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**‘Linkages between Politics and Society in Iraqi Kurdistan –
Assessing the region’s civil society’**

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1. Introduction

This paper aims at assessing the civil society within Iraqi Kurdistan, the region of the conflict torn country that is often perceived as 'the other Iraq' or at least tries to convey this impression to the outside world. Kurds are the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East but were never granted a chance to realise their historic long-term goal: An independent Kurdish nation-state. Between 4 and 4.5 million of the 20 to 25 million Kurds in the area live in Iraqi Kurdistan, an autonomous federal region in the northern part of Iraq, which approximately accounts for 15 to 20 percent of Iraq's inhabitants. Kurds are largely *Sunni* Muslims, speaking a language similar to Persian (Katzman/ Prados 2005: p. 1). And their region is indeed quite different from other parts of Iraq: While in cities like Mosul a bounty is promised on the heads of dead "Jews, Americans and Kurds", and unveiled women are constantly receiving death threats, the city of Erbil, only 40 kilometres away, provides a completely different picture: People considering themselves "resistance fighters" in Mosul are very likely to end up in one of Iraqi Kurdistan's prisons, holding mainly combatants engaged in spreading a radical political Islam (Osten-Sacken 2004: *Durchs brave Kurdistan*).

While this distinctive difference seems quite astonishing, it is worthwhile to take a closer look: In order to establish an accurate portrayal regarding the structure of Iraqi Kurdistan's civil society and both the obstacles and opportunities the actors within are facing, I will conduct three major steps prior to presenting a final conclusion: First, I will focus on the range of 'associations', i.e. the variety of actors that are to be found within civil society. While a more detailed definition of 'civil society' is given below, it is necessary to stress at this point that I do not regard civil society as being reduced to actors alone which are not political parties, instead I presume that the latter may be a part of civil society as well: The *London School of Economics* states that, while in theory "its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, [...] in practice the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated" (LSE: *What is civil society?*¹). A *Civil Society Party* has stood for elections in Thailand and Italy's *Partito Radicale* (a role model for furthering a substantive democratization of a country's society by turning referendums from a theoretic option depicted in the constitution to a widely used tool, thus aiding to topple the extremely corrupt and clientelistic '*partitocrazia*') decided after some success to advance its options by running for office as well. Migdal states that the distinction between associations inside and outside of civil society is their character: "They are separate from but address the state" (Migdal 1994: p. 29). Since there are always parties in opposition to those actually governing, it would seem not appropriate to exclude them from civil society

¹ http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what_is_civil_society.htm (Date: 26th of November, 2006).

simply due to their constitution as a party. Gramsci, too, delivers a definition declaring that “the logic of consent in civil society is upheld by dominant associations and cultural institutions such as the education system, the Church, political parties [...]” (Sjögren 2001: p. 29). There is even an entire report prepared by Bevis for the *United States Agency for International Development* entitled “Civil Society Groups and Parties” (Bevis 2003: p. 1).

I will furthermore not apply Putnam’s concept of ‘social capital’, but while a direct critique at this point has to be limited to a reference to Bordieu’s (and Stokke’s) criticism of the idea (as to not overstretch the scope of this paper), the reader will be able to en passant understand why I do not agree with its overly benign, dichotomous approach².

The second step will then focus on the patron-client dimension of Iraqi Kurdistan’s civil society, before undertaking an effort to apply information gathered so far to a civil society-state dimension. Both proceedings will shed a light on three different areas with distinct weight: The international (referring to external actors, i.e. especially the United States, international donors and NGOs), the national (shortly drawing on the leverage exerted on Iraqi Kurdistan’s civil society by both the former *Ba’ath* regime and under the new Iraqi government) and – most important of all, of course – the local level. The latter one will be strongly emphasized, while the two levels evaluated afore will be focused upon with regard to their impact on the local level.

I shall end with a conclusion, presenting the outcome of my research analysis and trying to identify measures that are best suited to facilitate a progressive development of Iraqi Kurdistan’s civil society.

2. Range of Associations

According to Rudolph, “associationalism” is a core concept within civil society: “Associations empower citizens who in isolation cannot confront the state as agent and participant, nor create consequences within society” (Rudolph 2004: p. 66). Törnquist defines ‘civil society’ as a “space where associations and individuals can hold the state accountable and join in struggles for citizenship rights” (Törnquist 2004: p. 6). The ‘classical’ notion of what scholars like Robert Putnam or James Coleman later on came to conceptualize as ‘social capital’ was introduced by de Tocqueville, who considered “autonomous associations” to be the “independent eye of society”. He viewed them as an outcome of the struggle between the equality manifested within popular sovereignty and the individual striving for freedom and liberty (Sjögren 2001: p. 27). Yet this classical definition

² See amongst other publications: *Stokke, Christian* (2005): *Habitus, capital and fields. Conceptualizing the capacity of actors in local politics* (Draft), <http://folk.uio.no/stokke/Publications/Bourdieu.pdf> (Date: 26th of November, 2006).

seems to regard associations as benign actors only, which represents a dichotomy too simplifying to correspond with the complex reality: Associations are not automatically engaging in political processes; neither do they have to be democratic or responsible. Many are “self-seeking” and struggle for economic survival of their members, without any attempt to challenge political power on a local or a national level. This is how Mamdani criticized what he considered a tendency to “romanticise civil society” in 1995 (Sjögren 2001: pp. 38). Examples for associations that do not live up to Toqueville’s high standards but are still engaging in civil society processes can be found all throughout history and include e.g. the Catholic Church (labelled an “intermediate association” by Montesquieu) or drug cartels (like the Sicilian ‘Mafia’) which are simply not civil (Rudolph 2004: p. 76). In order to provide an accurate portrayal of the associations that can be found in Iraqi Kurdistan, the following evaluation will rest on Rudolph’s concept of three different questions which have to be addressed when assessing an association: Is it political or decisively non-political? Is its structure hierarchical or rather egalitarian? Do members belong to the association by choice or does it draw on a ‘natural’ belonging?

Focusing on Iraq as a whole, well organized parties such as the *Shi’a* in the south have not supported a pluralistic democracy but rather tried to profit from the anarchical situation since 2003 by establishing local control based on patron-client relations, religious authority and armed militias. This is typical for a general development of regional control systems installed not only by religious groups and their associated militias but by tribal leaders as well (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 3). The common denominator they share apart from the patronage system is that individual rights are subordinated to the rights of collectives: People are no longer subjects loyal to the nation state but pledge allegiance to tribes, militias or religious parties (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 a: p. 42). However the situation is different in Iraqi Kurdistan: The Kurds as an ethnic group profited most from the fall of Saddam Hussein and have been enjoying a form of self-rule ever since 1991. There is an elected parliament and indications for both an economic (some analysts talk of a ‘boom’) and a political development, and minorities (especially Christians) usually live peacefully in the region, while there is no powerful insurgency (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 13). Since the main forces taking part in the political process are those that stood in fierce opposition to the Baa’thist regime, they include both major Kurdish parties, the KDP and the PUK, whose legitimacy highly rests on their resistance against Saddam Hussein (Lafourcade 2005: pp. 2). Both parties agreed to form the “Democratic Patriotic Alliance of Kurdistan” (DPA), including amongst them a number of smaller parties³. In the three Northern Governorates of Dahuk,

³ “the Kurdistan Islamic Union, the Kurdistan Communist Party, the Kurdistan Democratic Socialist Party, the Democratic Beit-Nahrain Party, the Assyrian Patriotic Party (or Assyrian National Party), the Chaldean democratic Union, the Kurdish Toilers Party” (Lafourcade 2005: p. 14).

Arbil and Sulaymaniyya, the list received more than 90 percent of the votes, while at the same time obtaining the majority in Tameem and still approximately more than 40 percent in Ninawa. The Alliance is hence the second biggest parliamentary group in the National Assembly (NA) after the UIA (*United Iraqi Alliance*), holding 75 seats (Lafourcade 2005: p. 14).

An important tool in order to assess associations is their structure, i.e. whether they function according to a highly hierarchical order or are arranged in a more egalitarian way (Rudolph 2004: p. 77). While the patron-client dimension will be examined thoroughly in part three of this paper, two statements have to be made regarding a very influential actor, the international NGOs: What Uwer refers to as “NGOization” (a phenomenon occurring especially before the regime change) served to affirm clientelism, as partners had to be found to distribute the large amount of aid (goods), and NGOs therefore turned to party officials and local tribal leaders. These in turn, could exploit humanitarian aid successfully because such a high percentage of the population was dependent on aid as its only resource of income. If excluded from aid in the region he or she lived, many had to leave their territory and move to one controlled by another patron force (Uwer 2005: p. 12).

2.1 Hierarchical and ‘Natural’ Associations

Yet another vital question for associations is whether they are open for everybody to join them voluntarily or whether they themselves only target a certain group of society for reasons of birth, religion etc. (the latter one being referred to as ‘natural’ associations) (Rudolph 2004: p. 77). ‘Natural’ associations may be able to generate strong connections as well, encouraging collaboration and cooperation. One main reason for their success is that they function well in order to “mediate” between individuals and society or the state. Yet the ties they might produce are very likely to remain limited to the members of this group, thereby existing not within society but only between parts of it (ib.: p. 70; pp. 80). Starting with a short look at Iraq as a whole again, we find that, while voluntarism does virtually not exist in large parts of the state (US Aid 2006: p. 7), ‘natural associations’ are quite successful at realizing their respective goals: Due to the risk of the state falling apart along ethnic or religious boundaries, these two factors apart from tribal affiliations are the most noted “primordial structures in Iraq”. However, that should not lead researchers to underestimate the influence of other factors, namely family, regional ties, membership in a specific political party or living in a certain area within a city or town (Uwer 2005: p. 5). In a poll conducted in 2004, 67 percent found religion to be the most important part of their identity, while only 1 percent referred to a tribe and only 12 percent stressed their ethnicity (Lafourcade 2005: p.

1). In order to compare these findings with the circumstances in Iraqi Kurdistan, it is essential to evaluate the importance of both religion and ethnicity:

2.1.1 Religion

Despite the high number of parties joining the DPA, some decided to run in the elections individually (e.g. the *Islamic Movement of Kurdistan*, capturing two seats in the NA) or to join a different list (e.g. the *Fayli Kurd Islamic Union* was part of the UIA coalition). While the latter one is rather marginal and severely restricted to voters from one specific group among the Kurds, the *Islamic Movement of Kurdistan* gives an ambiguous impression: Stressing that it does not aim at introducing strict Islamic law, and receiving funds from a very illustrious group of countries (from Saudi-Arabia, the US and Iran at the same time), some of its members allegedly decided to join the northern Kurdistan-based terror cell of *Ansar al-Islam* (Lafourcade 2005: p. 17). The *Kurdish Islamic Union* in turn has joined the DPA, it is especially popular among students and on good terms with both major Kurdish parties as its Islamic agenda is subordinated to its Kurdish identity. Yet this does not keep it from having strong ties with the Egyptian *Muslim Brotherhood* (of whom the *Hamas* is an offspring, amongst other groups). (ib.: p. 17). Despite this party's success with students and the differences between the cities and the conservative rural areas, the last years have seen a decline of religious associations (parties, groups) as many people do not seem to regard 'religion' as a very important part of their identity any more, especially among younger Kurds of whom large numbers consider themselves 'secular' (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 6). In Sulaymaniyya, many people refused to fast during Ramadan, liquor shops remained open, and the coffee houses were frequented during the day as well, resulting in numeral complaints of Islamic scholars about the city's lax moral. A famous soap opera televised features the popular characters drinking whiskey and listening to pop music while their evil counterparts dress strictly according to Islamic rules and constantly cite verses from the Qur'an (Osten-Sacken: *Durchs brave Kurdistan*). This could be subsumed under Migdal's notion that "new factors" that are introduced into an area (in this case, as will be shown in depth in part three, capital) can both benefit or harm social forces (like the religious associations in this case) (Migdal 1994: p. 22).

2.1.2 Ethnicity

Are there similar developments concerning people's approach towards 'ethnicity' as part of their identity? The probably most obvious 'clash' of different ethnic identities amongst the population can be noticed in Kirkuk: The city where large amounts of Iraq's oil can be

found is contested by the Arab, the Turkoman, the Assyro-Chaldean and the Kurdish community, which still has many of its members 'dreaming' of an own independent Kurdish nation state incorporating Kirkuk, which as of today is not a part of the three Kurdish provinces that united to form a 'Federal Autonomous Kurdish Region'. Ever since the defeat of the Baa'th Party's dictatorship, the Kurds have taken a number of measures supposed to 'reverse' injustice they encountered under Saddam Hussein's rule, e.g. the Arabization campaigns starting in the 1970s or especially the *Anfal* campaign in 1988, resulting in the mass murder of Kurdish civilians and destroying the livelihood of many. The constant return of Kurds formerly displaced and a struggle for the control of the complete area has led to accusations of "reverse ethnic cleansing" by other ethnic groups (ICG 2004: p. i). A huge problem is that there are no exact numbers depicting how many members of each group are nowadays living in Kirkuk. The last reliable census dates back to 1967 and reports the Turkoman population as the majority in the city while the Kurdish population outnumbered any other ethnic group in the governorate as a whole (Fawcett/ Tanner 2002: p. 31). In order to prevent what they fear might be the secession of an independent Kurdish nation state; the *Shi'a* militias have taken action as well by reportedly deploying hundreds of armed fighters to Kirkuk (NCCI 2006: p. 51).

However important the role of Kirkuk and its history of displaced people, one must also draw attention to other displaced persons that can be found throughout Iraqi Kurdistan: Apart from Arabization campaigns and the *Anfal* atrocities of 1988, Kurds had already been displaced before – e.g. to Iran during the 1970s (many of whom have been returning after 2003). Many also fled the internal fighting between KDP and PUK in the mid-1990s, and among the *Sunni* Arabs of the region that were opposed to Saddam Hussein's regime, several escaped from territory that was government controlled (Fawcett/ Tanner 2002: p. 14). 800,000 people are estimated to have been displaced before the fall of the Baa'th regime in northern and central Iraq (mainly Kurds), the total number for all of Iraq today is 1,5 million (about 1,1 million total in 2003) (NCCI 2006: p. 14).

Two noticeable groups among the Kurdish population, although sharing the same ethnical identity, have to be mentioned because they strongly deviate from the mainstream of the population: The (both so-called) *Faili* Kurds and the *Al-Qilaa* Kurds. The latter group, approximately 45,000 people today, collaborated with the Iraqi regime in its operation against the majority of the Kurdish population during the 1980s. After the self-rule was established in 1991, it is unclear whether they escaped voluntarily or were driven out of the North, fleeing to Mossul where they settled in empty military barracks (in Arabian "*Al Qilaa*"). They are still labelled derogative terms ("donkeys, *jash*") by many Kurds (Fawcett/ Tanner 2002: p. 39). The *Faili* Kurds historically have family members on both sides of the border, i.e. in Iraq and Iran. Before the Iraqi invasion in Iran 1980, 480 of the wealthiest Iraqis were told to gather by

the Chamber of Commerce, one third of them being *Faili* Kurds. All of them were expelled to Iran. 40,000 had already been expelled during one single incident in 1971. Today the number of this groups refugees in Iran range from 100,000 to 300,000 (Fawcett/ Tanner 2002: p. 31).

2.2 The Two Major Kurdish Parties

The two main Kurdish parties have been presented so far en passant, yet it takes a thorough investigation of each one of them according to Rudolph's three configurations (this will also enable a better understanding of the patron-client dimension in Iraqi Kurdistan that is to be examined in the next part of this paper): The KDP (*Kurdish Democratic Party*) was founded in 1945 by the infamous Mullah Mustafa Barzani, head of a tribe from a village about 60 kilometres from Mossul. After his death in 1979, the leadership was passed on to his son, Masoud Barzani. The KDP has had alliances with Syria, Iran and noticeable, Turkey, joining the fight against the PKK operating from KDP territory. After 2002 relations have declined, as many in the KDP strive for an autonomous federal Kurdish region incorporating Kirkuk, which is seen by Turkey as a Turcoman city. Both sides, however, are trying to improve their relationship (Lafourcade 2005: p. 18; Katzman/ Prados 2005: p. 2). While the KDP, despite being baptised a 'Democratic Party', has its root clearly in a tribe dominated by one family (which is underlined by the fact that the leadership after Mullah Mustafa's death in 1979 was not subject to internal party elections but was simply 'inherited' by his son), and furthermore has been able to increasing its legitimacy by obvious religious roots, the PUK (*Patriotic Union of Kurdistan*), founded by Jalal Talabani in 1975, started as a Marxist-oriented splinter party from the KDP. After the internal fight between both parties over power and revenue sharing issues (still the most contested area among them) from 1993 to 1998, the parties are on good terms today. The rather urban PUK controls the southern areas of Iraqi Kurdistan, while the more conservative KDP (still more traditional and tribal) dominates in the mountains in the north of the region (Lafourcade 2005: p. 20; Katzman/ Prados 2005: p. 2).

2.3 Voluntary and Egalitarian Associations

Yet the domination of these two parties must not be understood as an absence of associations that are independent of both, especially since 2003: Conferences are held on a daily basis in cities like Sulaymaniyya, Dahuk or Arbil, dealing with topics as e.g. civil society, human and women's rights (as mentioned above), cultural planning, urban development or the economy. "Dozens of local civil society organizations operate in the region, ranging from initiatives for environmental protection to organizations combating violence against women. They actively participate in public debate and initiate a variety of projects", among them day

care centres for homeless children, the elderly or disabled people as well as places offering help to women who are victims of domestic violence (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 5). It is furthermore quite simple to register a new NGO or a media company, and since the internet and international media can be accessed easily, people e.g. engage in publishing Kurdish books, build cultural centres or form their own media organisations. Five universities and a number of research institutes exist in the region (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 5; US Aid 2006: p. 10).

In terms of an egalitarian approach, one of the main fields where equality has to be achieved is between men and women. In the words of US Aid: "Working with women provides a valuable return on the investment." (US Aid 2006: p. 6). Or as Uwer/ Osten-Sacken justifiably state: "Any transformation of the Middle Eastern into a more democratic region depends on the range of women's emancipation and participation in all spheres of public life and decision-making processes." Although differences remain high between cities like Sulaymaniyya and rural regions which generally tend to be more conservative (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 10), a remarkable progress has taken place in Iraqi Kurdistan: The first women organizations were established after 1991, most of them linked to political parties, e.g. the *Kurdistan Women's Union* (KDP), the *Zhinan Kurdish Women's Union* (PUK) or the *Komala Afretan* (Iraqi Communist Party). But soon many local initiatives appeared as well, not least due to the fact that many women became alienated from their original parties because of how male decision-makers abused their authority. As of today, the mobilization of women is rather "subject dominated" instead of depending on party affiliation. Often alliances of women from many different backgrounds have proven to secure a winning outcome, e.g. when abolishing a law about 'honour killings', organizing a conference on female genital mutilation, establishing shelter for women or in 2004 successfully lobbying against a Governing Council's plan to reintroduce *sharia* rules in domestic law (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p.5; pp. 11).

As "localized political mobilization" is often caused by "popular struggle" e.g. concerning local or national issues (Mohan/ Stokke 2006: p. 2), we can perceive similar tendencies in Iraqi Kurdistan, manifesting itself in an increasing anger towards the two main parties regarding their clientelism and nepotism that will be subject to further explanation shortly. While these protests against the government might to some extent encourage political extremists, they represent at the same time a notion of "citizen's self-organization" that is quite unique for the Middle East: These demonstrations are neither initiated by the ruling government (obviously) or extremist organizations, nor do people explain politics in terms of conspiracy theories targeting abstract external enemies like Israel or the United States. Instead they are trying to hold their own government responsible for its errors (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 10). Since "local political spaces" are highly depended on the

structure they are given both by international donors and the addressee states (Mohan/Stokke 2006: p. 3), it seems especially important to focus on the relationship between the latter one and its inhabitants, which will be carried out in the third sub item.

2.4 Concluding Remarks

Rudolph, while referring e.g. to constructivist theories unravelling categories that are perceived as “primordial”, concludes that only focusing on a dichotomy prevents scholars from focusing what he labels “intentional associations”, i.e. those that are “hybrid”, pointing out e.g. that what is thought to be an ethnic category might simply be constructed (Rudolph 2004: pp. 78). This is also true with regard to associations in Iraqi Kurdistan, e.g. one can notice that people to some extent choose if ‘ethnicity’ or ‘religion’ is the most important feature of their identity, while this decision again might depend on decisions taken by e.g. the head of a tribe, a family etc. The process of ‘construction’ is apparent. “The Iraqi society may be depicted as an ethnic/confessional mosaic – but it is far from being simply a puzzle one can put together to networks. Various kinds of social formations and we-groups exist that define values and norms, demand allegiance, and provide solidarity to its members” (Uwer 2005: p. 4). While the ‘performance’ of each association hinges on how well they manage to apply popular symbols, have access to resources and if they can optimize their internal structure (Migdal 1994: p. 20), an association is most likely to succeed when it arrives at “finding allies, creating coalitions, and accepting accommodations” (Migdal 1994: p. 21). This, too, applies to many associations in Iraqi Kurdistan, ranging from the women’s organizations up to the two major parties.

To ensure an ongoing positive development, it seems vital to support “non-partisan movements, independent media and initiatives”, even if this results in conflict with the KDP or PUK (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 15). This could in the long run lead to a more democratic society consisting of people using institutions as well as associations in order to participate in the political process (Uwer 2005: p. 3). The new factors that could be introduced to alter associations for the better (Migdal 1994: p. 22) include a separation of both civil and judicial services from the governing local parties, a more transparent administration that is checked by independent bodies, efforts that try to leave the one-party-system behind and detach economic movement from the structures of local parties and thereby from the ruling elite (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 7). Two basic assumptions to proceed in this direction are clearly stated by Uwer and Osten-Sacken: First, keep “Kurdish party-structures out of civil society programs”, second, adopt a universal instead of a cultural approach, thereby avoiding compromises with ‘culture’ if these compromises would endanger

either human rights in general or women's rights in particular (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 15).

One short comment regarding to role of the Kurdish 'Diaspora': While Mohan and Stokke conclude that there is "a growing awareness of how community self-help amongst recent migrants on the basis of religious, hometown and other group affinities affects local government in Africa and Latin America", which is based on linking an 'inherited' birthplace to a partner movement abroad in order to further development (Mohan/ Stokke 2006: p. 24), they are also well aware that "transnational communities, like any community, are not socially homogenous and power free groupings, but divided along various lines, which are exploited in the context of these networked relationships", resting on an organization through male dominated public spaces and applying coercion (often morally) to ensure people's consent (ib.: p. 25). With all regard to active contribution to the process of strengthening civil society externally is it thus best to focus on the development within the region itself, i.e. within Iraqi Kurdistan.

3. Patron – Client Dimension

As has been demonstrated above, hierarchical associations, of whom a large percentage relies on patron–client relationships, are unlikely to facilitate democratic conditions (Rudolph 2004: p. 77). Yet it has also to be taken into account that it is usually rich countries that can maintain functioning democracies, while poor countries often fail to achieve this, per-capita-income being one of the most reliable indicators to predict a chance for democratic development (Khan 2005: p. 704; 710). The underlying assumption is that a prosperous economy suffers less from conflicts of distribution (which weaken democracy) and democratic processes can be conducted easier due to people's increased level of education (ib.: p. 711). This of course, while highlighting the importance of stable economic progress is not stating that democracy in turn is unable to further trade and industry: It does so by e.g. providing all actors with better information, by allowing for a flexible change within institutions and by sustaining property rights through a solid political system (ib.: 706). The main features distinguishing developing countries from developed countries include the absence of capitalism in large areas of the economy, hence resulting in a very small national income and many people continuously living from agriculture or informal trade activities. Since there is not much to distribute, the most successful strategy seems to be to organize and obtain access to scarce resources by using coercion: This is when patron–client relationships are established, because factional leaders need to mobilize support and ensure it by delivering small 'rewards' to their followers (ib.: pp. 17), which complies with the definition of "clientelism" by Harriss, Stocke, and Törnquist, who also point out that the

support achieved might be used as well to gather votes if these leaders decide their best strategy to improve access to resources is obtained if they run for office (Harriss/ Stokke/ Törnquist 2004: p. 20).

3.1 International Level

Patron–client relationships are not limited to the area within developing countries' societies, but can be found as well in the liaison between external actors and donors and the developing country, the latter one usually being very dependent on financial and structural support from abroad. This is also the case in Iraqi Kurdistan, where the existing achievements depend on further assistance by both the US and the EU (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 14). As the US is the main actor responsible for ending the rule of Saddam Hussein, it has the biggest influence on nearly every progress within Iraq as a whole. Yet it runs the risk of exploiting humanitarian aid to a degree where it actually might endanger the development of civil society: As Fanny notes, humanitarian aid as always been and still is subject to abuse by many powerful actors, but this has reached a unique level in the case of Iraq: Not only is the US amongst the groups that use humanitarian aid to exercise political pressure (as the occupying power is the prime donor), there are even tools like the "*Commanders Emergency Response Fund*", consisting of money obtained from Saddam Hussein's private assets. This money is not accountably invested by a controlling body; it is available to e.g. US-Army officers mutely spending money on humanitarian objects. While this might indicate the goodwill and benevolence of those trying to help, an army trying to restore the civil society of an occupied country is very likely to distort civil society and is clearly contrary to de Tocqueville's classical notion, because it leaves little space for autonomy to be developed by civil society's associations (Fanny: pp. 2).

It has already been pointed out that NGOs sometimes appear almost to be forced to collaborate with actors they would rather avoid when trying to deliver humanitarian aid, but this is extremely apparent when it comes to international, external NGOs (many of whom again depend on money from the US): As they and their employees are not rooted within the society of e.g. Iraqi Kurdistan, they have a harder time identifying and convincing local actors that are strong enough to deliver support to them. They are thus even more likely to have to rely on e.g. local clientelist strongmen or party militias (Uwer 2005: p. 12).

3.2 National Level

3.2.1 Under Saddam's *Ba'ath*

Uwer and Osten-Sacken come to the conclusion that the *Ba'ath* dictatorship "systematically impoverished the country and completely changed its society" (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 2). It did so by completely controlling every level of economic activity, leaving literally no space for autonomous efforts by citizens. Apart from quietening all of civil society by coercion and furthering patronage by installing an all comprising system of party organizations (ranging from youth groups to neighbourhood associations; Uwer 2005: p. 6), the regime deliberately installed a system in which the majority of the people were either dependent on the ruling party's administration or on the "food rations system" (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 2). What enabled the *Ba'ath* dictatorship to perform these steps was its strategy to exploit the oil sector in order to establish patron–client relationships while simultaneously deliberately destroying all alternative economic sectors that could not be controlled by the party (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 8).

3.2.2 Under the New Iraqi Government

The access to resources, i.e. in the case of Iraqi Kurdistan control of the oil-rich areas and especially the city of Kirkuk, are among the most contested areas between different factions within post-Saddam Iraq: It was noted earlier that the Kurds have undertaken efforts to 'reverse' the injustice they encountered under the *Ba'athist* rule (this often leading to forcefully driving the Arab population out of Kirkuk), they *Shi'a* are deploying armed militias to prevent a what they perceive as the attempt of a Kurdish secession and the Turcomans highly rely on their Turkish ally (both funding and financing the 'Turcoman Front'). Latest Kurdish efforts to ensure their influential role on development at a national level include large parts of the *Peshmerga* militia joining both the regional government's security forces and the Iraqi Armed Forces (Baker 2006: p. 17). The Kurds still profit from what was laid out in the *Transitional Administrative Law* (TAL) (Paragraphs 58 and 61), stating the reversal of demographic *Ba'ath* cruelties as an official goal and furthermore installing a blocking minority regarding the now accepted constitution (due to its status as an autonomous region) (Fürtig 2006: p. 3).

Apart from oil, water has shown to be a 'dead pledge' that might turn out to be useful as a bargaining tool for the Kurdish parties, as the reservoirs of Dokan and Darbadikan are of high importance also for the agriculture in the Arabian parts of Iraq, withholding water might have an impact reaching as far as the fields of southern Iraq (ib.: p. 4).

3.3 Local Level

Complementary to the introductory remarks about patron–client relations in developing countries, it has to be pointed out that the “personalization” of leadership cannot be reduced to traditional or tribal structures but constitutes a quite ‘modern’ phenomenon as leaders pay-off supporters they need to establish their goals listed above (Khan 2005: p. 712). This can be illustrated in the case of Iraqi Kurdistan as well, both at the early stage of Kurdish self-rule and in today’s post-Saddam Iraq: When Iraqi troops left the region in 1991, it was impoverished due to suffering from the internal conflict between KDP and PUK, a legal situation that was yet to be clarified and international sanctions. More than 70 percent of the population at that time depended on relief aid provided by international organizations, hence resulting in these organizations being highly dominant in the economic sector (apart from the ‘black market’) (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: pp. 4).

While living conditions have changed radically over the past years, it is still the same regional elites that are maintaining their patron–client network by relying on the same structures that materialized during their resistance against the *Ba’ath* dictatorship (ib.: p. 7). It is exactly this “superior organizational power” that can explain why the poor are not able to determine government decisions despite their high number in the population (Khan 2005: p. 707), and why not all people have been able to profit from the region’s newly achieved ‘wealth’ (if compared to former times). Although there are incentives for elites to reduce poverty if this would result in a higher legitimacy, gaining the ruling parties “political mileage” (e.g. by generous motion towards the poor, especially if these share the same ethnic and/ or religious affiliation as is the case in Iraqi Kurdistan) (Luckham et al 2003: pp. 30). However, Iraqi Kurdistan faces a very specific challenge, as “state controlled oil revenues are virtually the only income” (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 13).

This is a situation similar to those in many authoritarian societies that are based on wealth through oil: Apart from the neglect of rural areas altogether, of industry and agriculture (due to no pressure for the government or those capable of investing to place funds in any economic branch except the oil sector, which is bound to deliver the highest pay-off), this affects people’s autonomy and diminishes their space to take actions as well. Hence it is the two ruling parties that have an even stronger grip on civil society as they function as the two main employers (ib.: pp. 13). After the internal war between the KDP and the PUK from 1994 onwards, the region of Iraqi Kurdistan is de facto split in two areas, the north being controlled by the KDP, and the south by PUK. Hence every administration can be found two times: In Sulaymaniyya and in Arbil. Until today many doubt that either party is willing to abandon precious influence, despite their effort to apply a unified strategy with regard to the central government in Baghdad (resulting in the joined party list). Recent rumours report of attempts

of both parties to flat our 'buy' during the elections, offering voters up to 70 US Dollars (Osten-Sacken: *Durchs brave Kurdistan*).

Although conflicts over the access to resources between different factions do not necessarily lead to "economic stagnation or the breakdown of democracy" (Khan 2005: p. 705), they result in a growing gap between urban and rural areas in Iraqi Kurdistan: Patrons spent most of their money where there followers are, and these can mostly be found in the cities where public authorities reside. This in turn leads to a growing movement of people leaving their rural communities: According to a UN report Dahuk, the governorate in the west of Iraqi Kurdistan is today the least developed in all of Iraq (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 9). In an economic approach, processes can be regarded as efficient if "the winners gain more then the losers loose" (Khan 2005: p. 708), yet in Iraqi Kurdistan and is many regions were power is distributed quite unevenly, there is no pressure on the 'winners' to in any way 'compensate' the 'losers'. The latter ones are left with their only chance: To become an ally of a strong faction themselves (ib.: pp. 708).

The 'modernity' of Iraqi Kurdistan's patron-client relation manifests itself in the structure of the bureaucracy that has been established by the two major parties. Similar to many developing countries, it seems to represent the complete opposite of the classical notion by Max Weber of a "formal, meritocratic" bureaucracy: There is no clear separation between the private and the public sphere, while the latter one is penetrated by the patron's diverse interests (Khan 2005: p. 713). In the governorate of Sulaymaniyya, 130,000 people work in the public sector while the governorate only consists of 1.6 million inhabitants. The few factories that exist belong to the *Kurdish Regional Government* (KRG) and since higher wages are paid by the government, the most skilled and motivated people are employed here while they often have "virtually nothing to do" (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: pp. 8). This is especially critical as the institutions demand loyalty but not ingenuity from their employees, who can loose their job easily if criticising the government, meanwhile local party officials are constrained to form patron-client relations themselves. The result is a 'vicious circle' of repetition that helps to spread the extent of the patron-client dimension (ib.: p. 9).

"Economic viability" is very important in developed countries, but most economic benefits in developing countries only produce very small surpluses (Khan 2005: p.715; p. 720). This is true for Iraqi Kurdistan as well, except for the oil sector that has brought the region an astonishing level of 'wealth'. However it is this very sector the profits of which are not only limited to a few powerful patrons and their associations but also directly causes other sectors to remain underdeveloped: As long as its high profit rates serve to maintain a comforting level of interest, the few actors in control of the oil sector see no need to develop e.g. a functioning industrial segment. Thereby controlling the oil sector is an "easy and quite suitable way of controlling a society" (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 8). Iraqi Kurdistan is

not yet a “key oil-exporting region”, but the negative aspects associated with such a development are already apparent: 17 percent of Iraq’s national income is distributed to the Kurdish region, leading to the KRG’s budget being four times as high as before the fall of Saddam Hussein. But most of this money, as outlined above, is used to employ people in the public sector, sometimes even leaving them without a chair to sit on. The development is highly undemocratic because the KRG does not have to rely on ‘citizens’ as neither taxpayers nor producers (ib.: pp. 8). This highlights that the patron–client dimension is not caused by a lack of democracy; it is rather the economic structure itself that keeps features of a modern welfare state from being installed (Khan 2005: p. 722). A more democratic distribution is necessary, but it has to be accompanied by a vision of the region’s future economic development.

There is, however, a ‘light at the end of the tunnel’: Transformations – “the growth of cities, the increased use of fossil fuels and other technological innovations” – have often lead to progressive initiatives by both the state and society (Migdal 1994: p. 10). Positive signals include an agreement with a Norwegian firm that has successfully begun to drill for oil in the December of 2005 (Norway being the role model for successfully using oil wealth while minimizing the risks it is usually accompanied by⁴) and at the same period the launch of “Kurdistan Airlines”, flying twice a week to Dubai (UAE) and Frankfurt (Germany). This might be a possibility for businessmen and –women to become more independent and e.g. find possible investors abroad for sectors other than the oil segment (as those foreign investors would obviously not be relying on the latter one to establish a control system similar to the two big parties).

What has become obvious is that the patron–client dimension in Iraqi Kurdistan results in very authoritative local rulers, whereas it would be important to “dilute social structures that keep individuals dependent and obedient” in order to achieve an economic and political perspective for all people in the region (Uwer 2005: p. 14), e.g. an economic development situated outside of the ‘state economy’ run by the two major parties. This also appears to be the best strategy to reach the high number of adolescent and young people representing the region’s future (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 a: p. 43).

4. Civil Society – State Dimension

Civil society according to Rudolph consists of a “non-state autonomous sphere, empowerment of citizens, trust-building associational life and interaction with rather than subordination to the state” (Rudolph 2004: p. 65). Both post-Marxists and what is nowadays

⁴ see e.g. Allendorf, Henrike (2007): Erdölpolitik in Norwegen - Vorbild für den Umgang mit Ölreichtum?, Verlag Dirk Koentopp: Osnabrück 2006.

wrongly perceived by many as a “neo-liberal” (although being significantly different from ‘classical’ liberalism) position would agree, the latter one not only regarding civil society as outside of the state but even in fierce opposition to it (Mohan/ Stokke 2006: p. 1)⁵. But is this rather positive notion compatible with the reality in e.g. Iraqi Kurdistan? While it is true that people do not necessarily have to regard the state as the authority best fit to negotiate the most important issues between different associations (Migdal 1994: p. 10), an approach that is not as dichotomous has to keep in mind that civil society can originate both from society and from the state (Sjögren 2001: p. 22). Migdal points out that major conflicts in “multiple arenas” determine a society’s dominant and opposing actors (Migdal 1994: p. 9), i.e. the state can either challenge or interact with civil society’s associations. Thus associations might be integrated in political projects, for “democratic, conservative or apolitical and mainly self-serving purposes” (Sjögren 2001: pp. 44). The domination of either the state or associations in one area (which may be as ‘simple’ as deciding about which crop is to be sown) can quickly affect other areas as well (Migdal 1994: p. 22), leading to a ‘spill-over effect’.

There is furthermore not much use in perceiving the state as an everlasting opponent to civil society, because the state “is not a fixed ideological entity” but may be subject to transformation (e.g. altering “moral orders”) by getting in contact with a range of associations (Migdal 1994: p. 12). Could Iraqi Kurdistan be subject to such a process of change occurring with a progressive outcome? The most notable transformations have not yet pointed in this direction but concerned the structure of the federal region: First, the internal conflict between KDP and PUK lead to a distinct split between the northern parts (controlled by the KDP) and the southern areas under PUK control. The second development was due to the rising insecurity in the other parts of Iraq and resulted in a vast number of Kurds moving back to the region as well as many others now refraining from travelling elsewhere in the country, hence leading to an “enclosure of the Kurds inside their territories” (Uwer 2005: pp. 8).

4.1 International Level

Although NGOs are able to generally “promote empowerment” in many different ways (e.g. by furthering alliances between people or by helping them to employ collective efforts) (Mohan/ Stokke 2006: p. 12), it is important in the case of Iraqi Kurdistan that “humanitarian space is never a given fact; it has to be negotiated by humanitarian actors with the belligerents in areas of conflict”. The tendency in Iraq towards both national and international

⁵ see e.g. Cohen and Arrato (1992) as post-Marxists or John Keane (1988) (Sjögren 2001: pp. 32).

NGOs is to apply severe methods of control instead of recognizing the NGOs efforts (Fanny: p. 5).

A risk identified by scholars is that civil society may even be damaged by “external linkages” (Rudolph 2004: pp. 72), as it is constantly penetrated by international NGOs and donors with clear agendas (Mohan/ Stokke 2006: p. 10). With regard to Iraqi Kurdistan this is even recommended by one of the largest contributor (US Aid 2006: p. 9), who tries to set clear goals that have to be met in order to qualify for help. Whether this is actually endangering or furthering the fate of civil society will be answered in this paper’s conclusion with reference to the question of ‘politicised’ vs. ‘de-politicised’ development.

4.2 National Level

4.2.1 Under Saddam’s *Ba’ath*

The Iraq under Saddam’s dictatorship was “not only a totalitarian state but also an extreme case of a totalitarian *society*” where a private life or civil affairs were simply not existent, and all decisions were made by a small number of all-male actors (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 2). Since the *Ba’ath* Party managed to interfere with every aspect of everyday life, no feature of a democratic society could exist (ib.: p. 3). Whilst 1991 marks a turning point for the Kurdish north of Iraq, it also flags the point at which, despite all ideological claims (e.g. one of *Ba’ath*’ first communiqués in 1968), the government started to intensively cooperate with tribalism, using it as a vehicle to maintain their power and control over society (Uwer 2005: p. 5). There had even been periods when the regime tried to establish a collaboration with the Kurdish parties, first with the PUK around 1985 (until different demands concerning the status of Kirkuk could not be settled so the PUK quickly turned to Iran as an ally) (Rabil 2002: p. 16) while later on briefly assisting the KDP to recapture Arbil in 1994 (after it had been taken by PUK militias) (Katzman/ Prados 2005: p. 3).

4.2.2 Under the New Iraqi Government

Iraqi Kurdistan has been under de facto self rule from 1991 on, which lead to the establishment of a high degree of autonomy: The *Peshmerga* militias, although part of the Iraqi army, are controlled by the KRG, which itself is supposed to be checked and balanced by an elected parliament; and decisions concerning the northern region can be made quite independently by the KRG alone (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: 6), including the very important right to tax (Katzman/ Prados 2005: p. 5). This unique situation offers a stability

unknown elsewhere in Iraq, where militias and violent patron–client associations have taken control, the most famous example being the infamous Sadr City borough of Baghdad: These associations work twofold, undermining the national state's authority while at the same time destroying the rights and freedoms of the individual, hence severely diminishing all possible progressive effects within civil society (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 a: p. 42).

Despite the progress achieved politically in Iraqi Kurdistan, one has to keep in mind that the violent internal rivalry between the KDP und PUK started as early as 1993, right after the instalment of the Arbil-based parliament in 1992. Both parties struggled for the exact same privileges they nowadays autonomously decide about together, baring in mind the de facto split in two distinct areas (as described above) (Lafourcade 2005: p. 8). Still after the peace agreement of 1998 and the regime change in 2003, both parties have enjoyed huge support from the voters, rewarding their joint list 75 seats (27 percent) in the first election (ib.: p. 8) and still a presentable 53 seats in 2005's election after the new constitution was accepted (Fürtig 2006: p. 1). The winning UIA is therefore dependent on the Kurdish Alliance (and even a third party if a majority of two thirds is required), which uses 'threats of secession' as a bargaining tool (Lafourcade 2005: p. 8). The main controversial subject between the Kurds and the Iraqi state remains the question of Kirkuk (Fawcett/ Tanner 2002: p. 16): Kurdish leaders seem now willing to offer a "historic compromise" to the Iraqi Arabs by accepting a 'special status' of Kirkuk that would lead to some sort of "sharing agreement", but this has yet to be communicated to the Kurdish community where it is likely to trigger off very negative emotional reactions (ICG 2004: p.i). A great step towards a more peaceful situation in Kirkuk would be any prevention of a violent escalation based on ethnic belonging, in the case of which even democratic institutions would not be deemed sufficient for maintaining "neutral forums for conflict management" (Luckham et al 2003: p. 39). A situation avoiding bloodshed would thus not only benefit the city of Kirkuk (an economically all Iraqis as the profit of the oil business would not be limited to one ethnic group) but the Kurdish region in general: People would not feel obliged to join 'their fellow brothers' in their struggle in Kirkuk but could use their energies to facilitate and improve civil society. Although there is no causal mechanism rendering this a win-win-situation, there seems to be no association capable of effectively exploiting possible grievances of the Kurdish population regarding the 'sharing contract', if both major parties (and their powerful counterparts, e.g. the Turkish government) reach an agreement (and no factions break off of the KDP or the PUK). A " Hamas-effect" (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 15) is highly unlikely as this conflict completely focuses on the question of ethnicity in terms of ideology.

4.3 Local Level

According to Khan, “the worst conditions of rule are those where societies face the predation of rulers behaving like roving bandits. [...] Since stationary bandits want to maximize their tax take overtime, they have an incentive to *reduce* the rate of taxation so that social output can rise, and the *total* tax they collect is maximized” (Khan 2005: p. 709). While this might apply to a number of regions in Iraq (e.g. those where no stable ethnic or religious strongholds have been established), there do not seem to be similar effects in the vast majority of Iraqi Kurdistan’s areas. One reason ensuring at least that those contesting for power do so with regard to a future perspective is the sooner instalment and legacy of political parties (thereby introducing not less than the option of a “smooth transfer of power”; *ib.*: p. 709) in Iraqi Kurdistan: While political parties in general were founded throughout the 1940s and 1950s, all of them had to operate from outside of Iraq under the *Ba’athist* rule, and it was only the two Kurdish parties that could return already in 1991 to resume their undisturbed work, thus enabling them “to build constituencies among the population”, a step that parties in other parts of Iraq have yet to accomplish (Lafourcade 2005: p. 4). It is also noteworthy that Christians as a minority were able to obtain five seats of the 1992 105-seat-parliament (Katzman/ Prados 2005: p. 3). But problems still endure: Although Kurds are allowed to utter critique towards the government and the two ruling parties, there is only a very limited space for criticism: In recent times a Kurd with an Austrian passport was sentenced to 30 years in prison after insulting Massoud Barzani. Apart from the tough sentence the trial cannot be considered ‘fair’ either (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: p. 6).

Migdal justifiably argues that it is the state that actually determines the borders of society, because it constitutes the furthest limit to which people relate (Migdal 1994: p. 23). Out of the four possible “junctures” between state and society he identifies, the one most likely to be found in Iraqi Kurdistan appears to be the “state incorporation of existing social forces” (*ib.*: p. 26), as a high number of associations in civil society is still dependent on either the KDP or the PUK. Yet the progressive forces outlined in the second part of this paper might have the power to alter and shift the situation, if they manage to keep on performing successfully.

Although some scholars argue that ‘democratisation’ may even threaten civil society by destructing older forms of cooperation (Rudolph 2004: p. 72), this seems to be the best way for progressive associations to put an increased pressure on the state (e.g. on local council members; US Aid 2006: p. 7) in at least some arenas (Migdal 1994: p. 26), e.g. if international donors support those “non-partisan” actors that have a high legitimacy with the local people (US Aid 2006: p. 7). It has yet to show whether this is sufficient in order to ‘break’ the states “integrated domination” that allows it to establish hegemony on many levels

of society (Migdal 1994: p. 27). It has been stressed by many that shifting resources risks triggering off fierce reactions by those trying to prevent them (Luckham et al 2003: p. 33), yet even the (again, wrongly labelled) “neo-liberalism” stresses that “the key role for local people is to mobilize the resources – land, labour and capital”, hence making a choice about their development, influence the state’s policy making and hold it accountable for possible errors (Mohan/ Stokke 2006: p. 10). This seems to be the only promising way to actually focus on the individual as the prime unit of development (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 a : p. 39): “[T]here is still no substitute for a citizen based state and independent political vehicles”, supporting debate and controversy over collective action, or, in one single term: politics (Harris/ Stokke/ Törnquist 2004: p. 15)

One important field in which this is vital is the situation of women in Iraqi Kurdistan, making up 60 percent of the entire population and stabilizing living conditions especially in rural areas. Women suffer from high rates of illiteracy and poor career prospects (Uwer/ Osten-Sacken 2006 b: pp. 10), ‘female genital mutilation’ and so called ‘honour killings’ (leaving an estimated 2000 women dead during the 1990s) are still widespread phenomena (ib.: p. 11). The associations combating this misery that were addressed under the first sub item have started successfully and have come a long way, yet there is still an incalculable time that will pass before a “rights-based approach” will be adopted on a significant level (Uwer 2005: p. 18).

5. Conclusion

Starting with a short regard to the external actors heavily influencing the civil society in Iraqi Kurdistan, the United States are probably best off adopting a strategy that, while they keep supporting the tremendous efforts outlined by associations in this paper, allows them to omit their direct penetration of civil society and leave the facilitation of this area to these very associations. As for international NGOs, there seem to be quite a number of substantial efforts that are worth being supported, and they go hand in hand with what derives from the conclusions gained by this research:

Being aware that also identities that appear ‘primordial’ are often subject to construction (as visible in Iraqi Kurdistan) underlines the task of supporting the non-partisan movements within civil society, i.e. those that are separated from both the KDP and the PUK and focus on the individual as the prime unit that has to be strengthened. This appears to be what Harriss, Stokke and Törnquist mean when they conclude that there cannot be an alternative to a “citizen based state and independent political vehicles” (Harriss/ Stokke/ Törnquist 2004: p. 15). Yet empowering the individual is strongly linked to ‘substantial democratisation’ reached through politics, as citizenship can be defined as granting citizens

“access to the public sphere and hold governments and state élites accountable” (Luckham et al 2003: p. 28). The issue of politicisation will be addressed in an instant.

Furthermore, the patron-client dimension strongly opposing progress in Iraqi Kurdistan's civil society cannot be reduced to 'tribal', 'ethnic' etc. links either. Instead, it has to be understood as a modern phenomenon, being an outcome of the region's oil dependent economy and sustained through the clientelistic bureaucratic apparatus. This causes in a 'vicious circle' that has yet to be stopped. In order to successfully do so, Iraqi Kurdistan desperately needs an economic development outside of the state-controlled oil sector. Again this hinges on destroying structures that keep individuals dependent from that very sector, respectively the pay-offs it produces that help the patrons to keep their clients subordinated.

The possibly most effective way to shift the developmental focus towards the individual is to further and deepen political contestation about claims and collective plans, ensuring that “people in general possess sufficient powers to make use of significant democratic rights and institutions”, as outlined by Törnquist (Harriss/ Stokke/ Törnquist 2004: p. 25), the core of democracy being “popular control of public affairs based on political equality” (Törnquist 2004: p. 201). Instead of fostering “de-politicization”, i.e. portraying political issues (e.g. territory, access to resources) as merely 'technical', citizens have to have the capability to actually make use of formal institutions (ib.: p. 201). In order to proceed in this direction, “non negotiable identity claims” (Luckham et al 2003: p. 38) have to be weakened if not altogether abolished. This might be a tough task, yet it can be achieved as it has been shown that these perceptions are constructed, not 'primordial'.

Although political parties have been a helpful tool in Indonesia, Porto Alegre or Kerala (India), the two major Kurdish parties rather seem to be part of the problem than being able to contribute to a solution (e.g. Mohan/ Stokke 2006: p. 14). If and when 'new' political parties might emerge, e.g. from progressive associations within civil society, seems unclear, if not unlikely under the present conditions and with regard the support KDP und PUK still enjoy with the population, despite the vocal criticism audible every now and then.

Two things that have to be kept in mind in terms of the recent development of both Iraq as a whole and Iraqi Kurdistan in particular is that first, “democratic efforts are always genuine, no matter how small” (Törnquist 2004: p. 205), and second, “democratic advance requires that the old forces should be defeated before they are accommodate” (ib.: p. 205). While Iraqi Kurdistan shows many signs of a hopeful progress, its development will also depend on the latter requirement, i.e. the overall security of the entire Iraqi state. A 'Lebanization' (Baker) of Iraq would be highly unlikely to leave Iraqi Kurdistan's civil society with the space actors were able to obtain so far and which they are constantly trying to enlarge.

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