the new realities of the displacement community, embraces the same 'essence' of Kurdish nationalism discourses.

In other words, an emphasis on representations of Kurds as an oppressed nation can be commonly observed in the current narratives of the diaspora as an intrinsic element of the typical Kurdish nationalist discourse.

Accordingly, separation from homeland has not stopped the Kurds from claiming their ethno-national demands out of Kurdistan. In exile, they have preserved or restored a sense of their Kurdish identity, and they have organised themselves into a variety of associations and networks. Within the opportunities provided in exile, the Kurds have set up their networks through a means of communications which has made it possible for them to become re-oriented toward Kurdistan and their state of origin (cf., Khayati, 2008; Van Bruinessen, 2000).

5.4.2 The statelessness of the Kurdish diaspora

According to the definition of stateless diaspora discussed in an earlier chapter, the Kurds alongside the Palestinians are two examples of stateless diaspora that share some common features, because they do not possess an independent state to relate to, and both have experienced a traumatic history which distinguishes them from other diasporas. The Kurds are believed to have the largest stateless diaspora in the world which is highly political as well (Grojean 2011, p.182). Van Hear (2003) notes that stateless diaspora intends to create a new state or at least attain a certain degree of local autonomy in the original homeland through setting up various diasporic organisations. In this respect, they have attempted to construct and reproduce their identities via memories of traumas, separations and genocides as well as with the narratives of statelessness (Alinia, 2004; Khayati, 2008). However, due to the provided space of diaspora, the statelessness of the Kurds has become the most important concern among the exiled Kurds from both the first and second generations of migrants (Baser, 2015; Eliassi, 2013, 2016a).

Even though both state-oriented and stateless diaspora are practising long-distance nationalism, the nature of their activities and the political relationships among state-connected and stateless diaspora are different. The politicised scale and intensity of each diaspora is dependent on the environment in the original homeland. For example, the Turks in Europe have not been found to be very political and politicised, because they have their own independent political state to relate to. Some communities, such as the Iranians, are

not political unless important events occur, and even then, they only temporarily become political. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the Green Movement in 2009 were the two events, which changed, more or less, the temporary orientation of the Iranian diaspora to a political one. Apart from these events they have not acted as an active political diaspora.

Yet for a stateless diaspora, the setting has always been political. Sheffer (2003) points out that the stateless diasporas may choose a strategy of separatism or irredentism. They seek this strategy so as to "take or be given land that once was their historical homeland and ultimately establish a sovereign state in that historical homeland", whereas state-based diaspora take on a strategy towards either establishment and operation of several communal associations or formation of representative institutes that are officially recognised by host governments (pp. 24, 25).

Vera Eccarius-Kelly (2002) argues that some of the Kurdish refugees who migrated to Germany or Europe subsequent to the military coup in Turkey and the Iranian revolution of 1979 relocated "clandestine political resistance networks to Europe, and thereby changed the composition of the respective diasporas from predominantly apolitical guest worker communities to networked and homeland-oriented political activist organizations" (p.92). Moreover, the growth of political consciousness of the Kurds has been considerably influenced by the Kurdish diaspora. The Kurdish diaspora has become an indisputable support for the Kurdish national movement in the homeland. For example, the PKK has considerably benefited from the financial and emotional support of the Kurds in Europe (Baser, 2015, p.62). This is true about almost all other Kurdish political organisations since a considerable number of their members and affiliates are residing in the diaspora. Indeed, there are several disputed issues on social media which arise from the policies of these political parties. I will return to them further in chapter eight.

Since the history of the Kurds has been mingled with the question of identity and the lack of a state, statelessness is mostly regarded as mark of inferiority among the diaspora Kurds. As Hannah Arendt (2004) once pointed out, stateless groups are recognised by being deprived of their political homes, state protection and political rights. In another inference, statelessness is a 'political orphanhood' connoting social and political vulnerability (Eliassi, 2016, p.180). It has become a 'stigmatising' weak spot on the face of the Kurd (Tas, 2016). This has been manifested throughout all literary, social, cultural and political Kurdish

spheres in the diaspora (Baser, 2015; Khayati, 2008). 'Where are you from?' and 'where is your country?' are thus two of the most troublesome and annoying questions for stateless people to answer. This happens often for the Kurd in the diaspora if they are asked such questions and are in doubt about an answer to them. For example, if they say they are from Kurdistan, they should explain for hours where Kurdistan is, who the Kurds are, why Kurds are deprived of a state, and so on. However, it is an unpleasant feeling for them to say they are from Turkey, Iran, Iraq or Syria in which they have been oppressed, and subjected to genocide and assimilation for years. Statelessness has highly influenced almost all aspects of the Kurdish national discourse in the diaspora. Therefore, the lack of state has caused many Kurds in the diaspora to feel their 'political existence is contested' (Eliassi, 2016, p. 183). The ethnography of the current thesis recorded many interesting or sad stories from the social media users of Facebook regarding statelessness and its social and psychological impacts on the Kurdish individuals in the diaspora.

Although both Kurds and Palestinians are regarded as stateless, it is still the Palestinians who are more noticed as a 'stateless nation' by the world's politics, media and intellectuals. This has given the Palestinians the opportunity of legitimisation of their claim for a state. Nevertheless, it would be difficult for the Kurds to identify themselves as a distinct nation or ethnic group while aspiring for statehood (Eliassi, 2016, p. 181). However, during recent years, some changes have taken place both in Palestine and in some parts of Kurdistan (South/Iraqi Kurdistan, and West/Syrian Kurdistan) where a kind of independent and autonomous authority has been assured for both nations, respectively. It is worth mentioning that the Palestinians are still a step ahead of the Kurds in regard to the formation of an independent state. Moreover, they are recognised as a country by the UN and by many other powerful countries in the world and their land is not divided between many countries. On the other hand, the recognition of the Kurds is limited to a small federal region inside Iraq in the name of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Nevertheless, the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government in 1991 and the recent emergence of Rojava cantons paved the way for the official diplomacy of the Kurds to be acknowledged globally. Also, this has opened up new economic, cultural and social horizons for the Kurdish diaspora (in addition to a political nation-building plan) in these parts of Kurdistan. Over the last two decades, the Kurdish diaspora has contributed quite a

lot to the Federal Region of Kurdistan through investment in the infrastructure of the region, and participation in the economic and political development in the area. It may be argued that, today, the Kurds are considered with and, somehow, without a state, compared to the prior creation of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq. Moreover, the current political developments throughout the Middle East following the rise of ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and Levant) have considerably influenced the nature of the Kurdish diaspora as well as the Kurdish politics in the homeland, Kurdistan. Subsequent to the changes, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has gained a key regional role as a non-state actor involved in fighting ISIS and has been partially supported by the international community.

Likewise, the Kurds in Syria have been able to establish three semi-autonomous cantons and have been involved in political and military campaigns against ISIS and other Islamic extremists linked to Al-Qaida. As one aspect of the chapter, the fieldwork chapter of this thesis will investigate how the war against the common enemies, and the most recent one, the ISIS, has helped the Kurdish diaspora to recover or at least lessen long-standing splits among Kurds. The numbers of rallies in the diaspora and the scale of online activism for the support of a Kurdish cause or a besieged town, such as, Kobane or Shingal demonstrate the vibrancy of the Kurdish diaspora and its concerns regarding the Kurdish national cause.

5.5 Conclusion

The main discourse of the Kurdish diaspora is centred on the notion of homeland, which is comparable to earlier literature on diaspora. In this regard, Kurdish nationalist elites in the diaspora use the concepts of homeland, dispersion and trauma as paradigmatic cases in order to explain Kurdish diasporic experiences. Following the ideas discussed in this chapter, I can argue that diaspora has become one of the most favourable environments for the Kurds to articulate and reproduce national identity. In fact, as McDowall (2004) rightly noted, "early advances of national ideas took place largely outside Kurdistan" (p. 455).

Kurdish diaspora suitably represents what Anderson (1992) called 'long-distance nationalism'. It forms and strengthens a multifaceted collective Kurdish identity in that certain diasporic context (Alinia, 2004. P. 321). Like the formation of nationalism in the homeland, the Kurdish diasporic identity also represents an opposition to imposed national

identities in the states occupying Kurdistan. Although Kurdish diaspora still reproduces the existing social, cultural and political divisions within the Kurdish societies, it has contributed to the reproduction and expression of a collective and trans-national Kurdish identity (Alinia, 2004; Eliassi, 2013, 2016; Hassanpour & Mojab, 2005; Khayati, 2008; Wahelbeck, 1999)

Owing to the experience of dispersion, traumatic history and exile, Kurds have been able to broadcast and mobilise their national cause through the provided space of the liberal democratic countries in the diaspora. Moreover, by highlighting the 'diasporic conceptualisation of statelessness' (Eliassi, 2016a), the Kurdish diaspora has cultivated a respectable comprehension of the way national awareness develops. In this sense, statelessness has been reproduced and reflected throughout the entire stages of the Kurdish diaspora, and is often referred to as a stigmatising phenomenon. Consequently, the Kurdish diaspora attempted to mobilise itself around such a discourse to address statelessness as well as the construction of a national identity and establishing connections among Kurdish communities in various diaspora countries around the world. This happened through transnational ties and performed long-distance nationalism within the Kurdish diaspora and its relation to the homeland.

To realise the evolution of the Kurdish diaspora, we can examine how globalisation influenced the Kurdish national movement. Subsequently, it can be contended that without the mobilisation of Kurds in the diaspora through the use of broadcasting and online media, the Kurdish national movement, either in the homeland or in the diaspora, would not have developed or attracted the global support, encouragement and understanding it receives today. The next chapter will focus on and examine the Kurdish media and the role of the Kurdish diaspora in their development.

Chapter Six: the Formation and development of Kurdish Media in the diaspora

6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the emergence and the evolution of the Kurdish media from print to online social media. In the first part, the chapter presents an overall picture of the history of Kurdish media from the day the first Kurdish newspaper was published until the Kurdish printing in the 21st century. In the second part, it explains the emergence and the role of broadcasting media (radio and television) among the Kurds. Finally, a comprehensive review of Kurdish online media from the early weblogs to the new social media will be outlined. In all three parts, the role the Kurdish diaspora has had in establishing, and in developing and operating these communications channels will be discussed in more detail. In addition, the media of the Kurdish diaspora will be discussed further, as it relates to the articulation and the representation of Kurdish national identity.

The chapter argues that the emergence and the development of the Kurdish media in the diaspora has provided and continues to provide a great opportunity for the Kurds to connect, organise, and advance the construction and articulation of their identity. In this regard, since the Internet media is more relevant to the research question, the final sections of the chapter will place more emphasis on the discussions related to the Kurds and their introduction to the Internet and the way it has served and continues to serve as a mobiliser or as social capital for Kurdish nationalism and for the realisation of the idea of Kurdish nation-building.

6.2 The origins of Kurdish media

The notion of the diaspora points to several interactions, connections, flows of information and ideas as they relate to the identity of a particular ethnic group or nation. In the 21st century, the communication media, especially TV and cyberspace, play significant roles in linking people or groups with similar political, religious and ethnic backgrounds (Appadurai 1996, 2002; Georgiou, 2005, 2011; Hassanpour, 1997; Keles, 2015; Rigoni, 2002; Romano, 2002; Sheyholislami, 2011). According to Georgiou (2011), "diaspora presents an exceptional case of intense mediation; as communication networks, and information

exchanges develop across various locations they follow different directions with consequences for identity and community" (p. 208).

For the Kurds in exile who are usually mentioned as the largest stateless diaspora in the world (Khayati, 2008; Natali 2004; Romano, 2006), the advent of media technology has greatly influenced the articulation of Kurdish identity and their 'politics of recognition' (Diamandaki, 2003). The Kurdish media emerged and developed with the first Kurdish newspaper, *Kurdistan*, which was first published in 1898, (Hassanpour, 1998b). Since then, the Kurds have been taking advantage of media technologies in order to effectuate, and give rise to their own nationalist identity discourse as well as to promote their national and political demands.

6.3 Kurdish Print Media

As discussed previously, print media have been a catalyst for the creation of modern nations in Europe and America since they have made it "possible for a growing number of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways"(p. 36). As a stateless nation, the Kurds have experienced modern communication technologies through print and from the diaspora. Print technology helped the exiled Kurds to publish the first Kurdish newspaper, Kurdistan[47], on April 22, 1898 in Cairo, Egypt. Issued bilingually in Kurdish and in Turkish, it endeavored to raise ethnic and national awareness in support of the Kurdish people (McDowall, 2004; Sheyholislami, 2011). Due to certain political restrictions in the Ottoman Empire, the newspaper was published in exile, and according to Van Bruinessen (2000), it was not in Kurdistan or even in Istanbul, the political and cultural center of the Ottoman Empire, that the first issues were published. The first issues were published in Cairo, since Cairo was out of reach of censorship from the sultan and it was also where a number of opposition journals were published. Later, owing to pressure placed on the Egyptian authorities the Ottomans, the newspaper was moved to Geneva and then to Folkeston in the United Kingdom (see, Khayati, 2008; Hassanpour 1992; Bruinessen, 2000; Sheyholislami, 2011).

The Kurdish print media, according to Hassanpour (1992, p. 221), have been the significant bones of Kurdish nationalism through which the Kurdish people followed the process of

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[47] This newspaper was issued by the support of Kurdish Badir Khan family, especially Mikdad Midhat Badirkhan who was a member of *Cemiyeta Tealiya Kurd [*Society for Rise of Kurds].

nationalism and, respectively, aimed at constructing their national identity. It is relevant to argue that the advent of print and broadcasting media among the Kurds signifies the beginning of the Kurdish national movements (Ahmadzadeh, 2003; Sheyholislami, 2011) in which they made the image of the *others* that empowered the Kurds to differentiate themselves and create their own identity. Hence, it is almost unlikely "to understand national identities adequately without investigating how communication technologies serve as catalysts for their (re)construction" (Sheyholislami, 2010, p 290).

Furthermore, Kurdish print aided the conversion of the Kurdish political discourse from the traditional, feudal-tribal leadership of the nationalist movement to a modern, political party organisation (Hassanpour, 1994). Print media have had an increasing influence on the development of the Kurdish national identity in quite a unique way in that whilst it has performed as a route of communication between the Kurdish political or nationalist elites both in the homeland and in the diaspora and linked them together in terms of creating a bond of common understanding, at the same time, they have served to disseminate their message to the literate part of society. However, due to the lack of a widespread developed education system in Kurdistan, print media were limited to the few who are literate in the society. Some decades after the emergence of the Kurdish newspaper, as an outcome of increased literacy among the Kurdish society from the 1950s onward, the Kurdish print media started to reach a significant number of people in the Kurdish regions in the 1960s and 1970s. As a result, their role in establishing the channels of communication between the Kurdish intelligentsia and the literate Kurdish youth became important (Uslu & Gilmore, 2011, p. 111).

On the basis of the Kurdish culture and looking at the national demands of the Kurdish people as a whole, the Kurdish print media were born in exile. Consequently, they 'took advantage of the media experience and favorable conditions of other countries and nations'(Mikhailov, 2013, p. 12). Since the printing of the first Kurdish newspaper up until 1985, a considerable number of Kurdish printing publications in the form of magazines, newspapers, pamphlets and so forth have emerged. In addition to publications by private persons almost all of the Kurdish political parties and organisations have been spreading their own political agenda through print media and, consequently, they have played a key

role in the development of such media among the Kurds, particularly in the diaspora, due to the relatively easy access to the technology.

Moreover, the emergence and the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraqi Kurdistan has helped the most in terms of the issuing of thousands of print publications in Kurdistan in both of the main dialects of the Kurdish language (Sheyholislami, 2011). Although the Kurdish print media have been growing in Kurdistan, as mentioned previously, their genesis had been shaped in the diaspora, and, in fact, such a development may not have been possible without the role of the Kurdish elites in the diaspora. Owing to the existence of the favorable social and political conditions during the diaspora, Kurdish nationalism and the notion of Kurdish national identity grew faster in exile (Alinia, 2004, p. 193). According to Hassanpour (1992; 2005), the Kurds in the diaspora have been attempting to disseminate Kurdish culture, politics and national sentiments through any other available communicative means, such as, magazine, radio, photo, video, graffiti and so forth. Rigoni (2003) discovered that from 1975 to 2003 it was only the Kurds from Turkey who issued 77 Kurdish newspapers and magazines across European countries (Cited in Alinia, 2004, p. 34). Due to the fact that there were more Kurds from Turkey in the diaspora and due to their active political role, almost all of the Kurdish periodicals and books of the Kurdish diaspora, prior to 1991, (the date of the establishment of Kurdistan Regional Government) were issued in Kurmanji Kurdish. Moreover in 1997, about 150 Kurdish periodicals were published with circulations throughout the world (Newrozi, (n.d.); Sheyholislami, 2011, p. 81).

Yet, today the Kurdish print media in the diaspora have gradually been vanishing for several reasons. First, it is due to the fact that the Kurdish online media have become more and more popular mainly because they are much more convenient and less costly to produce and they are also more accessible for Kurds throughout the world to access, compared with local print newspapers. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Moreover, due to the high costs related to publishing newspapers and the declining sales as well as the numbers of readers, publishers are not as keen to invest in newspapers and other forms of print media. And although the advance of online and social media at the expense of the printed press is not specific to the Kurdish print media in the diaspora and in Kurdistan,

since it is a global phenomenon, it appears that the Kurdish journals and newspapers in the diaspora have been affected the most by the development of the online media.

6.4 Kurdish Broadcasting media

6.4.1 Radio

Since radio was first broadcast in December 1906, it has gone through a period of great development and success, both in America and in European countries in the 1930s and 1940s, with 95 percent of homes possessing a radio by 1950 (Dominick, 2008, p. 12). Although this technology arrived about two decades later to the Middle East as well as to Kurds, following on from print media, Kurdish radio stations became very important channels for disseminating Kurdish culture and politics.

The Kurds in the diaspora were aware of the importance of modern technology and realised that, in exile, they must be connected to their fellows in Kurdistan. This time, similar to the Kurdish printing which was brought about by Kurdish diaspora, the Soviet Kurds played a key role in raising Kurdish culture and nationalism by establishing Kurdish radio stations (van Bruinessen, 2000). Hence, the emergence of the first Kurdish radio and audio communication occurred out of Kurdistan as well. The Transcaucasia Kurdish autonomous region of the Soviet Union was the birth place of Kurdish radio between the years 1929-1932 (Hassanpour 1996; Sheyholislami, 2011).

Later, the Kurdish radio in Baghdad that was established in 1939 is regarded as the second audio recording and broadcasting media of the Kurds and it comprised three hours of programming during the day (Ahmad, 2011). The process of establishing Kurdish radio stations continued among the Kurds in exile owing to the relatively easy access to the new broadcasting technologies. Following on from the Kurdish radio of Baghdad, numerous Kurdish radio stations began to emerge, almost all of which were transmitting from the diaspora. Some of the notable Kurdish radio stations included the Kurdish radio of Yerevan (Armenia) in 1943; the Kurdish radio of Beirut (Lebanon) in 1941; the Kurdish radio of the near east in Palestine in 1942; the Kurdish radio of the Kurdistan republic of Mahabad in 1946; the Kurdish radio of Cairo in 1957; the Kurdish radio in Tehran (1958); the Kurdish radio in Bulgaria (1963); the Kurdish radio in Czechoslovakia (1962), the Kurdish Voice of America (1992), and many other radio stations throughout the European and American

countries wherein Kurds were known to reside (see, Ahmad, 2011). Although some of these services were state radio rather than solely for the Kurdish diaspora, for example, Voice of America or the Kurdish Radio of Tehran, with their own political agenda, the Kurdish diaspora took advantage of them at least for the preservation and dissemination of Kurdish culture and language. These radio stations also played a key role in the development of the Kurdish ethno-political demands. David McDowall (2004) points out the importance of radio stations and explains the following.

> *In the 1970s transistor radios and cassette tapes provided an important channel for political actions and cultural communication. Even so, these developments were nothing compared with the information revolution of the 1990s (p. 459).*

Today, despite the existence of multiple Kurdish Satellite TVs, the Internet and many other forms of modern technology, the radio still has a place, although not major, among the Kurds and the Kurdish diaspora is involved in operating many Kurdish radio stations in their host countries. Thanks to online development, all radio stations are accessible via the Internet and the smartphone, so it is relatively easy and convenient for people to listen in and get involved in the radio programs. Although there is not a reliable study that is available on the generational difference in terms of which age groups for the most part use which form of media, the fieldwork of the current thesis will demonstrate that radio is not often used by the younger generation of Kurds either in the homeland or in the diaspora. However, it shows that there are still a considerable number of people who are in the older generations who listen to Kurdish radio regularly.

6.4.2 Kurdish Satellite Televisions

During the 1900s, several important technological developments, that had an emphasis on information technology, contributed to rebuild the pillars of society at a fast pace (Castells, 2009). Television, one of the most important innovations, has played a significant part in the redevelopment of our human identity. Visual media and communication devices have detached people from their close local environments and introduced them to a virtual global journey. The reason television has been called the 'magic box', refers to the fact that it has the capability to enable humans to enter into a virtual world.

Likewise, studies about the consumption of media in Europe indicate that ethnic minority communities in the diaspora are much more interested in watching TV channels from their home countries rather than the national TV channels in the countries wherein they reside (Christiansen, 2004). In his investigation of news consumption among Swedish migrant groups, Roald (2001) has even portrayed satellite dishes as 'the immigrants' ear to the homeland' (cited in Christiansen, 2004, p. 186). Therefore, it can be safe to assert that the diasporic media not only represent a link to a faraway homeland, they have become the examples of voices that express their political and national discourses even after the act of exit from a nation-state" (Kosnick, 2008, p. 4).

An important milestone for the Kurdish usage of modern media has been the implementation of Kurdish Satellite Televisions (KST). This was the first experience for the Kurds throughout their troubled and 'divided' history, to be able to "see their own lives, their own reality, reflected on the television screens across the world"(Romano, 2006, p. 153). The Kurds were the first stateless nation in the world to set up an independent satellite TV, *MED-TV*, in 1994 (p.153). The channel was mostly organised and broadcasted by the Kurdish diaspora in Europe. Based in London, MED-TV was broadcasting in several Kurdish dialects. It provided a service that had 18 hours of programs that included news, documentaries and entertainment from a satellite positioned over Africa to a Kurdish population living in and around Kurdistan[48]. As the mission of the TV station indicated, it aimed to promote Kurdish language and culture and to offer communication for the Kurds. It took pride in offering unprejudiced coverage of all opinions in terms of the Kurdish cause (Ryan, 1997). MED-TV became the 'home for the world's largest stateless nation', since it was possible for the Kurds in Iran to understand and also speak to the Kurds in Turkey, Iraq and Syria via 'phone-ins' and find out about how their fellows live in Europe and in other parts of world (Romano, 2006; Ryan, 1997).

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[48] MED-TV's founder and principle director was a Kurdish author and filmmaker, Hikmet Tabak. Owing to his political activities and involvements in the Kurdish national movement, he had spent 11 years in prison in Turkey. Finally, he fled his home on the Turkish/Armenian border in 1992, and was granted political asylum in the UK. He and 20 others established MED-TV back in 1994, taking the name 'MED' from Medes myth. It has been quoted that they had only £5,000 in the bank when they launched the TV. However, they launched several fundraising campaigns among the Kurdish diaspora, particularly the Kurds from Turkey, and managed to run the TV until it was closed down (See, Romano, 2002, Ryan, 1997)

There is a reciprocal discursive relationship between the new media and Kurdish ethnic and national identities, (Sheyholislami, 2011). And the Kurdish struggles with the nation states that have ruled over Kurdistan were given the potential to be produced and broadcast for a 'made-to-air' audience through the emergence of the Kurdish visual media. Since they were broadcasting in Kurdish and presenting a Kurdish perspective of the news, politics, and history, the Kurdish TV channels broadcasting from the diaspora have challenged the dominant sovereignty and dominant nationalism of the nation states ruling Kurdistan. In other words, the rebuilding of the Kurdish identity, history and language through Kurdish media has challenged the denial politics of these states (Keles, 2015). For example, the Kurdish MED-TV covered the subject of the clashes between the Kurds and the Middle Eastern states that ruled over Kurdistan and challenged the boundaries and politics of these countries. This changed 'the theatre of war' in favor of the Kurds….[and] "the Kurds [felt] that they have achieved sovereignty in the sky" (Hassanpour, 1998, p. 53). As a visual and auditory medium, MED-TV was very influential in creating and maintaining a national culture and identity symbols among the Kurds. In addition to children's shows, drama, music, and documentaries, it contributed to political programs on issues and topics that were previously considered 'taboo subjects,' including the 'Kurdish claims for self-determination" (Romano, 2006, p. 155)

The development of new media, especially satellite channels, has been essential to the diaspora groups. As Downing et al. (2001) have argued, through broadcast media, diaspora groups have not only conserved their connections with the homeland, they have also challenged the Western media domination of the countries that aimed at the assimilation of the diaspora and ethnic communities into western cultures. In the Kurdish case, however, it was not the western media that were challenged by Kurdish satellite TVs. They mostly defied the media domination of the nation-states occupying Kurdistan. David Romano (2006) acknowledged the role of the Kurdish media in altering the reproduction of power relations among actors in the region in which the Kurds live. Romano claims that it was the emergence of the Kurdish new media and the Med TV that provided the Kurds with the opportunity to oppose the unequal power of the states, such as, in Turkey in regard to the battlefield of information broadcasting. In other words, they produced a counter narrative to the narrative that had been disseminated by the Turkish, Iranian or some Arabic state

media against the Kurdish political and nationalist struggles. Consequently, the Kurdish activities throughout the diaspora became a subject of concern for the countries occupying Kurdistan as they attempted over a number of repeated diplomatic negotiations with the European countries where the TV station was based, to stop the station from broadcasting. For example, Turkey employed many diplomatic initiatives to pressure the British government to revoke the channel's license in the supposed accusation regarding the broadcasting of 'terrorist' propaganda linked with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and it was finally revoked in April 1999 (Alinia, 2004; Hassanpour, 1998; Ryan, 1997).

Nevertheless, visual broadcasting did not end with the cancellation of MED-TV. A few months after the cancellation of MED-TV, another Kurdish satellite TV (Medya TV) started broadcasting from France. This TV was broadcasting to 77 countries in the Middle East, Europe and North Africa (Alinia, 2004, p.199). As Khayati (2008) mentioned, the launching of Medya TV, a few months after the closure of MED-TV, indicates the determination of the Kurdish diaspora to continue with the use of such substantial media to speak about their nationhood. During one month in October 2002, the channel broadcast 403 hours of programming consisting of news, documentary, political analysis, in addition to programs for children, women, film, music, literature, and so forth. The programs were broadcast from Europe mainly in both of the main dialects of the Kurdish language (Kurmanji and Sorani) as well as in Turkish (Medya TV program guide, cited from, Alinia, 2004, p.199). On 13 February 2004, the French government revoked the license for Medya TV since the station was accused of having ties with the PKK[49]. However, the previous staff of MED-TV and Medya TV launched another satellite television, ROJ-TV, in Denmark only a few weeks after the closure of MEDYA-TV. As the successor to MED-TV and MEDYA-TV, ROJ-TV[50] (established on 1 March 2004) became an 'ear' to the Kurds in the diaspora and an effective

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[49] The PKK was considered a "terrorist" group by Turkey, the US, the EU and a number of other states

[50] There is no credible academic source to substantiate the actual ownership of this TVs. However, according to the Kurdish TV program, Rawej, at ROJ TV, the founder of Medya TV and ROJ-TV were two Kurdish journalists and political activists, Dler Akreyi and Ferda Cetin, residing in Europe. According to this program, the whole financial sources of MED-TV, Medya, and ROJ TV were from the Kurds of diaspora. (see, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qygm9-uV3I)

tool in promoting a standard Kurdish language, culture, ethnicity and national identity as well as challenging the current policies of the states occupying Kurdistan (Ayata, 2012).

Sheyholislami (2011) investigated the role of one of the important televisions, Kurdistan TV (K-TV), on the Kurdish identity. Although this TV station was based in Iraqi Kurdistan, it recruited a considerable number of staff from the Kurds in the diaspora and even broadcast some programs from Europe. Sheyholislami's Critical Discourse Analysis approach consisted of cooperative observation, an online ethnographic data collection, and interviews with producers and audiences of these satellite channels. He argues that this satellite channel was able to create a mutual understanding between speakers of the two major Kurdish dialects. He also emphasised the way this TV played a symbolic role in the definition of the Kurdish language as the Kurdish identity (pp. 118-120).

Satellite TV stations and broadcasting technologies are not only effective in creating bonds in the social environment they can also actually create such environments (Peterson, 2000, cited in Christiansen, 2004: 187). Over the few years, Kurdish satellite televisions have been able to have their 'media effect' (Laughey, 2007) on the Kurdish individuals and public opinions. The most important influence of the emergence of Kurdish satellite and visual media has been to empower and promote Kurdish ethnic/national consciousness among the Kurds themselves both in the homeland and in the diaspora (Hassanpour 1998; Khayati 2008; Romano 2006).

There are plenty of examples in which Kurdish satellite television stations contributed to the mobilisation of the masses, including street protests, and provided several forums for their viewers to discuss cultural, social, political and national questions. In an example, As Romano (2002) indicated, communications technology, particularly Med TV played a decisive role in the mobilising people Kurdish diaspora in Europe and in the homeland for street protest. The TV was broadcasting the demonstrations and people were discussing organising the events on the TV.

In a case study of Kurdish satellite TV stations, in their article, Mohammadpur et al. (2016) described how Kurdish *Newroz TV (*based in Europe) characterises the Kurdish nationalism as opposed to both the broader nation states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria as well the internal Kurdish opposition. As they explained, "Newroz TV not only describes the real

Kurdish nationalism, but by doing so, prescribes a specific behavior as Kurdish, here as active resistance against outside oppressors" (p.10).

Moreover, the existence and development of Kurdish satellite TVs in the diaspora (specifically in the Scandinavian countries) indicate how effective Kurdish transnational activities have been in terms of changing some of the strongest cultural and political restrictions in Kurdistan. In addition to challenging the politics and media domination of the states occupying Kurdistan, Kurdish satellite TV, has propelled those states to provide more opportunities for the growth of state-sponsored Kurdish TVs inside their countries. Ayata (2012), pointed out that "the emergence of a state sponsored Kurdish channel in Turkey is a further reaction by the government to the existence of the Kurdish satellite TV Station ROJ-TV in Europe, after the Turkish state's efforts to shut down the station failed" (524). This is also true about Iran. Following the establishment of Kurdish satellite TV (including Rojhelat-TV, Tishk-TV, Aso Sat, and Komala TV) by the Kurdish opposition political parties from the diaspora, the Iranian government granted more opportunities to Kurdish state-sponsored provincial TV inside Iran. It also extended the broadcasting of Kurdish Sahar International TV. Moreover, as a reaction to the efforts of Kurdish political parties and their shows broadcast on TV stations, the government broadcasted more about Kurdish culture and tradition through the Iranian state media. This suggests that these states anticipated they could distinguish the Kurdish ethno-cultural identity from the nationalist identity and support the former, and not the latter.

In a word, for the Kurds who were isolated and suppressed by the media of the countries occupying Kurdistan, satellite TV created amazing opportunities to be able to make their voices heard. Kurdish satellite TV stations have had a key effect on the standardization process[51] of the Kurdish language (Hassanpour 1998), the processes of Kurdish identity construction and nation-building (Romano, 2006), challenging and affecting the policies of states occupying Kurdistan regarding the Kurds (Keles 2015; Romano 2002), and democracy and the promotion of human rights in Kurdistan (Khayati, 2008). Today, many Kurds have

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[51] This does not mean that the TVs created a standard Kurdish language. In fact, there is no standard Kurdish language even today and there are various arguments on how a standard language should be. What Hassanpour mainly means is that the Kurdish satellite TVs created a sphere of mutual understanding between the Kurdish dialects, particularly between Sorani and Kurmanji that may facilitate the process of standardisation of Kurdish language.

access to more than 50 Kurdish television channels, reaching Kurds from New Zealand to Alaska. The TVs can be viewed anywhere in the world via low cost satellite dishes or through the Internet or several mobile applications. Despite the growth and popularity of the Internet among the Kurds, TV broadcasts still remain reliable and popular source of news and information among the Kurds. As I will discuss in the following chapters, online users on the Internet have often referred to videos or podcasts from the broadcast media. This will be discussed further in the following chapters.

6.5 Kurdish online media

While explaining the concept of the 'network society' Castells (1997, 2010a) discussed how people act and produce meaning in 'virtual communities.' He stresses how social structures and agency movements inside these structures are arranged around the data given within the networks and, in this regard, the virtual community becomes the wellspring of resources and power. Castells writes:

> *People increasingly organize their meaning not around what they do but on the basis of what they are, or believe they are. Meanwhile, on the other hand, global networks of instrumental exchanges selectively switch on and off individuals, groups, regions, and even countries, according to their relevance in fulfilling the goals processed in the network, in a relentless flow of strategic decisions. There follows a fundamental split between abstract, universal instrumentalism, and historically rooted, particularistic identities. Our societies are increasingly structured around a bipolar opposition between the Net and the self (p.470).*

Through the virtual world, real borders have been devalued or removed. In this sense, the communities that were physically separated can stay connected on the Internet and social media in order to share ideas and broadcast news as it relates to their communities. Consequently, a large number of individuals can easily become 'mobilised' within the time span of a 'click' (Couldry, 2012, pp.1-3)

In terms of the influence of the basic features of print and broadcasting media on national identity, they can also be applied to the age of new media, including social media. However, they offer much broader, trans-diasporic communication opportunities in the new globalised era than print media provided two or three centuries ago, at the peak of nationalistic aspirations in Europe, or at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century in the Middle East. Certainly, the speed at which the dissemination of

information flow occurs in the age of the Internet is much higher compared to print and broadcast media in the late 20th century. Comparing the Internet (especially social media) with conventional media, through the many functions of the Internet, it has been possible for migrant and diaspora groups to redefine and reconstruct the concept of nation in a different way. These virtually constructed nations or communities might be formed by people who look for and associate with other people who have ethnic, cultural, religious, political or ideological commonalities. This point of view has been explained by Fox (2004) who wrote as follows:

> Applying the idea of imagined community to virtual community allows for an understanding of the concept as more than just people interacting online … a virtual community is entirely predicated on an individual's extended consciousness, which helps to imagine his virtual community as real….For individual members to truly belong, they arguably must be able to both imagine the community and in turn perceive themselves as a part of the community (p. 52).

This has defined and accelerated the process of nation-building online which also includes social media. By connecting the actors 'largely unaware of another', the internet is able to situate the users in 'homogenous' and 'empty' time and this would enable the evoking of an imagined community of a nation, in their minds (Anderson, 2006, pp. 30-31). In this sense, as Anderson asserted regarding the role of print media, the Internet and the social media, in theory, are likely to nurture a fast and accessible ability for the Kurdish diaspora to communicate with their Kurdish fellows in the diaspora and in the homeland, which reinforces 'long distance nationalism' among the Kurds in the diaspora. However, these types of communications from Kurds on social media are very different from the Kurdish traditional media which greatly depend on a one-to-many pattern — they create a message and transmit it to the people through TV, radio and print. Since these types of communication do not produce audience interaction and engagement, therefore the discourse of identity building remains to a great extent in the arena of the media owners. The findings of this research, in chapter seven and eight, will investigate this assumption in practice.

Moreover, Appadurai (1996) points out that media are interconnected with diaspora and migration, which create a "joint effect on the work of the imagination as a constitutive

feature of modern subjectivity" (p. 3). This argument is relevant to the current research on the Kurdish diaspora and their practical application and implementation of social media. In the first place, the Internet has played a critical role in the assembling and mobilisation of the Kurdish diaspora, because their mission related to advancing the Kurdish national cause would not have been as successful without the advent of such modes of communication. In other words, the Kurdish diaspora has taken advantage of the freedom of expression in the respective countries in which they currently reside and they have also utilised this to push the liberal countries and their democratic establishments to raise awareness and create broader support for the Kurdish national cause.

Appadurai (1996) also mentions the transformation of the previous era of communication and interaction by electronic media or 'electronic mediation.' Speaking of the Kurdish diaspora, this argument appears to be relevant enough. During the 1990s and in the early years of the 21st century, Kurdish websites and blogs operated by the Kurdish diaspora played a key role in drawing the attention of the international community and people to the history of the Kurdish people, as well as their problems and national demands. They were also able to attract many ordinary people in the diaspora to participate and take part in the Kurdish national movement. It can be argued that Kurdish electronic media, through providing unlimited and public sphere for articulation of Kurdish identity, induce the transformation of everyday discourse as "they are resources for experiments with self-making in all sorts of societies [and] provide resources for self-imagining as an everyday social project" (p. 3-4).

At the point the development of electronic media coincided with the expansion of the diaspora and the migrant communities "we have a new order of instability in the production of modern subjectivities…. whereby viewers and images are in simultaneous circulation. Neither images nor viewers fit into circuits or audiences that are easily bound within local, national, or regional spaces," (p. 4). As I will demonstrate through the findings of this research in the case of Kurdish diaspora "the work of the imagination, viewed in this context, is neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined but is a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern" (p. 4).

The Internet has been more than a network of websites which are freely accessible. It is a 'body politic' and 'terra incognito' with respect to its "exteriority to existing societal norms and social imaginaries" (Mutlu, p.130). While the Kurdish broadcasting media have offered a ground for ideologies and political positions, the Internet has turned out to be an incredible participatory tool of 'the everyday life of the Kurdish diaspora' for about two and a half decades (Keles, 2016). These virtual social structures have created a new conversation between the diaspora and the people in their homeland that has enabled the Kurds to 'redefine their lives and challenge dominant states' (Romano 2002:128). This argument is based on the idea that individuals can share their common sense of identity and sentiments of connection without governmental or legislative restrictions.

6.5.1 The early structure of the Kurdish Internet

The Kurdish diaspora contributed significantly to the introduction and development of the Internet among the Kurds both in the diaspora and in the homeland (Khayati, 2008) and for at least a decade later the people in the homeland are still influenced by the diaspora. The domination of the Kurdish diaspora during the early period of the Internet can be attributed to a great extent for reasons to various technical, political and economic changes and innovations that occurred as a result of living in other countries around the world. The Kurds from the diaspora could have easy access to the Internet. Also, in light of the fact that a united writing font for Kurdish (especially in terms of Sorani Dialect) had not yet been developed, they could write and communicate virtually on the Internet by using the fonts or languages of their host counties much more conveniently than with a Kurdish font.

While there were still a number of political, cultural and economic barriers for the Kurds in the homeland to access the Internet, the Kurdish nationalists and political activists (especially those in diaspora) had a great opportunity to freely express their ideas and activities regarding the Kurdish question. Still and all, later in the early years of the 21st century, inside Kurdistan (in Iraqi Kurdistan only), the KRG played a key role in setting up and developing the Internet. For instance, the KRG contributed to building and developing the telecommunications infrastructure required for the Internet to operate, expand and develop. The dramatic increase in the quantity of Kurdish sites and web blogs began in the 2000s since the KRG allowed the installation of ISPs (Internet Service Providers) and this

contributed to the development of the first Unicode-based Kurdish writing font (Sheyholislami, 2011, p. 90).

Nevertheless, in spite of the KRG's influential role, mainly it was individual members of Kurdish diaspora who were the most visible in terms of the introduction and the development of the Kurdish Internet and online technologies. For example, in the early days of the year 2000, the *Kurditgroup,* a group of IT specialists in Europe, produced the Kurdish Unicode (p. 90). They designed a Windows application that supported Kurdish programs, and a standard digital Kurdish letter set which helped to make writing Kurdish on PCs and publishing on the Internet very convenient. This standard style created by *Kurditgroup* was soon adjusted and used by Kurdish Sorani online users throughout the world.

The use of the Internet by the Kurds started at a great speed and immediately a large number of Kurdish websites and blogs emerged. Van Bruinessen (1990) was astonished by such growth and called it 'the renaissance of Kurdish culture and language.' As he explained "the Kurdistan on the ground has been supplemented with the Kurdistan of the airwaves and in cyberspace. And much of the Kurdish nationalist struggle is going in the latter" (p.20). The Kurds and especially the Kurdish diaspora, reinforced their online presence in the first decade of the 21st century by continuing to stay in contact with each other, by taking part in political and cultural activities, and by creating various sites, such as, *Kurdistan Net*, *Kurdish info*, *Kurdistan Press*, *Kurdish News*, *Kurdish Globe*, *Kurdistan Observer*, *Kurdistan Post*, *Zkurd, WeKurd, Kurdish Media*, *Renesans*, *4Rojhelat*, and so on. Khayati (2008) argues that the great number of sites is a strong indication and confirmation of the presence of the Kurdish diaspora on the Internet (p.93). Following the developments related to the technical aspects and also to the contribution of the KRG in regard to improving the infrastructure, the quantity of Kurdish sites and different online platforms expanded even further. For instance, various Kurdish sites, online distributions, Web lists, and online networking, alongside 'on-air' TV and radio courses of action emerged in the first decade of the new millennium.

In one of the earliest studies on the Kurdish Internet, Bakker (2001) used the search engine *hotbot.com* to look for the names of websites containing the word 'Kurdistan' in their front or title page. His search returned 1,800 results. Searching on the same track, in May 2007, Sheyholislami (2011) conducted the same search and his search returned 658,500 items. On

22 August 2016, this researcher conducted a similar search and it returned 3,380,000 sites containing the name of Kurdistan on their front or title page. Concurrently, I searched the words 'Kurdistan' and 'Kurds' through google search engine. It returned 35,800,000 results for the word 'Kurdistan' and 55,700,000 results for the word 'Kurd', which demonstrates a considerable growth in terms of the presence as well as in terms of the political activism and internationalisation of 'Kurds' on the Internet since 2007.

In the early days of the Kurdish Internet, the Kurdish diaspora had only made a few attempts to write and create websites in English or in the other languages of their host countries. The trend of utilising English and other European languages among the Kurdish diaspora's Internet continued and developed considerably so that in the early days of the 2000s there were many websites that were published by Kurds in English, in addition to Kurdish and in other languages, such as, Persian, Turkish and Arabic. The presentation of the Kurdish national movement in English and in other languages by the Kurdish diaspora contributed greatly to the introduction of the movement and its internationalisation.

Along with the emergence and development of the Kurdish fonts, particularly Kurdish Unicode font ,due to the fact that they made it easier to use the Kurdish script in online publishing, Kurdish became widespread to a considerable extent. The improvement of the Unicode was essential in modifying the Kurdish Perso-Arabic scripts so they were workable for Internet users and due to this particular development, the types of independently published websites and blogs by Kurds both in the diaspora and in the homeland increased dramatically.

According to Sheyholislami (2010), the Kurdish language plays a significant role in terms of the Kurdish identity and it is the most important manifestation of the identity of the Kurdish people. The Kurdish language is frequently promoted and instrumentalised to construct and maintain a cross-border Kurdishness through the use of the Internet. If the activists who are part of the Kurdish movement aim to use the Internet in order to strengthen their Kurdish identity and to mobilise people for the purpose of the nation-state building of Kurdistan, it is logical that they would distribute information to and engage with their fans and supporters mainly in the Kurdish language. I will return to the discussion of language and Kurdish online user in the fieldwork chapter.

6.5.2 The multiple functions of the Internet for a stateless diaspora

Castells (2001) points out that "neither utopia nor dystopia, the Internet is the expression of ourselves—through a specific code of communication, which we must understand if we want to change our reality" (p. 6). The Kurdish diaspora's Internet has served different purposes. A substantial number of Kurdish sites – especially those registered in Western countries – included information about the Kurds. Although for the most part they were the result of individual initiatives and served private purposes, and as Khayati (2008) mentioned, there are "a good number of individual blogs and websites that systematically provide their readers not only with articles on different subjects but also with fresh news about various political and cultural events that concern the daily lives of Kurds" (p.57).

Moreover, the huge quantity of websites and online activism related to Kurdish political parties and organisations illustrates that the Kurds of the diaspora played a key role "in transferring an important part of their nation-building project and their political rhetoric and activities to the domain of Internet" (p. 93). Despite the differences in content, style, and mission, Kurdish websites in the early part of the decade of 2000 had some common features. Candan (2008) summarises these commonalities in the following ways.

> 1. In almost all sites the common Kurdish history, society, politics, language, literature, and historical sites (e.g. Hasankeyf in Turkey) and personages are discussed at length. Background information on the various "massacres" of the Kurds (e.g. "Enfal campaign" in Iraq during the 1980s) is also extensively covered.
>
> 2. The users have access to Kurdish television and radio (e.g. ROJ TV, Kurd 1, or Denge-Mesopotamia Radio) on most of the Internet sites. Additionally, the websites serve their own television and radio programs or link to documentation on German television that deals with Kurdish issues.
>
> 3. A majority of the Internet content appeals for demonstrations, petition campaigns, and political/cultural activities, such as, seminars and concerts designed around the themes of Kurdistan and the Kurdish cause can be found in the online and offline world (p.137).

Moreover, Eriksen (2007) underlined the importance of the Internet by the stateless groups, in which he partially mentioned the Kurds' involvement with the Internet. He argued that nations flourish on the Internet in cyberspace and this includes online chatrooms, semi-official data on websites, magazines, newspapers, and so forth. In this sense, cyberspace has been a very important environment for identity performance or nation-building for those nations that have lost their region (for example, Afrikaner-led South Africa), nations

that have been scattered for political reasons, (for example, Tamil Sri Lanka or Kurdistan), and nations that have a vast migrant population, (for example, India or Caribbean island states). Accordingly, he described four varieties of Internet nationalism: state-supported (Chile), surrogate (Afrikaner), pre-independence (Kurdish) and multiculturalist (Moroccan-Dutch) (p.12). Eriksen positioned the Kurdish Internet in the category of the pre-independence Internet nationalism by which he defined the Kurds as an ethnic group in the process of the formation of a nation. He mentioned that the "Kurdish national identity can be said to be in a formative stage" and highlighted the 'considerable factionalism' and divisions among the Kurds. Eriksen's observations about the Kurdish Internet are still worth noting, even though he has not been exempt from criticism. For example, Sheyholislami (2011) considered Eriksen's work as suffering from 'a methodological shortcoming' since his observation relied on Kurdish Internet sources that exist in English or in other languages than Kurdish, such as, *Kurdishmedia.com*. Sheyholislami argued that in Eriksen's study of the Kurdish Internet, the Kurdish language has been neglected (p.92) since he mainly emphasised the English contents. Despite the relevant criticisms, Eriksen's partial observation of the Kurdish Internet is still regarded as one of the most important research studies on Kurdish online nationalism and has been referred to frequently by subsequent studies. It was the first work which clearly mentioned Kurdish cyber-nationalism including its categorisation, aims, and issues. In line with Eriksen, Mills (2002) also conducted research reviewing a number of English language websites that were managed by Kurds or that were focusing on the Kurdish cause. He acknowledges the existence of a Kurdish cyber-nation and argues that the Kurdish use of the Internet is to preserve their "logical state' or 'cybernation' known as Kurdistan . . . providing common points of contact and sources of instantaneous cultural and political information to its members around the world"(p.82).

These studies suggest that the Internet has provided the Kurdish stateless diaspora with a platform as well as a transnational space to spread their views and feelings regarding their history, their collective identity and to enter a political discourse about their political aims and accordingly to reinforce the Kurdish national identity by re-articulating and re-negotiating it. This has finally resulted in the emergence of the Kurdish 'virtual community' (Eriksen, 2007). Likewise, the Internet enabled the Kurdish locals to expand their communicative practices and the capability to exchange within geographically distant

contexts. The current Kurdish online activism signifies a new development in the Kurdish national movement, which can be referred to as virtual or 'Cyber-Kurdistan' (Keles, 2016). The lion's share of this internationalisation as it relates to the Kurdish national cause was as a result of the growth of the social media network among the Kurds of the diaspora. This will be discussed and examined in the next chapter and in the fieldwork of this study.

The Kurdish diaspora, as a result of war, displacement, migration and relocation, has transnationalised the Kurdish question mainly through their political engagements and online media activism. In this regard Keles (2016) argues that "much of the Kurdish diaspora have had to re-invent their homeland and the media, and the Internet and the mediated experiences they produce create a new form of relationship among Kurds across nation-state borders" (p.8). These initiatives provided by the Internet regarding the articulation of a specific Kurdish national identity have empowered Kurdish users and given them the chance to set up new spaces of communication that have challenged the current geological, social, and political restrictions in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria.

6.5.3 The Internet as a space for the diasporic political activism

Cohen (1997) argues that diasporas maintain 'political solidarity' as well as possible mythological connections with the homeland, and with diasporic groups in other locations. This might serve to explain the primordialist conceptions of the nation that might be apparent on the Web. It can be argued that the connection that brings the Kurdish diaspora and the Kurds in the homeland together, both off-line and on-line, via the Internet is "a common interest in their location of origin and a foundational identity that is rooted in that place which defines an in-group, in spite of the fact that people may or may not have ever personally interacted with one another in real time and space" (Hiller & Franz, 2004, p. 132).

By compressing time and space and connecting Kurdish individuals and groups from various political and geographical spaces, the Internet has contributed to creating "a sense of belonging, sharing collective ethnic, national and religious common experiences and identity" (Keles, 2015. p. 122). This can also lead to the establishment of new and expanded spaces, such as, online groups, forums, and social media networks. In the Kurdish case, as Eriksen (2007) pointed out, "since much of the Kurdish elite is in exile, the Internet has

turned out to be a perfect medium for the consolidation of identity and dissemination of news for Kurds" (p.9).

Similar to many other stateless groups, such as, the Tibetans, Tamils, Chiapas and so on, the Kurds have utilised the Internet "to further their identity construction or self- determination projects" (Mills, 2002, p. 70). In this sense, as discussed previously in earlier chapters, some scholars have argued that the use of the Internet by marginalised groups as it relates to building their national identity indicates that internationalising theories have not responded correctly and "it is far too soon to declare the end of nationalism and parochial identity" (p.70). Romano (2002) claimed that the Kurds have utilised the Internet, e-mail and social networking sites, for the purpose of 'organizing protests, meetings, and nationalist projects' (p.139). The Internet has connected the Kurdish diaspora together from various geographical, social, religious, and political spaces. Therefore, it has been important and influential in terms of bringing the individuals and groups of the Kurdish diaspora together online to participate in transnational political interactions and strengthen the diaspora of the Kurds.

In a research study on the 'political online participation of migrants in Germany', Kissau (2008) argued that the Kurdish websites in Germany have been much more involved in 'ethnic-group consciousness' and identity articulation compared with other diaspora, such as, Russian-speakers or Turkish. Through the Internet, the Kurdish diaspora has tried "to define themselves in contrast to other groups in the host society." This is in line with another argument that has referred to the Kurdish diaspora as one of the most highly politicised diaspora throughout the world (Alinia, 2004; Khayati, 2008). Accordingly, Kurds were less interested to discuss subjects, such as, "life in Germany, integration or the political development in Germany" (Kissau, 2008). However, the Kurdish nationalist discourse is the most obvious element throughout the Kurdish online domain. In this regard, the Kurdish online diaspora has created, re-created, negotiated and re-negotiated their political activism in a way to re-produce the significance of statelessness, the Kurds and what it means to be *Kurdistani* or where Kurdistan is and reiterate that it is not a state.

Cyberspace and the Internet enabled the Kurdish diaspora that had origins in oppressive or closed countries to organise the opposition and identity discussion platforms not only within the diaspora, it also served to contribute to the mobilisation of Kurds in the homeland. For

example, as I will be explaining in a later chapter, Kurds have organised many street protests and events via social media. In this sense, the Kurdish Internet media "is obviously of 'central significance' (Schmidinger, N.D.), and initiated a more "immediate, less embedded more intense and more effective form of transnational bonding" (Verhulst, 1999, p. 30). This new type of virtual interaction and 'self-collective representation' has formed a specific 'cross-border networking that is known as 'virtual communities' (Rheingold 1993; Appadurai, 1996). According to Candan (2008), a 'virtual Kurdistan' has already existed. It is an online space in which Kurds have imagined a distinct border for the Kurdish nation that is different from the real and physical borders of the current nation states encompassing Kurdistan. This notion has been highly acknowledged by a majority of online users. The creation of a virtual Kurdistan via the virtual Kurdish diaspora represents, in some ways, a re-production of the existing Kurdish society and the diaspora.

In addition to conventional websites and weblogs, the early chatrooms played a significant role in connecting the Kurds of the diaspora and the Kurds who still reside in the homeland. The Kurdish diaspora very commonly organised chat rooms for enjoyment or political and organisational drives. For instance, as Khayati (2008, p.93) mentioned, many Kurdish *Paltalk* chat rooms remained open to visitors for twenty-four hours almost every day. There are plenty of examples that these chatrooms have become a space for political participation and activities. Khayati pointed to an example that a Kurdish political organisation, KOMALAH, organised parts of its 12th Congress via the Internet in August 2006. Since some of the members were not able to physically attend the meeting, the organisers accessed *Paltak*, *Yahoo Messenger* and *MSN Messenger* to connect with other members at the headquarters of the party in Sulaymaniyah in the Kurdistan Region (p.93). During the recent years, the Kurdish diaspora has attempted to organise various campaigns and demonstrations to gain support from the international community for the Kurds in Iraq and Syria. While ISIS attacked the towns of Shingal and Kobane, the Kurdish diaspora in many countries rallied and demanded financial, military and other support from their host countries for the Kurdish Peshmarga and guerrillas who have been fighting on the ground against ISIS. Some of these campaigns and political activities will be elaborated upon further in the next chapter that includes a discussion of the social media activities of the Kurdish diaspora.

Also, among the Kurdish political organisations in the diaspora, the PKK has been one of the most active groups regarding the mobilisation of the Kurds online by issuing multiple online press releases and other activities in cyber-space. Likewise, for the members of Kurdish political parties in the diaspora, the Internet has become a crucial space and a channel to advance the Kurdish cause due to the fact that it has created an immediate connection between the Kurdish diaspora and the Kurds in the homeland, as well as creating a direct connection between the Kurdish diaspora and the world. As Keles (2015) points out, the Internet inspired a Kurdish public discussion of the various 'taboos of Kurdish parties' (p. 67). For example, many online users exceedingly question their Kurdish leaders for their past wrongdoings. They dispute the issues of corruption and lack of democracy within Kurdish political parties. Through the Internet, diaspora Kurds could be updated regarding the recent news and political developments, and rapidly respond on these occasions. The involvement of the Kurdish diaspora in the Internet serves to enlighten the Kurdish community throughout the world about global activities and changes and also plays a part in 'raising international awareness over the Kurdish question' (Mutlu, 2010, p. 133). For example, following the arrest of Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK used the Internet to mobilise the masses and generate great turnouts to protest his arrest and trial. The PKK supporters have also created online initiatives, such as, 'Freedom for Öcalan' and 'Peace in Kurdistan.'

In this regard, the political activities of the Kurdish diaspora on the Internet serve as 'social capital' for the political and nationalist mobilisation of Kurds. This social capital has not been limited to the Kurdish political parties or organisations in the diaspora only, since all individuals could access it. For example, Keles (2016) mentioned that "many Kurdish political dissidents who do not agree with either the Turkish state or the PKK have established Internet-based newspapers or blogs to participate in the debate over the Kurds and Kurdistan and ongoing conflicts"(p.124).

Any production of social capital in both the diaspora and the homeland has many geographical, economic and political restrictions. However, through the creation of a user-generated platform, such as, social media, the Kurdish diaspora "use their human capital and e-skills to produce cultural, linguistic and political content as bloggers, video producers, authors and opinion makers in virtual networks" (Keles, 2016, p. 8). In the chapters that follow, I will discuss the shift to user-generated sites and that it contributed to a substantial

improvement in terms of the Kurdish online experience. In this era, more Kurdish individuals, groups and political parties have become involved online rather than just relying on the few websites set up by some technically knowledgeable experts.

Although the Internet has significantly helped the Kurds become connected, it has produced a space for articulation of diverse and contesting political, cultural, religious and linguistic differences. Internet, (and in its best meaning, Social media) has effectively empowered Kurdish users to find a new way of communicative space, as well as giving voice to their views and objections to events in the original homeland or in diaspora country with relative immunity (Mahmod, 2016, p. 200). In other words, the over-articulation of the marginal identities, particularly dialects and political views, has resulted in the emergence of sub-national or minor discourses throughout Kurdish society, which has reduced the discourse of Kurdish nationalism and the Greater Kurdistan to the dialects, regions and religions of the Kurds. To some scholars (Mahmod, 2016), this means Kurdish imagined community has been 'weakened.' This discussion is one of the core parts of this dissertation and I will return to these difference and the way they affect Kurdish national identity.

6.6 Kurdish conventional media versus the Internet media

The Kurdish Internet started with a variety of activities and forms, such as, mailing lists, chatrooms, websites, weblogs, podcasts, and so on. Likewise, the same clashes and concerns that people experienced with Kurdish real life and the Kurdish nationalist movement also carried over to the Kurdish virtual world. However, the Kurdish nationalist movement and activities were present prior to the age of the Internet, and the World Wide Web did not devise them. This indicates that the Kurdish online world has been considerably affected by the Kurdish real world and accordingly by the Kurdish nationalist movement. Thus, as Bakker (2001) pointed out at the beginning of the Kurdish Internet, there are still many similarities between the Kurdish real and online worlds. Likewise, there are elements of Kurdish websites sites that resemble the elements of other Kurdish print and broadcasting media. Some of these similarities and differences will be discussed further in chapters seven and eight.

Both the Kurdish broadcasting and Internet media have considerably challenged the media domination and sovereignty of the states ruling Kurdistan. Even so, there are some

substantial differences between them. The elements of the representation of the Kurdish national identity facilitated through TV and other media have continued to be prominent, in different ways, in the context of the new electronic media platforms. The Internet revolution has resulted in the possibility and in the development of written communications in a totally new way. This has guaranteed an increase in the movement and in the amount of information that can be shared.

Moreover, the contents of this new medium, as Bakker (2001) pointed out, are more than a broadcasting medium. Since visible or serious control does not exist, the tone can be significantly more 'outspoken.' In other words, as a suitable 'public sphere,' the Internet media (especially social media) are offering the same, yet better and much freer opportunities for marginalised groups to speak out in a globalised era than the print media did two or three centuries ago at the peak of nationalistic aspirations in Europe. The distinction between the Internet and traditional broadcasting media is associated with the literacy of the viewers, the listeners and the users. While traditional broadcasting is audio-visual based and can transcend literacy barriers, in addition to offering audio-visual, the Internet provides a written-based mode (Sheyholislami, 2011, p. 184) that has become a distinctive element as it relates to the articulation of Kurdish national identity. Moreover, according to Sheyholislami (2011), for the Kurds in the homeland, satellite television is more accessible 'for both economic and socio-political reasons' and he asserts that for the Kurds in the diaspora communicating via cyberspace is more convenient. "Even today, as it will be discussed in the findings of the current dissertation, Kurds living in Europe and North America beyond a doubt constitute the majority of webmasters, bloggers, forum, and chat-room administrators and moderators" (p. 175). In the next chapters, I will return to further potentials of social media, as the most developed forms of Web 2.0, in the development of Kurdish national movements in the diaspora.

6.7 Conclusion

Globalisation, mostly the globalisation of communication technologies, for instance the Internet and online networking, has significantly empowered and developed the activities of diasporas and permitted them to reach and have an effect on a worldwide scale (Adamson and Demetriou, 2007; Brinkerhoff, 2009; Lyons, 2006b; Østergaard-Neilson, 2006; Vertovec, 1997). The advent of media technology has greatly influenced the articulation of identities

and the politics of recognition for the Kurds in exile who are often referred to as the 'biggest stateless diaspora' in the world (Aninia, 2004; Eliassi, 2013; Khayati, 2008; Van Bruinessen, 2000).

This chapter argued that new media, both broadcasting and Internet media have acted as significantly positive phenomena in regard to the promotion of Kurdish national question and the way they articulate the concept of nation-building. Based on the information mentioned in this chapter and also according to the previous discussions regarding the Kurdish diaspora and transnationalism, it can clearly be claimed that the Kurdish diaspora and Kurdish nationalism would not have reached the mobilised stage it has reached today, nor could they have received such international attention, if there would not have been such a mobilised and active media emanating from the Kurdish diaspora.

From the time the first Kurdish newspaper, *Kurdistan, was* published in 1898, the Kurdish print media started to advance (Hassanpour, 1998). Since that time the Kurds have been taking advantage of media technologies (including print and broadcasting) to reproduce and develop their own nationalist and identity discourses and also to promote their demands. Through the print, and broadcasting media, the Kurdish diaspora has played a crucial role in the creation of a transnational social space through which the discourse of Kurdish nationalism and identity has been exported to the four parts of Kurdistan. Since Kurdish newspaper, radio and satellite TV have not ever been free of limitations and restrictions within the states encompassing Kurdistan, they [the four states] have put for their best efforts to struggle with these new broadcasting technologies in their attempt to place pressure on various European governments, countries where the Kurdish media have been broadcasting, to close down or restrict the media. In addition, they restricted the access of Kurds in the homeland to these media, especially satellite TV, as much as possible.

Since the Kurds and their national discourse were generally excluded from the public sphere of the mainstream media of the nation states encompassing Kurdistan, the Internet has served as a new domain and offered the best opportunity for the Kurdish diaspora in terms of communication, imagination, participation and representation. Therefore, the Internet has turned into 'the weapon of choice' for diasporic groups (Mutlu, 2010). In the case of the Kurdish diaspora, they effectively used the Internet as the medium of communication and as a device to make up for the barriers that have existed in the communication between the

homeland and the diaspora. Hence, to a degree, the favorable, free, and less restricted media have possibly provided for the Kurds in exile, the best support for the Kurdish cause and nationalism. Through these media platforms the Kurds have been defining and redefining the Kurdish national identity and have turned the diaspora into a scene of that encompasses "convergence, cultural and political revival, and the formation of a collective identity" (Sheyholislami, 2011, p.72).

Indeed the speed of dissemination of information is much greater and more rapid than that of print and broadcasting media. This has accelerated the process of a kind of nation building called '*nation-building online*' and it includes social media as well. Thus, nation building is carried on and continued in the age of new media, although in ways rather different from the previous times. However, as this thesis will argue, social media have transformed the notion of Kurdish nationalism and 'nation-building' in the diaspora into a more pluralistic and participatory era. This will be discussed in further detail in chapter eight.

Chapter seven: the fieldwork process and findings

7.1 Introduction

The following chapter offers the process and the results of the conducted empirical online ethnography as well as the primary analysis of the posts, videos, photos and all other textual and audio-visual communications of the Kurdish diaspora users. It speaks about the significance of social media, especially Facebook for the Kurdish diaspora. The chapter maps the discourses and practices of national identity through a collected group of Facebook pages and from members of the Kurdish diaspora. It considers the kind of conceptions of the nation that are being shared, discussed and described in the social media posts as well as the relationship, for example, between the expressions of conventional *Kurdayeti* and a sense of nation in social media era. For this purpose, the findings are categorised into four themes including ethnicity, culture, religion and politics. Each of the four themes are further sub-divided and categorised into certain sub-themes that focus on the discourse of Kurdish identity and national identity in the diaspora.

7.2 Research process

Research on the Internet and social media begins like other types of research in that "Possible research areas are explored until a final topic is settled; the reliability of the source is judged, solid information is gathered, a working bibliography is framed, and databases at research centres are accessed" (Hewson, et. al., 2016, p.15). Likewise, the first mission of any qualitative and empirical research is choosing 'what is to be observed' along with 'how observations are to be recorded' (Krippendorf, 2013). Social media, especially Facebook, afford an excellent source of information for conducting research that does not require the direct involvement of researchers. So they can obtain the data through a passive or 'lurking' online participant observation (Kozinets, 2010) without full participation in the online setting. In this regard, data collection online is similar to the conventional method of collecting data through print media, such as, newspapers (Hine, 2000). This current research adopts a qualitative analytical method by which the investigator is able to "find research material where they naturally occurred, retrieving routinely accumulated records,

and capturing human behaviour through passive observation" (Fielding, Lee, & Blank, 2008, p. 9). It is also helpful to ensure the research is "based on careful observation and measurement of the objective reality that exists out there" (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

7.2.1 Familiarisation with the setting

Although I cannot confirm the exact number of Kurdish diaspora who participate in social media, I can argue that this proportion is significant, considering the population of Kurds in the diaspora. At the beginning of the observation I did not know exactly what types of pages or groups to look for. This is actually one of the most common problems of any virtual or online ethnography (Hine, 2000). However, what I was sure about was the themes of the study. So, I selected the appropriate pages, groups, websites and participants. While mapping the pages and groups that would construct the structure of the work, I constantly set out the entry to be ongoing as new pages, blogs, groups and websites could turn up at any stage in the observation. So, any site or page that attracted attention was added at any point throughout the research. In any case, after two weeks, I focused more on those pages and groups that could serve to provide a more thoughtful analysis with respect to the research questions.

At the very least and if it was necessary I forwarded an introduction, regarding my background as a Kurdish researcher, that enabled me to be welcomed warmly by the Kurdish diaspora online groups. Accordingly, I could be regarded as an observer, yet a passive participant observer, of this ethnography. Even though I had been an active member of Facebook for many years before the start of the observation, it was necessary for me to revise my Facebook account in order to specify the times I allocated to this study. My first involvement in the social media domain involved consistently visiting any page or profile related to the Kurds of the diaspora to identify and focus on the desired sources, for the duration of the ethnography.

Since this ethnography was to be conducted in the form of a more or less passive, non-direct, or 'non-reactive participation', the activities of the users, safety, and behaviours were not to be affected throughout the process of the data collection (Janetzko, 2008). Similar to any kind of ethnography, concerns can arise regarding confidentiality matters through cyber-ethnography. However, since the observation was conducted in a passive

way and the research was conducted with participants I did not interact with face to face, and in whatever way these concerns are not as serious as they might be in an off-line, real-world ethnography (Bird & Barber, 2007). I did not require formal Ethics approval from my University for the research. Even so, due to further ethical restraints of the research, I completely observed the 'privacy' of the members of the groups within the observation and their identifying or personal information was kept strictly confidential, as advised by Bird and Barber (2007, p. 145). In this regard, I avoided mentioning or recording their actual names and personal information, although whatever I was receiving from them was wholly public information that any other member of the page could easily access. Furthermore, in the later phase, I reviewed the profile of the admins and the active members of the pages or groups. The purpose of the review included examining and authenticating the names of the pages, the message components, the number of members or followers of the pages, the residence place of the administrators of the pages, as well as how often the pages and sites were updated.

7.2.2 Sampling Plan

Sampling is an important stage part for selective inclusion of an analysis (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 99). A sampling structure must be created by the researcher if there is no other appropriate list available. In this sense, the sampling must be comprehensive, correct and updated (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 262). Since the study required a description of the context of the Kurdish diaspora, I tried to gain an understanding that included a general perspective of the individual members of Kurdish on Facebook via a mapping method. This stage involved mainly identifying the various Facebook pages, regardless of the nationalist or political dispositions of the pages. It consisted of the quick observation of a very high number of public pages, groups and activities on Facebook[52] run by the Kurds in diaspora. I started skimming and scanning Facebook, including public pages, groups, and even pages

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[52] As a social network site (SNS) Facebook has provided its Kurdish users the possibility of displaying themselves in an online profile, gathering friends in their account, enabling them to post comments and other media products on each other's page, and see each other's profile any time they want from anywhere. Although this research is on social media of the Kurdish diaspora, Facebook is the most important platform that has been studied. Today in 2018, Kurds are using many other social media platforms such as telegram, WhatsApp, Instagram, Viber, twitter, etc. However, Facebook is still the most popular one among the Kurds living in the diaspora. May people are only using Facebook as it includes many of the functions that other social media applications might have. For example, Viber and telegram are only messenger applications, while Facebook is a voice/video text messenger, a platform for sharing information, and networking, etc.

formed by individual users, organisations, communities, political parties, governments, media corporations related to Kurds and Kurdish diaspora.

For the purpose of mapping, all the data has been collected manually through the official sites. I used Google and Facebook search engine tools to find and locate the pages, groups and websites run by Kurdish diaspora. This is a very common approach used in many studies in which the web or social media pages are chosen with targeted restrictions outlined by the research (Snelson, 2005). Facebook and Google search tools were used for this aim, as both have the highest index of covering the news, pages, websites and all other online activities. Through their filtering and advanced search functions, they were capable of distinguishing the Facebook public pages and groups as well as excluding them from individual sites. As a result of the search, many Facebook pages, groups and websites were carefully recognised under the keywords referring to, for example, *Kurds in Europe*, *Kurdish Diaspora*, *Kurdish Youth Association of New Zealand/Australia/UK/USA,* and so on. These key words were also searched in other languages, such as, Kurdish, Persian, Arabic and [in a few occasions] Turkish. This was very helpful in identifying the environment of the Kurdish diaspora on Facebook and creating the preliminary search list of 300 sites. Likewise, from this overall early search the following points or problems emerged:

- One of the very common problems at this stage was the different spelling of the Kurdish names.

- There were a number of pages or groups created by non-Kurds, mainly these are people who are related in some way to Kurds and Kurdistan.

- If the sites were in Perso-Arabic fonts, some fonts were not recognisable through the engine searches. In other words, about 80 percent of the sites were only detectable by *UniKurd* font that is a common font for writing Kurdish in the Perso-Arabic alphabet.

- This stage also included a comprehensive search of the keywords mentioned above in several languages including English, Persian, Arabic, Turkish, French, Swedish, and German.

- Many of the sites mentioned in their introductory remarks of the pages that they aim at introducing Kurdish culture, society, resistance and the Kurdish cause to the world.

- Referencing the four parts of Kurdistan, the Kurdish diaspora contributors openly tended to use the more obscure, unofficial and internationally unrecognised terms. For example, they mentioned *Northern Kurdistan/Bakur* instead of the Kurdistan of Turkey, *Eastern Kurdistan/Rojhelat* instead of Iranian Kurdistan, *Southern Kurdistan/Bashur* instead of Iraqi Kurdistan, and *Western Kurdistan/Rojava* instead of Syrian Kurdistan.

- The search results included the ranking of active or updated pages and groups.

- In addition to Facebook, some other social media areas were observed as well. Hence, the regular Facebook observation was supplemented by casual observation of selected Kurdish weblogs, Twitter accounts and videos on YouTube.

While the previous studies, (Candan, 2088; Jacob, 2013; Mahmod, 2011, 2016) related to the Kurdish diaspora and social media, have mostly focused on the Facebook users and their personal profiles, I focused on Facebook pages, groups and sites created and activated by the Kurdish diaspora. In other words, I have observed the users who are involved with collective public groups and pages. During and following the search stage, a list of the sites was created that were likely to be the sampling frame of the Facebook pages and groups created by the Kurdish diaspora. This primary list included 300 Facebook sites (up to January 2015). Although the administrators of the pages were from a Kurdish background, some of the sites included users who were commenting on Kurds who are not Kurds. I included them in the sampling too. And the pages and groups with the following characteristics were not included:

- Pages or groups created under the names of Kurdish political parties,

- Sites created by the Kurdish, governmental or international organisation,

- In terms of duplicated sites. I chose the one with higher membership and more updating history.

- Those pages/groups which were under the name of Kurds or Kurdish diaspora yet did not have much at all to do with the Kurds,

- Sites used for personal or business purposes,

- Sites which were likely to be run, controlled or influenced by the states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria,

- Sites that had either no regular updates or very few updates,

- Sites created or run by the same user(s) or administrator(s).

In doing such filtering I aimed to study the pages or groups which are specifically run by the individual members of Kurdish diaspora, regardless of their political or nationalistic positioning. It is worth mentioning that the excluding phase helped me considerably to attain an overall depiction of Kurdish voice on social media. All of the excluded sites had been included in the early pooling/mapping of the Kurdish diaspora's social media, and I meticulously investigated them before making a decision to leave them out. The process of early pooling and elimination was productive, thorough and time intensive. All of the remaining sites that were to be finalised for observation had to have the following most significant characteristics:

- They must have at least 500 members or followers

- They must include both genders and generations of Kurdish diaspora

- They must be in English or the two main dialects of the Kurdish language (the Sorani and Kurmanji Dialects)

- They must be related to the Kurds who were born, raised or living in the diaspora (e.g. Kurdish Youth Association in New Zealand, Kurds in Sweden, and so forth.)

- They must have existed for at least 6 months or more prior to the date I started observing

- The introduction of the sites should present some brief information about their mission

This type of filtering gave me a good understanding of the productivity, duration, and chronology of the sites. Finally, from the list of 300 sites in the early pooling, the following 100 possible sites were selected on a 'purposive sampling method' (Palys, 2008) to be observed, focused on and utilised for the purpose of this study.

Title	Type	Language (s)
Adelaide Kurdish Community	Public community page	English
Advice for Kurdish Students	Public page	English/Kurdish

Alliance for Kurdish Rights	Public page/campaign	English
An Independence Referendum for Southern Kurdistan	Campaign/public page	Kurdish/English
Anarchists in Support of Rojava-Kurdistan	Public community page	English
ANZAK (Aotearoa New Zealand & Australian Kurds)	Closed group	English
Boukan Jelas	Closed group	Kurdish/Persian
Children of the Sun and Fir-the Medes Kurds	Public page	English
Children without Borders in Kurdistan	Public page	English/Kurdish/Arabic
Cofee7	Closed group	English
Erdogan, We won't be part of your crime against the Kurds	Public/campaign page	English/Turkish/Kurdish
Folklora kurdî (Kurdish Folklore)	Public page	Kurdish
Freedom Fighters of Grand Kurdistan	Closed group	English
Friendship & Support for Kurdistan & its People	Closed group	English
Help Free the Kurds	Public page	Kurdish/English
International Brigades of Rojava	Public page/news media	English
International Institute for the Study of Kurdish Society	Closed group	English
International Support for Kurds	Public/Campaign page	English
Komala Çanda Kurd a Japan (Kurdish Community in Japan)	Public community page	English/Kurdish
KOMCIWAN-Komela ciwanên kurd li Swêd [Kurdish Youth Community in Sweden]	Public community page	Kurdish/Swedish/English
Kurdê lê Swêdê (Kurds in Sweden)	Public community page	Kurdish/Swedish/English
Kurden aus aller Welt (Kurds from around the world)	Public page	German
Kurden Japonye (Kurds of Japan)	Public community page	Kurdish/Japanese/English
Kurdish American Youth Organization-Los Angeles	Public community page	English

Kurdish Children Foundation	Public group	English
Kurdish Community of New Zealand	Public community page	Kurdish/English
Kurdish Diaspora in UK	Public community group	English
Kurdish Events	Public group	English/Kurdish
Kurdish Events Sweden	Public page	English/Swedish/Kurdish
Kurdish Info	Public page	English
Kurdish Migration	Public group	English/Kurdish
Kurdish Question	Public page/new publishing	English/Kurdish
Kurdish Revolution Info Page	Public page	English/Kurdish
Kurdish Literature	Public group	Kurdish/English
Kurdish Studies & Student Organization	Closed group	English
Kurdish Studies Network (KSN)	Closed group	English
Kurdish Vines	Public page	English/Kurdish
Kurdish Women's Rights	Public page	English/Kurdish
Kurdish Youth Association of Canada	Closed group	English/Kurdish
Kurdish Youth Festival	Public page/event	English
Kurdistan and Realities	Public page	English
Kurdistan Supporters From Around the World	Public Page	English
Kurdistan, One Nation United without Borders	Public page	English/Kurdish
Kurdistanian Diaspora Scholars & Professionals Network (KDSPN)	Closed group	English
Kurdpress Group	Public group	English/Kurdish
Kurds in Europe	Public page	English
Kurds North America	Public page	English/Kurdish
KYANZ (Kurdish Youth Association of New Zealand)	Closed group	English/Kurdish
London's Kurds	Public community page	English
Mala Kurd le Elmaniya (Kurdish House in Germany)	Closed group	Kurdish/German

Nashville Kurds	Public/Community page	English/Kurdish
NNS Roj	News media/public page	Kurdish/Persian
Post Kurdistan	Public page	Kurdish
Qandilpost	Public page	Kurdish
Radio & Website Kurdane	Publishing/News Media	Kurdish
Republic of Kurdistan Anniversary- Nashville, TN, USA	Public page/Event	Kurdish/English
Rojava News	Public page/news media	English/Kurdish
Rojgull	Public page	Kurdish
Rojhelat Post	Public page	Kurdish
RojiKurd	Public/news media	Kurdish/English/ Persian
Rudaw	Public/news media	English/Kurdish/Arabic
Şacîwanî Kurdistan- Miss Kurdistan	Public page	English
Sirik Campaign	Public group/campaign	Kurdish/English
Solidarity with Kurdistan	Public page	English
Kurdistan Today	Public page	Kurdish/English
Stand with Kurdistan	Public page	English/Kurdish
Stop Massacring Kurds in Turkey	Public page/Campaign	English
Stop War on Kurds	Public page/campaign	English
Stop Yezidi Genocide	Public page/campaign	English
Suomen Kurdit-Finland's Kurds	Public community page	Finish/English/ Kurdish
Sydney Kurdish Youth Society	Public community page	English/Kurdish
The Lions Pride	Public page	English
The Right of Education on Mother Tongue	Public page/Campaign	Kurdish/Persian/English
VOA Kurdish	Public page/news media	Kurdish/English
دانشجوهای کرد (Kurdish Students)	Closed group	Persian/Kurdish
رهومندی کوردی (Kurdish Diaspora)	Public page	Kurdish/English

زانیاری دروست (True Information)	Public page	Kurdish
زمانی پەتی کوردی (Kurdish Pure Language)	Closed group	Kurdish
زمانی ستانداردی کوردی (Kurdish Standard Language)	Public group	Kurdish
ژینگەوان (Environment Protector)	Public page	Kurdish/Persian
قسەی خۆش با ون نەبێ (Let's keep joke alive)	Public page	Kurdish
کردهای فیس بوک از تمام جهان Facebook Kurds all over the world	Public page	Persian/Kurdish/English
کرماشان (Kirmashan)	Public community page	Kurdish/Persian
کوردانی بەریتانیا (British Kurds)	Public community page	Kurdish/English
کوردانی فەرانسه (Kurds of France)	Public community page	Kurdish/French
کوردستانه شیرینەکەم (My Sweet Kurdistan)	Public group	Kurdish
کوردەکان لە کانادا (Kurds in Canada)	Public community page	English/Kurdish
گوتاری ناسیونالیزمی کوردی (Kurdish Nationalist Discourse)	Public group	Kurdish
گۆرانی کوردی (Kurdish Music)	Public page	English
مافی ژنان (Women Rights)	Public page	Kurdish/English
نەتەوه ئەنفالکراوەکان (Genocided nations)	Public page	Kurdish
هەڵپەرکێ (Kurdish Dance)	Public page	Kurdish
ئاڵای کوردستان (Kurdistan Flag)	Public page	Kurdish
ئاوارەکان لەبیر ناکەین (We won't forget refugees)	Public page	Kurdish
ئەنجومەنی سەوزی چیا (Chiya Green Association)	Public group	Kurdish/Persian

7.2.3 Timing of the observation

The observation was conducted in two phases. The first phase was the continuous and daily observation which took nine consecutive months starting from April 2014 and ending in December 2014. Through a cyber-ethnographic method and as a native Kurd, I was privileged enough to conveniently communicate with other Kurds through participating in and observing the Kurdish diaspora's activities online at least for two hours each day. My

everyday life at that time was fully absorbed in the political, cultural and social environment of the online participants either as real Facebook users or pages/groups.

The second phase of the observation was conducted in an interrupted and inconsecutive way which started by the end of the first phase in January 2015 and continued until December 2015. During this phase, I kept myself updated regarding recent news, issues, discussions and topics on the Kurdish diaspora's Facebook pages. Although I was not involved in daily observation of the pages, I tried to add any new data that seemed supportive to the ethnography and analysis. At this stage, I sampled the most important discussions and topics to observe, especially those that were new and likely to add significant value to the collected data.

7.2.4 Tools and data collection approach

A number of the data collection methods present in traditional and offline ethnography are also applicable to online ethnography. Actually, a growing number of scholars have mentioned that the methods of traditional data collection can be applied to online, social media or Internet-based research (Alessi & Martin, 2010; Payne & Barnfather, 2012). Among the various methods of data collection in ethnography, observation or participant observation is regarded as the main method to explore the social phenomena. According to this method, examining a cultural and social phenomenon on social media is achieved through the observation and analysis of the everyday activities, along with an ethnographer, who documents impressions, insights, and experiences while participating (Hine, 2000; 2005).

The activities of the Kurdish diaspora on Facebook mostly included uploading posts on their own pages, sending textual and audio-visual messages and commenting on private or public discussion. However, while outlining the qualitative content analysis frameworks, I noticed that their communication and activities on social media could be best comprehended as a sort of textual communication in which the exchange of ideas and information among members happens widely. Moreover, the Facebook communication can be stored and is obtainable by the users or researchers requiring searching them in another time. In this regard, the messages, discussions and all of the produced communication can be regarded

as 'textual message' or text. Hence, they were proper and relevant components for the point of the study.

At the first stage of the observation, all the data were meant to be recoded, categorised and managed by the help of Nvivo software. However, this method did not suit the project since I found it rather time-consuming and difficult to work with. Also, it demanded another rearrangement of the framework of the thesis in order to understand the textuality or multi-aspect nature of the social media experience. So, I decided to collect, classify and save the data for the balance of the research in the standard (manual) manner. Through Facebook's News Feed application, the Facebook page of the researcher was continuously updated with multiple statuses and posts from other pages, groups and friends. Since Facebook saves all activities and contributions of the users, I was able to observe the activity as it happened and could also investigate each page, group or user's history of activities and posts at any time during the research. Additionally, in order to avoid any likely loss the data were stored in Microsoft Word Format by using phone or Window's screenshot function. Thus, if messages or discussions were removed from Facebook, I relied on my saved documents, although there was still the risk of losing updated information. In order to investigate the online identities of the admins and the active members of the groups and pages I followed a similar approach to other online researchers, for example, Susan Driver (2007), who used several direct quotes from online users in order to define and name the themes concerning how the individuals articulate or perform identities. In this sense, I kept records of the activities of the Kurdish diaspora users through the Facebook sites that were under observation. This included recording their thoughts, interactions, and emotions as well as the way they presented their profiles, statuses, comments, photos, videos, and so forth. Through all of the mentioned steps, I attempted to relate the inquiry to the research question, in other words, how the Kurdish diaspora members construct and perform their national identity on social media, specifically on Facebook and if they believed Facebook represented or served as a better space than broadcasting media for the presentation of such identity.

7.2.5 Producing themes and codes based on the key words and ideas

At this phase, the data associated with national identity building were classified, examined and discussed. The findings of the research are decoded and analysed according to the

ways, meanings and realities constructed and developed by the Kurdish members of diaspora who are active in cyberspace. This part is sorted into five themes as well as a number of sub-themes and each one is concerned with distinctive parts of the research. For this aim, I focused on three general areas including *ethnicity*, *culture*, and *politics* in order to cast light on the collective symbols and elements employed by the Kurds in the diaspora in the construction and representation of the Kurdish national identity through online social media. As mentioned, each theme was likely to split into some related sub-themes, depending on the nature of observation, events and coming developments in the Kurdish diaspora's issues and homeland society.

I chose 'theme' and 'sub-themes' as the textual components of the research. According to Charles Smith (1992) the thematic classification can signify "the analysis of story-like verbal materials, and the use of relatively comprehensive units of analysis, such as, *themas* (Murray 1943), *themes* (Holsti, 1969)...combination of categories (Aron 1950), motifs (Thompson 1932), imagery and thoughts" (cited in Krippendorff, 2013, p.108). Ethnographic surveys that stress understanding themes and subjects in their entire socio-cultural and political framework are especially helpful in this sort of study. This enables the researcher to identify developing theories from the data. While the research contents include text and multi-media communication pieces, their grouping is useful in identifying the themes and codes which are related to the research question and presented 'patterns of meaning' (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.86). Using a discriminating qualitative coding, I recognised and analysed the mentioned codes and themes concerning national identity formation through Facebook. As Lindlof and Taylor (2002) point out, an essential part of a qualitative research should be the categorisation and coding in order to make sense of the qualitative data (p. 214). The collected data at this phase provided me with a better understanding of how the Kurdish diaspora is connected, communicated, organised and constructed on social media in relating to the scope of their identities, including ethnic and national identity. I employed this sort of thematic selection as it allowed me to considerably make choices in the data analysis and to interpret 'various aspects of the research topic' (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 79).

Codes and themes are essentially units of data that scholars diagnose while they examine the bulky data they gathered. This research utilised a two-phase method to deal with discovering the categories and understanding of the collected information. I first looked at

the information through a few sessions of close checking and scanning, utilising inductive consideration "to stimulate the development of categories" (p. 215). At this stage, the data were underlined according to the levels of 'ambiguous' or 'high inference' groups, which "call[ed] for knowledge of cultural insider meanings or required the researcher to assimilate several pieces of evidence" (p.215). Secondly and finally, I found and brought several passages including units or codes of information which were associated with the 'concepts, themes, [and] constructs' of the research (p. 2016). Here, I aimed to reflect more on the categories by relating them to my theoretical outlines and applying them to the data in a rational way. Through this research, the theoretical outline and categories are all related to the groups, pages and user's national identity articulation that includes ethnicity, language, religion, culture and politics. In this sense, as spelled out by Lindlof and Taylor (2012), "A priori theory can sensitize one to what could be important, but it should never override or overshadow the meanings that the researcher discovers in the scenes being studied" (p. 215).

The criteria for choosing the discussions and topics were about their relations to the Kurdish diaspora and Kurdistan (identity, language, culture and so forth), however this evolved and went through some changes as I let the materials determine the themes and sub-themes (for instance the most recurrent topics that the participants themselves talk about). So while I was deciding the name for the themes, it was likely that the participants themselves and the discussions would produce and develop these themes.

The first topic, ethnic representation of Kurdish identity, is related to the common characteristics of Kurdish ethnicity that distinguish the Kurds from others. The members of an ethnic community commonly maintain the notion of solidarity and kinship. An ethnic representation of Kurdish nationhood at first appears on the basis that Kurds are racially or ethnically distinct from others (see the discussion of ethnic origins and ethno-symbolism in the chapter on nationalism). Historical dates and events were considered as significant sub-themes of Kurdish ethnic identity. For example, as a traditional New Year festival, *Newroz* is celebrated throughout some countries in the Middle East, and for the Kurds it has had a very special meaning that is associated with Kurdish identity.

The second theme is culture which also overlaps with ethnicity in some ways. So, it is very difficult to distinguish ethnic identity representation from a cultural one. However, I

considered it a separate theme due to its importance in the construction and representation of a nation, as pointed out by the modernist and ethno-symbolist perspectives. Looking at a brief overview of the different types of nationalism and a short history of the modern Kurds (discussed in a separate chapter), the observation will then show how a cultural type of nationalism on social media aims to create the idea of a Kurdistan distinct from that of the states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq or Syria. In this regard, the festivals, parties, dance gatherings, music events, food festivals, sport clubs, jokes, and so forth were categorised into the theme of culturally representative Kurdish national identity. Within this area, language is mostly focused on as a primary feature of Kurdish cultural [also ethnic] identity that determines Kurdish diaspora social media use and preferences. Language is not just about words. It can likewise be viewed as the ground on which all other cultural articulations of that nation are founded (Breuilly, 1994, p.105). Likewise, as Christiansen (2004) mentioned, the understanding of a mother tongue, the knowledge of an international language and the host country language affects immigrant [diaspora] choices (pp.191-192). Through social media, there were many heated debates regarding the ways that Kurdish culture should be preserved, developed or taught in the diaspora as well as whether to have a unanimous and standard Kurdish language in Kurdistan or let the speakers of other minor dialects have their education in their own dialects. In addition to language, other noticeable elements of Kurdish culture on social media include Kurdish music, attire and dance (Halparke) that were placed as substantial categories in classifying the cultural sub-themes.

In addition to ethnicity and culture, religion was another topic of discussion on the observed pages. This area consists of several contending discussions pro and against the existence and practice of religion by the Kurds. Since the Kurdish diaspora has been generally regarded as secular (Baser, 2013; Eliassi, 2016), there are no studies that have investigated the role of religion among the diaspora Kurds. At the beginning of the observation, I did not aim to place religion in a separate theme since I had assumed that the religious discussions are not so visible among the Kurdish diaspora. However, online spaces can also be used by members of the diaspora as source for articulating and building religious identity. For example, Vertovec (2004) refers to the diaspora as a dispersed people "sharing a common religious heritage" (p. 2). Even so, through the observation process many topics and

conversations arose which required a new theme to be created and categorised. Thus, religion became the third theme of the observation.

The fourth theme is politics. It was a very broad topic that could be divided into other sub-themes including party politics, political protests, human rights, and the Kurdish claim of self-determination in the form of federalism, autonomy or independence. In this area, party politics and the question of independence brought forth many heated and challenging debates among the members of the pages and groups. The question of independence (specifically the independence of Kurds from Iraq) was not a new discourse among the Kurds, as the Kurdish intellectuals, activists and politicians in the four parts of Kurdistan, as well as in the diaspora, have, more or less, addressed such a question. Another sub-theme was focused on the discussions of Kurdish political parties and organisations in diaspora, which I called *party politics*. My aim was to determine how Kurdish individuals in the diaspora play roles in the operation or leadership of Kurdish political organisations and how this affects Kurdish national identity in social media, compared to the other conventional broadcasting media run by the Kurdish political parties and organisations. An important subject that appeared throughout this sub-theme was the difference among Kurdish online-users due to their party affiliation.

7.3 Findings

7.3.1 Theme One: the ethnic representation of Kurdish national identity

As discussed in earlier chapters, the Kurds have experienced many challenges and hardships as a result of their ethno-national movement In this regard, ethnic association has been the primary, common, and the most significant feeling among the Kurds of the diaspora (see the chapter on the Kurdish diaspora). The main elements of this representation include the Kurdish culture, myth, history, religion, rituals and language. This observation demonstrated that the users from the Kurdish diaspora were considerably involved in the articulation and spreading of ethnic symbols of the Kurds via social media, and to be specific, Facebook. The essential concerns through the communications posted on Facebook have been the preservation and representation of a coherent Kurdish ethnic identity. According to a high number of the observed online postings, the Kurdish diaspora (particularly the first generation), compared with the Kurds of the homeland, felt a stronger need to preserve and develop it (see also, Eliassi, 2013). They have been living outside of the homeland and often tried to strengthen the significant elements that they associate with their ethnic existence and identity as Kurds. As an example, the manager of the page *Kurdish American Youth-Los Angeles*[53] pointed out the following:

> *This page ultimately aims to establish a channel of communication for the Kurdish youth to stay united and to bolster our sense of nationalism. Furthermore, we aim to raise awareness amongst our youth about our history and ethnic identity in order to encourage the Kurdish youth to remain culturally focused. We created this Facebook page in order share and update information about our culture, people and nation within the provided chance of living in a free world and free social media.*

The Kurdish diaspora members of Facebook, particularly the first generation, highlighted the idea that the conservation of Kurdish identity [ethnicity] must be practised from an individual level, and from the early days that they learn about *Kurdayeti*. Accordingly, they should also accomplish their duty to rightfully represent their ethnic identity as members of

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[53] According to its introductory description, Kurdish American Youth Organization (KAYO) is an independent and non-profit national youth and student organization in the U.S. We are dedicated to the development of the Kurdish youth, raising awareness of the Kurdish nation, and building positive relations in American communities across the States. https://www.facebook.com/LAKurdyouth/

Kurds' society. Sometimes, ethnic representation became a significant self-identification through which Kurds tried to distinguish themselves from other nations. Heval whose profile shows he is in his 40s expressed such a feeling in this way:

> I knew that I am a Kurd, but could not express it easily when I was in Turkey. They [the authorities] were calling me a Turk. When we moved to Germany, I met many other people who were speaking my language, dressing my clothes and thinking like me. We gather every now and then. These meetings are great opportunity to let our children know about their history and identity. We should let them know who they are." (Heval, member of Mala Kurd le Elmaniya/Kurdish House in Germany).

This post is an example of many that explain the Kurdish users, particularly the first generation of Kurdish diaspora, are passionate about their ethnic identity and that they are concerned about its demise and resurgence. Similar to this user, there were other members that expressed a feeling of threat towards the demise of Kurdish culture and ethnic identity in the diaspora. This danger could be from the states ruling Kurdistan, the generational gaps within the Kurdish diaspora, and the diaspora countries wherein the second generation of Kurdish diaspora considerably integrates in the culture of the host country.

However, due to the complexity of the geopolitical reality of Kurdistan, the ethno-national representation of Kurds is not always expressed straightforwardly. In one of his online interviews, Mahir an active member of many Facebook pages and the team leader of the *Erbil Lifestyle Project*, and ASWAR[54] expressed his perception about Kurdish ethnicity as follows.

> Whenever I introduce myself, I have to say, "I am from Kurdistan, Northern Iraq" — I can't simply say Kurdistan. Sometimes if I just say, "I am from Kurdistan" they think I am talking about Kazakhstan in Southern Russia! When I tell Americans that I am from "Northern Iraq," they immediately envision a war torn region, and I have to try and explain the Kurdish situation, and impart a little bit of the Kurdish history to explain why things are the way they are.

This post shows the complexity of Kurdish identity among some elements of Kurdish diaspora. When the Kurds in the diaspora are asked about their country of origin, they have to name a country, either Iraq, Iran, Turkey or Syria, since people do not understand where Kurdistan is as a country. This type of expression of identity indicates a dual loyalty expression that some members of the first generation of Kurdish diaspora bear. However, the loyalty to the states of origin (Iraq, etc) is not as strong as loyalty to the country of

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[54] ASWAR is new digital cultural center for marginalized ethnic groups, such as the Kurds, who lack cultural representation.

residence (Sweden, whatever) by many users of the first generation. Rebin (a Kurdish Facebook user in his 50s as his Facebook profile indicates) who has been living in New Zealand for 15 years mentioned that "he wants to contribute to New Zealand as much as he can," because this country has been "very nice" to them and "given him and his family what Iraq has not." Similarly, on the ANZAC day[55] some Kurdish users (mostly Kurds of Turkey and Iraq living in Australia and New Zealand) posted on their Facebook remembering the valour of Australian and New Zealand soldiers in the fight against Turkey[56]. Their posts indicated that they are "proud to be an Australian" or Kiwi while they were mostly indifferent about Turkey wherein these soldiers were killed.

Notwithstanding, throughout the observation, I have not noticed any evidence about the inclination of the second generation of Kurdish diaspora towards their country of origin, i.e, Turkey, Iran, etc. In fact, their discussions were mainly around the loyalty to their country of residence and to Kurdistan. As an example, some members of the community page Kurds in Canada posted the videos and photos of celebrating Canada's multiculturalism day on June 27. Through the video, I noticed that two young men who were chatting together were from Iran; one Kurd and one non-Kurd. However, they were speaking in English, and although they were both from Iran. The Kurdish boy was representing the table/stall marking by Kurdistan's flag and the non-Kurds representing Iran's flag.

The mentioned example is also aligned with the previous studies (Alinia, 2004; Eliassi, 2013) that argue that the second generation of the Kurdish diaspora who have been raised out of Kurdistan are as concerned about their ethnicity as their parents are. The younger generation expressed strong feelings for their Kurdish 'nation' and Kurdistan, although some of them have never been there. Although the nature of younger generation's representation of Kurdish ethnicity and imagination of Kurdistan is different from that of the first

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[55] ANZAC day, 25 April, marks the anniversary of the landing of Australian and New Zealand Australian soldiers – the Anzacs – on the Gallipoli Peninsula in 1915. On this day Australians and New Zealanders remember the sacrifices of their soldiers who died in the Gallipoli war. The Gallipoli war resulted in thousands of death from all sides: 87,000 Turks, 44,000 men from France and the British Empire, including 8500 Australians and 2778 New Zealanders. The campaign led to the defeat of Australia and New Zealand forces who were serving in the name of British Empire, however, this date produced a feeling among Australians and New Zealanders that they had a role in the war distinct nations (see, https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/anzac-day/introduction)

[56] Coincidently, this is a case in which Kurdish nationalisms falls in line with Australian/New Zealand nationalisms, emerging in the context of battle against Turkish forces.

generation of Kurdish diaspora (I will cover it through this chapter and next chapter), they are interested and passionate about articulating their ethnic elements and self-identification as Kurds when they sense a common external threat. While following a discussion about Kurdish New Year (Newroz) on *Sydney Kurdish Youth Society*, Jiwar, a young member of the page, identified the significance of the individual representation of the Kurdish ethnic identity and the way it should be seen in the future. His explanation follows:

I think this is a wonderful thing for the future citizens of Kurdistan. The Youth must be heard, allowed to gather and exchange good ideas about the future's plans to grow, live and raise their family in peace, exchange ideas, trade, [and] understanding of culture and religion with the people of other free nations. God Bless and Save Us All. Don't argue about the past, but debate the right future path. Unity is the only way to succeed, forward all as one, under one Flag. Thank you for your time

Self-identification as 'Kurds'

Explicit self-identification contributes to reinforcing the feeling of belonging to an ethnic group (Ashmore et. al 2004). Kurdish social media users mostly recognise themselves as *Kurdish*, not Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi and Syrian. The observed users commonly mentioned terms, such as, '*Kurd*', '*Kurdish*', and '*Kurdistani*', in order to distinguish themselves from other immigrants, ethnic groups and the diaspora. In this regard, I found the second generation of Kurdish diaspora more explicit in articulating their ethnic identity. They openly expressed themselves as Kurds not Iranians, Iraqis, Syrians or Turks. In an discussion thread at the page of Adelaide Kurdish Community, Honia, a female second generation diaspora member, pointed out that "through my talks with people in Australia, I would like to be called an Australian Kurd rather than an Iranian or Turkish Kurd."[57]

The first generation of Kurdish diaspora (and the second generation, to a notable extent,) identify themselves with the geography and homeland of *Kurdistan* which, they believe, is occupied by their 'enemies' and split into four parts. This produced several examples of disputes and sometime verbal clashes between Kurdish users and non-Kurds (from Turkey, Iran, and some Arab states) in regard to how to identify Kurds. As an example, one Iranian (Persian/Fars) user insisted that it was not appropriate to use the word *Kurdistani* to refer to the Kurdish user, yet the Kurdish user whose Facebook profile indicated he is in his 30s

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[57] This is probably partly due to the fact that there is an active discourse of multiculturalism in Australia, the US, Canada, etc, that allows people to combine a national identity – Australian, etc – with an ethnic identity – Kurdish. (eg: Greek Australian, Italian Australian, etc.)

strongly denied this proposition by making the claim that "this is what you, 'the occupiers,' wish to say. This is not the reality of our identity." During the observation plenty of similar arguments emerged while Kurdish users challenged the viewpoint of the members of dominant ethnic groups regarding the identification of Kurds. Following a challenging debate with a Persian user, Zozan, a member of the page *Kurds in Europe*, concisely explained the outcome of her discussion in this way:

> *These people [Persian and Turks] still think they are living in Iran or Turkey under the despotism of Islamic Republic of Iran or Atatürk. How sad… They want to impose their positions indicating we [Kurds] are not a nation. I am sorry for them that they don't like to understand the reality of Kurdistan. Also, I am sorry for them that they have not learnt anything about human rights, respect for people and democracy even though they are living in a democratic country (Sweden) [translated from Kurdish].*

Likewise, discussions on identity and knowledge of the ethnic origin and history of the Kurds were quite obvious on social media among both generations. The observation indicated that some users actively disseminate information frequently regarding their origin and history on social media, especially Facebook. The available information that they disseminated was mainly around two general subjects: first, the history/myth of glorious eras of the Kurdish Medes Empire, the Kurdish principalities of pre-modern time, and secondly, the trauma, oppression, genocide and difficulties Kurds experienced in modern times as the key sources of national identity. Hiwa, a Canadian Kurdish journalist and organiser of some Kurdish events and an online activist narrated his experience in a post as follows:

> Facebook has provided us [Kurds] the chance to express ourselves as a Kurd, not as an image depicted from us by the occupiers of Kurdistan. We want the world to know the Kurds in terms of who they are, not what they have been presented by the occupiers. They should know about our sufferings caused by the despotic and totalitarian regimes of the Middle East.

The findings indicate that Kurdish epic, and ethnic poetry, anthems, sayings and folklore (especially Kurdish music and dance) were openly posted and shared by the Kurdish diaspora users of Facebook. In this respect, folklore, songs and literary pieces that specifically relate to the self-identification of the Kurds were going viral. For example, Ibrahim Ahmad's famous poem, 'I am a Kurdistani' (mentioned in chapter three) was one of the most posted literary examples on Kurdish diaspora's social media, indicating the representation of Kurds as Kurds, not as Arabs, Turks, or Iranians. It is important to mention that the younger generation of Kurdish diaspora usually used the translated (often, English)

version of the Kurdish literary pieces on their social media pages while the first generation used the Kurdish pieces. This is part of the generational gap resulted from language barrier which I address at several points throughout this chapter and the next.

Additionally, the personal lives of users were commonly represented on Facebook, although this was usually mixed with cultural and ethnic elements. The users often posted their photos or videos with Kurdish traditional clothes. It was noticeable that the second generation of Kurdish diaspora who might not ever have been to Kurdistan were posting their profile photos in Kurdish traditional clothes and were regarding it as their 'national attire. These activities simply represent the strong cultural representation of Kurdish identity in the diaspora and would serve as the raw material related to nationalism on the part of the diaspora.

As discussed in earlier chapters, the Internet is a global communication network, but its use and its evolving reality are the product of human actions under specific conditions of differential history (Castells, 2001). In the case of statelessness of a national group, the Internet encourages and facilitates communication from one to numerous with the end goal of state building. The expression of the above mentioned poem is a good example of how Facebook and social media create a "foundation for self-directed networking as a tool for organization, collective action, and the construction of meaning" (p. 55). Thus, the articulation of traditions and folklore indicates that the Kurds in the diaspora denied being recognised as and identified with the states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. They identified themselves as Kurds or Kurdistani regardless of the existing imposed geopolitical realities of the four states.

7.3.2 Theme two: the cultural representation of Kurdish identity

Culture is regarded as an inseparable component of both ethnic and national identity. As easy accessible tools, social media, specifically Facebook, have efficiently paved the ways for the representation and reproduction of symbols, myths and cultural traits. Kurdish members of Facebook have created a high number of pages in order to preserve, revive, and represent the Kurdish traditional songs (e.g., *lawik*, *Heyran*, *Bend*, *Hore,* and so forth), myths, food, clothes, dance (Halparke), games, Kurdish sports, and so forth. The main concern of these folkloric pages and the members is the revival and representation of

Kurdish practices constituting a nation that possesses its own cultural characteristics that distinguish it from *others*. The three-coloured flag of Kurdistan was mostly represented through all the pages and groups I observed. The Kurdish national anthem was also included on many pages, and each page and group displayed, at least, one ethno-national symbol.

Kurdish culture among the younger generation of Kurdish diaspora

The engagement of youth in activities and events that talk about Kurdish culture and history was noticeable. It suggests an attachment they still have to their culture and 'imagined' homeland despite leaving it all these years ago, or for some of them never even having seen it at all. The observation showed that the younger users were involved in producing and reproducing their cultural identity and their articulation of the Kurdish cultural identity through social media was performed aiming at the representation and maintenance of their ethno-national identity. Alan, a young leading member of the Kurdish Youth Society in Nashville pointed out the following:

> *Since my teenage years I have been pretty active in the community, I attend all community events, whether good or bad, all our festivities, the holidays, Newroz, [and so on]. I also joined the youth groups that are available. In recent years we found a new powerful youth group which serves as a Kurdish youth club. These types of organisations have been very successful in uniting Kurds from all around the U.S. We are mostly active on Facebook and Instagram these days. Our Facebook page has acted great in assembling Kurds throughout Nashville and the US. It is quicker and much more interesting to do our activities online. Facebook is not just for posting personal photos and showing off. We need to participate in activities regarding Kurds who are being massacred by the brutal regimes. We have to be a voice on social media for those Kurdish Yezidi women who have been enslaved by the barbaric Islamic terrorists [ISIS].*

The cultural association between the Kurds in the diaspora appeared to be quite obvious and solid, according to the activities of the users on Facebook. It was important for the members to participate in cultural and social activities organised by Kurdish associations in the diaspora in order to practise and express their national culture as well as to form a strong connection with each other throughout social media. For example, in events, such as, 'Ethnic and Multi-cultural' festivals that were held in most of the Western countries, many Kurds participated actively and the photos and videos of their Kurdish dancing performances went viral on Facebook. In almost all of these cases, their cultural association and activities came along with some political articulation of the Kurds as a culturally distinct people and Kurdistan, such as, rehearsing the Kurdish national anthem, *Ey Reqib* [Hey the enemy], and

raising the flag of Kurdistan. In answering the public Facebook question of 'how do you feel about your Kurdish identity' and in a Facebook comment under the video of a Kurdish cultural festival in the U.S., Banoo wrote as follows:

All of us when we go to a Kurdish party, we represent ourselves, as wearing Kurdish clothes because that is part of our culture. No one is ashamed of wearing Kurdish clothes. None of us are ashamed of saying that I am Kurdish, I was born there and [so on]. We have always kept that identity with us, and that has made us feel proud of ourselves. But, yes, it has always become a challenge when we have other friends. There a culture here, a western culture that we have to blend in and we had to create by swearing allegiance to this culture. From my personal experience, I have not followed the American culture, nor have I followed the Kurdish culture fully. But I have created a new culture for myself that has taken the best of both worlds. So, I am a part of both worlds.

Photo 1: A Kurdish cultural festival in Adelaide, Australia. Facebook contributed a lot to the advertising, organising, and broadcasting of this event

Festivals and events

Kurdish cultural festivals and functions were also very popular topics among the Kurdish diaspora users of Facebook. Among the hundreds of special festivities and cultural events observed in this study, one of the most significant and widely celebrated events was the Kurdish New Year (Newroz). As mentioned in earlier chapters, Newroz is regarded as the celebration of New Year in Kurdish and Iranian society. Also, as a traditional New Year festival, *Newroz* is celebrated by several other nations throughout the Middle East and East Asia, and for the Kurds and especially those in diaspora it has a very special meaning. In addition to its cultural meanings, since the end of the 1980s, Newroz has notably been associated with the expression and resurrection of the Kurdish identity, especially among the Kurds in Turkey (see Baser, 2013, Eliassi, 2013; Khayati, 2008 Van Bruinessen, 1999, 2000). It can be viewed as a way of showing the passion and support for the Kurdish national identity. The following snapshot is a video footage that went viral on Kurdish diaspora's social media in Newroz 2016. It shows Turkish police attacking Kurdish university students in Turkey just because they are singing in Kurdish and dancing in four a Kurdish festival that is the Kurdish New Year. Police chief says to the student "this is republic of Turkey. You are not allowed to sing any song related to Kurdistan here." Just one minute after, the dance started again, police started attacking the students. All the students dancing were arrested.

In another example, during the New Year festival in March 2015, a considerable number of users posted the song of *Newroz* by the late Iranian Kurdish vocalist *Hassan Zirak* which was edited as a video clip containing influential ethnic and heroic images. Likewise, some users posted videos and photos of their private celebration of New Year or the celebrations organised by Kurdish Communities in their residing city or country. One notable example is the New Year celebration of the Kurdish Youth in Adelaide (Australia) that got attention on social media pages and was broadcasted by satellite TV, such as, *Kurd Chanel*.

Since the New Year coincided with the challenging and disturbing time following the attack of ISIS on Kurdistan and the Kurdish Peshmarga and guerrillas in Iraq and Syria were directly at war with either ISIS (or at some stages with Turkey and Iran by the PKK and PDK-Iran), the celebration often turned to be mixed with heroic signifiers. For example, several users

changed their profile pictures to their photos taken with T-Shirts displaying the names of Peshmarga or the flag of Kurdistan.

Photo 2: A very big gathering of Kurds in the city of Diyarbakir (Amed in Kurdish) in the Kurdistan of Turkey. Hundreds of thousands of Kurds had gathered to hear the recorded voice message of their imprisoned leader, Abdullah Öcalan, and celebrate New Year. Throughout the festive, the face of Öcalan was shown through large screens and people were rising flags of PKK and Kurdistan while singing heroic songs. Kurds in the diaspora, particularly the Kurds from Turkey and the PKK and other political organisations' affiliates, continued such rallies throughout several European countries such as the UK, Germany, France and Belgium. Source: Facebook.

Photo 3: the photos and videos posted on Adelaide Kurdish Youth Society's Facebook page related to the New Year Celebration on 25 March 2015

Introducing the culture to non-Kurds

Through social media, diaspora groups are producing new practices of communication, participation, political discussions, and identity construction, (Graham and Khosravi, 2002). The current study adopts Dewey's (2009) notion of the 'parallel public sphere,' which is regarded as a cultural phenomenon or place for silenced people to communicate with each other and discuss private and public dilemma. In this sense, Facebook seems to be a place through which Kurdish users/participants are not only connected with other Kurds throughout the diaspora, but also with individuals from various groups, genders, classes and ethnicities. This type of connection is applied to all pages regardless of generation differences of the users. As a public sphere, the Kurdish diaspora utilise Facebook so as to involve in areas of significance to their national cause as well as to inform themselves and others. Some Kurds in the diaspora (especially the Kurdish political activists) have also been active in introducing their culture to other non-Kurds in various diaspora countries. Due to their subordination by those in power, marginalised people require the opportunity to speak for themselves (Spivak 1994). Since Kurds are deprived of an independent state to propagate their culture through its strong media or diplomatic initiatives, they wanted to compensate for this loss by organising festivities and cultural events. Through these occasions which were mainly organised through social media pages, they were also inviting their non-Kurdish friends in order to familiarise them with Kurdish culture, history, politics, and also probably discuss the idea of an independent Kurdistan. For example, in the Auckland International Cultural Festival, the videos and photos of the festival indicated that there have been a notable number of New Zealanders trying Kurdish foods and discussing facts and information about Kurdistan with the organisers of the Kurdish section of the festival. In one of the popular videos, an English-Kiwi man was speaking to other people about Kurdistan raising the flag of Kurdistan and joining in on a Kurdish dance. In another case in Adelaide Kurdish Community, the gatherings led to the formation of online forums in which the members were discussing the issues regarding the Kurds in the homeland. These examples indicate that Kurdish diaspora (both generations) are concerned about introducing Kurdish cultural and political issues to online discussions and forums.

The observation confirmed that Facebook served as a 'parallel public sphere' for the Kurdish diaspora through providing a medium or an opportunity through which they discuss important issues including national identity. The users involved in the ethnography expressed their feelings and mentioned that they felt as though they have a voice on social media. Most importantly, their voice is being heard. They advertised and broadcasted these events to a great degree in order to attract and inform more non-Kurd members regarding the Kurdish cause. Following these events, the online pages were replete with postings and comments of non-Kurdish members discussing or praising Kurdish culture (mostly Kurdish dance), as well Kurdish 'resistance.' Thus, as an admin of a page wrote, they, through online media, seriously "want to find friends for Kurds among the European [Western]people through their activities, such as cultural festivals." As Ashleigh, a young Kurdish New Zealander and organiser of several festivals indicated they "want to enlighten the world about our Kurdish national cause."

Arts, literature and language

Literature and nation building are directly related to each other in a way that "literary change becomes a metaphor for national resurgence or national decline"(Parrinder, 2006, p.2). The originality and development of Kurdish literature has contributed to the consolidation of Kurdish national feeling to a great extent, in spite of the fact of Turkish, Persian and Arabic hegemony (Meho and Maglaughlin, 2001). Kurdish literature, be it romantic or realist, written or oral, has been a mirror of the Kurdish national movement through which Kurds "recognise the beauty and greatness of their country as well as the poverty and denial that are imposed on them"(p.9). In addition to language and politics, Kurdish oral and written literature occupies a considerable space in the history of Kurdish national movements. As Ahmadzadeh (2003) mentioned, the lack of their own state among the Kurds resulted in the challenges of developing a common alphabet, a common standardised language, and a common education system, as well as a lack of publishing and circulating literary works (p.30).

However, due to the wealth of information online and, by the best means, social media, the obstacles for, at least, for publishing and for the expression of literary works, have been reduced. Likewise, sharing Kurdish literary works has been given positive attention. In this sense, the appearance of the Kurdish literature on social media specifies the objective

of the Kurdish diaspora to preserve this heritage. Literature is presented online through various forms of posting poems, traditional songs, folklore, dance, and so forth. Although the literary and artworks posted by the Kurdish diaspora online include various subjects, the articulation of their love for homeland and their hopes for the future of Kurdistan are still the highest focal points which contribute to reinforcing the awareness of the Kurds' awareness regarding their ethnic and national identity.

The ethnography found many examples of pages that were posting collections of Kurdish poetry and users were discussing them. The themes of these poems, fictions, drama and other forms of artworks were mainly focusing on love, nature, and misery and statelessness of Kurds. Also, many users were contributing to publishing Kurdish literature both online and offline. On the page of Kurdish Literature one user, Zeynel who seemed to be from the Germany posted his about the reproduction of Kurdish literature and language in diaspora. He had a publishing house in Berlin. He published and distributed over 100 Kurdish books in Berlin and distributed over 10.000 Kurdish books in Kurdistan. He also donated many books to the Kurdish educational institutions and gave as a gift to those who could not effort to buy one. He describes his dedication as "keeping the Kurdish language alive, contributing to the development of the Kurdish language and literature, encouraging the Kurds to read and write in Kurdish and providing Kurdish writers with an opportunity to meet their readers." He also publishes a philosophy journal in Kurdish and published it online. To him, social media is another representation to the real world and a place wherein "Kurds can learn more about Kurdish literature," although, he still 'preferred' paper books.

Likewise, language has often been considered an integral part of ethnic identity as well as nation building (Sheyholislami, 2009). It has been commonly argued that the Kurdish language is possibly one of the most significant elements of Kurdish identity, both culturally and politically, since it distinguishes the Kurds from their neighbouring nations more than any other cultural or physical characteristic. Building a strong feeling of ethnic identity is considerably connected to maintaining language among those who are a part of the Kurdish diaspora and who are also users of Facebook. In this regard, through social networks, learning, introducing and promoting the language are subjects of concern for many Kurdish diaspora online members.

The observation showed that there have been many heated discussions on the issue of Kurdish language and its varieties on social, media which shows the complexity and differences within Kurdish communities. These included the discussions on the preservation and teaching of Kurdish, having a unanimous and standard Kurdish language in Kurdistan, and letting the speakers of all main and minor dialects use their own dialects while communicating on social media. There are numerous Facebook pages related to the Kurdish language and culture organised by those in the Kurdish diaspora. While some of the pages claimed the necessity for a united or standard Kurdish language, some pages and users discussed the need for preserving and developing Kurdish dialects. However, through both perspectives a common theme emerged that includes the recognition of the importance of language as a strong part of the Kurdish national identity.

Zimani Standardi Kurdi[58] [Kurdish Standard Language], an example of the pages for discussion on the Kurdish language (Sorani dialect) issues, consists of the Kurdish members both from the diaspora and the homeland. Members of the page brought new words, idioms, or topics about the Kurdish language to discuss on an ongoing everyday basis. *Kurdish language and Politics*[59] was another page that considered the language and politics of a nation as interconnected elements. The page introduction mentioned the leading role of language and politics in the national and social process and development as follows:

> Politics is not only parties and parliaments or war and peace. Politics is everything, at least potentially…But everything is not seen politically. And not everything is [a] product of politics. …language reflects power structure[s]-and language has an impact on power structures. Language can be seen as an indicator of social and therefore political situations and language can also be seen as a driving force directed at changing politics and society….language influences politics and is influenced by politics. Language can be an instrument for or against enlightenment, for or against emancipation, for or against democracy, for or against human rights.

During the observation, many Facebook members and pages were posting Abdullah Pashew's [the popular Kurdish poet] remarks on the Kurdish language explaining in a meeting in Erbil that the "Kurdish language is our honour and pride. Without language we are nothing. We have to keep it for any price". On the International Day of Mother Tongues

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[58] https://www.facebook.com/#!/groups/KurdStandard/
[59] https://www.facebook.com/#!/groups/244538515641723/ (retrieved 4/7/2014)

on 21 February 2015, this poem, written by the Kurdish poet Xanay Qubay went viral on Facebook that says:

Hercen mewacan Farsi şekeren [Although they say Persian is sweet]
Kurdi ce lay min bes şirinteren [Kurdish is much sweeter if you ask me]
Melumen ce dewr dinyay bedendeş [No wonder that in this unjust world]
Diłşaden herkes we zuwan weş [Everyone is happier with their own language]
(Xanay Qubadî, Kurdish poet, 1700–1759)(Translation, cited in Sheyholislami 2012)

This poem champions Kurdish language over Persian and indicates a strong depiction and feeling towards the Kurdish language that is also a representation of Kurdish cultural and ethnic identity. Members were sharing this poem alongside its translation into several languages, including Farsi, Arabic, Turkish, Swedish, French, German and English. Some members were expressing sympathy for "such a brilliant poet for composing such a meaningful and great piece of poetry." On the International Day of Mother tongues members were praising Kurdish and expressed their pride in being a 'Kurd' who speaks Kurdish, although some members (especially those in the second generation of the Kurdish diaspora) were not able to communicate in Kurdish as fluently as in English or another language.

In addition to the use of Kurdish in some postings, the users have clearly expressed their concerns regarding the threats to the Kurdish language. These threats may result from the banning of Kurdish by the nation-states ruling Kurdistan, the failure of the Kurdistan Regional Government in strengthening and developing Kurdish, and most importantly, the apathy of the second and third generation of the Kurdish diaspora about the Kurdish language. While a big majority of the first generation of Kurdish diaspora on Facebook were posting in Kurdish, younger users including second generation found it easier to post and communicate in the language of their host country, and particularly in English. Through these mediated spaces the younger generation of the Kurdish diaspora are negotiating their identity and language between being Kurdish and the identity of their host country.

We can learn our language

With respect to the previously mentioned concerns about the Kurdish language, some of the Kurdish diaspora users attempted to utilise social media to teach and participate in Kurdish

language lessons online. This includes the teaching of the several dialects of Kurdish. The study observed some examples of Kurdish classes on YouTube, telegram, Facebook, mobile applications, websites, and through Webinars (Web-Based Seminars). Although these sorts of online language teaching classes mainly aimed at teaching Kurdish to Kurdish children in the diaspora, there were also many participants from the homeland. One of these educational websites was *learn 101.org/Kurdish* that is administered by a Kurd in the diaspora who is also active on Facebook and created a YouTube channel for the lessons. The aim of the channel is described as follows.

> *I would like to welcome you to the Kurdish lessons. I'm here to help you learn Kurdish, by going step by step. All the lessons contain audio and are all offered for free. We will learn the alphabet together. We will also review some simple grammar rules, practice common phrases, and we will have fun memorizing many important vocabulary lists, and everything else that you see below.*

Since Sorani Kurdish is written in a Perso-Arabic based alphabet and it is very difficult for the Kurdish children of the diaspora to read or write in this transcript, so the users of the social networks usually transliterated the words and phrases into the Latin alphabet so that everybody could understand and read them easier. For example, instead of writing 'hello '[سڵاو] in its Perso-Arabic alphabet, they wrote it 'silaw' in a Latin way. The findings of the observations also indicated that there is willingness for the expansion or substituting of the Latin based alphabet instead of the Perso-Arabic alphabet in Sorani Kurdish. As mentioned in earlier chapters, the Kurmanji speakers of Turkey and Syria are still writing in a Latin way.

In addition to social networks, the educated Kurds of diaspora have contributed in a major way to the creation and development of various mobile Apps related to the Kurdish language, literature and history. A simple browsing of the mobile application through Google Play or Android brought up many names of Apps related to the Kurdish language and most of them have been created by the Kurds of the diaspora, according to the history and the specification of the Apps. Some of these applications are as follows: *Learn Kurdish Language*, *Learn Kurdish*, *ABC KURDI*, *Kurdish Language For Child*, *Ferbun-Kurdî*, *Kurdish Alphabet*, *Kurdish Books*, *Kurdish Names*, and so on. Likewise, in more recent years, some members of Kurdish diaspora have created a number of Kurdish dictionary applications, which have been used and referred to very frequently on social media, especially by the Facebook users.

Who is responsible for passing the culture to the children?

The children of the Kurdish diaspora are among the most important topics of the discussions on the Kurdish social media pages and the main question around them was "how can the Kurds of the diaspora teach Kurdish to their children so they will sympathise with it as part of their identity and culture?" The parents whose children have grown up in the diaspora were concerned about their children and wanted to give them a feeling of belonging to a community through participating in the events, such as, wedding parties, celebrations and cultural gatherings. They were trying hard to ensure that Kurdish traditions and customs are still present in the family home if nowhere else. Some common ways included the cuisine, dance, clothing and the language. Regarding the parent's emphasis on familiarising their children about the Kurdish traditions, Rizhna Chnar, a young female active member of the American Kurdish groups and pages on Facebook explained as follows:

> My mum makes rice, Brinji Fasulya, all the time, so we definitely keep in touch with the cuisine. [My sister and I] were in a Kurdish dance team. We even did a dance team for George Mason University for an international dance fest. I love Kurdish food and I think the language is the hardest to keep. We speak Kurdish at home and my mum and dad always encourage us to speak Kurdish, but it is hard to maintain all the words. For example, when talking to somebody who is a little bit older a lot of words don't come as easy for me, so I use a mix of English and Kurdish.

In most of the observed examples, the users were narrating their experiences of being children or parents and how they behaved or reacted with respect to teaching and conveying the traditions and culture. Also, through their discussions, some members mostly blamed the Kurdistan Regional Government, Kurdish political parties and related organisations for not helping them in regard to establishing Kurdish schools and institutes as some other countries have, for example, Israel, Turkey and China have organised in terms of teaching and developing their languages in the diaspora. Aran, the member of page *Roj Gull* pointed out the following.

> *We [Kurds] are very unique and strange human beings! Every government is caring about its own people in exile. Look at Israel and the Jews; they are educating the Jews everywhere! Israel helps Jewish children to learn their mother language and culture everywhere. They even help them financially. But what about our so called Kurdish government, [Kurdistan Regional Government]! They are just stealing our wealth and pride! They are corrupt and won't do anything good for the sake of Kurds neither in Kurdistan nor in Europe [diaspora]. [Translated, from Kurdish].*

There were many other examples of such comments blaming the Kurdish authorities and Kurdish political parties for their lack of support for the Kurdish diaspora, especially regarding promoting the language and culture. However, through the mentioned discussion thread, 40 participants (out of 50) reprimanded themselves as the Kurdish individuals in the diaspora who "have not passed the sense of *Kurdayeti* to their children," and that is why they [the children] are not willing to speak their mother tongue. Hozan, an active Facebook member from Germany stated:

We must learn that changes within our society would only come when we change our mentality first. We have to learn that our children are the dearest assets to our nation. We have to do our best to teach them their mother tongue and their own culture before they will be absorbed in a foreign culture. We shouldn't wait for a miracle to save us. We are our own saviours [Translated from Kurdish].

In order to fill the gaps and compensate for the failures, 15 participants including the diaspora Kurds of Iraq and Iran suggested that they should put their efforts together and work on strengthening the existing Kurdish communities of the countries in the diaspora and organise more Kurdish language lessons without hoping to receive financial aid from Kurdistan and other agencies. In the mentioned discussion thread, one member stated the following.

I am wondering how some people [Kurdish members of the discussion thread] think, and why they don't want to grow up? They are living in a nice and prosperous European country and are very likely receiving social benefits from the host governments. They are living in a very good condition although they are not working! These types of people are expecting the Kurdistan Region, whose people are still suffering financially, to send them money! How senseless a person might be! [Translated, from Kurdish].

This comment was favoured considerably, and the majority of users agreed with it indicating the key role of parents in encouraging their children to identify with their mother language and learn it. Moreover, the first generation users, were discussing the problems and issues of the Kurdish children in the homeland as well. While speaking about the Kurdish children of the diaspora, the main concern of the users was about the children's identity, specifically, in regard to the preservation of the Kurdish culture, and language. In other words, the significant question of this argument was "how can we (the Kurds in the diaspora) ensure that our children preserve their culture, and learn their mother tongue within the environment (of their host country) where another culture and language are absolutely

dominant? This suggest that there is a generational shift in attitudes to traditional culture which occurs in nearly all migrant groups in the diaspora (See also, Eliassi 2013; Skrbis, 1999)

However, when it came to speaking about the children in the homeland, cultural and language issues were not of the focus of the users. In these cases, the users usually discussed the children's welfare, education, and the conditions related to their human rights in the countries overlapping Kurdistan. During the time of the ethnography, there were some campaigns in support of the Kurdish children in Kurdistan, which were mostly organised and advertised by the Kurds in the diaspora. These campaigns were significantly echoed on social media. Some of the campaigns that sought support for the Kurds in different parts of Kurdistan include *Fundraising for Rojhelati* [Iranian Kurdistan] children injured by 'Landmines', *Mindallani Kurd* [Kurdish Kids], and *Zarokên Kurdistanê* [Children of Kurdistan].

In addition to welfare, security and concerns about human rights as it relates to the Kurdish children of the homeland, the study showed that the observed users were mostly concerned about the lack of standard and good education or the existence of education systems that deny the Kurdish ethnic or national identity. Some users narrated their personal experience as students or teachers in the Kurdistan of Iran and Turkey, as well as the Kurdistan of Iraq. In one instance, Sait (a 50-year old Kurds from the UK) recounted his story from his schooling in the Kurdish areas of Turkey in the following way.

> *I was an intermediate school student in Van [a city in Turkey with majority of Kurdish speakers]. We had to memorise Turkish poems indicating that Kurds are mountain Turks. When I realised that this is very insulting I was not happy studying at that school and dropped out one year later.*

This user claimed that his failure in continuing his education was related to the unqualified and unjust system of schooling in Turkey in which Kurdish students were being 'Turkified.' Many other users maintained such claims by narrating their own views and experiences of schooling, in particular, in Turkey, Iran, Iraq or Syria. In this regard, the experiences of the Anfal massacre and Halabja genocide were more frequently narrated by the Kurds from Iraq. In a discussion on the anniversary of Halabja, a number of the users were also

concerned that these experiences may be repeated as the children living in Kurdistan during the time the ISIS attacked Kurdish regions may have suffered from a similar victimisation.
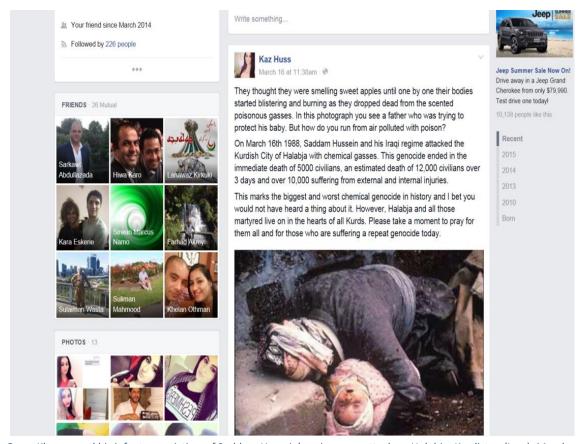

Photo 4: Kurdish father Omar Khawar and his infant son, victims of Saddam Hussein's poison gas attack on Halabja, Kurdistan (Iraq), March 16, 1988. This photo was posted by Kurdish users on several social media pages on the anniversary of the Halabja massacre.

'We are here for amusement, not disrespecting our nation'

The online cultural engagement of the Kurdish diaspora has also gone beyond the conventional cultural issues and criticised Kurdish culture and society in an ironic way too. In this way, they were addressing the backward norms and traditions in the Kurdish society. One of these pages was 'Kurdish Vines'[60] which was mostly populated by the young Kurds in the diaspora. It attracted about two hundred thousand followers by January 2016 and evolved as a platform for short comic videos and pictures about Kurdish society. This page made some 100 Kurdish *vines* that varied from the typical angry Kurdish father reacting to the wrongdoings of his children to a comic comparison comparing the way Western and Kurdish lifestyles differ. Shlovan, a US-based young Kurd and one of the administrators of the page, pointed out that they [he and some other Kurds from Finland] "started making videos in October 2013. Vines were very popular, and there were several editions, in Spanish, in Arab [ic], African and so we decided to make videos for our own people." Many people regarded their videos as mocking Kurdish culture and identity. Shlovan says "At first, the reaction was crazy, especially from Kurds living abroad, particularly in Europe. It was 99 per cent positive, but there was a lot of criticism back home".[61] The accusations went so frenzied that Shlovan and his team had to explain their intentions indicating that they are meant to amuse rather than to insult the Kurdish people because they love their people.

Regardless of its amusement side, these videos and the reactions to them say a lot about the generational gaps in the Kurdish diaspora, the gap between the homeland and the diaspora and the different interpretations of Kurdayeti. Each sides (younger and older generations) clearly identify themselves as 'Kurds' and believe they are 'helping' or 'promoting' Kurdayeti. However, the way they do this articulation is different. For example, the younger generation think it is not necessary to always wear Kurdish clothes or speak Kurdish in order to be identified as Kurds, while the older generation consider attire, language, food and other cultural elements inseparable parts of Kurdish identity. This also

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[60] "*Vine* is a short-form video sharing service where users can share six-second-long looping video clips. The service was founded in June 2012, and American microblogging website Twitter acquired it in October 2012, just before its official launch". Cited from Wikipedia, retrieved on 13 May 2016.
[61] Interview with Rudaw news agency, available at http://rudaw.net/english/world/17052014 , retrieved on 25/08/2015

suggests that the diasporic Kurds are more likely to express different point of views about national culture, than are Kurds in the homeland. I discuss this in the next chapter in the contexts of 'wider imagined community' and pluralistic nature of Kurdish identity on the social media that is different from the 'imagined community' produced by Kurdish print and broadcasting media.

7.3.3 Theme three: the religious representation of Kurdish identity in diaspora

Although the Kurds have been generally regarded as religiously less fanatic and radical compared to other ethnic groups in the Middle East, it cannot be ignored that religion still comprises a part of the Kurdish identity. (See the discussion on the diverse religious structure of Kurdistan in chapter three). This observation showed that a number of Kurds in the diaspora utilise social media, especially Facebook, to state their religious concerns in Kurdish society and in the diaspora. However, these types of activities have become quite obvious at the time of religious festivities, such as, Ramadan, and Qurban which are celebrated by the Kurdish religious believers as well as by other Islamic communities around the world. During these occasions, they were using and posting by word of mouth, flyers, SMS messaging and so on, in order to celebrate the festivities with each other. It is worth noting that the greeting messages about these occasions were also posted from both those who truly practised religions and those who did not believe in religion. As an example, the greeting messages on Ramadan were posted through the accounts of some Facebook and Twitter members who had mostly been posting secular, nationalist and sometimes atheistic comments previously. However, they were celebrating a religious festivity with their Kurdish fellows and sending themselves messages with blessings and hope for a better and more prosperous future for them. Similarly, depending on individual religious positioning and sectarian affiliation, the Kurds of the diaspora have been meeting up on Skype, Telegram, Viber, and many other video conferencing and online communication apps either weekly or bi-weekly discussing religious issues in their native language, or on a few occasions in English or in the language of the host countries.

Within the circles of Kurdish Muslim believers, some religious Arabic cliché words, such as, *Mashalla*, *Alhamdulilah*, *Inshaullah* were used frequently through their daily communications on the social networks. For example, the page 'I Am a Kurd & Muslim'

starts off its mission in the following way often using the Arabic term Insha'Allah many times as follows:

> *Whether Kurd or non-Kurd, Muslim or non-Muslim, this site is,* **Insha'Allah,** *for anyone who wants to learn about the stories of our culture and religion. We believe that the Kurdish youth should know a little about their culture and religion, especially as little was taught about it, hence this page is supposed to* **Insha'Allah** *change something and improve it* **Insha'Allah** *over time to follow good posts [translated from German].*

This is only one example indicating the importance and the articulation of some of the religious symbols among the Kurdish diaspora. During the observation, some of the members discussed the Kurdish question in certain ways alongside their own religious principles. In those cases, the element of Kurdish ethnicity still existed even among their purely religious discourses. During the observation, some members tended to use the Kurdish equivalents of the Arabic terms instead of using their original forms. There were a number of pages and discussions indicating how to look at Islam through both a Kurdish and a nationalist perspective. Applying these religious expressions, symbols and clichés in a way rather than in a conventional Arabic narration of Islam indicated that the members tended to adjust some of the Islamic symbols into a Kurdish context. One of the best and also most interesting examples was the time that some secular or even atheist Kurdish diaspora users were posting the views of a Kurdish religious figure, Abdulrahman Sediq, who tried to present 'another interpretation from Islam.' He was running a series of TV programs on Kurdistan 24 TV called "In Kurdish." As the name of the program signifies, the series was to present Islam in a Kurdish way, by which he meant the 'moderate and beautiful' sides of this religion. At the time one of his videos was posted on the page of the *Kurds in the UK*, the members were praising such 'nice' views.

Although there were about tens of other examples indicating the articulations and reproduction of the Islamic religious elements through the online activities of the Kurdish diaspora, the religious representation was still not such a dominant signifier within the discourse of the Kurdish identity in the diaspora. The observation indicated that religion has not been used to preserve Kurdish culture and identity as it was used by some other non-state nations, such as, the Uyghurs (Nuermaimaiti, 2012) or the Palestinians (Aouragh, 2011). Daily postings on Facebook showed that the amount of information on religion and Islam was frequently re-posted by a few members of the study who were sometimes re-

sharing the same posts several times among their own circles for consideration and ongoing discussion. Thus, compared to discussions on ethnicity, culture, language, music and other national elements, religion on social media was placed in a considerable minor position among the online Kurds of the diaspora.

7.3.4 Theme four: Politics, 'even our breathing is political'

The Kurdish diaspora is one of the most politically aware diaspora in the world (see the chapter on the Kurdish diaspora). As mentioned previously, following the several divisions of Kurdistan, and the traumatised history that Kurds have witnessed and suffered through during the last century, politics has been an inseparable if not the most significant part of Kurdish identity. Thus, political issues, the past and ongoing happenings in Kurdistan appeared to be underlined in almost all of the debates among the Kurdish diaspora online. The observation of this research showed that despite its involvement in the politics and social life of the host countries, the Kurdish diaspora is still strongly affected by the political issues and developments in their homeland, Kurdistan.

The Kurds in the region have formed multiple political parties and before the emergence of online media they were noticeably active in the arenas of print and broadcasting media (see the previous chapter on the Kurdish media). Inspired by the emergence of the Internet, many Kurdish websites and online forums were created which were mainly published and run in the diaspora. The Internet has provided the Kurdish intellectuals, politician and nationalists with the opportunity to freely discuss their political and national issues. The Kurds in the diaspora were actively involved in sharing and publishing information about the resistance, oppression, history and politics of the Kurds in relation to the four dominant nation states occupying Kurdistan. However, social media provided a much better opportunity for ordinary Kurds to be more active politically. They publicise and stimulate political activities for online users in order to participate in social and political activities or specifically to support a Kurdish political party. The observation demonstrated that the Kurdish political parties, by having their own active members and followers on Facebook and other social network websites (not the official pages/sites of the parties), aim to connect with people, discuss different topics, share views of their affiliated parties, and finally, attract more members.

The findings of the research maintain that Facebook pages and groups that allow free use by fans or members are more successful than those groups in which the discussions have been controlled, limited and monopolised by administrators. The former groups were not only well-visited, popular and updated, they were also more seriously involved in political discussions, intercultural competence, multilingualism, national identity and other questions related to the Kurdish diaspora and society of Kurdistan. For example, the pages *Kurdish Diaspora in UK*[62] limited their discussions to very specific subjects, e.g., how the diaspora can contribute to the homeland. Their postings did not run popularly and the administrators deleted 'unwanted' posts. On the other hand, the pages such as *PostKurdistan* or *Roj Gull* attracted many heated discussions and comments and their administrators did not influence the views of the users even though they might seriously be against the pages' aim or political agenda.[63]

Although the feeling of identification with Kurdish ethnicity has been very strong and common among the Kurds of the diaspora (as discussed above), the observation showed that political ideologies and party politics often became hindrances to the formation of a single Kurdish state or even to the creation and development of a unified interpretation of nationalism. As an example, following the liberation of the town of Sinjar[64] from the ISIS by the KRG Peshmarga forces, the news and chants of the victory were not received well by the Pro-PKK pages on Facebook and they often tried to undermine the victory. Instead of celebrating the liberation of this Kurdish city, some members were arguing about who was the 'actual' liberator was, the PDK/ KRG or the PKK? A member of *Qandil Post* (a pro-PKK

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[62] Kurdish Diaspora in the UK is a Facebook public community page with over 3000 followers. It has stated its aims as: Promoting Kurdish Identity in the UK and all over the world; Creating connection between Kurds and their friend from all over the world, being part of multicultural society in the UK by sharing our culture with other nations who live in the UK; inform the Kurds and other about the Kurdish activities taking place in the UK and all over the world; Being a contact point to assist one another in the areas of study, research, social activities etc. (https://www.facebook.com/www.kdinuk.co.uk/)

[63] PostKurdistan and RojGull are two pages in which the most heated and often insulting discussions were occurred. Although they did not declare any political party affiliation, their propaganda could be considered pro-KDP and Pro-PKK respectively. The users of these pages were from both generations of the Kurdish diaspora as well as from the homeland.

[64] Sinjar (also written as Shangal/Shingar in Kurdish) is a town in Ninevah province in North of Iraq. It is mostly populated by Izadi Kurds. In August 2014, the ISIS attacked the Kurdish populated areas of the Province, occupying the town of Sinjar. As a result of what is referred to as the Shingal massacre, it was thought that 2,000 to 5,000 Yazidis Kurds had been killed,while about 200,000 civilians fled and many were arrested and a high number of women were taken and enslaved. (See also, "Kurdish forces seize Iraq's Sinjar town from ISIS," The Daily Star Newspaper, retrieved on 16 June 2016).

page) mentioned that "the PDK is not such a force to be able to liberate Shingal. It was even about to give [lose] Erbil to ISIS. How could such a corrupt and tribal party act for the liberation of the Yazidi Kurds in Shingal?" Likewise, most of pro-PKK pages tried to give more importance to the PKK guerrillas as the main liberators of the town while, it seemed they had no more than 100 fighters around the town and the Peshmarga forces of PDK [KRG] were directly involved in the fight with a very greater number of 7500.[65]

Likewise, this was the same for the time that the YPG guerrillas liberated the town of Kobani in the Syrian part of Kurdistan. This victory was also undermined by the Pro-KRG and pro-PDK pages by highlighting the role of the international allies as the liberators of Kobani (and not the YPG and the Kurds themselves). As an example, heated discussions on the *PostKurdistan* page ensued in which the members were commenting on the liberation of Kobani. Sevan, a Kurdish user from Finland commented that "Kobani is a Kurdish town. It is liberated now. The YPG did well, but we should thank the Peshmarga forces and president Barzani who attempted in lobbying for the Kurds in Syria through international community. If there were no such supports by the president Barzani, there would have been no victory over ISIS in Kobani…" This comment like many others tried to undermine the role of the Kurdish YPG guerrillas in Syrian Kurdistan by giving more weight to the helps of international community (especially the U.S) and portrays the President of Iraqi Kurdistan region (Masoud Barzani) as the main contributor of the liberation.

In another communication thread on the NNSR Facebook page, there were challenging debates between the KPD-Iran related users with PKK affiliate users on the recent skirmishes between the two political parties in Qandil Mountains in 2014 which resulted in the death of a Kurdish Peshmarga from KDP-Iran. Some users clearly called the PKK "the mercenary of the Iranian government acting against other Kurdish political parties and Kurdish national project". At the same time, users who passionately supported the PKK accused the PDK-Iran and the KDP-Iraq as "the agents of the Turkish government acting in order to sabotage the election in Turkey against the Kurds alongside with the Erdogan government."

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[65] I cannot confirm the exact number of the PKK forces in the Shingal Liberation war due to the security aspects and the involvement of many other groups that might be affiliated to the PKK. (See Gordon & Callimachi, 2015, accessible at
https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/14/world/middleeast/sinjar-iraq-islamic-state.html

These types of disagreements and arguments were also quite visible on the subject of the Kurdish national flag. A majority of Kurdish diaspora users from Iraq and Iran mostly opted for the current Kurdish flag raised on the Kurdistan Regional Government's institutions, including the Parliament. Yet, the majority of the Kurdish diaspora users from Turkey and Syria were unwilling to raise/ display this flag and had their own flag which was different from the flag of Kurdistan raised in Iraqi or Iranian parts of Kurdistan.

Left: The flag displayed mostly by the PKK and the YPG members in Kurdistan Turkey and Syria. **Right**: The flag commonly accepted as the Kurdistan flag by the majority of Kurds, especially in the Kurdistan of Iran and Iraq.

The arguments about the flag or other ethno-national elements signify the diverse nature of the Kurdish diaspora and how party politics or even personal issues can present a different understanding of national identity. The users and pages usually interpreted Kurdish national identity according to their personal relationships, political affiliations, assumptions, values and expectations. In such circumstances, they viewed national beliefs and norms as 'personally meaningful' (Ashmore et al., 2001) and attempted to translate them into daily practices. This indicates that national identity is malleable and open to interpretation and can be co-opted for political purposes, which seems consistent with the modernist approach. Many examples could be found of users who previously were close friends, yet due to their different political affiliations posted hostile comments directed to one another on social media. For example, through the above mentioned arguments, there were two users who mentioned that they had been friends and 'comrades' before while they were both members of X political party. However, at this stage, each of them advocated a certain belief or understanding of *Kurdayeti* and posted opposing and sometimes even insulting comments on each other's pages.

Despite the existence of thousands example of obvious political discussions, there have been some users who were very active in postings related to Kurdish culture, yet they were less involved in political activities related to the Kurds on Facebook. For instance, eight selected members from the Iranian Kurdish diaspora frequently posted regarding Kurdish dance videos, music and even commented on the political issues in Turkey, Iraq and Syria, yet, they were completely silent about the Kurdish issues and 'politics' in Iran, such as, the increasing number of executions of Kurdish political prisoners by the Iranian authorities, and many other examples of discrimination and inequality in the country. Some of the pages clearly mentioned in their introductions that "it is not a political page and members have to avoid any political discussions." For example, the page '*Boukan Jelas'* removed or blocked the members who tried to post 'political' or 'sexual' or gender-based comments[66]. During the research, when I posted on one of such pages and asked their reason for being 'apolitical,' they replied: "we do not aim to be involved in politics. It is a dangerous task for us and we do not have enough knowledge of political issues." This type of fear was a visible element in the behaviour and identity of many users of social network websites and it might be related to the massive rates of suppression of the Kurds and the political activists in the homeland, particularly in Iran and Turkey, as well as the scrutinised checking of the Internet by the authorities. While responding to my personal messaging, Komar[67], a young Iranian Kurd living in Finland mentioned that he is scared of 'political discussions,' because his "political activities online may bring threats to his families residing in Iran."

Regardless of any internal disputes among the political parties, these daily postings have not only transformed Kurdish internal divisions in the online era, they have also cultivated various political opinions among the users. It is true that the internal divergences inside the Kurdish society and diaspora have been more articulated and visible on these free media. In this sense, the observed users and groups have become more involved and active in shifting a significant part of their political discourse to social media. Through the mentioned

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[66] *Boukan Jelas* is a Facebook page with about 22000 members. It is managed and populated mainly by Kurds from the city of Boukan (Also written as Bookan, in Iran). The members of this page are mainly from Bookan and the diaspora. This page declares that it is not a political page and its aim is for amusement and promotion of Kurdish culture. The members of this page uses both Kurdish and Persian in their discussion. https://www.facebook.com/groups/466259753429649/

[67] In some cases like this one, I have changed the name of the users due to the likely risks to them and their families back in Iran or Turkey

discussion, one could argue that this diversity of political views among Kurdish users is an indication of pluralistic nature of the national identity that is empowered by the social media. This definition is lined up with Erikson's views (2007) and in that he argues that for understanding the nation building of the stateless people such as the Kurds we should put aside the classic conception of the nation as a homogenous unit and alternatively we should consider pluralism as a an important part of the subject (p. 16).

'The occupiers of Kurdistan must be blamed'

The Kurdish diaspora online users expressed and performed resistance to the repressive policies of the states encompassing Kurdistan through the constant reiteration of their hopes for freedom and independence. In this regard, the users were posting many Kurdish or even non-Kurdish epic poems, videos and snapshots in order to represent their sense of hope and desire for freedom, self-determination and independence. One of the very important aspects of the political activities of the diasporic Kurds observed on social media is related to their concerns and discontent regarding the marginalising, discriminatory, and oppressive policies of the countries encompassing Kurdistan against the Kurds. In this regard, even natural and environmental phenomena became highly politicised. For example, while a forest in Iranian Kurdistan was burned due to global warming and the wrongdoings of the local people who were setting up a fire in the forest, Dylan a member of the Kurdish diaspora from Finland posted questions indicating: "This is the regime's own plan [Islamic Republic of Iran] to destroy our landscape. This is an anti-Kurdish regime and plans to remove us from the earth. It has targeted all our nature, animals, farms, children, women, men, and in a word, our existence. In another page the members discussed the question of "why this regime does not provide enough contribution to extinguishing the fire?"

These arguments are also true about the part of Kurdistan in Turkey. Users posted and uploaded news reporting the numbers of Kurds who were punished, tortured or jailed by the Turkish government. Answers and discussions around such postings praised those imprisoned and tortured people, calling them 'friends', 'hero', 'freedom fighters', and 'martyr'. In some cases the online activities against the Turkish government became so extreme that Facebook hindered their activities or blocked their pages.

During the observation, at least five public pages and many personal profiles that I was observing were blocked by Facebook administration. The members claimed that this was "because of their ethnic and Kurdish identity". Renas, a member whose Facebook account was deleted twice explained as follows.

> *Dear Friends, Facebook has deleted my account because of my activities regarding the Kurds, my nationalist approach and my attempts to raise national awareness of my people against the Turkish government. This is because the Turks do not want us to be effective in the election [the parliamentary election in Turkey in June 2015]. They have influenced Facebook administration to stop our activities.*

Similar to Renas, some other users whose pages or accounts were removed by Facebook mentioned that they had debated about the clash and war between the Kurds and Turks through their Facebook pages and their discussions frequently led to disputes with the Turks. Thus, they claimed that Turkish users mostly reported their posts and pages, and Facebook consequently blocked 'Kurdish' pages. Although the news of blocking the pages was broadcast through some newspapers, such as, the Guardian as per the photo above, I could not find any information posted on Facebook. Moreover, some users mentioned that their Facebook accounts were hacked by the Turkish 'nationalists' and 'fascists' who have influence with Facebook managers and "manipulate Facebook for the sake of the Turks". It should be noted that while the Kurdish nationalists were making these claims, Turkey was

blocking Facebook and other social media sites, on the grounds that they were too sympathetic to the PKK, HDP, and Erdogan's opposition groups.

Rallies and protests for promoting real world events

As Castells (2001) pointed out, "Core economic, social, political, and cultural activities throughout the planet are structured by and around the Internet, and other computer networks. In fact, exclusion from these networks is one of the most damaging forms of exclusion in our economy and in our culture"(p. 3). The Kurdish diaspora chose Facebook as a platform for organising political rallies and protests. During the observation, due to the political changes in the Middle East, such as, the emergence of ISIS, many protests were organised by Kurds in the diaspora in their host countries in support of the Kurdish cause and against terrorism, ISIS, and the specific policies of Turkey and Iran. In one example, many social media pages were created in the name of *Solidarity with Kurdistan*, *March in Solidarity with Kurdistan*, *Stop Genocide against Kurds*, *Save Kobani*, *Save Shingal*, and so on, through which street protests were being announced and organised. In one example, on the page of *March in Solidarity with Kurdistan* organised by the Kurdish Youth Association of New Zealand, 2000 people were invited on the page to join the march even though some of them were not even living in New Zealand and Auckland. However, 750 Facebook users had accepted the invitation and another 645 had shown their interests as 'Maybe Going'. Regarding the influence of social media on the Kurdish diaspora's rallies, Sirwan, an organiser of the event mentioned the following.

> *A considerable amount of work and preparation for this event was organised through Facebook and other online social media. They [social media] have facilitated our job much easier. I remember when we were about to organise an event in Pakistan [they had been in a refugee camp in Pakistan for 8 years], it was much more difficult and horrible to gather people and provide facilities. But now, it is very easy, thanks to media such as Facebook and Twitter!"*

There have been many other examples of using Facebook in the protests, political rallies and campaigns in order to influence the policies of countries and individual minds in favour of the Kurdish political prisoners in Iran and Turkey, In many of the cases, the Facebook campaigns for petitions and support have been set up by the Kurdish activists in the diaspora and, to some extent, in the homeland. Some of many examples of Facebook Kurdish campaigns, observed during the study, which have a high number of members

include the campaigns such *Support Mohamad-Seddigh Kaboudvand*[68], the *Support of the Kurds* in *Syria*, *Save Kobani*, *I am also Yezidi*, , and so forth. For example, the story of Turkish military attacking at the Kurdish city of *Cizre* was highly echoed by the Kurdish diaspora users of Facebook. Some of the postings showed photos of Kurdish mothers mourning while showing photos of their children who were killed by the Turkish army. These stories went viral online and had many repercussions among social media users both in the diaspora and in the homeland.

Some of users of this study (particularly the first generation) have been also concerned about the economy, welfare and the unemployment rates in the Kurdish areas. In some example, the users concentrated on the rate of unemployment in the Kurdish cities of Turkey, and Iran. One of the most visible examples were the twitter hashtag and social media campaigns in support of Kurdish Kolbars[69] in Iranian Kurdistan. In majority of the discussions the reason for remaining backward in economic terms is due to discrimination by the government on account of being Kurdish, and that they mostly analysed the economic questions through the lenses of politics, and particularly Kurdish nationalism. In other words, since 'we are Kurds', those governments do not want us to progress and do not allow the development of infrastructure and economy in Kurdistan, compared to other non-Kurdish regions.

The political engagements, rallies and protests conducted by the Kurdish diaspora on social media are much broader than some limited examples. This ethnography demonstrated that

[68] Mohammad Sedigh Kaboudvand is the Iranian Kurdish journalist and human rights activist and the founder of Kurdistan Human Rights Organisation. He was imprisoned by the Iranian authrities under the charges of "acting against the national security" and boycotting the 9th presidential election which resulted in bringing Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to office in 2005. In 2009, he was awarded the international journalist of the year by the British Press Awards. The international human rights organisations and the human rights activists throughout the world organised several d campaigns for his release. He was released on 12 May 2017 after serving a ten-year sentence (Kurdistan24, 12 May 2017: http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/b7ab7b30-f666-4990-b99e-d0c5a1be04e4/Kurdish-journalist-released-from-prison-in-Iran)

[69] The *kolba*r(s) are semi-legal porters who carry heavy packs of goods (usually cigarret, tea, house furniture, automobile parts and so on) on their backs, across the mountains and dangerous routs from the Kurdistan Region to Iran. Since there is not enough employment opportunities in the Iranian Kurdistan, thousands of people even highly educated ones, are involved in such a risky job. The Iranian border security forces regard the unlicensed kolbars as 'smugglers involved in an illegal economy, bringing weapons and drugs into the country and posing a threat to Iranian security.' According to the France-based Kurdistan Human Rights Network, Iranian authorities indiscriminately shoot people in the borderlines, and in 2016 only, 42 Kurish Kolbers were directly shot dead, 30 were injured, and 22 drowned or died of hypothermia and other causes (cited in Rudaw, 30 March 2017: http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iran/30032017?keyword=ISIS)

Kurdish members of social media, especially Facebook members, were keen to conduct their political activities on these provided platforms and regarded Facebook as an important space in the aim of solidarity and support for the Kurdish political and national cause.

Photo 5: The rally in support of Kurds against ISIS, organised by the Kurdish Youth Association of New Zealand. Source: the Facebook page of Kurdish Youth Association New Zealand (KYANZ)

Photo 6: The campaigns for supporting the release of Kaboudvand. Source: Facebook

Photo 7: A twitter storm in support of Kurdish Kolbars. The photo relates to a Kurdish Kolbar sitting and mourning by his Kolbar friend who has just been shot dead by the Iranian border security forces

Photo 8: Dozens of thousands of the Kurds rallied in Germany's Cologne in support of referendum on the Kurdistan Region Independence which was held on September 25, 2017. (Photo: Facebook)

Chapter Eight: Towards a plural grassroots national identity

8.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the results of the findings and elaborates on the question of the discursive formation and articulation of the Kurdish national identity on social media by the Kurdish diaspora. It considers the primary and secondary research findings in light of my theoretical framework so I can derive conclusions about the research and the framework of the study. In this regard, the chapter includes an empirical analysis and expands the themes of ethnicity, culture, religion and politics as well as the sub-themes by relating them to the subject of national identity in order to elaborate upon a concept regarding the Kurdayeti that is practised and interpreted by the Kurdish diaspora on social media.

My ten months of concentrated observation of the Kurdish diaspora on social media focusing on the Facebook pages confirms that the ethnic/national indicators have increased online, and that social media have proved to be an important space for propagating nationalist ambitions and the development of the idea of the state of Kurdistan. As I will argue here, despite the existence of the challenging and fragmenting linguistic and political issues among the users, the increase in the usage of Facebook as well as other social media platforms among the generations of Kurdish diaspora has enabled them to rebuild and redefine their national identity in a wider, more popular and more participatory way, as well as taking a critical approach to the Kurdish traditional politics and society. This can result in furthering the democratisation of Kurdish national discourse.

8.2 Diasporic connectedness online versus off-line

Online social media spaces can become the place for the articulation of many conflicting identity issues. These spaces provide an example of a globalised arena in which diasporic groups can have access to many online media and convey messages to connect to other groups and individuals. The findings of the observation demonstrate that the Kurdish national discourse is at the stage of shifting from the centrally produced message of print and broadcasting media to the more dispersed ground of social media. This transition is evident and observable in the Kurdish diaspora's daily engagement with social media and in

their articulation of their national identity and statehood. They tend to communicate with other Kurds of their ethnic community through online social networks or virtually in other kinds of communications, including several mobile and telecommunication applications. This virtualisation of communication may have several imminent results and influence on the Kurdish national identity that is going to be reproduced and shaped in the future. And while not all of these consequences are clear now, some have already appeared which include the transformation in the type of communication from a one-to-many pattern to a many-to-many pattern, as well as the pluralisation, democratisation and glocalisation of the Kurdish national identity in the diaspora. In the sections that follow, I will be discussing each category in relation to the theoretical discussion of nationalism and national identity, in particular in relation to the modernist and ethno-symbolist approaches.

8.3 Many-to-many pattern of communication

As discussed in earlier chapters, nationalism, national awareness or national identity involves all the conscious and unconscious elements that inform and shape practices in social life. These elements include a common language, geography, history, homeland and emotional attachments that are produced and reproduced in everyday life (Billig, 1995). As a popular social networking site, Facebook has provided an interactive space for Kurdish individuals in the diaspora for the representation of their national identity that has been difficult to achieve through traditional media (see the chapter on Kurdish broadcasting media).

The observations of the study show that the Kurdish diaspora have tended to relocate and redefine their identity discussions away from mainstream media to the arena of online social media. The existence of a great number of Facebook pages, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram accounts, and so on, indicate that a big shift to the participatory and interactive online platforms is taking place. By signing up to an account on Facebook, the Kurds in the diaspora are able to connect to their fellows in the homeland and in other countries very easily. By sharing and uploading videos on social media they become both senders and recipients of many audio and visual messages. By becoming producers of the messages, as the observations show, they have brought some parts of their unheard history to the arena of these new media which are not covered by broadcast and print media.

The findings demonstrated that the emergence of online social media has made it possible for diasporic Kurds to produce, construct and articulate the content of their messages without the restrictions that exist in the broadcasting media. This indicates that if there is any national identity creation it is being produced from the bottom up by people who are ordinary members of the Kurdish diaspora. In contrast with the dominance of media professionals that has existed in the Kurdish print and broadcast media, the social media of the Kurdish diaspora are run by ordinary users who may not have had professional training related to media or journalism or possess the knowledge of Kurdish questions that a journalist, commentator or academic may have. Nonetheless, this type of formation and articulation of the Kurdish national identity has resulted in the further popularisation and mobilisation of the Kurdish national question.

Moreover, unlike traditional media, social media equate to multimedia that provide the users with many functions including utilising texts, audio, video and graphics at the same time. These functions facilitate more involvement, interaction and integration on the part of the Kurdish diaspora in regard to the Kurdish national movement. This shows the capacity of social media to bring "alive images that are ubiquitous, accessible to a myriad of people" (Tettey, 2009, p.158) and contest other conventional ways of the articulation and the construction of their national identity through print and broadcasting media.

8.4 Kurdish online public spheres

As Habermas showed, the 18th century European bourgeoisie's coffee houses, salons and societies served as sites of the public sphere through which people could meet to freely discuss and identify societal issues, and thus influence political actions through those discussions (Habermas, 1989). At the same time, Habermas has been critcised for privileging a unitary public sphere over the existence of multiple 'publics' (Appadurai, 1996, 2002; Bakker, 2001; Eccarius-Kelly, 2010; Jacob, 2013; Mutlu, 2010; Romano, 2002). Following this line of thinking, the current study observed that the public chatrooms, online social networking, and other sorts of online discussions are the characteristics of a new type of public spheres in the era of the Internet. These spaces provided a better opportunity for interactions among the diasporic users than those which had been offered by print and broadcast media. This has resulted in more discussions of Kurdish identity questions, and the articulation and imagination of their homelands. This has opened a new horizon for the

Kurdish diaspora to articulate their nationalistic aspirations and raise not just the question of *what* national identity is, but the question of *who* is doing the articulation of national identity within the online imagined community.

The elements of Kurdish national identity representation that have been produced and facilitated through TV and other conventional media continue to be salient but in different ways in the context of new electronic media platforms. The social media platforms inhabited by the ordinary members of diasporic Kurds are not representing a monological voice of national identity similar to the conventional mainstream media; rather they should be regarded as creating what Appadurai (1996) points to as a 'diasporic public spheres' or diasporic publics of a more participatory and plural kind. In this sense, Facebook has served as a public sphere for deliberations where many members of the Kurdish diaspora can participate in the process of the construction of Kurdish national identity. Through these public spheres, Kurdish nationalism is still being reproduced and it has been entered into an era in which the reproduction and articulation is obtaining a popular and yet transnational nature. A member of the Kurdish diaspora on Facebook can be at 'home' regardless of where his/her residing place is. As a form of such public spheres, social media are offering better and much freer opportunities for the members of Kurdish diaspora to speak out in our globalised era. This shows that the breadth of users across classes, genders, and generations is the real difference.

8.5 A wider imagined community

As Anderson (2006) mentioned, nations exist as constructed phenomena, the existence and endurance of which is strengthened through public debates and communication technologies. Throughout the dissertation, I have agreed with parts of the modernist argument that place emphasis on the role of the media in the formation of national identity. In this regard, this research demonstrates that the activities of the Kurdish diaspora users bring about new possibilities in terms of the transformation of the Kurdish imagined community and national identity from a centralised and one-to-many pattern to a pluralised many-to-many pattern. These interactions are likely to lead to the formation of 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 2006) or 'imaginary space' (Jones, 1997) in a different way. Similarly, these spaces become new sources of expressing nationalism which are encouraged and empowered by cultural and political activism. Likewise, the Kurdish

diaspora's online media have allowed the individual members of Kurdish society to create their own personal identities through a communicative setting that is fairly secure and exempt from the control and threats of the four states encompassing Kurdistan. Social media have been able to crack the limitations the states wielded that had an absolute control of its citizenry inside the national borders of their states. In this sense, the participation of the Kurdish diaspora in online forums is expressive and they (particularly the first generation) have been actively involved in Kurdish politics in all parts of Kurdistan even though they have been physically disrupted from the homeland. So it can be said that the social media platforms produced the indirect effect of enabling nationalist expressions by Kurds in the region. This demonstrates the populist grounding of nationalism on social media which is mostly produced by the generations of Kurds from the diaspora.

However, social media use also indicates a challenge to the modernist nationalist theory, including that of Gellner and Anderson, which observed nationalist elites playing the central role in the creation and development of national identity. Through the transnational public space online, the Kurdish diaspora's interactions happened as a bottom-up process which is different from the top-down strategies presented by Kurdish printing and broadcasting media which were mostly owned by Kurdish political organisations. On social media, the Kurdish users are generating their own political discussions and they cannot be controlled by any political obligations. This has produced a wider transnational Kurdish patriotism in which nationalism is entwined with all aspects of society including ethnicity, culture, religion, language, politics, and so forth.

Although social media are platforms for deliberation and debates on national identity, which confirms Anderson and the modernists' arguments, the nature of national identity presented on social media is different from Anderson's account in which governments, authorities, or national independence movements tried to control or lead audiences through the agenda setting on the media (Anderson, 2006). The Kurdish diaspora's social media has been opened up to Kurds from any group, (personality, gender, age, and background) who want to have a share in the production of their national identity. At this stage, imagining 'us' and 'them' is not the one-to-many pattern in which the message is produced and controlled by the political or nationalist elites (as this is the nature of print/broadcasting media), rather these are the ordinary users of the Kurdish diaspora who

discuss the concept through the virtual public sphere and finally create a more real and observable 'imagined community.'

The engagement of more users in discussions on social media has contributed to the possibility of the formation of various networks among the Kurdish diaspora. In the current study, I observed several Facebook pages and groups which served as a significant network for the Kurdish diaspora while the participants were articulating their personal, social, political and national aims. The involvement of more users in the free and uncensored online space provided a more democratic and pluralistic ground for the discussions of national identity and self-determination. This will be discussed in the following section.

8.6 Pluralistic and participatory presentation of Kurdish national identity

Contrary to conventional mainstream media, social media give ordinary Kurds a space that lets them feel their presence, speak freely and convey their messages and their thoughts. These functions facilitate the growth of democratic discourses within a Kurdish national movement. Through these new spaces, more diverse opinions and practices are being spoken about and listened to and this has transformed the production of Kurdish national identity in the diaspora to a new era distinct from the age of traditional media, I would argue. I refer to this as pluralisation and democratisation in the production of Kurdish national identity.

This study reveals the potential of the Kurdish diaspora's ability to function in social networks as the participants are able to produce and articulate national identity discourse despite linguistic and political fragmentations. In other words, in in social media, linguistic and political differences form a pluralist context in which various interpretations of Kurdish national identity can co-exist. This did not happen throughout the 20th century during the formation of Kurdish nationalism by print and broadcast media. As discussed in chapter six, the formation of national identity by the Kurdish mainstream media, notably under the influence of nationalist elites did not allow for the further participation of the masses in national identity making.

Because social media is not under the control of political elites and groups, its users cannot be influenced as the audience of the mainstream media are influenced. Therefore, it is

difficult to produce a monolithic notion of Kurdish national identity from social media. Also, as the Kurdish diaspora usually understand or communicate in a language or languages in addition to Kurdish (a dialect of Kurdish which is difficult for speaker of other dialects to understand), linguistic obstacles and 'misunderstandings' among the Kurdish diaspora on social media have gradually diminished. This is very visible among the second generation of Kurdish diaspora who mostly communicate in English on social media. There existed plenty of long communication threads on Facebook in the English language in which participants were originally from all dialects and parts of Kurdistan and were discussing politics, language, society and other issues related to 'Kurdistan.' Hence, it can be argued that the Kurdish national or ethnic identities that are being expressed in a variety of multi-lingual milieus that are conveniently reachable to a broader Kurdish population could be interpreted as an opportunity for the further mobilisation and pluralistic articulation of Kurdish nationalism.

It is true that the growth of Kurdish print and broadcasting media have developed the discourse about the Kurdish nation to a broader audience via the creation and broadcasting of a common interpretation of Kurdish national identity, yet they have also produced a political-economy of media in which only the selected groups and people could have their 'imagination' realised in a published and broadcasting form. For example, the Kurdistan newspaper was produced by Badir-Khan family and as the only funder, they have their own influence on the production of the nationalist message. This is the same for almost all of Kurdish newspapers, TVs and radios either in the homeland or in the diaspora (See the discussions of chapter six on Kurdish media). Despite the constructive influences of the Kurdish broadcasting media, they have been criticised for their economic and political dependency on the political parties or the Kurdistan Regional Government. This made the media channels less inclusive and turned to be problematic while these media compromised some democratic principles or national interests for the interests of the funding organisations. For example, *K-TV*, *Newroz*, *Kurdsat*, *Kurd-Channel* belong to or associate with the KDP, PJAK, PUK and PDK-I, respectively, and it is likely they prioritise their political parties agenda over other issues, such as, democratic or national matters and questions.

However, the findings of the study indicate that Kurdish diaspora online users attempted to fill the vacuum of free or independent Kurdish media through social media which facilitates

the engagement of the wider public and thus the further democratisation of Kurdish society and the production of Kurdish nationalist discourse both in the homeland and in the diaspora. As many users have claimed through discussion threads, social media may break this dependency and the one-to-many visualisation and broadcasting of Kurdish national identity by providing ordinary individuals with spaces to express their voices and opinion, having their presence felt through the wider public sphere of Kurdish national identity. This is the notable aspect of social media in the easing and enabling of the wider imagination of the Kurdish nation for the members of Kurdish diaspora. So it can be argued that through connection with homeland and participation in related online discussions, the Kurdish diaspora's presence in social media has paved the way for more civic participation around the Kurdish national question.

Through social media platforms, the Kurdish diaspora not only share their general views, they also participate in political discussions, and try to influence the political events in the homeland. In a discussion thread on the role of Kurdish social media, Ruwayda, a young female British-Kurdish blogger mentioned:

> As a result of greater access to the Internet, Social media has enhanced Kurdish democracy because it provides locals with unhindered access to a wide range of news, and platforms. It bypasses political-party funded news agencies, and helps create more diversity of opinions. If we can continue in this vein to accurately highlight issues relevant to the region, micro bloggers and activists will be able to have greater influence in the decision-making process.

This comment indicates that social media offer important possibilities for the development of democratic participation in Kurdistan as well as throughout the diaspora. It can also be paralleled with the argument Norris (2004) put forth on the role of online media in bringing democracy and development. Norris (2004) maintains that Internet has offered a wide-ranging possibility for the transfer of information and the sharing of knowledge that may lead to democracy and development in autocratic societies. She asserts that "many hope that recent developments, especially the spread of new information and communication technologies, will serve to undermine authoritarian regimes, creating a 'dictators' dilemma' in countries like Burma, China and Cuba" (Norris, 2004, p.15). The recent revolutions and social movements in the Middle East and North Africa have confirmed the role of social

media in bringing about changes and influencing the democratic process of the societies.[70] Although she specifically speaks about the countries such as Burma, China and Cuba, her arguments can be applied to the Kurdish context in which authoritarian governments have been ruling Kurds for decades.

My study shows that many pages that are managed and used by the Kurdish diaspora view through a critical lens the current social and political conditions of Kurdistan and the positions of Kurdish political parties. For example, through many discussion threads the Kurdish diaspora users criticised the Kurdish political parties or the KRG for their 'sluggishness', 'backwardness' and for their lack of democratic principles. This demonstrates that many Kurdish diaspora users (from both generations) want to change, improve or influence the political systems, whether they are under the control of an 'occupier' state or a Kurdish autonomous government in Iraqi Kurdistan, Syrian Kurdistan or the Kurdish political parties in all parts of Kurdistan.

The observation recorded many cases in which the members of the Kurdish diaspora (both generations) used Facebook or Twitter to promote democratic discussions about Kurdish society that were rarely discussed by the Kurdish broadcast media. These include tough criticism against tribal aspects of Kurdish politics, religion, traditions, and history. The emergence of such discussions gradually moved the area of Kurdish nationalism into the private life of the members of the diaspora, which was not common through the Kurdish mainstream media. In addition to widening the scope of national identity, this is an indication that social media can lead to a specific version of the production of Kurdish national identity which may encompass further liberal and personal elements.

In addition to bringing a sense of interconnectedness among the users, these discussions resulted in a more widespread political mobilisation of Kurds and served as spaces to weigh up political choices without the restrictions that exist in broadcast media. As an example, during the protests in Sulaimaniyah in Kurdistan Region in 2015 against financial corruption within the Kurdish government, the photos and videos of the protests set a very high record

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[70] In the chain of social movements called Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa, social media played a significant role in the social revolution among others such as social and political factors in the region. There are arguments that indicate social media have obviously transformed politics in the Middle East (See, Howard & Hussain, 2013)

for numbers of posts and shares on the Facebook pages of members of the Kurdish diaspora. My search results of that day using *#Protest in Sulaimani/Sulaymaniyah, #Slemni* or other Kurdish hashtags found 2000 posts and shares from the observed pages. This indicates that Kurdish social media users of the diaspora are interested in the social and political happenings taking place in the homeland, however, they are viewing the events through critical eyes which results in further political mobilisation/protests as well as the democratisation of the production of Kurdish nationalist discourse. Thus, based on the findings of this thesis, the spread of social media cannot be interpreted as the weakening of Kurdish nationalism and articulation of national identity, as indicated by Mahmod (2016). Rather, the spread of social media has transformed Kurdish nationalism by making it much more democratic, critical and diverse.

8.7 Ethnicity as a driving force on line

This study indicates that the theme of ethnicity is still the driving force of Kurdish nationalism among the Kurdish diaspora users of social media. Evidence shows that it has served as a mobilising factor on the way of the Kurdish political and national claim. It seems that oppression, trauma, and discrimination by the political regimes in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria still drive the Kurdish diaspora to powerfully articulate an ethnic identity by which they differentiate themselves from the Turks, Arabs and Persians. Although the construction of the Kurdish national identity has also been influenced and enriched by elements of cultural and political and sometimes religious identities, it appears that these elements are all influenced by Kurdish ethnicity, as the foundation and driving element of Kurdish national identity.

In this sense, the self-identification of the Kurdish diaspora as 'Kurds' in social media motivates the perception of their identity as distinct from others. Therefore, in accordance with Eriksen's (2010) discussions of ethnicity in chapter six, this observation affirms that Kurdish ethnicity on social media has produced a specific type of 'political organisation' that helps to define cultural boundaries. In this regard, to a great extent, political activism on social media on the part of the Kurdish diaspora, derives from relationships between the Kurdish communities with 'others', i.e., between 'us' and 'them.' The 'others' mostly points to the Turkish, Persian and Arab communities living in the diaspora or available on social

media. This indicates that Kurdish ethnic identification and the conflicts of real ground have also been relocated to the online area.

The emphasis on the articulation of ethnicity through online social media represents an expression of ethno-cultural nationalism. It has been also the main source of political mobilisation and social movement of Kurds in the homeland and in the diaspora since the emergence of Kurdish nationalism in modern times. This reminds us of Smith (1988) who argues that any ethnie aspires to nationhood, must become politicized and stake out claims in the competition for power and influence in the state arena" (p. 156). From this perspective, it can be argued that the Kurdish nation online is to be constructed through the enclosure and politicisation of the greater population of the Kurdish ethnie's users, not just a few elites as modernists argue.

Accordingly, the Kurdish diaspora users mostly self-identified themselves to their own Kurdish ethnic or national identity rather than to the official national identity which is usually imposed by states, such as, Turkey, Iran, Syria or Iraq. This has been also confirmed by other scholars (See also, Eliassi, 2013,216a; Baser 2013). This process is operating and becomes much obvious since the Kurds remember themselves as an ethnic or national group that has suffered a traumatic history of genocide, divisions, assimilation, forced migration, and so on. Indeed, this consciousness of historical trauma is at the heart of contemporary Kurdish identity. In this respect, ethnicity becomes a strong source of meaning for further political mobilisation in order to catalyse Kurdish efforts to achieve their national rights.

8.8 Glocalised and digital long-distance Kurdish nationalism

Social media have contributed to the realisation of the previously theorised 'death of distance' (Saunders, 2011) for the Kurdish diaspora. These new media platforms that have emerged as a communicative-interactive medium serve as tools with the capability of influencing almost all aspects of human social, cultural and political activities and reduce the hardship associated with the lack of face-to-face communication. The interesting point about the Kurdish online diaspora and the ways of their articulation and activation of national identity is the construction of a possible 'digital' and 'glocalised' and most importantly 'decentralised public space' that crosses borders. According to the findings of

the study, the production of Kurdish national identity on social media has been obviously centred on the homeland, regardless of whether the producers are in the homeland or in the diaspora. It should be noted that, in many examples it was very difficult through the sampling of the pages to distinguish the diaspora users from the Kurdish users of the homeland.

Further, the transnational relationships and networks among the Kurds have been maintained and strengthened through various new forms of communication including, Telegram, WhatsApp, Viber, Skype, SMS, Instagram, webinars, e-mails, and many other forms of social media. In other words, individual online users that comprise the Kurdish diaspora can be at home, in Kurdistan, from anywhere. In this regard, Kurdish transnational activities are disseminated and organised from the safe environments of host countries and without the restrictions that usually existed in the conventional mainstream media. The glocalisation of the Kurdish diaspora and nationalism may indicate that Kurdish identity construction processes emanate from the "local and speak for the local, yet take place on a global scale" (Diamandaki, 2003).

Kurdish nationalist activities and discourses have been shifting to the online and social media domains while maintaining the essence of conventional Kurdish nationalism, yet in new and pluralistic forms. For example, the present project's ethnography confirms that the online postings have helped to formulate the idea of Kurdish 'long distance nationalism', which has been a vibrant process in the construction and mobilisation of the national identity of the Kurds. It shows that the members of the Kurdish diaspora feel sympathy and love for the place they belong to and consider as their homeland, although whether they wish to return or not was not well defined. Even so, the point that was clear is that this place is not Turkey, Iran, Iraq or Syria; rather it is Kurdistan as the real or imagined homeland of the Kurds. In this way, the Kurdish diaspora perform as long-distance nationalists in that they identify with their homeland and organise their everyday activities in support of their homeland. This has also brought about a set of transnational processes that connects the previous homelands of the Kurds to their existing diasporic environments. Through this interconnectedness, the homeland has become a key symbol for all Kurdish transnational activities.

Hence, the notions of Kurdish homeland and Kurdish nationalism have extended beyond the conventional or official borders of the existing nation-states overlapping Kurdistan. In this respect, the involvement of the social media users who are part of the Kurdish diaspora in the practice of long-distance nationalism is also compatible with the analysis of Zlatko Skrbiš (2001). He argues that because the nationalism of today is partly de-territorialised, it is also determined by the politics of homeland, diaspora and cyberspace. In a Facebook question in which the members were asked about their city of birth, the participants answered the two choices concurrently, saying, one, the city of birth in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria or any other countries, and, then the second option of "we are all from Kurdistan," and "let's not let the cities separate us." In this sense, the place, Kurdistan, was a 'concretion of value' (Tuan, 1977). In other words, it was not a place in which one can only dwell or be born rather it became the site for the realisation of the national imagination. It shows that the members of the Kurdish diaspora communicate and join together on social media, especially Facebook, on the basis of a common culture, background, and common concerns. The basic and connecting point of all of the three elements mentioned is the homeland, Kurdistan.

As Anderson asserted regarding the role of print media, the Internet and social media are also likely to nurture a fast and accessible ability for the Kurdish diaspora to communicate with their Kurdish fellows in the diaspora and in the homeland, which reinforces 'long distance nationalism'(Anderson, 1992) among the Kurds in the diaspora. The connection between the Kurds in the homeland and the diaspora has contributed to the recognition and internationalisation of the Kurdish question. In this sense, clearly, Anderson's long-distance nationalism and the role of media can be viewed as connecting and mobilising points. Since the transnational contacts with their homeland have been constrained by the states ruling Kurdistan (see the previous chapters on the Kurdish diaspora and Kurdish media), in order to maintain contact with those in the homeland, the Kurdish diaspora have sought to make the most of the free and accessible online media.

Although the concept of Anderson's long-distance nationalism can generally be applied to this context, the representation of long-distance nationalism that was revealed from this observation seems to be in contrast with his arguments in certain ways. From my observation, long-distance nationalism has served as a tool for the politicisation and mobilisation of the Kurdish diaspora. The activities of the Kurdish diaspora have been aimed

at the Kurdish population both in the diaspora and in the homeland population, not only the latter, as is emphasised by Anderson. The Kurdish diaspora's relationship with the homeland is much more complex than simply 'supporting' political struggles in the homeland or sending money back as Anderson (1992) has mentioned. In addition to contributing to the democratisation processes in the homeland as discussed above, the Kurdish long-distance nationalism on social media has enabled the political mobilisation of the Kurds in the diaspora in the form of street rallies, youth organisations, women's forums, educational classes, and so on.

As discussed in earlier chapters, Anderson argues that the involvement of the diaspora in the politics of the homeland is limited and is based on personal interests, as they are not completely part of the polity either in the homeland or in the countries where they live. Previous studies of the Kurdish diaspora have often rejected this assumption and claim that the Kurdish diaspora's long-distance nationalism has established significant bonding and bridging 'social capital' (Keles, 2015), reciprocity, and solidarity among themselves. The current study observed many Kurdish diaspora users who were sharing their live videos or pictures while they were in Kurdistan and fighting against the ISIS or the states occupying Kurdistan. These examples reveal that long-distance nationalism is not practised only by some well-known nationalist or political elites or 'successful businessmen', as Anderson indicated (1992, p.11). Thus, in case of the Kurds, long-distance nationalism is usually a phenomenon which permeates both the private and public lives of the Kurdish expatriates. The participation of the Kurds in long distance nationalism, which has previously been recognised as the 'victim diaspora', has been transformed into 'trans-border citizenship' (Khayati, 2008). This phenomenon has continued to develop visibly, especially since the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraqi Kurdistan and the Kurdish self-managed cantons in Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan).

8.9 A grassroots imagined community

The main reason this thesis adopts some elements of the modernist perspective is due to its focus on media as a place for the discursive articulation of national identity and that "the medium is the message" (McLuhan, 2008). In this sense, it can be argued that social media can connect private and public lives, the same assumption that Hobsbawm put forward in relation to the print and broadcast media. Although Anderson's description of the nation as

an 'imagined community' informed my thesis, I have applied it to the domain of Kurdish diaspora's social media with illustrations and cautions and in this section, I reflect more generally on the concept.

Since I began my research, I have been thinking whether or how the involvement of the Kurdish diaspora on Facebook may represent Anderson's concept of 'imagined community'. I addressed this question the literature (discussed in chapter six) indicated that the Internet, similar to print and broadcasting media, has contributed to the creation of 'imagined communities.' Kurdish practices in various kinds of modern media, and Kurds' efforts to construct, activate, and define their national identity can be plausibly understood within the concept of 'imagined communities.' By considering the main roles that the Internet and social media are playing in creating Kurdish identity online, Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' seems relevant. The observation shows that the Kurdish diaspora active on social media attempted have framed their culture and history in line with Kurdish nationalism and hence created the 'imagined community' of the nation. The established broadcast media have been creating this national imagination and disseminating it to the people. At this stage, however, an ordinary member of the Kurdish diaspora (especially the younger generation) is able to create and disseminate an understanding of his/her national identity. In this sense, as Anderson (2006) asserts, nations, similar to individuals, achieve their identity through the recitation of their biography or history (p.4). Therefore, the individual members of online communities can also do such a recitation or imagine themselves as belonging to nations through their interconnectedness by framing their historical and political narratives.

However, imagined community is more complex than it might seem at first. Although this dissertation applied Anderson's idea of 'imagined community' through online networking, it cannot be denied that the Kurds have imagined several other communities or at least four Kurdistans in addition to one Greater Kurdistan. The findings of the study indicate that Facebook offers a secure and free space to interact and speak with people who do not often have an opportunity to speak with in a face-to-face communication. Although the boundaries upon which the Kurdish nation is imagined are still 'limited' to geographic and political 'sovereignties,' the members of the Kurdish nation on social media are not imagined anymore because they are able to at least see the profiles of others and even

'meet' them online. They are not anonymous and imagined in the way Anderson suggests in writing that "even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the images of their communication" (Anderson, 2006, p, 47). Thus, this aspect of 'imagined community' provided by print or even broadcast media is different from a more concrete notion of community on the social media. In this respect, Anderson's 'imagined community' contrasts with what has been observed in the present study.

Moreover, in terms of the findings of this study, the modernist approach can be further challenged due to the fact that an abundance of examples exist indicating the role of ordinary members of a society in the production of national identity and national community without the influence of nationalist elites. Social media have provided every member of Kurdish society, particularly in the diaspora, with the opportunity to express their voices and to reach other members. In this regard, the concept of imagined community is not formed through centralisation or the one-to-many pattern of communication. However, the Kurdish imagined community has become decentralised multiple imagined communities in which the members can meet each other in online public spheres. In this sense, social media can contribute to the emergence and growth of a new, yet strong form of Kurdish nationalism which I call 'online grassroots nationalism.' It is a durable, decentralised form of nationalism that is being constructed from the bottom up.

The transformation of Kurdish diasporic nationalism into grassroots nationalism via social media has resulted in the powerful and active participation of Kurds both in the homeland and in the diaspora. This facilitates the growth of the alternative model for the construction of the national image of the Kurds and Kurdistan that is the popularisation and further spreading of Kurdish national discourse. In other words, the Kurdish diaspora's grassroots nationalism allows for a horizontal level of identity articulation through social media. Thus, in the process of online grassroots nationalism, the members of the Kurdish nation have become the producers and receivers of nationalist messages and thus create their own pluralistic and wider 'imagined' communities.

Although their attachment to their homeland is expressed through various means that serve to strengthen the ethno-national identity of Kurds, the fieldwork has also observed that social network websites have also been places where obstacles and fragmentations among

the Kurdish diaspora have re-emerged which arise from the existing social and cultural divisions as well as from several contesting political views and affiliations to different Kurdish parties. In other words, a significant part of the internal problems within Kurdish society both in the homeland and in the diaspora have relocated to the domain of social media while in conventional mainstream media, the owners of the media or nationalist/political elites are able to control the narratives and mask divisions.

Although these fragmentations among the members run counter to the conventional form of 'imagined communities,' they have brought about a new type of articulation of the Kurdish national discourse on social media. In other words, while ethnicity has motivated and mobilised Kurds both in the homeland and in the diaspora against their 'oppressors,' and the 'occupiers' of Kurdistan, as outsiders, the socially and politically fragmented nature of Kurdish society has simultaneously acted to delay the Kurds in their formation of a unifying and cohesive imagined community or the idea of a pan-Kurdish nationalism. However, it does not necessarily mean that the articulation of Kurdish national identity or Kurdish imagined community has been 'weakened', as indicated by Mahmod (2016), even though the process and quality of 'unification' has been affected. In other words, the over-articulation of the marginal identities, particularly dialects and political views, has resulted in the emergence of sub-national or minor discourses throughout Kurdish society, which has reduced the discourse of Kurdish nationalism and the Greater Kurdistan to the dialects, regions and religions of the Kurds. The most notable of these challenges, observed in the study, include linguistic and political fragmentations and these will be discussed in the next section.

8.9.1 Linguistic and politics challenges or further participation?

Language has played a very significant and influential role among the Kurds, which they regularly like to emphasise (Sheyholislami, 2011). As indicated by the findings, there is an expressed sense of ethnic identity among the Kurdish diaspora online and this is often articulated in the use, preservation and development of the Kurdish language. The emphasis on language indicates that the Kurdish diaspora on social media consider language as one of the most important elements of their ethnic and national identity. In this sense, language serves as a way of communication and shows the ethnic attachments of the users. However, this concern about the use and preservation of Kurdish language is related to the first

generation of Kurdish diaspora. The second generation has been noticeably indifferent about language and many young users expressed their feeling of Kurdayeti in English or the language of their country of residence.

Concerning the first generation of Kurdish diaspora, language was mostly used in order to distinguish the Kurds from other groups and became an important element of ethnic identification. Since it is regarded as a cultural result of Kurdish identity, they have contributed a lot to maintain and develop it. This use of the Kurdish language in daily online conversations can also be regarded as a tool for preserving the language. In this respect, language has been regarded as one of the most powerful elements to mobilise the first generation of Kurdish diaspora politically and the use of the language acted as a forum for further discussions on Kurdish culture, history and so on.

Despite the powerful mobilising role, due to the fragmented nature of Kurdish dialects and the lack of a standard language for the Kurds in all parts of Kurdistan and the diaspora, language has not been able to function as a unifying factor for the Kurds. This was evident in the fact that some Facebook or Twitter users of the Kurdish diaspora preferred to use English, Turkish, Persian or Arabic to express their nationalist aspirations or to communicate with other members from other parts of Kurdistan. This diversity of dialects further widened the existing gaps among the Kurdish diaspora members and separated the discourse of Kurdish nationalism by certain regions and dialects.

However, with respect to the younger or second generation of the Kurdish diaspora, language is not seen as a fragmenting issue since they are mainly using English or the languages of their host countries in their daily online communications. Throughout the observation, it was noticeable that the younger generation of the Kurdish diaspora, despite using languages other than Kurdish, articulated more common accord with regard to the values of the Kurdish national identity than the first generation did and the first generation mainly communicated in several dialects of Kurdish language.

Moreover, since the second generation has not experienced the actual fragmenting realities of Kurdish society as much as the first generation has, they seemed to be less biased regarding the issues in dispute. For example, they often appeared to avoid posting about the challenging subjects among the Kurdish political parties or the fragmented language discussions. The second generation's postings were usually referring to the Kurdish

ethnicity, the 'enemies of the Kurds,' 'Kurdish nation,' and the presentation of Kurds as people who are 'freedom fighters,' 'tolerant,' and 'anti-radicalists.' This is a particular representation of Kurdish national identity that has been influenced by the diaspora environment, the recent political developments in the Kurdish society, including the ISIS crisis, and the widespread use of social media by the younger generation of the Kurdish diaspora.

Moreover, as discussed above, the Kurdish members of diaspora have contributed to the further transnationalisation and glocalisation in regard to the Kurdish question through the use of social media. In this regard, the efforts of the Kurdish diaspora on social media related to the Kurdistan of Syria (Rojava) are worth mentioning. However, similar to other past events, the political divisions still hampered the Kurdish users to arrive at a consensus on issues related to Kurdish national identity or to present a unified image of Kurds to the outside. While the world regarded all groups of Kurdistan as one people or as 'Kurds' who are fighting ISIS and the 'occupiers of Kurdistan,' the Kurdish diaspora's social media users have been divided between two general areas of thought on the subject of political organisation. Although there are many other orientations, they can all be related to one of these dominant thoughts. The first group supported and posted contents on social media in favour of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq that obviously claimed to be 'nationalists' and advocated an independent state for the Kurds at least in the Kurdistan of Iraq. Although this thinking was often under the hegemony of the Kurdistan Democratic Party/Iraq headed by Masoud Barzani, the incumbent president of the Kurdistan region, there were many users from the Kurds of Iran, and other parts who advocated such an ideology. On the other hand, the second dominant group was mostly influenced by the ideology of Abdullah Öcalan and the PKK which included the majority of Kurdish diaspora users from Turkey and Syria. Although they do not make a claim for an independent nation-state[71] since they are looking for certain kinds of 'democratic confederation' or 'self-rule' governments, the existence of the powerful signifier of *Kurdayeti* throughout their discussions indicates that national identity is also still a dominant discourse for this group as well.

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[71] From its outset, the PKK claimed an independent state for Kurds through uniting the four part of Kurdistan. For further information, see the discussion on the PKK in the chapter three.

Similar to the language discussions mentioned above, the younger generation of the Kurdish diaspora were more reticent regarding the politically divisive discussions on Kurdistan. Their activities on the observed pages were rarely addressing the challenging questions. In other words, since many of them have not seen and experienced the internal disputes or wars among the Kurdish political organisations, they are unaware of these issues. During the observation, it became evident that those in the second generation of Kurdish diaspora were rarely involved in the disputes that resulted from the problems among the Kurdish political parties that were often heated controversies within the first generation and in the Kurdish language. What they believe and imagine about Kurdistan is a nation or a 'family' divided between several countries. This is the perception they tried to articulate and represent on social media to the outsiders.

The existence of linguistic and political differences is a barrier on the formation of a unitary notion of the Kurdish nation as portrayed by the Kurdish traditional media. However, it should not be interpreted as the destruction of the Kurdish imagined community. In this sense, it is important to refer to Mahmod (2016) who argues that the younger generation of the Kurdish diaspora is excluded from the 'imagined diaspora' of the Kurds. Nevertheless, the findings of this ethnography indicate that the notion of the Kurdish imagined community or imagined diaspora exist significantly in the Kurdish diaspora regardless of generation, gender and class background. However, this is the way of imagining Kurdistan, the language, and politics that make the first generation different from the second generation. The younger generation is excluded from the imagined community that is portrayed by the first generation of Kurdish diaspora, yet, they are present and active in forming a wider imagined community that is being created on the social media. In other words, we can argue that the Kurdish imagined community is still present visibly in the diaspora yet its articulation and representation has been transported into a new form in which there is no central direction and the imagined community is achieved through diversity, participation and pluralism.

Thus, I argue that the articulation of the diversities on social media indicates a transformation of the discourse of Kurdish nationalism into a more pluralistic and democratic ground for both the younger and older generations of the Kurdish diaspora. Also, the Kurdish national identity on social media does not follow the conventional

nationalism that emphasises the unification of all linguistic, cultural and political groups of Kurds. Rather, it has relocated these diversities into a participatory ground in which the differences and diversities are negotiated with the aim to focus on producing a participatory and pluralistic notion of Kurdish national identity. However, instead of creating one Kurdish cohesive imagined community, it is likely that Kurdish diaspora users produce several linked imagined communities from the Kurdish national movement.

Although the majority of the users' discussions were highly focused on politics in a general sense (rather than party politics), the study observed some pages that were less involved in any types of discussions which might be directly related to 'politics' or the challenging issues around Kurds and Kurdistan. In this regard they preferred to remain 'apolitical,' as some users mentioned. Similarly, the Kurdish diaspora's political activities varied considerably according to the personal, geographic, and social background of the people participating. The observation demonstrated that those Kurds who aimed to casually return to Iran or Turkey (as their profiles indicated and according to their comments) and wanted to visit their families and friends in the homeland used more self-censorship and showed less engagement in political postings that might have unpleasant consequences for them or their families in homeland. However, the abstention from obvious political discussions does not mean that they avoided other activities which might not seem to be 'political activism,' yet are considered to be elements of Kurdish nationalist discourse, e.g. culture, arts, and so forth.

There are two main reasons for the existence of such a strong emphasis on culture and tradition in the diaspora. Firstly, these are uncontroversial aspects of national identity, which allow diasporic Kurds to avoid divisive political issues. This option may not be available to Kurds in Kurdistan, or even in the region. Secondly, many of these diasporic Kurdish communities are located in multicultural states – the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, which have pluralist societies in which the private and social expression of culture of origin is compatible with political identification with the host country.

This is the point that makes the ethno-symbolist perspective relevant to the domain of the Kurdish national identity where it places emphasis on the reinterpretation of pre-existing cultural motifs and the reconstruction of earlier ethnic ties and sentiments (Smith, 2010). Most importantly, it suggests that the ethno-symbolist dimension of nationalism is

something used to avoid political differences. The Kurdish national identity is implied here through the historical perception of the Kurds and the particular image of the home, Kurdistan. Thus, tradition, culture and ethnicity become the guides for the representation and construction of the modern Kurdish national identity in the diaspora. The cultural or ethnic sentiments articulated in the 'non-political' and wider context of social media can potentially serve as nationalist representations. They are favourable to a broader understanding of nationalism among the diaspora users who have less opportunity for becoming involved in political activities. They have offered ordinary people who are less engaged in political activities a chance to adapt their cultural and ethnic notions of Kurdish national identity. Whereas this is not only because they are so profoundly embedded in the ordinary practices of Kurdish users, they often mediate historical happenings, cultural norms and their symbolic forms.

This may indicate that the Kurdish nationalist activities are not necessarily limited to the 'political' elements, although the goal of Kurdish nationalists is a political goal, i.e., a state. Likewise, social media have provided the Kurdish diaspora with new sources of expressing nationalism and these are encouraged and empowered by both cultural as well as political activism. In this regard, the cultural and 'apolitical' activities of the users do signify a nationalist connotation. The celebration of Newroz and other cultural activities (discussed in the previous chapter) are examples of such implication. The modernist theory within the particular domain of social media is usually considered as inefficient approach in terms of viewing historical, cultural and non-political feelings. Thus, applying a purely modernist approach to the national identity of the Kurdish diaspora on social media would lead to ignoring some of the voices that are not directed towards a political goal, but are part of Kurdish national identity.

This thesis argues that online media served as an alternative public space for the ordinary Kurdish people in the diaspora to get involved in discussions related to Kurdish national identity. While adopting some aspects of modernist perspective, it mainly applies an ethno-symbolist approach to the presence of Kurdish diaspora on the social media and considers the role of Kurdish ethnie as one of the raw materials of Kurdish modern nationalism. The application of the ethno-symbolist approach is about the aspects of the theory that focus on the role of ethnic identity, and the cultural symbols in the construction of the modern

Kurdish national identity. The repeated mentioning of several historical memorials, ethno-national myths and events, and the depiction of the tradition previously glorified by the offline nationalist discourses all subscribe to creating a nationally-demarcated public sphere which offers its users, all of whom it considers as members of Kurdish society, to deliberate and discuss a 'Kurdish nation.' Viewing the Kurdish nation from an ethno-symbolist perspective is essential in that it contributes to envisioning Kurdish communities, groups, dialects and religions as embedded from a common origin as well as a construction of the nation from diverse backgrounds.

In a word, the historical ethnic ties of the Kurds have found better opportunities on social media to be re-articulated with the aim of developing the Kurdish national identity in the modern form of a nation state. The Kurdish 'ethnie' has taken advantage of the new technologies to reproduce itself in the modern age, particularly in our online and social media age. Thus, the use of Kurdish ethno-national identity in this thesis refers to the political and national movements of Kurdish ethnie that categorise itself as a distinctive cultural and political unit distinct from other neighbouring nations. In this regard, the key aim is national self-determination either through local Kurdish autonomies within the current nation states, the actualisation of a confederal government system, or the establishment of an independent Kurdistan.

Chapter Nine: Concluding remarks

When you don't have a country of your own, you are like having nothing. I was on a bus on my way to home from work. There were only three passengers on the bus and we started a conversation. One [passenger] was an Australian and he asked us [the other two] where we were from. The other guy simply said 'I am from Bangladesh' and the Australian easily got the answer. Then he asked me the same question. I replied, 'I am from Kurdistan.' He said, 'oh, Kazakhstan... close to Russia? My girlfriend is from Russia...' Then I said 'no, Kurdistan… I am from Kurdistan… do you know that Kurdistan is not a country but we, the Kurds, feel we are one nation who are deprived of having a country... I spoke a lot to let him know about my actual nationality. In the end, he still did not understand and I had to say 'I am from Iran, but a Kurd from Iran' although that was not my desired answer!

The quote is part of a discussion thread Rebaz, a 40-year-old Kurdish Facebook user from Australia discussing his experience describing 'where he is from' with some foreigners. This experience recalls Edward Said (1995) who describes political statelessness in this way: "they [Palestinians] feel they have been excluded and denied their right to a history of their own. When you continually hear people say 'Well, who are you?' you have to keep asserting the fact that you do have a history, however, uninteresting it may appear in the very sophisticated world"(p.126). This perception and stigmatising sentiments resulting from the lack of a 'state' has been the main theme underlying the Kurdish diaspora's social media during this study.

The case of the Kurdish diaspora on social media demonstrates the significance of online media in the maintenance and rebuilding of national awareness beyond broadcast media and print. It also illustrates how the Internet and social media have permitted the involvement of a broader number of users in a more concrete imagining of the Kurdish nation by providing them with a 'public sphere' to articulate their hopes for a state of their own. The Kurdish users show how a mixture of audio-visual and textual forms of communication of social media can lead to the formation of a linear and directed process to develop grassroots online nationalism which will bring about the further pluralisation and democratisation of the Kurdish imagined national identity.

This study has explained the significance of the applied methodology and the investigation of social media as an online ethnographic area to uncover and examine Kurdish national

discourse through the comments, posts, and other sorts of audio-visual messages that were unedited. The methodology used in this dissertation is a mixture of approaches and techniques that have developed from several theories and practical reflections. To answer the core research question, the qualitative analysis method has been adopted to achieve the overall aim of the research and it has helped me attain a more profound comprehension of Kurdish nationalism in general and understand the online engagement of the Kurdish diaspora in particular. The representation of ethnicity, culture, homeland, religion and most importantly politics comprise the main themes that are the topics this study has discussed and analysed. However, the findings show that the powerful signifiers of 'Kurdish nationalism' and 'national identity' are evident in each of the main themes as well as the sub-themes. Thus, the Kurdish diaspora has been actively involved with social media in order to maintain, build and reproduce the Kurdish national identity through several mechanisms, such as, culture, language, religion, gender, entertainment, and so on. This new sort of personal interaction and national identity articulation on the part of a stateless diaspora provide an interesting and necessary subject in regard to research to look more closely at the way issues of political and national identity and social media are conceptualised in the academic literature. In short, the Kurdish national identity in the diaspora has been constructed and based upon the continuing process of strife and conflict over the homeland, the oppression of the occupiers, nostalgia and the most importantly, Kurdish statelessness.

9.1 A more inclusive nationalism

More than a century ago, Ernest Renan (1996) famously stated that the 'nation is a daily plebiscite.' This is a 'spiritual principle' that is constantly constructed and reproduced by the process of 'remembering' and 'forgetting.' In line with this assumption and the modernist approach to nationalism and national identity, this dissertation has aimed to obtain a better understanding of national identity that is still articulated by the Kurdish diaspora in the 21st century. As I have shown in the previous discussions, social media platforms are used to produce and reproduce these national sentiments in everyday life. This clearly indicates clear Kurdish nationalism is powerfully present through these new platforms yet in the new guise that was subject of this dissertation. In this sense, the

perception of place or homeland constitutes one essentially inseparable element of Kurdish nationalism that is reproduced everyday through social media.

Drawing on Anderson's argument about the role of the print media in fostering nationalism, this study argues that the bond of thinking and sentiments the Kurdish diaspora share have empowered the development of Kurdish nationalism. Although the current research adopts the terms 'imagined communities,' and 'long distance nationalism,' from Anderson, it claims that what is referred to as the Kurdish online imagined community and long distant nationalism are much broader and more complex than Anderson presented. Thus, this study redefined Anderson's concepts by investigating the arena of social media and the Kurdish diaspora as a stateless diaspora. In this sense, the notion of imagining the Kurdish nation has been reshaped and transformed into a new guise. According to Anderson's notion of 'imagined community,' the Kurdish nation is an imagined concept because the members of Kurdish societies will likely never see the rest of their people. Nevertheless, social media have provided the possibilities that the Kurdish imagined community has become more accessible and more populated than it has been. As discussed thoroughly in chapter seven and eight, it is very convenient for the Kurdish users to share their views on *Kurdayeti* and find their fellow Kurds everywhere in the world. While I confirm the existence of the articulated diversities throughout the Kurdish diaspora, I argue that these diversities are transformed in the pluralistic and participatory notion of unity among the Kurdish diaspora.

In other words, the daily activities of the ordinary Kurdish diaspora on social media have resulted in the transformation of Kurdish nationalism into an emerging 'grassroots nationalism' that encompasses more ordinary people, and is not limited to a few circles of political and nationalist elites. In this respect, the findings of the study will contrast with the modernist approach, particularly Gellner and Anderson who have emphasised the role of elites as the creators who have encouraged nationalist ideas. Therefore, if a few members of the Kurdish diaspora have been leaders in terms of spreading nationalist sentiments in some circumstances in connection with traditional media, the abundance of posts of diverse social media users has extended the virtual ground of Kurdish nationalism enough to gather a greater audience as well as international attention.

With a focus through the lens of national identity on the political and sociological implications of the Kurdish diaspora's collective discourses, and also on its actions on the Internet and via social media, this study has examined the distinctive roles that social media can play for the Kurdish diaspora in attempting to articulate the concept of a distinct stateless nation and engage in a nation-state building process. In other words, the discussions on social media have provided the opportunity to explore alternative minor discourses about Kurdish national identity in which ordinary users from the Kurdish diaspora have articulated their thoughts about Kurdish nationhood and statehood. This confirms previous studies by scholars who have investigated how suitable the Internet can work as a 'democratic public sphere' (Dahlberg, 2001) and contribute to the democratisation process of nations (Appadurai, 2002; Norris, 2001) in both circulating the notion of national identity and in redefining it through various social media possibilities.

Furthermore, whereas it is difficult to pinpoint the relationship between social media and identities, social media are viewed as empowering opportunities instead of destructive threats in terms of ethnicity, culture, politics and other components of Kurdish national identity. Although online networks, per se, have not been able to bring major changes in the political structure of the Kurdistan Region, Kurdish political parties or the countries occupying Kurdistan, their influential power is undeniable particularly in terms of the democratic mobilisation of the mass both in the diaspora and in the homeland. In this regard, the findings of this study are in line with the previous studies on the role of online media in promoting democracy and pluralism in the homeland (Keles, 2015; Norris, 2001; Papacharissi, 2010).

While the Kurdish conventional national identity could be observed through the discussions and comments of many users, social media offered the opportunity for those Kurdish diaspora's voices that were not heard through the mainstream media. Through this process of identity representation, online forums became locations for several challenges including self-narratives, history, languages, humours, and many others which all can denote the diversity of the Kurdish national identity. Although the online sampling and discussions of this research cannot be a representative example of the entire Kurdish diaspora and details about their background, gender, age, place of residence and so on, they can represent significant aspects of nationalism articulation that originate from a variety of the views.

In order to analyse the discursive interactions of the Kurdish diaspora users on Facebook, this study has adopted an ethno-symbolist approach and some selective elements of modernist approach to show how national identity can be constructed and reconstructed through the social media of Kurdish diaspora communities. In this sense, it argues that, in order to understand the articulation and construction of Kurdish national identity on social media neither theory alone explains the recent Kurdish diaspora's online activism therefore both approaches are taken into account together. Despite drawing on the two perspectives, theoretically, this research has approached with a degree of scepticism, viewing the existing conventional arguments from a distance in order to provide alternatives for the conceptualisation of the Kurdish diasporic nationalism. Here my argument is that the online activities of Kurds in the diaspora have attempted to raise ethno-national awareness among the Kurdish community, i.e., the diasporic community. Thus, in addition to the reproduction of pluralistic, democratic and grassroots form of Kurdish imagined communities, the online activities of Kurdish diaspora and the circumstances surrounding their trauma and mass forced migration inform their formation of a special collective identity serving as a major theme for their long-distance nationalism and other political activities mostly concentrated on their homeland.

In this research I have tried to identify how the members of Kurdish diaspora view themselves within the existing Kurdish national discourse that considerably focuses on unity and social cohesion among the Kurds as characteristics of the Kurdish national identity. The findings of my research would not prescribe a wide-ranging definition of Kurdish national features that sensibly define Kurdayeti in the diaspora in the new century. Yet, in line with Sheyholislami (2011) and Mahmod (2016), I also confirm that the discursive formation of Kurdish national identity is indeed a multi-aspect task that results in bringing about several imaginations about Kurds and *Kurdayeti*. In this regard, different interpretations of Kurdish national identity emerge and the social media presented a more realistic perception of Kurdish national identity by revealing the gaps, challenges, and the diverse nature of Kurdish society in the diaspora.

Despite the existence of these gaps and diversities, they are less articulated and visible while the Kurdish diaspora is faced with the challenges from 'outsiders,' notably the states, groups and nations that are regarded by the Kurds as 'occupiers'. Thus, to an extent, the

Kurdish diaspora's nationalist practices on social media can be interpreted as the practice of 'unity through diversity.' In other words, they express a strong sense of unity against a threat from outsiders while their diversities are more articulated in normal situations. This indicates that the Kurdish diaspora can influence the production of national identity on social media and similarly that they can be influenced by social media.

While I acknowledge the existence of diversities and consider them as a way of transformation of Kurdish national identity into a participatory ground, I believe it is too early to argue that the notion of Kurdish imagined community is damaged and 'weakened' or to exclude the younger generation of the Kurdish diaspora from the imagined Kurdish diaspora, as Mahmod (2016) argued. According to my findings, the notion of the imagined and horizontal community of the Kurdish nation is slowly transforming into the participatory notion of the imagined community in which unity is produced through diversity. This not only includes the younger generation of Kurdish diaspora, it also indicates that they are producing Kurdish nationalism in a new way in which the linguistic and political fragmentations are less pronounced for the sake of the broader concepts of the Kurds and Kurdistan. Therefore, social media can also contribute to the production, articulation and dissemination of national identity amongst the younger generation of the Kurdish diaspora, even though this broadens the diverse and participatory notion of national identity.

Moreover, through the creation of a user-generated platform, such as, social media, the active members of Kurdish diaspora "use their human capital and e-skills to produce cultural, linguistic and political content as bloggers, video producers, authors and opinion makers in virtual networks" (Keles, 2016, p. 8). The shift to user-generated sites has been a substantial improvement of the Kurdish online experience. In this era, more Kurdish individuals, groups and political parties have become involved online rather than just relying on the few websites set up by some technically knowledgeable experts. In this sense "aspects, such as, the visual layout and design effects are closely related to Kurdish identity politics through references to the geographical, territorial and cultural aspects of Kurdistan, such as, the national colours (red, green and yellow), the map of greater Kurdistan, the flag, and Kurdish cities and natural world" (p. 8).

Last and not least, national identity is a fluid process that is goes on every day. In accordance with Castells (2010), this dissertation takes into account both subjective and

objective factors in the construction of Kurdish national identity in the diaspora. It argues that Kurdish individuals and social media users of the diaspora cultivate the raw materials of identity (subjective factors of Kurdish identity construction) and readjust their meanings to social requirements and cultural projects deeply rooted in the social structures and spatial-temporal frameworks of Kurdish society (objective factors of Kurdish identity construction). Kurds in the diaspora have attempted to achieve nationalist aspirations to build, activate, define, and redefine their national identity in new social media spaces. In this regard, Kurdish symbols, nationalistic discourses and interactions in social media are viewed as the best way to disseminate and define a specific identity for the Kurds, and thereby for them to distinguish themselves as a stateless nation online. In so doing, they have moved beyond the features of a 'dormant' diaspora toward an 'active diaspora'(Sheffer, 2003).

9.2 The transnationalisation and glocalisation of Kurdish question

This study contends that the emergence of new media has made it possible for Kurds both in the homeland and in the diaspora to create and circulate their views and 'nationness' freely and openly without access to the official and unofficial media of the countries that encompass Kurdistan. This indicates that the trend of globalisation, especially the development of communication technologies and transnational networks, has provided the Kurds with opportunities for identity articulation and reproduction. Thus, in accordance with scholars, such as, Van Bruinessen (2000) and Khayati (2008) the study argues that the forced migration of Kurds has resulted in the transnationalisation of Kurdish political identity as a major aspect of the Kurdish nationalist movement.

Of note about the Kurdish online diaspora is the construction of a possible digital and 'glocalised' and most importantly decentralised public spaces that cross borders. In other words, the reference to the famous Kurdish historical or natural memorials and the depiction of Kurdish traditions that are already sanctified by nationalist and political elements all denote the development of a nationally-demarcated public sphere that allows the users to discuss Kurdish national identity and statehood. In such spaces, discussions about the beauty of animals, trees or mountains will be represented as the beauty of the 'nation', lead to other discussion, for example, the backwardness, unemployment, oppression, education and other issues in the homeland.

Since the Kurds do not have an officially recognised country to call their own, many members of the Kurdish diaspora have chosen to disregard the existing 'unwilling' nation-states' borders dividing Kurdistan, and have endeavoured to fill that vacuum through creating and disseminating discourses about a Kurdish state on the Internet, specifically on Facebook. They were easily connected to their Kurdish fellows both in exile and in the homeland, and the members simply became both senders and recipients of the messages. By practicing their own 'Kurdish' identity, Kurdish individuals were capable of generating and accordingly influencing other members of online and social media communities without the restrictions of the offline forms of communication.

If we consider the notion of diaspora as "transnational social organization relating both to the country of origin and the country of exile" (Wahlbeck, 1999, p.179), we can obtain a deeper sense of the social and political reality of the Kurdish diaspora. In this respect, expressions, including *e-mail nationalism* and *Internet nationalism* (Eriksen, 2007), indicate the significant role of communication technology in the extension of this concept, a condition which reminds us the way newspaper or print-capitalism facilitated the growth of nationalism and thus the imagination and construction of nations and nation-states.

9.3 Online media versus mainstream media

The construction of national identity by the Kurdish diaspora on social media is different from that of print and broadcast media concerning their representation and sharing of power. Comparing the Internet and the Kurdish mainstream media, the distinction is connected to the literacy of the viewers, listeners and users. Traditional broadcasting is audio-visual based and can transcend literacy barriers. In addition to offering the two modes mentioned a written based mode is also available on the social media that has become a distinctive element with respect to the articulation of Kurdish national identity.

In general, social media have influenced the construction and articulation of national identity among the Kurdish diaspora in two main ways. First, social media offer places for participation and can be regarded as 'public spheres' for identity construction by ordinary members of the Kurdish diaspora. In this sense, they can influence many common aspects of social and political life including the national identity narratives and they have the possibility to reach all members of Kurdish society including the diaspora and the homeland, simply by

access to the Internet and having an account on one of the social network sites. Second, social media have enabled the Kurdish diaspora to further interact with people and communities rather than the Kurds. This is the very unique opportunity that has not been available on Kurdish mainstream media.

9.4 Limitations of the project

While the investigation of Kurdish nationalism and diaspora offers fascinating avenues for investigation, at the same time, these topics remain very challenging and demanding. The Kurdish question is discussed and followed from many aspects, which sometimes, has made research on the topic problematic, biased and politicised. This has also resulted in different interpretations about Kurdish nationalism. Besides, because of the timing and personal restrictions and also due to the scarcity of information on the population of Kurdish diaspora there are still many issues that remain outside the scope of this study. These problems are exacerbated by the rich complexity of the Kurdish multi-dialect diaspora, the divided politics of the political parties, the diverse culture, and the ambiguous history.

Likewise, social media ethnography is quite new in the area of Kurdish studies, thus multiple issues still remain undiscovered. First, national identity is a fluid concept and it is very difficult to classify it into specific categories and codes. During the ethnography, one of the main challenges has been how to classify such a complex subject into several themes and subthemes, as the qualitative content analysis required. Nevertheless, these themes and categories overlap each other in many cases. For example, language, music, and arts can be regarded as parts of both ethnicity and culture. This made the distinction of the themes and the research process challenging. Moreover, due to the diverse and complex backgrounds of the Kurdish users, the interpretation of the comments and messages has not always been easy. In this sense, contrasts sometimes existed regarding the meaning of the post and what I understood. For instance, the post 'We are proud to be Kurd' can be interpreted as a political, ethnic, and cultural, and nationalist claim. Also, from the many that were reviewed, there may have been cases that did not signify any political, ethnic, cultural, national or religious purpose however I might have interpreted a strong message from it.

Additionally, during the study the reliability of the data was another significant issue. The interactions and communications on social media cannot be straightforwardly relied upon

and confirmed especially if the users or page administrators used pseudonyms. It is also difficult to count the users and participants in a discussion thread. And even though this might be for the public good or for the privacy of users, as mentioned in many of the discussion threads, there could be further studies on the control and ethics in the Kurdish diaspora's social media use considering the assumption that online social media provide participatory and inclusive grounds for the articulation of national identity and statehood. Also, although social media can be beneficial and convenient instruments to use in collecting data and raising cultural, national, political or identity awareness, if not used carefully, they may have the potential to lead to unfair negative interpretations, imprecise information and possibly unjustified criticism. Similarly, while participation is often anonymous on many social media platforms, "participants are likely to have a polarized stance, opinion or critique" (Kasavana, 2008).

Another issue encountered in this research is the transient and unstable nature of the Kurdish question that is relevant to the Kurdish case both in the homeland and the diaspora. For example, during this research, many radical and geopolitical changes occurred in the Middle East that directly or indirectly affected Kurdish nationalism both in the homeland and in the diaspora. In the countries of Iraq and Syria, the emergence and growth of ISIS continues to be an influencing factor that that the Kurds are directly involved. In Turkey, during one year, the situation of the Kurdish parliamentary political party, the HDP, underwent critical changes from the participation in the parliament in 2015 to the imprisonment of almost all of their MPs and co-leaders in late 2016. Due to the fact that the changes are so quick it is difficult to even examine or predict the officially announced agenda of Kurdish political forces or the state occupying Kurdistan. For example, during the last two years the PKK and PYD changed their national strategic goals frequently as a result of regional changes. Once they were advocating an autonomous Kurdish region for the Syrian Kurds, later, they included Arabs and other ethnic groups under their control and while naming their government they avoided using the name of Kurdistan. Then, they decided to have several self-managed cantons instead of one autonomous Kurdish government. Recently, they are going to have an autonomous Kurdish government that is under negotiation with the Syrian government, Russia and the U.S.

9.5 Implications for future studies

Since the field of diaspora studies, especially diasporic social media, has formed the focus of academic research only recently, this area is still open for conceptual and theoretical discussions. Therefore, despite the fact that there are a number of theoretical and empirical studies related to the diasporic media and national identity, a comparison of Kurdish media on social media with those of other diaspora communities is beyond the theoretical and empirical scope of this study. Future research that goes beyond the necessarily limited scope of this study can make important contributions toward an understanding of the online Kurdish diaspora compared to other online stateless and state-based diaspora. Here, I would recommend a comparative study of Kurdish diaspora with at least one stateless diaspora, e.g., the Palestinian and one state based diaspora, e.g., the Armenian or Jewish diaspora. In addition, political theorisation about the involvement of diasporas in social media and the way they articulate their national identity will become more reliable if it is grounded in broader fieldwork consisting of a very large number of social media users who may also be accessible for face-to face interviews during the observation. This was much beyond the scope and potential of this study and required more time and financial support.

While I argue that social media as examples of participatory public spaces broaden the democratisation of Kurdish nationalism, it does not denote that I am not aware of the potential polarisations with the Kurdish national identity throughout the diaspora and the homeland. In general, the notion that social media offer a voice to marginalised and voiceless cultural, ethnic, religious or national identities and this could be examined further while they are going to be applied to the Kurdish question.

Moreover, there are requirements for studies of the political economy of Kurdish media both online and offline, whether in the diaspora or in the homeland. The mutual economic and political relationships between the Kurds of the homeland and the diaspora have influenced the political economy of the Kurdish media. This presents a fascinating subject for future research and will provide further information on issues, such as, politics and national identity which cannot be entirely independent from the funding sources of the Kurdish media whether it is television or a Facebook page.

This study supports the claim that the existence of several diversities with a nation can be regarded as a value, not a threat to the construction and representation of national identity

and statehood. This will prepare the Kurds for learning through difference and broadening their scope *Kurdayeti* much beyond that which they had assumed in the 20th century. Thus, further research is required to conceptualise the concepts, such as, the democratisation of Kurdish national identity, and the transformation of Kurdish nationalism from a purely ethnic-based into a civic arena considering the differences that exist in Kurdish societies.

Finally, the emergence of several minor or major issues, including the linguistic and political fragmentations, has opened up the discourse of Kurdish nationalism to many new challenges. Thus, Kurdish nationalism is undergoing a change in order to be able to accommodate the ethnic, linguistic, political and other diversities within the Kurdish diaspora and, in a broader context, the Kurdish national identity. In this sense the past and current gaps that exist offline have not only been reproduced on social media rather they are further articulated and manifested which has resulted in transforming the Kurdish nationalism into a new era which I have called online grassroots Kurdish nationalism. Although these diversities have slowed the process of Kurdish unified imagined communities, the thesis would consider them as indications of the further democratisation and pluralisation in the production of the Kurdish national cause. Thus, another new question related to the future of Kurdish nationalism will be whether it can adopt these democratic opportunities in the way of constructing a Kurdish national state. If the answer to this question will be yes, this would be something new in the context of the Middle East in which pluralism and democracy have been missing pieces of nation-building and nationalist projects in the region throughout the 20th century.

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