THE CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN A STATE WITHOUT NATION

Master thesis Cultural Geography

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to look how the national identity of Kurdistan is discursively constructed on a government tourism website, identify what strategies may be employed for the national identities, and if the tourism industry is of importance in constructing the national identity. By using the framework of Wodak (2009) it was possible to employ a Critical Discourse Analysis to find how the Kurdish national identity is constructed. This research has contributed to the literature of how national identities are constructed, with a focus on nations without state and a perspective of tourism. This study has found that the main use of tourism and the tourism website of the Kurdish government is to construct a national identity for tourism purposes, which in turn can help advance the legitimacy of existence of Kurdistan as a state. In future research, it is recommended to use different sources in which Kurdish identity is described in order to see how context influences the framing of the Kurdish identity

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1. Defining the research problem

Tourism is a global industry that appeals to a broad audience as it gives individuals the opportunity to travel to a wide range of destinations and become involve in new experiences. New experiences can revolve around different cultures and learning how other people from different nations go about their day. Tourism has the effect of enhancing national identity, as shown in the research of Yang, French, Lee & Watabe (2020); Chinese tourists going on outbound tourism affirms and express the national identity through symbolic interaction between the Chinese tourists and the outside world (Yang, French, Lee, & Watabe, 2020). This research shows the example of tourism affecting the national identity from the perspective of a tourist, however, there is less research on the construction of national identity of a host community.

Through the lens of national identity, it is possible for tourists to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for a destination (White & Frew, 2011). Once planners and managers of a tourist destination knows how national identities can affect tourism numbers, they might be better equipped to promote and manage the destination and anticipate on the expectations of a potential visitor. However, when considering only the national identity of the tourist, it will only look at what can be changed from the demand side; it is therefore also important to look at the national identities of the host community, so planners and managers know what can be used for marketing. Literature regarding the importance and the construction of national identity in the tourism sector is missing. Literature surrounding the construction of national identity in nations without state is also missing.

The aim of this research will be to look how the national identity of Kurdistan is discursively constructed on a government tourism website, identify what strategies may be employed for the national identity, and if the national identity is of importance for the tourism industry in Kurdistan. The following central research question will be used to guide this research:

"How is national identity constructed through tourism in nation without state?"

To help answer this question, this research will also address the following sub questions:

1. What is the content of the national tourism site?
2. What strategies are used to construct the national identity?
3. What claims are made and how are they argued?

The objective of this research is to find how national identity is constructed through looking what aspects are used to construct the national identity for tourism purposes. Firstly, theories and concepts regarding tourism and national identity will be explored. Furthermore, a section will be dedicated to the theoretical framework of discursively constructing the national identity, and a concrete methodology will follow.

2. Main theory and concepts

In the following section, the theories and concepts will be explained to understand the notion of national identity and how tourism may be related to the construction of national identity. Firstly, the concept of identity will be explained, including the various understandings. Furthermore, the tourism industry will be explained in terms of relevance to the national identity.

2.1 Identity

Identity is a very complex notion, and many definitions exist in literature surrounding this notion. Identity is a concept that is generally understood as an understanding of who someone is, and who other people are, and reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and others. It is the understanding of "who we are". Klanderman and de Weerd (2000) distinguish identity from an individual personal level and a collective group level. The individual identity can also be distinguished into the personal identity, and the several social identities that a person may have. The *personal identity* refers to self-definition regarding to personal attributes while *social identity* regards the self-definition in terms of social category memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Fearon, 1999)

Collective identity concerns the identity that is shared by a group and is derived from members' common interests, experiences, and solidarity (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). Collective identity is created through an interactive, shared definition of the field of opportunities and constraints offered to collective action produced by several individuals, and this must be conceived as a process as it is constructed and negotiated by repeated activation of the relationships that link the individuals to groups. (Melucci, 1989, p. 793).

The identity of a nation begins with a shared belief in the legitimacy of the political system, whether or not the political system is democratic (Fukuyama, 2018). Through formal laws and institutions, this national identity can be embodied, which language or languages can be considered as the official ones, or the education of the country's past in schools (Fukuyama, 2018). The national identity also extends to what collective identity entails: culture and values. It consists of stories that people tell about themselves: what and why they celebrate, where they come from, shared historical memories and their expectations about what it takes to become a genuine member of their community (Smith R. M., 2015). National identity can be broadly defined as a collective form of identity that provides a basic understanding as well as a compass for individuals of a country to define and locate themselves in the world (McCrone & Bechhoefr, 2015)

Smith (1991) and Anderson (1983) formulated the two principal theories of national identity. The theory of Smith says that a strong sense of national identity can offer the means of defining and locating individual selves in the world, with the help of the collective personality and its distinctive culture (Smith A. D., 1991, p. 7). This concept highlights how people define themselves as individual person but are also members of a nation; national identity can provide a basic understanding and a compass for individuals so they can define and situate themselves in the world (McCrone & Bechhoefr, 2015).

Anderson (1983) views nations as imagined communities, where national identity hinges on the shared symbols and rituals of a country (Anderson, 1983). National identity is therefore an imagined construct because in most communities, no one knows each member: "it is imagined as a community because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 1983, pp. 6-7)

This research will combine the definitions given by Smith and Anderson for the understanding of national identity, which is the following: national identity is viewed as the result of a historical process, where histories and cultures are viewed as the pillars of a modern nation, in which the nation is conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship (Smith A. D., 1991; Anderson, 1983).

2.2 Tourism and national identity

Within society, people have been fascinated by the past, and have been drawn to make visits to sites that are related to the past. Tourism is a part of the process where societies can engage with and use the past (Harvey, 2001; Smith L. , 2006). Heritage is understood as the inherited past of a nation, and the role of heritage attractions have undergone a 'cultural turn' in recent tourism studies, as matters of identity have been put in the centre of research (Palmer, An ethnography of Englishness: experiencing identity through tourism, 2005; Pretes, 2003; Wearing, Stevenson, & Young, 2010). Heritage is considered to then be a cultural product with political and social functions, moreover, tourism is a way in which history and the past are appropriated and commodified for economic gain in a destination (Lowenthal, 1985; Light, 2015) It is argued that travel as well as going on vacation, are opportunities for vacationers for self-making, to define, express and possibly experiment with their own identities (Franklin, 2003).

The use of heritage in cultural tourism has been related to the formation of identity on numerous points; heritage in cultural tourism plays an important role for nation-building and creating national identities. The construction of national history partly involves identifying

places, sites, and landscapes that are significant to the nation, and making the wider population aware of these places (Light, 2015). Makers of national heritage sites sent messages to tourists as to why this site is considered national heritage, and how then the national identity is shaped among a diverse population (Pretes, 2003). The desire to represent memory through marking a 'place' is prevalent in all modern societies that have had conflict or tragic events (McDowell, 2016). When it comes to marketing a destination, culture can become the brand image of the destination, as said by Bruner (1987, p. 7) *"writing about your own culture is establishing one's ethnic identity".*

It is important to note that it is not enough for the public to know that these heritage sites and attractions exist, but that they need to visit them and see it for themselves. According to Smith (2006) the 'public', which can be passive spectators, should engage with the heritage in order for the discourse of heritage to be authorized (Smith L. , 2006). Promoting travel to places of national significance can lead to the discourse of heritage to be authorized and experienced and transform national significance to state ownership (Franklin, 2003; Urry & Larsen, 2011).

In the context of domestic tourism, individuals can make a connection to the wider social formation of the nation (Palmer, 1999; Park, 2010). It is argued that shared identity is often the official goal of countries that house many different cultures, so the urge to create a national identity is to overcome diversity and differences in the country; monuments can represent something that is shared by all citizens, which helps to "popularize a hegemonic national message of inclusion (Pretes, 2003, p. 127).

Tourism is a huge sector and driver for development which have resulted in cultural attractions and destination competing for tourists. Therefore, in such a highly competitive environment which is the tourism industry, in which destinations and nations compete for the tourists and the foreign income, national identity can play a significant role in strengthening in competitive position with the passing of time (White & Frew, 2011).

3. Theoretical framework

In 2009, Ruth Wodak published a book in researching the construction of national identity. This research focused on the construction of Austrian identity through a critical discourse analysis. The critical discourse analysis is used in various social science and humanities disciplines, focussing on the systemic linguistic theory formulated by Willliam Firth (Firth, 1957) and Halliday (Halliday, 1962) that drew upon Foucault's theory of discourse. While there are many explanations and types of discourse analysis, for the construction of national identity Wodak (2009) has used the Vienna school of Discourse Analysis that situates itself in the Critical Discourse analysis as well as the philosophical and sociological tradition of Critical Theory (Wodak, 2009).

The Critical Discourse Analysis has two tasks when revealing the relationship between linguistic means, forms and structures and concrete linguistic practice, as well as making the reciprocal relationship between discursive action and political and institutional structures transparent. The Viennese Critical Discourse Analysis places more emphasis on the second aspect, as they are more concerned with the establishment of linguistic relations between linguistic sub-systems and social structures (Wodak, 1997).

3.1 Wodak's dimensions of analysis

Exploring the interconnectedness of discursive practices in social structures, the principle of triangulation is employed by the Vienna school of Critical Discourse Analysis. The principle of triangulation is concerned with how discursive phenomenon are approached, from a variety of methodological and theoretical perspectives that are taken from various disciplines (Cicourel , 1969), In the study of Wodak (2009), the principle of triangulation was implied by using various methods of data collection and the analysis of different sets of data including political speeches, articles, interviews, and focus groups. For the methodology of Wodak's research, the approach was to use a plurality of dimensions of analysis:

3.1.1 Content

Within this theme, Wodak distinguishes five major areas:

- The linguistic construction of **the homo Austracius** is concerned with the national mentality and national behavioural dispositions.

- The narration and confabulation of **a common political past** revolves around found myths and myths of origin. It also looks at the political successes, defeats, and crises.
- The linguistic construction of a **common culture** looks at topics such as language, religion, and arts.
- The linguistic construction of a **common political present and future** is concerned with citizenship, political achievements, and current and future conflicts in terms with politics.
- The linguistic construction of a **national body** looks at physical national artefacts and landscapes.

3.1.2 Strategies

The other dimension of analysis are strategies on how national identities are discursively constructed. Strategies generally denote a more or less accurate plan to achieve a certain objective, whether that is political, psychological, or so on. Framing events or things a certain way is a strategy to push a belief of how certain events have played out. Wodak (2009) has distinguished multiple macro-strategies that can be employed when discursively constructing national identity.

- **Constructive strategies** attempt to construct and establish a certain national identity by promoting unification, identification, and solidarity. They also attempt to create this national identity by differentiation.
- **Destructive strategies** aim to dismantle certain existing parts of the national identity construct.
- **Strategies of justification** look at problematic actions or events that happened in the past to construct the narrative of national history.
- **Strategies of transformation** aim to transform the already existing national identity into parts of another identity.

Besides these macro strategies, the strategies of assimilation and dissimilation also occur frequently in discourse. The strategy of assimilation is concerned with the linguistic creation of similarity regarding temporal, interpersonal or spatial concerns regarding the thematic dimensions. On the contrary, strategies of dissimilation create linguistic differences to the same dimensions (Matouschek, Wodak, & Januschek, 1995; Matouschek & Wodak, 1995).

3.1.3 Forms and realization

The last dimension of analysis is the forms and means of realization. This dimension is looked at by Wodak (2009) to see the linguistic means that are involved in discursively construct the national identity. This part of analysis was used to analyse behaviour and speech during focus groups and personal interviews. The most important syntactical and lexical units that were defined by Wodak (Wodak, Discursive construction of national identity, 2009) are the following:

- Personal reference (personal pronouns, generic terms, quantifiers)
- Spatial reference (toponyms, adverbs of places, spatial references through persons)
- Temporal reference (adverbs of times, temporal conjunctions)

3.2 Identity as a cultural artefact

Tourism is an industry in which culture, among other things, can become a product that a destination can offer to tourists. The commodification of culture will hold certain aspects of an identity of the destination that is shared with tourists in forms of products: an identity marker. "Cultural artefacts are unique manifestations of intellectual creativity imbued with, among other attributed, aesthetic and / or spiritual value" (Stumpf, 2003, p. 41). The culture and identity of Kurdistan will be treated as a cultural artefact, like the research of Picard (1997), has done. This research will in turn not focus on the construction of tourism in Kurdistan, rather it is to see how national identity is discursively constructed through a tourism site, in which Kurdistan offers their national identity imbued in cultural artefacts. In turn it will lead to the expression of the Kurdish identity when looking at what is offered to tourists.

4. Kurdistan

As mentioned, this research will focus on Kurdistan, a state without nation. A stateless nation is a group of people that share a common culture and are occupying a particular territory while it does not operate as an independent political unit with a defined, permanently populated territory and does not have sovereign control over its affairs, whether it being internal or foreign like other fully sledged states can (Baldacchino, 2002). Kurdistan is the most known nationless state, as it has between 30 million to 45 million people who deem themselves as Kurds. Kurdistan is a transborder stateless nation, occupying more than two states. The region is in the mountainous area and parts of Kurdistan are located within Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Armenia.

Throughout time, Kurdistan has faced many conflicts. Conflicts such as the banishment of Kurdish language and literature in Turkey, or the Anfal campaign against Kurdish civilians, and the terrorist threat by the Islamic State. Since then, the Iraqi part of Kurdistan has been the only region to gain autonomy; since 2005 Kurdistan was recognized by Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) was recognized as the region's institution.

Since Kurdistan has become an autonomous state, the need for their own development were paired with questions about strategies on how to develop the region. Kurdistan has faced so many conflicts that governments in transitional times have faced difficulties adapting to this, as said by the old president Jalal Talabani: "We came from the mountains, we were trained as fighters, and now, we had to run cities"[1]. Among the strategies that were employed, a tourism policy was also developed. For this research, it is relevant to see how a stateless nation develops their national identity that is used for tourism purposes. As Kurdistan is recognized and autonomous only in Iraq, it is relevant to see how the past and present are identified in Iraqi-Kurdistan, and how the common culture is defined for tourism purposes as the other regions of Kurdistan are unable to do this. This research will focus on Kurdistan in Iraq to see how national identity is discursively constructed and reproduced to emphasize their national uniqueness (Wodak, 2009). The tourism industry is similar in the sense that it will highlight the uniqueness of a destination, in this case a national uniqueness, but for competitive reason. The national identity is expressed through symbol and discourses and will help determine the significance of nationhood (du Cros, 2004).

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[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWYslKbs01A (timestamp: 18:00-19:00)

5. Methodology

Kurdistan has been a nation that has faced a lot of conflict over the past years, and through the analysis of the site, which have been developed by the government of Iraqi-Kurdistan, it is possible to see how national identity has been discursively constructed. To answer the central research question, a critical discourse analysis will be done to analyse how the national identity has been discursively constructed. The data that was collected will be analysed with the help of the framework made by Wodak (2009). Content will be presented, following with what is said in the content, and what strategies are employed. Claims are looked at in terms of how these claims are argued.

5.1 Data collection

The data that was used for the discourse analysis were gathered from the government-official tourism website of Kurdistan[2]. This website is a relevant source as it is a site made by government officials, ministers appointed by the government that are known as the Board of Tourism, and through what is said on the site, a perception is made around national identity by the Board of Tourism, which can have political implications. The narrative that is told on this website is used to attract tourists to visit Kurdistan and inform them about different aspects of this nation. However, the destination is made into a product, which is marketed and consumed; by analysing this website, it is possible to see how not only the national identity of Kurdistan is being framed and narrated, but also marketed for international purposes. The site, which is targeted towards tourists, gives implications about the most important and worthy attractions, sites, and events that tourists need to see. This will give an image of Kurdistan presented by the Board of Tourism and in turn also the Kurdish government. Besides content-related data, it will also be looked at context related data, who created the site, and during what time, and even if the site is still up to date. Due to the triangulation approach that will be used, different aspects from the site will be gathered that are in line with answering each sub-research question.

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[2] Unbelievable Kurdistan - Official Tourism Site of Kurdistan | (gov.krd) (Accessed between April and June 2024)

5.1.1 Content

One of the dimensions of the discourse analysis is the content, and with the following methodology, it will try to answer the following question research question:

What is the content of the tourism site?

There will be five themes analysed based on Wodak's research and methodology of discursive construction of national identity. The themes are the following:

1. The linguistic construction of the homo nationalis
2. The narration of a common political past
3. The linguistic construction of a common culture
4. The linguistic construction of a common political present and future
5. The linguistic construction of a national body

While Wodak (2009) has used the homo austracius as a theme to analyse the content, the definition of Homo Austracius is not clear to me, and further definitions or explanations of this concept are not found. Therefore, rather than use this theme, the concept of homo nationalis will be used. Homo nationalis is characterized by a strong resurgence of the nation-state political affiliation and national ideology and is strongly cultural in nature (Cicchelli & Octobre, 2022). This concept will be used to see if a national ideology is apparent, as tourism is already strongly cultural in nature.

5.1.2 Strategy

Within the context of the tourism site, and the use of national identity to attract tourists to Kurdistan, the strategies that will be looked at when analysing the tourism site are the strategy of emphasis on sameness and emphasis of difference to answer the following sub-research question:

What strategies are used on the tourism site to construct the national identity?

For both these strategies of linguistic analysis, the strategies for their social functions will also be looked at, which are constructive, destructive, transformative, or justifying.

5.1.3 Arguments

The claims made regarding the national identity of Kurdistan should be connected to arguments of this claim and are content-related warrants. If there are no arguments to justify this claim, it is difficult to establish conclusions about the national identity. Through the tourism site, claims will be looked at that are mentioned, and will try to find the arguments that justify the argument transitioning to the claim (Kienpointner, 1992). This will be done to answer the following research question:

What claims are made and how are they argued?

5.2 The tourism website of Kurdistan

The tourism website consists of many other pages. Pages such as **about Kurdistan**, **destinations, things to do,** or **where to stay** will lead the visitor of the site to information that they find useful or may need.

The page **about Kurdistan** tells more about the region, what the climate is like, the history of the region, religions and heritage, and factual numbers such as tourist numbers, the tourism plan and consulates.

The page **destinations** will redirect the visitor of the page to the four provinces and one administration of Kurdistan: Erbil province, Sulaimani province, Duhok province, Halabja province, and the Garmian administration. For each province, it is also possible to choose a city within the province. Once you click on a city or a province, a page will show up explaining the highlights for the province, but also for the possible activities and attractions in that city or province that a potential tourist can use to determine where to go

Where to stay will give many options for hotels, apartments and motels, and complexes. These can be filtered on the city or province of interest. While for some of these accommodations extra information is given regarding price, number of rooms, etc. With all the accommodation options given across the whole of Iraqi-Kurdistan, there are over 300 options that a potential tourist can book.

Things to do give the visitor of the site an overview of potential activities and attractions for tourists to spend their time. There are 9 categories of activities and attractions that are distinguished by the Board of Tourism. In table 1 it is described how many of the attractions there are mentioned for each category, and what is included for each category.

Category	Number of attractions	Mentioned
Well-being & spa	6	Resorts, rivers, mineral waters
Arts and cultures	7	Museums abouts Kurdish civilizations, citadels, handicraft gallery
History and heritage	80	Mosques, monasteries, caves, sculptures, ancient villages, bridges, cannons, cemeteries, old functional buildings, shrines, old palaces, temples, excavation, tombs, city remains, monuments
Active and outdoors	16	Safari, amusement parks, swimming pools, sports centres, stadiums
Parks & attractions	112	Zoos, resorts, (mountain) parks, recreation grounds, wells and springs, valleys, waterfalls, mountains, dams, tourist towns, caves, gardens, orchards, lakes, historical towns, forests, tunnels
Food and drinks	167	Bazaars, restaurants, malls, cafes, bars
Shopping	34	Malls, bazaars, city halls, gallery, markets, supermarkets, children's store
Tours	116	Guides, tours, airlines, travel and tourism centres, airways, travel agencies, companies (?), transport services
Visit	14	Touristic towns, resorts, old towns, unspoiled districts, cities, parks, administrative cities, caves

Table 1: Overview of sites and attractions

Under the page **contact** is a contact form that can be filled out if a visitor of the site wants to contact the Board of Tourism. Information is given regarding the personnel responsible for different topics within tourism: the general board, board members for tourism within each province, multiple managers for different topics including engineering, legal affairs, marketing, etc. **Upcoming events** which need to keep potential tourists up to date, date back to 2015 as the latest event.

Other widgets that are available on the website are **tourism instruction, live stream, weather update, Kurdistan videos,** and **press release.** From these different widgets, many are outdated and will redirect the visitor of the website to an outdated website that is not relevant to the visitor, an error page, or a page that is not finished. The **press release** widget is one of the two that works, the other being the **Kurdistan videos,** but these are not relevant to non-Arabic speakers. The **press release** showcases many visitations of the Board of Tourism to other countries, but also welcoming representatives from countries, companies, and universities to Kurdistan. The latest press release was published on 11th of April 2022.

5.3 Ethical considerations

For this research a critical discourse analysis will be held on different categories of a public government site. Therefore, to my understanding the need to look on how the data that is being collected and is being stored is not of relevance. For the analysis of the writers of the site, this research will look at the function of the people and regard them by name where deemed necessary.

5.4 Positionality

As this research adopts a framework of Critical Discourse Analys, and therefore is qualitative research, it is important to consider the role of the researcher itself in the research. The researcher is part of the social world that is studies and can therefore not be separated from the personal background (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). A qualitative method for research means that the results can be interpreted differently depending on the researcher and their position.

For this research, I would like to reflect on my position as a researcher. Firstly, I must reflect that I have a privileged position in terms of being able to go to a university that makes it possible for me to think of this subject without any concerns. It is also important to reflect that I have a background in tourism studies, meaning that I will look at the content more critically than most people will, as they are tourists willing to visit Kurdistan. My position in society as a person with a migrant history also has shaped the way how I look at the world, including this research and tourism site.

6. Results

In this section, the content of the tourism website created by the Board of Tourism will be described and analysed with the use of the framework by Wodak (2009). Before diving into the content of the site, the creators of the site will be analysed to create context of the content available. This analysis will also provide the different strategies used and claims that are made with the arguments. A more detailed argument scheme is provided in the annex.

6.1 The Board of Tourism

The Board of Tourism of Kurdistan-Iraq have created the official government tourism website to market and inform Kurdistan to tourists. They are tasked with managing travel and tourism within the Kurdistan region as well as introducing Kurdistan as a destination to the world[3].

Amal Jalal is the head of the General Board of Tourism that is part of the Ministry of Municipalities and Tourism. This ministry is part of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) which is the Parliamentary Democracy within the federated republic of Iraq. The ministry is responsible for infrastructure for Kurdistan, but also for supporting and enabling the development of tourism.

The website was created to realize the vision of the Board of tourism: Kurdistan will become a global tourist destination, characterized by the natural beauty and the authenticity of their culture. By developing an administrative framework for marketing and planning the sector and strengthening the partnerships with the private sector and local communities, they hope to realize this vision. Preserving and restoring tourist attractions and region's heritage is one of the main objectives to develop the region as a tourist destination. The Board of Tourism believes that preserving and restoring tourist attractions and region's heritage is the main objective to develop the region as a tourist destination, to create a base to have tourist learn their culture [4].

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[3] Official Site of Board of Tourism of Kurdistan - Iraq (gov.krd) (Accessed 11/5/2024)
[4] Official Site of Board of Tourism of Kurdistan - Iraq (gov.krd) (Accessed 11/5/2024)

6.2 Tourism site as stepping stone

When looking at table 1 of all the activities and attractions mentioned on the site, it can be noticed that **food and drinks** have the most mentioned attractions, and **tours** being the second category with the most mentioned attractions. What is observed is that these categories are mentioning every business, no matter how small they seem and across all the region of Iraqi-Kurdistan, for these categories. Restaurants, bars, or cafes are summed up by the site; while for some there is a description regarding type of food that can be expected and the times of service, most of the businesses that are mentioned regarding food and drinks do not have a description. This is also the case for **tours,** where there are a lot of touring companies that can help you further. There are also companies mentioned only by name, but without description on what their purpose or business is; contact information is also missing for some businesses which makes it difficult to establish for what purpose they are mentioned on the website. Lastly, the page **where to stay** is structured similarly; all accommodation options across Iraqi-Kurdistan are mentioned, with for some functional elements are described such as the opening times, number of rooms, and number of stars.

6.2.1 Food and drinks

The list of businesses regarding food and drinks is part of the construction of the common culture, how everyday life is in Kurdistan and how there are many cultures, cuisines, and people living together in Kurdistan. *"Food in Kurdistan is loved by locals and foreigners alike"*[5], is the claim when looking at all the restaurants on the site. The strategy used with this saying is the constructive strategy: it promotes the unification of many different cuisines as the Kurdish identity is linked to the cuisine and creates solidarity with the locals and foreigners by saying how the food is loved by everyone. This is also in line with the strategy of assimilation as this strategy is concerned with similarity with the food in spatial and interpersonal concerns; it is loved by everyone, no matter what your background is: the food in Kurdistan is represented as part of the culture and identity of Kurdish people. The tours page is vaguer, as it mentions some of the big businesses such as airlines and travel companies, as well as advice for using local taxi businesses, but do not use these businesses to help construct the national identity.

6.2.2 Where to stay

For accommodation, it is hard to determine whether the businesses that are mentioned are used for constructing the national identity. For all accommodation types there are no description on the tourism site as to why the visitor should go there. Hotels, motels, apartments, and complexes are regarded as a place to sleep when visiting Kurdistan, but not regarded as

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[5] Food and Drink (gov.krd) (Accessed 11/5/2024)

a place to learn more about the everyday life of the Kurds, the common culture. Mentioning resorts that are in the mountains or at rural communities can help establish the base of Kurdish identity: how a local farmer lives, and how a tourist stays at a local farm, can teach the tourist more about the ways of an ordinary farmer. In fact, rural areas appeal to tourists because of the mystique associated with these areas, as they have a distinct cultural, historic, ethnic, and geographic characteristic which make rural tourism a good tool for development (Edgell & Harbaugh, 1993). While there are few complexes that are based in rural areas, it is not mentioned by the tourism site as to why visitors should go there. Marketing the authenticity of such destinations can help construct the base of a culture and therefore the national identity.

While these lists of businesses have the potential to help create the identity of the Kurds, such as different cuisines and rural stays, these lists of businesses are mostly used to redirect the visitor of the site to the business in question; through the contact information that can be provided the visitor must then establish contact themselves, but also need to inform themselves on why they should go these businesses. The list for businesses functions as a stepping stone for the visitor of the website rather than an establishment of culture and national identity.

6.3 Nature is a friend and ally

After the two largest categories, the category **parks & attractions** has a lot of sites mentioned. When looking at the attractions and parks that are mentioned, it will become clear that nature and the mountains are essential to the Kurdish national identity. For each park, resort, or recreation ground, a description is given as to why tourists need to visit these sites; they are untouched, extremely beautiful, and important for the Kurds during times of conflict. One example gives a good representation on how the other natural attractions are framed:

"Just one kilometre from Pavel waterfall and 57 kilometres west of Sulaymaniyah is this beautiful area. The caves were the headquarters of Voice of Kurdistan radio and the Kurdish revolution in 1961. They were used again for shelter during later revolutions. It is inside a vast valley with a river flowing through, shadowed by immense trees and plants of all kinds. The Pavel waterfall can be viewed by the eastern part of the river. A resort with modern facilities has been built for tourists who visit this area"[6].

(Parks & Attractions)

Natural landscapes are described with much detail and with subjective adjectives such as *beautiful*, adding the facilities that tourists can use make for an accessible and must-see attraction for tourists looking for a place to escape the cities, while also getting to know the historical value of these landscapes. What natural landscapes, resorts that reside within the mountains, recreation grounds where nature is part of the landscapes are framed, is the linguistic construction of the national body. Not only do descriptions such as the example above describe why tourists should visit, it also shows the added value of history to these attractions; they have been used in times of need by the people, and will be appreciated by the Kurdish people as a natural space, but also as a safe haven, and because of the history of usage by the Kurds, the mountains are claimed by the Kurds.

The way that natural landscapes are described by the Board of Tourism shows that the Kurdish identity related to nature and landscapes. It shows how the natural attractions have helped build the national identity and protect this identity in times of need. By showing these on the website to potential visitors, it becomes clear that they are part of the national identity. The use of natural landscapes can then be the linguistic construction of a common political past and national body. On the page informing about the **land & environment** in Kurdistan, the following statement can be found:

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[6] Chami Razan (gov.krd) (Accessed 7/5/2024)

"Visiting Kurdistan for the first time you will notice that its most prominent geophysical feature is mountains. There is a saying among Kurds: 'no friends but the mountains' referring to oppressing states/neighbours and dictators surrounding the region

The mountains are very important to Kurds, they have not only shaped the history, people, tradition and culture; they have also been used more practically as hide outs for Kurdish Peshmerga's and guerillas fighting oppressing regimes"[7].

(Land & Environment)

The claim of the importance of the mountains for the Kurds is instantly explained, and therefore argued, as to why this claim is made. The Board of Tourism also considers the natural landscape to have shaped Kurdistan as the region it now is, with examples of shelter that the mountain has provided in times of oppression.

There are two strategies determined when looking at how natural attractions are framed, a mix of constructive and justifying strategies, with a strategy of dissimilation. The mountains have a function of unifying and creating solidarity between the people that have been oppressed; the mountains was a way to escape for those who were familiar with the mountains. A differentiation is also made to non-Kurds: other countries, and those who were not familiar with the mountains did not use the landscape for military actions. The use of the mountains which was done by the Kurds also looks at the events and problematic actions that have happened in the past to construct the narrative of the national history of Iraqi-Kurdistan.

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[7] Land & Environment (gov.krd) (Accessed 7/5/2024)

6.4 Time will tell

For this research, the definition of national identity was made using Anderson and Smith their understanding of national identity. How modern societies are built, is with the use of history as a pillar to build comradeship on. Kurdistan showcases and has a long history, and by using this history, whether it being bad or good, it can build a narrative in which a national identity can build upon. Analysing how heritage and history is framed can show how national identity is constructed.

Continuing to the page **heritage & history.** This page shows all kinds of different attractions that are significant to the Kurdish history and is deemed as heritage. Some of the attractions that are mentioned in **arts & culture** are also mentioned within the page of **heritage & history.** The variety in attractions within this category is very wide. One thing that can be noticed when reading the description of the attraction is that there is almost no mention of a war or conflict that Kurdistan has endured. Rather, descriptions use words such as "historic" or give the attraction meaning by telling the age of the site. The way of not mentioning war or conflict-ridden pasts to the monuments is the strategy of transformation; the Kurdish history is already known for the atrocities that the Kurdish people have endured. By highlighting the heritage that is not related to those atrocities, the Board of Tourism can transform the national identity to the cultural values and history rather than the conflicts. The following example captures how many of the cultural sites are framed:

"Erbil city is the capital of Kurdistan Region Government, the oldest city with continuous residentially. This city is regarded as one of the most deep-rooted Governorate in the area, its history begins 6000 prior to A.D. The city is a key element for eastern part and Kurdistan Region defining" [8].

(Erbil province)

"Kurdish people have upheld the tradition of carpet weaving" [9].

(Kurdish Arts and Crafts)

While the conflict is not mentioned for the cultural sites, under the page of **traditions and heritage** it is acknowledged how conflict has affected these sites:

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[8] Erbil Province (gov.krd) (Accessed 8/5/2024)
[9] Kurdish Art and Crafts (gov.krd) (Accessed 8/5/2024)

"This [Kurdish] heritage has been subject to injustices, neglect and repression, or has been eclipsed by other cultures. Important components of the Kurds' original cultural heritage have disappeared or have been destroyed"[10].

(Traditions and Heritage)

Two attractions that stand out on the list of **heritage & history,** is the Red Security Museum and the Martyrs monument. From the 80 attractions that are mentioned, there are only two attractions or sites that relate to the political defeats and crises that Kurdistan had faced, showcasing the strategy of transformation that the Board of Tourism is adopting. The following description is found for the Martyrs monument:

"Halabja massacre [i]s a heinous crime against humanity and General Kurds private, [w]here he used chemical weapons [d]uring the bombing of Halabja area in 16/03/1988.

This massacre committed by the Baathist regime chauvinist [is] brutal [a]nd claimed the lives of more than 5 thousands of martyrs and 10 thousands wounded, [a]s well as the destruction of the whole town and [has] burn[ed] [the] green [fully] dry. and still Omar Khaor Family.

[the] Martyrs' Cemetery and [the] Memorial Stain [is] well established in the archives of that wretched system[.] Imagine where all live for that crime[.] Panorama [a]nd details of a museum and national memory [is] [w]hat draws the attention of many visitors and guests.

Attend this memorial every year [with] thousands of local visitors, [f]oreigners and Arabs [t]o see those scenes that perpetuate these tragic anniversary"[11] .

(Halabja province)

This description is used to construct the common political past; this event that killed many is part of the defeats of the Kurds. The Martyrs monument is seen as heritage that plays an important role for nation-building and creating national identities. The cemetery is used to commemorate the fallen, but also to remember the crimes that were committed against humanity, and especially the Kurdish people. By publishing this as a site of heritage and history, the Board of Tourism makes the wider population more aware of these places, as the description invites foreigners to visit the anniversary. How this memorial is held is in line with what McDowell (2016) concludes: there is a desire to represent memory which is done through marking a 'place', which is prevalent in societies that endured conflicts or tragic events. The Board of Tourism inviting foreigners to come and attend the memorial is also in line with the theory of Smith (2006) as the 'public' should and have the possibility to engage with the

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[10] Traditions and Heritage (gov.krd) (Accessed 7/5/2024)
[11] The Martyrs Monument (gov.krd) (Accessed 7/5/2024)

heritage, and ultimately can authorize the discourse of the heritage which for this monument is that the Kurds have endured hardship in the form of a chemical attack.

One thing to notice about the description is that the story, written in English, has many grammatical errors. This monument is one of the most important displays of history, and therefore it would be expected to have the description be perfectly sound for visitors to know what happens here.

Religious sites are also mentioned often, and when mentioned, they are described to be also very old with sites dating back to 1220 A.D. The few museums mentioned all relate to the history of the civilization of Kurdistan and its related culture; folkloric tales and antiques showcase the origin of Kurdistan. The use of attractions is therefore deemed to be a linguistic construction of a common political past. The use of museums, the ages of certain attractions and the prevalence of the age of these attractions all showcase how Kurdistan has a rich history. Myths of how Kurdistan has originated as a group of people can be told when visiting these sites. Besides the construction of a common political past, the common culture is also prevalent with some attractions. The marketing of many religious components, whether they are temples, monasteries, mosques, and other sites, showcase the variety of religion but also the religious tolerance of Kurdistan.

The sites and attractions that are marketed, except the museums, are also stand-alone sites. There is no red line in how the sites are marketed; each site or attraction has its own story that contributes to the Kurdish identity, but there is no story that tells the Kurdish identity as a whole.

6.5 Diversity as an aspect of national identity

The definition of national identity that is used for this research also includes culture as the pillar of national identity in a modern society. The diversity of cultures, and the inclusion of sites and attractions of different cultures makes for a national identity: the tolerant and welcoming Kurds.

The Board of Tourism uses the diversity and tolerance of Kurdistan to attract foreigners to visit the region. The claim of being tolerant and diverse is partly argued with the example of the political environment of the KRG:

"The current coalition consists of several political parties that reflect the diversity of the Region's population, which includes Chaldeans, Assyrians, Syriacs, Turkmen, Yazidis, Arabs and Kurds living together in harmony"[12].

(The Kurdistan region in brief)

The acknowledgement of diversity in the region is also found when looking at heritage sites and attractions; many of these sites relate to different religions and histories from the people living in the Kurdistan region. The use of religious sites of multiple religions can be seen as an argument to prove the claim made by the Board of Tourism in where Kurdistan is deemed as a tolerant region to visit. Many of this can be found when describing the religions and religious tourism in Kurdistan:

"Kurds are tolerant in general and known for their respect for other cultures and religion".

"The coexistence of different religious and ethnic groups in Kurdistan Region, paired with its security and stability, has helped the religious tourism sector develop by attracting a large and increasing number of religious tourists from around the world. While the existence of many ethnic and religious groups in the Region gives colour, variety and an image of multicultural identity locally, it has also been a major attraction for foreign visitors"[13]

(Religious tourism in Kurdistan)

These claims that are made regarding tolerance and diversity are backed up with numbers and facts. Looking at the political present of Kurdistan, as the coalition government consists of several political parties that reflects the Region's population. The coalition includes Chaldeans, Assyrians, Syriacs, Turkmen, Yazidis, and Kurds, claimed by the Board of Tourism to be living together "in harmony": *"The KRG provides a stable security situation – not a single coalition*

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[12] The Kurdistan Region in Brief (gov.krd) (Accessed 9/5/2024)
[13] Religious tourism in Kurdistan gov.krd) (Accessed 10/5/2024)

soldier has lost their life, nor a single foreigner has been kidnapped in the area administered by the KRG"[14].

On the tourism site it is prevalent that the tolerance of diversity and diversity is used, it is not used only as a marketing strategy so tourists may feel safe to visit, but also to construct their national identity, the construction of common culture to be precise.

The strategy that is employed is the strategy of dissimilation, in which the Board of Tourism compares it to the nearby countries: Kurdistan is a tolerant region where people can express themselves in any language they desire, and have the religious freedom:

> *"Arabic is also an official language and is widely spoken or understood. The Kurdistan Regional Government promotes linguistic diversity and rights, and schools have been established that teach mainly in Assyrian Neo-Aramaic, Chaldean Neo-Aramaic, Turkmen and Arabic"[15].*

(Language)

> *"The Kurdistan Regional Government protects people's freedom to practice their religion and promotes inter-faith tolerance"[16].*

(Religion)

> *"The Kurdistan Region has a population of more than 5 million. In these past years, the population has gone up to almost 7 million due to violence in Iraq and Syria. The KRG currently shelters millions of refugees"[17].*

(Our people)

Kurdish people have faced the banishment of their language in Turkey, and in Iraq have faced the massacre of Saddam Hussein in the 1980s. The strategy of dissimilation is used to compare their beliefs, norms and values, and behaviour towards foreigners to how the Kurds have been treated in the past and are still treated in other regions of Kurdistan. The use of how Kurdistan treats the people living in the region is a strategy of justification, in which Kurdistan uses the problematic past that Kurdistan has faced to construct not only the national history, but the present and future of how they will treat these instances.

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[14] The Kurdistan Region in Brief (gov.krd) (Accessed 9/5/2024)
[15] Language (gov.krd) (Accessed 10/5/2024)
[16] Religion (gov.krd) (Accessed 11/05/2024)
[17] Our people (gov.krd) (Accessed 11/05/2024)

7. Discussion

In this chapter, the results will be discussed with theory discussed in previous chapters. Firstly, it will discuss how the Kurdish national identity is constructed by comparing it to the research of Wodak (2009) and discuss observations regarding to strategies employed on the tourism site. Additionally, this chapter will also discuss how the tourism industry is used in Kurdistan, and how the national identity is observed. Lastly, the academic significance of this research will be discussed.

7.1 Discursive construction of national identity

In the research of Wodak (2009) it is found that national identities are generated and reproduced through discourse: the discursive constructs of national identities emphasize the national uniqueness and uniformity within a nation, while tending to ignore the differences within that same nation. It is also assumed that the discursive construction of national identity is constructed on discourses of differences with countries that exhibit similarities (Wodak, 2009). In the case of Kurdistan's representation on the government tourism site, it is observed that uniformity within the nation is as important as emphasizing the differences of various groups and their uniqueness within the Kurdish region; uniformity is gained by emphasizing the differences of Kurdistan and in turn create a tolerant region. This finding in this research can lead to the question if embracing the diversity is necessary to claim the existence of Kurdistan as a state. This results in the following assumption of Wodak in which the national identity discursively constructs differences with other countries that are most like Kurdistan: Kurdistan is emphasizing on the tolerance and welcoming of diverse groups of people, which is in contrast with neighboring countries.

The strategy of celebrating and highlighting the diversity of Kurdistan, in which the Board of Tourism represents Kurdistan as a tolerant region can also be seen as a strategy of pushing that tolerance onto the inhabitants; this to withhold ethnic unrest. According to Wodak (2009), there is no such thing as one national identity, but rather different identities that are discursively constructed according to context which relate to the degree of public exposure, the setting, the topic, and the audience to whom it is addressed. This research arrives to a similar conclusion: Kurdistan does not only have one identity. Some of the identities within Kurdistan are considered vulnerable, and the number of identities can even lead to conflicts and strains. The two main parties in Kurdistan fit the mold of secular national movements, and if ethnic groups will be pitted against each other because of regional conflict, the Kurdish relationships with Turkey, Iran, and the United States will become strained (Jalal & Ahram, 2021, p. 405). The strategy of using diversity can be to not only market Kurdistan as a tolerant region, but also to

push this tolerance onto the inhabitants. Furthermore, the assumption of different identities that are discursively constructed to each context is something that is less observed in this research; the source used for this research to find how Kurdish identity is constructed is presented by the government – the Board of Tourism – meaning that there is no other construction available to see if and how contexts influence the constructed national identity.

The thematic content of discourses of the Austrian national identity were related to the construction of a common past, present and future; a common culture; a common territory; and the concept of *homo nationalis* (Wodak, 2009). While most of the findings are also observed in the study for Kurdish identity, the concept of *homo nationalis* is less apparent on the tourism website. While the national identity of Kurdistan is strongly cultural in nature, it also is tolerant in nature for different things, relating to religion, groups of people, etc. The construction of a common past, present and future; a common culture and a common territory is found a lot throughout the entire website and is in line with that assumption that national identity is related to those topics.

7.2 Kurdistan as a tourism destination

The use of tourism and the tourism website of the Kurdish government can be explained as a tool to construct an identity of Kurdistan to advance their legitimacy to existence as a state. If more tourists are attracted to Kurdistan as a region, and they notice the significant difference between the Iraqi identity and the Kurdish identity, it becomes easier to distinguish the Kurdish identity when compared to other identities. In the commercial perspective, tourism sells the commodified product of culture and national identity; the Kurdish identity that is presented by the Board of Tourism is a product that differs from the tourism product from other destinations. The marketing of attractions relating to the Kurdish identity gives the Kurdish Regional Government and the Board of Tourism the power to steer how the Kurdish identity is framed, and in turn defines the national identity to advance the legitimacy of Kurdistan as a state.

When marketing the sites of oppression and violence in Kurdistan, the Board of Tourism is inviting visitors to come and see, remember but also to authorize the discourse of history and the national identity at certain attractions and sites which put the focus on this history. This finding is in line with the findings of Smith (2006) which discuss that having people see it for themselves is also the authorization of the discourse of heritage. However, on the tourism website, emphasis is not put on this history of Kurdistan regarding violence and conflict, but more on the history of how the region has developed and originated. The visitor has a responsibility to know about the violent history of Kurdistan, rather than that the Board of Tourism educates the visitor. A reason for this strategy could be that the Kurdish region in Iraq does have political power, while the other parts of Kurdistan do not have this power: putting

too much emphasis on the unfair treatments Kurds are still enduring can lead to a strained relationship between the Kurds in Iraq and the neighbouring countries.

The promotion of attractions related to nature, which were also used for military operations gives a sense of community identity and a heightened sense of linking culture to local environments are created. These conclusions are similar to the findings of Ramos, Stoddart & Chaffe (2016) who have found that local communities value the cultural showcasing of their communities and history (Ramos, Stoddart, & Chafe, 2016). Besides tourism increasing a sense of cultural pride, tourism is also a tool to enhance the economic development in Kurdistan; the marketing of a tolerant and diverse Kurdistan, presented by the Board of Tourism, makes the cultural product that tourism offers more appealing.

Tourism has many functions within Kurdistan. As discussed in research regarding tourism in developing countries, tourism is a tool to help the region develop economically; this sector is accessible for inhabitants to work in, as education is not a prerequisite. Furthermore, tourism also spreads awareness of the history and culture of Kurdistan, a conclusion that is similar to the findings of Light (2015) and McDowell (2016). Additionally, the Kurdish history of conflict and violence has shaped the national identity, but the national identity encompasses more than only violence: tolerance and nature are also an essential part of the Kurdish identity.

7.2.1 COVID-19

In 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic has globally halted the tourism sector; restrictions on flying and the need for social distancing to keep others from harm has significantly affected the industry with a 60-80% decline on global scale (UNWTO, 2020). Like other tourism destinations, Kurdistan was forced to take measures to halt the spread of the virus. From 2023 it was necessary for Chinese tourists to have a negative PCR 72 hours in advance; further measures that were taken by the government of Iraqi-Kurdistan is not known.

The halt of the tourism sector because of the pandemic explains why the Kurdish tourism site has not been updated since 2020. The halt of tourism globally may have resulted in trying to diversify the market which is not depended on tourists visiting Kurdistan. One thing to note is that there is another tourism site for Kurdistan available which seems more up to date; it is not known who the makers are of the site, and it is less extensive in regards of details than the one used in this research.

7.3 Academic significance and importance of research study

This research study has contributed to the literature of how national identities are constructed, with a focus on nations without state and a perspective of tourism. It showcases the importance of highlighting attributes in a region, which are unique compared to other surrounding countries, to attract tourism. This research has found that the goal of the Board of Tourism site is not to only attract tourists for economic gain, but also use tourism as a tool to advance the legitimacy of the region as a nation-state with their own culture, history, norms and values. Most tourism research relating to the national identity would look at the pull-factors of an already existing national identity. This research has turned it around as there was no definitive identity of Kurdistan, and it is difficult to know what heritage and tourism sites relate to the Kurdish identity. It showcases what tourism uses to market the attractions, which are in line with the research of Wodak (2009): the common past, present, and future; the common culture; and the common territory.

8. Conclusion

This research has examined the various content, strategies, and arguments of how the Kurdish government represents and market the Kurdish identity for tourism purposes. During the research, the framework of Wodak was used for the case study of Kurdistan to answer the central research question:

"How is national identity constructed through tourism in nation without state?"

According to the results of the analysis, it has become clear that heritage and history is a defining factor for a national identity, especially for a region that is not acknowledged as a nation state. Content regarding heritage and history, which is considered as common past, is shared among the people of Kurdistan, and acts as a base to build upon to define the identity. The common culture and common territory (national body) is linking the common past to the common present and is in turn used to define a common future: Kurdistan becomes a hub for tourists wanting to know more about the Kurdish culture and heritage, appreciating the natural landscape that was and still is important for the people in Kurdistan. Unfortunately, it is unsure as to how Kurdistan wants to and if they still want to develop their tourism industry as COVID-19 has globally halted this industry, and since the outbreak of the pandemic, the tourism site has not been updated.

This research has shown that the use of tourism is an essential tool that is used by Kurdistan to the region on multiple aspects: besides the economic gain that is known with the tourism sector, it also gives the opportunity to spread awareness of the history and culture without the need to put emphasis on the violence and conflict. The Kurdish national identity is much more than only violence and conflict and encompasses many diverse groups making for a tolerant identity. The most important finding of this research is that that the main use of tourism and the tourism website, that is created by the Board of Tourism and in turn the Kurdish government, is a tool to construct an identity of Kurdistan for non-Kurdish people, and in turn advance their legitimacy to existence as a state.

In the end, this study contributed to the knowledge gap about how national identities are discursively constructed, how they are created considering tourism, and how they are created for a nation without state. This research can be applied to other tourism destinations, even to smaller destinations such as regions or cities that feel as if their identity is different than the surrounding regions. In this way, it can be seen what patterns are found regarding marketing strategies. Future research can also consider other factors that may influence the way that Kurdish identity is discursively constructed, as this research has only used one source which is commercial in nature.

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10. Annex

A. Colour codes for analysis:

Content

- <u>Common political past</u>   → `Purple`

  Myths, myths about origin, mythical figures, political successes

- <u>Common culture</u>   → `Blue`

  Museums, exhibitions, theatre, architecture

- <u>National body</u>   → `Light blue`

  Physical national artefacts, landscapes

Strategies

- Constructive   → `Grey`
- Destructive   → `Dark green`
- Transformative   → `Dark purple`
- Justifying   → `Yellow`
- Assimilation   → `Green`
- Dissimilation   → `Red`

Argument

- Claim   → `Brown`
- Argument   → `Dark blue`

B. Claims and arguments table

Claim	Argument	Strategy*
Food in Kurdistan is loved by locals and foreigners alike		Constructive strategy; strategy of assimilation
The mountains are very important to Kurds	They have not only shaped the history, people, tradition and culture, but were also used as hide outs	Constructive strategy; Justifying strategy; strategy of dissimilation
Kurdistan is a tolerant region	Use of various sites of religion; different religions	
Kurdistan is tolerant and diverse	Coalition includes Chaleans, Assyrians, Syriacs, Turkmen, Yazidis, and Kurds	Strategy of dissimilation
Inhabitants are living together in harmony	The KRG provides a stable security situation	Strategy of dissimilation