Education in Kurdistan Region at the Intersection of Nationalism and Democracy

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This dissertation studies the condition of formal education in Kurdistan Region-Iraq by taking a critical theoretical approach to examine major educational policy documents in both K-12 and higher education. The critical examination of the documents reveals major policy frameworks, which are related to the Kurdish nationalist agenda of establishing a nation-state. These policy frameworks in education are: Kurdish nationalism, democratization and bureaucratization. Analyzing the documents reveals the intricate relationship among these policy frameworks in forming the overall national agenda of state building of Kurdistan Regional Government, as well as their relationship with developing and perpetuating various educational issues in Kurdistan Region. By analyzing the documents through a critical democratic lens, I elaborate on the ways in which Kurdish ethno-nationalism, a titular, rhetorical and institution- and market-friendly notion of democracy, and an overriding, top-down bureaucratization, all within the political context of establishing a Kurdish nation-state for the past 25 years, have rendered a non-democratic, socially unjust and oppressive educational system. The main argument in this dissertation concerns presenting a transformative democratic framework in education as an alternative to the current pervasive nationalist paradigm. Rather than framing education and society within the paradigm of Kurdish ethno-nationalism, which depends on the exercise of power, hegemony, violence and indoctrination within the parameters of a modern nation-state, the transformative democratic framework, which promotes democratic relationships based on substantive moral values, such as equity,
inclusion, empathy and human relatedness, can become the basis for establishing a more equitable and just society in Kurdistan Region.
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This introductory chapter includes a general description of the topic, which is an examination of the condition of formal education in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR). Through a critical examination of major educational policy documents issued by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the KR parliament in the past 25 years, I study the condition of formal education in relation to nationalism and democracy as two major frameworks that have shaped these policies. Understanding the political endeavors and experiences of the KRG in the past 25 years helps to elaborate on the relationship between nationalism and democracy and the current condition and direction of education in KR. A holistic, in-depth and critical examination of the nationalistic and democratic frameworks and the conflicting and/or compatible attitudes that these frameworks postulate in KR’s educational system is significant in order to not only elaborate on the position and direction of formal education but also arrive at a possible educational process that goes beyond the issues and limitations of schooling in its current form. In other words, the current condition of formal education in KR is better understood when it is linked with the political and cultural conditions around the formation and functioning of the KRG. As such, I present appropriate background information on the political and social history of Kurdish nationalism and processes of state building in the Iraqi Kurdistan in the past 25 years, which are encompassed in the formation of the KRG in 1992. I also elaborate on some of the major educational issues, which prompt a critical examination of educational policies in order to present the major argument in this dissertation. I argue that the educational issues in KR are better understood in relation to the Iraqi Kurdish endeavors to consolidate a Kurdish national identity that has been geared towards establishing a modern Kurdish nation-state. In other words, I argue that the educational issues in KR are closely related to the social, political, and cultural forces that have accompanied and directed the educational processes within the parameters of modern state structures, such as the educational system. Therefore, I examine the condition of formal education in KR in relation to nationalism and democracy as they
pertain to the recent Kurdish nationalist endeavors in forming an independent modern Kurdish nation-state in northern Iraq.

1.2 The Iraqi Kurds in a de facto but possibly independent state

Amidst the numerous crises and events that are taking place in the Middle East, Soderberg and Phillips (2015) believe that for policymakers “One area that deserves more analysis and attention is the incipient independence of Iraqi Kurdistan” (p. vii). Like other nationalism in the Middle and Near East, Kurdish nationalism\(^1\) has emerged after the World War I in the form of a political movement aiming for the creation and consolidation of a modern nation-state. The Kurdish nationalist project has gone through various forms and intensities. However, none has been as keen and socio-politically viable as the conditions that emerged after the popular uprising of 1991 in the northern provinces of Iraq where Kurds mostly live (known as Iraqi Kurdistan Region). Even though previous Kurdish nationalist surges and mobilizations have impacted negotiations with the central Iraqi government on the various political formations and identities of the Iraqi state (Kirmanj, 2013; Bengio, 2012; Natali, 2005; O’Leary & Salih, 2005), the socio-political and socio-economic realities that came about after the elections and the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in 1992 consolidated Kurdish nationalism in Iraq as a project for an independent Kurdish state. According to Aziz (2009), “the real history of the consolidation of a Kurdish national identity and nation building in Iraqi Kurdistan, started after March 1990 [1991], and the 19th May elections of 1992” (p. 356, sic).

Many studies and texts on the Kurdish people in the Middle East refer to the Kurds as a nation without a state. Eriksen (2010) elaborates that the term ‘nations without a state’ is used as a common terminology for ‘proto-nations’. Proto-nations are groups who

\(^1\) Taken generally, ‘Kurd’ and ‘Kurdish nationalism’ imply Kurdish populations and nationalist movements in and across the nation-states of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. However, the focus of this study is particularly directed towards the Kurdish population and nationalist movement in Iraq.
have political leaders who claim that they are entitled to their own nation-state and should not be ‘ruled by others’. These groups, short of having a nation-state, may be said to have more substantial characteristics in common with nations…than with either urban minorities or indigenous peoples. They are always territorially based; they are differentiated according to class and educational achievement, and they are large groups.

According to Smith (1986), the Kurds in Iraq are an ethnie engaged in a process of nation building whether or not this leads to “independent statehood” (p. 129). As Aziz (2009) argues, “modern Kurdish national identity is a twentieth century phenomenon” particularly because of the arrival of modernization to the Kurds very recently (p. 220) as well as the historical development of the Iraqi political culture in the twentieth century (Ahmed, 2015; Aziz, 2009; Natali, 2005; O’Leary & Salih, 2005). Aziz (2009) argues that the modern Kurdish nationalism in Kurdistan Region “can be regarded as state seeking and nation-building” (p. 360). Based on the experience in last 25 years of Kurdish self-governance, the processes of institutionalization in Kurdistan Region (KR) have not been “in a fully self-sufficient, stand-alone manner, but as a de facto Kurdish state where there is an organized political leadership which has risen to power through democratic elections, received popular support, and has achieved sufficient capacity to provide governmental service, effective control is maintained internally and regionally, and is capable of entering into relations with other states” (Aziz, 2009, p. 360, Italics in original). Even though, as Soderberg and Phillips (2015) have reported, “Iraqi Kurds have been building a de facto independent state since 1991” (p. vii, Italics in original), KR is currently moving towards full independence from Iraq (p. 26; also Rubin, 2016).

Fulfillment of the nationalist principle of self-rule is at the heart of politicized Kurdish nationalism. The significance of the preservation of the idea of the state for Kurdish nationalism is reflective of the modern nationalist discourse and sentiment. Gellner, (1983) argues: “Nationalism holds that [nations and the states] were destined for each other; that either without the other is incomplete, and constitutes a tragedy” (p. 6). Even though the formation of the KRG in 1992 was not the beginning of the process of Kurdish nation-building, it has been the start of “the real history” of its consolidation.
KRG has been the single example of a Kurdish modern quasi-state, which has used most, if not all the modern state instruments and bureaucracies. “In the first decade of the 21st century, Iraqi Kurdish nationalism has become the most highly developed form of Kurdish nationalism among the entire Kurdish people” (Gunter, 2013, pp. 37-38). The significant development in the Kurdish nationalist project, hence, is correlated to the Kurdish actualization of the self-rule principle of nationalism.

Soderberg and Phillips (2015) believe that an independent Kurdish state is a matter of *de jure*, which needs to be backed by the international community. However, an independent Kurdish state in Iraq will have different local, regional and international impacts, which render Kurdish state building a challenging process (Rubin, 2016). Kurds see the existing nation-states in the Middle East, which came about as a result of the Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916, as a historical injustice because the agreement by the British and French colonial forces resulted in dividing the Kurdish people and land on the emerging nation-states. In other words, the nationalist Kurds consider the nation-states of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria as antithetical to their right of a sovereign nationhood. Consequently, as an independent state, KR will greatly impact the current Middle Eastern nation-states where Kurds live. As Soderberg and Phillips (2015) argue, “Iraqi Kurdistan’s march toward independence, even with careful consultation, risks destabilizing neighboring countries with Kurdish populations. The international community, too, will face challenges as Iraqi Kurds consolidate their state” (p. vii). When it comes to the internal front, Soderberg and Phillips also believe that a “coherent coordinated plan for capacity-building in Iraqi Kurdistan” in the process of building an independent Kurdish state does not exist whether internally or by the international community (p. 23). The inattention to capacity building has led the forces involved in the state-building process, especially the internal forces, to utilize traditional means and methods, such as depending on nationalism and modernization processes. “The characteristics of the political system [in KR] can be seen to have roots in the decades of political development before the 1990s” (Stansfield, 2003, p. 177). Furthermore, Aziz (2009) argues that the KRG “does not at present possess a broadly based democratic culture and leave unanswered questions about the prospects for its emergence in the future” (p. 360). Although the formation of the Kurdistan National Assembly (the
Parliament) has been the main indicator of democratization in KR, most people in Kurdistan, however, consider it a very weak assembly (Aziz, 2009). Furthermore, according to Carver (2002), the Kurdish authorities in KR have not been able to provide adequate protection to international standard for the people of Kurdistan (p. 83).

The current condition of the educational system in KR is intertwined with the political and cultural conditions. The KRG has been involved, from its start in 1992, in reforming the educational system and rebuilding its infrastructure, prioritizing the provision of access to schooling, particularly in Kurdish. The government also focused on reforming teacher education programs and school curricula. However, the issue of an inappropriate, ineffective and unresponsive educational system at both the K-12 and higher education levels in KR has become a public concern, a concern that has increased in level and scope particularly after 2003. Critics and government officials agree that illiteracy among the population in KR is still high. The curriculum is still limiting students’ opportunities to pursue and “advance their professional goals…Teaching is not a respected or highly valued profession in Iraqi Kurdistan; most teachers enter the profession because they did not qualify for advancement in other fields” (Soderberg & Phillips, 2015, p. 38).

1.3 Research focus

The socio-economic developments that tend to accompany the running of a highly bureaucratized administration have influenced the advancement of the Iraqi Kurdish nationalist discourse. I examine the nature and scope of the education through which the modern Iraqi Kurdish national identity and political culture are formed in relation to the processes of nation-state building. My examination involves the educational practices of the KRG as a modern quasi-state, and the influences of nationalism, as conceptualized mainly by Gellner (1983) and Anderson (2006), on those practices. In this dissertation, I take into consideration Anderson’s (2006) proposition, that distinguishing communities are to be understood “by the style in which they are imagined” (p. 6). Anderson’s proposition has led me to consider the relationship between Kurdish nationalism as the
process of ‘imagining communities’ (Anderson, 2006) and the system through which the acts of imagining take place. Nationalism is a complex, self-realizing and self-fulfilling process of creating and imagining the idea of nation, which is bounded by the interplay of mythology, power, hegemony, and emotional and symbolic force in drawing the boundaries of a people’s identity (Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 2006; Eriksen, 2010). Hence, the relationship between this complex interplay and the KRG political system and structures, particularly the educational system, requires serious critical scrutiny. Kirmanj (2014) states: “It is well-established that modern education systems and schooling are among the most important agents of nation-building” (p. 367). Education has been the medium for nationalism not only to invent the nation but also to bring the society into line with the nationalist imperative encompassed in the industrialized, modern nation-state (Gellner, 1983, p. 111). State-run educational systems are not simply tools for shaping and maintaining the boundaries of the nation. Rather the very doctrine of nationalism and its dispersion depends on education. Nationalism depends on education as a “specialized plant” to produce the kind of culture with which the nationalist state needs to be congruent (Gellner, 1983). The role of formal education in this complex relationship is to become the arena for the provision of “conscious design, supervision, surveillance or special nutrition” that are required to differentiate the cultivated cultural norms and traditions, what Gellner (1983) calls the “high culture,” from the uncultivated ones. High cultures, according to Gellner (1983), are “standardized, literacy- and education-based systems of communication” (p. 54). Such systems of education nonetheless become very much dependent on the political and systematic support of the state to a point that the state and the educational system become organically connected.

Educational researchers, teachers, administrators and policymakers in KR criticize the processes of formal education in KR. Most critics agree that Kurdistan’s educational system, at both K-12 and university levels, suffers from foundational, systematic and practical issues (Abdullah, 2010; Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Saeed, 2008; Wahab, 2014; Omer, 2014; Omer, 2015). Through engaging in the educational issues, critics hope to shed light on some of the fundamental social and political issues in KR, particularly the assumed inability of the formal schooling system to significantly influence the political, social and economic direction of the society. The critics claim that the educational system in KR is a
continuation of the Iraqi Ba’thist educational system, which the KRG has adopted without significantly changing it. The critics agree that the educational processes in the past 25 years of Kurdish self-governance have suffered as a result of lack of a comprehensive national educational vision as well as the political and structural complexities in the Kurdish approach to governance (Omer, 2015; Omer, 2014; Wahab, 2014; Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Abdullah, 2010; Saeed, 2008). Among the main issues in KR schooling system are violence and harassment (Saeed, 2004; 2008), issues and challenges for human rights, equality and democracy (Wahab, 2012; Osler & Yahya, 2013), indoctrination and rote memorization as the dominant teaching and learning methods, and unbalanced power relations between students and teachers (Saeed, 2008; Kirmanj, 2014), and systemic oppression and exclusion from decision-making (Saeed, 2008; Wahab, 2014).

By considering the Kurdish self-governing experience in KR in the past 25 years in relation to the educational issues, in this dissertation I examine the political and systematic support that the KRG has presented in developing and maintaining the current educational system. In other words, I examine the organic relationship between the education policies that have supported the current educational system and the Kurdish quasi-state in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, particularly on a path towards independence. In light of the major educational issues and the political, social and economic endeavors of the KRG in the past and its prospective future, the aim of this investigation is to answer the main research question: What kind of education do we need to have in KR in order to establish a more equitable and just society?

In the process of answering the main research question, this dissertation investigates the relationship between Kurdish nation-state building and the educational issues, which will be guided by the following sets of subsidiary questions in order to articulate the main thesis. The first set of questions is related to the nature of the educational issues in relation to educational policy in KR: What are the reasons that make the foundational, systematic and practical issues in education prevalent in KR? Where do

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2 The Arab Socialist Ba’th (or Ba’ath) Party-Iraq Regional Branch was led by Saddam Hussein from 1979-2006.
the current principles and approaches in education and policymaking intersect with the prevalent non-democratic practices in schools and society? What policy frameworks manifest themselves through these issues?

The second set of questions is related to the nature and the persistence of the current educational system: What are the reasons that perpetuate the particular form and system of education in KR? Even though the Kurds in Iraq have been administering their own social and political affairs encompassed in the KRG for the past 25 years, why is their educational system still inflicted with the qualities of the political and social system against which they have been revolting for the most part of the 20th century? Why is the KRG unable to depart from the previous Iraqi Ba'thist educational paradigm? What are the reasons behind the failure of the KRG to go beyond the dominant policy frameworks or to critically engage in foundational questions in its educational reform endeavors?

The third set of subsidiary questions is related to the Kurdish self-governing experience and the socio-political relationships in KR: How has the Kurdish nationalist movement in KR approached the governance of education in relation to its state building agenda in the past 25 years? How do the systematic and practical principles of Kurdish national identification and governance in KR shape the socio-political and socio-cultural relationships in education? What alternative frameworks can be developed in KR in order to offer possibilities of a different educational experience in KR?

The major focus of this thesis requires a critical understanding of the current condition of the educational system in KR. Such a critical understanding entails examining the issues in the foundations, administrative structure, and schooling system and practices in relation to the overarching theoretical and political frameworks in educational policymaking within the Kurdish endeavors of nation-state building. One can engage with the main research question and the subsidiary questions in different ways. For example, one can conduct a sociological analysis of the situation by conducting surveys and interviews, or conduct an ethnographic study of schools and classroom practices. This thesis focuses primarily on macro policies. I will be examining major educational policies produced for both the K-12 and higher education by the KRG in the
past 25 years. I conduct a critical document analysis of educational policies mainly because the policy documents can reveal KRG educational vision, philosophy and tendencies, which I will examine in relation to the main question. The major reason why I examine educational policies in order to answer the main research question is that policies can greatly influence the direction that education takes. By educational policy I mean public, state-sanctioned initiatives in the form of moral, legal, political and material power utilized as input into designing, initiating and directing social, political, and economic processes in educational institutions for the purpose of accomplishing general and specific goals. Educational policies are usually designed by governments “to improve student academic performance and social development as well as the management and operation of the schools they attend” (Sykes, Schneider, & Ford, 2009, p. 1). Educational policy, according to Bascia, Cumming, Datnow, Leithwood, and Livingstone, (2005), is most basically “a rational plan, consciously articulated by an authoritative body, usually a government or governmental agency, codified in text such as law or regulation which articulates clear expectations for behaviour and explicitly or implicitly reasserts the formal authority of government in requiring that behaviour” (p. xii). According to Heck (2004), “Policies are developed and implemented to advance particular political viewpoints or to address problems perceived as pressing” (p. 1). Sykes et al. (2009) refer to policymaking as “the process through which rules and regulations are adopted” and the developments that these rules and regulations entail (p. 1). Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, and Henry (1997) elaborate on the extent of policy beyond its recorded accounts, and highlight that “policy is much more than a specific policy document or text. Rather, policy is both process and product” (pp. 24-25). Sykes et al. (2009) elaborate that “policy research traverses the full spectrum of issues in education, from governance and finance to curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, and across all levels of the educational system, from the federal government to the classroom” (p. 1). According to Heck (2004), “understanding the political dynamics that accompany policy activity” is one of the aims that “form the basis for conducting policy research” (p. 1). Heck (2004) refers to three main differences between policy research and basic social research or technical research:

First, policy research focuses on problems that have drawn considerable political attention, and it generally seeks a higher utility of results to generate greater
understanding of policy issues, actions, and impacts in resolving social problems… Second, because issues, actions, and solutions can be politicized, there can be great interest in the results of policy studies that address policy-makers’ aims… Third, temporal issues and the observation of change are also central to research on educational policy. Policy develops, is implemented, and produces impacts over a considerable period of time. (pp. 186-188)

1.4 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework adopted in this thesis is a combination of the following related theoretical stances: critical theory, critical pedagogy, critical democracy, and anti-oppressive framework.

Critical theory is a multi- and transdisciplinary social theoretical framework that emerged from the works of certain members of the Frankfort School and their contemporaries (Darder, 2005; Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003; Peters, Lankshear, & Olssen, 2003; Giroux, 2003; Kincheloe, 1999). As both a school of thought and a process of self-conscious critique, critical theory prompts “a commitment to penetrate the world of objective appearances to expose the underlying social relationships they often conceal” (Giroux, 2003, p. 28). McLaren (2003) explains that critical theory encompasses a multiplicity of dialectical theories, which recognize the problems of society as more than simply isolated events of individuals or deficiencies in the social structure. Rather, these problems form part of the interactive context between individual and society. The individual, a social actor, both creates and is created by the social universe of which he/she is part. Neither the individual nor society is given priority in analysis: the two are inextricably interwoven, so that reference to one must by implication mean reference to the other. Dialectical theory attempts to tease out histories and relations of accepted meanings and appearances, tracing interactions from the context to the part, from the system inward to the event. In this way, critical theory helps us focus simultaneously on both sides of a social contradiction. (pp. 69-70, Italics in original)
By taking a dialectic approach, critical theory seeks to “challenge the traditions of modernity” through “oppositions to the forces of modernization and representations of modernity” (Peters, Lankshear, & Olssen, 2003, pp. 2-3). While not neglecting the “positive influences” of modernity, critical theory revises and updates the orthodox Marxist theory “by focusing attention on the irrational and oppressive features of modernity and on its totalitarian tendencies” (p. 3). Unlike traditional theory, one of the major projects of critical theory is “to subvert and undermine” the relations of capitalist society leading to “a society without injustice” (Peters et al., 2003, p. 3). At the heart of critical theory is the belief in “sustained critique” as a way to preserve rather than displace “the fundamental ideas of truth, freedom, and justice” (p. 4). As a radical praxis, critical theory “seeks to isolate and expose the relationships between cultural elements, economic and social processes, and the historical context. Adopting the viewpoint of oppressed social groups, it expressly seeks to become an agent in the promotion of social change and transformation” (Peters et al., 2003, p. 5).

To take Kincheloe’s (1999) candid definition, “Critical pedagogy is the term used to describe what emerges when critical theory encounters education” (p. 72, Italics in the original). It is a critical educational framework that draws its theoretical foundations from the works of the major critical theorists of the Frankfort School, along with other social and political theorists such as Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas (Darder, 2005). Critical pedagogy is the “shape and coherence [of] the theoretical landscape of radical principles, beliefs, and practices” with the aim of emancipation as an ideal of democratic education (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003, p. 2). Critical pedagogy basically “links the practice of schooling to democratic principles of society and to transformative social action” (Darder, 2005, p. 90). It involves “a commitment to the unwavering liberation of oppressed populations and a belief in the historical possibility of change” (p. 90). Critical pedagogic theorists reject the “deterministic perspectives” of orthodox Marxist scholars who argue that schools are exclusively “capitalist agencies of social, economic, cultural and bureaucratic reproduction.” Rather, critical educators argue that although indeed schools do reproduce capitalism, “schools, as venues of hope, could become sites of resistance and democratic possibility through concerted efforts among teachers and students to work within a liberatory pedagogical
framework” (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 71). By bringing in together divergent radical views and perspectives of education, critical pedagogy aims to “invigorate the capacity of radical educators to engage critically with the impact of capitalism and gendered, racialized relations upon the lives of students from historically disenfranchised populations” (Darder et al., 2003, p. 2). As Giroux (2003) asserts, the critical theoretical framework of the Frankfurt School “provides a major challenge and a stimulus to educational theorists who are critical of theories of education tied to functionalist paradigms based on the assumptions drawn from a positivist rationality” (p. 50). The early critical theorists set forth critical perspectives that become the foundation for the philosophical principles that inform critical pedagogy. These principles are: Cultural politics, political economy, historicity of knowledge, dialectical theory, ideology and critique, hegemony, resistance and counter hegemony, praxis, and dialogue and conscientization. The critical pedagogic framework involves questions of power, hegemony, culture, social injustices, oppression, exploitation, domination, democracy, participation, agency, voice, emancipation and so forth, with the ultimate aim of changing and transforming the human condition (Darder, 2005; Darder et al., 2003; McLaren, 2003; Giroux, 2003a; Giroux, 2003b; Kincheloe, 1999).

To build on Kincheloe’s work, when critical theory encounters democracy, what emerges is critical democracy. Critical democracy encompasses a robust conception of democracy,3 which draws its theoretical and political premise mainly from the philosophical works and principles of John Dewey and Paulo Freire, along with contributions and articulations from “[c]ontemporary democratic theorists and philosophers including Antonia Dardar, Joe Kincheloe, Shane O’Neal, John Portelli and Patrick Solomon, Ricardo Blaug, Paul Carr, and Landon Beyer” (Pinto, 2013, p. 153). By encompassing the critical theoretical tradition and framework, and drawing from the contributions of theorists and philosophers such as Foucault, Habermas, Derrida, Irigaray, Kristeva, Cixous, Bakhtin, and Voygotsky, critical democratic theory “is especially concerned with how democracy is subverted, domination takes place, and human

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3 Which is based on substantive values such as equity, diversity, and strong participation in all aspects of life in order to arrive at a strong notion of social justice, as opposed to a mere equality of opportunity and a limited, ‘soft’ or ‘thin’ participation in formal institutions.
relations are shaped in the schools, in other cultural sites of pedagogy, and in everyday life” (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 71). Critical democracy as a way of life (Dewey, 1915) includes both the individual side of people as well as the social side. Critical democracy concerns itself with dismantling any formal and informal obstacles that could impede full human development. The social side of people indicates the significance of such values that become manifest as a result of people’s various social interactions. According to Cunningham (2002), “part of this ‘social side’ of democracy is to demand ‘cooperation in place of coercion, voluntary sharing in a process of mutual give and take, instead of authority imposed from above’” (p. 161). Bai (2001) presents democracy as “a moral vision of life that condemns domination and promotes mutual governance, seeing the latter as a better way to live” (p. 309). Mutual governance, which initially requires that “ordinary people put their ‘heads’ and ‘hearts’ together,” (p. 308) is based on “mutual enquiry, consultation, and deliberation” (Bai, 2001, p. 310). Democracy, therefore, becomes an endeavor to realize our relatedness: the bond that not only provides us with the democratic power but also “makes us committed to promoting each other’s well-being” (p. 310). Critical democracy encompassed in strong participation and robust inclusion promotes such social values as “dedication and sacrifice, energy, resourcefulness and disinhibition” and “a personal rejection of subjugation” (Blaug, 2002, p. 106). Democracy as conceptualized by Price (2007) consists of both process and content; participation in decision-making as the process, and the content of which is peace that is realized in “the presence of social, economic and environmental justice” (p. 16). Democracy then becomes “about hope and commitment, power, possibility and promise” (Price, 2007, p. 15). It also becomes the endeavor “to support and encourage individual liberty and community freedom” (Glickman, 1998, p. 50). Critical democracy, as conceptualized by Price (2007), involves the belief in “the interdependence of all life forms on this planet” (p. 16), thus making democracy to transcend political arrangements into broader aspects of life and relationships. In this way, solidarity becomes “a principal virtue of democracy” (Cunningham, 2002, p. 123). Such substantive values are ideals that need to be sought, and become the defining features of critical democracy. Conceiving democracy through cultivating and enacting its substantive values “produces a set of principles on which institutions, schools in particular, are constructed” (Kincheloe, 1999,
Critical democracy does not bind itself with a particular, predetermined site of social and political interactions, whether a state, a social community or a classroom. Rather, by always expanding the scope and dimensions of democratic participation, those sites of interaction become open to readjustment. That is why, a democratic society, according to Dewey (1915), is one “which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life” (p. 106). Readjustment of social institutions is forcefully connected with the level and scope of the individuals’ consciousness. At the core of critical democracy is “an individual’s consciousness of himself or herself as a social being,” which is one of the fundamental principles of critical theory and pedagogy (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 71). An individual’s consciousness as a social being means understanding “why and how his or her political opinions, worker role, religious beliefs, gender role, and racial self-image are shaped by dominant perspectives” (Kincheloe, 1999, pp. 71-72).

Cunningham (2002) argues that democracy needs “politically engaged citizenry” in order to engage in cultivating democratic political and cultural values (p. 81). Critical democracy thus becomes interwoven with critical pedagogy’s aim to promote and develop critical self-reflection among students. Critical self-reflection is a type of reflection that is aware of the political dimension that exists in the very act of reflection with the aim of bringing about a certain political transformation. Critical democracy as a broadened concept of associated living, which expands politics to mean more than government affairs (Dewey, 1915), works on raising awareness and consciousness in the public about certain social and political issues. The critical self-reflective students/citizens become the core force in the transformation of the public consciousness, which eventually influences the state policies concerning social and political issues (Graham, 2001). The critical and conscious engagement with the self and within the community is a core indicator of democracy as a way of life (Dewey, 1915), which requires that education and schooling are established around core democratic values that concern individuals in their community life and their striving for the intricacies of social
justice. As Dei (2013) argues, “Education is critical to deal with social injustice, social poverty, and political apathy. Critical education is about empowerment of people. Democratic education is ultimately about power and being able to ask new and critical questions of the processes and structures of educational delivery” (p. 53).

1.5 Positioning myself

The critical theoretical position that I espouse highlights the historical and contextual sensitivity of critical democracy, which is evident in critical theory’s embodiment of a “mode of cognition” that does not assume neutrality. Unlike the positivistic constructs of natural sciences leading to the absolutization of knowledge, this mode of cognition is based on the historical construction of knowledge. As Thomas McCarthy argues: “One of the first tasks of critical theory was to challenge the privileged ‘non-position’ of social-scientific knowledge by analyzing the modes of its production, the roles it played in society, the interests it served, and the historical process through which it came to power” (quoted in Peters et al., 2003, p. 4). The critical approach to knowledge as a historical construct indicates the approach to the social truths as both reflexive and contingent (p. 4).

I therefore find it necessary to indicate the relationship of the critical theoretical framework I use in this dissertation with my social and political position. I am a male researcher from Kurdistan Region of Iraq, a Kurd by ethnicity, and a Sunni Muslim by faith. I have a BA degree in English language and literature from KR, an MA degree in literary studies from the USA as a Fulbright scholar. I have been pursuing a Ph.D. degree in Toronto, Canada for the past 5 years, working within an academic environment that is critically engaged with issues of social justice education. While I have lived most of my life in a position of privilege within a dominantly Kurdish, Muslim and patriarchal society, I have also been on the periphery of Kurdish political power. I have been raised in a socially stable, culturally traditional, religiously semi-conservative, and economically working family. Nevertheless, due to the political and religious activism of my father, my family has seen different levels of persecution from both the Ba’thist and Kurdish
governments. I have lived my early life among Arabs, and then in refugee camps in a neighboring country for four years. I have also lived in North America for a total of seven years. As such, I know four languages, the fourth of which is English. I have held a teaching position as a university instructor for five years in KR. I have also held an administrative position at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research-KRG (MoHESR-KRG) for a year. My life experiences and position, as both an insider and outsider in relation to social and political centers of privilege, have influenced the development of my arguments and thesis in this dissertation.

My argument is forcefully for a critical participatory concept of democracy that goes beyond the liberal, representative and procedural conception into a concept that is predicated on substantive, robust moral values. My inclination to this concept of democracy is aptly explained by Glickman’s (1998) statement: “Participatory democracy appeals most to those who have been outside the liberal system but have found optimism in strategies of protest and resistance, forcing deliberations and changes in governmental decisions” (p. 48). Focusing on community life and forums as the foundations for a democratic society is also the result of my skepticism and critical stance towards formal and procedural democratization. I believe in what Bai (2001) aptly suggests, that a person or a community cannot be democratic in character by simply “following the rules and procedures of democratic governance, even if faithfully carried out” (p. 307). This is because democracy, at least in its critical stance, goes beyond democratic procedures, and is sometimes critical of those procedures and structures. I come from a religious and cultural background where democracy is usually propagated from above as a political system, and perceived as imported from or dictated by the West. My early experience with democracy has been in the form of quasi-religious or even anti-religious political and ideological engineering endeavors to reshape KR’s social fabric that I was most familiar with, particularly in relation to the controversial topic of the sovereignty of God and humans and the sources of human rights and values (Soroush, 2000). Nevertheless, as a result of ideological conflicts between and among religious and secular conservatives, a narrow conception of democracy has particularly become pervasive in KR: democracy to only mean a Western liberal invention of participation in elections and choosing representatives. As explained by Balug (2002), engineering democracy, particularly when
such endeavors are done from the center of power structures, leads to dictating a narrow and mechanical form of democracy while neglecting and undermining more participatory and critical forms. Engineering initiative undermine robust democracy mainly because they “are the carriers of a particular organizational paradigm that devalues critical participation and sees it as antithetical to effectiveness” (Blaug, 2002, p. 112). By disregarding local and contextual preferences of communities, engineering attempts in democratization tend to result in unwarranted and antidemocratic consequences. I believe that democracy cannot be enforced and dictated from above and cannot be detached from its context. Otherwise, engineering and dictating democracy from above can be paradoxical or even antithetical to robust democratic values (Blaug, 2002; Barrow, 2007). When democratic endeavors stem from and are based on the community life and values, they can be not only morally praiseworthy but also effectively sound.

One of the principles of critical pedagogy is the belief in the ‘historicity of knowledge’, which stresses the historical context of knowledge “that gives life and meaning to human experience” (Darder, 2005, p. 91). This approach to knowledge highlights the significance of understanding the historical and social factors within which social and political institutions and other sites of human interaction become meaningful. “This historical view of knowledge offers an analysis that stresses the breaks, discontinuities, conflicts, differences, and tensions in history, which highlight the centrality of social agency and the possibilities for change” (p. 92). The historicity of knowledge as a principle informs research to go beyond the discourse of established political, social and educational institutions into the nuances of the historical elements of these institutions, which allows for their readjustment and transformation. It similarly allows the conceptualization of democracy in a manner that is beyond, and sometimes against, the pervasive, colonial and imperialist notions. A critical, context-sensitive conception of democracy suggests that ideal democratic situations or organizations cannot be transferred into other locations. Critical democracy is aware that one ideal situation for a group might not be so ideal in another situation for another group (Cunningham, 2002). Since people have different experiences in any particular historical moment or geographical, cultural or social location, their perception of what democracy entails varies, and sometimes democracy has contrasting perceptions based on those
experiences. For an Iraqi or a Native American, for instance, democracy might mean occupation, suffering, war, the destruction of the land and losing of the loved ones (Glickman, 1998, p. 47). A critical engagement with democratic situations, therefore, becomes a rejection of a proceduralist, universal, one-size-fits-all understanding of democracy (Portelli & Konecny, 2013; Portelli, 2013). A critical engagement with democracy transforms it into something dynamic, growing and always in the process of reconstructing, rethinking and rediscovery (Portelli & Konecny, 2013). My position on democracy is, therefore, a belief in the collective undertakings and transformation of the human affairs in various forms of moral interpersonal and intercommunity relationships.

1.6 Significance

Undertaking a critical research project on and about Kurdish nationalism, democracy and the endeavors of state-building in KR through examining major educational policy documents has not been previously accomplished, neither in Kurdish nor in English. Even though there are many books and studies that examine the history and development of modern Kurdish nationalism, identity and the experiences of Kurdish self-governance (Rubin, 2016; Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Gunter, 2013; Bengio, 2012; Aziz, 2009; Romano, 2006; Natali, 2005; O’Leary & Salih, 2005; Stansfield, 2003), the systemic relationships between Kurdish education and nationalism in relation to nation- and state-building have not been given due attention. There are valuable studies that examine Kurdish nationalism in education, such as the influences of the humanities and social sciences curricula on the processes of Kurdish nation-state building in Iraq (Kirmanj, 2014), the historical and political development of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq and the significance of its promotion in KRG educational system (Abdullah, 2010, Kurdish), and the processes of ethno-national identity formation and development among university students in KR (M. A. Aziz, 2009). There are also books published in Kurdish that examine and critique many of the issues in KR’s educational system (Saeed, 2004; 2008; Siwayli, 2007; Abdullah, 2010; Wahab, 2014; Omer, 2015). However, the current dissertation is the only academic work, either in English or Kurdish, that engages in a
critical and systematic analysis of major educational policies in KR. In fact, the policy documents considered for analysis in this dissertation have not been studied in such depth and scope prior to this current endeavor, nor has a critical theoretical framework been previously used in investigating the issues in KRG educational system. Furthermore, the main argument presented in this dissertation, which involves showing an intricate relationship between non-democratic and oppressive educational processes and the processes of nation-state building in KR, and also presenting a critical democratic framework—a viable and morally justifiable solution—as an alternative to nationalistic education, has never been so vigorously offered. The critical democratic framework as an alternative and the argument for it are important if education in KR is to prepare a generation with a vision for a morally praiseworthy life in a possible post-nationalism world, in which the social and political issues are not maintained and perpetuated. It is also significant to point to lack of studies on and about the relationship between democracy in the Middle East and the political and social frameworks of the nation-states as reflected in their educational systems. In other words, most studies about democracy, or lack thereof, in the Middle East, at least those conducted in English, tend to neglect its relation to education (Cochran, 2011). This dissertation, therefore, not only presents a bulk of information and critical insight about the recent history and development of KR and its educational system but also is an endeavor to fill in some of the research gaps about KR and the Middle East, which will have considerable implications that go beyond the regional boundaries of the area.

1.7 Structural design of the dissertation

I have developed this dissertation through a systematic structure that reflects the progression of the thesis and main argument. This introductory chapter to the dissertation has included a general description of the topic, research focus and question, a short presentation of the issues that have led to asking the main research question, the main

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thesis of the research, the theoretical framework and my personal position and stake in undertaking this research, as well as the significance of the present study to KR, the Middle East and beyond.

In chapter two, I present a short socio-political and socio-historical background of KR, followed by a short background and survey of major educational issues in KR educational system. These background explorations are necessary not only to create connections between them but also to present valuable information to the reader in understanding the political, social and educational context of the main thesis and argument. The background sections are then followed by an introduction to the research focus and thesis of the dissertation.

I have divided chapter three into three sections. In section one, I have conducted a critical review of literature on nationalism and democracy. I have engaged with examining the meaning of nation and the nature and scope of nationalism, including an account of major factors and principles of nationalism along with the position, scope and purpose of education in relation to nationalism. In section two, the literature review on democracy involves the process, positions and significance of conceptualizing democracy and its justification through its substantive values. I have also reviewed literature on critical democracy and education. In section three, I present and argue for the significance of the conceptual framework that has emerged from the critical review of literature.

I have dedicated chapter four to present the methodology adopted in this dissertation, and a description of the major educational policy documents that comprise the research data and findings in this dissertation. The documents consist of educational laws at both K-12 and higher education levels, educational conference proceedings, and strategic plans and projects. I have followed the presentation and description of the documents by historical factors and the institutional context of educational policymaking in KR.

Chapter five comprises the analysis of the major educational policy documents. I have divided this chapter into three main sections; each section analyzes a major policy
framework derived from the documents. I begin section one by elaborating on the nature and aspects of the Iraqi Kurdish nationalism through involving the literature on nationalism and particularly Kurdish nationalism. Then I commence by analyzing Kurdish nationalism as a major policy framework in the educational documents. In section two, I analyze democratization as another policy framework in the educational documents, and examine its nature and scope in the KRG educational policymaking and practices and in relation to the overall political process in KR. In section three I analyze the third major policy framework, which is the Kurdish nationalist endeavors in bureaucratizing/modernizing formal education.

The final chapter is a concluding chapter, which is dedicated to presenting a recapitulation of the main topic of the dissertation, a summary of the thesis and its development. I also argue once again for the unique nature of the study and its significance in relation to KR and the Middle East. I also present the main implications of this research and its argument and findings, particularly for teachers, teacher education programs, educational leadership and administration, and policymaking, whether in Kurdistan Region, the Middle East or beyond.
Chapter Two: Cultural, Historical, and Educational Background

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a short socio-political and socio-historical background on the formation and development of Kurdistan Region (KR) and its government since 1991. This background chapter also includes information about the demographic, social, political and economic components of KR, which can help the reader to better understand and connect the theoretical and political arguments with the contextual realities of KR. I also present a short survey and examination of some of the major educational issues in KR in order to set the focus of the research and also provide information about the educational system to readers who are not familiar with education in KR.

2.2 A Socio-political and socio-historical background of Kurdistan Region

Kurdistan Region comprises a federal province in Iraq and includes within its administration the four governorates of Erbil, Slemani, Duhok and Halabja. With an ethnically diverse population of more than 5 million, it includes a majority Kurds along with Turkomans, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Arabs, and a religious diversity, among them Muslims, Christians, Yezidis and Kakayees. After the Gulf war of 1991, the people in Kurdistan started an uprising against the Ba’thist Iraqi security forces in the Kurdish majority governorates, which was then backed by the Kurdish nationalist movements’ fighters, the peshmarga. The Kurdish fighters had been engaged in guerrilla warfare against the different Iraqi governments and army in the northern Iraqi areas on and off since the 1960s (Natali, 2005; Romano, 2006; Bengio, 2012). Even though at the beginning, the uprising resulted in the full control of the Kurdish forces over the Kurdish majority areas in north Iraq, the Iraqi army started to retaliate, and eventually pressed against the popular and Kurdish guerrilla forces. As a result, the people of Kurdistan started an exodus towards the Turkish and Iranian borders in fear of the retaliation and
brutality of the Iraqi forces against the civilians. The exodus eventually resulted in a humanitarian crisis as over a million people were trapped in the mountainsides and hills and were denied entry into the neighboring countries. The devastating situation attracted the attention of the international media and community, and pressured the US and the UK to enforce a military exclusion and no-fly zone against the Iraqi armed forces north of the 36th parallel north. The no-fly zone eventually led to establishing a safe haven for the people in Kurdistan. The Iraqi central government not only withdrew its armed forces but also its civil administration, thus creating a security as well as administrative vacuum in the three governorates of Erbil, Slemani and Duhok. The different Kurdish forces created a unified Kurdish Front in order to assume administrative responsibility, and conducted a parliamentary election, which led to the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in 1992 (Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Bengio, 2012; Natali, 2005; Stansfield, 2005; Stansfield, 2003).

The winners in the election, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), agreed on a 50-50 sharing of the 100 seats in the Kurdistan National Assembly (the parliament), with the remaining 11 seats reserved as a quota for the ethnic minorities in the Region. The two parties solely controlled the first KRG cabinet. However, in 1993 political tension and polarization started to surface among some of the Kurdish militant factions over power and economic resources. The KDP and the PUK engaged in a brutal civil war in 1994, which eventually led to a split in the KRG administration after the KDP, backed by the Iraqi military, took control of Erbil city, the capital of the KR. By 1997, there were two KRG administrations, one run by the KDP in Erbil and the other by the PUK in Slemani, along with a dysfunctional parliament. Even though by then, the fighting was halted after much interference and mediation of the neighboring countries as well as the US and some European countries, the two parties were able to reach an agreement in 2000 to stop the hostilities against each other and their respective affiliates and supporters. The agreement was directly supervised and sanctioned by the USA in Washington DC, which led the two parties to form an alliance after the 2003 invasion of Iraq (Bengio, 2012; Stansfield, 2003). In 2006, the two separate KRG administrations joined to form the 5th KRG unified cabinet. The current 8th KRG cabinet was formed after the election that took place in 2014.
The period of the KRG’s establishment in 1992 through the first few years of the 2000s has been characterized for the most part by many political and economic hardships and obstacles in KR. It was a time when the KRG was struggling with lack of experience in self-governance amid the administrative vacuum as a result of the withdrawal of the central Iraqi administration from the KR. The economic embargo enforced on the whole of Iraq by the UN Security Council in 1991 (Bengio, 2012) also had devastating effects on life in general and education in particular. The period was also characterized by the bloody KDP-PUK civil war, which eventually led to dividing the Region and the KRG into two administrations (Rubin, 2016; Bengio, 2012; Erkmen, 2012; Kelly, 2010; Stansfield, 2005). It was, nonetheless, a period in which the Kurdish nationalist movement obtained an unprecedented opportunity to consolidate the Kurdish ethnonationalist identity in KR (Aziz, 2009), and engage in defining the nationalist boundaries of the government institutions.

In the post-2003 era, the Kurds of Iraq did not have many of the issues that afflicted them before. The 2000s started with a sustainable peace agreement over power sharing between the warring KDP and PUK, which was more of “a mutual accommodation to divide their geographic control of Iraqi Kurdistan.” However, this eventually led the two parties to form a unity government (Kelly, 2010, p. 723), which also meant joining most of their government administration structures and bureaucracies (Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Erkmen, 2012). The UN Security Council-enforced economic embargo was lifted on Iraq in 2003, which opened many doors for relationships and communication with the outside world for the Iraqis in general after decades of political and cultural isolation. The new political and economic situation also opened the door for international trade and investment, while the KR was guaranteed 17% of the Iraqi oil revenues (Zaman, 2016b). The new political and legal situation, such as the approval of the Iraqi constitution in 2005 that formalized the KR as an autonomous federal province within Iraq, also allowed for the exploration and production of oil and gas in KR, which has enhanced the aspirations for an eventual Kurdish independence (Rubin, 2016; Kelly, 2010; Mills, 2010). Other political parties became more active in playing a role in the political life in Kurdistan Region (Erkmen, 2012). The elections of 2005 in KR and Iraq resulted in ending the KDP-PUK monopoly over the Parliament in Kurdistan, which
expanded the marginal participation of other political parties in the KRG decision-making. Opposition parties became stronger both in the parliament and on the streets, which at times could harvest the pressures on the street to demand reform (Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Erkmen, 2012). Free media also started to become stronger, and were able to voice opposition and critiques, albeit within the limits of the sociopolitical situation in KR. These developments also had an impact on some high political government officials to voice their concerns over the traditional power (in the manner of the 1990s) that the KDP and PUK had over the KRG (Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Erkmen, 2012). Furthermore, the economy became much more dependent on “a rentier structure linked to a service-intensive economy that is based on oil revenues” (Erkmen, 2012, p. 92). The post-2003 period also witnessed a boom in the number of universities, both public and private, which provided enrollment opportunities in Kurdistan that were otherwise unavailable (Rubin, 2016). This new situation led the Iraqi Kurdistan to have “a more advanced political organization than the period when the ‘safe haven’ was formed in 1991” (Erkmen, 2012, p. 98).

Nevertheless, the story of progress and development is not all weaved with roses. In fact, the period of the economic boom that KR witnessed after 2003 is also the period in which a few became extremely rich on oil and other public revenues, which were also used to strengthen patronage networks, buy votes in elections and eventually bloat the public sector due to what is known as “ghost employment”. Even though certain margins of civic and political freedoms expanded, the period, nonetheless, saw many crackdowns on civil liberties and imprisonment or even assassination of journalists and voices of dissent (Rubin, 2016; Zaman, 2016a). Therefore, critics of the new situation have considered it more of a “gilded” rather than “golden” period (Zaman, 2016a). Furthermore, since 2014, KR has been going through many political and economic difficulties and uncertainties (Morris, 2015; Zaman, 2016a; Rubin, 2016). The current difficult situation does not come as a shock to those who have observed the processes of Kurdish self-governance in the past 25 years, however. While external regional and global factors have impacted the emergence of many challenges to the Kurdish self-

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5 It is when people are on the government’s payroll without actually being required to go to work, or when the same person is on multiple payrolls across different government sectors.
governance experience, many longstanding internal factors nonetheless comprise the core of such challenges (Rubin, 2016; Bajalan & Wahab, 2016). Due to tensions between the central Iraqi government and the KRG in the past few years over exporting oil from the fields within the KRG administrative borders, as well as the drastic plunge in the international oil prices, added to it the vast number of Iraqi IDPs and Syrian refugees residing in KR, the KRG has since reached the brink of bankruptcy (Zaman, 2016b; Zaman, 2016a; Rubin, 2016; Bajalan & Wahab, 2016). At the same time, the political tension between the KDP and the other political parties participating in the current KRG cabinet over the legitimacy of the Kurdish president and over amending the presidency Law has also led to political tension and stagnation in the government processes (Rubin, 2016; Zaman, 2016a). The current internal political and legal situation in many ways resonates the period of the civil war in the mid 1990s, and the old divide between the two KRG administrations has once again become apparent (Morris, 2015). The war with ISIS has also put much pressure on the economy and the general security of the Region, particularly since the frontlines are weakened by the internal political divide (Morris, 2015; Zaman, 2016b). Observers believe that the political uncertainty rather than the technical challenges is more likely to repel international interest in KR’s oil resources (Mills, 2010) as well as challenge the chances of an effective independent Kurdish state (Rubin, 2016; Zaman, 2016a). Added to the external and internal political and economic issues in KR are the issues of cronyism, patronage networks, party loyalty and nepotism, mismanagement, corruption, lack of transparency and independent judiciary (Rubin, 2016; Zaman, 2016a; Kelly, 2010), all of which create roadblocks in front of achieving Kurdish statehood (Zaman, 2016a).

Currently, due to the weakening of the Iraqi military and government after ISIS took control over much of the Iraqi northwestern lands (Mitchell, 2014), the tensions between the KRG and the Iraqi government, as well as the ability of the KRG to export its own oil (Zaman, 2016a; Wahab, 2014), the KR’s prospects for independence has become more visible. The KRG has become the point of focus for the international community in the war against ISIS (Mitchell, 2014), and the government is trying to gain direct military support in this regard (Zaman, 2016b). There are many speculations, both locally and internationally, on the possibility of independence for Kurdistan Region.
While there are many internal and external challenges in front of Kurdish independence in Iraq, according to observers, however, the Kurds in Iraq have never been as close to having an independent state as they are now (Rubin, 2016; Zaman, 2016a; Soderberg & Phillips, 2015; Mitchell, 2014).

2.3 Educational background

Education and educational reform in Kurdistan Region of Iraq has become a recurrent theme in the recent local public discourse, as evident in the documents considered for analysis as well as in media coverage, books and articles specifically tackling the nature and issues of the educational system. While the KRG has been involved, from its start in 1992, in reforming the educational system and increasing access, the issues of educational reform have seen unprecedented attention in the past decade by both the government as well as the general public. The issue of an inappropriate, ineffective and unresponsive educational system at both the K-12 and higher education levels in KR started to become a public concern particularly after 2003. The new political, social, and economic situations greatly influenced the public’s engagement in education and in

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6 Number of K-12 schools in KR in the academic year 2015-2016 was 6,799, which indicates more than 500% increase from the academic year 1991-1992. Number of students enrolled in K-12 institutions in the academic year 2015-2016 was 1,706,509 (male: 890,817; female: 815,692), which indicates more than 300% increase from the academic year 1991-1992. Number of teachers in the academic year 2015-2016 was 126,112 (male: 53,540; female: 72,572), which indicates more than 600% increase from the academic year 1991-1992 (http://moe-krg.com/?page=table&c=statistics).

By the year 1991, there was only one university in the northern Iraqi governorates comprising the KR. As of the academic year 2015-2016, however, there are a total of 35 post-secondary institutions in KR, of which 14 are public and 21 are private. 123,566 students (male: 58,342; female: 65,224) were enrolled in the public post-secondary institutions, and 35,681 students (male: 21,222; female: 14,459) were enrolled in the private ones. The number of teaching staff in the public post-secondary institutions is 8,854 (male: 5,952; female: 2,902), while the number of teaching staff in the private ones with a long-term position is 934 (male: 743; female: 191), and with a short-term contractual position is 891 (male: 773; female: 118). (Information received from personal correspondence with the MHESR-KRG, Office of Statistics).

Public educational institutions at both the K-12 and higher education are free of charge in KR. The tuition fees for the private institutions are capped annually by agreement between those private institutions and the Ministries of Education and Higher Education in KR.
voicing their concerns about its issues. Communication with the outside world, through the widespread of mobile technologies, local satellite TV channels, the Internet, and foreign tourism, also witnessed unprecedented developments (Zaman, 2016; Rubin, 2016). This led the public as well as the government to realize the discrepancy between the outcomes of formal education, at both the K-12 and higher education levels, and the human resources needed to deal with this new economic and cultural situation.

Since formal education in Iraq has had a long history of tight government control, the general public was never closely involved in much decision-making or mobilization around educational policies and project implementation. Traditionally, the KRG has also relied heavily on similar policies and administration, such as centralized, top-down policy-making procedures and high rates of public employment to deal with public pressure for economic and social stabilities (Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Rubin, 2016). The KRG has realized that public policies they had relied on have been ineffective in dealing with issues of public pressure, mainly because those pressures have increased in the last decade as a result of more public awareness on social and economic discrepancies in the society. The political, cultural and economic changes after 2003 in KR have also created a new atmosphere in which the public has started to put pressure on the government to deal with the lack of school and university response to the matters of everyday life.

### 2.3.1 Background to educational issues in Kurdistan Region

Discussing education and educational reform in Kurdistan has two main points of departure. First is the inherent characteristics of education, schooling, school administration and system, and how these characteristics are shaped and need to be shaped by the modern advances in social, political and economic lives and technologies both globally and within KR. The second point is the ways in which education and schooling could impact the political, social and economic aspirations of the Region. These two points have become the impetus of the considerations, particularly in the past decade, of the nature and role of education in shaping the social, political, and economic realities comprising the national identity of KR. The discussions also come in the form of
criticisms of the current situation of the schooling systems in KR, both in the K-12 and higher education. These criticisms, which come from independent critics, educational leaders and politicians alike, shed light on various issues in the educational system and processes in Kurdistan. There is a general agreement amongst the political and educational leaders as well as critics that some of these issues have been inherited from the historical development of formal schooling in Iraq, while some others have emerged as a result of recent political, social and economic developments in the Region (Abdullah, 2010; Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Saeed, 2008; Wahab, 2014). The educational issues in KR presented in these discussions can be categorized into (a) issues in the foundation of education, (b) issues in the system of educational administration, and (c) issues in the practices of schooling.

**Issues in the foundation of education**

The issues in the foundation are related to the theoretical, political and cultural grounds on which education and schooling are based. Most of the criticisms about education in Kurdistan Region relate the issues in the foundation of education to the lack of a Kurdish national vision and philosophy of education, and how this has shaped the course of formal education in the KR. The Iraqi Kurdish nationalist movements and their political leaders and elites who ran the semi-independent political entity comprising the Kurdistan Region after the 1991 popular uprising did not have much, if any, experience in running a country and maintaining a system of governance. They, however, had much experience in guerrilla warfare and sabotaging government systems. This created major challenges, since the previous Iraqi regime left the Region with a semi-destroyed and dismantled governance structure (Ala’Aldeen, 2013, p. 2). The new Kurdish government started on the ruins of an already collapsed social, economic and academic infrastructure as a result of decades of neglect and destruction by the Iraqi government. The KRG started with two main missions. One was to maintain what was left from the devastated governing system, and the other was to remove and reform the visible aspects of the Ba’thist regime, such as removing the portraits of the Iraq’s supreme leader, Saddam Husain, on the streets,
government offices, and in school textbooks. The KRG also canceled some contents of the humanities and social sciences school curriculum and textbooks that indicated the Ba’thist Pan Arab nationalist agenda, and those that directly mentioned the glories of the Ba’th party and the Iraqi leader. There was also a major change in the language of instruction in schools. The majority of schools began using the Kurdish language as the official language of instruction (Aziz, 2004).

Ala’Aldeen (2013) argues that the Kurdish self-governance in the Region started without a much-grounded national vision, and has had many good as well as bad experiences. The local experiences and many political and economic challenges on both regional and international scales have deemed the form of governance in Kurdistan inappropriate and irrelevant to the national aspirations of its people (p. 4). Lack of a national vision in politics and governance in Kurdistan has also been reflected in the education sector. Critics agree that public education in Kurdistan is not established based on a Kurdish national social, cultural, political and economic vision (Abdullah, 2010; Ala’Aldeen, 2013; S. Omer, 2014; Saeed, 2008; Shakely, 2010). Even though the Kurdish popular uprising in 1991, the safe Kurdish enclave enforced by the US and the UK and the formation of the KRG as a result were major political, economic and administrative developments for the Kurds in Iraq, Shakely (2010) and Ala’Aldeen (2013) agree that these developments did not radically impact the quality of the social and cultural structures or people’s everyday life. They believe that a radical shift, a departure from the previous regime did not take place in Kurdistan Region after 1991. Similar to the unchanged social and political structures, radical changes did not take place with respect to the foundations on which education and schooling were based. According to Abdullah (2010) and Saeed (2008), the educational system in Kurdistan has only witnessed minor, superficial changes and reform, and has not fundamentally departed from the previous system set by the Ba’th regime. This inability to depart from the previous educational system was again apparent in 2003 when the US invasion of Iraq led to the toppling of the Ba’th regime and a change in the Iraqi governing system. After the invasion and the proclamation of the Kurdistan Region as a federal province with its own legal administration in the new Iraqi constitution, there was an important opportunity for a radical change in different sectors not only in Iraq but also in Kurdistan Region,
particularly in education. The radical reform expected to happen, however, did not take place, because, as Abdullah (2010) argues, a philosophy of education and a national policy that is reflective of the Kurdish society in Kurdistan Region does not exist.

Saeed (2008), Abdullah (2010), Shakely (2010), Omer (2014) and Omer (2015) agree that the lack of a national educational and cultural vision and philosophy has been the major reason for the failure of the Kurdish government to initiate radical reform in education and in the larger society. Due to this lack, the KRG has not been able to establish an inclusive policy that can encompass the foundations on which reform can take place. Furthermore, education reform projects in Kurdistan have been limited to certain symptoms in the system and practice of schooling without asking fundamental questions (Omer, 2015; Saeed, 2008). In other words, fundamental questions related to the nature and type of the educational system fitting the national aspirations in the KR have not become the driving force for the reform processes. Saeed (2008) believes that having a national educational policy and curriculum is significant if reforms are to give significant results. This is mainly because, according to Saeed (2008), a national policy can help policymakers in Kurdistan determine what kind of educational system it is that they are seeking to have in the future (p. 176). According to Abdullah (2010), the current educational philosophy in Kurdistan is still not clear on what kind of person it produces for the society and how to direct the social and political structures (p. 91). The criticism for not having a national vision and philosophy of education indicates that the educational system in Kurdistan is not reflective of the social, cultural and political life in the Region. It also shows concerns that what takes place in education has been a maintenance of the Ba’thist educational and cultural philosophy, agenda and system (Abdullah, 2010; Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Wahab, 2013; 2014).

**Issues in the system of educational administration**

These issues are related to those processes, theories and practices that shape how formal education in Kurdistan Region is administered. They include the issues in the structure, mechanisms and techniques in the governance and administration of formal educational
processes. These issues are related to the laws, policies, standards, standardizations, administration and schooling systems through which the foundations of education manifest themselves in the public, and in formal educational and social discourses. Saeed (2004; 2008) believes that a Kurdish educational system in Kurdistan does not exist at the moment, because the current system does not reflect the cultural, social, political and economic realities of Kurdistan Region. Even though the Kurdistan Region has a democratic governing system, in the sense that people have the right to vote and form political affiliations and political parties compete in elections, the current system of education in Kurdistan still resembles those of dictatorships and totalitarian regimes (Abdullah, 2010, p. 275; Wahab, 2014). Saeed (2008) believes that the educational system in Kurdistan is a military system, which the Kurdish government has adopted from the old Iraqi regime and maintained it without any significant development. It is a system that the British imposed on the Iraqis early in the twentieth century (Saeed, 2008, p. 25). The resemblance of the educational system in Kurdistan to a military system is also manifest in the ways in which schools and universities are designed to look like military bases and prisons, and the classroom practices and organization to resemble those of military schools and training fields (Saeed, 2008, p. 26; also Wahab, 2012; 2014). This entanglement in the Iraqi system is the result of the major issues in the foundation of education indicated earlier, as well as of political and structural stagnation in Kurdistan. These two factors affecting the state of education are deeply intertwined.

Since public education in Kurdistan Region and Iraq has been under very strict and centralized control of the government, the issues of the educational system are very much related to the larger issues of governance and government structure. Different political regimes in Iraq have considered education as a very effective ideological apparatus (Althusser, 2006), whether for broader agendas of identity and nation-building (Kirmanj, 2013; 2014) or for specific political and ideological gains (Abdullah, 2010). The Ba’thist educational system in Iraq was keenly shaped and designed specifically to control and discipline so that the ideologies of the one political party are internalized in the society and become the norm. The relationship between teachers, students and school and university administration has been a manifestation of this ideology (Saeed, 2008; Abdullah, 2010). This system, Saeed (2008) argues, has made the teachers unproductive,
unprofessional cadres who tend to control children. The didactics used has been centered on the admiration and worship of the few who are at the top of the power structure. The curriculum has been designed so that all people think and be the same, to a point where historical and scientific facts have been changed to serve the purpose. In running and maintaining the educational system, the Kurdish government has not deviated drastically from how the previous Iraqi regime had run it, because the KRG has depended on the same theoretical foundations and systematic procedures of the Iraqi Ba’thist regime.

Adding more political interference into the system due to Kurdish partisan rivalries has further complicated the situation (Saeed, 2008; Ala’Aldeen, 2013). That is why the education system in Kurdistan Region has been a powerful utility for social engineering based on the design and agenda of those in power (Saeed, 2008). It has been politicized and regulated based on the political parties’ direct and indirect interference and according to the political situation in the Region (Saeed, 2008; Abdullah, 2010; Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Omer, 2015). Ala’Aldeen (2013) argues that the system of higher education in Kurdistan has always reflected the disturbed and abnormal political situation in Iraq and Kurdistan. Like all other government institutions, colleges and universities have been entangled with bureaucratic procedures. The administration structure consists of many intertwined institutions that have complicated decision-making, increased government expenditure, and lowered the quality of services through webs of bureaucratic procedures (p. 261).

Furthermore, the Kurdish political parties in power have utilized the universities to advance their political agenda and hegemony, and have used the system to issue mandates and regulations that support favoritism and, in the course, advance their members through the educational and political systems, all this at the expense of the quality of education (Omer, 2015, pp. 151-156; also Siwayli, 2007).

For instance, it is difficult to indicate the role of the educational system in Kurdistan in changing or reforming undesired conditions or in taking the lead in the development of the Kurdish culture and society. According to Abdullah (2010), in its current state, the educational system cannot educate members of the society in Kurdistan, and cannot bring about any significant changes and development in the society (p. 272). In Kurdistan Region, schools are at the periphery of the society and its other institutions, such as families, places of worship, civil society organizations, and political parties.
These institutions have much more influence on the educational system and schooling and can steer formal educational institutions their way (p. 272). Schools have also become institutions that reproduce the inequities and violence in the larger society (Saeed, 2004; 2008). Institutions of higher education in Kurdistan have not become models for the development of the society (Siwayli, 2007). They have not been able to transform themselves from consumptive to productive institutions (Omer, 2015). These formal educational and academic institutions have not been able to produce research and studies on the effect of education on social and political issues (Abdullah, 2010, p. 75). In fact, while there are more than thirty public and private universities and colleges in Kurdistan Region, there is not one single academic department for studies in education (Wahab, 2015). The current status of education in Kurdistan Region has also resulted in lack of adequate information and resources for research on the condition of education in Kurdistan (Abdullah, 2010, p. 183).

**Issues in the practices of schooling**

These issues relate to the practices and dispositions that define the realities of education and schooling within the educational institutions and the society at large. These are the indicators of the social, political, cultural and economic identities of the society as a result of the form, system and discourse of education in Kurdistan Region. These issues are decisive not only in how schools are defined but also how foundational and systematic issues are manifested within the educational communities. Violence and harassment (Saeed, 2004; 2008), issues and challenges for human rights, equality and democracy (Wahab, 2012; Osler & Yahya, 2013), dependence on indoctrination, rote memorization, unbalanced power relations between students and teachers (Saeed, 2008; Kirmanj, 2014), and systemic oppression and exclusion from decision-making (Saeed, 2008; Wahab, 2014) are among the main issues in schooling practices in Kurdistan Region.

Corporal punishment has become a normative form of schooling and discipline within educational institutions in Kurdistan Region. According to Saeed (2008),
educational officials in Kurdistan Region admit that beating children is one of the many problematic features in the educational processes. Saeed (2008) believes that educational institutions in Kurdistan have not become spaces for the development of healthy mental and social relationships. Violence and harassment characterize the form and attitude to discipline at K-12 schools, universities as well as in the larger society in Kurdistan.

Violent social relationships in the family, in the tribal and political organizations have a great influence on children’s wellbeing. Such violence has also been perpetuated by the schooling system to a point where schools have become institutions of shaming, pain and torture (Saeed, 2004; 2008). According to Saeed (2008), the educational system in Kurdistan cannot solve the issue of how children do their schoolwork without beating them and breaking their personality. As a result, there exists in the schooling system an unhealthy, unstable relationship between teachers and students. Teachers act like chieftains, patriarchs, politicians and checkpoint officers who want to control everything about their students (Saeed, 2008). In a study conducted by Saeed (2004), he found that during the school year 2002-2003, about %74 of the children were beaten in schools.

Consequently, students do not feel that their teachers care about them or are on their side (Saeed, 2004). Saeed (2008) believes that political and educational officials do not have a clear vision and project for solving the issue of violence and harassment in schools even though the government has prohibited beating schoolchildren (p. 15). Having a very narrow conception of violence (Saeed, 2004) and exclusion (Wahab, 2014) in the educational policies, laws and practices in Kurdistan Region have limited the effect of legislations and plans to end corporal punishment. Laws and policies usually neglect the systemic forms of violence and oppression that are embedded in the whole process and system of schooling. This is notwithstanding the exclusionary tendencies in policy-making and enforcing policies on schools without much consultation and participation from them (Wahab, 2014). Additionally, lack of educational knowledge and critical awareness among the public is also apparent in Kurdistan Region, which has deprioritized the democratic, social and cultural values of education among the majority families. According to Saeed (2008), families as well as schools systematically destroy the personality of children (p. 24), an attitude that has maintained the “deeply-rooted inequalities…between children” (Osler & Yahya, 2013, p. 194).
Schooling practices in Kurdistan Region also tend to impede human rights and the development of democratic education. Many educational policy and legal documents in KR consider democracy as a principle in education and mandate the application of human rights codes. There is also human rights education as well as democracy as topics in the social sciences curriculum in schools. Nevertheless, the human rights education is “often perceived as low-status and taught without adequate consideration of everyday rights denials” (Osler & Yahya, 2013, p. 189). Similarly, Saeed (2008) indicates that children study democracy as a topic in school; however, they are not taught how to live according to the democratic processes (p. 25). Systemic, cultural, religious and political factors in the educational system and within the broader society make human rights and democratic education very challenging. Such factors influence policymaking as well as their prioritization and implementation in schools. Osler & Yahya (2013) argue that in Kurdistan Region, “teaching about human rights in school…takes place in contexts where children’s rights (and particularly those of the girl child) are denied, and in family and societal contexts where powerful conservative and patriarchal values prevail” (p. 205).

Another aspect of the issues in the practices of schooling comes from the positivist epistemological tradition in the school and university curricula, which is interwoven with the systematic and political organization of schooling. According to Saeed (2008), Wahab (2014) and Omer (2015), the system of education in KR does not approach knowledge in a critical way. This system does not allow students to question the topics that they study, and teaches them to copy and accept as facts the information given to them in the classroom. Having a single textbook printed by the government for each topic in any course of study is a norm in Kurdistan Region, particularly in the K-12 system. These textbooks are the sole authority over the knowledge in any school topic, which students are required to attain through rote memorization and written testing. Single textbooks for school courses are used by the KRG, according to Kirmanj (2014), as “essential tools” to spread particular government ideologies, such as the narrative of the Kurdish nationalism and nation-building (p. 368). Teaching is based on the ‘banking concept’ (Freire, 2000) that does not allow much critical engagement with the content or with the class environment. Uncritically adopting the textbook content has significant political, social and epistemological consequences, particularly in Kurdistan, because
instruction is mainly lecturing; students are not engaged with critical analysis or contestation of the claims contained in the textbooks. In such contexts, “teachers are perceived as authorities akin to parents, and messages contained in textbooks disseminated through teachers carry near absolute authority” (Kirmanj, 2014, p. 369). Extrem...
political affiliations, the current educational system in Kurdistan still resembles that of dictatorships and totalitarian regimes (Omer, 2015; Wahab, 2014; Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Abdullah, 2010; Saeed, 2008). The criticisms surveyed above claim that the educational system in KR is a continuation of the Iraqi Ba’thist educational system, which is picked up by the KRG without radically changing it. The critics agree that lack of a comprehensive national vision for education as well as political and structural complexities in the Kurdish approach to governance have contributed to maintaining the current system (Omer, 2015; Wahab, 2014; Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Abdullah, 2010; Saeed, 2008).

The social, political and historical challenges at the K-12 and higher educational system in KR indicate a systematic relationship among the issues in the foundation, structure and practices in education. The systematic, cultural, religious and political factors in the educational system and within the broader society create challenges for radical developments in education, such as endeavors to uphold basic human rights and democratic principles (Wahab, 2014; Osler & Yahya, 2013; Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Saeed, 2008). These factors also create tensions not only for making policies but also for implementing them in schools. Furthermore, the discussion on the practical issues in education refers to a discrepancy between some of the laws and policies in official documents and their practical implications in schools and society in KR (Osler & Yahya, 2013; Saeed, 2008). Ala’Aldeen (2013) links the discrepancy between policy and practice mainly to a lack in the general political will among the Kurdish political elite or those who hold positions at the top of the governing structure. However, I argue that the ways in which the policies and laws are formed as well as the overall theoretical groundings and political objectives on and for which schooling is intended are at the forefront of not only the policy-practice discrepancy but also the overall educational issues. Underlying my argument is the belief that the educational issues are related to the systemic aspect and objectives of schooling in KR. This argument rejects a top-down, linear and deficit approach in understanding and treating the educational issues. Just as McLaughlin (1987), Codd (1988), Bascia (2001), and Burch (2007) argue that it would be inaccurate to assume a linear relationship between policy and practice, likewise, it would be inaccurate to assume that the educational issues in KR are issues of lack of a national
vision, political will, or issues of implementation and interpretation of policies. Granted the existence of a discrepancy between policy and the reality of education and schooling in KR, the issues of violence, oppression and exclusion could indicate the way the administrative system in education truly functions. Taking a critical approach to understand the educational issues provides a framework, which explains how educational policies and legislations are systemic reflections of the political and social frameworks that structure educational communities in schools and society in KR. Likewise, the claim that the KRG has been reiterating and maintaining the Ba’thist educational and administrative paradigms could reveal the foundational, conceptual and institutional groundings that the KRG upholds in the endeavors of educational reform and development. Even though in the past 25 years KR has witnessed visible developments in the economy, infrastructure and cultural technologies, these developments do not necessarily reflect fundamental shifts in the social, political and institutional experiences (Shakely, 2010). There seems to be a particular rational framework that is pervasive in the educational discourse in KR that reiterates authoritarian tendencies and practices (Wahab, 2012; 2013; 2014). As such, the three categories of the educational issues in Kurdistan indicate an intricate, systemic relationship between the educational theory, policy and practice in KR’s educational system.

Hence, the claims of lack of a Kurdish national educational vision and theoretical ambiguity in the KRG, which has resulted in bureaucratic and structural stagnation, perpetuation of violence and non-democratic aspects in its educational system, need to be looked at through a critical lens that provides a deeper and broader view of these issues. Not only does the existence of these issues need to be validated but also their range and complexities need to be expanded to specify the intricate, systemic relationships that may exist among them. If, for instance, critics believe that educational policies in KR are more about bureaucratizing and micromanaging than supporting schools and universities in their educational processes (Saeed, 2004; 2008; Omer, 2015; Wahab, 2014), the existence of policies for bureaucratizing and micromanaging education is an expression of a philosophy in education and a form of governance. As such, there exists a particular kind of vision that requires such a system and appropriated organizational practices.
Additionally, while Ala’Aldeen (2013) argues that the issues of governance in KR cannot be solved unless tackled from the foundations of its structure and processes of decision-making and rule of law (p. 252), he, nonetheless, still presents his argument within the paradigm of Kurdish nationalism and nation-building, which imply a particular understanding of state structures, rule of law and decision-making processes. Such remarks from critics and educational leaders mean that the educational and cultural institutions are not free-floating entities and that the KRG may indeed have a vision or plan in the educational processes. Furthermore, it may also be problematic to assume the educational issues as simply those of inheritance, particularly after more than two decades of Kurdish self-governance in KR. Aziz (2009) argues that “Kurdish nationalism after 1990s is a phenomenon of political culture and a result of a conscious choice made by Kurdish political elites and educated masses” (p. 95). The Kurdish self-governing experience in the past 25 years has integrated the Ba’thist socio-cultural and socio-political relationships in education with those of the Kurdish nationalist movement (Natali, 2005; Bengio, 2012; Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Rubin, 2016). The conscious social and political choice has defined the Kurdish political elite’s engagement in the process of “building the institutions of an independent state” (Soderberg & Phillips, 2015, p. vii). In other words, it is not by accident or mere inheritance that the KRG is what it is, but is rather the reflection of a national project of state building. Hence, the argument about lack of a national educational and cultural vision in KR needs to be reexamined.

The educational issues in KR need to be understood in relation to each other. The perpetuation of violence, oppression and exclusion on different levels, and their depth and complexity cannot be understood through simply critiquing the visible issues. The intricacy of the issues that makes them resistant to radical reform also requires critical engagement with the educational vision, system and schooling practices in KR in relation to their larger socio-political and socio-historical contexts. To do that, the contexts in which these issues take shape need to be brought forward. Based on the accounts on the various educational issues surveyed above, the educational process in KR requires a close examination of its theoretical and political foundations and principles. This also means

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7 A former Minister of HESR in the 6th cabinet of the KRG.
critically examining the historical groundings, cultural realities and political practices that
dem the current theoretical foundations and principles indispensable. When educational
critics and leaders consider the major educational challenge to be a lack of a national
educational vision to reflect the political, social and cultural aspirations of the people in
KR, it denotes thinking about education within the paradigms of a modern polity because
having a national educational vision is related to visioning education within a modern
state. Therefore, the critical examination needs to go beyond the particular visible
educational issues into issues of how people in KR come to establish their relationships,
national identities, and governance within the paradigms of a modern state structure.
Chapter Three: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into three main sections. Section one presents a critical review of literature on ‘nationalism’ and ‘democracy’ as two main policy frameworks coming out from the context of KR as well as an initial examination of the major policy documents. The literature on nationalism and democracy are considered in studying the condition of education in KR. First, the literature review will critically engage with the meanings and development of nationalism, indicating the major historical, political and social factors of its emergence. It will also indicate some of the principles of nationalism, which can assist in situating and understanding nationalism as a rationalizing force for the emergence of modern states and state apparatuses, such as the educational system. The literature review will also explain the particular social, political and institutional understandings and paradigms that nationalism predicates on education. Section two presents a critical review of the main theories of democracy. It engages with the intricacy of conceptualizing democracy amid its different and, at times contrasting, definitions. This review of literature particularly focuses on a critical conception of democracy. A critical engagement with the literature on democracy indicates the significance of conceptualizing democracy around its substantive values, and through such engagements, to promote the overarching values of critical democracy. Section three will expand on the discussions regarding the processes of nationalism and the robust values of critical democracy in the context of education, which will inform a conceptual framework espoused in this work. I have called this conceptual framework ‘transformative democracy,’ which is an educative, dynamic, self-conscious and self-transforming form of democracy.
3.2 Nationalism

3.2.1 What is “nation”? What is “nationalism”?

Whether “the nation” as a particular political idea is a recent invention or is rooted in the historical existence of people groups, theorists and critics of nationalism agree that it has, nonetheless, become very entrenched in the general imagination and has become a firm ground for the widely accepted form of the modern nation-states (Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 2006; Eriksen, 2010; Smith, 1998; Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1998; Mehrotra, 1998). This idea, in its modern sense, has become “the accepted standard” for political units and “the norm” for their legitimacy (Gellner, 1983, p. 49, Italics in original). Nationalism, as the political, social, cultural and ideological endeavors associated with the idea of the nation, “has been a catchword with many different meanings in modern times. It can work in a multiplicity of forms. It can be exploited for cultural integration, political ends, democratic ideals and even toward authoritarianism” (Mehrotra, 1998, p. 831). Therefore, understanding the contingencies of the modern concept of the nation is bound by understanding the contingencies of the age of nationalism.

Terms like “ethnicity, ethnic group, nation, nationalism” have become common in formal and informal discourses in media, politics and everyday conversations, along with recent growth in scholarship on issues related to ethnicity and nationalism. While ambiguity and lack of consensus remains a feature of their meanings, growth of interest in studies related to issues of globalization, identity and modernity in today’s scholarship signifies the importance and desire for a general theory and a more intricate understanding of these terms (Eriksen, 2010; Smith, 1998). The visible impact of ethnicity and nationalism in the formation of social, cultural and political identity for many people, an impact that still continues into the third millennia, has made ethnicity and nationalism significant for current scholarship in order to understand the processes of identity politics (Eriksen, 2010). However, Anderson (2006) argues that while the effect that “nationalism has exerted on the modern world” is immense, “plausible theory about it is conspicuously meagre” (p. 3). Having a general theory of nation and nationalism
could assist not only in explaining the ever growing “field of ethnic and national phenomena” but also “the considerable impact” that this phenomena has “on other fields of human existence, notably international politics and global security” (Smith, 1998, pp. 222-223). The significance of understanding the dynamics of ethnic and national formations, therefore, goes beyond the boundaries of the modern nation-state to involve many aspects of regional and international affairs and relations. And this requires a thorough understanding of the cultural, social and religious factors along with “knowledge of the local history, socio-economic conditions and political life” that are involved in the emergence of ethno-nationalism and the issues related to it (Mehrotra, 1998, pp. 829-830).

There are different paradigms or schools of thought in theorizing nation and nationalism. Two of the most noticeable are the primordialists or essentialists and the modernists or constructionists (Smith, 1998; Gunter, 2013). The primordialists base their theory of nation and nationalism on certain sentiments that are derived from “‘primordial’ attributes of basic social and cultural phenomena like language, religion, territory, and especially kinship” (Smith, 1998, p. 223). They believe that nation and nationalism have “ancient roots…an origin in the ethnie” with attributes that “date back to some distant point in history,” which predate the age of nationalism (Gunter, 2013, p. 29-30). The modernists or constructionists, on the other hand, consider many nations and nationalism as products of modernity. They argue that these constructs have been formed as a result of “novel processes of modernisation” through utilizing “novel ways to cope with modern conditions and modern political imperatives” (Smith, 1998, p. 224, sic). In this respect, modernists argue that nationalism and its formative activities such as state bureaucracies and warfare have invented or created nations (Gunter, 2013; Smith, 1998). Even though these paradigms can differ on the particular origination of nations, there are theoretical grounds on which they can have their approaches combined. For instance, according to Gunter (2013), while the primordialists maintain that nations predate nationalism, they do not reject the constructed elements of modern nations (p. 29-30). Aziz (2009) argues that Anthony D. Smith, who is more aligned with the primordialists, believes that “nations are modern expressions of an age-old collectivity known as ethnicity” (p. 109). In this sense, some primordialists do not reject the modern elements of nations and nationalism but
rather insist on the continuity of the ‘ethnic core’ “at the heart of the modern nation” (p. 109).

3.2.2 Factors and principles of nationalism

In this subsection, I present a number of factors and principles taken from the review of literature on nationalism. While not particularly peculiar to the idea of nation and nationalism, these factors and principles could explain central characteristics of the idea and the consequential political and social formations in modern times. A complex of the following factors explains how the modern idea of nation and nationalism could be recognized or differentiated from other forms of societies and group identities. In many ways, these factors and principles align with the modernist and postcolonial paradigms, without neglecting the primordialists’ or the perennialists’ take on the continuous aspects of some nations before the emergence of modernity (Smith, 1998).

The contingent nature of the nation and nationalism predicates various possibilities on their definition and boundaries. The contingencies that determine the meanings and scope of the nation are connected with the social, historical, political and economic developments that gave rise to the age of nationalism as “a new form of social organization” (Gellner, 1983, p. 48). This approach presents nationalism as the complex and dynamic enabler for the emergence of the modern nation; the force that forms the self-consciousness required in the formation of new independent identities (Mehrotra, 1998, p. 832). This means that understanding the full meaning and scope of the concept of the nation requires understanding the principles and processes of nationalism (Gellner, 1983, p. 55). According to Gellner (1983), the concept of nationalism is intrinsically linked to the organization of the modern society. The following factors and principles, therefore, can help explain ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’ in relation to the organization of modern society.
Nations as modern constructs

Theorists of nationalism, particularly within the modernist paradigm, agree that nationalism and the idea of a nation, in their modern sense, are historically, socially and politically created or imagined phenomena (Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 2006; Eriksen, 2010; Ashcroft et al., 1998). According to Gellner (1983), nationalism is a social, cultural and political construction “suitable for the conditions now prevailing [in the modern, industrial, capitalist and globalized era], though admittedly using as their raw material the cultural, historical and other inheritances from the pre-nationalist world” (p. 49). Anderson (2006) argues that nationalism, nation-ness and nationality are “cultural artefacts of a particular kind” (p. 4). Nationalism is not only a social and political construction, it is also the force that gives shape to and crystalizes new political units (Gellner, 1983). In other words, nationalism is the framework on which modern political units imagine themselves and construct the social, cultural and political boundaries that more or less separate them from other political units. As “ideological constructions seeking to forge a link between (self-defined) cultural group and state,” nations “create abstract communities of a different order from those dynastic states or kinship-based communities which pre-dated them” (Eriksen, 2010, p. 120). Within the framework of nationalism lie the “discursive networks of communication” and the “retualised activities and symbolism in forging national communities” (Smith, 1998, sic). Eriksen (2010) argues that nationalism is “the ideology of the modern nation-state…Nations and nationalist ideologies are modern large-scale phenomena par excellence” (P. 118, Italics in original). This means that studying and theorizing around the modern formation of nations and understanding the principles of nationalism are also new.

Critical examinations of the idea of the nation and nationalism emphasize the contingent nature of these concepts (Smith, 1998). The particular focus that theorists of nationalism like Gellner (1983) and Anderson (2006) put on the created and imagined aspect of the nation counters the primordialist nationalists’ argument around how the nation comes to know itself. In such nationalist discourse, the idea of nations is presented “as natural and immutable formations based on shared collective values” (Gellner, 1983, p. 48). Some even believe in the “seamless, immemorial and even biological character of
nations” (Smith, 1998, p. 11). This nationalist discourse brings forward the idea that “the ‘nations’ are there, in the very nature of things, only waiting to be ‘awakened’ (a favourite nationalist expression and image) from their regrettable slumber, by the nationalist ‘awakener’” (Gellner, 1983, p. 48). Gellner (1983) argues, “nationalism is not the awakening of an old, latent, dormant force, though that is how it does indeed present itself” (p. 48, Italics in original). For Anderson (2006), nations as imagined political communities means that the image of the nation and their communion, in the manner and form presented by the doctrine of nationalism, only exists in the imagination of its members (p. 49). Ashcroft et al. (1998) maintain the socially constructed aspect of nations, and argue that, as a result nations are inevitably unstable formations (pp. 149-150). The modern idea of the nation as “a contingency, and not a universal necessity” means that, even though “it has now come to appear as such” and has become universal and normative, “[h]aving a nation is not an inherent attribute of humanity” (Gellner, 1983, pp. 6-7).

The mythic element of nation

Even though the modernist paradigm considers nationalism a real political movement, it still argues for its groundings on mythic elements (Gellner, 1983). In this respect, nationalism, as a political movement, works on constructing a myth and advances itself through the advancement of that myth. It creates a sense of continuity, links an “immemorial past” to a “limitless future” (Anderson, 2006, pp. 11-12). Gellner (1983) also expresses this by indicating that nationalism uses “the cultural, historical and other inheritances from the pre-nationalist world” as the “raw material” for the construction of new political and cultural units (p. 49). According to Anthony D. Smith, “nations always require ethnic ‘elements’. These may, of course, be reworked; they often do” (Aziz, 2009, p. 106). Nationalists engage in the reworking of the ethnic characteristics of nations and utilize them for the political project of nationalism, which could lead to casting a mythical dimension to the idea of nationhood. Ashcroft et al. (1998) argue that “The myth of nationhood, masked by ideology, perpetuates nationalism, in which specific
identifiers are employed to create exclusive and homogenous conceptions of national traditions” (p. 150). Even though it works in various forms, it is this ideological tendency in nationalism that “can sometime be dangerous as it may lead to the formation of an authoritarian government” (Mehrotra, 1998, p. 831, sic).

The force that national myths and mythmaking have in the workings of nationalism influences some of the contingencies of nation and nationalism. It is through “myth-symbol complexes” that nations are able to determine the persistence of ethnic boundaries, and “without which nationalism would be powerless” (Smith, 1998, p. 45). Although ‘myth-symbol complexes’ are durable over time, “This durability does not imply that myths and symbols have static meanings, but rather that they create a myth of common origins” (Aziz, 2009, p. 109). When the contingent aspect of this myth is coupled with the political, social and economic imperatives of defining and sustaining modern societies, the boundaries that define the nation assume mythic characteristics. Ashcroft et al. (1998) argue that “Nations and nationalism are profoundly important in the formation of colonial practice” (p. 151). They refer to the inseparable and long history of the link between the idea of nation and colonial expansion (p. 152). This is particularly because the myth of nationhood has allowed the imperialist powers of the nineteenth century to expand their nationality along with the expansion of their territories. “Imperialism” of the nineteenth century, which was formed by “the newly emergent nations of the post-Renaissance world,” was based on the ideology of the nation and the creation of unifying myths for social and political cohesions based on “unifying signifiers of language and race” (Ashcroft et al., 1998, p. 153). The mythic aspect of the nation and the dangerous ideological premise of nationalism become evident in employing the myth of unified, historically uninterrupted and culturally homogenous national traditions “not only to legitimize a general idea of a social group (‘a people’) but also to construct a modern idea of a nation-state” (Ashcroft et al., 1998, p. 150). And in this process “all the instrumentalities of a state power…are subsumed and legitimized as the ‘natural’ expressions of a unified national history and culture” (p. 150).
Nationalism as a political principle

It goes from here to suggest that the meanings and implications of nation and nationalism are therefore related to the organization of the modern society. Modern industrial society, Gellner (1983) argues, is based on principles such as “universal literacy, mobility and hence individualism, political centralization, the need for a costly educational infrastructure” (p. 110). The factors that are at work in making modern societies are “power, education and shared culture” (Gellner, 1983, p. 97), which are manifested in the instrumentalities of the modern state. This review of literature on nationalism proposes that nationalism is very much dependent on politics, ideology, and power in its argument for shaping the national identity and the nation’s cultural distinctiveness, homogeneity and uninterrupted history. Culture, as it is presented in the nationalist discourse, is created and imagined through processes of under-communication, reinterpretation of historical accounts to respond to the requirements of the present, and the subjective identification of symbols. Culture, therefore, is not objective, which makes it possible that ethnic and national identities maintain themselves even while the national cultures change (Eriksen, p. 85-87). Although a paradoxical aspect of the created identity this might be, the “ambiguity or ‘multivocality’ of symbols,” nevertheless, “makes it possible to manipulate them politically” (Eriksen, p. 87). Furthermore, the formation of a particular ethnic or national identity is predicated not only on what members of a group share but also, and more importantly, on the mutual rights and duties they firmly recognize to each other as a result (Gellner, 1983). When taken as such, this argument indicates the political and ideological intricacies of nationalism, particularly when the national identity is very much bounded by the political identity of the state (Gellner, 1983).

Even though ethnic and national identities share much of their workings (Eriksen, 2010), and that “the terms ‘ethnic’ and ‘nation’ form part of a continuum” (Smith, 1998, p. 181), based on Gellner’s (1983) view, ethnic identity becomes national identity when the boundaries of the state are taken to be drawn around the constructed identity. According to Anderson (2006), nationalism is very much dependent on its political power while it is poorly dependent on philosophical groundings. This means that nationalism is first and foremost a political project and very much dependent on particular political
arrangements. The political arrangements in turn hypostasize nationalism (p. 5).
Nationalism as such does not exist (at least concretely as well as philosophically) without its political arrangements. “Nationalism has been defined,” Gellner (1983) argues, “as the striving to make culture and polity congruent, to endow a culture with its own political roof” (p. 43). Gellner’s definition resonates John Stewart Mill’s (1861/2001) conclusion that the boundaries of the government and the nationalities are necessary to coincide in order to have free institutions. Gellner’s (1983) definition of nationalism is predicated on the link between social and cultural peculiarities of ethnicity and the political identity in the form of a state. Based on this view, Eriksen (2010) argues, “Nationalisms are… ethnic ideologies which hold that [a particular ethnic group] should dominate a state” (p. 119). Nationalism, in turn, shapes the type of political arrangement it needs in order to thrive. Nationalism, therefore, is “primarily a political principle” for how a nation’s political boundaries are drawn. It is “a theory of political legitimacy,” (Gellner, 1983, p. 1) backed by a “profound emotional legitimacy” (Anderson, 2006, p. 4). Nationalism is also the incubator for the imagining and development, and is the sustainer of national identity. The political as well as emotional principle depends not only on the material from which the modern nation is developed but also on the manner in which it is constructed and imagined, defined and understood, for which the social, economic and historical developments in the age of nationalism provided the conditions. In this respect, Gellner, (1983), Anderson (2006) and Ashcroft et al. (1998) argue that the idea of the modern nation is congruent with the rise of modern capitalism and industrialization and with their demand for new social and political formations, which represented national entities. “These new ‘national’ entities demanded a new national narrative,” a narrative that was very much dependent on discursive processes (Ashcroft et al., 1998, p. 152). Both Gellner (1983) and Anderson (2006) refer to the strong social, economic and political links between the emergence and necessity of formal, centralized and standardized forms of communication encompassed in literacy and numeracy and the advancement of nationalism.
Dependence on power and ideology

Understanding the nature and position of power, whether in the form of force or legitimacy (Boudon & Bourricaud, 2003), in modern societies signifies the ways and the circumstances in and under which power is used and its influences in the construction and development of not only the nationalist ideology but also the national identity and boundaries. The force that nationalism provides as a doctrine for the formation and establishment of the modern state comes from the political legitimacy as well as powerful sentiments developed along the development of the national identity. The political legitimacy is very much related to the industrial social and cultural arrangements of the modern life. The legitimacy that nationalism stretches to any particular nation-state is also based on the modern idea of self-rule of the nation or ethnic group as opposed to the rule of the foreigner (Mehrotra, 1998, p. 833), which, if otherwise, results in offending the nationalist sentiment (Gellner, 1983). The relationship between power and its political and sentimental resources with the instrumentality of the modern state indicates the complex relationship between the nation and the state.

According to Gellner (1983), “Modern societies are always and inevitably centralized” where the power for “the enforcement of the social order” is “concentrated in the hands of some of the members of society.” This occurs in a way that there is a “distinction between the power-holders and the rest” of the nation (pp. 88-89). Gellner (1983) argues that there is no alternative to the centralized and concentrated aspect of power in the hand of the power-holders as distinct from the rest of the society, unlike other aspects of the modern society, such as education (pp. 89-90). The relationship between power, education and culture presents the concept of national identity in terms of access to culture, power and education, and the endeavors of nationalism as achieving this access. Gellner’s (1983) conception of nationalism, and of power, is basically different from that which is put forward in Marxism, where based on the latter, nationalism and ethnic conflicts are seen as camouflages for class conflicts. While in Gellner’s (1983) sense, access to education seems to have replaced access to capital, because it is assumed that it is through education that capital and wealth can be achieved (pp. 93-97). Based on the centralized and exclusive nature of power in modern societies,
the relationship between power, education and culture very much indicates the workings of nationalism and the various processes of national imaginings. The ideological underpinnings by which the nation comes to imagine itself determine the nature and position of power associated with modern societies. An aspect of the ideology that is at work in the construction of the nation and the homogenization of its traditions is manifest, Ashcroft et al. (1998) argue, in “the confusion of the idea of the nation with the practice and power of the nation-state” (p. 151). This ideological complex makes nationalism not only “one of the most powerful forces in contemporary society” but also “an extremely contentious site, on which ideas of self-determination and freedom, of identity and unity collide with ideas of suppression and force, of domination and exclusion” (p. 151). This means that once the nation’s political endeavor encompassed in the formation of a congruent state takes hold of the processes of identity-formation and sustenance, the nation sees itself mainly in the various practices of the nation-state.

**Hegemonic culture**

Gellner (1983) argues that “nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high-culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, and in some cases of the totality, of the population” (p. 57). The concept of ‘high culture’ used by Gellner initially means the culture from among the diverse cultures in a population that has had access to the modern opportunities of cultivation, such as education and print technologies, and through which it has been presented by the nationalists as distinct from the mass cultures. This cultivation of the ‘high culture’ and its presentation as the national culture has taken place within the contingencies of capitalism and industrialization (Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 2006). The forces that play a role in the cultivation, homogenization, standardization and imposition of the national culture integrate hegemony with the processes of national imaginings, making the constructions of the nation “potent sites of control and domination within modern society” (Ashcroft et al., 1998, p. 150). The signifiers that are at work to create homogeneity of the national traditions “always fail to represent the diversity of the actual
‘national’ community for which they purport to speak, and in practice, usually represent and consolidate the interests of the dominant power groups within any national formation” (Ashcroft et al., 1998, p. 150). This argument basically presents nationalism as a project of the elite, particularly when it is “The elite group [who] is the main motivating force in imbibing self-consciousness in an ethnic group and raising the demand for the recognition of its independent identity in a community” (Mehrotra, 1998, p. 833). Aziz (2009) argues that even though traditional social, political and economic structures contribute in the formation of modern nations, the elite “‘hoodwink’ the popular classes into accepting an ideology that is a simple tool for the maintenance of hegemony” (p. 109). Notwithstanding, Gellner (1983) argues: “It is not the case that nationalism imposes homogeneity out of a Machtbedürfniss [the need for power]; it is the objective need for homogeneity which is reflected in nationalism” (Gellner, 1983, p. 46). The need for homogeneity is a manifestation of the social, cultural and political needs of capitalism and industrialization, which in turn manifests itself in nationalism. In other words, Gellner’s (1983) argument is that nationalism is a consequence of homogeneity that has come about as a result of political, economic and social changes in an industrialized and capitalist world.

The created and mythical aspect of nations, while supplemented by religious undertones, also creates a hegemonic environment. The nationalist discourse is established mainly around the preservation and revival of cultures, yet these cultures are often nationalism’s own invention, or they are cultures that are “modified out of all recognition” (Gellner, 1983, p. 56). Through this process of creation and modification, the nation engages in a religious-like process of “a social…collective self-worship” (p. 56). Gellner (1983) further argues: “nationalism has its own amnesias and selections which, even when they may be severely secular, can be profoundly distorting and deceptive” (57). That is why, “Nationalism is not what it seems, and above all it is not what it seems to itself” (p. 56). The complex of power and hegemony, therefore, influences how nationalism comes to be recognized or differentiated from other forms of group-formations. Even though there might be genuine cultural and structural differences between, say, nationalism and tribalism, power and hegemony become determinants in calling the various social formations what they might not be. “Tribalism never prospers,”
Gellner (1983) argues, “for when it does, everyone will respect it as a true nationalism, and no-one will dare call it tribalism” (p. 87).

To summarize, rather than being a political call compelled by the awakening of the nation to its own national reality, nationalism is the incubator and sustainer of nations. In this sense, as a new form of social organization, nation is created and imagined in connection with and through the social, historical, political and economic developments that led to the age of nationalism. Smith (1991) defines nationalism as “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or a potential nation” (p. 73). Nationalism presents its argument based on the concepts of culture, language and historical experience presumably shared by the members of a national unit, and the need to make the boundaries of the state congruent with the boundaries of the national unit (Gellner, 1983). Although the concept of culture is loosely, if at all, defined in the nationalist discourse, and while the nation as a natural entity is a myth, Gellner (1983) argues that cultures do exist “often subtly grouped, shading into each other, overlapping, intertwined” (p. 49). Neglecting the definition of culture yet furthering the narratives of the myth serves to establish the nationalist argument for the congruence of the boundaries of culture with those of the state. This is mainly because the definition of culture becomes bound by the ideology and power, among other factors, that determine the grand narrative through which the nation takes shape. The conscious neglect in defining culture coincides with the conscious construction, advancement and imposition of the national language as the manifestation of the high, cultivated culture. However, the process of conscious neglect and conscious construction of culture, although theoretically and pragmatically limits the idea of nation as a modern construction (Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 2006), serves the invention of the nation through a conscious limitation and exclusion of ‘others’ so that the boundaries for the inclusion of members can be drawn. Ahmed (2015) argues that “nationalist modernity” is the agenda of “forgetting the past” on the way of treating “the present” so that a progressive future can be reached. In the process of forgetting the past lies the acts and process of homogenization and exclusion of difference, therefore making “nationalist modernity…the visible face of nationalism’s hidden ideological agenda” (p. 25). Nonetheless, the idea of the nation has gained so much power that
disrupting its narrative seems like disrupting the necessary courses of nature. Although nationalism uses “cultural shreds and patches [which] are often arbitrary historical inventions” as the material for constructing the nation and laying the route for its imaging, Gellner (1983) argues that this should not mean that nationalism as the principle for modern political organizations is contingent and accidental. This is mainly because nationalism is a reflection of the shared social, economic and political conditions of the modern times (p. 56). Therefore, even though the modern concept of the nation as a product of nationalism is founded on a myth, nationalism itself has become an inevitable reality.

3.2.3 Nationalism and education

The factors and principles of nation and nationalism explained above guide a particular type of education, a type that is bounded by both the prospects and limitations of the idea nation and nationalism. Power, politics and hegemony, which are embedded within the processes of nationalism, are particularly significant in determining these prospects and limitations. Since nationalism is “the consequence of a new form of social organization,” (Gellner, 1983, p. 48), this form of social organization is much dependent on education, both in its selective practices of what would constitute the national cultures and in internalizing those cultures into its members. Education as a crucial tool and process of reification of nationhood has a significant role in creating and familiarizing the society with the national symbols and indicators, and instill in them the skills and senses needed for national communication and identification (Osborne, 2001). In other words, education becomes a major process through which the image of the nation and the nationalist narrative are constructed, and the method of the nation’s imagining is outlined. All the signifiers necessary in the construction of nationhood take shape in the processes of formal education (Anderson, 2006; Gellner, 1983).

According to Gellner (1983), nationalism “is the establishment of an anonymous, impersonal society, with mutually substitutable atomized individuals, held together above all by a shared culture” (p. 57). In the nationalist discourse, the shared culture is a
“complex of skills which makes a man competent to occupy most of the ordinary positions in a modern society, and which makes him, so to speak, able to swim with ease in this kind of cultural medium” (Gellner, 1983, p. 89). The shared culture is cultivated and formed through formal schooling for highly bureaucratic and technological forms of communication “in place of a previous complex structure of local groups, sustained by folk cultures reproduced locally and idiosyncratically by the micro-groups themselves” (p. 57). Even though the conditions necessary for nationalism gained through education are not strictly specified, particularly in that the acquisition of the skills can be achieved through other means (particularly due to social mobility, mass communication, and in modern times new and social media, etc.), minimum skill in literacy, numeracy and technical competence is, nonetheless, still so significant that “its wide and effective diffusion presupposes a well-maintained and effective centralized educational system” (Gellner, 1983, p. 89).

The principle of nationalism set forward by Gellner (1983), which indicates that specific cultures need corresponding political roofs, works particularly under a specific assumption of culture: that of a standardized, centrally sustained and homogenous culture. If culture cannot be so, then the political argument of nationalism and its nation-building project fails. At the same time, education “has often been used as an instrument of ideological indoctrination and cultural imposition” and that historically, “public schooling was designed to serve the needs of the state more than it was the needs of children or their parents” (Osborne, 2001, p. 39). There is, therefore, a reciprocal relationship between nationalism and the modern schooling structure. On the one hand, the relationship between nationalism and schooling indicates why ideological state apparatuses (Althusser, 2006) are so significant for the nation, particularly since public schools have within them the fundamentals of state functionality (Ryan, 2006; Osborne, 2001). Furthermore, as explained earlier, in the nationalist endeavors of constructing the general idea of a unified nation and the corresponding nation-state, the instrumental actualization of state power becomes a “‘natural’ expression of the national historical and cultural unity” (Ashcroft et al., 1998, p. 150). As such, the state becomes the representation of the collective identity of the nation. The state apparatuses not only protect and consolidate the national identity but also provide the paradigms for its
imagining and creation. Therefore, the nation comes to see its very existence in the image of the state. The reciprocal relationship between nationalism and schooling also means that nationalism uses state apparatuses to sustain itself. As explained earlier, nationalism not only brings forward some of the “pre-existent cultures” as its foundations but also “transform[s] them in the process” (Gellner, 1983, p. 48). This transformation becomes apparent within the process of national education. In this way, nationalism becomes very intertwined with education. For the nationalist project, education is the process by which not only the necessary shared culture, language, skills and traditions are created but also the members of a nation are formed, through providing the means, such as print-language (Anderson, 2006) and “standardized, formalized and codified, literacy-carried high cultures” (Gellner, 1983) in order to recognize those shared attributes necessary for their belonging to the same nation. In this process, education does not simply make people aware of their natural and shared attributes but also creates the very attributes that are necessary for the formation of the nation, since, Gellner (1983) states, “nations maketh man” (p. 7, Italics in original).

Understanding the forces that are at play in the process of the creation of unified national cultures, and the ways such forces gear the currents and waves of the cultural transformation is significant. Power, politics and hegemony as examples of the forces that play a role within formal schooling in the dissemination and consolidation of the national culture and identity can manifest themselves in processes of standardization of literacy and culture, indoctrination, and the pervasiveness of a positivist epistemology.

Standardization and centralization of culture and cultural dissemination tools are at the heart of the conditions that make the nationalist discourse. A standardized and centralized form of literacy is not only necessary for the nationalist project but is also very much interconnected with its emergence. Like other social, economic and political conditions that paved the way for the age of nationalism, the standardized and centralized form of literacy made it possible for nationalism to take shape and be disseminated as the ultimate discourse for structuring new nation-states (Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 2006). Nationalism has used standardization as a means of creating and disseminating a shared culture under the assumption that unless there is conformity to one high culture, the
nation will not function. However, against the illusion of a shared culture as a historical foundation in the formation of a nation, Gellner (1983) argues that “Culturally plural societies often worked well in the past: so well, in fact, that cultural plurality was sometimes invented where it was previously lacking” (p. 55). Notwithstanding, however unique a culture might be, a political boundary of a state (any kind of state) is less likely to exclusively contain it (Gellner, 1983). This means that the nationalists’ political and ideological endeavors in forming a state based exclusively on a shared culture is a fallacy. Hence, with countering this fallacy comes the attempts of standardization and homogenization, which could lead to processes of genocide, ethnocide and linguicide (Hassanpour, 1992).

Nationalistic education reifies tradition based on the principles of nationalism, in a way that supports the nationalist principles of uninterrupted shared history, superiority of the national culture and the unity of the nation against outsiders, one-sided narrations and “selective renderings of history” (Eriksen, 2010, p. 84). The national identities created through nationalism are contested identities, as Eriksen (2010) argues. However, their treatment in education as natural and permanent expressions of ontological existence rather than as social constructs of modern political groupings demonstrates processes of indoctrination, when the political history of national identity fall outside of any critical scrutiny in schools (Enslin, 1999). Furthermore, nationalist education works on the dissemination of “the nationalist myths and sentiments to control, suppress and discriminate against minority groups within many post-colonial states,” (Ashcroft et al., 1998) particularly if the existence of minorities is seen as a hurdle in front of the image of the nation as homogenous with a unified and distinct history. Since nationalism is the ideological doctrine of the relationship between the state and the high culture, in that “every high culture…wants a state, and preferably its own,” as Gellner (1983, p. 51) indicates, the educational system not only works around the maintenance of the high culture for which it is established but also works against the development of other high cultures, which might demand their own state and potentially lead to the break-up of the homogeneity of the dominant culture. In this way, nationalist education becomes a force not only for the creation of a particular high culture but, once it is established and becomes dominant, also becomes the suppressor of other cultures (Mehrotra, 1998; also
Nationalism, and the conditions that led to its rise, predicated a particular kind of cognitive knowledge that was at the same time bounded by economic advancement. This historical development means that nationalism is predicated on a particular kind of epistemology, based on the Cartesian and empiricist philosophies. “Their essence was to de-absolutize all substantive conviction about the world, and to subject all assertions, without exception, to neutral scrutiny by criteria ('experience', 'the light of reason') located beyond the bounds and the ramparts of any one belief system” (Gellner, 1983, p. 78, sic). In the nationalist doctrine, education is designed not only based on the imperatives of modern, industrial, and economic-driven form of life but also to maintain the same form of life and to dispense the type of culture that is required in the process. In a society that is shaped around the requirements of nation-building, division of labor, or economic competitiveness, change might mean changing languages or integration into the high literate culture, without having to adapt new “thought styles” (Gellner, 1983, p. 116).

To conclude, the culture with which the modern state wishes to be congruent is highly literate, technically coded and regularized, not dependent on context for its communication; it is a centralized and universalized form of culture. The system of education thus becomes the creator and the shaper of such a culture (Gellner, 1983), while the state becomes its guardian (p. 62). In this complex, the type of state, whether autocratic or democratic, becomes very significant and intertwined with the type of culture promoted as the national culture as well as the education through which this is realized. Even though Enslin (1999) argues that national identity as an educational aim contradicts democratic aims in education, a democratic and educative approach to teaching identities means “to provide students with as much opportunity as possible for self-definition” (p. 109). At the same time, democratic forces could steer the transformation of cultures in a different direction than non-democratic forces. This brings us to the significance of examining democracy in its different conceptions, and the prospects that democracy can offer in relation to some of the issues of nationalism.
3.3 Democracy

3.3.1 Conceptualizing democracy

In this subsection, I review and critically discuss different conceptions of democracy, and examine some of the arguments and values in democracy, particularly in its critical conception. This discussion and examination will help to explain the connections, implications and applications of democracy in education. Any serious and substantive engagement with democracy needs first and foremost a careful examination of its meanings. It is problematic not to define democracy, or rather to assume that people understand what one means when democracy or its various adjectival associations are mentioned. A review of literature on democracy and on democratic theories shows that there is a lack of consensus when it comes to what democracy entails. “Democracy,” Cunningham (2002) argues, “like ‘justice’ or ‘freedom,’ is what some call a ‘contested’ concept embedded within rival theories” (p. 3). According to Barrow (2007), democracy is “inherently evaluative, the question of what constitutes true democracy is forever open to argument” (p. 29).

Investigating the different conceptions and theories of democracy shows that some forms and concepts of democracy actually stand in direct opposition to other forms and concepts. For instance, Cunningham (2002) argues that participatory theory of democracy is not only “the polar opposite” of the theory of democracy on the basis of the free market but also sets itself “against all versions of liberal democracy that see active politics as the domain of government and…interest group leaders” (p. 123). Blaug (2002) locates “incumbent democracy,” an umbrella term he uses for the liberal and representative conceptions that depend on formal institutions, in a position that is “very different” and rather opposite to the critical democratic conceptions. Pinto (2013) contrasts critical democracy to the “popular conceptions of democracy” within the liberal tradition, because they limit democracy “to a form of rule that fails to go beyond narrow, government-sanctioned citizen activities such as voting” (p. 155). Since the meaning of democracy is “socially constructed and contextual,” as Price (2007) argues, “There are competing definitions and expectations of democracy” (p. 14). Part of the contestation
and polarity among the theories and concepts of democracy is because, according to Blaug (2002), “democracy is not one thing, one journey, one continuous project which reaches up to the state and down to the grassroots” (p. 103). Blaug suggests recognizing different democratic projects as incompatible, while at the same time avoiding the promotion of “a particular understanding of democracy and a particular set of organizational assumptions” (103).

However, examining the various democratic theories shows that understanding democracy in terms of dichotomies can be problematic and can narrow the scope of democracy. Cunningham (2002) problematizes drawing dichotomies for being the result of conceptualizing democracy in abstraction regardless of the political realities occurring in various contexts. Since democracy is a contested concept, any attempt “to give prototypical examples” can lead to exclusionary and oppressive practices (p. 5). Dealing with democracy in abstract terms not only fails to explicate the meaning of democracy but can also lead to further confusion and ideological manipulations. Dewey (1915) takes a normative stance on engaging with democratic theory and understanding ideal societies: “We cannot set up, out of our heads, something we regard as an ideal society. We must base our conception upon societies which actually exist, in order to have any assurance that our ideal is a practicable one” (p. 89). The normative approach to explaining democracy by dealing with specific and actual examples can clear the way for a more concrete and robust understanding of democracy. “Attempting to give concrete examples,” Cunningham (2002) argues, “forces precision or at least the sharpening of theoretical decisions on such matters” (p. 4). The Deweyan approach presents democracy as a matter of degree in which democracy is something to be improved rather than a finished product (Cunningham, 2002, p. 4). Further, as Glickman (1998) indicates, people’s realities give them different perspectives; definitions and understandings of democracy should stem from the realities of the communities (p. 47). Taking it as such, democratic boundaries are not formed theoretically “prior to engaging in democratic politics; rather they arise as practical problems in the conduct of such politics itself” (Cunningham, 2002, p. 214). Democracy in this sense becomes the process of understanding the relationships of individuals and communities with themselves and with the world around them (Bai, 2001). It becomes a process of setting, negotiating and
questioning boundaries of the political relationships and communications in any given context.

Nonetheless, conceptualizing democracy through presenting it in ideal situations should not mean that such ideal situations are without issues or that we accept ideals as they already are in existing societies. Rather, it is significant that ideals do not impede the critical processes by which we “criticize undesirable traits and suggest improvement” (Dewey, 1915, p. 89). Although activist democrats challenge deliberative democracy for neglecting the systemic conditions of power in influencing the course of deliberations and their results (Young, 2001), in democratic deliberations, however, agreement and consensus are not meant to stop further agreement and consensus. They should not create a stagnating status quo in such a way that obstructs further discussion and critical examination of democracy. An ideal democracy, and a challenge as such, keeps the critical process going (Cunningham, 2002, p. 146). In this sense, democracy is to make sure that conflicting views are given their chances to present themselves, and by that making it “imperative to work away at counteracting institutions and attitudes that promote conflicts” around general and specific issues (Cunningham, 2002, p. 161). Glickman (1998) argues for the importance of having a “working, shared definition” of democracy that allows public discussion of the purposes, goals and aims of education and schooling (p. 53).

### 3.3.2 Justifying democracy

A recurrent aspect of conceptualizing democracy is the argument around its justification, and this justification elaborates on what type of democracy is promoted. According to Barrow (2007), justification of democracy is basically trying to answer such questions as “why we should value democracy, what are the goods we expect to realize through democracy” (p. 30). Gutmann (1996) argues: “If we cannot justify democracy, then neither can we know what kind of democracy is worth defending” (p. 340). In other words, justification of democracy means examining the value of democracy. The argument around the aspects of democracy where its value, and thus its justification, lies
eventually leads to conceptualizing democracy in relation to its content, various values, ideals as well as its procedures. Nevertheless, the content, values and ideals of democracy not only shape but also justify democratic procedures. The liberal, representative democracy, which is conceptualized as a set of procedures that require a number of social, political and cultural preconditions (Cunningham, 2002), is sometimes justified by bringing to the foreground the benefits that such procedures will have in the long run. However, focusing solely on the procedural aspect of democracy and long-term benefits undermines the justification of democracy, which is necessary “to the people who are bound by its practices and policies” (Gutmann, 1996, p. 342). As Gutmann (1996) indicates, “long-term benefits may be there; yet without the basic liberties that democracy brings, those benefits would be insufficient to justify nonideal democracies to people here and now” (p. 342). Focusing on democracy as mere procedure or process without its substantive values would only mean relying on its long-term consequences on the expense of its immediate ones (Gutmann, 1996, p. 342). In doing so, matters pertaining to power imbalances, inclusion and social justice issues remain in the margins to the central interests brought forth by the elected elite (Pinto, 2013). Discussing democracy as a matter of people’s immediate daily lives, issues and concerns brings forward a conception of democracy that is critical, which is predicated on its substantive values.

3.3.3 Discussing democratic values from a critical democratic perspective

Democratic values rather than preconditions

A major task of democratic theorists is discussing the theory and values of democracy (Cunningham, 2002). The different discussions and arguments in this regard set the foundations for the various conceptions of democracy. The liberal form of democracy, which is conceptualized mainly around its procedural aspects, sees democratic values as only viable when put within and practiced through organized formal structures. According to Cunningham (2002), theorists, like Schumpeter (d. 1950), who conceptualized democracy around its procedures, argue that democracy requires certain preconditions in order to succeed (p. 10). Since this incumbent and proceduralist
conception of democracy “achieves its effectiveness through institutions,” as Blaug (2002) explains, success of democracy in this sense solely depends on the existence of such institutional preconditions that influence institutional work. In the procedural sense, democratic participation “becomes primarily instrumental, subsuming ethical considerations into interests to be adjudicated and preferences to be aggregated” (p. 105). Therefore, participation in the incumbent, liberal and representative democracy is “characterized by voting, by normalized interaction within structured groups and by orderly civic involvement” (p. 105). This conception, therefore, limits democracy to the tempered social and political interactions within those institutions and does not associate democracy directly with what takes place in the larger society (Pinto, 2013).

The argument for democratic preconditions usually takes place within the incumbent conception of democracy. This approach to democracy concerns itself with how best to secure such preconditions so that democracy can succeed. However, “[r]ecommending conditions for securing, protecting, or extending democracy (be they necessary, sufficient, or just facilitating)” is always “laden with prior theories about the nature and value of democracy” (p. 26). Cunningham (2002) explains: “To identify conditions for democracy is already to suppose democratic-theoretical principles” (p. 25). This means that the way the conditions of democracy are conceived indicates theoretical principles and values of democracy. For instance, a participatory and deliberative conception that sees democracy beyond the governmental affairs puts forward conditions, values and ideals that are different with or even contradictory to those put forward by the conception that sees democracy solely in elections or conceives its value in its instrumental effect (Blaug, 2002). The market-based conception of democracy highlights those democratic pre-conditions that are market-appropriated and promote choice within the confines of the ‘marketplace’ (Pinto, 2013). However, the incumbent or liberal conceptions should not be taken without critical scrutiny. Such conceptions of democracy need to be reexamined through approaches to democracy based on critical and robust values.

Most democratic theories concern themselves with themes as: freedom, equality, rights, decision-making, legitimacy, justice, and so on (Cunningham, 2002, p. 2). These
are some of the constituents and elements that democracy addresses. Nonetheless, these are value-laden themes and concepts that can turn democratic discussions into the arena for examining substantive values. Studying democratic theories is examining the values that each theory promotes and defends, and on which each theory is based. For instance, talking about preconditions to democracy in the liberal, representative conception means that such preconditions are outside the conception of democracy itself. Hence, democracy in the liberal form becomes a procedure, a technicality for securing specific aims, such as individual autonomy, equality and choice. Furthermore, to talk about preconditions to democracy in this sense is to talk about “pregovernmental, social or economic conditions that make well-functioning democracy possible, or in the strongest version ensure it” (Cunningham, 2002, p. 23). This way of seeing democratic values as preconditions limits democracy to the formal politics and business of government. However, discussing democracy as a way of life involves going beyond the concept and implications of democracy as a formal political arrangement of governments (Portelli, 2001, p. 280). Going beyond the proceduralist democratic thought means that democratic preconditions are part and parcel of democracy. In this sense, democratic values do not simply become preconditions to something outside of themselves but rather substantive democratic values and ideals. As Benhabib (1996a) illustrates, “[c]itizens’ autonomy needs to be protected and expanded through the guarantee of certain social and economic rights that would enable participation in democratic deliberative processes” (p. 7). A more inclusive and robust democratic process, therefore, needs not only to work on the procedural aspect, but also on the substantive values, since democracy depends on guaranteeing such values, without which democracy will lose its meaning and legitimacy.

**Inclusion as opposed to oppression**

The issue of inclusion in democratic processes is the subject of extensive argument among democratic theorists. The way inclusion in democracy is conceived is related to how democracy, and particularly participation (Blaug, 2002, p. 107), is conceived. Discussing inclusion in relation to how democracy is conceptualized also sheds light on
the scope of oppression and how it is understood. Understanding how different conceptions of democracy consider participation and the issue of oppression is important. According to Blaug (2002), “Incumbent democracy is primarily motivated to preserve and improve existing institutions by maximizing and managing orderly participation” (p. 107). The view on the importance of institutions for democracy comes from the particular assumptions about effectiveness that adherents of liberal democracy generally hold. For incumbent democrats, “effectiveness is only achieved through institutions” (Blaug, 2002, p. 107). Since liberal, representative democracy is based on maintaining a centralized and representative core structure of government, and that it sees democracy within the interactions of the state institutions, the existence of institutions becomes a de facto, and it becomes primary to anything else. Hence, in the formal, representative sense, participation becomes secondary. In the liberal, representative structures, the organizational assumptions do not become the subject of careful scrutiny (Blaug, 2002, p. 109). A major criticism by advocates of participatory and direct democracy against the liberal democratic thought, however, is that the liberal conception of participation provides citizens a very limited role in governing and organizing the society (Graham, 2001, p. 155). Critical democracy also challenges the idea that existing institutions are the only way to achieve effectiveness (Blaug, 2002). In critical democracy, Blaug (2002) argues, “effectiveness can arise out of collective adherence to common concerns…effectiveness is seen to derive from anti-institutional activity” (p. 107). Even though some participatory democrats preserve the importance of having a centralized and representative core institution, the issues of “inclusion and difference generate a deep suspicion of institutions” (pp. 107-108). This suspicion of institutions can be better understood in relation to how oppression is understood through the experiences of people coming from different locations. Oppression, according to Cunningham (2002), is “the situation of people who unjustifiably endure disadvantages just in virtue of characteristics they share with others in a group identified by gender, class, assigned race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, or state of physical ableness” and so on (p. 68). Exclusion, according to this conception of oppression, is at the heart of some forms of democracy, particularly the forms that discourage public participation and political involvement at the expense of stability and effectiveness. This is because “when oppression involves being politically
subordinated to the will of members of other groups or excluded from effective participation in political activity, democracy is directly impeded” (Cunningham, 2002, p. 68). Also, as Barrow (2007) indicates, “limits, restrictions and restraints on people’s access to knowledge, opportunities, means, etc., contradict the values that make democracy worth having” (p. 37).

In the critical democratic thought, the issue of oppression is tightly connected to the narrow conceptions of participation and inclusion. From the critical and participatory democratic point of view, citizens’ limited participation in the liberal democratic tradition also leads to a very limited concept of oppression. There exist exclusionary and oppressive tendencies embedded within the representative aspect of liberal democracy. The Schumpeterian conception of democracy, for instance, requires “a relatively passive citizenry that concerns itself with governmental affairs only to vote” and also a “relative freedom of government from public scrutiny” (Cunningham, 2002, pp. 24-25). The minimalist conception of participation replaces active participation with registering preferences (Pinto, 2013). When democracy becomes limited to participation in elections and the guarantee of voter rights, not having the freedom to vote or register preferences among the given choices simply becomes the indicator of oppression (Cunningham, 2002). In other words, seeing democracy in the formal procedures of elections and voting confines the meaning of oppression within the process of elections and neglects any other forms that occur beyond the formal procedures. Furthermore, theorizing democracy around the affairs of public, formal life simply perceives oppression as an issue of the public realm, therefore fails to extend democratic involvement to the private realm. Reducing democracy only to certain and specific procedures not only makes democracy exclusionary but also leads to various forms of oppression in disguise. This is because “people whose experience in collective self-determination is confined mainly to voting acquire neither the knowledge, the skills, nor the expectations for taking charge of their lives, thus acquiescing in their own oppression” (Cunningham, 2002, p. 133). The fact that liberal democracy manifests itself mainly in the procedures of voting to elect representatives entails more than concerns of practicality, effectiveness and stability of governments. In a liberal democracy, citizens do not have direct involvement in their political and cultural affairs, because they are considered unable and unfit to make
decisions on their own. Citizens are put in the margins when it comes to matters of engagement, because they “do not posses the time, interest, knowledge and intelligence to deliberate and solve issues for themselves” (Glickman, 1998, p. 48). In the liberal, representative conception of democracy, citizens are not equal to the representatives and the decision-makers, neither in their knowledge, skills and opportunities nor in their decision-making will and powers. Thus oppression becomes a dynamic cycle of “political passivity and continuing subordination” (Cunningham, 2002, p. 133).

The definition of incumbent democracy as being “a competition for votes and as the (political) survival of the fittest” (Blaug, 2002, p. 105) is problematic for the moral vision of life that is based on intersubjectivity (Bai, 2001). Intersubjectivity means the process of “mutual sharing of thoughts, perceptions, values, in short, the content of consciousness” (p. 311). Bai (2001) argues that “we become intersubjective beings when, through sharing ourselves, we are open to each other’s subjectivity and allow its transfusion across our individual differences” (p. 311). What is most significant here is that the concepts of participation and inclusion are not confined to specified procedures and institutions so that “ordinary folk must not be reduced and disabled” (Bai, 2001, p. 309). Furthermore, since oppression is a systemic issue, in that it takes place and is maintained not only in deliberate and overt situations but also within social public and private structures, an anti-oppressive democracy should be concerned with various structures and forms of oppression, both public and private. In other words, inclusion must not be confused with “social engineering” which is “simply a matter of integrating the excluded, marginalized and problematic into an already existing system” (Ryan, 2006, p. 7). The form of democracy that encourages critical and strong participation not only provides the opportunity for all groups to have their voices heard but also “encourages those who suffer from oppression to name that oppression and to demand redress for it” (Graham, 2001, p. 161). Democracy based on critical participation deals with oppression the way it exists not only universally but also locally, thus broadening the concept of oppression so that multiple anti-oppressive endeavors can take place. Therefore, the focus of democracy and democratic processes should not only be on the inclusion of a great number of people but also on the inclusion of voices from a wide variety of peoples and groups, particularly from those who are usually marginalized
Conditions for ideal, effective and inclusive democratic deliberation would be equality of resources and the recognition that “conventional, historical justifications for exclusion from or inequalities of political rights’ based on such things as race or gender are incompatible with public deliberation” (Cunningham, 2002, p. 180). Such conditions are ideals to be sought, and deliberation should lead to achieving these necessary conditions. It is important to realize that when deliberation in a particular context takes place, it should not be assumed that participants are equally included, particularly when established formal procedures confining the deliberative process do not become the content of deliberation (Pinto, 2013). It is important that “the ability of people to express their opinions without fear of formal or informal reprisal” should be “among the conditions for free and equal deliberation” (Cunningham, 2002, p. 178). A project of democratization, therefore, needs to be a project for more participation, with a more robust concept of inclusion, the goal of which is “to see that everyone is included in the social processes common to communities and schools” (Ryan, 2006, p. 6), and through inclusion to change inherently oppressive systems (p. 7). In other words, robust participation is a core democratic value and principle.

**Engagement and participation**

In the participatory democratic thought, different communities and sectors of the society do not work in a disengaged manner. Rather, there is a correlation among them, and the difference between the public and the private is very thin. “For participatory democrats state and civil society are not distinct entities; there is no line dividing a state that rules and citizens in civil society who are ruled” (Cunningham, 2002, p. 127). There is a substantive equality in this argument between the state and the civil society, such that the relationship between the state and the civil society is more likely to be an intersubjective relationship (Bai, 2001). As Glickman (1998) indicates, in a participatory democracy citizens actively participate in the deliberation and decision-making processes of the government. Against the liberal representative assumption that citizens are lacking the interest, the capacity and the intelligence to make decisions, and hence the necessity to
elect representatives, democracy based on active participation of citizens assumes that “citizens are as intelligent as those they elect and those who are appointed as civil servants.” Therefore, it is the citizens’ participation and active engagement that shapes the choices and decisions of the state (p. 48). In the representative democratic thought, however, the government becomes a body separate from the people, with which the people need to negotiate and make contracts. The government is not a continuation of the people, and citizens’ democratic rights become voter’s preferences (Pinto, 2013). However, “On the participatory-democratic perspective,” Cunningham (2002) states, “democracy is control by citizens of their own affairs, which sometimes though not always involves instructing governmental bodies to carry out citizens’ wishes” (p. 126). Hence, representation and decision-making in proxy sometimes become necessary, but not sufficient or exclusive forms of engagement and participation. The critical approach to engagement and participation leads to a continuous relationship between the people with the government, which is different from what a liberal, representative conception of democracy entails. It also shows limitations in the way engagement in representative democracy is conceived when compared to participatory democracy, which presents a more robust concept of engagement.

A critical conception of democracy as context-sensitive can significantly respond to the issues of the deficient understanding of inclusion and oppression. Through expanding on the concepts of inclusion and oppression, critical democracy can also realize a more robust concept of equity. Talking about contextualized democracy is in fact talking about a paradigm for democratization that considers achieving substantive and robust localized democracy to reach, though not exclusively, a universal or broader democracy (Graham, 2001). Resonating the importance of contextualized democracy, Price (2007) refers to Dewey’s belief that “different democracies can represent different people” (p. 13), and brings forward the contextual aspect of democracy’s conception as a social idea. Price (2007) also argues for the importance of diverse indigenous cultures, experiences and histories as the source for “establishing contextualised or localised approaches to democracy as a way of life and governance” (p. 16). Contextualized and localized approaches to democracy show the importance of considering the nature of people’s engagement in local organizations and forums. A critical, localized approach to
engagement means understanding that certain institutional mechanisms can impede robust values, such as active participation, equal interaction, mutual trust and respect, and so on. For instance, participation in institutions that are hierarchical does not work as the preconditions for democracy (Cunningham, 2002, p. 24). Critical democracy problematizes hierarchical mechanisms as preconditions for democracy, because they do not develop or nurture democratic values or at least they impede their cultivation. In societies that have a pluralist political system, for instance, the mere existence of political parties, particularly when they are hierarchical, does not count as a precondition for democracy. Neither can hierarchical political parties be considered as localized contexts for nurturing democratic values. This can also be true of public educational institutions, which are hierarchical, a characteristic in itself is an obstacle for robust democratic progress (Ryan, 2006). Even though institutions are environments that give a structure and meaning to different forms of collectivity, any collective action in and of itself does not substitute for robust participation. “A collection of essentially isolated individuals who have little to do with each other and pursue their own separate good cannot have a democracy,” Bai (2001) argues. “It is only when people in the group interact with each other in *mutual inquiry, consultation, and deliberation* with the aim of arriving at a *common good* that we have democracy,” (p. 308, Italics in original). A critical, participatory democratic thought fosters different forms of participation and engagement, which depend on individuals who are “able to open up to each other’s subjectivity and share out thoughts, perceptions, emotions respectfully in a subject-to-subject relationship” (Bai, 2001, p. 311).

Robust participation and engagement in democratic activities in local communities and organizations can lead to undermining certain problems that are associated with democratic government, particularly in the liberal tradition, such as ineffective government or free-riding of apathetic citizens. Robust participation and engagement in public life through local, voluntary and nonhierarchical communities, forums and organizations “creates ‘social capital’ or the mutual trust and commitment to common projects necessary for democratically coordinated activity” (Cunningham, 2002, p. 24). Participation in local collective action is, therefore, an indication of robust democracy. The localized and contextualized form of robust democracy is also in line
with what Benhabib (1996b) calls “plurality of modes of association” which is privileged by deliberative democratic thought (P. 73). Moreover, in viewing politics as more than the government function of mediating private power with the collective goals, but rather as “constitutive for the processes of society as a whole,” solidarity becomes a major source of social integration that has priority over the formal, procedural aspects of democracy (Habermas, 1996, p. 21). Democratization outside the state (by those who do not seek to have a share of state power) along with expanding politics to mean more than government affairs work on raising awareness and consciousness in the public about certain social and political issues. The transformation of the public consciousness eventually influences the state policies concerning these issues (Graham, 2001).

The moral aspect of critical democracy particularly gives insight on the notion of robust engagement. There is a substantive difference between viewing democracy “externally” as “a piece of machinery,” the value of which is seen in “its economy and efficiency,” and viewing democracy “morally,” which “embodies the ideal of ‘a good which consists in the development of all the social capacities of every individual member of society’” (Cunningham, 2002, p. 149). Viewing democracy as a moral endeavor means that democracy is something good in itself, an end in itself, and an ideal to be sought. The “intrinsic value of democracy” means to understand “democracy by reference to the goals implicated in participation, in which case democracy will be considered an end in itself for anyone who values these goals” (Cunningham, 2002, p. 150). Conceptualizing democracy as a moral ideal stands against conceptualizing it as a mechanism, a mere instrument, a technicality, and a process of government. The moral democratic endeavor is critical of the forms and scope of limited participation and engagement that the instrumental view specifies. Nonetheless, critical democratic thought does not neglect democratic processes and structures. Barrow (2007) explains: “The value of the mechanics lies in their contribution to delivering goods that we wish to see delivered.” Values, such as participation, freedom and choice, “do not necessarily dictate any particular mechanics of government” (p. 30). In other words, local communities can agree on mechanisms for mutual governance peculiar to themselves as long as the mechanisms are faithful to and promote robust democratic values. Critical, localized democracy requires its adherents to find the most morally appropriate and context-based
mechanisms for achieving it. Cunningham (2002) states: “for the participatory democrats, representation and competitive voting in formal elections are viewed as necessary evils at best, which they aim to replace when possible with decision-making by discussion leading to consensus” (p. 123). When democracy is considered as an ideal, it is “to guard against its being sacrificed in the interests of something to which it is thought instrumental.” It is also to stand against “the erosion of communal attitudes on the part of citizens should they come to think of democracy as a dispensable tool” (Cunningham, 2002, pp. 149-150). This intrinsic view of democracy as an ideal and a moral stance does not go without criticism, however, because it “will help to justify overriding individual rights, and it will provide moral cover for demagogues claiming to embody the democratic will of people” (Cunningham, 2002, p. 150). One way to temper this criticism would be through the argument made above on the provincial, context-sensitive aspect of democracy. The context-sensitive approach signifies that no single centralized and standardized form of democracy can override localized democracies or claim the embodying of the democratic will of people, granted that localized democracies adhere to robust notions of engagement and involve “democratic validation and revision” of democratic values. Barber (1996) aptly captures the spirit of robust engagement when argues: “Democracy is for the living, and the living are always democratically empowered to change their founding democratic constitution” (p. 356).

In concluding this section, conceiving inclusion, engagement and participation, as robust democratic values, in the manner presented above implies a consistent relationship of procedural processes and institutions with a substantive, critical concept of democracy. It sheds light on how structures can be democratic and acquire democratic legitimacy. Bureaucratic and decision-making structures greatly influence people’s participation. Dewey (1946) states: “The ways in which any organized social interest is controlled necessarily plays an important part in forming the dispositions and tastes, the attitudes, interests, purposes and desires, of those engaged in carrying on the activities of the group” (p. 62). For such structures to be democratically legitimate, however, they need to contribute to the democratic end (p. 58), which is to adhere to and develop democratic values such as participation and engagement of all peoples. For instance, if participation and engagement are to take place in educational processes, educational policies and
administration need to be designed and implemented in a way that values various forms of engagement, and encourages participation and empowers participants. Democratic processes can thus create opportunities for engagement as long as no institutional impediments are put in front of full participation at all levels. Through full and strong participation, democracy stands against exclusion not only as a “subtle form of oppression” but also as a form of disempowerment and miseducation (Dewey, 1946, pp. 58-59).

3.3.4 Critical democracy and education

According to Barrow (2007), the importance of education in relation to democracy lies in at least two ways: one is that through education we can engage in developing a better understanding of democracy, and two, through education we can develop the values and dispositions that are necessary for the promotion of democracy (p. 28). In fact, for Barrow, the main purpose of education stems from “the need to provide an altogether more critical and deep understanding of democracy than, generally speaking, is currently provided, given the tendency to see it in terms of institutions and procedures that are presumed to be intrinsically superior” (p. 38). As indicated earlier, in the liberal, procedural democratic tradition, education is seen as an enabling, pre-governmental factor for the acquisition of certain preconditions for democracy. In perceiving democracy as a procedure, democratic education, for instance, becomes an instrument, and its value lies in how best it creates and nurtures democratic preconditions, such as individual freedom to choose, knowledge and skills, civility and tolerance and the like, that are considered necessary for a smooth operation of democratic institutions. From the perspective of critical democracy, however, education becomes the praxis of developing and nurturing core values that constitute, and are not separable from, the whole of democracy. The critical democratic approach indicates an intrinsic relationship between democracy and education. Therefore, from the latter perspective, it seems difficult to imagine democracy without education or to think of education as something independent from democratic endeavors. This intricate, reciprocal relationship between education and
democracy is genuine to the concept of democracy as a way of life (Portelli, 2001). This inherent relationship between democracy and education is also clearly seen in Glickman’s (1998) definition of democracy as being

the belief that citizens can educate themselves well when a society ensures freedom of expression, a free press, the marketplace of ideas, the general diffusion of knowledge, and the pursuit of truth (truth with a lower case ‘t’) so that each generation may uncover new and different truths. In effect, it is individual liberty and community freedom as a way of learning. (p. 50)

Based on Glickman’s definition of democracy, there is an intricate connection between democracy and education such that one cannot exist without the other. After all, “a community and participatory democracy [as one] is an educative belief about how citizens best learn” (p. 49). A communitarian and participatory democracy is particularly interconnected with education because it underlines the way people best learn, which is in a community, in people’s interaction with each other and with their surroundings. The intricate connection identified presents a thesis for a critical democratic pedagogy in which knowledge production and acquisition are consequences of various social interactions and not the result of apolitical and technical activities. Democratic pedagogy therefore becomes an effective and active social and political endeavor. This is particularly apparent when we realize that “Democratic pedagogy is the most powerful form of student learning. Not only is the pedagogy consistent with the aims of democratic education, it is how students become knowledgeable, wise and competent citizens” (Glickman, 1998, p. 50) – attributes that are necessary for democracy to become the form of life worth living. Attaining such a life is “a central moral goal,” as Pring (1999) argues. A type of education is thus necessary that can help “young people to find value in what they do and to decide – in the light of evidence, the experience of others, critical discussion – what sort of life is worth living, and what skills, qualities, dispositions and understandings need to be acquired in order to live that life” (p. 159). The core values and qualities of critical democracy are in line with the moral aims of education (Price, 2007, p. 16). Critical education is a conscious and conscientizing engagement with the world, which is why the educational practice is inseparable from what Freire (1998) calls “the
universal human ethic” (p. 23). What is significant about critical democratic education is that democratic education is both pedagogically and morally praiseworthy. On the one hand, democratic education is consistent with the moral values of education, such as enabling self-determination and cultivating “the democratic spirit of good will and common good” (Bai, 2001, p. 309). On the other hand, democratic education is pedagogically successful and morally legitimate.

A democratic take on aims of education

There are at least two different approaches to the relationships between education and democracy, which are education for democracy and democracy in education. As Portelli (2001) elaborates, “education for democracy” assumes “a causal/linear relationship” between education and democracy. The procedural, linear relationship between education and democracy means that education is used as a means, as something from without, to reach a democracy, and that education and democracy are two distinct “realms” (p. 280). While “democracy in education” indicates that democracy is not simply a set of procedures outside of the educational values but rather an integral part of the aims of education. For Dewey (1915), viewing education to be the medium through which certain preconditions for democracy can be appropriated, as in the first approach, is a “superficial explanation” of the importance of education in democracy (p. 93). However, based on the second approach, of democracy in education, democracy and education become one and the same in their substantive properties and in sharing their substantive moral values. As Dewey states: “Democracy is itself an educational principle, an educational measure and policy” (quoted in Portelli, 2001, p. 291).

The consistency of democratic education with the moral values of democracy is clear in the human capacity for self-determination. If humans are perceived to equally possess the capacity of self-determination, it means that humans have the capacity to shape the context of their own actions. Since self-determination is a morally praiseworthy capacity, as Graham (2001) argues, education as an endeavor “to provide the conditions required for the development and exercise of the capacity for self-determination” (p. 60)
becomes morally praiseworthy and compelling. Democracy is thus conceptualized as enabling self-determination, which becomes a major aim of democratic education provided that education enables the development and exercise of self-determination. The moral aspect of self-determination connects it to the moral imperative of enabling its development and exercise, not only in individuals but also in communities. In this sense, self-determination becomes a common good that also requires a good will. As Bai (2001) elaborates, “common good indicates a good common to all members of the community” (p. 309) that requires the good will, which is the commitment of all the members of the community to the common good. “[T]he democratic spirit of good will and common good,” Bai (2001) argues, “has to be cultivated” since it is neither inherent in individuals nor can be forced from the outside (p. 309). Cultivating the democratic spirit of common good and good will can be done through mutual inquiry, consultation and deliberation (p. 310), which make up the core of democratic education.

When we take critical democracy “as a benchmark for the conceptualization of school purpose” (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 78), democratic education accordingly means resisting the culture and the “meaningless memory rituals of a positivistic education” (p. 76). Democratic education is against the conservative stance that considers knowledge as fixed, given (not constructed), transferred, and imparted, which consequently some people (such as teachers) have it while others (such as children) do not (Portelli, 2001; also Pinto & Portelli, 2013). When viewed from a critical democratic perspective, the purpose of education and schooling becomes enabling the human potential so that robust democratic values are nurtured and developed (Bai, 2001; Portelli, 2001; Portelli & Konecny, 2013; Pinto & Portelli, 2013). A curriculum based on critical democratic education engages students and teachers in “concerns for community building and social justice” (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 73). And this is where the public significance of education lies. As Glickman (1998) states, “Education is not public because it is publicly funded, rather it is public because of public purpose” (p. 52). Hence, discussions and decisions on and around the aims of education require a democratic engagement along the “participatory, public and critical” line (Portelli, 2001, p. 280). Democratic education thus becomes cultivating the values and conditions of a democratic way of life and
nurturing the democratic potential of individuals in their relationships within and beyond their various communities.

Democratic education essentially needs to be based on, develop and promote morally praiseworthy values and conditions. Pring (1999) considers moral seriousness and social commitment as neglected but central aims of education. He articulates moral seriousness as “a concern to work out what kind of life is worth living and should command our allegiance” (p. 167). Seriousness is the key attribute here, and as long as it is genuine, the outcome of seriousness can become the subject of critical deliberation and disagreement. Moral seriousness can become a standard value and basis for democratic education, since “all good education should be centred on this moral purpose” (Pring, 1999, p. 170). In a democratic education, other purposes of schooling, such as training and economic preparation, become legitimate as long as they are achieved within the moral purpose of education (p. 171). Gutmann (1987) sets forth the development of democratic character, a character engaged in deliberative and moral reasoning, as a primary purpose of schooling. A democratic character entails having critical and coherent reasoning and tolerance for different ways of life. These attributes are necessary for democratic deliberation because “the development of deliberative character is essential to realizing the ideal of a democratically sovereign society” (p. 52). Promotion and tolerance of choice are also democratic values. According to Winch (1999), “A democratic society committed to the promotion, or at least tolerance, of a variety of values would normally allow its public system of education to give future citizens choice over which values to adopt and which ways of life expressive of those values to follow” (p. 77). The promotion and tolerance of difference and choice entail developing in children “capacities for criticism, rational argument and decision making” (Gutmann, 1987 p. 50). Such capacities and dispositions can only be democratically developed if children are “taught how to think logically, to argue coherently and fairly, and to consider the relevant alternatives before coming to conclusions” (p. 50). Democratic pedagogy of this sort, in essence, results in a form of mutual understanding necessary “to achieve widespread toleration of dissent and respect for differing ways of life” (Gutmann, 1987, p. 50). Furthermore, Cunningham (2002) associates democracy with the promotion of justice (p. 157). In fact, Pinto (2013) argues that social justice is the central aim of
democratic procedures and outcomes that “places critical democracy in opposition to the individual freedoms focus of liberal democracy” (p. 160). If we consider education as a moral endeavor for the development of a socially committed moral character, and since democratic education is a communitarian process (Dewey, 1915), we need to seriously consider “the community context through which individuals’ understandings and dispositions are nurtured, particularly the commitment to a more just and equal society” (Pring, 1999, p. 171). Hence we cannot talk about justice in education without talking about democratic communities. Similarly, talking about education reform without talking about reform in the society is certainly inconsistent. This is particularly so because education happens within communities and is not simply an individual endeavor, and educational institutions are not detached from the social and political environments in which they function. Nonetheless, individuals belong to different communities at the same time, and these communities embody their distinctive values. Still, the one value “which remains essential to all these different communities is that of justice” (Pring, 1999) argues. “And the way in which young people acquire that sense of justice is through participation in a just community” (p. 170). Along the same lines, education for justice calls for a just education. At the same time, a just education is a reflection of a just community. In a just and democratic community, Dewey (1915) argues, “all the members of the group…have an equable opportunity to receive and to take from others.” And for that to happen, “There must be a large variety of shared undertakings and experiences. Otherwise, the influences which educate some into masters, educate others into slaves” (p. 90). Arguing for democratic education is in fact arguing for a more just society. As Pring (1999) emphasizes, a just society needs schools where the desires and opinions of all, including those of the students, are taken seriously in decisions which affect their lives, and where there is a shift from dependence on authority to greater dependence upon reason, argument, explaining. Furthermore, such justice needs to be not simply within the institution but within the system of which that institution is part and which infects the values permeating the relationship between teacher and learner. (p. 170)
Therefore, in democratic education, justice is not only a matter concerning the interactions within the classrooms but in the whole system and in the policies and procedures that shape the whole educational process. The inclusive and broad meaning of social justice is critical democracy’s framework “toward a more just society where justice means equity for all” (Pinto, 2013, p. 160).

From the discussion on justice as an essential democratic value and on the connection between democratic education and democratic societies, it follows that we cannot separate “the teaching of values from the context in which those values are taught” (Pring, 1999, p. 157). This point emphasizes the inseparable nature of democratic processes and democratic values. Therefore, democratic education is not only concerned with teaching democratic values but also teaching them democratically. Teaching democratically entails “the provision of opportunities whereby the young person can reflect, deliberate, test out ideas, explore different routes” (Pring, 1999, p. 167). Such provisions need to be present in schools, and can only happen in democratic education and through democratic pedagogies. According to Glickman (1998), “Democratic pedagogies aim for freedom of expression, pursuit of truth in the marketplace of ideas, individual and group choices, student activity, participation, associative learning, applications, demonstration, and contribution of learning to immediate and larger communities” (p. 50). Such pedagogical engagements are consistent with what Portelli and Vibert (2002) call “a curriculum of life” in which curriculum is viewed as “a dynamic relationship among teachers, students, knowledge and contexts” (p. 36). Democratic pedagogies thus depend on such values as active, participatory and mutual learning, choice, responsibility, sharing, contribution, application, public participation and deliberation, and so forth, all on both individual and group levels (Glickman, 1998, pp. 50-51). Free and inclusive deliberation as a didactic endeavor not only substantiates educational processes as legitimate but also “enables citizens to understand, to communicate, and in some cases to resolve their disagreements” (Gutmann, 1987, p. 50). Hence, communitarian and participatory democracy directly influences the quality of student learning. According to Glickman (1998), “when community and participatory democracy is used as a guide for educational leadership and school reform, there is
significant personal, empirical and cultural evidence of educating students extraordinarily well” (p. 49).

To conclude, “democratic education is about building strong human relations and interdependence in the collective search for social justice and equity for all” (Dei, 2013, p. 52). Educational institutions and forums are practical forms of democratic association that create values, dispositions and habits significant for the democratic life. Understanding how various modes of engagement and participation can create values, dispositions and habits necessary for effective democratic government and a robust democratic life is central to critical democratic thought. Cunningham (2002) argues: “democrats should devote themselves to the practical questions of how to nurture participation in such organizations rather than to the concerns of abstract theory” (p. 24). This argument, which focuses on understanding and promoting democracy in actual human experiences and relationships, particularly signifies the imperatives of democratic education in addressing the cultivation of moral democratic values as well as critically and actively responding to the oppressive forces that lead to the erosion of the democratic spirit in individual and community lives. Democratic education understands that while schools “reproduce inequality,” and since they are “primary sites for critical transformation…they represent a starting point for realizing the critical democratic ideal” (Pinto, 2013, p. 165). Democratic education also understands that “The solution of educational inequity lies not in some universally applicable policy formulation or some foundationalist claim, for the problem manifests itself in some concrete, context-specific arena and must be dealt with in the light of local circumstances” (Osborne, 2001, p. 52).

At the same time, in its adherence to a universal human ethic, critical democratic education upholds the inescapable ethical responsibility towards the whole world as a result of one’s “conscious presence in the world” (Freire, 1998, p. 26). As such, democratic education prepares the young for a form of living in which democratic individual and community relationships are developed in a way that goes beyond human interactions to also include the respect and preservation of the environment (Osborne, 2001, p. 55; also Price, 2007).
Democratic education along critical democratic lines seeks the transformation of individuals and communities in a way that not only their social relations are organized around core democratic values but also become involved in critical reflection of those values. As Price (2007) argues, “Our classrooms and schools should be sites where the core qualities, values and possibilities of democracy are discussed, and experienced” (p. 21). Democratic education also means that the educational process involves not only open deliberation about what educational aims and values are but also being critical about how educational structures and schooling become sites where democracy is undermined and democratic progress is limited (Harris, 1999, pp. 11-12). That is why, being a critical democratic pedagogue means “rewriting of the world…making of a new history…and the revitalization of the democratic impulse” (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 78). Critical democratic education in this way becomes the blueprint for and the substance of transformative action (p. 81). The transformative quality of critical democracy entails a constant and dynamic development of democratic education.

3.4 Conceptual framework: Transformative Democracy

From the critical review of literature on the meanings and implications of nationalism and democracy in relation to education, I present ‘transformative democracy’ as the conceptual framework. Transformative democracy is basically conceptualizing democracy within educational settings and in relation to particular social and political contexts. This framework engages with a particular, yet at the same time overarching, conception of democracy. Transformative democracy, on the one hand, becomes overarching by examining what this concept entails in relation to its broad political, social and legal values. On the other hand, examining and defending the educative aspect of this concept gives a particular perspective on how it is conceptualized, experienced and defended. The purpose of positioning democracy as such is to reach at a more inclusive and robust concept of democracy—a concept that is based on robust democratic values, such as equity, inclusion, participation, open and critical deliberation and action, solidarity and recognition, and so on, and not merely on political or practical applications.
Therefore, I conceptualize ‘transformative democracy’ by basing it on central democratic values and adopting aspects from different concepts and theories of democracy. While doing so, it is notwithstanding the fact that ‘transformative democracy’ is more inclined with the critical, communitarian rather than liberal, institutional forms of democracy. The concept of ‘democracy as education’ indicates that democracy is not simply a set of procedures outside of the educational values. Transformative democracy is grounded on the basis of broad and inclusive forms of political, social and cultural associations, while at the same time it is critical of the pervasive notions, deficient understandings and practices of democracy, as well as the historical and ongoing underpinnings of democracy in relation to colonial and oppressive processes. Transformative democracy, therefore, presents a critical understanding of democracy that offers more for individuals and communities rather than less in their endeavors for a fuller and more meaningful life, and in the process, transforms undemocratic dispositions, attitudes, situations and relationships to more democratic ones.

Transformative democracy is fully aware that nationalism, particularly its ethnocentric form, and critical democracy can be juxtaposed based on the substantive aspects of the identities and relationships that they establish. Transformative democracy is critical of the processes and contents of the formation of national identities and the nationalist political projects that reinforce colonial and oppressive attitudes and polities. The disparity between critical democratic processes and nationalist social and political agendas is important and consequential. Nationalism creates, disseminates and imposes a particular identity, or at least enforces such tools and systems that indoctrinate the nationalist identity. Nationalism establishes the relationships among those who hold the particular identity (those who are considered to belong) as well as with those who are considered outside of the boundaries of the national identity. Transformative democracy, however, establishes relationships among the peoples in and with their environments based on robust values that could guarantee equity for all. And it is based on the democratic relationships that individuals and communities come to create and understand their identities. Unlike in nationalism, the identities created in democracy are based on people’s relationships. While in nationalism, people’s relationships are to be based on their created identity. As such, transformative democracy strives to transform people’s
various relationships in such ways that could lead to a fuller, more equitable and socially just form of living.

In conceptualizing and applying transformative democracy, Dewey’s conception of the continuity as a decisive feature of educative experiences is important. A transformative democratic experience is one that stimulates and leads to further that experience so that not only the experience but also the concept of democracy goes through continuous growth. Transformative democracy, therefore, has what Dewey (1938) calls “the category of continuity” (p. 33). The quality of continuity is what makes transformative democracy an educative process. Transformative democracy does not simply mean that engaging in democracy will lead to transformation of certain values, habits and dispositions. It also means that the very engagement in democracy, as a result of the transformation in those values, habits and dispositions, goes through transformation. Transformative democracy as a moral, engaged, informed and serious way of life implies educating conscious individuals engaging and participating in all worthwhile forms of life within the communities, along with “the need of the continual reconstruction of democracy” (Portelli, 2001, p. 290).

Transformative democracy as a concept involves more than democracy presented as formal political communications and arrangements. It is in line with what Dewey (1915) calls democracy as a social idea, “a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (p. 93). This concept of democracy “consists of people ‘having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing’ activities of the several overlapping groups to which each belongs” (Cunningham, 2002, p. 143). It is also inline with what Glickman (1998) calls “community democracy,” which means all the activities that involve the citizens’ everyday life, their personal and collective interactions for the purpose of improving “their associative conditions for the better” (p. 48). Price (2007) argues for this conception of democracy as “a critical red ideal,” which is based on organizing the various aspects of community life characterized by dialogic participation for “the nurturance of peace, and social, economic and ecological justice” (pp. 9-10). Transformative democracy is particularly significant in education, and can be compared with other conceptions of democracy when it comes to the content, value and
processes of education. For instance, as Strike (1999) argues, setting the aims of education within the political liberal views of a good life by focusing only on the plurality of comprehensive doctrines limits the scope of pluralism and people’s diverse interests. This limiting view ignores “culture-based educational interests” that arise from the realities of various social and political contexts. These interests are the various needs for community and solidarity, cultural initiations and production, an educational environment that is intolerant of alienating, oppression and domination, while at the same time respects people’s identities (pp. 57-58). A more robust and appropriate concept of democracy in education, however, is one that is responsive of such diverse educational aims. ‘Transformative democracy’ as education considers the promotion of justice one of its core values and aims. The promotion of justice also connects various formal and informal educational processes with the larger social and political associations. This means that talking about democratic education entails talking about democratic societies. This is because the type of society that is engaged in education indicates the values and dispositions that are not only at the background but also leading the educational process. “Any education given by a group tends to socialize its members,” Dewey (1915) opines, “but the quality and value of the socialization depends upon the habits and aims of the group” (p. 88).

A democratic society, Dewey (1915) argues, “must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder” (Dewey, 1915, p. 106). Furthermore, as Graham (2001) indicates, a participatory and pluralistic conception of democracy is the best way to realize the social goal of inquiries around the issues of oppression, subordination and marginalization (pp. 161-62). Blaug (2002) presents critical democracy, which he uses as an umbrella term for participatory, deliberative, direct and pluralistic democracy, as primarily “a response to suffering…resistance to elite governance.” It is a democracy that promotes a project for “increased participation and empowerment, often on the part of people normally excluded from political activity” (pp. 105-106). Transformative democracy also directs its critical engagement with those values and attitudes that have been categorized as democratic, such as a prevalent notion of inclusion. Dei (2013) argues: “Democratic education
is...more than an inclusion of all into the educational system and society at large. It is about listening to the voices in the missing dialogues of education as a challenge to the role of the liberal state and its capitalist-neoliberal agenda” (p. 53). Transformative democracy involves awareness of the political implications of inclusion as pervasively understood to be an action conducted by those at the center to offer opportunities of voice for those who are outside or at the margins of formal social and political organizations. This pervasive attitude still preserves the dominant power structure and modes of knowledge production, which maintain the colonial practices that continue to undermine the indigenous forms of knowing and living. That is why, as Kincheloe (1999) elaborates, the critical democratic theory “is especially concerned with how democracy is subverted, domination takes place, and human relations are shaped in the schools, in other cultural sites of pedagogy, and in everyday life” (p. 71). Price (2007) explains the depth of the communitarian, egalitarian and participatory democratic values and practices in various indigenous communities and their influences on the European intellectuals, thus establishing even stronger historical foundations for this concept of democracy than the pervasive liberal/neoliberal democracy. Hence, transformative democracy is grounded on the basis of broad and inclusive forms of political, social and cultural associations and depth, with a particular focus on rejecting various forms of injustices, violence, exclusion, disengagement, alienation, hegemony and ideology in education.
Chapter Four: Data and Findings

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the methodological direction espoused in analyzing the major educational policy documents. Then I present the educational policy documents that comprise the research corpus of data and findings in this dissertation. The policy documents are considered primary public records (Merriam, 2009), which are produced and made available by the government in KR. These 15 major documents, which overall consist of over 1000 pages of policy statements, reports, statistics and charts, include a variety of legislations, educational conferences, and strategic projects and plans that are sanctioned by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The documents are categorized into three groups: the laws, the educational conferences, and the strategic projects and plans. I have organized and presented the documents both contextually and chronologically. The laws are divided into those that concern the K-12 education and those that concern higher education. The educational conferences all cover policies pertaining to the K-12 education. The strategic projects and plans contain one document that is related to changes in the K-12 schooling system, one document that concerns higher education, and one that concerns the overall formal education in Kurdistan Region. Except in the last two documents, the language of the majority documents is Kurdish. I have translated the quotes from the Kurdish documents, which have been verified by Dr. Hawzhen R. Ahmed, a Kurdish scholar of English literature from KR. This chapter also provides a brief examination of the relationship between the historical and institutional contexts in which the documents are produced and the general and specific policy directions of the KRG. The contextual examination is significant to better understand the rhetoric used in the documents in relation to the broad social, political and institutional realities in KR.

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8 Most of the documents are readily available on the web pages of the KRG, the Ministries of Education and Higher Education. The legal documents are obtained from the KR Parliament’s web page.
4.2 Methodology

This thesis relies on critical document analysis as a qualitative research method to engage with the major educational policy documents produced by the KRG. Document analysis is a form of textual analysis, which looks at documents as texts that hold multiple layers of meaning. According to The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods, “Textual analysis is a method of data analysis that closely examines either the content and meaning of texts or their structure and discourse” (Given, 2008, p. 865). Textual analysis involves a deconstructive process of various forms of texts, including documents and their discourses, in order to “examine how they operate, the manner in which they are constructed, the ways in which meanings are produced, and the nature of those meanings” (p. 865).

The analytical method that I have adopted in examining the documents is critical in that it approaches the nature of the documents and examines them from a critical theoretical point of view. Even though a critical analysis of documents might include processes that are espoused by a positivist reading of text, however, Willis (2007) indicates that “The difference between critical theory research and other paradigms, especially interpretivism, is not so much in the methods used as in the way the data are interpreted and understood…the interpretation of data from a critical perspective entails thoughtful analysis and reflection” (p. 86). A critical analysis ultimately focuses on “the impact of power relationships in human cultures,” (Willis, 2007, p. 81) and exposes the distortions by social and political systems that “create in individuals a false consciousness that keeps them from seeing the real structure of society” (p. 87). For instance, as Codd (1988) argues, policy documents produced by the state work within a discourse that maintains and protects the general ideology and political purposes of the state. Even though states might promote public discussions around policies, the language used in policy documents creates particular meanings and signs that can lead to public consent and eventually maintain the existing power structures. Positioned within the critical theoretical framework of this dissertation, critical document analysis is, hence, a form of “critical social science research,” since its general goal is “to critique and challenge, to transform and empower” (Merriam, 2009, p. 34).
I approached this research in several recursive steps. After conducting a survey of the major educational issues in KR and categorizing them, I did an initial reading of some major policy documents, which I had access to through official KRG websites or in print, in order to understand the documents in relation to the major educational issues. During this initial examination I was also engaged in reviewing major literature on the theories of nationalism and democracy and literature on the Kurdish nationalism and experiences of self-governance in Iraq, particularly since 1992. The initial literature review was helpful in understanding the overarching educational discourse and political framework through which the KRG viewed its educational system. As I was engaged with the literature, I was going back and forth between the literature, the major educational issues and the policy documents. Hence, choosing the policy documents influenced the examination of the literature, while at the same time the literature on nationalism and democracy also influenced the choice and extent of the corpus.

Following an in-depth review of literature on nationalism and democracy, I thoroughly examined the documents, and included in the corpus other documents that updated and broadened the extent and quality of the data. I started to identify the discourses of nationalism and democracy and any related discursive instances by focusing on the statements of vision and mission of the KRG, its educational system and reform processes. I looked for, highlighted and commented on significant words, terms, phrases, sentences and any instances where the documents referred to themes such as nationalism, nation building, democratization, Kurdish nationalism, state building and any attributes and signifiers of Kurdish and other ethnic groups’ history, culture and identity. I also connected across the corpus the instances where there was focus on modernization, maintaining the educational system and the institutional hierarchy, strengthening centralization and top-down policymaking, as well as any reference to managerial and economic tendencies in the policy documents. I also recorded any inconsistencies and contradictions within and between the educational vision, the political and educational policy statements, which usually appear at the beginning of the documents, and the rest of the document contents, such as institutional designs, practices and even the processes through which the policies were produced. I read each and every document and their discourses in relation to each other and in relation to the historical,
political and institutional contexts in which they were produced. I also examined the
documents and positioned them in relation to the political orientation of the political
parties controlling the KRG at the time when the policy documents were produced.
Throughout this recursive process, I was taking notes, connecting and categorizing
themes, and cross out those themes that were repetitive, inconsistent or did not add much
substance to the main argument or did not directly answer the main research question.

Even though more documents could have been incorporated into the corpus, the
documents that I have examined, which extend through 25 years, have provided adequate
support for the main argument in this thesis. Taken as a whole, the items in the corpus
bring forth the main themes that are highlighted and discussed in the analysis chapter.
Examining additional documents would have only extended the dissertation
quantitatively without adding substantive quality to the main argument and analysis.

In analyzing the policy documents, I have not taken policies simply as texts
isolated from the overall political and institutional context of KR. That is why the
analysis also focuses on the political and institutional contexts in which such policies are
envisioned and produced. As Heck (2004) indicates, policy documents as a source of data
provide “important indication of the organization in action. The organization’s culture
leaves its imprint on most of the printed material that is produced” (p. 225). Paying
attention to the context and historical development of the documents reflects the critical
aspect of my analysis, which includes a deconstructive element. The implication of the
deconstructive approach in examining policy is that I consider the policy documents as
ideological products of their particular historical and political contexts rather than
“blueprints of political action” (Codd, 1988, p. 244). Hence, I have drawn attention to the
contradictions and conflicts of meaning, “incoherencies, distortions, structured omissions
and negations” (p. 245) that exist within the document texts. I have also analyzed the
areas where language is used to mask unwanted social realities and political complexities.

Because this research is critical in nature, the analysis of the data focuses on
questions of power and hegemony and the ways in which they are produced, maintained
and reinforced. According to Codd (1988), a deconstructive policy analysis means paying
attention not only to the importance of contexts in policy processes but also the political nature of policy documents and its effects on those contexts. That is why I have pointed to the processes of maintaining power structures in the details of policymaking and in the discursive frameworks that are used in the production of the documents. My aim in analyzing and critiquing the discourses that are at play to maintain power and hegemony is to empower the oppressed through better understanding “the subtle and overt manifestations of oppression” (Merriam, 2009, p. 36).

Although documentary analysis as a qualitative methodology is not without limitations compared to other forms of qualitative research, it has strengths that other research methods cannot hold. For one thing, as Merriam (2009) indicates, “Using documentary material as data is not much different from using interviews or observations” since documents also communicate and voice positions, present insights, arguments, and descriptions of events and scenes (p. 150). Textual analysis of documents allows close and detailed scrutiny of data, which “can provide rich discussion of presentational and structural specifics and subtleties that would remain unidentified if a cursory analysis was conducted” (Given, 2008, p. 865). Another strength is the stability of documentary analysis. Merriam (2009) argues that “One of the greatest advantages in using documentary material is its stability. Unlike interviewing and observations, the presence of the investigator does not alter what is being studied” (p. 155; also Given, 2008). A strength of document analysis in policy research is that documents “are a product of the context in which they were produced and therefore grounded in the real world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 156). Moreover, as the corpus for this research contain data and information recorded in the past 25 years, some of which also extend to visions of a designated future, the document analysis presents a valuable opportunity for a historical understanding and elaboration of the development of KRG’s educational system.

4.3 Major educational policy documents

4.3.1 Laws
The following educational laws legislate the workings of educational institutions and their governing bodies, and indicate their mission and administrative structures. The bills are usually prepared by the KRG and then presented to the Parliament in Kurdistan Region for approval into laws. The legal documents considered are all available in the Kurdish language.

**Laws in K-12 education**

**Law of Ministry of Education, 1992**

The Law of the Ministry of Education-KRG was first issued on 20 September 1992 by the National Assembly of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. It has ever since gone through three amendments, the last of which presents the framework for the current structure of the K-12 schooling system. This law provides the general and specific legal conditions under which the Ministry of Education in the KRG (MoE-KRG) works. It also sets the institutional foundation of the Ministry, its mission, vision, administrative structure, objectives and practices. This law gives the Ministry the full authority over the K-12 schools and institutes as well as the various processes of the pre-university educational system. The MoE-KRG, according to Article 14, is granted the sole authority in providing legitimacy to school certificates and diplomas, curriculum design and admission requirements.

Article 3 (2nd amendment, 2006) indicates the responsibilities of the MoE-KRG in “raising a literate, conscious and patriotic generation, who would adhere to scientific thinking, knowledge and good conduct, who can accept development in civilization, who is aware of the human rights and believes in the basic principles of democracy and citizenship and the responsibilities that these entail, and understands the freedom and responsibility of the society, and providing learning opportunity for those who want or need it” (p. 1). The law also gives detailed responsibility to the Ministry over all the affairs of public schools, from preparing the human capital, infrastructure and educational materials to policies and programs. The law also gives the Ministry a direct supervision
over the private schools and kindergartens. According to the law, there cannot be any private schools and kindergartens, local or foreign, unless granted written permission and according to the conditions and requirements set by the Ministry (Article 18). The Ministry also sets the regulations for private kindergartens (Article 11) and school curricula, admissions, testing, and other administrative procedures (Article 19).

Law of Private Schools and Institutes, 2012

The Law of Private Schools was issued in 2012. It governs all the private K-12 schools and pre-university vocational institutes. The rationale for the law is to respond to the increasing demand in opening private schools and institutes in Kurdistan Region, to organize the relationship of the private schools and institutes with the MoE-KRG. Lawmakers have issued this law in order to “encourage scientific competition and national and foreign investments in education so that more educational opportunities are provided to all” (p. 11). They assume that this law can “support the role of the private schools in developing the quantity and quality of the human resources and capital,” (p. 11) and assist in modernizing the public school system through international and foreign expertise. Article 2 of the law states the objectives of private schools and institutes: to provide “more new opportunities for education and learning, alongside the government’s efforts, in order to develop and help reach the objectives of the national educational process” (p. 1). The private schools are, according to the law, “to provide and prepare the necessary means to modernize education through modern programs and methods based on the principles of this law” (p. 1). They are “to pay attention to teaching lively foreign languages along with the approved educational programs” (p. 2). Private schools are there to also “encourage national and foreign investments in education” and “provide competition opportunities to promote human development and innovation within a modern program and system” (p. 2). One of the objectives of the private schools, according to this law, is also “to provide opportunities for expats, foreigners and returnees to Kurdistan to continue the national education, and to provide programs and systems that can accommodate both the educational programs of the Region and of the
countries from where they come” (p. 2).

**Laws of higher education**

Law of Higher Education, 1993

Before the establishment of the Ministry of Higher Education-KRG in 2005, there was, based on the Law Higher Education of 1993, a high committee, chaired by the KRG Prime Minister, which ran the affairs of higher education in Kurdistan Region. According to Articles 3 and 5, the Higher Education Committee was responsible for “making policies and planning for the higher education institutions… and standardizing them across the Region” (p. 188). The Committee was also responsible for implementing the plans, holding national conferences and managing the academic relationships, budgeting, admission procedures, and so on, in the higher education system. This law also set the legal, academic and administrative foundations, principles, mission and vision of the universities and technical institutes, and the structure of their academic faculties and departments. Article 9 of the law states: “University is a peaceful sanctuary, it is a beacon of civilization, thinking, science and technology in the society. It has an autonomous position, which is run by a committee” (p. 189). Article 10 states: “University consists of colleges, research centers, and any other necessary institution for theoretical and practical knowledge, which will be established according to their specific procedures” (p. 189). This law also set the credentials and responsibilities of the key administrative positions in the universities and institutes as well as the principles and details of academic credentials for each academic title. The law allowed the teaching staff to elect the key personnel, such as university presidents, college deans and department chairs. However, the amendment of 1997 excluded the teaching staff from electing the key positions, which were to be appointed from the top of the institutional hierarchy in higher education.

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9 In fact, the quotes indicate more of a definition of a university as seen by lawmakers than a vision.
Law of Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2004

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research-KRG (MHESR-KRG) was established in 2005 based on a new law issued in 2004, which replaced the Law of Higher Education of 1993. According to the Law of 2004, lawmakers in the KRG saw it important to establish a Ministry of Higher Education in order to pay “exceptional attention to the processes of higher education so that it can actively participate in the political, social and economic development and reconstruction that the Kurdistan Region was witnessing” (p. 17). A ministry was deemed necessary “to coordinate the works of the higher education institutions so that they advance scientific and technological development, and communicate with foreign cultural and scientific institutions”. KRG saw that this ministry can “take the people of Kurdistan to reach the scientific and civilizational developments in the world” (p. 17). The law also saw that the private sector had a significant role in the processes of reconstruction and development through establishing private universities “under the supervision and guidance of the Ministry” (p. 17). This law set the legal, administrative and academic foundations for the universities and the technical institutes. According to Articles 3 and 4 of the 2004 law, the mission of the MHESR-KRG was, among others, to develop and implement the Region’s policy in higher education; initiating quality development in science, arts and technology, and balancing theoretical knowledge and their practical applications; preparing academic cadres and the necessary human resources; developing and supporting research and innovation; serving the culture and paying attention to the history of the people of Kurdistan; supporting private universities and associations; planning for and managing students admissions; organizing the relationship between the universities and other KRG institutions; and so forth. According to Article 12 of this law, the public universities and the technical institutes belonged to the MHESR-KRG. Much of the law covered the administrative and technical aspects of the institutions of higher education and the key leadership and decision-making positions, much in the form of the previous law of 1993. However, in many ways, this law further bureaucratized the works of higher education institutions when compared to the Law of Higher Education of 1993. According to

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10 However, in 2008, a new law for the Ministry of Higher Education was issued, which abolished the 2004 law in Article 51.
Ala’Aldeen (2013), prior to the establishment of the MHESR-KRG, “higher education institutions were autonomous, directly linked to the Prime Minister, which meant they were close to the decision-making center, and thus had a simple decision-making structure” (p.316).


This law was issued to replace the Law of Ministry of Higher Education of 2004. According to the lawmakers, this new law is issued in order to “reflect the social, economic and political developments in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, which have deemed it necessary to review the philosophy and strategy of higher education so that it could be appropriate with the objectives of the new [political and economic] phase in the KRG” (p. 26). Lawmakers indicate that this law has depended on “the principle of economic and administrative decentralization of higher education institutions with a concentration on the academic departments as core scientific units” (p. 26). Lawmakers have made the changes reflected in the new law “in order to minimize,” according to the lawmakers, “the gap between higher education institutions in Kurdistan and the international universities, and to appropriate the universities in Kurdistan with the developments in higher education and scientific research in the world” so that “the needs of the society in Kurdistan are met” (p. 26). Article 3 of the law indicates the mission of the Ministry to design strategic planning in higher education according to the policy of the KRG; to plan for curriculum, publishing, research and translation in universities; to support and develop the necessary human resources; to issue the academic, administrative and legal procedures related to higher education; to make laws and policies; to evaluate higher education institutions; to supervise universities and guarantee their accountability for academic and scientific standards and international measures, and so forth, all of which fall under procedural and quality assurance matters. However, when compared to the previous law, this law simply adds to the mission of the MHESR-KRG, “the development of human character dependent on free thinking and working to bring about a free and bright society,” “strengthening the national belonging” (p. 2), as well as “establishing
Kurdish as the language of instruction in the humanities and social sciences in higher education and encouraging translations and publishing in Kurdish” (p. 3).

Law of Private Universities, 2013

Legislators have indicated that this law is to support the private sector so that through their services, private universities raise the scientific abilities, develop the human capacities and expertise in Kurdistan Region. This law is also issued to provide “competition opportunities between the public and the private universities;” “to encourage transferring technologies and new expertise in the world into the Kurdistan Region;” and “to organize the legal affairs of the private universities” (p. 18). Prior to this law, there were 4 sections in the Law of Ministry of Higher Education of 2008, which regulated the establishment and works of the private universities. These sections applied the same principles and regulations of the public universities in KR on the private universities (but also required that the KRG prepare a bill specifically for the private universities). Article 2 of this law states: “[Private] universities in the Region are established based on this law, according to the needs of the job market, in accordance with the higher education policy in the Region” (p. 1). Article 3 indicates the objective of the law, which is to “provide for the developed needs of the society and provide learning opportunities for those who want to raise their intellectual/scientific level;” to “participate in raising the level of higher education in Kurdistan Region;” to “provide new scientific expertise and prepare experts, technicians and skilled cadres in all areas;” to “provide research services;” and to “serve the national objectives of the people of Kurdistan based on the principles of democracy, human rights, away from tribal, gender and racial tensions” (p. 2). Article 5 of the law indicates the procedures by which those interested in establishing a private university submit a proposal, and outlines the content of such proposal, the criteria of private universities as well as the formal procedures by which the Ministry sanctions those that adhere to the criteria of private universities (pp. 2-4). Even though this law requires that the proposal to establish a private university contain the administrative structure of the university, nevertheless, the law dedicates much of its
articles to standardize such structures, including the different levels of governance procedures as well as characteristics and responsibilities of each key administrative position.

In summary, the above laws set the legal foundations for the workings of the formal educational institutions in KR, in both public and private sectors. The laws also outline the administrative procedures in the educational institutions, which can provide insight into the overall system of formal education in KR. The laws provide the general and specific political, social and economic visions and philosophy of formal education of the KRG, mainly through the statements of purpose for issuing each law and the mission statements of each educational institution. Much of these statements focus on establishing educational institutions that could support the political and economic endeavors of the KRG, consolidate the national belonging in the society, link KR to the outside world, as well as provide the public and the private sectors with the necessary human resources.

4.3.2 Educational Conferences

The conference documents contain the policy statements, proceedings, reports, general and specific suggestions, recommendations and policy decisions that construe and present the educational philosophy, vision, mission as well as the structure and processes of the K-12 educational system of the KRG since its establishment in 1992. The conferences are sanctioned, planned, organized and implemented by the Ministry of Education-KRG (MoE-KRG). To this date, there have been 8 conferences, but only 6 of them are considered in this analysis due to unavailability of the rest of the documents. The first educational conference took place in 1993 shortly after the establishment of the Kurdistan National Assembly (The Parliament) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and the latest conference took place in 2015. In preparation for each conference, the MoE-KRG usually announces its plans for conducting the region-wide assembly. It issues

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11 Some of these academic events have been called “congress.” However, since the terms “conference” and “congress” have been used interchangeably, and all of them have been conducted for the same purpose and have taken more or less the same approach, and to eliminate confusion, I have called all of them “conferences.”
mandates to its administrative branches in the governorates and districts to form subcommittees, and decides on the members and the agenda beforehand. The agenda usually contains specific topics, concerns, and aspects of the educational system that the Ministry deems significant and reflective of its overall agenda and program direction. These subcommittees include educational leaders, administrators, teachers and university professors, as well as invited Kurdish and foreign experts from abroad. The subcommittees engage in deliberation on reports, policy suggestions, evaluations and reform plans months prior to the main conference events. The conference events, which usually take between two to four days, consist of centralized gatherings of these subcommittees to form committees, which are mostly chaired by officials from the MoE-KRG and its directorates, and present, discuss and unify reviews, evaluation reports, and policy initiatives and suggestions.

The conferences usually start with ceremonial events where highest KRG as well as local and international officials from political and educational organizations participate. Through the ceremonial event, the government and political officials usually express the overall KRG educational policy and vision, making these statements the overarching educational as well as political vision for education in Kurdistan Region. Through these conferences the MoE-KRG designs its policies and administrative procedures, and initiates and announce educational restructuring, reform plans and projects. Although the MoE-KRG is the governing body of pre-university education in KR and its sole decision-maker, these conferences are used to disseminate the government policy projects, while allowing for the participation of educational officials, some teachers and experts to voice their input and concerns so that the educational policy and administration could be easily standardized and comparably implemented throughout the Region. Furthermore, conference suggestions and policy decisions sometimes lead to amendments and changes in the law of Ministry of Education, such as changing the system of K-12 schools in 2007 in the 3rd amendment. Even though some of the policy statements are also available in the English language, I have mainly depended on the Kurdish to keep a consistent examination of the documents.

12 These statements are documented and included at the forefront of the conference documents, thus making them an integral part of the conference proceedings.
The Conference of 1993

The conference of 1993 was conducted under the slogan “To educate the generations in Kurdistan with high morals, authentic Kurdishness, modern science and knowledge, and democratic principles” (p. 1). This conference generally focused on “designing a map and a program on which public education and schooling” (p. 1) in KR could be maintained and developed. Being the first conference shortly after the establishment of the KRG in 1992, the policies developed in this conference set the foundation for shaping schooling and school administration in KR. The proceedings and recommendations of this conference indicate the status of education in Kurdistan at the time, particularly reflecting what the political leaders deemed necessary in guaranteeing an uninterrupted schooling process. Educational administration in KR was facing difficulty due to the administrative and logistical vacuum resulting from the withdrawal of the central Iraqi government from the Region in 1991. The MoE-KRG considered this conference not only a plan to move forward but also “a scientific evaluation of our past [educational administration]” (p. 4) run by the newly formed Kurdish government based on the educational law approved by the parliament on September 9, 1992.

The Conference of 1997

This conference took place under the slogan “The Ministry of Education in Kurdistan Region views the future of education and science with a spirit of Kurdish patriotic sentiment.” It followed the establishment of the third KRG cabinet in Erbil, which was controlled by the KDP majority without its partner in the KRG and political rival, the PUK. This cabinet was established amid the civil war between the KDP and PUK militias and after the KDP, backed by the Ba’thist Iraqi military, took control of Erbil city, the capital of KR on August 31, 1996. Not only were the KRG and the Parliament dysfunctional during the time of war but also the whole educational system was at the brink of collapse. This conference followed the relative peace that followed the
The conference document refers to the significance of educational planning “as a strong basis for teaching and preparing future generations” and so that “efforts are not lost” (p. i). Therefore, the major aim of this conference was to focus on the institutionalization of education, administrative planning and structuring, and the provision of human resources and logistics so that the education process would not halt. The report from the curriculum committee refers to the issues of lack of textbooks, printing, and the content that reflects the Ba’thist agenda. The report also points to the significance of reforming the textbook content in a way to reflect “the will of the children in the Region and raising their knowledge level” (p. 8). The conference document does not contain a particular philosophical and educational direction different from that of the 1993 conference.

The Conference of 2000

This conference was also conducted by the KDP-run fourth KRG cabinet under the slogan “For the total elimination of illiteracy and upgrading educational level in Kurdistan.” This conference took place during the relative peace and political stability in both the KDP and PUK dominated areas, respectively, albeit with a still divided KRG administration. This conference focused on providing compulsory education and literacy opportunities, since, according to the Minister of Education, there was a high rate of illiteracy (in basic reading and writing skills) in the society in Kurdistan (p. 5). The conference also focused on enforcing the rules and regulations of the MoE-KRG in schools, which was reflective of the overall cabinet policy to enforce the rule of law in KR. Political and educational leaders saw it significant to focus on the organizational mechanism of education, and to abide by the system and regulations of the MoE-KRG, so that schools operate without obstacles (p. 3). However, the proceedings and recommendations of this conference only covered the KDP-controlled areas of Erbil and Duhok governorates.
The Conference of 2001

The PUK-run KRG cabinet also held a conference in 2001 under the slogan “Developing education” four years after the establishment of the cabinet. The objectives of this conference were to review and evaluate the status of education and schooling in the areas under the PUK control, to invite educational leaders and experts in order to deliberate and reach a collective agreement. As indicated in the statement by the Minister of Education, this conference had three main objectives: to understand that the future of Kurdistan Region depended on “the education of every child;” that “every child needed to act like a citizen;” and that “every citizen had to participate in developing the economic, cultural and social aspects” of KR (p. 6). Like the other conferences, this conference also focused on the “provision of schooling for all children, provision of healthy school environments and accountability measures to ensure equality of opportunity, with a particular focus on the organization and administration of the educational system in schools, and the different levels of educational governing bodies” (pp. 6-7). What particularly distinguishes this conference from the previous ones are the educational and political leaders’ focus on social and political values, such as democratic and civic society, acknowledgement of ethnic and religious differences in KR alongside the common rhetoric of Kurdish nationalism and institutional integrity of the educational system. The conference document also contains reports and papers on the philosophy of education and educational administration, which were absent in the document of the previous conferences. However, the conference proceedings and activities do not indicate a divergence from the processes that have taken place in the previous conferences.

The Conference of 2007

In 2006, the two separate KRG cabinets unified and established the 5th KRG cabinet (cabinet.gov.krd). The unified Ministry of Education-KRG held the conference of 2007, which initiated major changes in the structure of the K-12 schooling system. The conference was conducted under the slogan “Changing our philosophical view of the human is the principle for changes in the educational system.” This conference reflected
the political and economic situation in KR after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and KR’s constitutional position as a federal province in Iraq. The international economic embargo had been lifted in 2003 and Kurdistan was going through a different phase in its history due to both political and economic stabilities. This conference was the first conference that tackled some foundational issues in education and led to some visible changes in the institutional structure of K-12 schooling system. According to the KRG Prime Minister, “our teaching methodology and educational system resembles military system of instruction and does not pay enough attention to abilities in developing thinking and innovation” (p. 9). Therefore, according the Prime Minister, “a good educational system means guaranteeing a good future” (p. 14). According to the Deputy Prime Minister, “the educational system [in KR] is old and does not fit the system of globalization” (p. 17). Furthermore, the Minister of Education linked the success of educational reform initiatives to “changing the philosophical view that divides students on clever and lazy,” and instead “the new education should direct students towards their own venues” (pp. 21-22). The core objectives of this conference were, according to the Minister of Education, to advance KR towards civil society through changing the philosophy of education in Kurdistan, changing the educational system and curriculum, paying attention to the quality of education and democratization of education, and developing students’ communication skills in languages and technology so that Kurdistan could reconnect with the international community (pp. 21-23). This conference also resulted in the third amendment of the Law of Ministry of Education in 2007.

The Conference of 2015

The last conference was held in 2015 in the eighth KRG cabinet. Its slogan was “Development and human values.” This conference took place amid a time in which KR has been going through a security and economic turmoil and the KRG is facing political, economic and legal challenges (Zaman, 2016a; Rubin, 2016; Morris, 2015). Holding the conference in 2015, on the one hand, was due to the new administration of the MoE-KRG. On the other hand, it was important for the political and educational leaders in the
KRG to show and stress the functioning of the government and its institutions, particularly since the Parliament and the Cabinet had not convened for an extended time. However, in many ways, the 2015 conference reiterated the rhetoric of the previous conferences. The Minister’s statement in the conference reaffirmed that the Ministry has been working according to the KRG policies, and will continue to do so by focusing on “assisting children and students to attain knowledge and basic human values, such as: democratic values, peace, valuing life, gender equality, different individual values, helping the needy, coexistence, human rights, preserving the environment and fighting extremist ideologies” (p. 5). According to the Minister of Education, “it is important to bring about an equal and civic society that is healthy and multicultural so that it can satisfy the changes in globalism and modern life” (p. 6). The Minister also referred to the Ministry’s focus on linking schools to the job market, so that, according to him, skilled individuals can participate in the development of Kurdistan Region. The Minister of Education also referred to KRG’s approval to establish “three modern vocational compounds that will apply a vocational educational system supervised by the UNICEF and other government agencies” (p. 5). The conference also focused on institutionalization and downsizing of some Ministry offices. While the conference of 2007 particularly focused on the English language as the language of instruction in the science courses, the Minister of Education in the conference of 2015 pointed to the KRG strategy in making English the language of math and sciences, from kindergarten and on, gradually fulfilling the Ministry’s “strategic project” (p. 9). Nonetheless, and perhaps due to the current economic and political situation in KR, the Minister of Education used the Kurdish nationalist rhetoric that was not particularly present in the conference of 2007. According to the Minister of Education, “the sweet Kurdish language needs to become the national identity in Kurdistan, and should be scientifically improved in education” (p. 8). The discourse of nation-state building is also very clear in his statement, which he referred to as the national project waiting to be accomplished. The Minister of Education states:

The people of Kurdistan have a history full of triumphs, and have seen many acts of oppression and aggression…but they have not achieved independence and the right of self-determination yet. There are many international legal, historical and political
principles that allow the Kurdistan Region to become independent; this great process requires a patriotic spirit and loyalty to Kurdistan and its land. That is why our [educational] system tries to educate a generation that is self-confident, democratic, and loyal to the people and the homeland. (p. 6)

To summarize, the MoE-KRG conducts the educational conferences, decides their overall agenda and direction, and invites educational officials, administrators and teachers as well as local and international experts to review, evaluate and design policies for the K-12 educational system in KR. The conferences are the largest educational assemblies in KR that design the policy and system of the K-12 education to reflect the general political and economic directions of the KRG. While each of these conferences have had their particular focus depending on their social, political and economic contexts, they have, nevertheless, maintained the overall processes of institutional culture and policymaking procedures in KR since 1993.

4.3.3 Strategic plans and projects

The following are documents that reflect the KRG’s plans and projects for restructuring and reforming the educational system in KR. The project of changing the educational system was presented at the conference of 2007, approved by the MoE-KRG and was reflected in the 3rd amendment of the law of MoE-KRG in 2008. This project indicates the major aspects of the current K-12 schooling system in KR. The Roadmap to Quality of 2010 was a strategic report presented by the Minister of Higher Education-KRG and set the foundations on which the new administration of the Ministry in 2010 conducted the educational policy of 6th KRG cabinet. The KRG 2020 document contains the overall vision and strategic direction of the government in its different social, educational and economic sectors based on the past and present accomplishments particularly in the last 10 years. Together, these documents represent present and future policy strategies and projects sanctioned by the KRG in both the K-12 and higher education in KR.
The Project of Changing the Educational System, 2007

This project was one of the policy decisions proposed at the conference of 2007. It is a project by the MoE-KRG for changing the K-12 schooling system from having three levels (primary, intermediate, preparatory) into two levels (basic education and preparatory). The project presents the fundamental social, political and administrative values, such as active participation of students, gender equality, democratic schooling, transparency, patriotism, and so forth (pp. 4-5) that schools need to adhere to and inculcate in the school children. It sets the objectives of the project that could be achieved when implemented and points to the reasons why such a system change was needed in the educational system in KR. The project documents states: “The era of globalism and new technology needs a new system of education. The outcome of the [new] system is a generation that is self-confident, democratic, mentally healthy, and loyal to the land of Kurdistan” (p. 4). Among the main reasons for the system change were to “extend the period of compulsory education from 6 to 9 years to eliminate early dropout; democratize the school environment; raise the students’ skills based on the needs of the job market; and making schooling practice-based to accommodate the needs of the society” (p. 6). The project also introduces the main aspects of the new K-12 schooling system.

A Roadmap to Quality 2010

A Roadmap to Quality is a reform plan presented in 2010 by the Minister of Higher Education in the 6th KRG cabinet. According to the document, this plan reflects the KRG’s “new vision and long-term strategy” (MHESR-KRG, 2010, p. 11) to reform higher education in KR by focusing on raising the quality of teaching and administration in higher education, and strengthening democracy that “has allowed the gates of Kurdistan to open more widely to the international free market and foreign investment” (p. 10). This plan deems such reforms necessary to strengthen the foundations of state-building in Kurdistan and provide the social, cultural and technical skills necessary in the job market for sustaining the economic development in KR. Among the objectives of the policy are introducing a “modern” teaching quality assurance system, human capacity
building, reforming the management structure of colleges and universities, minimizing bureaucracy in administration, and protecting human rights and social justice. The report links the achievement of these objectives to a successful implementation of the quality assurance system introduced by the MHESR-KRG administration in the 6th KRG cabinet.

Kurdistan Region of Iraq 2020: A Vision for the Future

This document is the KRG’s framework for developing its five-year policies and priorities until the year 2020. The development vision states: “In Kurdistan Region-Iraq, all people will enjoy the benefits of freedom, health, welfare, and economic security and opportunity” (p. 1). Among the overarching activities that the KRG considers necessary to fulfill this vision is “An education system and labor market opportunities that will enable the population to achieve its potential and improve its standard of living” (p. 1). This policy framework puts a particular focus on linking education with the geopolitical position of the KR and its prospects for economic growth by encouraging “young residents of Kurdistan…to learn languages, information technology skills and become more work and service oriented” (p. 3). The document also presents the KRG educational vision for 2020. The vision is to provide “An educational system that equips our people to achieve their aspirations and support democratic values, economic development, and societal welfare” (p. 9). The document highlights the efforts that the KRG has taken since 2003 in modernizing the educational system, and the future plans to continue the process by addressing, among others, “educational access, quality, relevance, gender disparities, and transparency and accountability across all educational levels” (p. 9). The document states:

Our education system in 2020 will achieve consistent and sustained quality from basic to post-secondary education, helping us address the needs of the current and a more diversified economy. Upgrading the standards and aligning curricula across all levels of education will be an important part of this effort. It will contribute to improving student attainment in sciences, mathematics and languages and ensure that graduates meet the knowledge and interpersonal-skill requirement of employers… KRG education leaders
will also aim to improve the match between what students learn and what employers
demand. (p. 10)

The documents comprising strategic plans and projects indicate the current and future
directions of the educational system at both the K-12 and higher education in the KRG.
Along with the rest of the policy documents, they represent the formal and recorded
endeavors of the KRG in directing and administering its educational system from its past
experiences into a political, economic and social vision into the near future.

### 4.4 Historical factors in the KRG educational policymaking

Educational legislation and policymaking in KR have taken place and functioned within
the sociopolitical environment that followed the formation of the Kurdistan National
Assembly (the Parliament) and the KRG after the uprising of the 1991. The historical
context in which the educational policies and projects have been produced has had a
major impact on distinguishing between them. In other words, each document
encompassing the KR educational policy reflects the sociopolitical and socioeconomic
conditions, realities as well as vision in a particular period in the history of the KRG.
Without understanding this context, the policy statements cannot fully express the state of
educational policymaking and processes in KR.

At the inception of the KRG in 1992, its educational system did not go through
visible changes the way certain aspects of political life did. Even though, as evident in the
Minister of Education’s statement in the conference of 1993, educational leaders called
for radical changes to the educational system, the Kurdish authorities took the same
approach to education as the previous Iraqi governments; a separation of the educational
system and the political project and agenda did not take place (Rubin, 2016). The
objectives of the educational system were viewed and understood within the parameters
of the state (in this case, the Kurdish self-governance structure), its apparatuses as well as
the political power dynamics that regulated its workings. An initial survey of the
educational documents shows the impact of the political, social and economic tendencies
and transitions of the KRG on the educational system and schooling in its history of 25 years. For instance, although the overall objective of each conference, according to the documents, has been to assess and evaluate the works of the MoE-KRG and the K-12 schooling system, and also to design appropriate plans and programs for its development, each conference has had specific foci. These specific foci as well as issuing and amending the laws for educational institutions reflect the sociopolitical and sociocultural priorities of the KRG at the time, and disclose the processes of its transition. In what follows, I will elaborate on some of these policy foci and legal amendments and give evidence from the policy and legal documents.

The conference of 1993, for instance, focused on showcasing the accomplishments of the MoE-KRG in the 14 months of its establishment (p. 3) and responding to the institutional and logistical challenges facing the educational system in the first experience of Kurdish self-governance in Iraq. The conference also referred to the significance of procuring the necessary day-to-day provisions of the educational system. The Minister of Education-KRG pointed to the significance of educating and raising the generations of Kurdistan, “today’s students and tomorrow’s teachers and intellectuals,” (pp. 1-2) based on those academic, social and political values that the political leaders deemed necessary to fill the administrative vacuum in the Region. During the mid 1990s, schooling went through many periods of interruption and neared total cessations, particularly amid the bloody KDP-PUK civil war. That is why, educational and political leaders considered an uninterrupted schooling process to be a significant accomplishment during the early periods of the Kurdish self-governance and during the political upheaval. The conferences of 1997, 2000, 2001, which took place during the relative political peace, and the laws of the MoE-KRG and Higher Education particularly focused on bureaucratization of the educational system and institutions of higher education. The focus on bureaucratization and rule of law during this period reflect the priority that the KRG had in maintaining a stable sociopolitical atmosphere in KR. The administration of the educational system was also seen as a symbol for national unity and accomplishment, which was considered important against the social and political fracture in KR as a result of the civil war. For instance, the report from the testing committee in the conference of 1997 refers to the centralized and uninterrupted
administration of the national baccalaureate exams, both after the establishment of the KRG and during the civil war, as “a source of joy for students, of national solidarity, and a success against the national enemies” (pp. 119-120). Bureaucratization processes in education mostly started to take precedence during the peaceful periods of the late 1990s and early 2000s, in which the two warring political parties, the KDP and the PUK, were running their separate KRG administrations. The separation of the KRG administration into two geopolitical areas, each solely controlled by either the KDP or the PUK, brought about relative stability to their respective areas. The sole control of the two political parties over their KRG administration allowed each party to run their political affairs without direct confrontations, which allowed them to focus on reconstructing the government institutions and consolidating their power in their areas (Stansfield, 2005; Bengio, 2012). The political leaders and policymakers in the Conference of 2001, which took place in the PUK-run KRG administration in Slemani, saw the need for institutional development, believing that it would lead to development in the community and human resources, and to better administration and accountability of schools. The provision of compulsory schooling and eradication of illiteracy were among the main KDP-run 4th KRG policy objectives. Political and educational leaders were alarmed by the high rates of school dropouts and adult illiteracy. According to the Minister of Education in the 2000 conference, by prioritizing compulsory education and registering all the school-aged children, and by providing adult literacy opportunities, the KR would be “out of the circle of the backward countries” (p. 5). At the start of the 2000s and the years that followed the toppling of the Ba’th regime from power in 2003, the educational rhetoric in the policy and legal documents started to witness a gradual shift towards raising the quality and the standards of the educational system. Enrollment of the entire school-aged children in schools and ensuring quality of educational services based on “international standards” were among the objectives of the 2001 conference. This conference also initiated a more elaborate rhetoric of the social and democratic values in schooling that is not seen in the other policy documents. The conference of 2007, which expanded on the rhetoric of democratic and civic society values as a principle for schooling, saw that “bringing about a new system and abandoning the old ways” (p. 21) in education, schooling and society could be done through changing the philosophical outlook on the
human being, an outlook that, according to the Minister of Education, did not “divide children on being clever or lazy” (p. 21). Policymakers in the 2007 conference believed that advances in the status of education were needed so that the educational system could parallel the advancements in other countries and in the civil society in Kurdistan. Along the same lines, the Roadmap to Quality 2010 and KRI 2020 include policy statements and visions that attempt to raise the quality of teaching and administration, raise the level of technical and vocational education and skills, and to democratize the society so that they parallel the needs of the private sector, foreign investments and the economic prospects of the Region. Such policy objectives have been the response of the educational institutions in the KRG to the political leaders’ decisions on how Kurdistan needed to move towards civil society and the economy of the private sector and the market.

A close examination of the documents reveals that the educational legislation, policymaking and planning procedures have taken more or less the same format in the past 25 years in conducting their work and formulating their overarching objectives. Their efforts and objectives, nevertheless, can be categorized into two phases. Phase one is the period in the history of the KRG that reflects the consolidation of Kurdish ethnonationalist identity through the mechanisms of self-governance. Phase one was during the various political and economic challenges facing the KR from 1991 through the first few years of the 2000s. Much uncertainty was looming as a result of these challenges, and the Kurdish self-governance was struggling to create a stable atmosphere, particularly in the educational institutions. The educational laws, conferences and policy statements of this period seem to concentrate on the consolidation of the Kurdish national identity as well as maintenance of government structures and stability of its institutions.

Phase two is the period following the political, economic and social formations that came about as a result of the invasion of Iraq and removing the Ba’th regime from power by the US and its allied forces in 2003 (Erkmen, 2012). This latter phase encompasses the period in which the efforts of state building have become more apparent in the Iraqi

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13 This format is evident, for instance, in the details of the conference proceedings, reports, diagrams and policy suggestions that make up the bulk of the conference documents.

14 Erkmen (2012) takes this period further back to the early 1970s when the Kurdish liberation movement achieved substantive cultural and political rights in an agreement with the Iraqi government to grant autonomy status to the Kurdish populated areas.
Kurdish political and educational discourses. It is the socio-political and socio-economic position of the KR as a federal, autonomous province within Iraq as well on the international stage that has particularly become the defining force for how the state building processes in KR would take place (Rubin, 2016; Kelly, 2010). Such historical developments and factors comprising these two historical phases in the KRG need to be considered when examining the policy documents. The historical background of educational policymaking also needs to be supplemented by the institutional context of policymaking in the KRG because this context further elaborates on the rhetoric used in the policy and legal documents.

4.5 The institutional context of policymaking in the KRG

The examination of the policy and legal documents shows a consistency in maintaining the structure of the educational system that existed in the northern Iraqi Kurdish provinces before the formation of the KRG in 1992. Although in the past 25 years the nationalist and the democratic discourses have gone through changes and transformation, albeit in their rhetorical aspect, what has remained intact across the various educational conferences, laws and strategic reports is the institutional characteristics of the educational system. Despite the volume of political statements on the distinctive democratic example in the KRG (as expressed, for instance, in the 2015 conference, the Roadmap 2010, and the KRI 2020 documents) and the numerous educational policy and administrative endeavors to restructure the educational system to fit the new Kurdish self-governance experience, education in KR is still very much faithful to the Ba’thist model. This model depends heavily on the established institutional hierarchies, and legal and disciplinary pressures to design and implement policies, which indicate the extent of the political power of political officials and interest groups over the institutional integrity (Ala’Aldeen, 2013). The institutional model in KR also hardly utilizes research and evaluations of the existing policies. Other than the Project for Changing the Educational System in 2007, which led to certain structural changes in the K-12 schooling system, and A Roadmap to Quality 2010, which led to designing a TQA system as well as to
some changes in the hiring culture of key administrative staff in the MHESR-KRG, none of the policy initiatives have resulted in visible or significant changes in the institutional context of the KRG. A close examination of the policy and legal documents indicates that in the past 25 years educational policy initiatives and projects have not resulted in fundamental or significant changes in education in KR, whether in the educational theories, policymaking processes, or administrative and classroom practices.

4.6 Is there a national vision in the KRG educational system?

As discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis, many critics of the educational system in Kurdistan have voiced their concerns about lack of a vision and a comprehensive national policy for education in KR. I have also found in my examination of the policy documents that the educational conferences have also pointed to a lack of educational vision and planning in the KRG educational system even though the conferences have taken place to propose such visions and plans. Notwithstanding, political and educational leaders and decision-makers have clearly indicated many times that the intention and objectives of the laws, conferences and strategy reports are to design a system and programs in order to arrive at the vision in the KRG and accomplish the national objectives. For instance, in his statement at the conference of 2000, the Prime Minister in the 4th KRG cabinet states:

> During our work in both the 3rd and the 4th KRG cabinets, we have been thoroughly aware of the main guidelines in educational planning [in KR]. We have always sought to have clear objectives in this process. We have sought that our objectives in general and the education of the next generation of the people of Kurdistan in particular reflect the philosophy of Kurdishness and match the modern developed system of the time. (p. 2)

Furthermore, most recently the Minister of Education-KRG stated in the 2015 conference that, the MoE-KRG “has its own particular vision, worldview, philosophy and strategy for education, and while the current system of education has been complementing the past endeavors, the Ministry has its philosophy and program for the future” which are

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15 Many of these changes did not outlive the Minister’s two-year term in office.
outlined in the 2015 conference (p. 5). Likewise, every legal document, educational conference and strategic report considered for analysis in this thesis refers to past, present and future visions, strategies, accomplishments and objectives. These endeavors indicate that the KRG educational system has worked since 1992 according to particular national visions and strategies, which clearly present the prospective foundation for the future KRG educational system. Therefore, it is important to indicate at the outset of the analysis presented in this dissertation that I contest the presumptions made by critics and policymakers about lack of a national educational vision and comprehensive policy in KR. The overall development of the analysis also supports this contestation and provides numerous examples to support this argument. Therefore, my argument in this dissertation is not whether or not the Kurdistan educational system is based on any national vision but rather what the vision is and how it reflects on and shapes the overall educational system and the schooling experiences. And hence this argument links the educational issues in KR (discussed in Chapter 2) with the systemic manifestation and reflection of the national educational vision and policies.
Chapter Five: Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of the findings derived from the major educational documents, which comprise the educational policy and system in KR. The major policy documents signify the fact that in the past 25 years the political and educational leaders and decision-makers in the KRG have clearly specified the educational vision and national policy in KR. The critical analysis of the documents brings forward three main frameworks that reflect the overall KRG vision and policy in education. These policy frameworks are: Kurdish nationalism, democratization, and bureaucratization. These three frameworks intersect and work around each other, as parts of a whole, to create an overall social and political premise, which is the process of establishing a Kurdish nation-state in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. The inflexible institutional, cultural and political contexts of formal education in KR reveal two key arguments in this analysis. On the one hand, nationalism and democracy are seen in maintaining the current structure and bureaucratic tendencies of the educational system. On the other hand, maintaining the current institutional system also means that political and educational leaders and policymakers in KR see the current educational system as reflective of their nationalist as well as democratic rhetoric. Together, these arguments mean that policymaking and reform initiatives in education have not taken place beyond the current educational system, and the national educational vision in KR has maintained the institutional status quo. This interactive relationship between state institutions and the nationalist imaginary further explains and supports the point made previously, in which the national group and the political state become one and the same and where the nationalist agents cannot see a difference between centralized state structures and the idea of the nation. The Iraqi Kurdish nationalism’s inability to present an educational administration that is substantively different from that of the Iraqi Ba’thist regime also exemplifies the colonial relations between Kurdish nationalism and Arab nationalism in Iraq. It exemplifies post-colonial nationalists’ shortcomings in presenting an institutional experience that is radically different from that of the colonial state (see Chapter Three).
Therefore, nationalism, democracy and bureaucratization as foundations for education in Kurdistan need to be understood within and in relation to the institutional and political contexts in the past 25 years of Kurdish self-governance in Iraq and their endeavors of establishing and running a Kurdish nation-state. While I do not assume that these themes are the direct causes of the educational issues, I, nonetheless, demonstrate the relationships among the three directions of policymaking and the educational practices and issues in Kurdistan Region.

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section one begins by elaborating on the nature and aspects of Kurdish nationalism. Through involving the literature on nationalism and particularly Kurdish nationalism in examining the educational policy documents, the analysis creates connections between the nationalist discourse and the educational discourse in the documents. Critically analyzing the documents reveals the ethnocentric tendencies of Kurdish nationalism as a policy framework in limiting the progressive directions of educational policy reform and endeavors in KR. Even though the educational policy documents have attempted to incorporate a language that is inclusive of civic elements of nationalism in order to reflect the diverse cultural composition of the people in KR, the primacy of a primordialist Kurdish nationalism has confined such attempts within marginal accommodation of ethnic diversity.

Section two begins by examining the democratic values that the documents present as comprising a major foundation of the educational system in KR. By critically examining the ways in which democracy is presented in the documents and connecting the formal democratic discourse with the political, social and economic contexts of KR in the past 25 years, the analysis reveals that democracy as an educational foundation of the Kurdish educational system is confined within the boundaries of the policy rhetoric. In other words, the social and political realities in KR as well as the overall national agenda have rendered a minimalist notion of democracy with little substance in educational policymaking and practice. It is a notion that is bounded by its utilitarian value in promoting the overarching political premise of a Kurdish nation-state.

Section three elaborates on what bureaucratization as an educational policy
framework entails in shaping the current educational system and discourse in KR. This section argues that bureaucratization, as a forefront of modernization, which is embedded in the nationalist discourse, has been the unwavering bedrock of the educational reform endeavors. The discourse of bureaucratization in education not only corresponds to the nationalist agenda of state building but has also maintained the power structure in the educational system. The pervasive bureaucratic discourse has strengthened the structural status quo in KR’s educational system through presenting technical rationality as the embodiment of democratic governance in education. However, by examining literature on the complex nature of policy processes, the technical-rationalist assumption of linear policymaking as effective is refuted. Furthermore, in the methodological tradition of critical research, I challenge the neutrality of the bureaucratization endeavors in education in KR, which serves not only the Kurdish nationalist agenda but also the political and educational elite at the top of the educational hierarchy.

5.2 Kurdish nationalism

Kurdish nationalism is a major framework and principle in the KRG educational policy and processes. The formulation and manifestation of this framework in the educational discourse, as it is evident in the policy documents, go through different periods and transitions. These periods and transitions reflect the various political and economic situations through which KR has gone in the past 25 years of Kurdish experience in self-governance, as well as the impact of the historical formulation of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq. As a result, at times Kurdish nationalism, in its ethnic form, is crudely expressed in the policies as a major principle for the educational system and restructuring. At other times, it is expressed in terms of human values and endeavors for peace, democracy, human rights, patriotism, eradication of illiteracy, citizenship, modernization and self-governance, as well as connecting Kurdistan to the intentional community, the “developed world,” globalization and the neo-liberal market agenda.
5.2.1 Kurdish nationalism and ‘Kurdishness’

According to Gunter (2013), “Most Kurdish nationalists would be considered primordialists because they would argue that the origins of their nation and nationalism reach back into time immemorial” (p. 30). In a study that explores the development and perception of Kurdish national identity in KR, Aziz (2009) argues that the current consolidation of the identity is based on the ethnic conception of nationalism (p. 352). The Kurdish nationalist movement has been an “ethnonationalist movement,” which is a movement for political recognition, in what Eriksen (2010) calls “Proto-nations” or “nations without a state” (p. 19). Kurdish nationalism is an ethnonationalism mainly because it has worked on the principles of both ethnic ideologies, of stressing “the cultural similarities of its adherents” and, as such, drawing the boundaries for its paradigm of “inclusion/exclusion,” and the principle of nationalism, of drawing the political boundaries for the ethnic and cultural distinctiveness (Eriksen, 2010, p. 10; also Gellner, 1983). The Kurdish identity has been formed around the distinctiveness of Kurdish ethnicity and culture (M. A. Aziz, 2009) from those of their neighboring nations who, while still sharing much of their history, at least in the past century, have been considered as fundamentally different. “Since Kurdish nationalism in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran evolved in response to modernizing nation-states, it constantly stresses its ethnic ‘difference’, sometimes even evoking racism to historicize itself” (Yavuz, 2001, p. 3).

Even though the literature on nationalism and ethnic studies tends to distinguish between ethnicity and race, there is a close connection between them in the primordialist nationalist argument. Based on Eriksen's (2010) identification of ‘race’ as a ‘cultural construct’, regardless of a biological reality (p. 6), Kurdish nationalism has a tendency for racism,¹⁶ in the form of the belief in the influence of “hereditary characteristics” and “common myth of origins” on personality and cultural identity (pp. 6-7). The tendency for racism in this sense is particularly evident when we see that the Kurds link their current national and cultural identity, and thus their right to forming a nation-state, with the historical and political organization of the Medes from the 8th to the 6th century BCE.

¹⁶ The same argument can be made for the other nationalisms in the Middle East, since they are fundamentally based on their distinctive hereditary history and ethnic difference with their ‘Others’. See: Natali, 2005; Stansfield, 2003; Vali, 2006; Bengio, 2012.
(Gunter, 2011), while mostly ignoring more than 2000 years of other social, cultural and political organizations that followed. According to Eriksen (2010), “The new racism talks of cultural difference instead of inherited characteristics, but uses it for the same purposes; to justify a hierarchical ordering of groups in society” (Eriksen, 2010, p. 7). The connection between ethnocentrism and racism is significant for understanding the place of power and hegemony in Kurdish nationalism, and consequently the politics of state-building in KR, since Kurdish as a national identity does not refer to a resident of KR but to a member of the Kurdish race or ethnie (M. A. Aziz, 2009).

Even though the relationship between ethnicity and race is fluid, complex and kindred (Eriksen, 2010), Kurdish nationalism is related to ethnicity more than to race because of the fundamental focus on social and cultural distinctiveness, such as language, even though belonging to a common hereditary ancestry is a significant part of it. The narrative of common origin is used to give the historical continuity and shared history, which are significant factors of the ideology of nationalism. Furthermore, labeling the Kurdish national identity as simply race-based or ethnocentric does not go without complication. The consolidation of Kurdish identity and political nationalism in Iraq has gone through changes in reaction to Iraq’s changing political directions as well as the political developments in KR after 1990s (Natali, 2005; Aziz, 2009; Gunter, 2013; Ahmed, 2015). Aziz (2009) argues that “Kurdish national identity…has elements of both the civic and ethnic” nationalisms (p. 101). The civic aspect of the current Kurdish identity (i.e. Kurdistani) has been influenced by the post-colonial discourse around the right for self-determination. As Mehrotra (1998) states, “The self-determination movement has been a major historical force to establish a strong democratic state. It was also a legitimate demand to liberate a country from the yoke of a colonial ruler” (p. 834). As such, Kurdish nationalism in Iraq has used both the ethnic and the civic discourses. The democratic civic discourse can be seen in the names of political parties, such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) formed in 1946, as well as the establishment of the Kurdistan National Assembly (the Parliament) in 1992, which recognized and included representatives from the non-Kurdish residents of KR. The integration of the civic elements, such as focusing on the discourse of “human right, democracy, free market and individualism,” into Kurdish nationalism became more noticeable as a result of the
political transformation in KR after 1991 (Aziz, 2009, p. 104). The integration of civic elements in the recent discourse of Kurdish nationalism is also due to the effects that modernized state structures and bureaucratization have on the nature of tribal or ethnic movements and their transformation and consolidation into national movements (Gellner, 1983; Eriksen, 2010). However, as Aziz (2009) contends, “the distinction between cultural or ethnic and civic nationalism [in KR] is difficult to locate because the boundary dividing them is unclear” (p. 102). This is particularly because the ethnic discourse of Kurdish nationalism has become the national discourse without much change in the nature of the Kurdish identity-formation, even while this shift might have opened the boundaries for inclusion in the nationalist discourse in the form of assimilation and integration of other ethnic groups in KR.

To characterize the Kurdish national identity is to engage in understanding the complex processes of nation building. The normative understanding of Kurdish identity in KR stresses its ethnic aspect, stressing the cultural similarities of its adherents and its distinctiveness and fundamental differences from other nationalisms’ cultures and identities in the Middle East, particularly the Arab identity in Iraq. Since most Iraqi Kurdish nationalists are considered primordialists, Kurdish nationalism has a tendency for racism (as a social construct regardless of a biological reality). The racist tendencies are related to the nationalist belief in the influence of Kurdishness as a hereditary characteristic on Kurdish personality and cultural identity, and of Kurds as having a common origin extending an uninterrupted history. The connection between Kurdish ethnocentrism and racism also manifests itself in the fact that “Kurdish” as a national identity does not refer to a resident of KR but to a member of the Kurdish race.

However, Kurdish nationalism in Iraq has used both the ethnic and the civic discourses, particularly after 2003 when the legal standing of KRG in the Iraqi constitution as well as the internal political atmosphere become more stable. The formal diplomatic and economic relationships that KRG established also influenced the nationalist discourse to incline towards more civic attributed of a Kurdistani identity. The integration of civic elements in the recent discourse of Kurdish nationalism is also due to the effects that modernized state structures and bureaucratization have on the nature of
tribal or ethnic movements and their transformation and consolidation into national movements. While ‘Kurdishness’ is not simply adherence to a particular culture, but also a particular hereditary history, being ‘Kurdistani’ is an identity that the current nationalist discourse in KR promotes in order to integrate civic elements of nationalism into the historically ethnic-based Kurdish nationalism. Nonetheless, the ethnic elements of Kurdish nationalism still remain prevalent in KRG’s official discourse.

5.2.2 Kurdish nationalism in educational policy documents

During the early years of the KRG, Kurdish nationalism was manifested in strengthening the Kurdish national identity and sentiments, and disseminating the ideology of Kurdish nationalism as a legitimating force in self-governance. For example, the Conference of 1993 considered “authentic Kurdishness” as one of its principles and an educational value, as it is evident in the conference’s slogan. Kurdish history and national characteristics of hardship and struggle, as well as the political and administrative realities, which followed the popular uprising of 1991, the establishment of the Kurdish “safe haven” in Northern Iraq, and the formation of the KRG, are presented as the foundations for a new educational system. The statement by the Minister of Education-KRG in 1993 indicates the prevalence of the Kurdish nationalist narrative; that the new political and administrative realities in KR were a continuation of the Kurdish nationalist revolution, albeit in a new form that, instead of armed struggle, focused on endurance, reconstruction and development. The new form of nationalist resistance was seen in the formation of the KRG and its institutions, including the Ministry of Education. The Conference of 1993 considered ‘Kurdishness’ a prominent value, not only on which the educational system was based, but a value that the system also provided and inculcated in the society. According to the Minister of Education-KRG in the 1993 conference, the provision of schooling and education that took place from 1991 until 1993 was not based on “the Ba’thist agenda” but on “a new Kurdish view” (MoE-KRG, 1993, p. 3). As such, the Kurdish education was, according to the Minister, one that respected the human rights, defended peace, freedom, democracy, brotherhood, and struggled for the sake of
developing education. It was an education that served the Kurds and Kurdistan, so that the Kurdish people “did not get behind the other nations’ civilizations” (p. 3).

The slogan of the 1997 conference indicates that the MoE in the KDP-controlled 3rd KRG cabinet viewed “the future of education and science from the principle of the Kurdish sentiments.” Furthermore, according to the Prime Minister (PM) of the KDP-controlled 4th KRG cabinet, the KRG objectives of educating the next generation of the people of Kurdistan have been reflective of “the philosophy of Kurdishness” (MoE-KRG, 2000, p. 2). In fact, what the MoE-KRG had done, according to the PM, had been what the political party (by which he meant the KDP) and the nationalist movement had been doing all along, which was the provision of schooling and healthcare services (p. 2). The PM also considered the work that the teachers did for “the children of the Kurds” had been no less significant than what the “freedom fighters” had done to defend the Kurds and Kurdistan (MoE-KRG, 2000, p. 2). The Kurdish nationalist agenda and values continued to shape the educational vision and policy in the KRG after 2003. Nationalism was also a principle for changing the educational system in the Conference of 2007. Among the reasons for changing the system of K-12 schooling was “educating children to love the homeland and to be brought up on the spirit of nationalism/patriotism as a significant message in all levels of study in schools” (MoE-KRG, 2007, p. 267).

Likewise, in Article 2 of the Law of MoHE-KRG (KNA, 2008), the mission of the Ministry includes “preserving and developing the heritage of the people of Kurdistan, paying attention to their history, values and culture, bringing forward its civilizational antiquities, and strengthening the national belonging” (p. 2). Furthermore, the KRI 2020 document states: “After decades of painful struggle, we, the Kurdish people of Iraq, have achieved a self-governing region in which we can develop out culture and human potential” (MoP-KRG, 2013, p. 1). In the Conference of 2015, the statement of the Minister of Education in the 8th KRG cabinet also makes reference to the history of the people of Kurdistan as a foundation that legally and politically allows KR to become an independent state. According to the Minister, even though the people of Kurdistan have a history full of triumphs as well as oppressions and atrocities committed against them, Kurdistan has not yet achieved independence. “This great process” of state building, according to the Minister, “needs a patriotic spirit and loyalty towards land and
Kurdistan, which is why,” the Minister elaborates, the education system in Kurdistan “tries to educate a generation who is confident, democratic, and faithful towards the nation and the homeland” (MoE-KRG, 2015, p. 6).

Other than the statements from the political and educational leaders, the Kurdish nationalist discourse is usually also apparent in the details of the policymaking processes. For instance, the Conference of 1993 refers to the significance of changing the names of schools so that they reflect the political and national realities of post-1991 KR (MoE-KRG, 1993, p. 6). Article 3-5 of the Law of Private Schools and Institutes (2012) requires that private schools have their “distinct names that are appropriate with the cultural, educational and national characteristics of the Region” (KNA, 2012, p. 2). While it is not clear how the private schools and the communities interpret this reflection of cultural and national characteristics, the names of some of the private schools, however, still seem to concern educational leaders in the Conference of 2015. Among the recommendations for private schools in the 2015 conference is making sure that private schools have names that reflect “Kurdish or Kurdistani undertones” (MoE-KRG, 2015, p. 68). Additionally, the section on curriculum reform in the different conferences also reveals the nuances of Kurdish nationalist agenda, as evident in the conference details. Even though after 1991, the political system in KR, including the MoE-KRG, was independent from the central Iraqi government, the majority of the school curricula were still centralized from Baghdad. The KRG educational policy documents consider the school curricula to be the most significant element in the educational system that reflect and disseminate the social and political philosophy of the state (MoE-KRG, 1997, p. 8; 2001, p. 93). In a study on the KRG-issued history textbooks, Kirmanj (2014) argues that these school textbooks promote a grand narrative which focuses on the deep roots of the Kurdish nation in order to create a collective memory among the Kurds that is essential for the nationalist agenda in state-building. Even though school textbooks, as well as the educational policy statements, encourage tolerance and the appreciation of diversity and multicultural society in KR, Kirmanj argues that history textbooks in schools consider the Kurdish ethnicity as the “core component of Kurdistani national identity” while confusing and conflating “significant concepts such as ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship” (p.375). Furthermore, there is much focus in these textbooks on a positive self-image, but never
self-critical, of the Kurds as a nation, who have always been subject to mistreatment and oppression from others. The teacher’s perceived authority as the disseminator of curriculum content, which implies absolute truth in uncritical, lecture-based instruction, is also significant in understanding how the nationalist public discourse in KR is still saturated with ethnic and exclusivist tendencies. Kurdish educators, as nation-builders and nationalists, see school curricula as “a significant means and method to building a collective identity,” which is the aim in “authoring and teaching the history and social studies textbooks of the KRG school curriculum” (Kirmanj, 2014, p. 381). The Directorate of Curriculum, which was established in the MoE-KRG in 1994, represents the nationalist political agenda of the school curricula. Establishing this directorate was considered a significant step in removing the Ba’thist agenda from the educational system in KR. This directorate took control of revising and amending some of the textbooks that were coming from Baghdad through the UNICEF so that the textbooks would reflect the post-1991 national realities in KR. However, at the time, much of the changes were amendments of those aspects of the textbooks that visibly promoted the agenda of the central government in Baghdad, particularly the textbooks of the humanities and social sciences (MoE-KRG, 1997, p. 10). Similar revisions and omissions from these textbooks continued up until the end of the Ba’th regime in 2003 (MoE-KRG, 2000, p. 6 & p. 15). Nonetheless, the Directorate of Curriculum also engaged in printing and standardizing textbooks and pamphlets on the Kurdish nation and culture, while it entirely canceled some of the textbooks that were deemed irrelevant to KR and the Ministry’s educational objectives (MoE-KRG, 1997; 2001; 2007).

A rhetorical transformation

The analysis of the policy documents indicates a transformation in the nationalist rhetoric from one that focuses on ‘Kurdishness’ as a value to one that hails a ‘Kurdistani’ identity and citizenship. This transformation is particularly noticeable in the documents following the year 2000. In other words, the nationalist rhetoric in the later documents include more elements of civic nationalism. For instance, the conference documents of 2000, 2001 and
2007 include detailed elaborations of what it means to be a citizen in KR. The Conference of 2015 also calls for paying attention to citizenship as a value in vocational schools, along with the culture of peace, tolerance and forgiveness (MoE-KRG, 2015, p. 25). The transformation of the nationalist rhetoric mainly reflects the social and political developments within the society in KR, particularly after 2003. Nonetheless, the transformation of the Kurdish nationalist discourse does not indicate a radical departure from the established Kurdish nationalism that focuses on narratives of triumphs as well as tragedies as a way to arouse nationalist sentiments. For instance, the Conference of 2015 suggests paying more attention to the history of the people of Kurdistan, particularly their atrocities and struggles (MoE-KRG, 2015, p. 79), which reiterates the suggestions that were made in the first conference in 1993. The focus on the nationalist sentiments by reminiscing the historical narrative is perhaps the result of the recent events that have been taking place in KR and Iraq, particularly the atrocities committed by ISIS against the people in Iraq, particularly the Yezidis, as well as the economic and political stagnation within the society in KR. The literature on Kurdish nationalism points to this reactionary aspect of Kurdish nationalism and the effects of historical injustices and ethnic oppression against the Kurdish population in Iraq on raising their nationalist sentiments. Gunter (2013) argues that Kurdish nationalism as a consolidated political force has been a reaction to the “new Middle Eastern nationalisms” (p. 29). In Iraq, the contemporary Kurdish nationalism developed after the World War I when the newly established Iraq only permitted minimal opportunity for Kurdish autonomy. Furthermore, “the excesses of Iraqi Arab nationalism” promoted by the Ba’th party in the 1960s after they came to power, accelerated the Iraqi state’s practices of exclusion and oppression (p. 36-37; also Natali, 2005; Ahmed, 2015; Aziz, 2009). The Iraqi state policies and the historical practices discriminating the Kurds as a distinct ethnic group have influenced the Kurds, even after the formation of the KRG, to cling on to their ethnic distinctiveness. According to Aziz (2009), when the legitimacy and originality of their ethnic identity has been threatened, the Kurds’ reaction has been more clinging to this identity (p. 215). Currently, the war with ISIS has created much debate about the Kurdish values, the religious values and the secularization of the government and society in KR. These tensions and tendencies can be seen in the 2015 educational conference, particularly in
the parts that are related to modernizing the religious schools and curricula (MoE-KRG, 2015, p. 100), and in the campaign to encourage the private sector and the communities to participate in building school infrastructure as a reflection of their national duties (p. 89). The current events have influenced the political and educational leaders to rely, once again, on Kurdish nationalist sentiments, which at times of peace and economic prosperity seem to wane away in the face of a more inclusive civic nationalism.

**Legitimating Kurdish nationalism**

The discourse of Kurdish nationalism in KR often juxtaposes its agenda with the Ba’thist agenda in the educational system, and in many instances the Kurdish agenda for education is considered “new and modern.” Kirmanj (2014) argues: “Creation of a national identity by defining the Other is an approach frequently used in KRG textbooks” (p. 376). In the Kurdish nationalist discourse, the Iraqi Ba’th party and regime is the significant other (Vali, 2006), and in many instances is the point of reference and divergence that is needed to legitimize the Kurdish position. While the Ba’thist regime paid much attention to education, what seemed to be the issue with their education, according to the Minister of Education in 1993, was that it was based on a type of culture and worldview that was alien to the “authentic” Kurdish culture and tradition. To eliminate the Ba’thist education, it was therefore necessary, according to the Minister, to uproot it from its foundations so that an education based on “Kurdish and human values” could take place to stand against any form of social and national oppression (MoE-KRG, 1993, p. 3). Along the same lines, the president of the PUK-affiliated Kurdistan Teachers Union in the Conference of 2001 called for a five-year educational plan in cooperation with the Ministry of Education-KRG in which to abandon the Ba’thist system, and aim to rebuild the personality of teachers and children and to cultivate in them the “revolutionary concepts” of the Kurdish liberation movement (MoE-KRG, 2001, p. 18). The call for uprooting the Ba’thist agendas in the KRG educational system has been voiced numerous times by political and educational leaders in most of the educational conferences and reform initiatives, and have presented the Ba’thist system as essentially
different with the Kurdish. In many instances, the juxtaposition of the Kurdish agenda in education with the Ba’thist agenda has been a juxtaposition of the new and the old values, of authentic and alien cultures and traditions in the school curriculum. In the Kurdish educational policies and discourse, the Kurdish nationalist values encompass the new, modern traditions and habits and are always desirable, while the old, backward and alien traditions and habits representing the Ba’thist values are negative and undesirable.

However, notwithstanding the constant juxtaposition of the Kurdish and the Ba’thist values and educational agendas and claiming their fundamental differences, the analysis of the policy documents reveals the superficial and limited changes and amendments in the KRG educational system and school curricula. For instance, the laws of the MoE-KRG and MHESR-KRG have not been able to formulate educational institutions beyond the institutional centralization and hierarchical management structure of the Ba’thist model. In fact, as Ala’Aldeen (2013), argues, not only that the MoHESR-KRG was designed based on the “classical old Iraqi model” but that the Law of MoHESR-KRG of 2008 was a true copy of the Iraqi 1988 law, which was designed for “a state with a closed, dictatorial regime” (KNA, 2008, p. 317). Moreover, the curriculum committee in the 1997 conference suggested removing the name of the Ba’th party from the textbooks, or even replacing the name of the Ba’thist student union with the students union of the KDP (MoE-KRG, 1997, p. 121). While lack of infrastructure and resources have impacted such superficial changes and purging of the school textbooks, the necessary apparatuses in national identity formation (Kirmanj, 2014; 2013) as well as maintaining the Ba’thist philosophy of education (Abdullah, 2010) have allowed the ruling political parties to extend their particular political agenda and control over the educational system. Notwithstanding the anti-Ba’thist rhetoric, educational reform initiatives have taken place without much consideration of how the Ba’thist values were reflected in the aspects of the educational system, policymaking or the design and implementation of the curriculum.

Nation-building as the fundamental principle of the political culture, “the dominant pattern of beliefs and values,” (Aziz, 2009, p. 94) in the Iraqi Arab as well as Kurdish nationalisms can explain the inability of the KRG leaders to surpass the “Ba’thist
model” of the educational system. While Kurdish nationalism resembles Iraqi Arab nationalism, its form of government also resembles the Iraqi system, since the political culture of KR has not fundamentally changed from that of Iraq. The political culture in KR is shaped by Kurdish ethnonationalism, which endeavors to fulfill the requirement of the nationalist sentiment of making the political boundaries congruent with its cultural boundaries, as argued by Gellner (1983). Gellner’s principle of nationalism depends on the nation’s access to power, education and culture. Since the Kurdish relationship and experience with the Iraqi state in the past century regarding this access has not been positive (Natali, 2005), Kurdish nationalists have seen access to power, education and culture can only be guaranteed through the formation of a modern nation-state for the Kurds. However, the Kurdish nationalist political agenda does not necessarily present a divergent vision of a nation-state, and hence only engages in the rhetorical rather than systemic aspect of the nationalist discourse in education.

National and formal languages

One of the earliest educational policies in KR was changing and unifying the language of instruction in the educational institutions. The Law of MoE-KRG of 1992 made Kurdish the language of instruction in schools (KNA, 1992). The Conference of 1993 also demanded changing the name of schools so that they reflect the new situation in the Region after 1991 (MoE-KRG, 1993). The project of changing the educational System in KR proposed in the Conference of 2007 also paid a particular attention to studying the Kurdish language because it “is one of the principles the nation’s existence” (MoE-KRG, 2008, p. 18). Policymakers in the conference also believed that the native language was a means of developing the human identity, individualism and the ability to learn. Kurdish language was also seen as “a key to open the gates of past generations’ culture, as well as the national arts and heritage” (p. 18). Policymakers believed that learning Kurdish language would help in learning the other knowledges and information in other courses of study (p. 18). According to the Law of MoHESR-KRG of 2008, one of the missions of the Ministry is to make the Kurdish language the language of instruction in the
humanities and social sciences in the higher education institutions as well as to encourage translation of scientific and cultural resources into Kurdish (KNA, 2008). Furthermore, in his statement at the 2015 conference, the Minister of Education-KRG considered it one of the principles of the Ministry, in the past as well as the future, to pay attention to the “sweet Kurdish language as the national identity in Kurdistan” (MoE-KRG, 2015, p. 8).

**Accommodating ethnic diversity**

The earliest KRG educational strategy and legislation in the MoE-KRG was to make Kurdish the language of instruction in all the school grades. The policy documents indicate that this endeavor has continued to this date (KNA, 1992; MoE-KRG, 1993; MoE-KRG, 2008; KNA, 2008; MoE-KRG, 2015). The Law of MoE-KRG of 1992, Article 4, however, assigns “consideration of the particular needs of the minorities” in education as one of the objectives of the Ministry. Accordingly, the Law grants the other ethnic groups in KR the right to study in their own language in primary schools, in areas where they mostly live, granted that learning Kurdish remains mandatory. Particular offices in the MoE-KRG are established to manage these schools and design their curricula so that the other groups preserve their national cultures and schooling in a way that responds to the national policy in the Region. While the Law of 1992, Article 4-4, uses the term “language of minorities,” the second amendment of the Law in 2006 makes reference to the ethnic groups in KR in a more direct manner. It names three languages, the Turkomani, the Syriac and the Arminian, which can become the language of instruction in areas where their speakers form a noticeable density. Both Arabic and Kurdish languages, however, remain mandatory. It is worth mentioning that prior to the second amendment of the Law in 2006, the focus was only on Kurdish as the mandatory language of instruction in schools. The inclusion of Arabic language in the second amendment reflects the fact that not only these ethnic groups have acquired and normalized Arabic language but also that the political realities in KR after 2003 linked the KRG to the Iraqi state and made Arabic language in KR constitutionally binding.

17 Since the Iraqi constitution considers Arabic and Kurdish two official languages in Iraq.
Even though the other ethnic and religious groups in KR have had a more secure status compared to the rest of Iraq, both before and after 2003, it took the Kurdish authorities almost two and a half decades to issue a law specifically addressing the rights of the non-Kurdish and non-Muslim citizens of KR. The Law of Protecting the Rights of the (ethnic and religious) Groups in Iraqi Kurdistan was issued in April 2015, which grants these groups equal religious, cultural and political rights as citizens of KR (KNA, 2015). Kurdish nationalism, however, still remains the pinnacle of the social, cultural and political identity in KR. For instance, even though the aforementioned law is an example of the social and political development in the meaning and scope of citizenship in KR, the law, or any other for that matter, has not been able to address the nationalistic and ideological themes of the national anthem in KR, which not only recognizes and hails the rights, history, and national myths of the “nation whose language is Kurdish…the sons of the Medes and Kai Khosrow”\(^\text{18}\) but also reflects a particular point in the history of Kurdish nationalist movement. Furthermore, the educational policies and laws only grant the ethnic groups access to their own language and culture rather than creating any significant incentives for dialogue and solidarity among the different components of the society in KR. There are not any specific policies on how the Kurdish students would become familiar with the culture and history of the non-Kurdish ethnic groups, other than marginal inclusion of historical anecdotes in the history textbooks. Kirmanj (2014) argues that even though school curricula convey and promote a national identity based on “ethno-symbolist and primordialist theories of nationalism” very much pervasive within the Kurdish nationalist discourse, the textbooks and teaching methods in schools often tend to dismiss “more nuanced academic approaches” (p. 384). It is worth mentioning that while there was a law in 1982 in Iraq that allowed schooling in Syriac language for the Chaldeo-Assyrians, the Conference of 1997 points to the law as “a Ba’thist propaganda for assimilation” (MoE-KRG, 1997, p. 110) without making a case for what makes the KRG law any different. While this is so, it is important to taken into account that the KRG’s approach to schooling has not been very much different from the Ba’thist philosophy and practices in education (A. Wahab, 2014; 2012; Abdullah, 2010; Saeed, 2008).

Even though there has been a visible recognition of ethnic groups and cultural diversity in Kurdistan’s official rhetoric in the past 25 years, the political position of these groups in the dominant historical record of KR has, nonetheless, determined their position in the grand nationalist narrative. Furthermore, local and regional power dynamics have played a seminal role in shaping the political relationships between the Kurdish nationalist movement and the non-Kurdish ethnic groups in KR (Bengio, 2012; Stansfield, 2003). The report presented by the testing committee of the 1997 conference accuses members of the ethnic minorities in KR of creating issues for the Kurdish language tests. The report claims that those members create these issues for the political gain of their parties (MoE-KRG, 1997, p. 123). Granted that the official discourse in the legal and policy documents presents itself as nondiscriminatory, on the ground, however, ethnicity has been a factor in granting or restricting mobility and other forms of discrimination (Rubin, 2016; Carver, 2002). Since “in the KRG textbooks, race and common ancestry are the main determinants in defining the Other” (Kirmanj, 2014, p. 377), and while Iraqi Kurdish ethnicity has a privileged status in citizenship (Rubin, 2016), all non-Kurds are considered as Others, because their existence on the land has not been considered as natural but rather political (Kirmanj, 2014). There is an interrelationship between ethnic-nationalism and issues of social class and membership, particularly when ethnic-national identity becomes the signifier for “social ranking and distribution of power” (Eriksen, 2010, p. 11). Bourdieu’s (1984) analysis of cultural classes as having “symbolic power rather than property” (as reference in Eriksen, 2010, pp. 10-11) can explain how Kurdish ethnonationalist discourse promotes Kurdishness as an indicator of cultural class in KR. Therefore, when the ethnic identity becomes the reason why certain political and social statuses are granted in a multi-ethnic society that nationalism becomes a system for social ranking,¹⁹ which could lead to confrontation, assimilation or even genocide.

The difference in the ethnic composition among the people of KR has rendered assimilation and integration into a unified national identity problematic. This is particularly so since the ethnic identity of each group, as manifested in either their visible

¹⁹ An example would be to state that the Kurds deserve their nation-state but not the Assyrians within KR.
cultural, linguistic or religious differences, “becomes an imperative status, an ascribed aspect of their personhood from which they cannot escape entirely” (Eriksen, 2010, p. 7). At the same time, this inescapable aspect of personhood has also been ideologically supported by those ethnic groups’ own nationalisms that demand autonomous regions of their own (Carver, 2002), which makes integration ever more difficult with the pervasiveness of a primordialist Kurdish nationalism as the marker of the political culture in KR. In a report on the processes of state-building in KR, Soderberg and Phillips (2015) state: “Though minorities in Iraqi Kurdistan enjoy far more rights than minorities in other parts of Iraq, some of these non-Kurdish minorities object to an undeclared assimilation policy that they call ‘Kurdification”’(p. 11). In many instances, members of the non-Kurdish groups have voiced their concerns about the marginalization, discrimination and underrepresentation of the KRG political as well as educational systems against them and indifference towards their historical, national and cultural sensitivities.\(^\text{20}\)

Hence, the political position of the “Other” in the Kurdish nationalist discourse implies the KRG’s recognition of ethnic diversity in Kurdistan simply in the margins of Kurdish nationalist discourse and within the domains of the official political rhetoric. For instance, in the Conference of 2015, the Minister of Education-KRG indicates that the attention paid to other ethnic groups, the IDPs and the ‘safe haven’ created for them in KR is the reason why the international community has supported the KRG in its war against the terrorists. The Minister refers to this international support as the reason why the Ministry and the KRG has significantly looked at the Syriac, Turkoman and Arabic schools (MoE-KRG, 2015, pp. 8-9). The Minister’s statement indicates that the official rhetoric considers a utilitarian rather than a robust significance of diversity. The nationalist discourse in Kurdistan’s educational system, therefore, grants the Kurdish language, culture, history, and heritage a higher status compared to those of the other groups. School curricula emphasize the majority/minority or center/periphery relationship in the social, cultural and political dealings and arrangements in the society in KR.

\(^{20}\) http://www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php?action=profile;area=showposts;u=783
Internationalism

Educational policies in KR have paid attention to English language in formal education. This attention become particularly prominent in the Conference of 2007 (MoE-KRG, 2007), and was also recapped in the Conference of 2015 (MoE-KRG, 2015). In the project for changing the K-12 schooling system, policymakers have given detailed objectives for studying the English language because they consider it necessary to learn in “this age and time.” The project document indicates that students should acquire the linguistic knowledge and abilities as well as cultural knowledge on the English-speaking nations (MoE-KRG, 2008, p. 22). According to Aziz (2009), university students in KR have a positive attitude towards English language, while their attitude is negative towards Arabic language (p. 343). This is notwithstanding the fact that Arabic is an official language in Iraq, including KR, while English is a foreign language. Other than the pervasive notion of English as the international language of commerce, academia and the sciences in KR, the particular attention to English might seem counterintuitive to the nationalist project towards the Kurdish language. However, Kurdish nationalism not only renders English as a significant marker in its modernization endeavors but also a significant political element in its international agenda of recognition and legitimation.

Despite the prominence of the Kurdish as the national language and the language of instruction in public education, it seems contradictory, but nonetheless standard in the ideology of nationalism, to pay a particular attention to the English language by having a higher status in the educational system. The literature on nationalism refer to the historical link between the emergence of the idea of the modern nation and capitalism (Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 2006). Notwithstanding the complex relationship between nativity and elite competition (Mehrotra, 1998), nationalism and transnational market economy and global capitalism (Graham, 2001; Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1998), which have incubated but also hinder the modern idea of the nation, Gellner (1983) contends that the duality of folk/elite culture is inherent within the idea of the nation itself. Furthermore, according to Mehrotra (1998), the transformation of ethnic identity into nationalism, and building a congruent state goes through a process of recognition of the ethnic and the national, which demands recognition “from the international
community as well as consideration of their cause in international forums” (p. 833). This recognition requires adherence to international values, which can be contradictory to the local values. The inherent duality in nationalism and the simultaneous inward/outward looking in the process of national identity-formation makes the national ideology not so much contradictory but very easily adaptable with the ideology of global capitalism. Along the same lines, according to Ahmed (2015), the identity of the nationalist project is a blend of Western and non-Western tendencies, based on a European modernity and traditional nativity (p. 19) put forward by elites who are “Orientalized Orientals” (Soguk, 1993).

Within the dominant discourse of nationalism as the revival and reemergence of the national folk cultural indicators, such as a common ancestral language and historical myths, lies the political agenda of association of the nation with the international modern world. The legitimacy of the nation and its right to govern itself becomes comparable with the rights of those nations whose political projects in the formation of nation-states have been achieved. This comparability needs sharing cultural and political attributes. These attributes are particularly seen in the characteristics of globalism and free markets and the dominance of the modernization, democratization and secularization projects of the political and economic powers of the world. Nationalisms in the Middle East have been taking place as a self-conscious interplay of Orientalism and Occidentalism, resulting in drawing lines between and among societies and nations. This process has taken place in the form of modernization and secularization as remnants of Western colonial pressures. As Ahmed (2015) argues, “Postcolonialism itself is derived from Western colonialism” (p. 15). While nationalism such as that prevalent in Iraq, KR and the neighboring countries promotes a nativist discourse, this discourse is “dualist and its route convoluted” because it is still “inspired by Western interpretation of statehood” (Ahmed, 2015, p. 4). The nationalist modernity at the core of the Middle Eastern nation-states portrays itself “an Occidental subject” (Ahmed, 2015, p. 19), which can be seen in the tendencies of looking to the West for solutions to the issues of the state and governance of education. According to Soguk (1993), “for the Orientalized Orientals, the Western experiences are the master experiences constituting a master history called the
‘European history,’ to which they turn for approval and legitimacy” (p. 376). Structuring the nation-state around particular modernized/modernizing paradigms create and perpetuate a particular form of subjectivity, the “Orientalized oriental,” one who, while “Located in the strategic nexus of power networks—in the bureaucratic orders, the universities, and in the militaries…navigates the political and cultural terrains in the non-West in the hope of maintaining its privileged myth, called the ‘Modern India,’ the ‘Modern Turkey,’ or the ‘Modern Iraq’” (Soguk, 1993, p. 363), and for that matter, Kurdistan Region as “The Other Iraq”21.

Kurdish political and educational leaders have considered early on the connection with the global economic, political and educational stages not only a principle of educational change but also a legitimating factor in sociopolitical and socio-educational reforms. The statement by the Minister of Education-KRG in the Conference of 1993 emphasized the significance of democracy, freedom, peace, and educational development in assisting the Kurdish people to reach the level of other civilizations (MoE-KRG, 1993). The PM in the 4th KRG cabinet also considered the “philosophy of Kurdishness to be inline with the modern developed system” (MoE-KRG, 2000, p. 2). The same PM, who also chaired the 5th KRG cabinet, stated in the 2007 conference that the world was going through rapid changes, which made it necessary that the KRG change the system of education according to this principle (of rapid global changes). It was therefore essential to make the Kurdish educational processes compatible with the education of the international community, benefiting from the UN agencies, the World Bank and other international agencies (MoE-KRG, 2007, p. 10). One of the principles, if not the main principle, on which the new K-12 schooling system was designed in 2007, beside democratic and nationalistic principles, was the needs of “globalization and new technology”. The new schooling system was assumed to produce a generation in Kurdistan who would be “confident, democratic, patriotic, and mentally healthy” (MoE-KRG, 2008, p. 4). An objective of changing the K-12 school system was to raise the skills of the educational cadres. According to the project document, “the modern society and market needed skilled and literate humans” (MoE-KRG, 2008, p. 8). Policymakers

21 http://www.theotheriraq.com
believed that “studying until grade 6 would not fulfill the needs of the market in computer sciences, electronics and other global trends.” That is why the policy deemed it necessary to extend the compulsory basic education into 9 years (p. 8).

The higher educational institutions have also endeavored to align their system and processes with the global trends in education. According to Article 8 of the Law of the MoHESR-KRG 2008, universities in Kurdistan need to engage in “research about all the aspects of human life, science, and reality that are appropriate with the developments in the world, so that the current scientific and technological gap between us and the developed countries would be minimized” (KNA, 2008, p. 9). The Roadmap to Quality of the MoHESR-KRG (2010), the KRG’s educational and political vision for how the higher educational system in KR needs to restructure and reinvigorate itself in response to the economic development that KR started to witness after 2003, describes the old educational system as “complicated and outdated,” only because the system was designed to suit a “closed-market” that does not lead to attaining “high standard living or rapid educational advancement” (MoHESR-KRG, 2010, pp. 10-11). The policy also refers to KRG’s achievements in building “infrastructure and consolidating the foundation of governance,” and relates these achievements to two factors. These factors are economic investments and democracy, only to confine the worth of democracy to the role it has had in opening the gates of KR “more widely to the international free market and foreign investment” (p. 10). Educational leaders and policymakers in the KRG see the major requirements of the Region in having “highly skilled professionals” through achieving “higher standards in the fields of science, technology and management” (pp. 10-11).

5.2.3 Conclusion

It is evident from the policy documents that the discourse of keeping up with “the modern” and “the developed” world, of modernization and appropriation of the educational system and the whole society to the demands of globalism and the market economy is a pervasive element of the national educational vision d policy in KR. This discourse reflects not only a predominant aspect of Kurdish nationalism in educational
policymaking but also indicates how Kurdish nationalism has developed throughout more than two decades of Kurdish self-rule in the KR. In other words, internal and external forces have influenced the form and nature of Kurdish nationalism, which have geared it at times to be very ethnic-oriented and at other times leaning toward more civic or accommodating nationalism. In both cases, however, the dominance of the ethnic Kurdish identity, language and culture over other identities, languages and cultures in KR’s educational system, as well as the particular attention paid to the English language and other imperatives to align Kurdish education with the global trends are an indication of the hierarchy that exits among identities, languages and cultures in KR and its educational system.

The literature on nationalism show that the discourse of nationalism tends to be exclusive; once it is established and consolidated, it does not allow itself to be decomposed into other nationalisms. This is because the potential for the proliferation of nationalisms is vast, and may be without practical limits (Gellner, 1983). While the exclusivity argument can serve a pragmatic purpose for the nationalist project, especially of one that has achieved a nation-state, the possibility of including aspects of civic nationalism seems to emerge and open ways of inclusion and assimilation/integration. Since language as a cultural marker plays a significant role in drawing the boundaries of an ethnic group from that of another, tension within a multi-ethnic nation can emerge for the recognition of multiple languages as national. However, Mehrotra (1998) states: “A claim to a national status for a new language may lead to the formation of a new ethnic group and demand for recognition of its independent identity. Such a demand may be opposed by the government, thus, leading to confrontation between the two” (p. 832). Based on this pragmatic principle, Kurdish nationalism tends to prevent other nationalisms to emerge, the same way as Arab nationalism in Iraq has tried to prevent Kurdish nationalism to emerge and demand statehood. Even though Kurdish nationalism has been accommodating to the ethnic diversity and civic engagement in KR when compared to the Iraqi Ba’thist nationalism, such accommodation does not go beyond the official political rhetoric. The primordialist take on Kurdish nationalism, Kurdish ethnocentrism, and the interplay of power, ideology and hegemony in otherizeing the non-Kurdish are prevalent in the KRG’s educational discourse. They take place within taken-
for-granted political and educational systems that tend to maintain the dominant
nationalist agenda, and have rendered social, cultural and political integrations in KR to
be superficial. Based on Aziz’s (2009) study on the formation of national identity of
university students in KR, those participants who do not associate themselves with
Kurdistan and do not have national pride in Kurdistan are the non-Kurds. Aziz finds the
non-Kurds’ alienation to the Kurdish national identity not surprising (p. 300). He
considers it as something expected that non-Kurds in Kurdistan do not have a strong
Kurdistani identity, however, without going much into discussing as why this is so.
According to Aziz (2009), most university students in KR “do not distinguish between
Kurdism and Kurdistanyat” (p. 340, Italics in original). That is, they do not distinguish
between the ethnic identity of being a Kurd and the national identity of being a member
of the people of Kurdistan Region. “The two concepts in their perception have the same
meanings” due to the current political and nationalist culture in KR, Aziz opines (p. 340,
sic). There has been a hegemonic Kurdish nationalist culture in KR in the past few
decades (Aziz, 2009, p. 301). Just like when there was Arabization of the Iraqi culture
and educational system (p. 301), there has been a “Kurdification of Kurdistan’s culture”
and educational system (p. 304). According to Aziz (2009), due to a lack in civil society
in KR, there is also lack of “a developed sense of citizenship and democratization that
could stand on its own, without falling back on the props of titular ethnicity…The
attempts to make a nation based on the predominant ethnicity are bound to continue” (p.
352).

5.3 Democratization

5.3.1 Democratic principles in the educational policy documents

Along with Kurdish nationalism, democracy is also one of the principles in the
documents that comprise the foundation of the Kurdish educational system. Policymakers
and political and educational leaders have expressed this in various ways. The analysis of
the policy and legal documents reveals that there is a progression, nonetheless a
prevalence of a particular notion, in referring to democracy as an educational principle.
When Kurdish nationalism, particularly in its ethnic form, has a higher voice in the educational discourse and education is viewed as the instrument of inculcating national solidarity and a unified identity, democracy is viewed as a consequent result of Kurdish nationalism. This is particularly evident in phase one of the Kurdish self-governance experience. However, in phase two, which is a time of peace and economic prosperity as well as the existence of active, non-militant political, social and intellectual opposition, the discourse of citizenship, progress, private sector and market economy, and a civic Kurdish identity rather than an ethnic Kurdish identity become the defining feature of the democratic rhetoric. When the dominant nationalist rhetoric is less focused on strengthening a Kurdish ethnic identity and more on endeavors of state building, the rhetoric of democracy and human values are brought to the foreground.

5.3.2 Democracy and other values

The early educational documents indicate a very limited rhetoric and general approach to democracy, which has been overshadowed by the pervasiveness of Kurdish ethnic nationalism and sentiments. The first conference held in 1993 refers to democracy early on as a fundamental principle of the new Kurdish educational system. The value of democracy is linked, however, to the freedoms that it provides for the Kurdish national cause and the rights of self-rule. Political and educational leaders see democracy and Kurdish nationalism as compatible, that democratic principles could be fulfilled by basing the educational system on the Kurdish national values, freedom, human rights, and respect for other national and ethnic rights in Kurdistan. They see undemocratic procedures, however, in the practices and ideologies of the Ba’th regime (p. 3). The early policy documents in particular indicate that policymakers considered democracy to mean anything that went against the Ba’thist agenda in relation to Kurdistan and the Kurdish nationalist movement (MoE-KRG, 1993; MoE-KRG, 1997). Democracy was juxtaposed with the Ba’thist educational projects in governing the Kurdish majority areas. This juxtaposition, by default, gave the Kurdish educational system a democratic attribute. Nonetheless, as argued earlier, in many cases, “Ba’thist” is simply a negative attribute in
the documents and not an indication of a substance. As political and educational leaders, researchers and critics have maintained, Kurdish nationalism and educational system in many ways resemble those of Ba’thists, nevertheless, the political and educational rhetoric still maintains the Kurdish educational experience within the boundaries of the positive.

However, the later policies present a relatively more detailed explanation of democracy as a principle for the educational system. They also refer to social and political values alongside democracy as principles in the KRG educational institutions. For instance, according to the Minister of Education in the PUK-run KRG cabinet in the Conference of 2001, the ultimate objective of schooling is to create out of each child a civic and aware citizen within the Kurdish society who dreams of establishing a democratic system (MoE-KRG, 2001). The Minister also referred to access, equity and quality as necessary objectives in the educational system. Equity was used to mean providing each child an education based on his or her needs but also to mean equality of opportunity and access to a similar education, particularly between rural and urban schools. Quality was seen as a necessary indicator of democracy in teaching, of children’s cognitive thinking skills, of the curriculum, and of management in schools. The Minister of Education-KRG also pointed to two main missions of teachers. One mission was to form citizens; that “every individual Kurd needed to have a sense of confidence and self-dependency.” The other mission was to “plant correct information in the minds of students” (MoE-KRG, 2001, p. 8). The Minister also referred to educating students to “pay attention to the moral, social and spiritual values, and be kind and generous towards the religious, gender and cultural differences in the society” (p. 8).

After the year 2003, political and educational leaders in KR started to express the democratic values in more detail, urging the educational system to reflect those values. Even though the society in Kurdistan was going through rapid changes due to the new sociopolitical and socioeconomic developments in Iraq in general and KR in particular, political and educational leaders believed that the educational system was still lagging in its academic and institutional traditions. The political and economic developments that KR witnessed after the new Iraqi constitution in 2005, which granted the Region a federal
status with a fixed percentage of the national budget, pressured the political and educational leaders to design policies in order to respond to these changes. Political and educational leaders, intellectuals and civil society organizations became very vocal in demanding that the educational system adhere to new methods in teaching and administration. As a result, none of the educational conferences and policies of the KRG have resulted in dramatic changes as did the Conference of 2007, which led to very visible changes in the K-12 schooling system. According to the Minister of Education-KRG in 2007, “the Kurdish society is stepping towards establishing the foundations of democracy. That is why education also needs to be democratic” by focusing on topics that led to tolerance and forgiveness (MoE-KRG, 2007, p. 23). He also referred to the organic relationship between education and the cultural and social life in Kurdistan. He expressed that different sectors of the society criticized the educational system because these issues were not only related to the system of education but also to the society in general. Therefore, the Minister indicated the need for a different philosophical outlook on the human being in the educational system, a philosophy that, according to him, did not divide children on smart or lazy, successful or failed (p. 21).

Compared to the other conferences and policy initiatives, political and educational leaders at the Conference of 2007 provided a detailed vision for public schooling in KR. They touched upon many issues in the educational system and indicated the urgency to solve long-standing obstacles in front of reform. The detailed vision indicated that schools should educate students based on a number of principles, such as patriotism, valuing the human life, gender equality, individual freedom, supporting those who need help, respect for the law, tolerance, forgiveness, responsibility, and so on (MoE-KRG, 2008). The aim of schools, according to the project for the new schooling system, was to transfer knowledge and science to students and educate them in cooperation with their parents for the life of adulthood so that they participate freely and responsibly in the society. Policymakers also called for the prevention of oppression and harassment of students in schools (p. 5). Policymakers believed that these changes would lead to raising the level of knowledge and science in the educational system and in the society. They believed that changing the schooling system would also pave the way to strengthening democracy and protection of the individual rights. They also saw these changes as a
response to the calls from the political leaders for fundamentally changing the educational system in order to parallel the steps that the KRG has taken to develop democracy and the reconstruction projects (MoE-KRG, 2008).

Other policy and legal documents also indicate the prevalence of the rhetoric of democratic values as the Kurdish experiences in self-governance increases. For instance, Article 2 of the Law of MoHESR of 2008 indicates the vision and objectives of the Ministry to develop the human character so that he or she “depends on freethinking, striving to bring about a free and developed society” (KNA, 2008, p. 2). The Law of Private Universities of 2013 also indicates democracy and human rights as principles in private higher education institutions (KNA, 2013, p. 2). In reference to the vision of the MoE-KRG for the K-12 education, the Minister of Education in 2015 indicates a number of values and principles such as: “helping children to attain knowledge and human values such as democracy, peace, respect for life, gender equality, individual freedoms, cooperation, human rights, sustaining the environment and fighting the extremist ideology” (MoE-KRG, 2015, p. 5). Similar to the Conference of 2007 in its visible effect and vision for change, perhaps, was the Roadmap to Quality by the MoHESR-KRG in 2010. The short-lived 6th KRG cabinet’s promises for raising the quality and standards of higher education was a response to the increasing societal pressures on the government and the vocal political opposition in the parliament, on the streets and through the mass media. The 6th KRG cabinet and the leadership of the MoHESR-KRG presented a vision for raising the quality of university education as well as new mechanisms for the administration of the Ministry and the universities (MoHESR-KRG, 2010). These reform and restructuring attempts were unprecedented in the history of Kurdistan’s higher education, and led to many political and administrative tensions (Ala’Aldeen, 2013). However, the Roadmap to Quality was the MoHESR-KRG’s most visible, elaborate and democratically viable vision for the future of higher education in KR, the effect of which is, more or less, still noticeable in the current higher educational system.
5.3.3 Titular democratization

Although political and educational leaders seem to be very explicit in voicing their views and vision for how education and society in KR need to be, and do not hesitate to use the rhetoric of democracy and human values, the reality of education and schooling varies in how these visions and policies take shape in the school and university environments. Admittedly, the ways the conference proceedings and laws take shape and the details indicated in the documents provide significant evidence on the extent to which the democratic rhetoric has force over the educational policies and practices. The political and educational statements on and about the significance of democracy and the adherence of the leaders and the system to its values do not necessarily indicate the state of democracy in education in KR. On one hand, the statements and policies have not been critiqued, and their contradictions are never revealed in serious academic analyses. In other words, within the educational system in Kurdistan, the legitimacy of such statements on the significance of democracy and the legitimacy of the policy and decision makers themselves are not questioned. Other than general critiques of the educational system as being (supposedly) inherited from the Ba’th regime, for being non-democratic or having a pyramid-like management structure, none of the policy and legal documents engage in self-critique or any critique of the policies that preceded them. On the other hand, the policies do not engage in understanding the ways that the school and university practices could reflect the democratic values. Questions such as how institutional and bureaucratic procedures might impede the development of these values, and what the role of power in the institutional hierarchy would be in interpreting and prioritizing implementation have not become the concern of the policies.

5.3.4 Factors influencing the democratization project

In order to better understand the rhetoric of democracy and human values as one of the fundamental principles of the educational system in KR, this analysis considers four contextual factors that are apparent in the policy and legal documents, which can help in understanding the meaning and substance of democracy. These factors are: the way
democracy is conceptualized and understood, the political and social contexts of KR, the bureaucratic reality of the educational system, and the government’s neoliberal tendencies in education.

**A minimalist understanding of democracy**

There is a vague notion or a minimal understanding of democracy in the educational policy documents. Although the rhetoric of democracy has been present in the educational policy documents since the establishment of the KRG in 1992, none of the documents engages in offering any critical conceptualization of democracy. Democracy has either been associated with the form of government in KR, in engaging with the general elections and the formation of the KRG, or in associating democracy with the right of the Kurds for a nation-state or a self-governance in north Iraq. This association of democracy with the particular government structure indicates the pervasive notion of liberal democracy. The review of literature on democracy (see chapter 3) signified that any particular concept of democracy necessarily entails the kind of conditions that are necessary for democracy. Conceptualizing democracy in a particular way also indicates the values of such conditions, be they procedural, substantive, or both. For instance, conceptualizing democracy within a pervasive nationalist discourse and in accord with the overarching nationalist agendas can influence how democracy is understood; it can value democracy on pragmatic rather than substantive bases. Within the nationalist paradigm that considers hierarchical state institutions as pivotal to the nationalist project, a liberal conception of democracy is more likely to be adopted granted that it does not disturb the nationalist power structures. Hence, Blaug’s (2002) definition of “incumbent democracy” is particularly informing to understand the taken-for-granted notion of democracy within a nationalist project. According to Blaug, ‘Incumbent democracy’ is an umbrella term expressed through concepts like the “liberal, realist, representative, institutional and protective.” It is a form of democracy that is conceptualized from and by the center of the power structure (p. 105), which makes it politically and ideologically compatible with the nationalist project of nation and state building without fundamentally
changing the project.

The parliamentary election in KR in 1992 was the most visible form of democratic procedures, which the Kurds used it to distinguish their government with the Ba’th government in Baghdad. However, the 1992 election was the one and only parliamentary election that took place until 2005, two years after the toppling of the Ba’th regime. Nonetheless, none of the policy and legal documents questioned the legitimacy of the KRG and the divided and dysfunctional parliament due to the civil war. Nor did any of the policies question or critically assess whether the various institutions of the KRG, including the educational institutions, had adhered to democratic principles. Each policy document refers to its own period as a time in which democracy has been flourishing, only to confess in the following policies that the democratic experience in the Region in the past periods had seen unfortunate events, had been questionable, but nonetheless acceptable. For instance, after about 15 years of self-governance, the Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) in the 5th KRG cabinet stated in the Conference of 2007 that the KRG was still the heir of the previous regimes, which were “dictatorships, fascists, authoritarian, and militaristic, who did not follow any democratic system” (MoE-KRG, 2007, p. 16). The DPM further indicated that the governing system of the KRG had been “old and has not seen any development and is not compatible with the system of globalization and the current trends” (p. 17). In the Conference of 2007, educational leaders and policymakers justified why the schooling system needed to change by admitting that the previous system had not been democratic. According to the DPM, changes in the form of government and society needed to start from education. The DPM, therefore, called for fundamental changes in the educational system so that Kurdistan could have a democratic government and society. The reason why democratization in schools and society had not taken place, according to the DPM, had been because of lack of knowledge and expertise in the new systems, which education needed to provide (MoE-KRG, 2007, pp. 17-18). Such confessions by political leaders and educational policymakers on the status of democracy in Kurdistan are far from unique. However, what seems to be prevalent in the political rhetoric is that the political leadership does not take the responsibility for the underdeveloped democracy. The political rhetoric on democracy assumes that the political elites’ struggle for power has not influenced the
status of democracy in the Region. Political leaders and educational policymakers seem to believe that there is a divide between school and society, or that there is a linear relationship between them. In this relationship, they believe that the values that are transmitted in schools are different from those transmitted in the society. For instance, according to the Project of Changing the Educational System, values such as rule of law, patriotism, and gender equality are transferred in schools and not on the streets, and therefore, they are the responsibility of the educational system (MoE-KRG, 2008). Hence, other than removing any form of accountability from the political and educational leadership, instead the political rhetoric on democracy holds education, and schools in particular, accountable for the state of democracy in the society.

The political discourse in KR has an immense power over education; the Kurdish educational leaders have not been able to detach the political rhetoric and tendencies from the educational (Rubin, 2016). This power indicates a utilitarian value of democracy in the educational system as a means of social engineering. The analysis of the documents indicates the widespread belief in Kurdish educational policymaking that reforming education based on preparing and advancing the abilities and skills of the school children is the foundation of social change, as it is evident in the Conference of 2007, which reveals the political mission of schooling. Kirmanj’s (2014) analysis of the Kurdish history textbooks and the grand nationalist narrative that they promote reveals that in KR, schooling reflects the current political and national aspirations of the KRG. It is used as an apparatus for strengthening and nestling in the young the political and economic tendencies of the political elite. The value of democracy and education, therefore, changes with the changes in the KRG’s political discourse. In the early educational policies, political leaders focused on Kurdish nationalism, history and the nation-building rhetoric as reflective of the democratic principles. The later documents, however, indicate a focus on the rhetoric of modernization, globalization, economic advancement, promoting the politics of the private sector and the market, and the value that democracy has had in creating opportunities to attract foreign investments into the Region. The utilitarian value of democracy is evident in linking the discourse of economic development with the processes of democratization in education. Furthermore, the value of democracy also seems to have advantages in the KRG’s foreign relations,
particularly when political leaders refer to international support for the Kurds in their conflict against the Ba’th regime in the earlier policies or their fight against ISIS in the 2015 conference.

The analysis of the documents indicates, on the one hand, that the way democracy is mentioned in educational policies is so vague that, when its principles are violated, it is difficult to identify it, and therefore, becomes without substance. Policies do not discuss what democracy means, other than references to rhetorical understandings of certain social values. Although political leaders and educational policymakers keep calling for democratization in education at any chance they get, they have not been able to surpass the political system and culture that they have themselves established. Failing to indicate and critically engage with what made the previous systems undemocratic have led policymakers to repeat the same policymaking and educational practices, nonetheless under different guises, as it is evident in the details of each document. The document analysis shows that policymakers do not provide evidence or question how reform initiatives, such as changing the schooling system, could actually participate in democratizing society or the school environment. The details of the policy documents, particularly the conference proceedings, do not indicate in any way how the democratization proposals could lead to happiness, equity, and a moral way of life in schools and the society. As a result, the pervasive rhetoric of democracy used by political and educational leaders and the power that they have over the educational system determine the implied meaning of democracy in the educational policies. On the other hand, political leaders and educational policymakers have not provided appropriate policy support and political will to interpret the democratic values in the administrative and day-to-day practices of schooling, thus creating a contradiction among the political vision for education, educational policies or the interpretation of these visions and policies into legitimate practices. For instance, while changing the K-12 schooling system in 2007, which changed the system from three stages (primary, secondary, high school) to two (basic and high school) took place under the assumption of democratizing the educational system, the Conference of 2015 divides basic education into two circles (MoE-KRG, 2015, p. 75), thus returning to the previous system. Maintaining the institutional and political structures in the face of democratic imperatives has granted
democracy a taken-for-granted, minimalist concept in the rhetoric of the political and educational elite. In this rhetoric, democracy has no social and educational substance other than being a byproduct of the pervasive educational system.

The political and social realities in Kurdistan Region

The democratic rhetoric used in the policy and legal documents cannot be understood in isolation from the political and social realities of KR of the past 25 years. KR has gone through both civil war and cease-fire periods since 1992, and has faced many internal and external challenges to its existence and the Kurdish self-governance experience. The KDP and the PUK have been running the KRG, whether in a unified or a separate administration. At times of internal political conflicts, these two political parties have not hesitated to engage in wars against each other, killing, imprisoning and displacing thousands of each other’s fighters and civilian affiliates. They also have not hesitated to rely on foreign and regional powers, including the Ba’th regime, for support against each other, directly or indirectly. While running their separate KRG administrations in their geographical areas of strength, they have not hesitated to use all the means to silence any form of intellectual, social and political dissent (Rubin, 2016; Zaman, 2016a; Bengio, 2012; Stansfield, 2003). As argued earlier, the democratic rhetoric in the educational policy documents witnessed a development, particularly during the economic and political stabili...
sharing is to end violence, but not to build democracy” (Aziz, 2009, p. 237).

Whether in times of war or of peace, the KDP and PUK political and educational leaders have not hesitated to call their respective administrations democratic, call for democratization and encourage the educational system to adhere to the virtues of citizenship, freedom, tolerance and equality before the law. The Conference of 1997 took place after the KDP relied on the military support from the Ba’thist regime in Baghdad to capture the city of Erbil on August 31, 1996. As a result, the PUK relied on the Iranian military to recapture Slemani and their other major strongholds within KR (Bengio, 2012). While the 1997 conference talked about the spirit of Kurdish nationalism, about the vision to eradicate illiteracy in Kurdistan, and about the rule of law, the reality of the matter was that these only involved the areas under the KDP control and not the whole of KR (MoE-KRG, 1997). Likewise, the statement by the Minister of Education in the PUK-run KRG in the Conference of 2001 about citizenship, equity and access as ideals in education (MoE-KRG, 2001) was at a time when there still was political animosity with the KDP, and many displaced Kurdish families of both political parties’ affiliates were not able to return to their homes. The democratic and state-building visions stated in the Conference of 2015 and KRI 2020 disregard the current dysfunctional and dissolved parliament, widespread corruption and nepotism, and the periodic demonstration and boycotting by teachers and other public servants due to the KRG’s delays and cutbacks in their salaries for several months (Friedman, 2016; Zaman, 2016a). In the Conference of 2015, the Minister of Education-KRG highlighted the vision of the Ministry for schools to establish an equal, civic, and diverse society so that it reflected the changes in globalism and modern life. It is significant to notice that the Minister’s statement does not address the current deteriorating situation of democracy in KR. The democratic vision of the MoE-KRG does not address the role of the authoritative political parties, in which the Minister of Education is a prominent leader, in suffocating the democratic spirit in the society. Instead, the Minister’s concern for democracy is to respond to global changes rather than to the needs of social and political cohesion within the society in Kurdistan. As Dei (2013) aptly puts it, “the mere acknowledgement of difference does not mean there has also been a concrete action to address what such difference implies and entails in terms of power and sharing of resources” (p. 50). In fact, Stansfield (2003) points to
the complex nature of the democratic discourse utilized by the major political parties. On one hand, “the KDP and PUK have been forced to acknowledge the necessity to encourage more democratic procedures and actions in order to gain the support of the international community for their plight.” On the other hand, however, political party leaders have felt the need “to preserve their own power base, both within the party and within the region at large” and “to preserve the current levels of elite accommodation” (p. 177). As such, when the rhetoric of democracy is put in the political and social contexts, which greatly shape the educational policy in KR, democracy’s substance in the political and educational statements come out as superficial and minimal.

The institutional and bureaucratic reality of the educational system

The institutional and bureaucratic reality of the educational system and the procedures of policy and decision-making greatly influence the concept and nuances of democracy in KR. The analysis of the documents reveals that while the democratic rhetoric goes through much transformation along with the transformation of the nationalist discourse, the institutional and bureaucratic realities seem to remain intact, or become even more complicated. Political and educational leaders have expressed numerous times that the school curriculum is reflective of the views, philosophy, culture, needs and aspirations of the society, which, they believe, should be standardized within a national framework. The overemphasis on changing the school curricula while neglecting the mechanisms through which curricular decisions and policymaking are made reveals that political and educational leaders and policymakers ignore how the educational system and administration are also reflective of social and political positions. Separating the educational system from the democratic aspirations is not only a positivist belief in the neutrality of the management system, which will be elaborated on later, but also an indication of prioritizing the institutional status quo over democratic imperatives. The positivist belief in the neutrality of the educational system also reveals the systemic exclusion of those who work within the educational institutions to participate in shaping the form and culture of their institutions. In fact, according to Dewey (1946), exclusion,
deliberate or habitual, from participation in institutions that affect the social and individual lives of those who are within the institutions is a subtle and effective form of suppression and intimidation more so than overt physical intimidation or restrain. When this subtle form if suppression “is habitual and embodied in social institutions, it seems the normal and natural state of affairs,” which not only disables and disempowers those who are excluded but also deprives the institution from potential resources (p. 59). This form of exclusion indicates the priority that the bureaucratic system has over the democratic ideals in the educational institutions in KR. For instance, all the conference proceedings work within and maintain the same institutional paradigm regardless of the progress in the democratic rhetoric. Even though in the Conference of 1997, the political and educational leaders called for more democratization in education, the institutional and political realities witnessed even less democracy, such as evident in the 1997 amendment of the Law of Higher Education of 1993. The amendment basically canceled the articles that gave the teaching staff at the universities in Kurdistan the opportunity to elect the university presidents, faculty and college deans in their respective institutions (KNA, 1997). It is worth noting that in 1997, the Kurdistan Parliament was solely run by the KDP, while the PUK members were absent due to the civil war. In other words, the Parliament did not have the legal standing to legislate such a law. The law among other things, allowed the 3rd KRG cabinet, which was run by the KDP, to tighten its hold over the universities in the KDP-controlled territories.

Another indication of the priority of the institutional bureaucracy over the democratic vision is the fact that in all of the policy and legal initiatives, except perhaps the 2007 conference (MoE-KRG, 2007) and the Roadmap to Quality (MoHESR-KRG, 2010), the political and educational visions have not resulted in changes in the institutional and bureaucratic realities. This point not only reveals a contradiction within the policies but also a divide between policy statements and practice. At the same time, it indicates that policymakers believe that there is a linear, top-down relationship between policies as rhetoric and implementation. Even though the educational Conference of 2007 resulted in changing the K-12 schooling system, it nonetheless kept many of the other aspects of the system intact (Saeed, 2008). The disparity between the democratic rhetoric and the institutional realities create a contradiction between the educational vision of the
leaders and the priorities to maintain the institutional requirements and accountability measures enforced on schools. For instance, both the 2001 and 2007 conferences claimed that students are at the center of the educational process. The educational leaders stated that all of the educational system was at the service of ‘transferring’ the high values to students. This indicates a contradiction on both epistemological as well as institutional levels. It confirms a traditional approach to schooling, which aims to transfer knowledge, culture, language, and foundational values from one generation to the next (Dewey, 1938). The Conference of 2007 defined knowledge as “becoming aware of facts, receiving information, understanding and solving problems, and not memorizing” (MoE-KRG, 2007, p. 205). Furthermore, one of the objectives of the Project for Changing the Educational System was to raise children based on and transferring to them certain values, particularly when they are 12-15 years old (MoE-KRG, 2008, p. 8). The Teaching Quality Assurance (TQA) of the Roadmap to Quality also maintains the notion of the teacher as the active agent in the classroom who acts upon the students as passive receivers of instruction and information (MoHESR-KRG, 2010). This ‘banking’ approach to schooling does not put the students at the center of the educational system but rather maintains the traditional, top-down power relationship between the students, the curriculum and the teacher (Freire, 2000).

The “different philosophical outlook on human being” advocated for by the Minister of Education-KRG in the 2007 conference did not seem to have had much influence on the proceedings and final policy suggestions that came out of the conference, let alone the amendment of the Law of his Ministry in 2008. The 2007 conference maintained the final government-designed, standardized exams as the only method of student evaluation, with only slight changes in the accumulation of the final baccalaureate grade for university entrance purposes. Summative final exams, which neglect students’ differences, were and still are maintained as the only method of evaluation in KRG educational system. This heavy reliance on standardized testing has gone against the “uniqueness of each child” for which the Minister’s “new philosophy” advocated (MoE-KRG, 2007, pp. 21-22). Another example of the policy contradictions and imbalance between democratic ideals and institutional constraints is the political and educational leaders’ call for equal schooling for all, whether in cities or in the villages.
However, education policies still promote “model schooling” or special schools for the talented. The MoE-KRG pays these schools a particular political, financial and administrative attention and support, which has granted them a privileged status. The fact that educational and political leaders advocate for the equality of urban and rural schools in their statements while at the same time promote these model schools indicates a contradiction, especially since model schools do not exist in villages. As such, the rhetoric of the human values and democratic principles in policymaking has not led to a different process of policymaking and schooling. The majority proceedings of the 2007 and 2015 conferences, just like in the other conferences, prioritize the technical aspects of the educational system and ways to maintain them at the expense of the democratic values.

The last amendment in the Law of the MoE-KRG of 1992 does not seem to reflect the philosophical changes advocated for in the 2007 conference. The last amendment only addresses the changes in the schooling system, minor administrative reorganization and changes in the rhetoric used in the law (KNA, 2007). The rhetorical change indicates the legislators’ consideration of the social and political realities of their time in using a more politically correct language to address other ethnic groups and people with disabilities. However, this law and its amendments do not indicate the democratic nature of the educational system so fervently stated by the political leaders and policymakers in the conference of 2007 and 2015 as well as the KRI2020 strategy report. The Law of MoE-KRG does not encourage democracy and does not lay any clear foundations for democratization. Rather, the law maintains the administrative and bureaucratic status quo in the Ministry and in schools. The predominant structure of the educational system in KR maintains the argument that political and educational leaders in KR see the democratic values as byproducts of the current educational administration without having actual substance in and of themselves.

Democracy as a foundation for education in KR has not resulted in any alternative institutional culture for the top-down structure of the educational system, which, as many political and educational leaders and critics have confessed, is inherited from the Ba’th regime. Educational administrators have relied heavily on mandates as the major
instrument in policy implementation. Even though mandates can be very effective as an alternative policy instrument in certain circumstances, they, nonetheless, rely on coercion to achieve compliance to policy prescriptions. Furthermore, they not only “exact compliance as an outcome” but also “assume that the required action is something all individuals and agencies should be expected to do, regardless of their differing capacities” (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987, p. 139). Disregarding the different human capacities is evident in the educational policies and laws in KR, which also indicates the divide between the political and educational rhetoric of the elite with the institutional and social realities in the schools. An example for the disregard of the social realities in schools is the linear, top-down view of policymaking, particularly in the laws and regulations around the prohibition of child harassment in schools. One of the principles for changing the K-12 school system in 2008 was the prohibition of violence against school children. The policy, nonetheless, requires that, if occurred, the schools would be responsible for eliminating the issue (MoE-KRG, 2008, p. 5). The Minister of Education-KRG in 2015 also confirmed the responsibility of schools towards child harassment (MoE-KRG, 2015, p. 6). However, this is only a minimalist treatment of the issue, and does not engage in the deep, systemic, and sociopolitical and socioeconomic roots of child harassment in schools. It does not provide teachers with any alternative in dealing with the children and the social and political realities in schools (Saeed, 2008). The policies also hold the schools solely accountable and not the policymakers, political and educational leaders or the whole educational system. This form of policymaking also neglects the systemic harassment of teachers and the sociopolitical and socioeconomic factors affecting the administration and culture of the schools. Furthermore, in the pyramid-like educational system in Kurdistan, schools are not given the social, economic and administrative power and freedoms to handle issues of violence and harassment. Neither the conference of 2007 nor that of 2015 produces policies to directly support schools in their accountability towards the children or the teachers.
The neoliberal tendencies in education

Notwithstanding the pervasive priority of the existing educational system and bureaucracy over democratic ideals and values, the primacy of the neoliberal discourse in the policies also explains the wavering democratic discourse in the educational policy in KR. Understanding the democratic principles brought forward in the educational policies, therefore, requires understanding the neoliberal, internationalist and globalist tendencies in the Kurdish state-building discourse. As mentioned earlier, the neoliberal discourse became particularly evident in the processes of Kurdish state-building in Iraq. This does not mean that the globalist tendencies of the Kurdish nationalist elite are a new phenomenon. Rather, its prevalence in the later educational policies over the ethnonationalist discourse of the 1990s has become more apparent. For instance, the Conference of 2001, which was held by the PUK-run KRG cabinet, was the first conference that overtly mentioned a knowledge economy as a driving factor for educational reform. It is worth mentioning that the PUK is a political party and member of the Socialist International, and inclines towards “‘national liberationist’ leftist movements” (Erkmen, 2012, p. 89, Italics in original). According to the Minister of Education in 2001, who was a prominent leader in the PUK, due to the “new international division of labor…education has to do its job in generating such skills” that are in demand in the new job market, such as “new problem solving, collaborative, entrepreneurial and creative thinking skills” (MoE-KRG, 2001, p. 6). Furthermore, according to policymakers in the Conference of 2007, an objective in changing the schooling system was to get the KR closer to the democratic countries by abiding by the international law on child labor. Policymakers hoped that by extending compulsory education to 9 years, children could stay at school instead of dropping out to work in the job market (MoE-KRG, 2008, p. 7).

The neoliberal discourse of quality and accountability measures, of student learning outcomes and achievements particularly surfaced in the Conference of 2001 and the subsequent conferences and policies. In 2001, for instance, the Minister of Education-KRG based her Ministry’s strategies on “international trends in educational policy reform, particularly those that link educational inputs to student achievement” (MoE-
KRG, 2001, p. 9). The Minister stated: “we cannot step into the 21st century with the
same old learning and educational weapons and tools” (p. 7). The Conference of 2007
also prioritized educational reform and democratization based on international and global
trends in schooling and labor markets (MoE-KRG, 2007). The Roadmap to Quality not
only valued democracy for its ability to spread such social, political and economic
preconditions that are considered friendly towards foreign investment and market
development, but also added layers of bureaucratization and accountability measures
(MoHESR-KRG, 2010) that further deprofessionalize teaching in higher education and
tightens the government’s control over the classroom environment.

Even though policy recommendations have insisted numerous times on creating a
link between schools and society, albeit without much success, as it is evident in all of the
policy and legal documents, the 2015 conference has suggested for the first time that the
private sector participate in designing curricula for the vocational education as a response
to the demands of the job market (MoE-KRG, 2015). There are, however, no similar
suggestions for civil society organizations to participate in designing curricula for the
humanities and social sciences in schools. The tendency towards privatization of
education has become more apparent in the later policies, which have allowed
corporations, international organizations, as well as local and foreign merchants to open
many private schools and universities in KR. Nonetheless, the KRG has dealt with the
private sector, especially in education, with much confusion, uncertainty and suspicion.
These are evident in the manner in which educational policies and legal documents treat
schooling in the private sector. On the one hand, political leaders encourage the
involvement of the private sector in schooling, assuming to assist the government in the
Political leaders also believe that the private sector, particularly the international schools
and universities, can engage in the processes of democratization more successfully. On
the other hand, legislators and policymakers are suspicious of these schools, and tend to
require that the government closely monitor and supervise the private schools through
dictating top-down accountability measures (MoE-KRG, 2007; KNA, 2012; KNA, 2013;
MoE-KRG, 2015). Also, as mentioned earlier, the conference proceedings reveal that
dictating top-down accountability measures.
schools so that they reflect the ‘national realities’ of KR. Furthermore, according to the Law of Private Universities in Kurdistan Region, many of the procedures and regulations in the private universities are to be approved by the MoHESR-KRG. For instance, in Article 10, the Ministry is to approve each university’s admission annual plan, tuition fees, the curriculum and its implementation agenda, the pass or fail standards and ratio in accordance with their testing system (KNA, 2013, p. 6). The law prescribes how the private universities should function and administer their affairs. The law even prescribes how to appoint key administrative positions without giving faculty and staff members any opportunity for elections or voting. The law also prescribes the details of university committees and the responsibilities of each committee. This law simply dictates the pyramid-like management structure and the undemocratic administrative culture of the public universities on the private universities.

The neoliberal tendencies in policymaking and educational administration are also evident in the calls for prioritizing practice over theory, which also have created much confusion in educational policymaking and practices in KR. Political and educational leaders have insisted on the importance of focusing on the practical implications of schooling and their reflections on the job market. One of the objectives of the 2001 conference was to make the primary school curriculum more practical so that it becomes closer to the needs of the job market and the requirements of higher education (MoE-KRG, 2001). Subsequent conferences and laws have also focused on linking education to the job market, encouraging a practice-focused vocational education, as well as providing legal and administrative support for private schooling. Notwithstanding the assumed attention paid to vocationalized education, which reflects the neoliberal agenda of the market economy and values (Murray, 2012), the policy confusion is twofold. First, the systemic culture of formal education in Kurdistan indicates that abstract theorizing is still prioritized over practice. This is apparent in the heavy reliance on top-down, linear policymaking. A complete disregard for the implementation of policy at the grassroots is an example of the priority that policymaking as theorizing has over practice in schools and society. Also, standardized, summative written tests, which are the most dominant, if not the sole, form of student evaluation, even in the vocational schools in Kurdistan, means that the graduation and success of students do not depend on what they do as their
practice, but how much they reiterate the theoretical knowledge they have memorized from their standardized textbooks. Second, formal education in Kurdistan and Iraq has always been linked to the job market and the opportunities for placement in the institutions of higher education. However, the KRG officials have currently shifted their attention from the public sector to the private (MoE-KRG, 2007). While this is so, it is worth mentioning that in KR, there is not a significant divide between the public and the private sectors, and that party leaders and major KRG officials still control the private marketplace (Rubin, 2016; Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Erkmen, 2012). The major proportion of the KRG annual budget goes to public employment salaries as a result of its historical utilization by the KDP and the PUK for political gain, clientelism and patronage networks, which has resulted in a bloated public sector and a rentier society (Rubin, 2016; Zaman, 2016a). Notwithstanding, the KRG high officials have started to encourage linking education to the private sector job market as a way to divert the economic issues in KR. In the Conference of 2007, for instance, the KRG PM asked that people in Kurdistan stop depending on the government for everything, which, according to him, was a legacy from the Ba’th regime (MoE-KRG, 2007, p. 6). Furthermore, although the educational policies have led to increasing the number of offices and directorates in the Ministries of Education and Higher Education over the years, the current KRG tendencies are to downsize the MoE-KRG as well as other government institutions. These future visions are evident in the Conference of 2015 and the KRG 2020. The tendencies to downsize and cut public expenditure have also been a response to the current economic issues facing the KR. While many public employees, such as teachers, have been frequently on the streets and boycotting their work and the new school year, the KRG has become indifferent to the teachers’ concerns (“Teachers respond,” 2016). These two points, the heavy reliance on rationalized theorizing and the shifts in the meaning and indication of the job market, are examples of what Apple (2004) has called “old traditions, new markets” as an explanation of the neoliberal agenda in education.

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22 http://www.awene.com/2016/08/14/20102/
5.3.5 Conclusion

As mere rhetoric, democracy has been present in the educational and political discourses in KR. Political and educational leaders and policymakers fervently refer to democracy as a major principle in the educational system in Kurdistan. They demand that democratic principles become the principles in schooling and for students to live by in the society. However, democracy as a substance of the social, political and educational life in Kurdistan needs to be put under scrutiny. A critical examination of democracy in education in Kurdistan involves questions about the pervasive conception of democracy in the educational and political discourses, and the level of engagement and attitude that political and educational leaders demonstrate in their rhetoric. A critical examination of the democratic rhetoric in KR also involves frank and open analysis and discussion of the political history of the Region in the past 25 years of the Kurdish self-governance. This history includes many examples of success and triumphs for the nationalist Kurdish agenda, particularly when compared to the rest of Iraq under the Ba’th regime and during the sectarian and political unrest after 2003. Nonetheless, the recent history of KR also involves many incidences and examples of atrocities that the Kurdish nationalist movements have committed against each other and against the people of KR. Examples of undemocratic tendencies in policies and practices in education and other sectors are abundant in KR, during the very times that political and educational leaders have hailed the democratic experience of Kurdish nationalism. Furthermore, the bureaucratic and institutional realities of the educational system cannot be neglected in critically understanding the status of democracy in Kurdistan. The democratic rhetoric used in the policy and legal documents does not hold much substance in itself without understanding the contingencies that determine what democracy actually means in the institutional context. To fully understand this, it is significant to ask how policies and school administration regulations support the democratic values; how these values are understood within the pyramid-like structure of the educational system; and how the changes in the system, in the school organization, classroom management, teaching methodology, curriculum and evaluations have reflected democratic principles. It is also significant to examine how the MoE-KRG and the MoHESR-KRG, their Directorates and the hiring of teachers and administrators reflect the democratic ideals. Furthermore, the
neoliberal direction that the KRG is currently taking needs to be examined in relation to the democratic rhetoric promoted in the policy documents. As Palander (2013) indicates, while most KRG educational reforms in higher education “are state-driven, the ideology and its rules and regulations stem from neoliberalism” (p. 101). The same is true of the Kurdish government’s reforms in the K-12 system as well. The discourse of quality and accountability measures, of student learning outcomes and achievements, of the market-driven vision of schooling, of standardization of curriculum and evaluation are not recent inventions in the KRG educational policies. Rather, their recent prevalence and infusion into the democratic rhetoric are related to KRG’s internationalization efforts of linking the KR market, particularly after establishing an oil-dependent economy, to the global market. As I have explained above, the infusion of ‘market’ with ‘democracy’ or the confusion of democracy with market choice while solidifying the already-existing pyramid-style structure of the educational system comes from the paradoxical infusion of neo-liberal and neo-conservative discourses (Pinto & Portelli, 2013; Apple, 2004), which cannot be ignored in understanding the democratic rhetoric in educational policies. Through such a critical examination of the democratic rhetoric, the analysis of the documents reveals that educational policies in Kurdistan have employed different brandings for a similar educational process and system in KR in the past 25 years.

5.4 Bureaucratization/Modernization

This section elaborates on educational bureaucratization/modernization in KR as a major framework in educational policymaking and reform prioritization. Bureaucratization as a framework in education in KR entails endeavors to maintain the institutional status quo, democratization as a technical-rationalist approach that stands for an assumed neutral, apolitical administration of education, which nonetheless, maintains the political and institutional power structures.

The vast majority of the policy decisions and recommendations in KR cover institutional affairs, whether of administration and management of the Ministries’ offices or of schools and universities. Some of these centralized decisions and recommendations
go as far as covering very detailed issues, such as adding specific topics to the school curriculum, printing of textbooks, purchasing of office supplies, standardizing teaching methodologies and classroom practices, and so forth. Even though many of the educational policymaking objectives are geared towards fundamental changes in education, the policy recommendations and decisions do not seem to reflect the radical reform that the policy statements call for. The details of the conference proceedings, for instance, do not reflect the principle values of democracy, human rights and respect and recognition of the national values and rights that political and educational leaders so fervently endorse. Also, nowhere in the details of the conferences and legal documents the vision and mission of the KRG or even the components of the policy slogans are put under scrutiny and critical deliberation. Instead, almost all the proceedings deal with details of institutional administration of education. For instance, in the 2001 conference, the Minister of Education-KRG alluded to the teachers as the “golden mine” in whose hands lays the future of the children of Kurdistan (MoE-KRG, 2001, p. 8). She asked that the institutional hierarchy and all the resources that her Ministry could provide be put at the disposal of the teachers in order to fulfill their highly regarded mission. However, the proceedings of the conference do not include any significant form of support, decided or suggested, that could help teachers in their mission. Similarly, none of the decisions and suggestions concerns democratic values or significant improvement in the quality of the educational system. The policy decisions and suggestions concern administrative issues, standardization of practices, establishing particular units in the Ministry’s administrative structure, and micromanaging teachers and the method of their evaluation. This is true across all the educational policies and legal documents. Educational policymakers in KR heavily strives to maintain the administrative practices and culture of the established educational system. Notwithstanding the limited studies and reports presented to the KRG educational administration and policymaking initiatives, which present many valuable suggestions, these initiatives are always bound by the structural, administrative and bureaucratic realities of the educational system.
5.4.1 Maintaining the structural status quo

The structure of the educational administration in KR has proven to be beyond scrutiny and critical engagement in the KRG educational policies. A close look at the educational legal, policy and strategic documents indicates that all the reform initiatives and restructuring projects of the past 25 years have taken place within the same institutional culture. Policies are made within a taken-for-granted educational system, which, as many political and educational leaders and critics have confessed throughout the last 25 years, has been inherited from the Ba’thist Iraqi government. The Kurdish government’s inability to surpass this inheritance reveals that policymakers have disregarded the effects of the institutional structure and culture not only on practices but also on the substance of such concepts as democracy, human rights, quality, rule of law and so forth. For instance, all the documents consider democratic and human values to be fundamental in the Kurdish educational system. However, none of the policies explains what these values could mean in education or how they could be actualized in the processes of educational policymaking, practices in administration and in classrooms. Even though the educational legal and policy documents propose many reform decisions and recommendations, they do not necessarily find proper and supportive groundings within the established institutional tradition. In fact, the value and significance of educational and democratic principles are seen in the extent of their appropriation within the administrative system. This means that the current established system of education is a factor in granting value to education as well as to democracy. Likewise, the significance and value of policies and programs come from their correspondence to the institutional regulations and detailed mandates.

As it is evident in the 2015 educational conference, the inability of educational policymaking in KR to go beyond the traditional pyramid-like hierarchical structure, in which policymaking and administrative prescriptions start from the top and precise implementation is required from the bottom, denotes yet another aspect of the contradiction and confusion in the Kurdish educational system between the demands of the new market on one hand and the political and ideological needs to maintain the institutional tradition on the other. The analysis of the documents indicates that at one
point in the documents, policymakers contend the centralization and concentration of institutional power at the top of the hierarchy and as an impediment in front of educational development. While the very documents and their numerous policy suggestions maintain centralized decision-making, and at times even demand stronger centralization. For instance, in the Conference of 2015, when asking for institutional freedom of the research and supervision and pedagogy centers/directorates, policymakers associate this freedom to its institutional position at the top of the administrative hierarchy or suggest that the office of the Minister of Education directly supervise these centers/directorates (MoE-KRG, 2015, p. 16). However, later on in the conference document, policymakers consider centralization and concentration of decision-making at the top a major issue in educational administration (p. 53).

5.4.2 Technical rationality as embodiment of democracy

The analysis of the documents further indicates that, within the political and institutional rhetoric of the educational leaders and policymakers, adhering to democratic principles means adhering to what they call “the scientific method.” In this rhetoric, the scientific method means a particular form of educational administration that focuses on bureaucratization, modernization, internationalization, institutional hierarchy as well as working within the legal boundaries of the MoE-KRG and MoHESR-KRG. Many of the recommendations and policies in education are prescriptions of technical-rational planning extended through the smallest institutional levels. For instance, the Conference of 2007 suggests including a teaching instructions booklet with each school textbook to direct teachers on how to “transfer the textbook content to the students” (MoE-KRG, 2007, p. 262). When proposing to establish new offices or branches at the MoE-KRG, or when proposing to uplift the integrity of evaluation and the quality of university teaching and administration, policymakers suggest pyramid-like structures and top-down evaluation procedures, and mandate linear, technical accountability measures (MoE-KRG, 2007; MoHESR-KRG, 2010; MoE-KRG, 2015). The technical-rational perspective on quality, for instance, is based on the premises of organizational behavior, which, as
Blanco Ramírez (2013) argues, presumes that “rationality is the main, if not the sole, motivation for quality endeavours.” Technical rationality basically assumes that “employing the right technique or…adjusting the strategy” will solve issues facing quality endeavors in education (p. 131). This approach, however, neglects the political struggles around power and legitimacy, and instead presents quality assurance policies, and other reform policies for that matter, as being the result of practical demands and inevitable expansion of demand for education quality and development. “The prescriptive nature of this kind of work leaves little space for critique or reflection” (Blanco Ramírez, 2013, p. 131).

5.4.3 Institutional theory and the assumptions of linear policymaking

Even though the political and educational rhetoric in policymaking have seen changes in KR during the past two and a half decades, policies are still conducted within the established institutional framework, which is entirely top-down, one-directional and does not consider the contextual complexities of the implementing bodies. Traditional, top-down policymaking and program implementation reflect a simplistic, linear understanding of policy processes. In this respect decision makers tend to make policies and design programs without much consideration of the implementing contexts and the variables within these contexts, which more or less determine how such policies and programs are received and implemented. Studies on policy implementation show how different contextual factors affect not only the interpretation and reception of policy that greatly influence the direction of implementation, but also the production of policies and policy documents (Bascia, 1996; 2001; Burch, 2007; Codd, 1988; McLaughlin, 1987). These studies show policy-implementing contexts as a valid and significant component of policy processes. The implementing contexts at the bottom of institutional hierarchies forcefully shape policies by the ways they receive and implement them. They also reveal the limits of the technical-rational perspective in policymaking.

Top-down, one-directional policymaking is based on the presumption that a uniform policy will result in uniform implementation and outcomes. It presumes that
good policymaking means producing policy statements and elaborate plans that are overarching, thorough and highly prescriptive. This presumption, however, disregards the individual and organizational interactions that influence policies and plans, as well as how the broader environment influences organizational practices (Burch, 2007). As Burch (2007) argues, “The dependence between organizations and their institutional environments produces organizational forms and policy practices that often are loosely coupled with policy makers’ intentions” (p. 85). This means that the context of the implementing institution largely determines how a particular policy is received, interpreted and implemented. The local interactions, therefore, affect policy regardless of policymakers’ prior intentions, making a working policy at a particular instance and place not working elsewhere. Besides, since technical and formal activities frequently conflict with societal norms of institutional activities, following rules and regulations of policy prescriptions become near impossible.

Furthermore, as Bascia (2001) argues, there is a correlation between change in the social, political and economic conditions and change in educational policies. In many instances societal changes have led to dramatic changes in policy directions over time, nonetheless in a way that sometimes “incremental adding on” or replacing one policy by its reactions have been all that new policies have been able to accomplish (pp. 248-249). That is why, as Bascia (2001) opines, policy processes need to happen with the understanding that changes in policies will not result in immediate changes in concepts, values, rules and activities. Certain aspects of values and practices endure regardless of changes in official policy directions (p. 249). Therefore, even when changes occur in policy, some structural and normative aspects of the educational process and bureaucratic organization of schooling still remain solid. This shows the durable aspect of the educational system and processes that tend to “reproduce rather than challenge the social status quo” (p. 250). In other words, educational policy processes tend to work on certain bureaucratic fundamentals, and while new policies are called for, they might not necessary involve negotiations over those fundamentals. It is therefore important to understand that policy implementation will not result in a “linear sequence of events” (Bascia, 2001, p. 251) because implementation faces complications by forces that work within the contexts in which the policies are to be implemented. Such forces are the
teaching and learning processes within specific contexts, the influence of existing organizational structures and policies, the social and political histories of local contexts, and so on. Regardless of its power and force, policy is also “confounded by individual and collective experience and values” because policy always interacts with “organizational and individual realities” (Bascia, 2001, p. 263). That is why, despite the power of policy, “practitioners weave a complicated web of possibilities” (p. 263) around its implementation and range of influence.

Additionally, not only the internal forces within contexts influence policy but also the broader societal factors within which schools, for instance, exist. This is because, as Burch (2007) argues, “the practices and policies adopted by schools and governing agencies reflect the rules and structures in wider society” (p. 85). Such internal and external forces could lead to negotiating policies and implementation strategies by the local contexts rather than fully accepting or rejecting them. As for the policy options, the instruments that are used to implement a policy also greatly influence the directions of practice. As such, policy outcomes are bound not only by the power of the policy and its implementation but also by the policymakers’ choices of policy instruments. That is why, when traditional, top-down policymaking takes place without much regard to implementation contexts, there appears “disparity between the intent of policy at the top of the system and what actually occurs in classrooms” (Bascia 1996, p. 182).

The role of contexts as a main factor in policy implementation is very critical in understanding the complex and multidimensional nature of policy processes. One can see that policies, particularly educational policies, in Kurdistan have continually neglected the influence of contexts as a major determining factor in policy processes. This framework, which gives much significance to implementation contexts, also shows that policies are not simply bound by the will, the power, and the intention of policymakers. Rather, contexts have determining powers over the nature and processes of policy. That is why contingencies of contexts cannot be unaccounted for in policy production, implementation and analysis. Embracing this framework is particularly important in understanding the educational system in KR, where policy processes have always taken contextual factors for granted.
5.4.4 The fallacy of the neutral educational system

Political and educational leaders and policymakers in KR assume that “the scientific method” in educational administration grants a neutral status to the process of formal education. They believe in the existence of a standard form of educational administration and policymaking that goes beyond the political and ideological stances of those who run the system. This belief in the neutrality of the current structure of the educational system is evident in various ways in the policy documents. On the one hand, the fact that the KRG has maintained the same structure of the educational system, which has been inherited from the Ba’th regime, is an example of the pervasive belief in a neutral educational system. Whereas the Kurdish nationalist movement has defined its self-governance experience in the past 25 years as a contrast to the Ba’thist experience, the educational aspect of this experience has not been fundamentally different, as repeated many times by the political and educational leaders, policymakers and critics. On the other hand, the Kurdish political and educational leaders have repeatedly stated that it is the curriculum that reflects the vision, philosophy and strategy of the KRG as well as the national values, culture, needs and aspirations of the society in Kurdistan. The area in which educational policymaking in the past 25 years has been comparably visible has been in the humanities and social sciences curricula/textbooks of the K-12 and university systems, albeit on a superficial level. What is evident in the analysis of the documents is that the structure of the educational system, at both the K-12 and the post-secondary levels, has seen the least amount of change compared to the changes made in the content of the curricula and textbooks.

However, the neutrality of government and other state structures has been challenged within the methodological traditions of critical research. The political and educational leaders’ recurrent references to “the scientific method” as the source of both the validity of the Kurdish nationalist values and the legitimacy of its institutions is what Offe (1984) labels “the scientization of politics.” By this, Offe means “the authoritative participation of scientific experts in the development and evaluation of political programmes,” which is a political effort that serves to relief the political leaders from the social and temporal burdens of their political decision-making (p, 113). Furthermore,
Offe (1984) also argues that the state maintains the “institutions and social relationships necessary for the domination of the capitalist class” (p. 120, Italics in original), fundamentally granting such institutions an ideological and political force. Since educational institutions are political sites for the formation and appropriation of discourses (Foucault, 1972) and as “the instrument and object of power,” a state-controlled educational system, which itself is also a discursive practice, “works to maintain relations of power throughout the society as a whole” (Codd, 1988, p. 243).

Moreover, Darling-Hammond (1997) explains the misleading assumptions behind the “objective” nature of modern bureaucracies and the scientific management of schooling. Designing the schooling system according to the modern systems of production and manufacturing intends not only to produce uniform and standardized labor for the job market, but also leads to social stratifications and hierarchical control. The fact that the Kurdish educational system and the procedures of policy-making take the technical-rational route is in itself indicative of holding particular ideological and political assumptions about the social relationships in institutions and their effect on policy processes, as well as the relationship between theory and practice (Datnow & Park, 2009; McDonnell & Elmore, 1987).

5.4.5 Maintaining the power structure

When democratic principles are proposed within a linear, hierarchical and structurally centralized system of policymaking and schooling, the conceptual and practical integrity of the democratic and human values depends on the power structure in the educational system. An example would be the margin of participation and structured deliberation in the MoE-KRG’s educational conferences. In these conferences, there are a variety of people who are invited to participate: educational leaders and administrators from within the Ministry, teachers, university professors and invited Kurdish and foreign experts from abroad. These people are grouped into subcommittees and later into committees based on the topics and agenda set beforehand by the Ministry. Although many people participate, in reality, those who make decisions are key administrators at the Ministry level.
Furthermore, when it comes to educational policymaking, the only instances of
democratic participation of teachers and external experts are these nationwide educational
conferences. The majority of educational policymaking takes place at the Ministry level
and within the key administrators at the top of the administrative system. It is also worthy
to highlight that, notwithstanding the limited democratic educational policymaking in
KR, the educational system has traditionally depended on the partisan and institutional
power of those officials who hold positions at the top of the hierarchy (Saeed, 2008). A
quick examination of the conference proceedings indicates that the majority, if not all, of
those who have chaired the different committees have been high officials from the MoE-
KRG. This could explain one reason why there are hardly any policy decisions that could
undermine the institutional position of the educational and political leaders. The fact that
the Ministry sets the reform agenda and areas of concern and then asks conference
participants to deliberate possible routes of evaluation and eventually find solutions for
them limits the democratic aspect of the participation and deliberation. This is
particularly so since the existing power structure within the educational system is taken
for granted, and critical evaluations of and decision on deep-rooted systemic issues in the
vision and administration of the Ministry of Education do not take place in the
conferences. Hence, the educational conferences have become the arena where the MoE-
KRG disseminates the KRG’s educational policy projects. Allowing the participation of
educational officials, some teachers and experts to voice their input and concerns has
been mostly to make the standardization and comparable implementation of the
educational policy and administration easy and without major hurdles throughout KR.

Furthermore, the Conference of 2007 in particular contains two main, and many
times conflicting voices: the traditional voice and concerns of the local conference
participants in contrast to the progressive voice of the expatriate conference participants.
The existence of these voices can explain why the 2007 policy suggestions and
recommendations have tried to make room for both these voices, which in many
instances, along with other reasons, has led to contradicting policy decisions and
suggestions (MoE-KRG, 2007). The same can also be said on the details of the Roadmap
to Quality (MoHESR-KRG, 2010). In such situations, the institutional and political
reality of the educational system would decide whose voice is louder. According to Saeed
(2008), the educational system in KR did not see a major divergence from the previous one even after changing the K-12 schooling system, returning the cause to the overwhelming power that the institutional tradition has over progressive voices. While the 2007 conference tried to make room for the different voices, the Conference of 2015 makes a policy recommendation particularly asking that reform policies heavily depend on local experts (MoE-KRG, 2015, p. 54), which resonates the political struggle over the authoritative agency in policymaking. The decisive power of institutional positions in policymaking is also evident in the policy recommendations for opening new pedagogy and research centers in the MoE-KRG. Policymakers have recommended several times that in order for those offices and other reform policies to be effective, they need to be institutionally close to the MoE-KRG or that the Minister’s office directly supervise them (MoE-KRG, 2007, p. 218). Along the same lines, policymakers also recommend granting a professional title to school principles in order to strengthen their authority in their schools (p. 245).

One of the issues of the educational system in KR, according to the 2015 conference document, is disregard for the available data, and lack of informed and research-based decision-making (MoE-KRG, 2015, p. 53). The fact that the 2015 conference itself does not refer to any research or utilize data from the previous conferences in suggesting policies or alluding to educational and administrative issues shows yet another layer of the contradictions in the policymaking rhetoric. Disregarding available data and research in policymaking means that the educational policies have relied on the administrative status quo. It also means that such policymaking endeavors, however accessible they might be to a limited number of individuals, do not lead to open and critical discussions of what the previous conferences and policies have to offer or on how to build on the existing policymaking experiences. Furthermore, there is a tendency in the policy documents to use a vague language in referring to educational and administrative issues. Using a vague language not only simplifies the complexity of the educational issues but also conceals the real sources of the issues and those who would be accountable for the implementation of policy recommendations and decision. The Kurdish hierarchical educational system, as such, provides the political and educational leaders with the opportunity to use their position of power to dictate their political agenda.
and hold those with less political and institutional power solely accountable. As it is evident in the policy documents, the political and educational leaders refer to a proliferation of issues, particularly in administration, in a manner as if such issues are present regardless of those who run the top positions in the institutional hierarchy. Policy recommendations never refer to accountability and disciplinary procedures for the top political and administrative leaders even though these leaders speak the loudest about the incoherence of the Kurdish educational system. The leaders and administrators are not confronted with any accountability and disciplinary procedures, while those who are prone to face such procedures are the teachers, principals and students. Putting many detailed criteria for school principles, for instance, while similar criteria are not prescribed for those at the top of the institutional hierarchy indicates the maintenance of power at the top. The heavy reliance of policymaking on mandates and legal pressures from the top to implement policies, while confronting those at the bottom with layers of accountability measures and disciplinary action, and disregarding the contingency of the much-needed political, financial and administrative support, are all indications of maintaining the power structure above all else in the Kurdish educational system.

5.5 Conclusion

Aziz (2009) argues that “the Kurds in modern era have radicalised their national agenda into a politically organized national movement” (p. 178). Kurdish political nationalism in Iraq can be considered a reaction to the processes of marginalization, racial exclusion, political and cultural denial as well as violence against the Kurds in attempts to homogenize the Iraqi nation-state, eventually leading to “otherize” the Kurds (Ahmed, 2015; also Natali, 2005; Aziz, 2009). According to Yavuz (2001), “Kurdish nationalism is an outcome of the tension between the forces of homogenization and the struggle to maintain cultural and local autonomy. This tension is at the core of the politicization of the Kurdish culture” (p. 3; also Natali, 2005). As elaborated by Eriksen (2010), Ernest Gellner’s definition of nationalism is based on the idea of the nation-state that is “dominated by an ethnic group, whose markers of identity (such as language or religion)
are frequently embedded in its official symbolism and legislation” (p. 119). Gellner’s (1983) definition of nationalism, as a political ideology that strives to make the political boundaries of the nation-state congruent with the cultural boundaries of the national group, is much relevant to explain the current Iraqi Kurdish nationalism. It is relevant because Gellner’s theory of nationalism can explain both the ethnic nature of Kurdish nationalism and the nuances of the political project of creating a Kurdish nation-state embedded in the KRG.

The political project of establishing a Kurdish nation-state in Iraqi Kurdistan Region has been apparent in the political and economic arenas (Rubin, 2016; Soderberg & Phillips, 2015; Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Bengio, 2012; Aziz, 2009). However, the nuances of this process and the directions that it has taken in the past 25 years can be particularly understood within the formal educational discourse. A critical analysis of major educational documents indicates that state-building endeavors in KR have taken place through at least three main, and at the same time intersecting policy frameworks. These frameworks are: Kurdish nationalism, titular democratization and bureaucratization. An in-depth and critical analysis of the major educational policy and legal documents demonstrates the relationships among the three frameworks of educational policymaking and the issues of vision, policymaking, administration and practices in KR’s educational system. This chapter particularly elaborates on the nature and implications of the educational vision in KR, which is that of establishing a Kurdish nation-state, and presents a critical framework for understanding the educational issues in KR in relation to this political vision. It argues that the educational issues in KR need to be understood in relation to the pervasive Kurdish ethnonationalist agenda and what this agenda entails in educational policies and practices. It also argues that there is a dialectical relationship between the discourses of nationalism and democracy within KR’s educational system. While the dominant Kurdish ethnonationalist discourse has allowed only a minimalist, proceduralist, utilitarian notion of democracy, the democratic experience and expectations of the people in KR have also encouraged the integration of civic elements into the Kurdish nationalist discourse. However, both the political projects of nationalism and democratization have taken place within a taken-for-granted notion of the modern state.
Elaborating on the main policy frameworks in the KR’s educational system indicates that the political and educational elites in the KRG have promoted the structures of a nationalist state, as long as the state has been able to fulfill the nationalist sentiment (Gellner, 1983). In other words, it is not much of a concern for the fulfillment of the nationalist principle what kind of state the nationalists are running as much as the fact that they are running a state. While it is not easy to determine exactly why there is the persistence of the Ba’thist educational system and culture in schools in KR, major possible reasons could be derived from the analysis and main argument in this thesis.

For instance, the colonial relations between Kurdish nationalism and Arab nationalism in Iraq can explain the formation of the KRG in 1992 and its maintenance of the Iraqi Ba’thist educational structures without a radical divergence in the social and political experiences. The Kurdish self-governance in the form of the KRG did not start as a result of long, premeditated planning nor was it the result of previous experiences in governance beyond the Iraqi model. In other words, the political principles of both nationalisms are based not so much on how the nation is governed but on who should govern it. In the Kurdish case, as long as the Kurds run the KRG, the political and educational leaders seem to have no issue with its structure, including the structure of its educational system. Furthermore, while Iraqi Kurdish nationalism resembles Iraqi Arab nationalism, its form of government also resembles the Iraqi system, since the political culture of KR has not fundamentally changed from that of Iraq. Saeed (2008) and Ala’Aldeen (2013) argue that the KRG has depended on the same theoretical foundations and systematic procedures of the Iraqi Ba’thist regime. Adding more political interference into the system due to Kurdish partisan rivalries, particularly in the 1990s and early 2000s, and once again after 2014, has further complicated the situation and has allowed the Ba’thist system and practices in education to continue. During political rivalries and uncertainties in KR, the educational system becomes a powerful utility for social and political conditioning based on the design and agenda of those in power. Just like during the Ba’thist rule in Iraq, the educational system in KR has been politicized and regulated based on the political parties’ direct and indirect interference and according to the political situation in KR. Lack of capacity, infrastructure and experience in running a state bureaucracy such as the educational system could also be a reason why the
Ba’thist educational system and culture have continued into the Kurdish educational system. Lack of infrastructure and resources has impacted KRG’s educational reform initiatives, particularly at the beginning of its establishment in 1992, to be superficial, only concerning changes and purging of school textbooks. However, in the last 25 years the KRG has not paid much attention to capacity building, which has led the forces involved in the state-building process, especially the internal forces, to utilize traditional means and methods, such as depending on nationalism and modernization processes. Hence, the KRG has relied heavily on policies and administration similar to those of the Iraqi Ba’thist government, such as centralized, top-down policy-making procedures and high rates of public employment to deal with public pressure for economic and social stabilities (Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Rubin, 2016).

Notwithstanding, the Iraq Kurdish self-governing experience in the past 25 years has consciously made the choice to integrate the Ba’thist socio-cultural and socio-political relationships in education with those of the Kurdish nationalist movement (Natali, 2005; Bengio, 2012; Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Rubin, 2016). The conscious social and political choice has defined the Kurdish political elite’s engagement in the process of “building the institutions of an independent state” (Soderberg & Phillips, 2015, p. vii). In other words, it is not by accident or mere inheritance that KRG’s educational system is what and how it is. Nor can it simply be lack of experience or lack of infrastructure, after 25 years of self-governance and particularly the KR has seen much development in its national revenue and its infrastructure since 2003. Rather, the current educational system in KR is the political, social and institutional reflection of an Iraq Kurdish national project of building a modern nation-state.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this dissertation has been to answer the main research question, which is: What kind of education does Kurdistan Region need in order to establish a more equitable and just society? My answer to the question involves upholding a critical, transformative democracy as the educational framework for envisioning and practicing education in schools and society. In stark contrast to the dominant notion of nationalism that is dependent on ideology, power, and hegemony in forming a national identity of a people and drawing its political boundary accordingly, transformative democracy is based on establishing and cultivating the moral human relationships based on equity for all, solidarity, participation, human relatedness and empathy as the foundation for the various and multiple identities of a people, with the aim of arriving at a more socially and environmentally just polity. My argument for this answer has come from the findings of this dissertation. The current condition of the educational system in KR, and the existence of the issues in the foundations, administrative structure and schooling system and practices are related to the theoretical and political frameworks in policymaking. The analysis of the major educational policy documents has shown three particular frameworks: Kurdish nationalism, democratization and bureaucratization. By analyzing the documents through a critical democratic lens, I have elaborated on the ways in which Kurdish ethno-nationalism, a titular, rhetorical and institution and market-friendly notion of democracy, and an overriding, top-down bureaucratization, all within the political context of establishing a Kurdish nation-state in KR for the past 25 years, have rendered a non-democratic, socially unjust and oppressive educational system.

6.2 A summary of the thesis and its development

Since the establishment of the state of Iraq in 1920, the various Iraqi regimes failed to instill a “normative sense of Iraqiness” and form a strong Iraqi identity, particularly amongst the Kurds (Aziz, 2009, p. 354). According to Aziz (2009), the most important
change after the Kurds took over the administration of their political and cultural affairs in KR in 1991 was conducting a general election and a form of power sharing between the two main political parties, without much substantive transformation in the political and sociocultural discourses. In other words, the changes that took place after the popular uprising in 1991 in the northern Kurdish populated provinces and the formation of the Kurdistan National Assembly (the Parliament) and the KRG in 1992 did not result in changing the political culture that was dominant in modern Iraq. Political culture, according to Aziz (2009) is “the dominant pattern of beliefs and values, which are acquired and modify and change as a result of a complex process of socialization and feedback from the political system” (Aziz, 2009, p. 94). Aziz argues: “If nationalism is about identity and national identity is based on emotional bond, then national identity and political culture in Kurdistan are probably mutually complementary aspects of the same phenomenon. Since nationality is politically shaped, and reflects the national traditions of governance, political culture must be seen as an important aspect of national identity” (p. 94). Eriksen (2010) argues that societies in which their political movement is based on the preservation of their cultural identity, i.e, their processes of state building is based, first and foremost, on the preservation of their ethnic identity, the force of this identity becomes greatest particularly in societies going through modernization and “in situations of flux, change, resource competition and threats against boundaries” (p. 120). In other words, the persistence of ethnonational identities is related to the political conditions that are at work in and influence the rise and fall of those identities. While the politicization of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq has been a reaction to social injustices and political and ethnic marginalization by the successive Iraqi governments, particularly the Ba’thist regime (Bengio, 2012; Aziz, 2009; Romano, 2006; Natali, 2005; Stansfield, 2003), the Kurdish nationalist discourse has been enacted in the form of a post-colonial reaction. In the Kurdish case, the colonial forces have been the dominant nationalisms that have run the modern Middle Eastern states, since these states have worked according to a model, unprecedented in the imperial period in the Middle East, that have “imagined a nation without diversity” (Gunter, 2013, p. 35; also Natali, 2005).

The formal political agenda of the Kurdish nationalist movement in Iraq during the second half of the last century has gone though gradual development. The nationalist
agenda for an independent Kurdish state was not fully envisioned all along, but has been rather in a dialectical relationship with the political atmosphere of the Iraqi state (Aziz, 2009; Natali, 2005). A major demand of the Kurdish nationalist movement, at least since the 1960s in Iraq, has been the “administration of education, health and municipal institutions” (Carver, 2002, p. 65). For the Kurdish nationalists, establishing a modern Kurdish nation-state not only fulfills this demand but also grants the Kurds the status of a unique, legitimate nation in the face of the Iraqi nationalist agenda, which has historically undermined the Kurds as inferior to the Ba’thist pan-Arabist project (Abdullah, 2010).

The establishment of a modern state is, therefore, significant for a political nationalist project because it is the most prominent principle of nationalism. Kurdish nationalism is particularly formed around the nationalist principle of the congruence of the political boundary with the culture of the ethnonational unit (Gellner, 1983). The Kurdish nationalist sentiment has been to defy the violation of this principle: “if the rulers of the political unit belong to a nation other than that of the majority of the ruled, this, for nationalists, constitutes a quite outstandingly intolerable breech of political propriety” (Gellner, 1983, p. 1, sic). The post-colonial reaction is, therefore, manifested in the Kurdish nationalist sentiment that is aroused against the violation of the above principle. This reaction is evident in the Kurdish nationalists’ continued focus on the Ba’thist Arab rule in Iraq as the symbol of all that is evil.

However, the Kurdish reaction to the Ba’thist agenda does not mean that the nationalist elite in the KRG has depended on a state structure that is divergent from that of the Iraqi Ba’athist government. The review of literature on nationalism (chapter 3) and the analysis of Kurdish nationalism in the educational policy documents (chapter 5) undertaken from a critical theoretical framework (chapter two) have systematically led to the main argument in this dissertation, which is that the issues of education in KR need to be understood within and in relation to the contingencies of the modern nation-state. Nonetheless, this argument is missing in both the dominant Kurdish nationalist discourse and the critics’ treatment of the issues of education in KR (chapter 2), who tend to isolate the issues from the overall project of KRG state-functionality. The above point about the Iraqi Kurdish nationalist project in maintaining the Iraqi Ba’thist state structures is thus twofold, which can help elaborate on the main argument of this dissertation.
One: The critical review of literature, particularly by focusing on Gellner’s (1983) take on nationalism, indicates that the existence of a state, in the form of ‘politically centralized units,’ which “possesses the monopoly of legitimate violence” (p. 3) and is “concerned with the enforcement of order” (p. 4), is a taken-for-granted entity in, and is fundamental for nationalism. Nationalism becomes so much entrenched in the modern paradigm of the state that it sees, and thus creates and imagines, the nation in the image of the state. The nationalist elite, who incubates, consolidates and disseminates the idea of nation, tends to accept the structures of a nationalist state, as long as the nationalist sentiment (Gellner, 1983) is fulfilled. In other words, and to put it in the Iraqi Kurdish context, it is not much of a concern for the fulfillment of the nationalist principle what kind of state the Kurdish nationalist elite is running as long as the fact that the Kurdish elite is running a state. Governing KR after the uprising in 1991 was mostly derived by the need to fill in the vacuum created by the withdrawal of the Iraqi government and its administration from the area (Aziz, 2009; Ala’Aldeen, 2013; Bengio, 2012; Natali, 2005; Stansfield, 2005; Stansfield, 2003). Reflecting on the situations up until 2002, and concerning whether KRG functions as a state, Carver (2002) observes: “Executive, legislative and judicial functions are practiced within the region in principle, by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), the Kurdish National Assembly, and the court institutions. All of these are based upon the Iraqi Government model” (p. 73). In other words, the formation of the KRG in 1992 was not the result of long, premeditated planning nor was it the result of previous experiences in governance. As such, the idea of nationalism is not so much concerned with how the nation is governed as much as it is concerned with who should govern it. In this sense, as long as the Kurds run the KRG, and as long as there exists “a moral-political climate in which such centralized units are taken for granted and treated as normative,” (Gellner, 1983, p. 4), the Kurdish nationalist discourse does not seem to have fundamental issues with the structure of the nation-state.

Two: The Kurdish nationalist reaction to the Ba’thist agenda does not mean that the Kurdish nation-state will necessarily be fundamentally different from the Ba’thist Arab-state, in as much as the post-colonial state is not fundamentally different from the colonial state. Nationalism has largely been utilized in post-colonial nations as a reaction to colonization and as a fulfillment of the nationalist principle of self-rule and self-
determination (Mehrotra, 1998). As Ashcroft et al. (1998) argue, “the anti-colonial movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” used the idea of the nation as a “resistant nationalism” and its formation as a paradigm for self-determination. However, “it was that force of nationalism that had fuelled the growth of colonialism in the first place” (p. 154). Along the same lines, Ahmed (2015) argues, “Postcolonialism itself is derived from Western colonialism” (p. 15). The resistant nationalism of the post-colonial nations was, and still is based on the same paradigm of the difference and distinctiveness of the nation prior to the emergence of the colonial forces, however, not to recreate a social form that existed in the pre-colonization but rather a post-colonial state similar to that of the colonial power. Thus, the anti-colonial discourse of nationalism engages in reproducing the same colonial discourse (Ashcroft et al., 1998). In other words, post-colonialist national movements have within them the force that enables the perpetuation of colonialism. “[T]he degree to which [advocates of the post-colonial state] incorporated models and institutions based on the European concept of a nation created the continuing linkages that allowed the neo-colonialist control of these states to operate so effectively” (Ashcroft et al., 1998, p. 155). In this sense, as Ahmed (2015) contends, “‘Postcolonial’ nationalism, through its exclusions and inclusions, is colonialism’s heir” (p. 4).

Hence, even though occasionally, nationalist arguments can sound sweet and reasonable around the universal rights of nations for self-determination and the right of statehood, diversity of cultures and nations, and so forth, “nationalism has often not been so sweetly reasonable, nor so rationally symmetrical” (Gellner, 1983, p. 2). Perhaps this is because the sentiments that a nation adheres to when it comes to its own nationalism are not necessarily the same or to the same degree as when it comes to others’ nationalisms. This discrepancy between the sentiments of different nationalisms becomes especially evident when these nationalisms have conflicting political projects, as it is evident between and within the Middle Eastern nation-states (Ahmed, 2015; Vali, 2006; Natali, 2005). The inconsistency in the nationalist sentiment can create arenas for exclusion and oppression, particularly since nationalism depends so much on the force of the political power, ideology and hegemony encompassed in the institutions of the modern state. Furthermore, nationalists have a tendency to overlook the wrongs of their
own nationalisms (Gellner, 1983; also Soguk, 1993), which can lead to the reproduction and perpetuation of oppression and the same wrongs committed against one’s nation. Additionally, as much as the idea of self-determination is a unifying factor for an ethnic group to form a nation-state, it also is a force to fragment multi-ethnic nation-states (Mehrotra, 1998), resulting in identifying the right of self-determination against that of other ethnic groups. According to Mehrotra (1998), self-determination movements in the form of nationalism rarely result in establishing democratic states, or promoting democratic values in non-democratic states. In fact, the nationalist self-determination discourse may very well stand against the foundations of democracy, particularly when the nation-state of the dominant ethnic group refuses “to grant equal rights to minority ethnic groups residing in its territory” (Mehrotra, 1998, p. 834), and may result in the formation of racial, spacial and social hierarchies (Razack, 2002). As a political and ideological doctrine, nationalism, therefore, can present major issues when it comes to upholding democratic principles of equity and inclusion as foundations of social justice.

The above account concerning the discourse of nationalism leads to asking the question of how much the Kurdish self-governance in KR has been engaged in imagining a nation without diversity, particularly since the KRG has taken similar steps to the Iraqi model towards state building. In a study on education and nationalism in KR’s educational system, Abdullah23 (2010) admits that the KRG has not fully departed from the Ba’ath regime’s philosophy to undermine other religious and ethnic groups in the school curricula, a view also confirmed by Kirmanj (2014). Abdullah (2010) believes that the current educational system cannot educate a generation that is nationalistic and patriotic, a generation that loves Kurdistan and is aware of the culture of the Kurdish society. The educational system, according to Abdullah (2010), is not supportive of creating a national identity and sentiment among the Kurdish students. She eventually asks that KRG educational system pay more attention to Kurdish nationalism, language and culture particularly since there is much focus on foreign languages and cultures (p. 201). However, if we assume that KRG educational system does not promote Kurdish nationalism, and hence, according to Abdullah (2010), Kurdish students do not have a

23 Chnar Saad Abdullah is a former member of KR Parliament and KRG 5th cabinet. She is a member of the high leadership committee of the KDP.
strong nationalist sense, it follows to ask how the non-Kurdish residents in KR, who are not even included in the public educational discourse, feel about their identity in relation to KR. Aziz’s (2009) study reveals that the non-Kurdish university students in KR do not have the Kurdistani identity promoted in the formal educational discourse. Abdullah’s (2010) proposal for a new philosophy of education that fits KR, which resonates with that of many of the Kurdish educational critics and policymakers, is still based on a primordialist view of nationalism that is prevalent in the KRG educational policy documents. The primordialist nationalist thinking is not very critical of itself nor is it politically self-conscious. It simply swaps one nationalism with another without critically examining the systemic implications of nationalism, particularly one that is based on the ethnocentric elements of the nation as the legitimating factor for establishing a nation-state. Kirmanj (2014) argues: "Since its creation in 1992, and in particular after 2005, the KRG has endeavored to use school curriculum as a linguistic, ideological, political, and cultural tool in keeping with the modernist interpretation of nation-building” (p. 368). The modernist interpretation is evident in the pervasive focus on a centralized system of governance and using education as a tool to establish a particular narrative of the nation. The analysis of the major educational policy documents indicate that in KR educational policies are overwhelmingly conceptualized through the establishment of a managerial discourse and economic utilization. The discourses and concepts used in those policies are mostly derived from managerial aims at the expense of substantive moral educational aims. As the analysis of the major policy documents has shown, the discourse of school effectiveness, accountability and standardization, along with a minimalist, watered down notion of democracy has become the bedrock for the dissemination of the Kurdish nationalist agenda in education. However, the discourse of business and management, instrumentalism, utilitarianism and accountability creates serious challenges particularly to democratic education. When the discourse of effectiveness and accountability, along with “competitive individualism, the superiority of an unregulated market economy…and the necessity of consumption” become widespread, and when the belief in the neutrality of educational institutions “as an objective purveyor of truth” (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 75) is taken for granted, a critical democratic educational discourse becomes necessary and must be used as a counterargument.
The analysis of the conference proceedings, legal documents and policy statements and visions indicates that policymakers in KR have misconceptions about how the Ba’thist educational agenda has manifested itself in the KRG educational policies and system. Or perhaps the educational and political leaders have understood the power of the educational system in establishing the political agenda of the social, cultural and economic elite. This approach to governance indicates an adherence to a *de facto* vision. This is especially since the bottom-line of the Kurdish educational reform, particularly during the first phase of the KRG, has been consolidating the discourse of Kurdish ethnonationalism in conjunction with the political parties’ control over KR. It would be inaccurate to assume that educational reform processes in KR do not consider the foundational principles of education. There have been major changes in those principles in KR; however, the principles have still remained within the overarching paradigm of a nationalist education with the purpose of establishing a nation-state under a particular conception of democracy. Hence, lack of a national comprehensive vision and policy for education in KR should not mean that the educational process and system work in a theoretical and political vacuum. In the contrary, the document analysis has shown that the educational system in KR heavily depends on technical procedures that adherents of realpolitik in the Region have favored in the past 25 years, but nonetheless have provided temporary, superficial and ineffective solutions. These technical reform attempts have not substantively changed the conditions of students and teachers and their communities. The foundations for educational and cultural mobilization in KR have in fact been the theories, policies and practices that have shaped and still shape socio-political and socio-cultural identities and relationships of the society in Kurdistan. The existing educational issues are the result of larger fundamental issues, such as the educational, political, social and economic frameworks, which deem the current educational system appropriate. Therefore, the question we need to ask regarding fundamental educational issues is not whether or not the educational system in KR is based on any foundational or national visions, or whether or not human rights codes are incorporated into national educational policies. Rather what is most significant to ask is how and how deeply we need to examine these foundations, and what kind of vision and under what circumstances we have envisioned our educational foundations.
The main thesis that I have presented in this dissertation involves examining the issues of education in KR in relation to the processes of a Kurdish state-building. This thesis entails that the KRG has a clear vision, which is establishing a Kurdish nation-state. Such a nation-state indicates a particular form of modern state structures and institutions, for example, a centralized, top-down educational system. The educational system, particularly when it is based on an ethno-nationalist framework, inflicts violence and exclusion on the society. The violence and exclusion becomes especially heightened when nationalism, as a political ideology, homogenizes a particular identity and indoctrinates it through its educational and other systems on the people so that the people could fit into the pre-determined modern state structure. Hence, the fundamental issue of nationalism is that it creates and hegemonizes a particular identity, the national identity, to define the social and political boundaries of a people. The national identity eventually becomes the foundation, not only for social and political inclusion and exclusion, but also for all forms of relationships that the national group is required to establish. However, critically engaging in examining the history and the political, economic and social foundations of nationalism and the modern idea of nation provides possibilities to go beyond the political, ideological and institutional constraints of nationalism in defining a people, and beyond a nationalism-based education towards a polity and education that are based on robust values of equity, inclusion, empathy, solidarity and the acknowledgement and promotion of the human relatedness.

The critical theoretical framework espoused in this dissertation does not entail a total rejection of nationalism, however. My critique of nationalism is, therefore, not an orthodox Marxist take, for instance, because I am not completely rejecting nationalism as being a camouflage for the domination and reproduction of the capitalist class. I am critically analyzing the political reality of nationalism in general and of Kurdish ethno-nationalism in particular, and their implications in education. Espousing a critical theoretical framework entails paying attention to the oppressive features and totalitarian tendencies of modern nationalism and its educational system. Just as a critical theoretical approach to education does not reject schools as exclusively “capitalist agencies of social, economic, cultural and bureaucratic reproduction” but also as “venues of hope,” and “sites of resistance and democratic possibility” (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 71); just as a critical
understanding of democracy entails a critical consciousness about the historical connection between democracy, imperialism and colonialism, and uses this consciousness to subvert the oppressive tendencies in the thin, institutional, transnational corporate and market-friendly liberal democracy for a robust notion of democracy as a way of life, which involves the human connections within and among communities and the totality of being; a critical theoretical framework presents a radical view of nationalism and provides valuable knowledge in this regard. Critical knowledge on nationalism, particularly on Kurdish nationalism in KR, would resonate with Giroux’s (2003) elaboration of ‘a radical view of knowledge’:

it would be knowledge that would instruct the oppressed about their situation as a group situated within specific relations of domination and subordination. It would be knowledge that would illuminate how the oppressed could develop a discourse free from the distortions of their own partly mangled cultural inheritance. On the other hand, it would be a form of knowledge that instructs the oppressed in how to appropriate the most progressive dimensions of their own cultural histories, as well as how to restructure and appropriate the most radical aspects of bourgeois culture. Finally, such knowledge would have to provide a motivational connection to action itself; it would have to link a radical decoding of history to a vision of the future that not only exploded the reifications of the existing society, but also reached into those pockets of desires and needs that harbored a longing for a new society and new forms of social relations… (p. 50)

Critical theory presents a radical view of knowledge that has radical implications for the oppressed to transform themselves and their conditions. In this way, critically understanding the dialectic of nationalism empowers people to take action and transform it. It is with this objective that the concept of ‘transformative democracy’ becomes particularly significant in education. Transformative democracy focuses on establishing democratic relationships based on robust notions of equity for all, inclusion, strong participation and action in a way that all social and political relationships become opportunities for transformative education. As Dei (2013) aptly elaborates, “Critical democratic education can play a vital role in helping to create, build, and nurture the ‘social publics’ in terms of sustainable human capacities and capabilities that engage all learners in the political and social processes of schooling and education” (p. 53). Unlike
political nationalism as an ideology, transformative democracy creates democratic structures based on cultivating and promoting the democratic values and relationships rather than appropriating people’s identities to conform to predetermined social and political structures. Education according to principles of transformative democracy involves theorizing, viewing and doing education beyond the taken-for-granted institutions of formal education, which entails a radical transformation of the modern schooling structures. Hence an education that is anti-oppressive, inclusive and responsive to individual, community and environmental rights needs to be based on the principles of critical democracy. Transformative democracy aims to transform the ideological principles of national belonging and sentiments that are promoted in nationalism of identities in order to establish and promote a democratic nationalism of relationships.

6.3 The structure of the dissertation

I have taken a systematic approach in this dissertation in order to develop the argument, ask the main research question and subsidiary questions and arrive at the main thesis. In chapter one, I have introduced the general topic of this dissertation along with a presentation of the main research issue, research focus and question leading to the development of the main thesis and argument. I have also elaborated on the theoretical framework, which is within a critical theory, critical democracy, critical pedagogy and anti-oppressive framework.

In chapter two, I have presented a short socio-political and socio-historical background on the formation and development of KR and its government from 1991 to the present day. This background has included information about the demographic, social, political and economic components of KR in order to help the readers and me to better understand and connect the theoretical and political arguments with the contextual realities of KR. I have also surveyed and examined some of the major educational issues in KR as indicated by educational critics and leaders in the field. Surveying these issues not only provides information about the educational system to readers who are not closely connected with or have not experienced education in KR but also clarifies the
high stakes for conducting the present dissertation. Critically engaging with the educational issues have led me to introduce the main focus of my thesis, which has been to provide a framework in order to look at the educational issues more broadly and deeply than is currently taking place when it comes to KR. Such a framework is not only necessary to confirm the existence of the educational issues but also significant to explain how educational policies and legislations are systemic reflections of the political and social frameworks that have structured and driven educational communities in schools and society in KR for the past 25 years. In other words, through my own educational experience and work in KR as a student, university instructor, and administrator, through my critical research and reflections on and about education in KR, through the development of my theoretical and political knowledge in my doctoral studies in Social Justice Education, and after conducting a preliminary examination of major educational policies, I came to look critically at the foundational claim made by the educational leaders and critics about lack of a national educational philosophy and vision as the major source of the educational issues in KR. Therefore, to critically examining the condition of education in KR has meant to go beyond the particular visible educational issues into issues of how people in KR have come to establish their relationships, national identities, and governance within the paradigms of a modern nation-state. Hence, chapter two has also presented the main research question of what kind of education KR needs in order to establish a more equitable and socially just society. I have endeavored to answer this question and understand the relationships among the educational issues and the social and political context of KR through a critical theoretical and anti-oppressive pedagogical framework. This theoretical framework entails a self-conscious critique of established theories and practices in society and a commitment to reveal the often-concealed oppressive tendencies within social and political structures and relationships with the aim of empowering people to transform their oppressive conditions.

I have dedicated chapter three to an intensive review of literature on nationalism and democracy. I have divided the chapter into three sections. Section one has examined the meaning and scope of nationalism and the idea of nation as a modern social and political construct. It has elaborated on the principles and factors of nationalism and brought forth the modernist project of nationalism in constructing the idea of nation and
establishing a modern state through such processes as power, ideology and hegemony in homogenizing the national culture. I have then followed by examining the role and position of education in relation to nationalism within the process of establishing a modern nation-state. Section two has engaged in reviewing some of the major dialogues in conceptualizing democracy, and the significance of politically and morally contextualizing it in order to arrive at a robust concept of democracy. Hence, I have engaged in discussing democracy from a critical democratic perspective, which has brought forward a notion of democracy that is not only been justified but also dependent on its robust values, such as a robust notion of inclusion (as opposed to various forms of systemic oppression), and strong forms of engagement and participation, which might require undermining pervasive institutional structures, democratic or otherwise, so that democracy and way of social and individual life can flourish. I have then presented the implications of such a critical notion of democracy in education. These implications elaborate on the reciprocal relationship between critical democracy and education. Section three presents the conceptual framework derived from the literature review, which is transformative democracy as a fundamentally educative process. Transformative democracy presents a critical understanding of democracy that offers more for individuals and communities rather than less in order to support their endeavors for a fuller and more meaningful life. It empowers individuals and communities to transform undemocratic dispositions, attitudes, conditions and relationships into more democratic ones. At the same time, transformative democracy is fully aware that nationalism and critical democracy can be substantively different in forming people’s identities and relationships. Transformative democracy is fundamentally critical of the ideological contents and oppressive processes of national identity-formation and the nationalist political projects that reinforce colonial and oppressive attitudes and conditions.

In chapter four, I have presented the methodology adopted in examining the major educational policy documents that comprise the research data. I have also introduced the major documents and have presented short, comprehensive description of each document. Comprising over 1000 pages in total, the documents include educational laws, conference proceedings, and strategic plans and projects, all produced and sanctioned by the KRG in the past 25 years. I have also complemented the description of the documents by
providing some factors that have historically influenced educational policymaking in KR, as well as elaborations on the institutional context of educational policymaking in the KRG. I then conclude the chapter by contesting the presumptions made by educational critics and policymakers about lack of a national educational vision and comprehensive policy in KR.

I have dedicated chapter five to the analysis of the major educational policy documents, which have brought foreword three main policy frameworks in KRG educational system. These policy frameworks are: Kurdish nationalism, democratization and bureaucratization. I have argued that these policy frameworks have intersected in KR in the past 25 years within an overall social and political principle, which has been the process of establishing a Kurdish nation-state in KR. The analysis of the documents reveals two key interrelated arguments. One, educational policymaking in KR has perceived nationalism and democracy through establishing a modernist structure for, and submitting to modernist tendencies in education. Two, political and educational leaders and policymakers in KR have considered the current educational system and bureaucracy as reflective of their nationalist as well as democratic rhetoric. Together, these arguments mean that policymaking and reform initiatives in education have not taken place beyond the established policy frameworks and the current educational system in Iraq and KR. The national educational vision in KR has maintained the institutional status quo mainly because educational leaders have not seen any significant discrepancy between the current educational system and the political project of establishing a nation-state. Therefore, through the critical analysis of the documents, the relationships among the issues of nationalism, democratization and bureaucratization and the educational issues in KR become manifest. Understanding this dialectic within and in relation to the institutional and political context of KR in the past 25 years of Kurdish self-governance, an experience that has envisioned and endeavored the establishment of and running an independent Kurdish nation-state, provides not only a wider lens for exploring the current educational condition in KR but also an opportunity to present and espouse a framework that goes beyond the established frameworks in order to establish a more equitable and just society in KR.
6.4 The significance of the dissertation

The work encompassed in this dissertation presents considerable information, knowledge, and critical insights on the condition of education and the route that educational processes in KR have taken in the past 25 years and are more likely to take in the near future. The perspective from which I have presented this critical knowledge is unique considering not only the limited volume of data and information about KRG educational system both in Kurdish and in other languages but also the critical overarching quality in which I have analyzed the documents and developed the main arguments. As such, critical, qualitative works concerning the type of education and its theoretical and political frameworks in KR have not been done prior to the present study. The thesis and argument that I have presented in this dissertation concern not only the educational system but also the political and social systems in KR. Regional and international interest in the Iraqi KR has recently witnessed an unprecedented increase, and the literature on Kurdish nationalism, Kurdish self-governance and the prospects of an independent Kurdish state has grown in volume. However, many studies on Kurdish nationalism and state building processes in KR seem to have underestimated, neglected, or overlooked the role of education in shaping these processes. Such studies have usually considered the history of Kurdish nationalism, the political and economic conditions that have helped in shaping and directing it. Concerning perspective and scope, these studies have taken pervasive political and economic frameworks in order to understand Kurdish politics. They have made suggestions that are mostly directed to the political elite concerning top-level policy adjustments, technical efficiency in governance and economic utilization. However, by critically examining macro-level educational policies in relation to their social and political implications in schools and society, I am not only showing and critiquing the dominant frameworks of policymaking and governance but also suggesting that pervasive technical-rationalist approaches to educational, social and political reform and restructuring can only have limited, rhetorical implications rather than substantive ones. Even though my position as a researcher, located outside or at most at the margins of the educational bureaucracy in KR, has empowered me with the opportunity to present a more critical analysis, it will be less likely that what I offer in this dissertation will impact
immediate policy processes in KR (Taylor et al., 1997). Nevertheless, this dissertation has substantive, particularly long-term implications for educational, social and political theory, policy and practices in KR and beyond.

6.5 Implications of the research thesis and argument

The main argument and findings of this research can become the grounding to rethink education not only in KR but also in the Middle East and beyond. Given my thesis and argument, and based on the concluding remarks, which stress the significance of democratic relationships as the main educational framework that could lead to a more equitable and just society in KR, this research presents major implications for educational practices, administration and policymaking.

6.5.1 Implication for teachers

- The main implication for teachers is to reconsider their position as developers and sustainers of the democratic spirit both in schools and society. Teachers need to consider themselves as democratic agents who are engaged in democratic practices. Democratic practices in education are based on, develop and promote core democratic values and conditions. The promotion of justice, moral seriousness, social commitment, critical, coherent and moral reasoning and capacities, choice, fairness, inclusion, transformation and so forth are all values and necessary conditions for a democratic educational process.

While the knowledge and skills in any school course is important, it is significant that the teachers’ overall goals are based on cultivating the democratic moral values in themselves, their students and their social and institutional environments. For instance, teachers not only need to consider the promotion of justice and moral seriousness as standard values and bases in their teaching but also standards for other purposes of schooling, such as training, economic preparation and acquisition of skills, as long as they are achieved within the moral purpose of education.
Democratic teachers understand that even though knowledge and skills are basic requirements of democratic processes, knowledge and skills alone cannot uphold the critical democratic spirit without integrating critical thinking as a central feature. By critical thinking I mean a social, political and cultural disposition, rather than simply a set of technical skills. Critical thinking as such entails not only answering questions from different points of view but also asking critical questions about the systemic implications of knowledge in relation to power, authority and domination. Democratic teachers educate their students based on the conviction that critical thinking turns the knowledge and skills into dynamic processes so that they resist rigidity and stagnation. In an ideal of democratic classroom, students’ and teachers’ critical interaction with knowledge leads to a substantive expansion and transformation of knowledge. It becomes “a kind of knowledge that is not just propositional but is empathic and based in experience” (Bai, 2001, p. 318). Through a critical transformation, instead of simply reducing it to empirical input for established theories, knowledge also becomes “a standpoint from which to question the validity of the theories themselves” (Graham, 2001, p. 161). As such, a democratic teacher stands opposite to and prevents indoctrination. Instead, the teacher encourages open and public deliberation, and engages in conscious action in cooperation with the students towards subverting systemic oppressive environments.

Glickman (1998) refers to a number of studies conducted on the impact of democratic pedagogies on students’ learning and achievement, which show that democratic pedagogies positively impact student engagement. According to Glickman (1998), “those teachers and schools that define democracy as participatory and community-oriented appear to have much greater success with all their students” (p. 52). Democratic educators encourage participatory learning, which not only engages students in understanding critical knowledge as relational but also leads to knowledge growth by providing a diversity of stimulations. “Diversity of stimulation means novelty, and novelty means challenge to thought,” Dewey (1915) argues. “The more activity is restricted to a few definite lines—as it is when there are rigid class lines preventing adequate interplay of experiences—the more action tends to become routine…” (p. 91).

Democratic teachers understand that democratic education is not only concerned with
teaching democratic values but also teaching them democratically. That is why
democratic education depends on democratic pedagogies, which aim for and depend on
such values as active, participatory and mutual learning, choice, responsibility, sharing,
contribution, associative learning, application, public participation in deliberation and
action, and so forth, all on both individual and group levels. The transformation of
knowledge into critical consciousness is also at the core of critical pedagogy, which
involves a freeing process of self-reflection and empowerment. Critical consciousness as
a moral political objective eventually means teachers aim to educate themselves, their
students and the society to critically resist and prevent knowledge from becoming a tool
for oppression (Kincheloe, 1999).

6.5.2 Implication for teacher education programs

- By upholding the principles of transformative democracy and its implications in teaching,
teacher education programs can become a key element for initiating a transformative
educational process in KR and beyond. Preparing democratic teachers requires a program
that can become the arena where strong democracy takes place. Educating and preparing
teachers in the manner of strong democracy mean focusing on student-teachers’ creativity
and consensus through “common talk, common decision, and common work”
(Cunningham, p. 2002, p.131). In a democratic teacher education program, student-
teacher-citizens become active participants in transforming their practice through their
critical political consciousness of what it means to be a teacher. Such programs are
fundamentally opposite to prescribed technique-based teacher education curricula that are
imposed from above and take teachers out of the equation (Thomas, 2005).

- Teachers should be directly involved in designing the teacher education programs.
Dewey (1946) considers the act of teaching as more intellectually demanding than
participating in administrative decision-making. Nondemocratic processes of designing
teacher education programs fall into a contradiction when they assume that teachers who
are seen unfit to participate in decision-making could be fit to carry out the result of those
decisions.

- Educational policies for teacher education in KR do not go beyond the idea of teachers as
conveyers of the curriculum content. That is why teacher education programs in KR have focused on knowledge of course content and methods of transferring textbook information to the students. Teacher education programs should not simply focus on producing skilled teachers. Rather, they should focus on preparing and supporting professional democratic educators. A teacher education program that aims to prepare such teachers needs to be based on the significance of those democratic powers, dispositions and skills that support transformative social and political action. In other words, the most significant purpose a democratic teacher education program is to empower teachers in their endeavors to promote social justice, which cannot be fully achieved without holding a robust notion of critical, reflective thinking and action. It is significant for a transformative democratic teacher education program not to confuse critical thinking with a set of technical-rationalist thinking and teaching skills and methods, which take place within and maintain a positivist, apolitical knowledge paradigm. Rather, critical thinking in a teacher education program aims at nurturing the relationships among teachers and their communities in a subject-to-subject manner so that they transform their and their students’ conditions in the schools and communities.

6.5.3 Implications for educational leadership and administration

The promotion of justice is one of the core moral values and aims of transformative democracy as education. Promoting justice involves various formal and informal educational processes not only in schools and classrooms but also in the larger social and political associations. Hence, engaging in democratic education requires engaging in democratic societies, since the type of society in which education takes place indicates the values and dispositions that determine educational theories and practices. Therefore, in democratic education, justice not only concerns the interactions within the classrooms but also the whole system of educational administration. It follows to stress that we cannot separate “the teaching of values from the context in which those values are taught” (Pring, 1999, p. 157). This is mainly because democratic processes and values cannot be separable. In other words, democratic administration should not allow pre-established bureaucratic hierarchies to stand against the transformative nature of democracy and prevent education from taking place at any level and circle of the
- Since democratic education is essentially based on, develops and promotes fundamental democratic values and conditions, it follows to argue that educational decision-making and administration need to be based on open, free, inclusive and transformative deliberation and active participation. However, educational leaders and decision-makers need to understand that while participation depends on people’s eagerness to participate, institutional realities often construe various forms of obstacles in front of active participation. For instance, reluctance and apathy are not inevitable social realities but are rather the result of a history of antidemocratic cultures and practices. Educational leadership in the manner of transformative democracy, hence, needs to focus on reducing apathy through creating opportunities for active engagement. Democratic leadership nurtures values such as solidarity, empathy, self and group confidence, and empowerment, which are necessary for self and community development.

- Democratic educational administration needs to not only adhere to democratic principles but also allow democracy to flourish. Educational leadership and administration in this sense become the endeavor to remove the hurdles in front of reaching the democratic aims of schooling. Dewey (1946) argues that democratic governmental and political arrangements are means to realize an end, which is democracy as a way of social and individual living. Democratic arrangements are not to be made into ends but “to be judged on the basis of their contribution to end” (p. 58). Opposite to dogmatic thinking, indoctrination and subjugation, equal and inclusive participation in deliberation and reasoned thinking and action legitimizes educational processes and outcomes of leadership. Just like when the learning that happens in a democratic classroom is legitimate because it has been the result of open and equal deliberation and critical, morally conscious thinking and action, the same holds true of leadership and decision-making processes.

- A democratic administration of education cannot be mere technical, rational, objective and disengaged calculations of how to manage a group’s affairs and enforce change in a social institution. Rather, administration should be an engaged and engaging relationship
of those who are involved in the institution with all its aspects and details. Democratic educational leaders understand that participation in educational processes in and of itself does not mean that all who participate are substantively included. Rather, the forms and procedures of participation and the discourses that are at play within participatory environments need to be inclusive and respective of all communities, particularly those who are historically marginalized and socially and politically disempowered. In the case of KR, teachers and students need to be directly involved in leadership and decision-making.

- Democratic administration and leadership are not only morally praiseworthy but also pragmatically sound and effective. Dewey (1946) believes that “the absence of democratic methods is the greatest single cause of educational waste” (p. 65). While leaders and administrators face challenges from three interrelated dimensions: the intellectual-managerial, the personal-professional, and the bureaucratic-hierarchical, an effective way to deal with these challenges is for the leaders and administrators to see these challenges through a comprehensive idea or plan in order to integrated them together. At the center of this comprehensive idea is the central function of the school, which, based on the democratic method, is to take part in the transformation of existing social conditions rather than to perpetuate them (Dewey, 1946).

6.5.4 Implications for policymaking

- Democratic policymaking celebrates and encourages diversity of interests. It focuses on open and inclusive deliberation as a way to settle on educational aims. It entails the necessity of having a multiplicity of educational aims and standards, since critical deliberation brings about provincial, context-sensitive aims and values. Democratic policymaking is based on the belief that social, political and cultural capacities are widespread among peoples and are not the property of a few elites. Democratic policymaking is a participatory process, the pedagogic implication of which supports the importance of having multiple standards, values and interests. Having various standards and principles for education implies that participatory democratic policymaking focuses on cooperation rather than competition or the survival of the fittest. This is because
cooperation happens when there is difference, and celebrating and encouraging cooperation implies celebrating and encouraging difference. This attitude towards difference is opposite to the competitive attitude towards difference in nondemocratic policymaking procedures in which competition is mainly to bring forth a type in order to undermine and dominate the rest. Therefore, cooperation in policymaking means believing in multiplicity of standards, while competition means standardization as a belief in one-size-fits-all.

- The power of traditional, top-down policymaking is based on the bureaucracies and hierarchies that define an institution rather than the force that the institution has in cultivating democratic dispositions. Relying on mandates, strict accountability measures and standardization in policymaking is intricately related to the prevalence of nondemocratic institutions and administration. Nondemocratic policymaking can lead to the perpetuation of disorder, confusion and nondemocratic dispositions and practices, which can eventually lead to undesired or at best inconsequential outcomes of policy implementation. Nondemocratic educational policymaking that limits or denies participation of those who are directly involved in the educational process, such as teachers, students and their communities, tends to produce apathy, disengagement, lack of responsibility and disempowerment. By disempowering, disengaging and miseducating those who are involved in educational institutions, the pervasive notion of power that is derived from political and institutional hierarchy eventually leads to “the greatest single cause of educational waste” (p. 65). An alternative to top-down, externally imposed policymaking procedures is backward mapping (Elmore, 1979), which is not only more inline with the democratic spirit and aim of policymaking but also particularly effective in targeting the needs of implementation contexts such as schools and communities. Policymaking in a backward mapping manner “begins not with a statement of intent but with a statement of a specific behavior at the lowest level of the implementation process that generates the need for policy” (p. 604). By becoming a needs-based rather than politics-based process, policymaking is more likely to effectively and efficiently target the educational objectives of schools and communities and provide the due political, economic and institutional support in an equitable manner.
The above implications, which have emerged from the critical theoretical take on issues of educational philosophy and vision, policymaking processes, aims and practices of schooling, entail a transformation in the educational frameworks that are traditionally undertaken in Kurdistan Region. As a collective, the people of KR need to transform the principles that bind them together so that instead of establishing an educational system based on their nationalistic and ethnocentric identities, they base their education on the democratic relationships that can lead to a more equitable and just society.

6.6 Suggestions for further research

This study of major educational policy documents engages in understanding the overall theoretical and political frameworks in macro-policymaking and the relationships that these frameworks have with the current approach to schooling in KR. However, the current study is not without limitations in scope and focus. As such, further qualitative studies are needed in the implications of such frameworks in micro-policy and decision-making at different levels in the educational system in KR and beyond. It would be significant to further widen the scope of this study to closely look at micro-policy mandates and administrative decisions, analyze and evaluate the processes of their making in order to understand how administrators attempt to interpret and implement policy suggestions. Such studies would engage in finding the social, political and institutional relationships that emerge in and shape the micro-level policy and decision-making as a reflection and interpretation of the macro-policy and decision-making processes.

Critical ethnographic and case studies at the school and classroom level at both K-12 and university education would also be invaluable in understanding how the findings and main argument of the study at hand manifest themselves in shaping the social and political relationships between and among students, teachers and administrators. To expand the scope of such critical studies means to engage teachers, students and school administration in dialogues amongst themselves and with their communities in order to bring to light the intricacies of their relationships in understanding and implementing
macro and micro-level reform and restructuring policies. Understanding the social, cultural, political, economic and institutional conditions of schools and universities in KR and how these conditions might shape the educational discourse presents significant insight into the reasons why educational critics, administrators as well as policymakers believe that the educational system in KR does not have a clear, comprehensive vision for education, even though the current study has shown otherwise.

Studies on the relationship between Kurdish nationalism and its endeavor of state building in the past 25 years and other ethnic nationalisms can further explain the nature of the official discourse of social, cultural and political diversity in KR in school and society. Even though the study at hand takes a critical stance towards Kurdish nationalism and its reflections in major policymaking processes and the structure of the educational system in KR, similar studies in relation to the other nationalisms in KR would become complementary to the major argument concerning the dialectical relationship between nationalism and democracy. In-depth studies concerning other nationalisms can elaborate on the possible congruencies or tensions that other ethnic groups in KR might experience in the educational system and processes.

Furthermore, while much of the critical democratic theory is based on critical questioning of existing institutions, field studies are needed in KR to examine how we can reconcile critical democratic attitudes and practices in schooling when such attempts are done within the existing institutions of formal education. Studies in democratic theorizing and practices are needed in KR to show how the existence of such conditions as equality, individual and group participation and responsibility as well as values, such as solidarity, empathy, and moral political consciousness could temper the dilemma of institutional authorities. For instance, the existence of a teacher who traditionally represents a higher authority in a rigid institutional hierarchy in KR can create a dilemma for democratic education, particularly when teachers are also deprofessionalized through insufficient teacher education programs, prescription of teaching methods and the imposition of standardized curricula.
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