

Comparing Separatism Across Regions:
Rebellious Legacies in Africa, Asia and the Middle East

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In January of 1946 ethnic Kurds in Iran declared the independent republic of Mahabad, capping a three-decade long period of intermittent rebellion by Kurdish minorities in Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. Within a year this ambitious declaration in Iran's Kurdish region had been crushed and has since been overshadowed by much greater material successes for Kurds in Iraq and Turkey. Do the divergent pathways of Kurdish nationalism in these three states and Syria hold broader insights for scholars studying separatist conflicts? To take one example, could the experiences of Kurdish nationalist movements in Iraq and Turkey help to explain how the Free Aceh Movement in Indonesia survived heavy state repression to win substantial concessions from the central government in 2005? If so, how might we go about exploring comparative dynamics over time?

This chapter outlines the methodological rationales for comparing separatist conflicts across multiple regions, addressing this volume's methodological goals and elaborating them in the case of studying violent ethnic conflicts through comparative area studies (CAS). It does so in a research design aimed at elucidating why it is that ethnic minorities in some setting are able to sustain broad challenges to their governments while other seemingly similar ones fail to. First, the centrality of post-imperial ethnic region partitions to the broader project's theoretical and methodological framework require cross-regional inquiry. The partitions that divide ethnic regions into multiple states are relatively rare, all but demanding a cross-regional scope of possible case selection consideration.

Drawing first on the division of interwar greater Kurdistan into parts of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, I employ the central factors in the theoretical framework in analyzing two other such border creation episodes in the Baloch region of Southwest Asia and the Tuareg region of North Africa. This cross-region, cross-temporal framework makes possible a structured comparison across three coherent ethnic groups/regions that were divided into several states and subjected varying nation-state building projects. The new ethnic minorities in each state develop systematic historical trajectories that can be compared not just to other Kurdish, Baloch or Tuareg minorities in other states but to other groups' new minority regions as well.

Second, incorporating a case from an additional region, in this case Aceh, for analysis at a more micro-level facilitates the exploration of trajectory effects as they influence individuals' decisions about participating in rebellions. After process-tracing the macro-dynamics in Aceh to assess the argument's purchase on broad trends (an out-of-sample and out-of-region macro-level theory test), I conducted approximately 50 semi-structured interviews with former Free Aceh Movement fighters and leaders, nested in a survey of 1,200 former members. This interview and survey research allowed me to understand how broad historical patterns of resistance helped to shape the choices ordinary Acehnese made to join the movement at great potential cost to themselves. Then, I used the micro-level insights from Aceh to revisit available individual-level data from the Kurdish regions of Turkey and Iraq, again leveraging cross-regional inference but at a second level of analysis.

The comparisons of four Kurdish minorities, comparison of that group to three similar ones in Balochistan and five Tuareg regions, and then of Kurdish nationalism with Aceh's, provides some methodological strengths reflective of those in comparative area studies. First, it allows for contextually rich analysis across world "areas," or regions:

Ahram's (2011) conceptualization of regions as analytic categories is at the root of how I discuss them here. Second, these comparisons also highlight a strength of CAS not as yet developed—the ability to take in-depth analysis of multiple regions to explore theories at different initial levels of analysis before then cross-testing at one level at a time. This is perhaps the greatest strength of CAS in that it allows a multi-level comparative approach that would be impossible with cross-country or cross-region regression analysis. Finally, to the extent one is willing to be convinced that important phenomena like center-periphery conflicts might have long-range historical dimensions—so that “secessionist ethnic onsets” in 1926 and 1958 might be closely related rather than isolated—a turn to in-depth comparative analysis of regions both a part of a scholar's repertoire of expertise can yield important insights not uncoverable any other way.¹ The cross-temporal depth and attention that characterizes much work by historically attuned area specialists is yet another strength of the approach.

A final contribution that CAS has to offer here is in using comparative analysis of multiple ethnic groups within regions to address the often puzzling absence of mobilization in some major world regions otherwise noteworthy for high frequency civil conflict. Where Ross (2015) has asked how we can explain “Latin Americas' Missing Separatist Wars,” and Englebert and Hummel (2005) have attempted to explain “Africa's Secessionist Deficit,” the historically deep and spatially broad explanation made possible through CAS sheds light on why some entire regions of the world are so much different when it comes to such major events.

¹ The term “secessionist ethnic onsets” comes from an indicator, *secethonset*, that is part of the Ethnic Power Relations data project (<http://growup.ethz.ch/>). My use of it here is not intended as a criticism of the project—in fact it has long relied on experts on individual countries to collaborate in coding decisions—but simply to say that conflicts even decades apart can be closely linked historically and politically.

In the next section I discuss the empirical foundations for and central theoretical framework in an ongoing research project, which focuses on the durability of some ethnic minority challenges to central states and the fragility of others. Substantively it analyzes post-imperial ethnic region partition as well as singular regions, and in particular minority responses to post-independence state builders. The third section addresses the specific benefits of using cross-regional comparisons to address implications of a single theoretical framework at multiple levels. It also outlines strategies for second-stage recursive comparison back and forth across regions, checking conclusions from one level (and one region) against others. The fourth section explores the value of CAS approaches for testing theories that are deeply historical. As even econometrically driven scholarship begins to shed light on the long historical determinants of such outcomes as development and conflict, comparative area studies promises to help elucidate not just the presence of long-range relationships but the mechanisms and reproducing processes that sustain them over decades or longer.

**Comparative Separatism and Comparative Area Studies:
Self-Determination Conflicts in Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Africa**

In the course of conducting research for a previous project on the politics of oil wealth—also employing a CAS approach (Smith 2007)—I was reminded of the short-lived, but politically ambitious declaration of independence by Kurds in Iran. The Mahabad Republic of 1946, encouraged and supported by the Soviet Union, remains to date the most expansive demand for statehood of any of the Kurdish minorities. In fact, Mulla Mustafa Barzani, leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) of Iraq, took his militia to Mahabad to stand in arms with the KDP-Iran. Less than a year later, however, the Mahabad

movement had been crushed and Barzani and his followers were forced to flee to the Soviet Union.

Today Barzani's descendants lead the Kurdish Regional Government and the KDP-Iraq, one of the two main political parties for Iraq's Kurds. Iran's Kurdish movement has failed to mobilize any subsequent mass movement and has in fact often taken refuge in Kurdish Iraq. Why such dramatic reversals of fortune? Why have Kurdish movements in Iraq and Turkey become the central players in Kurdish nationalism, eclipsing their counterparts in Iran and Syria?² More broadly, why do some ethnic minorities succeed in sustaining long-term challenges in the face of heavy state repression while others fail? This set of questions is at the core of a book project entitled *History and Rebellion*. In it, I suggest that the persistence of some ethnic nationalist movements into the present is directly related to early post-independence rebellions. One of the book's central methodological approaches is comparative area studies, and it takes two forms: one intra-regional comparative and one cross-regional. It is worth noting that, like my first major research project, this took advantage of the leverage afforded by having extensive academic training, language proficiency and past fieldwork experience in two regions, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

The first several substantive chapters focus on Kurdistan, from the early 20th century through post-World War I partition and forward to the present. The creation of four new states—self-made in the cases of Iran and Turkey, foreign-made in those of Iraq and Syria—presents a unique opportunity to explore the historical determinants of long-range mass nationalism within a single ethnic community, holding ethnic identity and history

² One might note usefully here that, even with the support of hundreds of U.S. air strikes in late 2014, Syrian Kurds in Kobane could retake the city only once hundreds, perhaps thousands, of *pesh merga* fighters from Kurdish Iraq, and hundreds more fighters from the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey crossed borders to fight on their behalf.

loosely constant. Divided into four minority communities, Kurds in each founded Kurdish Democratic Party organizations to represent their interests. In three of these countries—Iraq, Iran and Turkey—Kurdish leaders mobilized armed groups to challenge new state leaders. However, in only two of them have Kurdish aspirations continued to persist at a mass level. In short, this within-region set of four cases provides a strong setting in which to explore answers to the above questions.

At first blush the divergence across these Kurdish minorities fits poorly with extant theories: many of the key cross-national predictors of civil conflict have no real purchase when it comes to explain why some Kurdish minorities have fared so much worse than others. Mountainous terrain, resource wealth in minority region, state exclusion all fail to co-vary with the outcomes across these cases. And, analyzing the cases with close attention to Middle East-specific contextual factors—in these cases either Ba’ath Arab socialist homogenizing nation-state projects in Iraq and Syria or center-right homogenizing ones in Iran and Turkey—still fails to provide us with a causal starting point. What does offer a promising starting point is insights from two bodies of theory: resource mobilization and agrarian political economy. As I detail below, these theoretical foundations also square well with Middle East studies as a substantive field.

The late 19th and early 20th century Kurdish rebellions were often led not by radical urban nationalists, but instead by rural elites. These figures—Mustafa Barzani, Ismail Simqu in Iran, etc.—were rebelling as much to defend their places atop the hierarchy of social power in the Kurdish countryside as much as anything else. Beginning with that insight, I theorized that quasi-feudal social life might be a key explanatory factor. Indeed, the one Kurdish region not to have given rise to a serious post-independence challenge to central authorities—in Syria—was populated largely by displaced Kurds from what became Turkey, meaning that no established rural hierarchy was in place. I mention this not only

because it exemplifies specific cases that run afoul of prominent explanatory theory, but also because it draws heavily on the historiography of Kurdistan, pinpointing here a factor that has been central to many of the canonical works of Kurdish and Middle East history and sociology (Batatu, Van Bruinessen, White 2000, 96-100, McDowall etc. to cite here).

The highly hierarchical and often near-feudal nature of Kurdish social life meant that those at the top with an inclination to rebel could make use of existing social structures to mobilize peasants for fighting as well as for agriculture, a dynamic often pointed to in the peasant studies research of the 1960s to 1980s but less often in the study of ethnic conflict (Hobsbawm 1959; White 2000). In response to these rebellions, state leaders used heavy force and often subsequently tried forcibly to crush the social power of these lords and other elites. That in turn, along with efforts to commercialize agriculture, led to urban migration in large numbers. It was during this historical period—the 1950s and 1960s in particular—that paths diverged again.

In the Kurdish regions of Iraq and Turkey were multiple sizable urban centers—Diyarbakir, Van, Bitlis, Erbil, and Sulaymaniya among them—whereas Kurds in Iran and Syria largely had to migrate to ethnic Persian or Arab cities. Noting this—and the new, more politically radical organizations that emerged in Kurdish regions in Iraq and Turkey (foremost among them the PKK and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan in Iraq)—a set of systematic trajectories of ethnic mobilization or demobilization began to take clear shape. Drawing on comparative historical analysis of these four Kurdish trajectories, derived in part from literatures across multiple disciplines and in larger part from Kurdish histories themselves, I constructed a long-range historical framework to explain the pathways along which contentious ethnic politics can travel. Figure 1 illustrates it. The essentials of the argument are that ethnic minorities with both historically established social hierarchies (with elites at the top) and whose region has major urban centers tend to generate both

early rebellions *and* a geographic capacity to sustain rebellions across generations once urbanization takes place. Those groups lacking the strong and historically grounded social structure are unlikely to stage any early rebellions, and those that lack major urban centers tend not to sustain challenges beyond the first stage.

Figure 1 about here

At this point it is worth making some observations about the comparative areas studies framework. First, this comparison of four Kurdish regions is both empirically and theoretically embedded in the field of Middle East studies, perhaps the most tumult-characterized area of study in the post-colonial world. In part this is a function of the early centrality of colonial-era philology or “Oriental studies” in defining the region for Western publics and officials. It is also a function of the fact that Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) caused arguably more uproar in this field than in any other regional studies community. Following that, the emergence of Islam as a global political force in the American public eye has continued to define the region publicly. More importantly, and drawing on Ahram’s (2011) conceptualization of regions as analytic categories, Kurdish mobilization via social structures is theoretically embedded in the area’s long focus on the political import of tribes and rural notables well into the modern era (see for example Khoury and Kostiner 1991). Building a theory of persistent separatist rebellion from these cases drew directly on a set of analytic building blocks that have been part of the field of Middle East studies throughout its contemporary history.

Another important component of the explanation is that it is both historically lengthy and historically rich. Lengthy in the sense that important causes unfolded over decades rather than years, stretching from the 1920s to the present. From the founding rebellions that set some minority groups on contentious trajectories vis-à-vis their respective central governments, state responses helped to generate the kinds of macro-

social changes (especially weakening vertical ties and encouraging urban migration) that then helped in turn to provide a second generation of more politically radical leaders. Close attention to the individual details of each case (ethnic minorities in different states), even as the central analytic framework remains the guiding lens of inquiry across many periods and spaces. And historically rich in the sense that deep historical-causal forces appear to be driving long-range contentious trajectories for some ethnic minorities and preventing others from ever making significant progress toward greater minority rights. As a result, careful comparative historical analysis of multiple regions—as well as in-depth ethnographic and interview research in still another—require the kind of attention to both geographic breadth and to historical depth for which CAS is arguably a uniquely suited meta-methodological choice.

Both because the initial focus on Kurdistan is inherently delimited and because it is a single region, one could (and I did) raise questions about the extent to which we could be confident of the broader reach of a theoretical hunch derived in part from just one ethnic group. Moreover, the initial argument was pitched at a macro-level, developing testable implications for group changes and contentious politics within states. As a result, the uncertainties about portability involved dynamics a) at the unit of analysis (whether other *ethnic minorities* would evince similar dynamics), b) at the regional level (whether groups in *world regions* lacking a strong tribal role would also produce similar trajectories, and finally c) at the level of analysis (whether the import of early rebellions would manifest in *individuals' decisions* about participating in later ones).

The unit of analysis question could be answered in a number of ways—maximally broad but less causally deep (cross-group or cross-country regression) or less broad but more causally deep (i.e. cross-regional structure comparison). The regional question essentially demands that, given the relatively lesser role played by tribal structures in

other regions, we consider a step up Sartori's (1974) ladder of abstraction and ask if other social hierarchies might perform the same mobilizing roles. Finally, the level of analysis question asks whether there are micro-foundations to the macro-argument. If, after all, these early rebellions facilitate later recruitment and mobilization, it would seem to have to do so at least in part at the individual level. The latter two strategies for elaborating the reach of the argument both fall solidly into a comparative area studies approach, and in the next sections I outline the ways in which such an approach helped to navigate these methodological challenges.

Cross-Regional Comparison of Divided Groups: Kurdistan in Baloch and Tuareg Perspective

Seeking first to test the core parts of the argument—with an explicit focus on hierarchical group social structures, early rebellions and subsequent trajectories—my first step was to look for cases similar to Kurdistan. These are, analytically speaking, ethnic communities with coherent and politically salient identities that during the first half of the 20th century were divided into multiple states following imperial collapse and/or during decolonization. Two in particular—the Tuareg (divided between Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali and Niger) and Baloch (divided between Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan)—stood out as potentially promising comparisons.

Although Balochistan is fairly close to Kurdistan (comprising southeast Iran where Kurdistan occupies part of western Iran), the additional variation posed by lengthy British colonial experience provides another set of political priors, and *ceteris paribus* would increase confidence in the theory's purchase should its main implications find support here too. While by necessity the comparative exploration of three Baloch regions and five Tuareg ones is much briefer than the Kurdistan study, it provides in the book two additional sets of new ethnic minority regions against which to compare. And, it provides supportive evidence

for the link between social hierarchy and mobilization: only in Pakistan, where the Sultanate of Khanate was based, were Baloch able to mount initial, effective challenges to the central government there. Unlike the much weaker movements in the Baloch regions of Iran and Afghanistan, in Pakistan Baloch nationalism has been a present force since independence. However, it has been limited in scope. Demography suggests an important part of the answer. Pakistan's Baloch population, occupying the largest region in the country but making up less than 5% of the total, have been hampered in the effort to build a mass-based opposition movement by the increasing trans-migration of ethnic majority Punjabis into Balochistan's few urban centers. Like the city of Urumqi in the ethnic Uighur region of Xinjiang in Western China, government policies aimed at diluting minority predominance by importing ethnic majority Pakistanis have dampened second-generation nationalist mobilization.

Among the Tuareg, there is more uniformly hierarchical clan-based social structure across the now five regions, so much so that early European ethnologists classified its divisions as feudal in the early modern European sense (Lecocq 2010). The Tuareg region was divided among five independent states in the early 1960s: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali and Niger. Following independence, Tuareg minorities rebelled in Mali and Niger, but only in Mali has Tuareg nationalism persisted as a mass phenomenon. It has done so in part as a function of cross-generation mobilization, which as in Kurdistan and Balochistan was first largely rural and in the 1990s and beyond mostly urban.

Sil (2013) has argued for a mode of comparative analysis termed cross-regional contextualized comparison (CRCC), noting that regional specialty can often be built into a more broadly comparative set of cases in which subsequent cases are explored in less depth. While Sil focuses on this sequence in the context of a single research project, looking back at some central figures in the field of comparative politics it is possible to see this as a

research agenda-level sequence as well. We have in fact several decades of noteworthy scholars as exemplars of this intellectual dynamic. Robert Bates' landmark *Markets and States in Tropical Africa* (1981) has its analytic origins in an ethnographic study of industrial workers in rural Zambia. David Laitin's early research on language policy and ethnic politics in Somalia shaped his subsequent work on states' roles in ethnic politics around the continent. What this iterated mode of "branching out" comparison offers is an initially very deep, very contextual exploration of causal hunches (more formally, hypotheses), first-stage confirmation (internal validity tests) followed by less in-depth assessment in a broader but still causally deep set of case studies. On the one hand Sil argues:

While Millean conceptions of small-n comparative analysis generally stay close to the nomothetic end of the nomothetic-idiographic continuum, area-bound comparative studies can be found at many more different points of the continuum, depending on the representativeness of cases and the generalizability of mechanisms and causal relationships. (2013, 5)

On the other, comparative studies are only "area-bound" until we engage a case or cases outside that area. The first-stage analysis—which may be area-bound for reasons pertaining to hypothesis generation and/or establishing internal validity of a theory—allows for as much contextually inductive rival hypothesis testing as the scholar finds appropriate. Given a commitment to more, rather than less, extensive theoretical reach, not all of these contextual factors turn out to be causally crucial.

Comparing Regions I: Africa and Southeast Asia in Middle East Perspective

Because these ethnic region partitions are relatively rare phenomena, studying them comparatively is by definition a cross-regional endeavor. And, to reiterate, studying different ethnic groups across those regions is in part an analysis of the regions themselves.

The often-shared imperial, colonial, religious and linguistic legacies within regions just as often mean that one of them—a strong role for feudal social structures, or for a particular kind of religious organization to take two examples—may play an important role in shaping post-independence politics in a number of states.

It also means, however, that we must be careful about over-stretching concepts originally derived and initially tested in a single setting or sample (Sartori 1974; Collier and Gerring 2009). Just as Sartori originally warned about the analytic problems in taking hasty steps up the ladder of abstraction, crossing regional boundaries means not just that we face increasing numbers of complex causal factors but also that we must think seriously about the portability of the original concepts. In this case my original focus was on Kurdish rural social structures—a rough combination of tribalism and feudalism that produced a strong set of mobilizing resources that could be put as readily to armed struggle as to agricultural production. As the persistent political importance of tribes in the Middle East has few parallels in other regions (but see Collins 2006 on Central Asia), it is necessary to think about different kinds of social forms that could facilitate the same level of mobilization.

Brustein and Levi (1987) point to feudalism as key to explaining why some peripheral regions in early modern Europe rebelled against nascent nation-state leaders, and in fact the key characteristics of it are close to those in Kurdish tribal structures. Co-ethnic vertical bonds, strong notions of hierarchical status, and expectations of loyalty enable the recruitment of potential fighters from lower strata. Tuareg social structure, as mentioned briefly above, is so typified by these traits that European ethnologists scarcely bothered to explore how it might differ from their own continent's feudal structures (Lecocq 2010). Alone among the three Baloch regions of Southwest Asia, the Princely State of Khalat in what is now Pakistan was characterized by an historically established and clear

hierarchy with the royal family and nobility at the top, in contrast to much more fluid and mobile social organization in the now Iranian and Afghani regions of greater Balochistan.

Comparing Regions II: Explaining Latin America's 'Missing' Separatist Wars and Africa's Secessionist Deficit

Turning to the question of why some post-colonial regions have many separatist conflicts while others—Latin America—have none, we find an opportunity to use the insights generated at the level of ethnic groups recursively to analyze regions. Early in the process of collecting aggregate data for this project, I sought to limit the sample to groups that could plausibly be expected to rebel. I found that no dominant groups, unsurprisingly, had ever rebelled in the 20th century. But another large set was entirely missing: Latin America, everything south of the United States-Mexico border. As mentioned above, this has not gone unnoticed: Michael Ross (2015) has asked where the region's "missing" separatist wars are, given that center-seeking civil wars have been common in the last 100 years. One could ask just as reasonably why sub-Saharan Africa, with the volume of civil conflicts it has suffered in the last fifty years, has seen only a small handful of viable separatist conflicts, in South Sudan, Eritrea and the Tuareg region of northern Mali.

The explanation for persistent separatist mobilization under discussion here—that it is a function first of strong, historically established social hierarchy within ethnic groups—may help us to understand these regional disparities. Latin America saw its indigenous regions socially pulled apart under Spanish and Portuguese colonial rule, with mestizo elites forcibly installed at the top of rural social strata. This new vertical cleavage meant that, unlike for example Kurdish aghas who held tremendous social authority over Kurdish peasants, mestizo caciques had no such legitimacy over peasants and in fact regularly required the state to maintain the hierarchy by force. In short, Latin America more than

any other post-colonial region today has a legacy of cross-ethnic rather than co-ethnic hierarchy in the countryside, making viable separatist mobilization all but impossible.

The explanation in sub-Saharan Africa is similarly related to rural social structures. In much of the region, As Hyden (1981) and many others have detailed, peasantization simply never was accomplished. As a result, no deep-rooted ties of obligation held small farmers to co-ethnic lords across most of the region, with just a few exceptions. These were Rwanda and Burundi, the Horn of Africa, and the Tuareg region of the Sahel. In the first of these, as Straus (2006) has noted, a long tradition of peasant obedience to authority served state power and even facilitated mass violence. In the latter two, strong vertical ties within ethnic regions made possible the successful war for Eritrean independence and a long-running insurgency in northern Mali's Tuareg region.

The explanation at work in this study helps to square the reality of few separatist wars in Africa compared to center-seeking ones with a broader research program on civil conflicts. Englebert and Hummel (2005) have suggested that the dearth of secessionist conflicts in Africa is a function of weak states unable to do much to pacify minority regions. But this logic directly contradicts much of what we continue to find about civil wars writ large: that weak states make civil wars more, not less, likely by impeding public goods provision (creating grievances) and by hindering state efforts at direct rule of their territories (creating incentives). On the other hand, if the prospect for separatist rebellion by ethnic minority groups is tied to the ability of ethnic minority elites to mobilize followers on the basis of vertical legitimacy and obligation, then its relative scarcity in Africa can go far to help explain why separatist struggles are also so rare.

This exploration of regions highlights another strength of comparative area studies: the capacity of in-depth analysis of one set of regions to shed light on the dynamics of others. As the range and quality of explanatory frameworks for answering "big" questions

at the core of the field of comparative politics improves, we can bring them to bear on refining the scope of our inquiry. To take one of these out-of-sample regions, noting that not once since 1900 has Latin America had a serious separatist conflict, scholars of separatist conflict broadly can feel justified in excluding the region both from the samples in quantitative data projects and from comparative area or other smaller-N research designs. To the extent that Latin America's missing separatists are a systematic function of ethnic minority social structures, this affords us not just greater "area" understanding but better understanding of regions as "theoretically grounded analytic categories" (Ahram 2011). In doing so employing comparative area studies, as a distinct approach to comparative analysis, helps in refining econometric study of cross-region dynamics.

The Micro-Logic of Macro-Rebellions: Historical Legacies and Recruitment in the Aceh Conflict

Following the trend in Western Europe after the Napoleonic Wars, The Dutch in the Netherlands East Indies began in the mid-19th century to try to impose direct rule on their disparate island territories. They began a large-scale military effort to conquer the Sultanate of Aceh in 1873 and took more than three decades to do so, making Aceh the last pacified part of the colony. During the Indonesian war of independence (1945-49), the Sultanate of Aceh played a key role, providing funding, men and even fighter planes. Because of this outsized contribution to the independence effort,³ Aceh was one of only two provinces of Indonesian to receive "Special District" status along with the Sultanate of Yogyakarta.⁴

³ Aceh comprises less than two percent of the country's population.

⁴ Yogyakarta, in south-central Java, is part of the country's historic Javanese heartland and most of the country's leaders are Javanese. It is noteworthy, in other words, that Aceh would be noted in the same way given its much less central ethnic footprint.

Just a few years later, however, President Sukarno folded Aceh into the ethnically different province of North Sumatra, abnegating for the first (not the last) time a central grant of special autonomy to Aceh. In response, Aceh joined the multi-region Darul Islam rebellion of 1953-59, which sought to reinvigorate the Islamic nature of the Indonesian state. The ultimate settlement of that conflict spelled out substantial new concessions to Aceh, first being the reinstatement of special provincial status, but extending much further to cultural autonomy and indigenous education. Like the independence-era commitments, Sukarno's successor President Suharto failed to fulfill these promises. In the mid-1970s, following the discovery of massive oil and natural gas fields off the coast of Aceh, Hasan di Tiro founded the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* or GAM). Di Tiro was the great-grandson of Teungku Cik di Tiro, the leader of the resistance to the Dutch during the Aceh War. Hasan himself had fought in the Darul Islam rebellion, as had most of his original GAM leadership who were also related to, in some cases veterans of, that earlier rebellion.

GAM's war against the Government of Indonesia (GoI) persisted off and on until 2005. Nine months after the Boxing Day tsunami that killed roughly 200,000 Acehnese, negotiators from GAM and the GoI signed a comprehensive peace agreement that again guaranteed substantial autonomy for the region, this time well beyond what had ever been assured before. In addition to returning the vast majority of oil and gas revenues to Aceh, GAM was allowed the special right to form a region-only political party, *Partai Aceh*. Ethnic or regionally specific parties had been constitutionally banned in Indonesia after Darul Islam, and so this was an especially meaningful concession. The now ten years since the peace accord have been ones of gradual improvement in the representativeness of local government in Aceh, now dominated by PA. More importantly, the province's economy has rebounded impressively.

Because this conflict has been durably over for some time—and more importantly because of the improvement of the security situation—it has been possible for many scholars to conduct field research in post-conflict Aceh. In 2010-12 I conducted nearly 50 semi-structured interviews with former fighters, military and civilian officers for GAM in all of Aceh's coastal regions and in the Gayo Highlands. My main goal in this research was to explore the micro-level implications of the book's central argument: namely that early rebellions create an historical legacy of rebellions. Ultimately, without some coherent micro-level links the macro-dynamic could not work. While the macro-level argument pertained to social structural and demographic change within large ethnic groups, the micro-level argument is that those legacies form a political resource that facilitates recruitment. That hypothesis guided my interview research. It suggested in essence that the knowledge of past resistance could be a valuable resource for ethnic elites in crafting narratives about the group's current mobilization.

To be transparent about my early expectations, I anticipated the emotive implications of this hypothesis to be the most prevalent. What I discovered during the course of the interview research, and then while situating the interview data in a World Bank survey of roughly 1200 former GAM members (Barron et al 2008, Tajima 2010), was a richer and more variegated set of links between the knowledge of Aceh's rebellious legacies and individual decisions to join. Along a loose spectrum from highly ideational-emotive to highly instrumental-rational, individuals saw the Aceh War with the Dutch, their role in Darul Islam, and finally GAM's war as: demonstrating a credible commitment to ordinary Acehnese, to a better prospect of family livelihood than could be gained outside GAM, to a coherent frame for understanding what could be gained by resisting state coercion, a family or village obligation, and finally the emotive appeal to Acehnese nationalism that I originally expected to find. This array of motives sits well with a growing realization that

the original greed-grievance dichotomy postulated by Collier and Hoeffler to explain civil war onset was too rigid (Collier and Hoeffler 1998, 2009; Tezcür 2015). Rather, an array of motives come into play, even for individuals, and allowing for that variety as well as highlighting how rebellious legacies fit into those motives produced a much more accurate explanation of why people chose to participate at high potential cost to themselves and their families. Here it enabled me to establish at the individual, family and village levels the role that rebellious legacies play in facilitating mobilization. In the same way that mass education has been found to “carry” national identity forward in time (Darden 20XX; Darden and Gryzmala-Busse 2006), in ethnic minority communities banned from including their own narratives in official curricula families and villages were the vehicles for transmitting identity to successive generations.

As with the cross-region, cross-group comparisons discussed above, exploring yet another ethnic group’s rebellion at another level of analysis also made it possible to then revisit the macro-dynamics in Aceh, as well as to use the micro-implications of Aceh recursively in the Kurdish cases. First, did social structures in Acehnese society and early rebellions catalyze the same basic contentious trajectories that I analyzed in Kurdistan, Balochistan and the Tuareg regions? With some contextually specific differences, the answer is affirmative. The main contextual difference is that, during the 1940s an effective social revolution took place in Acehnese society. A cadre of Islamic leaders, the *Persatuan Ulama Seluruh Aceh* (PUSA, the All Aceh Ulamas’ Association) with the aid of a number of youth militias including its own, took advantage of the lapse between the Japanese surrender and the Allied effort to reestablish Dutch colonial control to stage a social conquest of Aceh’s landed nobility, the *uleebalang*. In large part they mobilized using the social authority of ulama around Aceh, building on a consensus that jihad was warranted to establish armies loyal to individual ulama (Reid 1979, 189-245). By the time formal

independence arrived in 1949, this movement had become the social center of Acehese society.

In effect one historically established social hierarchy replaced another, and led directly during the 1950s to the ideational foundation for Aceh's joining the Darul Islam rebellion. Subsequent to its resolution in 1959, central government investment in Aceh led to substantial urban expansion along the coast. While retaining ties to the ulama who had been the key social gravity actors, this new urban Acehese population also diversified and in substantial part provided, as Kurdish cities had, the recruiting ground for GAM as a second-generation vehicle for Acehese nationalism. The same essential trajectory of contentious politics as a function of social and demographic change carried Acehese nationalism forward into the late 20th century.

Second, did the same micro-dynamics uncovered in GAM recruitment and mobilization evince in the Kurdish regions of Iraq and Turkey? Not having conducted research of this sort in Kurdistan, I had to rely, as Sil (2013, 20-21) outlines as a necessary tradeoff of CAS, on secondary research and by necessity at less depth than in Aceh. But at least in the case of PKK mobilization in Turkey the dynamics are very similar. Moreover, that they are similar despite the PKK's heavy anti-traditional elite origins suggests a role for these rebellious legacies that survives even in the face of such a dramatic ideological change across generations and organizations. In-depth research by Tezcür (2015, 2014, 2010, dates), Marcus (2007) and others suggests a powerful role for both family and village networks in facilitating participation as well as an individual calculus that is shaped in part by knowledge of rebellious Kurdish legacies in southeastern Turkey.

Conclusion

Studying separatist conflict across multiple regions of the world, especially when the analytic framework indicates deep historical origins of conflict, by definition requires comparing deeply across those regions. The variant of comparative area studies discussed here offers a number of payoffs to research that other approaches would arguably lack. First, the relative rarity of ethnic region partitions in the post-colonial world and the value of them for comparative analysis demands that we be willing to search for the cases of partition wherever we find them, and explore later to ascertain whether they are appropriate for inclusion. It also demands that where we find them, we take the time to engage in careful historical analysis, asking not just whether we have fit at the start and at the end of theorized trajectories but also whether the trajectories appear to unfold in systematically comparable ways. It is this prioritization of historical-causal depth that enables compelling evidence of the argument's breadth.

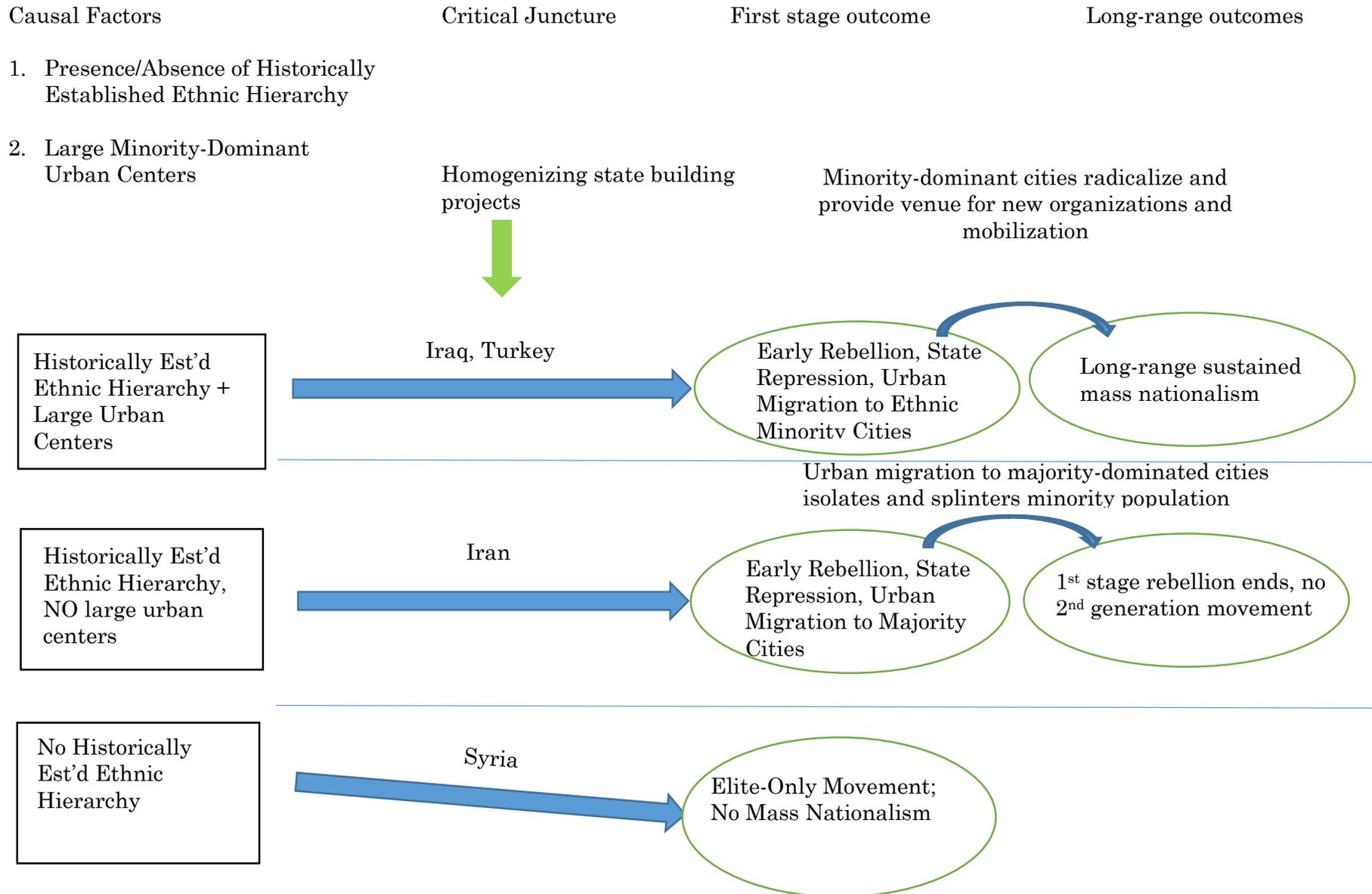
Second, and third, a CAS approach allows scholars to engage in recursive testing of theory at different levels. In this instance comparing macro-dynamics across Kurdistan and Aceh in depth, and then across Balochistan and the Tuareg region of Africa in less depth, led to much greater confidence about the comparative fit of a trajectory framework. At the micro-level, extensive prior fieldwork experience, language facility and the kind of contextualized knowledge of a particular country (Indonesia) made in-depth ethnographic and interview research that uncovered a number of unexpected implications of the theoretical framework. That in turn allowed a return to the original cases in Kurdistan to see if similar dynamics at the individual, family and village levels obtained as had in Aceh. This may be the greatest strength of a CAS approach—namely the relative ease of moving between levels of analysis to explore multiple implications of a theory. On the one hand, we can explore those multi-level inferences in depth that would be impossible with cross-country or cross-group regression. On the other hand, comparison across multiple regions

affords much more assurance of external validity than would be plausible in a similarly small- or medium-N setting within a single region.

Fourth, the insights generated by studying groups across several regions of the world, and at multiple levels, provides valuable region-level conceptual understanding. The dynamics of separatist mobilization in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, paired then with analysis of a particular ethnic region in Africa, helps to explain both the relative paucity of such mobilization in Africa as well as the complete absence of it in Latin America, the latter two of which otherwise have suffered from a larger-than-average number of center-seeking civil wars. To the extent that subsequent inquiry approaches the selection of cases without prior assumptions, it is valuable to know why Latin America has had no separatist wars in recent decades and why Africa has had so few. All of these are contributions to comparative inquiry for which comparative area studies is uniquely suited.

Finally, the historical richness of a CAS approach, paired with its geographic breadth, holds much promise in uncovering the reasons that many of today's most persistent civil conflicts have "deep historical roots" (Fearon and Laitin 2014; Dincecco, Fenske and Onorato 2014). Political scientists and economists deploying historical statistical data increasingly find powerful long-range relationships between pre-colonial sociopolitical factors and contemporary conflict risks, but have limited ability to tie them to compelling explanations. To the extent that scholars using CAS approaches engage similar questions, we stand to have solid explanations for those long-range correlations as well as to know how those long-gone causes continue to reproduce their effects over decades or even centuries.

Figure 1. Contentious and Quiescent Trajectories in Kurdistan



References

(to come-omitted for now)