UNDERSTANDING ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL MINORITIES IN TURKEY

POLIGRAFI

UREDILI / EDITED BY

ANJA ZALTA

TAHIR ABBAS

UMUT AZAK

U N D E R S T A N D I N G   E T H N I C ,   R E L I G I O U S   A N D   C U L T U R A L   M I N O R I T I E S   I N   T U R K E Y

Uredili / Edited by: Anja Zalta, Tahir Abbas, Umut Azak

P O L I G R A F I

UNDERSTANDING ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL MINORITIES IN TURKEY

INTRODUCTION

The study of ethnic minorities is of vital concern in the context of nations consisting of different groups, some of which are immigrants whilst others are indigenous to the land. While a considerable degree of effort is made concerning studying the real-world situations of minorities in Western Europe and North America, there are generally limited approaches to exploring the situation in the Middle East. Similarly, although there is important work on the experiences of minorities in Turkey being published, few examine minority groups holistically in terms of elaborating on the current state of affairs as well as situating the analysis into a wider discussion on the nature of ethnic and religious differences in contemporary Turkey. This special issue is an attempt to explore the nature and reality of the lived experiences of ethnic and religious minorities in Turkey from different conceptual and analytical perspectives, ranging from the sociological, historical, and anthropological to the political.

Cultural racism highlights cultural differences or differences between *nomos-es*, if we borrow from Peter Berger, between value systems which arbitrarily differentiate between "civilisational" values and between "inferior, barbaric, undemocratic, etc." Local Middle Eastern societies are not immune to the separation of *who is* and *who is not* "us" or who has "legitimate" ethnicity *and/or* religion and who has not. Such reductions in religion, culture and ethnicity are a manipulation in the service of ideologies that indicate a fear of the consequences that diversity and plurality might bring. They are also most certainly the result of the emergence of nation-states and related nationalisms, which often lead to homogenising processes of defining a common territory, history, culture, language or religion. Although many nations do not form a homogeneous body and are made up of different ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious groups, the rhetoric of nationality treats the nation as an integral unit. This is also the case in contemporary Turkey where multifold minority populations have often been rendered invisible due to powerful waves of Turkish nationalism, exceptionalism and, in more recent periods, neo-Ottomanism.

The formation of the Turkish nation-state involved specific inclusion and exclusion mechanisms vis-à-vis the population of the remaining territories of the Ottoman state at the end of the Great War. During the Ottoman era, different religious groups were granted the capacity to govern their internal affairs as long as they were loyal to the Sultan. In the transformation of the Empire into a secular republic in the early 1920s, only the Greek Orthodox, Jewish and Armenian communities were officially recognised as "minority" and received certain protections under the new Turkish Republic in light of their religious affiliations. However, Kurdish groups, representing at least one-fifth of the population, were denied recognition of their cultural, linguistic and ethnic heritage. They were Muslim by religious classification and therefore not counted as a minority. As other ethnic and religious groups, including the Roma, have continued to suffer at the hands of an exclusivist Turkification project, a Turkish-Kurdish separation remains an ongoing challenge for the future of Turkey.

Ethnic and religious dimensions of Turkish nationalism as reflected in the Turkification policies of the Young Turk government in the final years of Ottoman era were inherited by the republican political elite. This legacy, i.e. the program of creating an ethnically homogeneous nation and national Muslim-Turkish economy and policy, shaped not only the Republic's assimilationist policies against Kurdish groups, but also the immigration policies and several discriminatory policies against non-Muslim minorities. The coexistence of the ethnic, religious, and civic dimensions of Turkish nationalism, often resulting in contradictory policies concerning minorities, could have very destructive results, as in the case of the Wealth Tax of 1942–1943 or the Pogrom of 6–7 September 1955. In other words, religious and ethnic minorities (legally recognised or not) during the Republican period have been in a tense and precarious relationship vis-à-vis the state. The Republic's civic nationalist discourse which defined Turkishness on the basis of citizenship in the 1924 constitution, as well as the secularist principle which led to the removal of Islam (as a "state religion") from the constitution in 1928, were in contradiction with the policies in practice. This very ambiguity of Turkish nationalism could also create manoeuvring space for minorities who have adopted a variety of strategies vis-à-vis

2

the government ranging from revolt to silent consent or voluntary assimilation (as exemplified in several articles in this issue). The multiplicity of minority experiences continue today as the AKP government has not reversed these defining features of official Turkish nationalism despite its leadership's Islamist ideological background, as well as the democratic reform packages in the framework of the EU inclusion process. The study of minorities in the Turkish Republic both in the past and now offers scholars both the difficulties and challenges involved in the analysis of diverse receptions, responses, and strategies adopted by minority groups. The recent Syrian refugee crisis and the AKP government's handling of the crisis by using Syrian asylum seekers, often as leverage in its relationship with the EU, combined with rising anti-Syrian nationalism within the population has created new challenges for the study of minorities in Turkey. This collection provides historical and contemporary analytical perspectives to these challenges as well as those of neoliberalism, authoritarianism, and globalisation in the context of the broader Middle East region and its politics.

Tahir Abbas, Umut Azak, and Anja Zalta

THE PERCEPTION OF MINORITIES TOWARD THE TURKISH STATE: THE CASE OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Anna Maria Beylunioğlu,
Özgür Kaymak

The relationship between the state and non-Muslim communities has been a delicate issue since the founding of the Turkish Republic, despite the principle of secularism stated in its constitution. Against this background, the association of national identity with Sunni Islam has been the main marker of inclusion in and exclusion from the Turkish national identity. Especially since 2002 when the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power, the debate with regard to freedom of religion and the rights of religious minorities have come to the fore. There are numerous academic and political studies approaching the Turkish state's perspective towards religious minorities which were done mostly in the late 1990s. In approaching the inequalities and state-citizenship relations, these studies mainly employed legal, historical, and political tools. Valuable contributions have been made that question a homogeneous national identity as well as the official historical narrative.[1] With the increase in oral history studies in social sciences, pivotal research has also been conducted focussing on the identity construction process among various non-Muslim communities.[2] Among

[1]   Samim Akgönül, *Türkiye Rumları* (Istanbul: Iletisim,2007); Rıfat Bali, *Antisemitism and Conspiracy Theories in Turkey* (Istanbul: Libra, 2013); Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide* (London: ZedBooks, 2004)
[2]   Marcy Brink-Danan, *Jewish Life in Twenty-First-Century Turkey: The Other Side of Tolerance*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Karel Valansi, *The Crescent Moon and the*

these studies, however, little attention has been paid to the role of minority identity in shaping the perception of non-Muslims towards the state, its bureaucracy, and the population at large.

In light of the previous academic debate, there are several questions that need to be raised in order to provide a comprehensive and contemporary picture of non-Muslim minority perspectives towards the state; how do non-Muslim communities and individuals perceive the attitude of the state and the population at large towards non-Muslim minorities and what do they think about the state's *raison de'être* behind its exclusionist approaches? How do these communities apprehend the state's policies against minorities, irrespective of the government in power? After recasting the parameters of freedom of religion in Turkey during the AKP period, do non-Muslims sense any continuities/breaking points, in particular in their relationality with the state, its bureaucracy, and the population at large?

Only through answering these questions, we believe, can one have a general opinion on minority perspectives in contemporary Turkey. To this end, we have benefitted from 41 in-depth interviews conducted between 2018 and 2021 with not only individuals who belong to non-Muslim minority communities but also community representatives and civil society activists. The interviewees were found through snowball sampling. The qualitative approach employed provided an outlet in which non-Muslim minorities' experiences were revealed through their own voices. The meaning of citizenship in this context is best understood through individual experience. Therefore, we aim to understand and create meaning from the informants' subjective interpretations and experiences. Acknowledging the fact that it was not possible to achieve a unique perception of various minority communities, we aim to reflect different minority perspectives, all of which are a substantial part of the general picture. The data collected through this fieldwork will be

---

Magen David: Turkish-Israeli Relations Through the Lens of the Turkish Public (London:Hamilton Books,2018); Özgür Kaymak, "Being a Turkish Jew in Unwelcomed Public Sphere," in *Turkish Jews and Their Diasporas*, ed. Kerem Öktem and İpek Kocaömer Yosmaoğlu (Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming, December 2021); Su Erol, *Mazlum ve Makul İstanbul Süryanilerinde Etno-Dinsel Kimlik İnşası ve Kimlik Stratejileri* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2016).

presented in light of the debate in the literature on citizenship, nationalism, and minorities in Turkey.

In this article, we first provide a brief historical perspective of the state's behaviour towards religious minorities from the establishment of the Turkish Republic until today, including the AKP period. In the second part of this study we aim to explore the role and persepective of non-Muslim minorities over the previous decade, taking into account information garnered from our interviews with members of non-Muslim communities. We highlight the respondents' perception of continuity between the Turkish state's policies on non-Muslims, irrespective of the ideology of the political party in power. Moreover, we argue that this perspective plays a crucial role in non-Muslims' relationality with the state, taking into consideration the role of the state in the construction of idea of citizenship. The article also aims to demonstrate the gap between the AKP's promise of restoring freedom of religion and the reality that non-Muslims have been facing in recent years. Finally, the new negotiation fields that have been flourishing among these communities in the past few years will be addressed.

The Status of Non-Muslim Minorities in Turkey: A Brief History

Although the principle of secularism is enshrined in the constitution of the Republic of Turkey, religion and the activities of religious groups and individuals have been restricted in political, social, and private spheres. In fact, the main objective of Atatürk, founder of the republic, was to introduce the *laicité* principle in order to separate religion and state as an extension of the modernisation and secularisation processes began in the late Ottoman Empire. However, in practice secularisation in the Turkish context has been twofold: on the one hand, it has distanced itself from all religious beliefs; on the other, it has favoured Sunni/Hanefi Islam over other denominations. This practice has left certain religious groups and individuals in a disadvantaged position and failed to protect their basic rights. Hence, despite the fact that freedom of worship "regardless of one's language, race […] religion, sect […] etc" is guaranteed in the constitution as well as in the Treaty of Lausanne, the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), a bureaucratic

organisation under the Prime Minister's Office designed to oversee religious activities, has promoted a controlled version of Sunni/Hanefi Islam rather than a complete separation of church and state. Consequently, this has not left equal or enough space for non-Muslim faiths in the public sphere.

Thus, the state-centric modernisation project was reflected onto non-Muslim societies through various cultural, economic, and political practices. The impetus behind these policies was to create a national bourgeoisie and a homogeneous society in which being Sunni/Muslim was defined as the main element of "being Turkish." Just before and during the First World War, the most striking policy towards non-Muslims in the empire was the exile of Armenians from Anatolian lands in 1915. Subsequently, the implementation of the modernisation project materialised through the population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1923 resulted in a tremendous decrease in the size of the *Rum*[3] Orthodox population. Moreover, the laws passed during the 1930s in order to regulate the economic and societal sphere set "being a Turk" as the minimum criteria for economic participation. The cornerstone of the economic handover was the Capital Tax implemented in 1942. Considering that non-Muslims comprised 87 percent of the payers of this special tax, which was implemented to cover the expenses of the Turkish government during WWII, the financial burden fell disproportionately on non-Muslims.[4]

These policies, which have been called Turkification policies, were not limited to the exclusion of non-Muslims from the economic and societal sphere; they also included spatial arrangements. The 1934 pogrom that took place in Thrace, considered the first antisemitic action in the Turkish Republic, is a primary and striking example.[5] After the 1934 pogrom, the September 6–7 pogrom took place in 1955 target-

---

[3]   The authors acknowledge the interchangeable use of *Rum* and Greek in the text. *Rum* Orthodox is used in this article in differentiation with Greek Orthodox (denoting those who belong to the Greek nationality) to refer to those who stayed in the Ottoman Empire after 1821 and then automatically became, first, Ottoman subjects and then citizens of the Turkish Republic in 1923.

[4]   Ayhan Aktar, "Homogenizing the Nation, Turkifying the Economy," in *Crossing the Aegean*, ed. Renée Hirschon (New York: Berghahn, 2003).

[5]   Bali, *Antisemitism and Conspiracy Theories in Turkey*.

ing, notably, Istanbul's Rum community as well as other non-Muslim communities. As a result of these Turkification policies, by 1955 the population of non-Muslims in Turkey dropped below one percent of the total. Turkification policies continued through 1964 when the Turkish government cancelled the "Treaty of Commerce and Navigation," which was signed in 1930 between Greece and Turkey, in parallel to the escalation of the conflict between Turks and Greeks in Cyprus.[6] Greeks residing in Istanbul were deported[7]and Rums of Istanbul who were married to Greek nationals had to leave Turkey, which resulted in the complete vanishment of the Rum Orthodox population in Istanbul.

Besides Rum, Armenians, and Jews, many other non-Muslim populations in rural Anatiolia were subjected to displacement policies. For instance, these displacements impacted the non-Muslim population living in south-east Turkey in the 80s and 90s due to the rise of PKK (Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê) related activities in the region and the Turkish state's response against it. According to a Chaldean interviewee,[8] both political and economic distress paved the way for the evacuation of villages which resulted in the vanishment of their population in the region.

Apart from the Turkification policies summarised above, non-Muslims have encountered numerous difficulties and extrajudicial practices limiting their civil and religious freedoms since the founding of the republic. The most striking of these violations took place after Turkey's military intervention in Cyprus in 1974 when Rum citizens were treated as "hostages." The direct reflection of this state attitude became visible in a Supreme Court decision in 1971 that authorised the confiscation of property from non-Muslims and depicted non-Muslims as "local-foreigners." In addition to this decision, provisions of the Law on Foundations, the Turkish Civil Code, and the Municipality Law restricted the properties that Christian communities could possess. Through these laws non-Muslims were prevented from legating their

---

6 İlay Örs, *İstanbullu Rumlar ve 1964 Sürgünleri* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2019).
7 The Treaty of 1923 allowed Greek citizens who were resident in Istanbul before 30 October 1918 to become *etabli,* which means that they were part of the Istanbul *Rum* community without the need for Turkish citizenship.
8 Interview conducted on April 17, 2021.

properties to religious foundations. Moreover, the state also interfered with the election procedures of both administrative authorities and religious bodies, and teaching religion was restricted for non-Muslim minorities.[9] The Rum Orthodox Theology School was closed by the state in 1971, while Syriacs, Protestants, and Catholics were denied a clergy school throughout the entire republican period. Finally, while state agencies aimed to "monitor" the activities of religious minorities, it became a legal requirement to identify one's religion on the national identity card, a policy that has remained in practice for decades. Religious minorities were also subject to discrimination in many other fields, from university entrance exams to recruitment in government institutions.

Historically speaking, the second-class treatment of non-Muslim communities in Turkey has remained constant throughout the past century of the republic, regardless of the party in power. Despite the events targeting non-Muslim communities having taken place during the Democrat Party (DP) administration of the 1950s, the DP period was perceived as more tolerant compared to the authoritarian and discriminatory policies of the Kemalist[10] establishment. During the elections that took place right after the September 1955 pogrom, the DP received the vast majority of non-Muslim votes, which reflects non-Muslims' loyalty to the party. However, this trend, which led non-Muslims to believe in a future in which they will be perceived as equal citizens, was interrupted by the state's discriminatory policies up until the 1980s as a series of military regimes periodically came into power.

During the Motherland Party (MP) government of the 1980s, short-term enhancements of freedom of religion for religious minorities were implemented. With the liberalisation policies of the Özal government (1983–1989) the freedoms that had been limited after the military coup were restored. This also had a positive impact on non-Muslim communities such as the reintroduction of the board of elections of

---

9   "Annual Report 2021," United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, accessed 1 May 2021, https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021-04/2021%20Annual%20 Report.pdf

10   Kemalism refers to the state ideology developed and named after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the republic.

community foundations, allowing Rum citizens to reclaim the right to sell their properties, which had been restricted with the 1964 enactment. Last but not least, the Turkish Jewish Museum was established in 2001 following the formation of the Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews in 1989. However, despite these advances, this did not lead to any substantive transformation with regard to the rights of ethno/religious minorities in Turkey. The government began to introduce a reform agenda only after the intensification of Turkey–EU relations following the Helsinki Summit in 1999. Within this context, the government took several symbolic steps, such as inviting the expatriate Syrian Orthodox citizens of Turkey to return to their homeland, as well as changes made to certain laws and the constitution.

Turkey's European Union (EU) candidacy had been seen as the driving force and main facilitator in enhancing the religious freedoms of non-Muslims. However, despite this perceived shift—as we will see in the coming sections—the conventionalist Kemalist approach towards non-Muslims did not fade away. The state disregarded and ignored many EU-led policies, and by and large non-Muslims claim not to have noticed substantive improvements in their daily lives apart from a short period of time in which they were hopeful. The EU's impact remained largely limited to formal legislative changes.

Non-Muslim Minorities and the AKP

When the AKP came to power in 2002, its roots in political Islam raised doubts among different factions of society. Contrary to expectations, however, the AKP continued the EU reform process initiated by the previous government. Declaring a strong commitment to international human rights standards, the AKP passed several reform packages including certain changes with regard to non-Muslim minority communities. These reforms included the demand for the return of confiscated properties as well as the acquisition of new ones. The government's discourse addressing "human rights" and the "fraternity and richness" of non-Muslim minorities in Turkey turned out to be instrumental in dismantling certain aspects of the Kemalist project, of which the AKP has been highly critical from the first days they came to power.

The intense reform process paved the way for Turkey to begin formal accession negotiations with the EU in 2005. As previous studies suggested on the one hand, the AKP's resentment towards the Kemalist–secularist policies that excluded pious Muslims, who had been previously considered a threat to the state, from the public and political spheres provided the "pull" factors enabling reforms until 2005. On the other, EU conditionality, which was seen as a path to an alternative model for religion-state relations in Turkey, functioned as a "push" factor in the negotiation process.[11] One way or the other, the AKP's special interest in recasting the parameters of religious freedoms was welcomed by most non-Muslim minority representatives due to the AKP's positive emphasis on the "richness" of different cultures in comparison to the Kemalist tradition of opposing the enhancement of non-Muslims' rights. After the assassination of the Armenian intellectual and journalist Hrant Dink, the level of empathy for non-Muslims increased to a large extent, which accelerated reform packages passed in parliament. The government's reconciliatory approach to non-Muslims culminated in the reintroduction of the Law on Foundations, which was reinstated by former President Ahmet Necdet Sezer in 2006.

In reality the AKP's approach to freedom of religion in general and the rights of non-Muslim communities in particular was not fully compatible with the EU's framework of human rights,[12] which have been repeatedly stated in progress reports published by the European Commission. During the height of Turkey's accession process, Turkish lawmakers would reference the Ottoman Empire and its tolerant approach[13] towards non-Muslim minorities. Similarly, the government

---

[11] Gözde Yılmaz, "It Is Pull-and-Push that Matters for External Europeanization! Explaining Minority Policy Change in Turkey," *Mediterranean Politics* 19, no. 2 (May 2014): 238–258, https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2013.838443.
[12] Anna Maria Beylunioğlu, *Freedom of Religion in Turkey between Secular and Islamic Values* (PhD Thesis, EUI, 2017).
[13] In the *millet* system of the polyethnic and multireligious Ottoman Empire, religious minorities were all recognised as self-governing units and allowed to impose restrictive religious laws on their own members. The Ottomans allowed these minorities not only the freedom to practice their religion, but a more general freedom to govern themselves in internal matters. The Ottomans accepted the principle of religious tolerance, where that is "understood to indicate the willingness of a dominant religion to co-exist with others." Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Homes&Meir, 1982).

embodied a discourse towards its Ottoman heritage, referring to the *millet* system in which people of different religions coexisted and were tolerated under the superiority of Islam. This shift could also be seen in the parliamentary debate on the Law on Foundations in 2008, in which AKP parliamentarian Avni Erdemir supported the legislative proposal emphasising the fact that "everybody is under the protection of this country." He included a well-known phrase attributed to the non-Muslims of Constantinople during the Byzantine times: "I would rather see an Ottoman turban in the midst of the city than the Latin mitre."[14] While these references became frequently visible in the discourses of government representatives, it would be naïve to consider this shift coincidental. Many argued that upon the European Court of Human Rights decision on Leyla Şahin v. Turkey, in which the court found Turkey's ban on headscarves compatible with the principle of religious freedom, the AKP's disappointment from the decision led the party to search for alternative models.[15] After this point, the EU began to be perceived as a subpar alternative to the Ottoman model of tolerance for diversity and co-existence.

Although it is possible to observe the continuation of the dialogue process between non-Muslim communities and state representatives through the EU model of freedom of religion, this dialogue slowly lost its focus amid the resurgence of the Ottoman model. While in 2014 the state commemorated the *Struma* disaster[16] for the first time and in 2015 the General Directorate of Foundations decided to build a new church for the first time in the history of the Turkish Republic,[17] as well as to allow the first celebration of Hanukkah in a public space, signaling an increasing positive dialogue between non-Muslim communities

---

[14]   "Parliamentary Speech of AKP MP Avni Erdemir on 31 January 2008 (Term 23, Session 57)," TBMM, accessed 12 June 2021, https://www.tbmm.gov.tr.

[15]   Marcie J. Patton, "AKP Reform Fatigue in Turkey: What Has Happened to the EU Process?," *Mediterranean Politics* 12, no. 3 (October 2007): 339–358, https://doi.org/10.1080/13629390701622382.

[16]   Uygar Gültekin, "Struma Faciası için ilk resmi anma," Agos, 24 February 2015, http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/10682/struma-faciasi-icin-ilk-resmi-anma.

[17]   "First Church of Republican Era To Be Built for Istanbul's Syriacs," *Hurriyet Daily News*, May 19, 2016, https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/amp/first-church-of-republican-era-to-be-built-for-istanbuls-syriacs-99389

and the government, most of the non-Muslim communities' problems remained unsolved. First of all, reforms outlined in the EU harmonisation packages remained limited and were poorly observed in practice. Although legislation was enacted in order to pave the way for the return of property to non-Muslim community foundations, in practice non-Muslims only received 10–12% of the possessions that they legally demanded in this process. The Protestant community representative stated that the struggle for the reconstitution of the Protestant church in Diyarbakir, which had been confiscated by the state in the 1950s has not yet been returned. Similarly, a member of the Chaldean community reminded us that the building in Taksim, Sıraselviler, a district once populated by non-Muslims and having one of the highest property values in the city, was confiscated and the restitution process has not been completed.[18] In addition, the 2008 Law on Foundations, which facilitated community foundation board elections to elect administrative leaders, was suspended by the Directorate General of Foundations (VGM) in January 2013 and this suspension was only nullified in March 2021.[19] Another issue that remains unsolved is the lack of the legal personality of minority foundations.[20] In addition to these, administrative and educational issues for minority schools continue; for example, the Theological School of the Patriarchate that was closed by the state in 1971 still remains shuttered.

Moreover, non-Muslim individuals seek a legal framework that would enable them to be formally recognised and a constitutional protection to secure their religious freedoms.[21] Hate speech was highly visible in the official statements of the *Diyanet* directly targeting le-

---

[18]   Interviews with the Chaldean and Protestant community members on April 17 and 21, 2021.

[19]   "Vakıf Seçimlerini İptal Eden Genelge Hükümsüz," Agos, March 23, 2021, http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/25481/vakif-secimlerini-iptal-eden-genelge-hukumsuz

[20]   Dilek Kurban and Kezban Hatemi, *Bir 'Yabancı'laştırma Hikayesi: Türkiye'de Gayrimüslim Cemaatlerin Vakıf ve Taşınmaz Mülkiyet Sorunu* [A Story of Abalienating: Problem of Foundation and Immovable Property of non-Muslim Communities in Turkey] (Istanbul: TESEV, 2009).

[21]   Anna Maria Beylunioğlu, *Freedom of Religion in Turkey*.

gal missionary activities.[22] The statements of government representatives harboured traces of hate speech against non-Muslims.[23] As Türkay maintains, exclusionary statements indicated provocative phrases about non-Muslim minorities that represented them as potential threats to the country.[24] This exclusionary attitude peaked after 2011 when government representatives began to reference Islamic values and Ottoman heritage. While the most remarkable example of this is then Prime Minister Erdoğan's statement where he referred to "Islam"[25] as the absolute priority of the state, government representatives began to describe "real decendants of the Turkish nation" and labelled non-Muslims as "traitors" and "exploiters." [26]

Last but not least, turning the Hagia Sophia Museum – which was originally built as a church and then converted to a mosque after the Ottoman conquest – in Istanbul into a mosque reveals the AKP intends to prioritise Islam over other religions. After seeing the churches with an identical name in Iznik and Trabzon, which had earlier been converted into museums, become mosques again, Hagia Sophia's becoming a mosque in July 2020 with a court decision revoking the 1934 decree preserving its museum status has caused serious debate in both the national and international media as well as in political platforms. Its reconversion into a mosque was an indispensable dream of Turkey's Islamists. The idea was that opening the Hagia Sophia for prayers would

---

[22]   Presidency of Religious Affairs, "Basın Açıklaması – Misyonerlik [Press Release - Missionaries]," February 6, 2003, https://www.diyanet.gov.tr/tr-TR/Kurumsal/Detay/1211/basin-aciklamasi.

[23]   Minister of Defence Vecdi Gönül's statement of 10 November 2008 can be considered in this context: "Could we still be a nation state if Rums and Armenians continued to exist in this land?"

[24]   Türkay Salim Nefes, "Perceived Group Threats and Right-Wing Political Party Membership as Driving Forces of Negative Descriptions in Turkish Parliamentary Debates (1983–2018)," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47, no. 1 (May 2021), https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2021.1924051.

[25]   "Erdoğan: Bizim Tek Derdimiz Var, İslam, İslam, İslam [Erdogan: We Have Only One Concern, Islam, Islam, Islam]," Bianet, July 31, 2015, https://bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/166454-erdogan-bizim-tek-derdimiz-var-islam-islam-islam.

[26]   For detailed analysis of the issue, see: Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak, *The Erdoğan Revolution in the Turkish Curriculim Textbooks,* ed. David M. Bayer (Israel: IMPACT-SE, 2021), https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Erdogan-Revolution-in-the-Turkish-CurriculumTextbooks.pdf.

mark the maturation of Islamist power which had considered its becoming a museum under the early republican regime to be a foreign imposition.[27] While the move by the AKP was criticised as the "Islamisation of stones,"[28] various authorities from the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches voiced their indignation. Meanwhile, while Turkey's Christian population are bystanders in a debate that ultimately ignores the challenges facing a shrinking community; the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recommented Turkey for a "special watch list" and the European Commission released its latest report continuing to highlight the need for improvement of the conditions of non-Muslim minorities in Turkey.[29]

Turkey's Minority Policies through the Lens of Ethno-Religious Minorities

As the above review of the Turkish state's approach to non-Muslims demonstrates, despite the fact that there have been enhancements in religious and civil rights, these remain limited and are far from meeting international human rights standards. Minority members interviewed also confirm this finding. The interviewees – regardless of social class, level of education, or gender – hold similar views with regard to the Turkish state's policies on non-Muslim minorities since the founding of the republic. They all agree that the state's policy defines non-Muslims as "scapegoats," "internal enemies," "the fifth column," "the other," "foreigners," and "less reliable" entities that need to be eliminated through oppression and exclusionary policies. The state's long-term policies cut across right/left-wing or conservative-religious/secular ideologies. One of our interviewees strikingly highlights this point:

---

[27] Selim Koru, "Turkey's Islamist Dream Finally Becomes a Reality," *New York Times*, July 14, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/14/opinion/hagia-sophia-turkey-mosque.html.
[28] Olivier Roy, "Islamising Stones Is Easier than Islamising Souls," Qantara.de, July 27, 2020, https://en.qantara.de/content/interview-with-olivier-roy-on-the-conversation-of-hagia-sophia-islamising-stones-is-easier.
[29] "Turkey Report," *USCIRF*, accessed 26 May 2021, https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Turkey.pdf; "Turkey, 2020 Report," European Commission, accessed 28 June 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2020-10/turkey_report_2020.pdf.

It is as if we are like a "stepkid" when, in fact, the "father state" should take care of his children equally. Although we are their own child, we are treated as stepchildren.[30]

There is a deep-seated perception amongst non-Muslim minorities that the state has been violating the rights guaranteed in the Treaty of Lausanne. For example, Rums suffer from the "reciprocity mentality"[31] – that although the founders of the new republic had signed the treaty, they only reluctantly accepted the non-Muslim population. As one interviewee puts it, "There is, of course, a minority policy: the other. If I may put it boldly (the policy is) 'you are the citizens that we approved reluctantly.'"[32] According to most of the non-Muslims we interviewed, this policy functions along with the *millet* system that was established during the Ottoman Empire and was *de facto* inherited by the Turkish Republic. With the founding of the republic, although contradicted by the aim of the secular state, non-Muslim citizens continued to be defined as minorities with reference to their religious identity and excluded from the national identity, only to be tolerated as second-class citizens and never trusted.

Within this context, for non-Muslims, Turkish governments, including the İnönü (1938–1950), Menderes (1950–1960), Ecevit (1974, 1977, 1978–79, and 1999–2002), Özal (1983–1989), and Erdoğan (2002–present) governments have a common policy over non-Muslim minorities regardless of their right- or left-wing ideologies.

In the memory of non-Muslim communities, the Capital Tax, Turkification campaigns, Thrace pogroms, and the September 6–7 pogrom – for which non-Muslims hold the Republican People's Party (RPP) responsible – hold a deeply negative place. Adnan Menderes' term (DP), although from the right-wing party, has a positive connotation in the memory of non-Muslims due to the moderate policies followed by the

---

30   Interview with a member of Chaldean Community on April 17, 2021.
31   The Reciprocity Principle is based on Section Three of the Treaty of Lausanne which refers to the "parallel obligations" of Greece and Turkey on their Muslim and non-Muslim communities. However, from the most negative sense, both Turkey and Greece implemented this principle in order to penalise individuals and use them as a tool to send a message to the respective state. Baskın Oran, *Minorities and Minority Rights in Turkey* (Boulder: Lynne Reinner, 2021).
32   Interview with an Armenian Orthodox interviewee on December 26, 2018.

DP government compared to RPP's oppressive and authoritarian regime and discriminatory policies towards religious minorities. Ecevit's term is remembered negatively especially by the Rum minority due to the Cyprus intervention (1974) that took place during his term. The Jews that were interviewed also underlined the fact that the commercial limitations on non-Muslims took place during Ecevit's term. A Jewish interviewee claimed that these limitations continued to transfer the capital from non-Muslims to Muslims underlying the fact that "financial incentives were not given to the firms owned by Jews. They were all given to Muslim firms in order to enrich them." [33]

These traumatic experiences hold a significant place in the memories of senior members of the minority and were inherited by the younger generations through the collective memory of families and communities. According to younger generations, in the 1980s the state pursued a minority policy in order to decrease them in numbers, make them "minorities" and suppress them in order to create a religiously, ethnically, and culturally uniform society in Turkey. They also consider that their decreasing numbers due to the social, cultural, and political oppression and eventual migration create a picture where they are not even enough to be the subject of such a political agenda today. An interviewee belonging to the Rum community narrates these oppressive policies by stating that:

we did not have books in Greek in primary school... Inspectors were a source of fear to me. Because when there was an inspection we were hiding our books. Because our books were coming from Greece, because they were not giving us books here.[34]

After the terms of the RPP, DP, JP (Justice Party), and MP (Motherland Party), for most non-Muslims, the AKP era is considered a period in which significant liberalisation took place as experienced by non-Muslim communities. At first, the non-Muslim individuals interviewed for this study hold more or less common views with regard to the practices that have taken place for the first time since the founding of the republic. In the eyes of those interviewees who hold representa-

---

[33]   Interview on July 20, 2018.
[34]   Interview on February 17, 2019.

tive positions of their communities, these changes were "not even possible to dream of."[35] They argue that it was not possible to engage with politicians before as they underlined the fact that today they can build sincere relationships with ministers and certain bureaucratic steps are more convenient than in the past.

We have a dialogue. We met with the Prime Minister (Recep Tayyip Erdoğan), with Bülent Arınç, and Egemen Bağış three times.[36] They have a good approach. Some of our issues have not been solved yet, but their intention is important.[37]

Although most non-Muslims simultaneously declare that they have been ignored due to the paucity of their numbers and that the AKP government returned some of their rights during the EU accession process, they also raise concerns about their being instrumentalised for the political interest of the government as a part of the democratisation process. [38]

They settled old scores at the same time. It led to gains for the minorities, yet what mattered for the AKP was only its own cause. There emerged an environment of emancipation but the Kurdish political movement had affected this too. Over the last ten years, however, there is a deterioration. There is a large gap between what is being said about transition and what actually happens. Gains are important, however many things remain unchanged.[39]

Despite the positive steps taken compared to previous governments, the AKP is also criticised for their political agenda to create a monotypic society with the Sunni-Muslim identity playing the leading role. Non-Muslims today increasingly declare that they are considered "unwanted entities" being kept on the peripheries and their multicultural identity promoted by the government in recent years remained a veneer:

---

[35]   Interview with a member of Rum Orthodox community on September 16, 2018.
[36]   Bülent Arınç served as the 22nd Speaker of the Parliament of Turkey from 2002 to 2007 and as a Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey between 2009 and 2015. Egemen Bağış is the former minister for EU Affairs and chief negotiator of Turkey in accession talks with the European Union.
[37]   Interview with a member of Rum Orthodox community on May 13, 2019.
[38]   Interview with a member of Rum Orthodox Community on September 26, 2019.
[39]   Interview with a member of Armenian Orthodox community on April 28, 2021.

They tried to say, in the old regime "we made mistakes, we suppressed (non-Muslims) but this country is good with these colors." *[Author's note: "colors" here is being used to refer to multiculturalism.]* But today, they do not say this anymore; they do not want us. Yes, they return the properties of Rums and Armenians, but these are political decisions… If their relationship turns bad with Greece again, they would not care about Rums… They want to create a Sunni Muslim country.[40]

The reserved and distant approach of non-Muslims towards the state's minority policies was frequently expressed with regret and concern during the interviews. As we have mentioned above, throughout the history of the Republic, assimilationist, and discriminatory pressure from state and society has been rife, and, as a result, the population of non-Muslim communities has been shrinking dramatically, so that non-Muslims remained less then 1% of the population at large today. The following quote succinctly describes the negative perception towards the reform process due to the decrease in population:

Do you know how I describe them (the government)? They provide the deadly ill with recovery medicine. Who is going to take care of the community properties they return? Nobody is left! In my (minority) school there were around 5,000 (Rum) students in 1962; in 2004 nobody is left.[41]

Within this picture it is possible to observe a feeling of insecurity developing against the AKP. Some non-Muslim interviewees described their insecure state due to the possibility that "the interest of the government can reverse any time," citing that Erdoğan had threatened Armenian citizens working in Turkey with deportation in the past.[42] They emphasise the fact that they are affected by the disagreements of the Turkish state with its neighbours such as Greece or Armenia or political crises taking place in the Middle East, which often position Turkey-Israel relations at the centre of the debate. Although they believe that it is not very likely, non-Muslims continue to worry about the possibility of being used as leverage or considered "hostages" within Turkey. In ad-

---

[40]   Interview with a member of Jewish community on March 13, 2020.
[41]   Interview with a member of the Rum Orthodox Community on March 27, 2018.
[42]   Ibon Villelabeitia, "Turkish PM threatens to Expel Armenian," Reuters, March 17, 2010, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-armenia-idUSTRE62G2GN20100317.

dition, non-Muslim youth fear that the anti-Christian or anti-Jewish/anti-Israel/antisemitic speech frequently used by politicians and right-wing media in times of political tension paves the way for society to perceive non-Muslims as "foreigners" or "enemies," especially in the absence of active legal mechanisms.[43]

According to the representative from the Protestant community, this insecure state is rooted in the Turkish-Islamic synthesis which was recently visible in the AKP-MHP[44] alliance. As the interviewee explains, the mentality adopted which had been rooted in the state cadres for a while perceived the missionary activities of Protestant communities as a threat which led them to engage in activities to stop their expansion:

> They consider us to be an external threat, but actually we are an internal threat? Why an internal threat? Because we are causing a transition from within. We are shaking the foundations of the state's tradition of white-Turkish-Muslim. I am a Turk, I am deeply rooted in these lands, but in terms of faith I am a Christian. This is difficult for the state, something that spoils its DNA. As we are a growing community, they try to block our way. Ways of doing this through democratic means are limited. You have to resort to undemocratic means. They do not want to do this, at least for the time being.[45]

The policies of early AKP governments, along with language that centred on multiculturalism and diversity, raised expectations that it would be more accommodating to Turkey's non-Muslim communities than its predecessors. Yet these hopes for equal citizenship were soon dashed. Turkey's authoritarian drift under the AKP intensified after the Gezi Park Protests in 2013 and coup attempt in 2015.[46] Nevertheless, in the AKP period Sunni-Muslim values have become the core element defining what the "nation" is. Within this sociopolitical context, the future of non-Muslim communities in Turkey appears to be in question. Turkish Jewish community leaders expect the Jewish community to contract to half its size within the next decade.[47] The interviewees

---

[43]   Özgür Kaymak, "Being a Turkish Jew in Unwelcomed Public Sphere."
[44]   Nationalist Action Party.
[45]   Interview on April 21, 2021.
[46]   Interview with a member of Armenian Orthodox Community on May 25, 2021.
[47]   Information obtained from one of the prominent leaders of the Jewish community in December 2019.

emotionally conveyed that the question of "to go or to stay" was always discussed in their homes as non-Muslims and within their community social circle, that it was not an easy decision, of course, and that they were loyal to their land:

Of course my brothers don't want to stay here. Although I do not want to stay, when I look at the pictures of my village, I prefer to live in the village again, even if I die, I prefer to die there.[48]

The desire to go abroad is lower in the Protestant community than in others. Unfortunately it has increased a lot in the last few years, which is not a good thing. And all the good ones left this country.[49]

Despite all these worries, however, fieldwork reveals that Jewish interviewees prefer to exercise silence on political issues compared to Rums and Armenians. This is a significant finding that needs to be explained. Although this code of silence has been subject to internal criticism amongst Jewish youth, it is acknowledged as the historical continuation that Rıfat Bali[50] calls "being the model minority." Looking at the historical roots of this situation, the Jewish minority was first welcomed by the Ottoman Empire after their exile from Spain during the 15th century Inquisition. These descendents of the Sephardic Jews prefer to picture themselves as the "good minority" or the "tolerated other," which led them to build a moderate relationship with the Turkish state compared to their Rum and Armenian counterparts. As they are historically a migrant society and do not have property issues from the past, Jews became the minority who best attempted to become culturally "Turkish." As a part of this historical particularity, the Jewish community felt the need to pay their loyalty and courtesy first to the Ottoman Empire that "welcomed" them and then to the republic. This state of being the "loyal minority" crystallises in their preference not to be in conflict with the state, which from time to time leads them to be apolitical, which is materialised in the following words of the interviewee:

---

48   Interview with a member of Chaldean community on April 17, 2021.
49   Interview with a member of Protestant community on April 21, 2021.
50   Bali, *Antisemitism and Conspiracy Theories in Turkey*.

We always described ourselves as a "loyal society." Throughout history we positioned ourselves accordingly.[51]

New Fields of Negotiation

As has been observed above through the discourses of non-Muslim individuals, there is a tendency to criticise the relationality of minority community representatives and state authorities. Despite the fact that this tendency cannot be generalised to apply to the non-Muslim population as a whole, it provides insight into the current general perception of state policies. This tendency toward criticism is mainly derived from the passive, moderate, and coherent relationality that non-Muslim communities have built up with government representatives. Non-Muslims mainly criticise the silence of these representatives against the continuous discrimination and exclusionary practices they face in their daily lives as well as administrative issues waiting to be solved. Nevertheless, we also witness the flourishing of alternative, oppositional voices within the communities themselves against this stance. Among these new negotiation fields, we can cite Avlaremoz vs. Şalom, *Agos* and Nor Zartonk, and Istos.

Avlaremoz, a new online platform*,* demonstrates the most remarkable shift in the rhetoric of young non-Muslims in Turkey compared to the long-standing Şalom newpaper. Şalom is a Jewish weekly newspaper, publishing current political and societal issues of the Jewish community in Turkey. Despite its changing face in recent years, this traditional newspaper has been criticised for embracing a state-centric approach and not being critical enough – so much so that in the times of crisis raised between Israel and Turkey, the newspaper abstained from taking a bold stance. Against this background, *Avlaremoz*, which means "let's speak" in Ladino, began to be published online in early 2016 in order to break down this philosophy of silence, or as they prefer to use the Ladino term, *kayadez* – which represents the "silence," "having a low profile" tradition of the Jewish community, and to raise conscious-

---

[51]   Interview with a member of the Jewish community on June 2, 2020.

ness of antisemitism in Turkish Society. A member of *Avlaremoz*[52] explains the *kayadez* embodied mainly at Şalom:

We have a complaint against *Şalom*. We call Şalom a newsletter (of Chief Rabbinate) instead of a newspaper… We criticise their speaking in the state's language.

The practice of *kayadez* is not just a type of behaviour belonging to the Turkish Jewish community. Since the foundation of the Republic, the traumatic collective memory mentioned above has pushed all non-Muslim societies to live in a closed circle. On the other hand, it is possible to see a similar perception in the statements of the Protestant interviewee. The interviewee stated that this strategy of introversion brings more harm than good; considering the point that communication technologies have reached today, and that integrating into the wider society is of vital importance in reinforcing communication between communities, recognising and respecting differences, and fighting hate speech.[53]

In comparison to the keen difference between *Avlaremoz* and Şalom, the coherent relationality between *Agos* and Nor Zartonk is remarkable. Voicing the problems facing Armenians in Turkey to the public and focussing on issues of democratisation and minority rights, Agos – founded by Armenian journalist and intellectual Hrant Dink and his friends – underlined its oppositional stance by touching upon sensitive issues with regard to coming to terms with the past such as raising awareness of Islamised Armenians. Nor Zartonk, on the other hand, was initially established as a political and intellectual e-mail group and then turned into an online platform with the contribution of Turkish and diaspora Armenians. A representative of Nor Zartonk explains their founding purpose to create a common platform for Armenians to voice and demand their collective rights.[54] According to them, their attempts to speak politically and act collectively are the two features that differentiate them from *Agos*. The Hrant Dink court case is one event to which Nor Zartonk has actively contributed. The outlet aims

---

[52] Interview with a representative of Avlaremoz on October 3, 2018.
[53] Interview with a representative of the Protestant Community on April 21, 2021.
[54] Interview with a representative of Nor Zartonk.

to create public awareness, collective organisation, and visibility, which is reflected in the regular posts on their websites as well as in their press releases. As their representative mentions, although their main aim is to create collective action among Armenian society, they do not isolate themselves from the atmosphere surrounding them. In this regard they consider the Gezi Park resistance that took place in June 2013 to be a milestone in their collective action. Nor Zartonk also played a prominent role in the Kamp Armen resistance which took place in 2015 aimed at blocking the demolition of a summer camp for Armenian children which had been confiscated by the state by gathering all non-Muslim citizens as well as leftist groups empathising with their cause to take back this confiscated property.[55]

Istos publishing house is in a different line with the other platforms mentioned above. Istos, which is a startup by a group of people from the Istanbul Rum community aiming not only to commemorate the city's nostalgic Rum culture, but to join this nostalgia with everyday life practices. As their representative mentions,[56] a significant factor in the choice of books to publish has been to demonstrate the multilayered and hybrid structure of Rum society which contains various sociocultural and class-based differences in addition to its nostalgic and cosmopolitan character. Within this background Istos aimed to create a non-conservative alternative public space that does not hold an organic connection to the church; hence underlining the multi-voiced aspect of the society. Filling an important intellectual void, books released by Istos continue to grow its political, intellectual and oppositional stance.

New fields of negotiation began to arise in the late 2000s, creating a new dynamic in the political and social spheres of non-Muslim communities wherein individuals began reconsidering the tradition of remaining silent on issues related to politics and the state. Despite their shrinking numbers, young non-Muslims are experiencing hopeful moments and were empowered through their collective action gathering with other marginalised groups, especially during the 2013 Gezi Park protests.

---

[55]   Interview with a representative of Nor Zartonk.
[56]   Interview with a representative of Istos.

Concluding Remarks

Despite the fact that there has been an increase in studies focussing on the daily practices of non-Muslim communities in Turkey in recent years, there is still much more work to be done in this field. This study has focussed on non-Muslim community members' and representatives' perception of the state, especially the AKP. In this study, revealing non-Muslim minorities' experiences through their own voices, we aimed to explore non-Muslims' perceptions through interviews with members of the communities.

One of the main findings from the fieldwork was the perception of continuity in state policies from the establishment of the republic until today, irrespective of the governments' ideological character. Non-Muslims agreed that the state's policy defines religious minorities as "scapegoats," "internal enemies," "the fifth column," "the other," "foreigners," and entities that need to be eliminated.

Despite this continuity, which has also been present during the AKP's term, non-Muslim's considered Turkey's EU candidacy to be the driving force in the attempts to enhance the religious freedoms of minorities. However, as the government replaced its EU motivation with its discourse on Ottoman heritage, the expectations of non-Muslims have not materialised. As reflected in the discourses of many interviewees, they perceived the government's democratisation attempts to be a part of *realpolitik* and their approach to non-Muslims as instrumental. Many non-Muslims remained doubtful about the real intention of the AKP to create a monotypic society in which Sunni-Muslim identity plays a key role in defining Turkishness. We also argue that a feeling of insecurity is developed against the AKP among non-Muslim communities. As political Islam and authoritarianism is on the rise, the social tensions non-Muslims face in daily life highlight the dilemma between being a citizen and a minority.

Last but not least, the flourishing of new negotiation fields in the late 2000s created a new atmosphere in the political and social spheres of non-Muslims. All of these examples demonstrate the fact that it is still possible to be in solidarity with other non-Muslim communities as well as the society at large in different fields, such as politics and even

literature and other intellectual works. These new negotiation fields appear to be an ideal alternative in order to negotiate minority rights and rights in general.

Bibliography

Agos. "Vakıf Seçimlerini İptal Eden Genelge Hükümsüz." March 23, 2021. Accessed May 21, 2021. http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/25481/vakif-secimlerini-iptal-eden-genelge-hukumsuz.

Akçam, Taner. *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide*. London: ZedBooks, 2004.

Akgönül, Samim. *Türkiye Rumları*. Istanbul: Iletisim, 2007.

Aktar, Ayhan. "Homogenizing the nation, Turkifying the Economy." In *Crossing the Aegean*, edited by Renée Hirschon, 79–95. Oxford, New York: Berghahn, 2003.

Bali, N. Rıfat. *Antisemitism and Conspiracy Theories in Turkey*. Istanbul: Libra, 2013.

Beylunioğlu, Anna Maria. *Freedom of Religion in Turkey between Secular and Islamic Values*. PhD Thesis, EUI, 2017.

Bianet. "Erdoğan: Bizim Tek Derdimiz Var, İslam, İslam, İslam [Erdogan: We Have Only One Concern, Islam, Islam, Islam]." July 31, 2015. Accessed May 20, 2021. https://bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/166454-erdogan-bizim-tek-derdimiz-var-islam-islam-islam.

Braude, Benjamin and Bernard Lewis. *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*. New York: Homes and Meir Publishers, 1982.

Brink-Danan, Marcy. *Jewish Life in Twenty-First-Century Turkey: The Other Side of Tolerance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011.

Cohen Yanarocak, Hay Eytan. *The Erdoğan Revolution in the Turkish Curriculum Textbooks*, edited by David M. Bayer. Israel: IMPACT-SE, 2021. https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Erdogan-Revolution-in-the-Turkish-CurriculumTextbooks.pdf.

Erol, Su. *Mazlum ve Makul İstanbul Süryanilerinde Etno-Dinsel Kimlik İnşası ve Kimlik Stratejileri*. Istanbul: İletişim, 2016.

European Commission. "Turkey 2020 Report." October 6, 2020. Accessed June 28, 2021. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2020-10/turkey_report_2020.pdf.

Gültekin, Uygar. "Struma Faciası için ilk resmi anma." *Agos*, February 24, 2015. Accessed April 15, 2021. http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/10682/struma-faciasi-icin-ilk-resmi-anma.

Hurriyet Daily News. "First Church of Republican Era To Be Built for Istanbul's Syriacs." May 19, 2016. Accessed May 3, 2021. https://www.hurriyet-dailynews.com/amp/first-church-of-republican-era-to-be-built-for-istanbuls-syriacs-99389.

Kaymak, Özgür. "Being a Turkish Jew in Unwelcomed Public Sphere." In *Turkish Jews and Their Diasporas*, edited by Kerem Öktem and İpek Kocaömer Yosmaoğlu. London: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming, December 2021.

Koru, Selim. "Turkey's Islamist Dream Finally Becomes a Reality." *New York Times*, July 14, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/14/opinion/hagia-sophia-turkey-mosque.html

Kurban, Dilek, and Kezban Hatemi. *Bir 'Yabancı'laştırma Hikayesi: Türkiye'de Gayrimüslim Cemaatlerin Vakıf ve Taşınmaz Mülkiyet Sorunu* [A Story of Aba-lienating: Problem of Foundation and Immovable Property of non-Muslim Communities in Turkey]. Istanbul: TESEV, 2009.

Oran, Baskın. *Minorities and Minority Rights in Turkey*. Boulder: Lynne Reinner, 2021.

Örs, İlay. *İstanbullu Rumlar ve 1964 Sürgünleri*. Istanbul: İletişim, 2019.

Patton, Marcie J. "AKP Reform Fatigue in Turkey: What Has Happened to the EU Process?" *Mediterranean Politics* 12, no. 3 (October 2007): 339–358. https://doi.org/10.1080/13629390701622382.

Presidency of Religious Affairs. "Basın Açıklaması – Misyonerlik [Press Release - Missionaries]." February 6, 2003. Accessed May 21, 2021. https://www.diyanet.gov.tr/tr-TR/Kurumsal/Detay/1211/basin-aciklamasi.

Roy, Olivier. "Islamising Stones Is Easier than Islamising Souls." Qantara.de, July 27, 2020. Accessed May 22, 2021. https://en.qantara.de/content/interview-with-olivier-roy-on-the-conversation-of-hagia-sophia-islamising-stones-is-easier.

Salim Nefes, Türkay. "Perceived Group Threats and Right Wing Political Party Membership as Driving Forces of Negative Descriptions in Turkish Parliamentary Debates (1983–2018)." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47, no. 1 (May 2021). https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2021.1924051.

TBMM. "Parliamentary Speech of AKP MP Avni Erdemir on 31 January 2008 (Term 23, Session 57)." Accessed June 12, 2021. https://www.tbmm.gov.tr.

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. "Annual Report 2021." Accessed May 1, 2021. https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021-04/2021%20Annual%20Report.pdf.

USCIRF. "Turkey Report." Accessed May 26, 2021. https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Turkey.pdf.

Valansi, Karel. *The Crescent Moon and the Magen David: Turkish-Israeli Relations through the Lens of the Turkish Public*. London: Hamilton Books, 2018.

Villelabeitia, Ibon. "Turkish PM Threatens to Expel Armenians." *Reuters*, March 17, 2010. Accessed May 25, 2021. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-armenia-idUSTRE62G2GN20100317.

Yılmaz, Gözde. "It Is Pull-and-Push that Matters for External Europeanization! Explaining Minority Policy Change in Turkey." *Mediterranean Politics* 19, no. 2 (May 2014): 238–258. https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2013.838443.

CAUGHT BETWEEN THE NOTIONS OF ETHNICITY, CITIZENSHIP AND DIASPORA: THE CASE OF THE BOSNIAKS IN TURKEY

Melih Çoban

Along with many others, Bosniaks are an ethnic group within the contemporary Turkish nation with immigrant roots dating back to the last quarter of the 19th century. They are socially regarded within Turkish society under the category *muhacir*, an attribution used to denote "Muslim immigrants" in the Turkish language.[1] As an immigrant-based community, Bosniaks in Turkey do not form a homogeneous group, as they are members of an immigrant stratum built up by continuous migration waves from various regions in different historical periods and, at the same time, they constitute a multigenerational society. The geographic origins of Bosniaks in Turkey are Bosnia-Herzegovina and the former Sanjak[2] region.[3] In terms of migration waves, while during the Ottoman era it was a combination of Bosniak immigrants from Bosnia and Sanjak coming to Turkey, during the Republican period it was mostly Bosniaks from Sanjak who migrated to Turkey.[4] Today, Bo-

---

[1]   Fahriye Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar: Boşnakların Türkiye'ye Göçleri (1878–1934)* (Istanbul: Bilge Kültür Sanat, 2010), 37.
[2]   Sanjak was an administration term used by the Ottoman authorities to denote provinces. The term *Sanjak* (Sandžak) in Bosniak history refers to the territories of the former Novi Pazar province which are currently divided between the states of Serbia and Montenegro.
[3]   Amra Dedeic Kırbaç, "Tarih ve Gelenek Bağlamında Türkiye'de Boşnaklar," *Uluslararası İnsan Bilimleri Dergisi* 9, no.1 (2012): 704.
[4]   Sabina Pacariz, *The Migrations of Bosniaks to Turkey from 1945 to 1974: The Case of Sandzak* (Sarajevo: Center for Advanced Studies, 2016), 109.

sniaks live in Turkey as Turkish citizens who share many cultural traits with Turks but at the same time possess a different ethnic background.

Constituting a significant ethno-demographic part of the Ottoman legacy within the modern Turkish nation, Bosniaks in Turkey have long refrained from identifying themselves with a separate ethnic or cultural identity when confronted with the assimilationist cultural policies of the new nation state. But while adapting themselves to Turkish culture and identity, at the same time Bosniaks preserved a collective identity of Bosniakness mostly owing to the fact that their population in Turkey has been fed by continuous migration waves in different periods. This multigenerational characteristic perhaps makes them unique among all other ethnic groups in Turkey.

Another important characteristic of the Bosniaks in Turkey is the complexity they encounter in identifying themselves. This self-identification process has presented a problematic situation whereby Turkish Bosniaks can be said to be caught in the middle of concepts of citizenship, ethnicity, and diaspora. The aim of this article is to analyze the problematic development of a Bosniak identity in Turkey with regards to the cultural assimilation processes and continuous migration waves and other factors on both foreign and domestic scales. This qualitative study is based on data acquired from a literature review including books, articles and journals, online sources such as social media groups founded by Turkish Bosniaks, and an in-depth interview held with an expert on Turkish-Bosniak culture. The fact that more in-depth interviews could not be performed due to the Covid-19 pandemic should be noted as a limitation of this study.

The Earliest Backgrounds of Bosniak Identity

For many of those studying the history of Bosniaks, it is a popular tendency to quote Amin Maalouf in terms of stressing the interchangeable character of Bosniakness as an identity whereby he refers to a Bosniak in Bosnia who identifies himself under different identities such as Yugoslavian, Muslim, Bosniak, and Bosnian according to changing

situations in different timelines.[5] The dilemma of expressing identities as seen in this case is highly visible when it comes to the Bosniaks in Turkey. Turkish Bosniak identity presents a merging of the various identities of Bosniakness, Turkishness, Muslimism and muhacirlik.[6] Sharing the same country as citizens with their Muslim co-religionists and being assimilated to a certain extent within Turkish culture, they also maintain an awareness of being immigrants of different territorial and ethnic origins. They are largely caught between these different identities both within emic and etic perspectives. In order to define this dilemma, the historical origins of the Bosniak ethnicity in general and its transformation within the Turkish experience should be evaluated.

In terms of racial origins, Bosniaks are regarded as a Slavic ethnic group and placed by many historians under the category of Southern Slavs along with Serbs, Croats, Slovenes and Montenegrins. Linguistically, they speak a dialect of the Serbian/Croatian language which includes a considerable Turkish and Arabic vocabulary integrated into their language during Ottoman rule. The word Bosnia, which serves as the historical origin of their ethnic identity, is actually a territorial term which through the ages has been used to denote the geography covering certain territories of the contemporary Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.[7] The etymological root of the word "Bosnia" is a controversial problem among scholars in terms of determining its linguistic origin as used by different tribes who resided in the region.[8] To explain the origins of this term, a general reference is given by many scholars to the word "bos", which is believed to mean "river" in the language of the Illyrians, a historical tribe who inhabited various regions of the Balkans since the ancient age. Illyrians were known to be the oldest residents of Bosnia who belonged to the Indo-European race group and established their dominion in the region in the 9th century A.D.[9]

---

[5]   Amin Maalouf, *Ölümcül Kimlikler*, trans. Aysel Bora (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2004), 17.
[6]   *Muhacirlik* in Turkish refers to the state of being a *muhacir* (immigrant).
[7]   Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar: Boşnakların Türkiye'ye Göçleri (1878–1934)*, 47.
[8]   Imamovic, Mustafa, *Boşnakların Tarihi*, trans. Cenita Özgüner and Hüseyin Gül (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2018), 21–23.
[9]   Amra Dedeic Kırbaç, "Boşnakların Türkiye'ye Göçleri," *Akademik Bakış Dergisi* 35 (March/April 2013): 2–3.

When it comes to determining the ethnic origins of contemporary Balkan nations, it becomes a very controversial and difficult task considering the variety of ethnic tribes who inhabited the region throughout the centuries.[10] The same difficulty emerges within the case of the Bosniaks. Throughout history, various ethnic groups such as ancient Macedonians, Goths, Byzantines, Teutons, Huns, Avars, Bulgarians, Pechenegs, Slavs, Greeks and Turks have inhabited the Balkans.[11] This ethnic and historical variety leads to a highly complex situation in terms of stating the actual ethnic origins of most Balkan nations. There are various approaches to the question of ethnic origins when it comes to Bosniaks, forcing them into a unique situation of consensus. It is a general approach by many Serbian historians to treat Bosniaks as converted Serbs.[12] From the Croatian side, Bosniaks are mostly recognized as converted Croats.[13] Another approach is that Bosniaks are the descendants of Scythians.[14] A current trend which is slowly on the rise among some Bosniaks is to refer to Illyrians as their ancestors.[15] According to Mustafa Imamovic, a renowned Bosnian historian, under any circumstance, the determining factor in the ethnic origins of Bosniaks is the Slavic language and ethnicity.[16]

By building a bridge among the ethno-cultural, territorial/political and religious meanings of the term Bosnian, it is possible to find a general consensus in explaining Bosniak ethnicity. In ethno-cultural terms, Slavic culture under a Slavic speaking community dominated the region beginning from as early as the 9th century. Following this period, the

---

[10]   Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Milletler ve Milliyetçilik: Program, Mit, Gerçeklik*, trans. Osman Akınhay (Istanbul: Ayrıntı Yayıncılık, 2006), 84.
[11]   George Walter Hoffmann, "The Evolution of the Ethnographic Map of Yugoslavia: A Historical Geographic Interpretation," in *An Historical Geography of the Balkans*, ed. Francis W. Carter (London: Academic Press Inc., 1977), 464.
[12]   Aydın Babuna, *Bir Ulusun Doğuşu: Geçmişten Günümüze Boşnaklar* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2000), 1.
[13]   Imamovic, *Boşnakların Tarihi*, xiv.
[14]   Ercan Çokbankır, *Arnavutlar, Boşnaklar, Pomaklar: Balkan Türklerinin Kökleri* (Izmir: Etki Yayınları, 2008), 185.
[15]   Şevket Koç, interviewed on April 15, 2021, Istanbul.
[16]   Imamovic, *Boşnakların Tarihi,* 19.

term Bosnia also gained a political meaning since it was first a Banate[17] of Bosnia established in the 12th century, which served as a vassal kingdom ruled by local monarchs called *ban* who were bound to Hungarian kings, later becoming the independent Kingdom of Bosnia under King Tvrtko I in 1377.[18] Similar to many cases of deriving national identities from territorial or dynastic names, the historical and mythological backgrounds of the modern Bosnian nation have been founded upon this historical kingdom.[19] But speaking of national identity, in both the Kingdom of Bosnia and the contemporary state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the third element constituting the bridge towards Bosniak ethnicity is to be found in religion. During the reign of the Bosnian Kingdom, the subjects of the Kingdom were divided among themselves on separate religious identities based on sectarian differences. The bulk of the Kingdom's population consisted of three main groups namely Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats and the Bogomil. Bogomilism was a sectarian movement named for a Bulgarian priest who had developed a new, alternative Christian understanding and his teachings attracted many followers in Bosnia and the surrounding regions. Unlike other Christians, the Bogomil rejected the Old Testament and the holy days of the Saints and did not convene in churches, nor did they eat meat or drink wine.[20] Based on these alternative religious and cultural beliefs and practices, they were largely regarded as heretics by the authorities of other Christian sects.

The Ottoman Era and the Development of Bosniak Identity

Many historians who study the history of Bosniaks tend to refer to the Bogomil Slavs of Bosnia as the ancestors of modern Bosniaks. According to this approach, the religious element in the construction of Bosniak ethnicity follows a two-fold path whereby following the Ot-

---

[17]   Banate was the name given to administrative units under the medieval Hungarian Kingdom.
[18]   Imamovic, *Boşnakların Tarihi,* 67–68.
[19]   Yalçın Köksal Demir, "Cemaatten Ulusa Boşnaklar," *Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 2 (July 2011): 73, http://acikerisim.ktu.edu.tr/jspui/handle/123456789/123.
[20]   Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar,* 62.

toman conquest of Bosnia in 1463, the Bogomil masses converted to Islam and this converted community came to be known as Bosniaks.[21] The element which distinguished the Bogomil from their Serbian and Croatian brethren was still of a religious nature: before it was sectarian differences that set them apart and later there was a totally new non-Christian religious identity. So, Islamic religion and Muslim identity became the determining factors for the Bosniak identity. Adhering to the Bogomil-Islam connection, Bosniaks can be identified as the Bosnians who converted to Islam and adapted to Turco-Islamic culture following the Ottoman Conquest of Bosnia in 1463.[22]

For many historians, the conversion of the Bogomil to Islam was a voluntary action and this choice was for mostly cultural reasons. According to this, the Bogomil felt themselves very close to Muslim Ottomans in their view of Jesus as being mortal rather than the son of God and of recognizing Muhammad as a prophet. In addition to this cultural resemblance, the tolerance of the Ottomans towards non-Muslim communities had been an accelerating factor in terms of their conversion to Islam after long years of mistreatment under the reign of the Catholic Hungarian Kings.[23] Some historians have suggested that such a choice of mass conversion, apart from cultural or emotional motives, was prompted by highly rational and even pragmatic reasons. The Bogomil converts, by recognizing Islam as their new religion, were granted certain privileges under Ottoman rule such as opportunities for upward mobility through being employed in the service of the state in various bureaucratic levels of the Ottoman Monarchy. The privilege mentioned here is an officially granted breach of the Ottoman mechanism of bureaucratic reproduction, namely the *devşirme* (devshirme) system. According to this model, Christian children were taken from conquered lands in order to be raised as loyal converts who would be employed in different levels of the military and civil bureaucratic machinery. This system was closed to Muslim-born children, however, the new Muslims of Bosnia were allowed to send their children to the capital for

---

[21]   Imamovic, *Boşnakların Tarihi*, 163.
[22]   Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar*, 46.
[23]   Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar*, 74.

their training and education for state service.[24] In addition, the official socio-political order of the Ottoman State namely the *millet* (nation) system was based on Islamic law which suggested the allowance of non-Muslim communities to preserve their beliefs and co-exist with Muslims, but it was a system of Muslim priority in political and legal issues regarding the subjects of the Sultan and in this sense, Muslims constituted the ethnic core of Ottoman society. Thus, their conversion to Islam would in time pave the way for the Bosniaks to become the social and economic elites of their region when compared to the Christian communities of Bosnia and many Bosniaks throughout Ottoman history were able to enjoy the privileges and prestige of being employed in state service.

The Ottoman *millet* system was based on the ethno-demographic mapping of society with religion as the distinctive element. The population of the Empire was divided into various nations, although the concept of "nation" was based on religious and sectarian characteristics rather than the modern understanding of nation. According to this system, Ottoman society consisted of *millets* (nations) such as the Muslim, the Orthodox (Greeks, Bulgarians and others), Armenian (Gregorian) and the Jewish nations.[25] Although each nation included different ethnic groups within itself, such ethnic differences were not taken into account in the eyes of state authorities and before the law. It was religious or sectarian identities which were dominant in this understanding and ethnic identities were given an inferior status. For instance, the ethnic identity of a Muslim subject such as Turk, Arab or Kurd was not a significant matter in terms of societal issues and laws; instead it was the membership in the *ummah* (Islamic community) which determined a Muslim subject's place within Ottoman society. In this respect, Bosniaks were considered part of the *ummah*, but the term Bosniak, which provided a link to their ethnic identity, was frequently used by state authorities and other Islamic communities. In the official state records, they were often referred to as "Bosniaks," "Bosniak *taife*" (Bosniak group) or the "Bosnian people." As for the Bosniaks, they also

---

[24] Imamovic, *Bošnakların Tarihi*, 164.
[25] Babuna, *Bir Ulusun Doğuşu*, 14.

kept themselves in a separate position in regards to their co-existence with other Muslim communities.[26] Thus, in both emic and etic perceptions of ethnicity, they were able to maintain their Bosniakness within Ottoman society for centuries. Another issue we should note is that Bosniaks, as autochthonous people of the Bosnian territories, lived together in a concentrated population and could practice and preserve their authentic culture, thus keeping the Bosniak ethnicity alive.

Under Ottoman rule, in time Bosniaks emerged as the socio-economic elites of Bosnia as they controlled large plantations on behalf of the Ottoman Sultan and prospered. In comparison to other local non-Muslim groups such as Serbs and Croats, they could enjoy a higher social status under the religious hierarchy of the *millet* system which placed Muslims at the top. In addition, they succeeded in having considerable access to employment in the Ottoman bureaucracy. Following a *ferman* (royal decree) in 1515, one thousand Bosniak boys were to be sent annually to the capital to be trained for state service.[27] In terms of high bureaucracy, many Bosniak statesmen served the Ottoman crown under the title *pasha*[28]. The most renowned of these Bosniak *pashas* are Hersekzade Ahmed, Damat İbrahim, Sokollu Mehmed, Lala Mustafa, Malkoc Ali, Lala Mehmed, Dervis, Kara Davud, Husrev, Topal Recep, Salih, Sarı Suleyman and Damat Melek Mehmed.[29] These *pashas* still remain in the collective memory of Turkish Bosniaks as figures of collective pride which reminds them of their proud and happy times under Ottoman rule and protection.

Speaking of Bosniaks in general, it is their conversion to Islam which deeply shaped the Bosniak identity. As for the Bosniaks in Turkey, the second important element in terms of identity development is their immigrant background. Bosniaks in contemporary Turkey are not autochthonous, but rather a cumulative group built up by a cycle of huge migration waves which followed one another since the last quarter of the 19th century. These migration waves first started as part of the nationalist uprisings in the Balkans during which the Ottoman State had

---

[26]   Çokbankır, *Arnavutlar, Boşnaklar, Pomaklar,* 187.
[27]   Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar*, 68.
[28]   *Pasha* was a title to denote members of the higher bureaucracy in Ottoman administration.
[29]   Çokbankır, *Arnavutlar, Boşnaklar, Pomaklar*, 190.

lost control of most of its territories in the region, and continued during the Turkish Republican era as well. During this long-term process, thousands of Bosniaks left their homes and followed an eastward route of migration towards the lands which still remained under Ottoman control.

Starting from the 17th century, the Ottoman State entered into long-term conflicts with monarchic powers like Russia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which aimed to eliminate Ottoman control in the Balkans and establish their dominion in the region. Following the French Revolution in 1789, the conflicting interests of the three major monarchies in the Balkans overlapped with nationalist movements by various ethnic communities in the region who sought independence. In this respect, while Russians assumed the protector role over the Orthodox ethnicities in the Balkans, the Austrians assumed the same role over Catholic communities.

The Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878, namely the 93 War in Ottoman historical records, was a turning point in Bosniak history, as this incident marked the beginning of the first migration waves to Turkey.[30] After the war, Ottomans as the defeated party lost their sovereignty over most of their territories in the Balkans on which the independent kingdoms of Bulgaria, Romania, and Serbia and Montenegro were founded. The Treaty of Berlin, which was signed after the war, also granted the Austro-Hungarian Empire the right to occupy the region of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the motherland of the Bosniaks. Following the signing of the treaty, Austrian troops entered Bosnia marking the end of the Ottoman rule that had lasted more than four centuries in the region. Bosniaks did not welcome this new situation and initiated a resistance movement against the Austrians, but their resistance was easily suppressed by the occupation forces.[31]

Austrian occupation forced many Bosniaks to leave their homes and migrate towards lands still under Ottoman rule, mostly to Istanbul and other Anatolian cities at the heart of the Ottoman State. This migration

---

[30]   Here, Turkey refers to the former Ottoman territories which are currently under the sovereignty of the Turkish Republic.

[31]   Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar*, 116–120.

wave, which formed the first step of the Bosniak presence in today's Turkey, did not occur at once but rather took place as a result of a combination of various factors which promoted the idea of migration among many Bosnian Bosniaks. First of all, there was a strong socio-economic motive behind the idea of migration which foresaw the end of Bosniak dominance in the region without the protection of the Ottomans. Driven by the fear of losing their possessions, wealthy Bosniaks began to sell their immovable properties and migrate to Ottoman territories.[32] This fear of land loss was later confirmed by the agricultural policies of the occupation forces, which installed Catholic subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in Bosniak-owned agricultural fields.[33] Among lower class Bosniaks, migrating to Ottoman lands was seen as the first step towards a fresh new start which could facilitate better economic conditions. Rumors were widespread among the Bosniaks, such as it was the Ottoman Sultan's great pleasure to welcome Bosniak immigrants and that he would grant them lands and livestock for free, which accelerated migration.[34]

Apart from economic anxieties, most Bosniaks were feeling insecure about their survival in their homeland and this feeling of insecurity was based on two situations to their disadvantage. First of all, their centuries-long motherland was occupied by a non-Muslim power. Secondly, following the Ottoman defeat in 1878, nationalist movements by various Christian ethnic communities in the Balkans had accelerated with growing violence. Orthodox and Catholic groups could enjoy the protection and support of their sectarian protectors Austria and Russia, the two great powers in the region, but for the Bosniaks, their connection to their Ottoman kin had been broken.

A third motive behind Bosniak migrations was a cultural character which led to a growing anxiety related to the maintenance of Muslim identity against certain assimilationist policies of the occupation forces. The emphasis on Croatian culture and loyalty to Austrian rule, which was highly integrated into the education system in Bosnia-Herzegovina,

---

[32]   Tufan Gündüz, *Alahimanet Bosna: Boşnakların Osmanlı Topraklarına Göçü (1879–1912)* (Istanbul: Yeditepe Yayınevi, 2012), 97.
[33]   Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar*, 193.
[34]   Gündüz, *Alahimanet Bosna*, 100–101.

was an influential exercise of an ideological state apparatus and deeply worried the Bosniaks about the risk of assimilation. Another assimilationist policy was the mandatory military service officially imposed on male Bosniaks.[35] Muslim Bosniaks who had lived as loyal subjects of the Ottoman Empire for centuries now found themselves under the political and cultural assimilation of a relatively foreign power which was perceived as a direct threat to the maintenance of their Bosniak identity.

The anxieties of the Bosniaks reached a peak point in 1908 when Austria officially annexed Bosnia, and a second migration wave ensued, which would coincide with the forthcoming Balkan Wars in 1912–1913. In comparison to the occupation period, the ratification of the annexation deepened the collective fear of survival shared by many Bosniaks. The following Balkan Wars, while ending the remainders of Ottoman rule in the Balkans, increased the feeling of insecurity among the Bosniaks who were surrounded by Christian elements in the changing Balkan geography. A never-ending series of attacks and massacres by Christian militia groups targeting Muslim communities in various parts of the Balkans during and after the war forced many Bosniaks to migrate to Ottoman controlled lands, which were considered a safe haven.

Specifying the exact number of Bosniaks who migrated to Turkey between 1878 and 1913 is a very hard task considering the lack and loss of official records during wartime. There is a variety of statistical data claimed by different sources. According to the Austro-Hungarian official records, 63,000 Bosniaks migrated from Bosnia-Herzegovina during this period.[36] Historian Vojislav Bogicevic claims this number to be around 150,000 while Djordje Pejanovic, another historian, extends this number to 160,000. According to Mustafa Imamovic, this number is 180,000.[37] Considering the demographic changes in Bosnia-Herzegovina during this period, the best guess about the number of Bosniak immigrants is said to be around 150,000.[38] Just as it is hard to calculate

---

[35]   Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar*, 197–198.

[36]   Hayri Kolaşinli, *Muhacirlerin İzinde: Boşnakların Trajik Göç Tarihinden Kesitler* (Ankara: Lotus Yayınevi, 2003), 74.

[37]   Kırbaç, "Boşnakların Türkiye'ye Göçleri," 10.

[38]   Babuna, *Bir Ulusun Doğuşu*, 27.

the number of Bosniaks who left Bosnia-Herzegovina, it is also very hard to specify the number of Bosniaks who settled in the territories remaining within the frontiers of contemporary Turkey, again due to a lack of official statistics. The Bosniak immigrants who found their way to Anatolia settled in cities like Karamürsel, Bursa, Adapazarı, İzmir, Ankara and Istanbul. Of these, Istanbul, as the capital of the Ottoman State, the city of the Sultan, most attracted Bosniak immigrants.[39] Many Bosniaks settled in the provinces of Bayrampasa and Yenibosna (New Bosnia) in Istanbul, which still remain as districts with notable Bosniak populations.[40]

The Republican Era in Turkey

As the end of World War I marked a new era in world history with the emergence of new nation states in Eurasia, the fate of the Bosniaks continued to coincide with that of the Turks. Bosniak migrations to Turkey continued with new waves after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923. While the migrations between 1923 and 1951 were mostly based on individual choices relatively autonomous of each other, the period between 1952 and 1967 witnessed massive migrations of Bosniaks to Turkey.[41] The basic motive behind the individual migrations in the former period was the dissatisfaction Bosniaks experienced regarding their place and status within the constitutional framework of the Yugoslavian Kingdom founded after the First World War. The political elites of the new state, while emphasizing the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes as the founding elements, ignored the presence of Bosniak ethnicity by simply placing them under the category "Muslims" and by doing so, treated them as their Slavic cousins who had converted to Islam. This official approach made some Bosniaks question their citizenship ties to the Yugoslavian Kingdom and migrate to Turkey, the political heir of the Ottoman State.

---

[39]   Gündüz, *Alahimanet Bosna*, 173–202.
[40]   Muammer Demirel, "Türkiye'de Bosna Göçmenleri," *Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 12, no. 2 (July 2008): 292.
[41]   Cemile Tekin, "Yugoslavya'dan Türkiye'ye Göçün Nedenleri (1950–1958)," *Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 39 (2018): 250.

The establishment of the socialist regime in Yugoslavia after the Second World War was an important turning point in terms of Bosniak migrations. As seen in the case of most socialist or communist regimes, the ruling elite in Yugoslavia adapted the policy of creating citizens deprived of religious identities and this policy had an extremely negative effect on the Bosniaks. The new regime aimed to cut off the cultural connection of the Bosniaks with their Ottoman past and erase the traces of Islamic civilization in the country. In order to achieve this, a series of executive actions such as the confiscation of some mosques, *turbes*[42] and other Islamic objects, the closure of *mekteb*[43] schools and the enacting of the Law on the Abolition of the veil and burka were implemented.[44] Such restrictive actions caused deep tensions among the Muslim citizens of Yugoslavia and starting in the 1950s, a massive migration wave towards Turkey was initiated. This migration wave included not only Bosniaks but other Muslim communities like Turks and Albanians. According to the official statistics from the Turkish state, following the end of the Second World War, a total number of 240,469 Yugoslavian Muslims had migrated to Turkey.[45] This post-war migration continued until the 1970s in various waves and thus, the Bosniak community in Turkey completed its migratory structure.

One problem regarding the Bosniaks in Turkey is to determine the size of their population. As they were never officially recorded as Bosniaks, there is no official data about their population, but rather there are estimated numbers. In accordance with the official conceptualization of citizenship in Turkey, statistical data related to ethnic origins of citizens are not recorded via census or other means. The only sign of ethnicity officially recorded is religious identity, but this blurs the process as there are many other ethnic groups with a Muslim identity in Turkey. It is rumored that there are 10–12 million citizens of Bal-

---

[42] *Turbe* is the name given to tombs of renowned religious or historical figures in Islamic culture.
[43] *Mekteb*s are traditional elementary schools inherited from the Ottoman Era.
[44] Pacariz, *The Migrations of Bosniaks to Turkey from 1945 to 1974*, 127–138.
[45] Mustafa Memic, *Karadağ Boşnak (Müslüman) Tarihi* (Istanbul: Kastaş Yayınevi, 2016), 379.

kan ancestry in Turkey[46] but since this estimated number also includes ethnic Turks, Albanians and others who migrated to Turkey from the Balkans, it fails to constitute a reliable reference.

It is estimated that between 1878 and 1939, around 400,000 Bosniaks migrated from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Sanjak to Turkey.[47] According to the official records of the Yugoslavian Chamber of Immigrants, around 185,000 Bosniaks had migrated from Yugoslavia to Turkey between 1945 and 1975.[48] Taking the approximate birth and death ratios over a period of more than a century, an estimated number ranging between 1–2 million would be a rational estimate. As a matter of fact, state-financed research in 2008 specified the number of Bosniaks in Turkey as 2 million.[49] According to Şevket Koç, the owner of the online community newspaper *Boşnakmedya* and a renowned member of the Bosniak community in the Pendik district of Istanbul, there are 3 million Bosniaks in Turkey, but regarding the maintenance of Bosniak culture and identity, this number is as low as 1 million due to cultural assimilation.[50]

This statement by Koç brings forth another question regarding Bosniak ethnicity in Turkey – simply how do Turkish Bosniaks identify themselves within the context of ethnicity, citizenship and culture? Considering the academic literature about Bosniaks in Turkey, it is generally claimed that Bosniaks are a different ethnic group with a Muslim identity and an authentic culture who have historical ties with the regions of Sanjak and Bosnia-Herzegovina, but like many other ethnic groups within Turkish society, they have become subject to cultural assimilation within the policies of the Turkish nation-state. But, con-

---

[46]   Nurcan Özgür Baklacıoğlu, "Between Neo-Ottomanist Kin Policy in the Balkans and Transnational Kin Economics in the EU," *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 14, no. 3 (2015): 53, https://www.ecmi.de/fileadmin/downloads/publications/JEMIE/2015/Ozgur.pdf.

[47]   Kırbaç, "Boşnakların Türkiye'ye Göçleri," 12.

[48]   Zeynep Işıl Hamziç, "Marmara Bölgesi'ne Göç Eden Balkan Göçmenlerinin Yerleşim Yerleri," December 14, 2018, https://www.bosnakmedya.com/marmara-bolgesine-goc-eden-balkan-gocmenlerinin-yerlesim-yerleri/.

[49]   "Türkiye'deki Kürtlerin sayısı," *Milliyet*, June 6, 2008, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/turkiye-deki-kurtlerin-sayisi--magazin-873452.

[50]   Koç, interview.

demning these nationalist policies as the only reason behind the assimilation of the Bosniaks would simply mean ignoring the cultural and political attitude of the Bosniaks towards the concept of Turkishness. As one author noted: "Bosniaks are, among all other peoples of Turkey, the most adaptable elements. Unlike such communities as Kurds and Circassians, who coexisted with the Turks for centuries, the Bosniaks have lost their ancestral ties and language wherever they mingled with Turks individually or as small groups, and in terms of national self-identification, they have become Turks even more than ethnic Turks."[51]

During the Republican era in Turkey, Bosniaks have largely refrained from identifying themselves under a different identity and referred to themselves as Turks. This attitude can still be said to be prevalent based on statements such as "We are Turks" or "We are Turks of Bosniak origin" when asked about their identity. Such an attitude is based on various factors which place the Bosniaks among the most adaptable ethnic groups in Turkey and at the same time, all these factors can be counted as the primary elements building the Turkish Bosniak identity which can be summarized as a combination of the notions of being Bosniak, Ottoman, Muslim, Turk and *muhacir* (immigrant).

As noted before, contemporary Bosniak identity finds its roots in the Ottoman era, during which they converted to Islam and developed a separate collective identity among other Slavic Christian communities of their region. Becoming the dominant elements of their region under the religious hierarchy of the Ottoman *millet* system and being Muslim subjects loyal to the Ottomans, they have been identified by their neighboring communities like the Serbs and Croats as "Turks."[52] The term *Turcin*, meaning Turk, was attributed to them by the Christian Slavs, but this term was used to denote being Muslim instead of Turkish ethnicity.[53] During the Balkanization process, Christian ethnic groups who revolted against Ottoman rule for independence ignored the fact that Bosniaks were not ethnic Turks since religious (and sec-

---

[51] Yaşar Nabi, *Balkanlar ve Türklük II* (Istanbul: Cumhuriyet Kitapları, 1999), 77.
[52] Gündüz, *Alahimanet Bosna*, 13.
[53] Imamovic, *Boşnakların Tarihi*, xiv.

tarian) identities were perceived by them as the basis of nationhood.[54] Therefore, this etic identification of Bosniaks with Turks or Muslims in general, found its emic reciprocation among the Bosniaks as feeling close to Turkishness with a religiously comprehensive meaning beyond ethnic background. This reciprocal identification based on religion continued during the Austrian occupation and the establishment of Yugoslavia.[55] Under the reign of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Bosniaks were often identified with the Ottoman Turks who were the symbols of historical enmity in the eyes of the founding ethnic elites of the Kingdom and anti-Islamic propaganda condemning Bosniaks as traitors who had betrayed their Slavic brethren was very popular.[56] A less hostile, but still discriminatory attitude was officially represented during the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, as Bosniaks had to register themselves as either Serbs or Croats since the Bosniak nationhood was not officially recognized before the law.[57] In the 1948 national census, Bosniaks were offered three options of registering as a Muslim Serb, Muslim Croat or Muslim other, and 90 percent of the Bosniaks in Yugoslavia registered themselves as Muslim other, denying the imposition of Serbian and Croatian identities and clinging to their Muslim identity.[58] Such treatment by the state authorities urged many Bosniaks in the Sanjak region to question their place within Yugoslavia and an inclination towards Turkishness as a savior gained momentum, such that:

There persisted a strong feeling of impermanence and of not belonging, which affected the whole attitude toward the economy and other aspects of life in Sanjak. This was partly due to the broad impression that Bosniak identity is directly tied to Turkish identity… led by the criterion of religion, many Bosniaks ignored the fact of being an autochthonous people of the Balkans and considered Turkey as their real homeland.[59]

---

[54]   Kemal Karpat, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Etnik Yapılanma ve Göçler* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2013), 241.

[55]   Babuna, *Bir Ulusun Doğuşu*, 15.

[56]   Kırbaç, "Boşnakların Türkiye'ye Göçleri." 11–12.

[57]   Kolaşinli, *Muhacirlerin İzinde,* 177.

[58]   Kırbaç, "Boşnakların Türkiye'ye Göçleri," 8.

[59]   Pacariz, *The Migrations of Bosniaks to Turkey from 1945 to 1974,* 157.

A quotation from an autobiographical text written by a Turkish Bosniak[60] provides a good example of the attitude of the Bosniaks towards Turkey and Turkishness. According to this, an old Bosniak named Mehmet who migrated to the province of Gömeç in Turkey in the 1950s, when asked why he had come to Turkey, replied "can we underestimate the Turkish attitude, Turkish rule and the Turkish flag?"[61] This expression is very enlightening in terms of the Bosniaks' generally observed self-identification with Turkishness as a significant element within the context of Bosniakness and Turkishness is the "Turkish flag," a term which denotes lands of Muslim dominance, a safe-haven which promised salvation from oppression in the eyes of many Bosniaks. During both the Ottoman and the Republican eras, any territory under the Turkish flag was seen by the Bosniaks as the motherland where they could live freely. This perception is directly linked to the social trauma experienced by the Bosniaks after the Ottoman loss of the Balkans whereby they found themselves in an insecure and inferior position. Thus, alienated by their Christian cousins and keeping the image of the Turkish flag alive in their collective memory, Bosniaks identified themselves with Turks with their shared Islamic religious identity.

Thus, shared religious identity and the image of the safe-haven embodied by the Turkish flag have been significant elements which facilitated the adaptation of Bosniak immigrants into Turkish identity. Defining Bosniak ethnicity in terms of their religious differences with Christian communities like the Serbs and Croats in their homelands for centuries, Bosniaks did not much feel the necessity to refer to their Bosniakness within an almost heterogeneous Muslim society and could easily assimilate into Turkish identity. The influence of religion on this situation is obvious when we consider other Bosniak immigrant groups residing in countries with populations consisting of non-Muslim majorities. While these Bosniak immigrants have clung tight to their Bosniak identity, for the Bosniaks in Turkey it was mostly considered normal to adapt to a culture identical to theirs in terms of religion.[62]

---

[60]   Mahmut Çoban, *Güzel Zamanlar Güzel İnsanlar* (Istanbul: self-publication, 2013), 86.
[61]   The original text in Bosnian was: "Nije šala turska rabota, turski zakon i turski bajrak."
[62]   Koç, interview.

Even though the highly adaptive character of the Bosniaks, together with the uniting element of Islam, can be seen as significant factors which facilitate the assimilation of Bosniaks in Turkey, the other side of the coin should also be considered an important factor. In this respect, the official policies of the Turkish state concerning the Bosniaks and the attitude of the local Turks should also be taken into account. In this respect, the political and cultural policies of the Turkish state regarding the issue of nation-building in the Republican era have also been influential on the integration of Bosniak immigrants into Turkish society in political, social and cultural terms. The Turkish nation state, founded in 1923, had inherited a multi-ethnic society from its Ottoman predecessor and as seen in all cases of nation-building, ruling elites of the early republic aimed to develop a conceptual definition of Turkish nationhood along with a dominant cultural structure which would serve as a means to unite its citizens. The first initiative in this respect was to define Turkishness as a national identity which directly emerged from Turkish citizenship. Therefore, an official understanding of constitutional nationalism was put into effect. In addition to this, unlike the Ottoman socio-political system, which was highly based on religious organization of state and society, the Turkish Republic was founded upon a secularist framework which based all relations between citizens and state regardless of religious laws and identities. Theoretically, there was no problem with these frameworks, but in practice, as Turkishness also denoted an ethnic identity, the overlapping situation of Turkishness in its ethnic and constitutional definitions caused confusion and dilemma. In this sense, various enactments by the state in the early Republican era included a discriminatory character towards non-Muslim communities of Turkey, which excluded them from the content of Turkishness. On the other hand, defining Turks as a core ethnicity in the new nation-state was also a problem. Even though official efforts to define Turkishness in relation to a centuries-long ethnicity dating back to the first Turkic tribes in Central Asia were initiated as early as the 1930s, the presence of many Muslim ethnic groups like Arabs and Kurds, which did not fit into this definition, constituted a barrier against developing unifying content. Thus resembling the Ottoman *millet* system, which placed Muslims at the top of the social hierarchy,

ruling elites resorted to Muslim identity as a means to define the ethnic core of the republic and this tendency concerned not only the autochthonous communities in Turkey but also others like the Bosniaks:

The early Republican leaders used to define the Turkish identity in connection to Ottoman Islamic heritage. In this early post-Ottoman conception of the 'Turks left in the lost Ottoman lands' the Bosniaks, Albanians and the other Muslim communities in the Balkans were categorized as heirs of the Ottoman culture, thus, being Ottoman Muslim was considered a priory condition for the membership in the young Turkish Republic.[63]

While this emphasis on religious identity was in contradiction to the secular foundations of the Turkish Republic, it also played an important role in the integration of the Bosniaks into Turkish identity. In this context, the historical phenomenon known as "Turkification policies" has been influential. Turkification policies refer to the official efforts of the ruling elites to create a culturally homogeneous society united under the cultural framework of Turkishness. And, in this sense, since being Muslim constituted a significant element in Turkish identity, Muslim communities of Balkan origin like Bosniaks and Albanians were considered easily Turkified. Such an expectation did not only include the Bosniaks who already resided in Turkey, but also the Bosniaks who still lived outside national frontiers. In addition, Bosniaks and other Muslim groups in the Balkans were regarded as kin communities with their Ottoman background to whom the doors of the country should be open as a historical rather than humanitarian duty. Therefore, the continuous migrations of the Bosniaks during the Republican era were welcomed by state authorities with the hope of their rapid adaptation to Turkish culture and this expectation in time proved to be appropriate despite certain negativities.

The temporary negative impact of Turkification on Bosniak immigrants emerged within the context of language, since speaking the Turkish language was regarded as the primary means of being a Turk. During the early years of the Republic, this was a problem as many Bosniaks could not speak Turkish properly. There was strong pressure from the state on the ethnic groups who were targets of Turkification policy

---

[63]   Baklacıoğlu, "Between Neo-Ottomanist Kin Policy in the Balkans," 49.

and even language campaigns initiated by Turkish civil society under the title "Citizen, Speak Turkish!" took place starting in the early 1920s. Although the main target of these campaigns were the non-Muslim communities such as Jews and Armenians, Muslim communities with native tongues other than Turkish, such as Bosniaks, Kurds, Circassians, and Arabs, were also included in this agenda.[64] Bosniak immigrants had generally established their own neighborhoods and maintained the Bosniak language as a means of in-group communication.[65] In order to fit with the socio-cultural determinants of Turkishness and extend their social interaction with outgroup citizens, Bosniaks prevalently began to speak the Turkish language. The same problems were also experienced by those who migrated after 1945 and this relatively new immigrant stratum, while adapting themselves to the use of Turkish, could at the same time preserve their Bosniak language when compared to the descendants of pre-republican era immigrants.[66]

Today, the number of Bosniaks in Turkey who cannot speak the Bosniak language is much higher than those who can speak it. The last language based census in Turkey in 1965 marked the number of those who spoke Bosnian as a mother tongue as 21,143.[67] According to the statistics by the Joshua Project, today there are 109,000 people in Turkey who speak Bosnian as their mother tongue.[68] Although these numbers could be deceptive considering possible cases of abstinence in stating a language other than Turkish, observations among the Bosniak communities in Turkey put forward the fact that transmission of the Bosniak language to the younger generations is on a very low level, which makes it difficult for them to preserve their Bosniak identity.[69]

The end of the Cold War at the beginning of the 1990s marked the end of an era in which ideological clashes dominated international politics and ethnic politics began to rise as a new trend on the global

---

[64] Sanem Aslan, "'Citizen, Speak Turkish!': A Nation in the Making," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 13, no. 2 (April 2007): 253, https://doi.org/10.1080/13537110701293500.
[65] Kırbaç, "Tarih ve Gelenek Bağlamında Türkiye'de Boşnaklar." 700.
[66] Koç, interview.
[67] Kolaşinli, *Muhacirlerin İzinde,* 81.
[68] "Bosniak," Joshua Project, accessed December 14, 2018, https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/10953
[69] Koç, interview.

scale. This situation also brought the significance of ethnic and cultural identities back into the social and political agenda in many countries and, fueled by the rise of globalization, an increasing interest in ethnic identities has become an important worldwide phenomenon.

The Bosnian War (1992–1995) as a violent embodiment of ethnic politics in the 1990s marked a cornerstone in the awakening of Bosniak identity in Turkey. The news of massacres of the Bosniaks in Bosnia, while leading to public campaigns against Serbian and Croatian aggression, also evoked a historic link to Bosnia in the collective memory of Turkish Bosniaks. Another contributing factor during this period was the migration of Bosniak refugees to Turkey, which triggered a revival of Bosniak identity.[70] During this period, 20,000 Bosniaks migrated from Bosnia to Turkey although many have returned since the signing of the Dayton Peace Treaty in 1995.[71] Turkish Bosniaks, witnessing the live presence of their victimized kin, began to present an increasing interest in their Balkan origins and Bosniak identity. There have even been those who began to learn the Bosnian language as a result of this wartime awakening.

A more significant influence of the Bosnian War on this identity revival among the Turkish Bosniaks emerged under the foundation of Bosniak NGOs in Turkey. Until this period, possibly due to their successful adaptation to the cultural and political life in Turkey, Turkish Bosniaks had never felt the necessity to get organized in terms of civil society. Most NGOs in Turkey have been founded with the purpose of promoting collaboration among people sharing the same local or ethnic origin, which simply refers to a significant sociological phenomenon in Turkey, namely *hemsehrilik*. *Hemsehrilik*, an authentic Turkish term which can be translated as "hometown belonging" refers to a shared consciousness of having common local roots in the same (*hem*) town (şehir) and forms the basis of a social network which unites people coming from the same town or region and turns into a mechanism of collaboration in terms of employment, finding a marital partner and

---

[70]   Baklacıoğlu, "Between Neo-Ottomanist Kin Policy in the Balkans," 53.
[71]   Ahmet İçduygu and Deniz Sert, "The Changing Waves of Migration from the Balkans to Turkey: A Historical Account," In *Migration in the Southern Balkans*, ed. Hans Vermeulen et al. New York: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 99.

providing social assistance when needed. The hometown (*hemşehri*) associations in Turkey, while acting as networks uniting people from the same hometowns, also strengthen these shared local identities. Just like hometown associations, NGOs founded upon shared ethnic or cultural identities perform the same functions of social collaboration and cultural reproduction. In this sense, lacking the existence of such uniting bodies throughout their presence in Turkey, Turkish Bosniaks could not have developed a strong sense of hometown belonging or benefited from its collaborative functions like most other local or ethnic groups in Turkey.[72] Bosniak associations which were founded one after another following the Bosnian War began to fill this gap in their social lives.

Unlike other hometown organizations in Turkey, the basic motive in establishing these Bosniak associations was to provide aid and support in both material and non-material form for the Bosniaks in Bosnia and to perform an agenda-building function in terms of drawing the attention of the Turkish public towards their wartime sufferings.[73] The first organization founded in this respect was the Bosnia-Sanjak Association established in 1989, at a time when the clashes among the various ethnic groups in former Yugoslavia became apparent.[74] Following this organization, many other Bosniak associations have been founded in various regions of Turkey with notable Bosniak communities. All these associations are united under the umbrella organization called the Federation of Cultural Associations of Bosnia-Herzegovina in Turkey. As seen in all cases of hometown associations, a locality is placed under the official name of the organization, and in this sense, Bosniak associations refer to Bosnia-Herzegovina and Sanjak as geographic titles indicating their hometown origins.

After the Bosnian War, Bosniak associations in Turkey have extended their functions to establishing social and cultural ties with Bosniak communities in Bosnia and Sanjak, organizing homeland visits and providing material support in-kind for poor Bosniak neighborhoods in these regions.[75] Another function put into agenda by these associations

---

[72]   Koç, interview.
[73]   Kırbaç, "Tarih ve Gelenek Bağlamında Türkiye'de Boşnaklar," 704.
[74]   Sait Kaçapor, *Boşnaklar Türkiye'nin Sadık Vatandaşları* (Istanbul: Kastaş Yayınevi, 2014), 43.
[75]   Kaçapor, *Boşnaklar Türkiye'nin Sadık Vatandaşları*, 144.

is to develop in-group ties by organizing meetings, sociocultural activities and Bosnian language courses. Such activities contribute to the strengthening of an awareness of Bosniakness especially among young generations.[76]

Speaking of such a cultural awakening among the Bosniaks in Turkey, formal initiatives of the Turkish state in the 2000s should also be taken into account. The Turkish government, under the official program titled Democratic Opening Process, aimed to grant certain cultural rights to the non-Turkic ethnic communities in Turkey. In this respect, the first official initiative concerning the Bosniaks was periodic broadcasts on TRT, the state–owned television and radio channels in Turkey, in the Bosnian language which started in 2004.[77] Following this development, in 2017, within the framework of the Living Languages and Dialects Program applied in middle schools by the Ministry of Education, Bosnian language classes have been put into effect as an elective course in two pilot schools in Istanbul and İzmir.[78] While the language courses have been welcomed by many Bosniaks as a positive step, the execution of television and radio broadcasts led to a negative reaction by some Bosniaks on both institutional and individual levels. The Foundation for Friends of Bosnia-Herzegovina made a declaration stating that Bosniaks never demanded such a state service and it was against the principles of citizenship shared by many Bosniaks for state channels to broadcast in languages other than Turkish.[79] On individual levels, many Bosniaks have expressed discontent about this execution on social media platforms. The basic motive underlying such reactions can be explained by the general attitude of the Turkish Bosniaks in terms of identifying themselves as loyal and true citizens of Turkey who fit well with the principles of a unitary state and Turkish nationalism,

---

[76]   Koç, interview.

[77]   "Boşnakça Yayın Başladı," Internethaber, accessed December 14, 2018, http://www.internethaber.com/bosnakca-yayin-basladi-1074844h.htm.

[78]   Zeynep Işıl Hamziç,"Halilbeyli ve İstanbul'daki Okullarda Boşnakça ve Arnavutça Seçmeli Dersler Başladı," Boşnakmedya, accessed December 27, 2017, https://www.bosnakmedya.com/halilbeyli-istanbulda-ki-okullarda-bosnakca-arnavutca-secmeli-dersler-basladi.

[79]   "Boşnaklardan Boşnakça Yayına Tepki," *Radikal*, June 7, 2004, http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/bosnaklardan-bosnakca-yayina-tepki-713183.

therefore refraining from possible outgroup perceptions towards themselves as a separatist or autonomy-seeking ethnic group.[80]

Regarding other state-based initiatives which evoked interest among the Bosniaks in terms of their Bosnian heritage, the Lineage Query Service, which was put into effect online in 2018, can be said to be influential especially among the young generations as it informs them about their ancestry. In particular on social media platforms, a recent increase in the number of youth who define themselves as Bosniaks in their user info can be observed. Another initiative has been the documentary series titled "Migration Tales" (*Göç Hikayeleri*), financed and broadcast by the state-owned TRT channel, which included an episode about Bosniak immigrants. The documentary has drawn great attention from Bosniaks, and the main character of the episode, Hasan Babayiğit (Babaic) –a Turkish Bosniak living in Gömeç, became a renowned figure among the Bosniak community, his visit to his hometown in the Sanjak region encouraged many Bosniaks to plan similar visits to Bosnia and Sanjak.

Starting from the 1990s, the period of a cultural awakening of the Turkish Bosniaks together with the Bosnian War in the national agenda, the foundation of Bosniak associations and the state-based initiatives regarding them have increased the public visibility of the Bosniaks in Turkey. This situation can also be said to overlap with a shift in Turkish foreign policy. Since the beginning of the 1990s, it has become popular to denote the rising political interest and activism of Turkey in the Balkans under the term neo-Ottomanism.[81] According to this, Turkey, as the heir of the Ottoman Empire who ruled the Balkans for centuries, has adopted a form of kin-politics in the recent decades which assumes the contemporary Muslim communities of the Balkans, such as Bosniaks, Albanians, and ethnic Turks as kin communities and aims to establish transnational bonds with them, especially in cultural and eco-

---

[80]   Koç, interview.
[81]   İnan Rüma, "Turkish Foreign Policy Towards the Balkans: New Activism, Neo-Ottomanism or /So What?," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (2010):134, http://turkishpolicy.com/article/406/turkish-foreign-policy-towards-the-balkans-new-activism-neo-ottomanism-orso-what-winter-2010.

nomic terms which would revive Turkish dominance in the Balkans.[82] Within this policy, Bosnia-Herzegovina, regarding its civil war background and notable Muslim population, stood at a significant point through which the political influence of Turkey over the Balkans could be re-installed. The Turkish government even initiated the foundation of the Department of Bosniak Language and Literature in Trakya University with the aim of educating the necessary bureaucratic staff on the mutual relationships between the two countries.[83] In order to establish a link between this neo-Ottomanist policy and the increasing public visibility of the Bosniaks in Turkey, the quote below is very significant:

The fact that the increase in public visibility of Bosniaks in the public discourse in Turkey (including the emergence of Bosniak hometown associations) coincides with the rise of Neo-Ottomanism in the formerly introverted Turkish foreign policy, raises the question how both phenomena are interrelated. Whenever high-ranking Turkish politicians of the AKP-led governments, like present Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu or President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, visit the Balkans, they conjure up the commonalities and connections between Turkey, the Balkans in general, and Bosniaks in particular. They emphasize the meaningfulness of the Bosniak cause for Turkey due to the shared cultural heritage, and stress the kinship-like intensiveness of Turkish-Bosniak relations due to immigration. Their visits are flanked by prestigious renovations of Ottoman heritage sites under the aegis of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), like the world-famous Old Bridge of Mostar. Moreover, an impressive number of recently opened Yunus Emre Cultural Centers have been successfully promoting Turkish as a foreign language, and are attracting students from and to the Balkans with educational prospects and scholarship programs. Together with the popularity of Turkish soap operas, the perception of Turkishness and the Ottoman past in the Balkan streets has changed tremendously and positively.[84]

This rising influence of and interest in Turkey in Bosnia-Herzegovina finds its counterpart among the Turkish Bosniaks through the

---

[82] Baklacıoğlu, "Between Neo-Ottomanist Kin Policy in the Balkans", 56–57.
[83] Ömer Aksoy, "Türkiye'de Balkanlara Artan Akademik İlginin Bir Sonucu Olarak Boşnak Dili ve Edebiyatı Programı," *Erzurum Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 3, no. 5 (2018):146.
[84] Thomas Schad, *The Rediscovery of the Balkans? A Bosniak-Turkish Figuration in the Third Space between Istanbul and Sarajevo*, European Institute Working Paper Series (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Publications, 2015), 6.

roles played by the Bosniak associations in terms of organizing visits to Bosnia and Sanjak, establishing formal relationships with the NGOs and municipalities in these regions and organizing events such as the celebration of Sanjak Day or commemorations of the Bosniak national leader Alija Izetbegovic, all of which deepen the bond between Turkish Bosniaks and their kin in Bosnia and Sanjak. The increasing transnational link between these separated Bosniak communities can be seen as a positive move towards an efficient execution of the neo-Ottomanist kin policy in the Balkans.

The increasing interest of the Turkish Bosniaks in their Bosniak identity and in Bosnia and Sanjak as their territorial origins brought forth a debate in recent years with clashing opinions. Simply put, the question of whether or not to identify themselves as a diasporic community has turned into a debate among various Bosniak NGOs. A general attitude of the Bosniak associations towards this question is to refer to the Bosniaks as citizens of Turkey rather than a diasporic community.[85] These approaches towards the diaspora discourse can be interpreted under the traditional stance of the Turkish Bosniaks as identifying themselves as founding elements of Turkey and perceiving the concept of diaspora with a separatist notion.[86]

Defining diaspora as an ethnic group dispersed as minorities in various nation-states other than their homeland, Bosniaks in Turkey fit with this general definition. This consistence appears to be partially solid in terms of the criteria defined by William Safran where he defined diasporas as communities which: 1) are dispersed to at least two peripheral places, 2) maintain a memory or myth of their homeland, 3) feel an alienation towards the host country due to non-acceptance, 4) maintain the willingness to eventually return to the homeland, and 5) maintain continuing relationships with their homeland.[87]

---

85   Kaçapor, *Boşnaklar Türkiye'nin Sadık Vatandaşları,* 8.; Nusret Sancaklı, "Tarihi Gerçekler Işığında Göçmenler ve Diaspora Safsataları," December 11, 2016, https://www.bosnakmedya.com/tarihi-gercekler-isiginda-gocmenler-diaspora-safsatalari.
86   Koç, interview.
87   William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 83–84, https://doi.org/10.3138/diaspora.1.1.83.

Bosniaks in Turkey generally fit the first two criteria. First, in terms of being a dispersed community, they form a notable segment of Bosniak ethnicity with their population: which is even larger than the total number of Bosniaks in former Yugoslavia.[88] Secondly, Bosnia is mostly maintained in their collective memory as a historical homeland and this perception is mostly based on emotional rather than rational accounts especially among younger generations. Their use of social media is a highly determining element in this sense. Through increasing use of pictures of the Mostar bridge, Bosnian flag or Alija Izetbegovic's portrait as profile pictures and stating their homeland info as "Bosnia and Herzegovina" on their social media accounts, many Bosniaks, although they have never visited Mostar nor have they been actively involved in Bosnian politics and even have no historical ties with Bosnia with their ancestors having migrated from the Sanjak region, have been inclined towards this mythical image of Bosnia as their homeland.

In terms of the following three criteria, Bosniaks in Turkey do not seem to fully fit with them. Speaking of recognition and acceptance by the host country, the Turkish state has always presented a positive attitude towards the Bosniak immigrants in terms of welcoming them as kin citizens. From the societal perspective, even though minor cases of conflict have sometimes occurred between ethnic Turks and Bosniaks throughout history,[89] they remain exceptional against the general positive attitude of Turks towards their Muslim kin. Bosniaks in Turkey refer to themselves as true and loyal citizens of the Turkish Republic and mostly identify themselves with ethnic Turks in terms of sharing a common culture and destiny. In terms of the idea of an eventual return to their homeland, Turkish Bosniaks, due to being strongly integrated into the social, cultural, political and economic aspects of life in Turkey, cannot be said to share such a willingness. Even though there are minor cases among immigrants from Sanjak who apply for Serbian or Montenegrin citizenship, such initiatives, rather than a motive of return, stem from pragmatic reasons such as possible EU citizenship in the future

---

[88]   Kaçapor, *Boşnaklar Türkiye'nin Sadık Vatandaşları*, 9.
[89]   Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar*, 278.

once these two countries are allowed into the Union.[90] Finally, speaking of continuous relationships with their ancestral homeland, Turkish Bosniaks, except for the bonds established by the Bosniak NGOs and touristic homeland visits mentioned above and newly rising commercial relations on the part of some Turkish Bosniak businessmen, cannot yet be regarded as a community retaining strong ties with either Bosnia or Sanjak.

Regarding the general function of diasporas worldwide as groups owning the function of political lobbying, Turkish Bosniaks once more do not appear to be capable of undertaking such a function. In terms of lobbying for their own collective political, economic or cultural interests in Turkey, they do not hold a stance in either the state bureaucracy or civil society. Their political power is rather dispersed among the mainstream right or left wing political parties without any strong desire towards political representation. In the contemporary National Assembly of Turkey, of the 600 MPs, only two are of Bosniak ancestry.[91] In terms of lobbying for homeland affairs, Turkish Bosniaks, with the exception of their involvement in meetings protesting Serbian violence and the negotiations of their civil society leaders with Turkish state authorities asking for active Turkish intervention during the Bosnian War, do not seem much interested in the political affairs of Bosnia and Sanjak. A recent trend among some community elites is to stress the necessity of sending more Bosniak MPs to the Turkish parliament who could work for the increased economic support of the Turkish state to the Bosniak communities living in the vicinity of the frontiers of the former Sanjak region.[92]

Within the context of diaspora and Turkish Bosniaks, virtual diaspora (e-diaspora or digital diaspora in other uses), a relatively new concept in social sciences, can be descriptive regarding the fact that the current trend in the rising consciousness of Bosniakness in Turkey has overlapped with the digital age which, along with the new platforms of

---

[90]   Koç, interview.
[91]   Doğan Prepol, "Boşnak Toplumu Seçimlerde Birlik Olmalı," *Boşnak Dünyası*, accessed December 9, 2019, http://bosnakdunyasi.com/kasim2018/#p=14.
[92]   Prepol, "Boşnak Toplumu Seçimlerde Birlik Olmalı,"; "Sancak Günü Türkiye'de İlk Kez Kutlandı," Boşnak Dünyası, December 6, 2019, http://bosnakdunyasi.com/aralik2018/#p=7.

communication and information, directly contribute to this process. A virtual diaspora is:

an immigrant group or descendant of an immigrant population that uses it connectivity to participate in virtual networks of contacts for a variety of political, economic, social, religious, and communicational purposes that, for the most part, may concern either the homeland, the host land, or both, including its own trajectory abroad.[93]

In accordance with this definition, there is an increasing use of the internet among Turkish Bosniaks who find opportunities for communication, mutual interaction, mobilization and accessing information about their Bosniak culture and heritage which strengthens their awareness of Bosniakness in general and Bosnia and Sanjak as homelands. This virtual space includes websites and online newspapers as a source of information about Bosniak culture, news about Bosnia and Sanjak and Bosniak association activities, social media platforms such as Facebook groups, where they can meet in the thousands, and even instant messaging platforms such as Whatsapp groups. Among these different platforms, interactions among Turkish Bosniaks are most visible in Facebook groups. It is also a general fact that, of the web platforms hosting virtual diasporas, Facebook dominates the market.[94] In the Facebook groups used by Turkish Bosniaks, it has been highly observed that assimilated Turkish Bosniaks, when confronted with others with a relatively concrete consciousness of Bosniakness, lean towards learning more about their Bosniak ancestry and identity. Another rising trend observed in many Bosniaks on Facebook is also the use of their Slavic family surnames along with their Turkish ones.

---

[93]   Michel S. Laguerre, "Digital Diaspora," in *Diasporas in the New Age: Identity, Politics and Community*, ed. Andoni Alonso and Pedro J. Oiarzabal (Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 2010), 50.
[94]   Deirdre McKay, *The Virtual Meets Reality: Policy Implications of E-Diasporas. Special Report* (Canberra: The Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2017), 4.

Conclusion

Taking all these phenomena into consideration, it is possible to say that Bosniaks in Turkey do not yet constitute a Bosniak diaspora, but rather they can be regarded as a diaspora in the making. Despite the process of cultural awakening since the 1990s, their commitment to the Turkish state and their political and cultural assimilation into Turkish society still seem to disable the thorough construction of a collective identity effective to alter their feeling of belonging in Turkish society. They rather present the characteristics of a secondary ethnic group, as mentioned in Isajiw's work as, unlike primary or indigenous groups, a community who have their origin in a society different from the one in which they currently exist.[95] Fed by various waves of migration throughout history, lacking a homogeneity in terms of adhering to ethnic culture and being highly Turkified at the same time, the situation of the Turkish Bosniaks as a community caught between the notions of ethnicity, citizenship and diaspora is likely to continue, at least in the short run.

B i b l i o g r a p h y

Aksoy, Ömer. "Türkiye'de Balkanlara Artan Akademik İlginin Bir Sonucu Olarak Boşnak Dili ve Edebiyatı Programı." *Erzurum Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 3, no. 5 (April 2018): 145–153.

Aslan, Sanem. "Citizen, Speak Turkish!: A Nation in the Making." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 13, no. 2 (April 2007): 245–272. https://doi.org/10.1080/13537110701293500.

Babuna, Aydın. *Bir Ulusun Doğuşu: Geçmişten Günümüze Boşnaklar*. Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2000.

Baklacıoğlu, Nurcan Özgür. "Between Neo-Ottomanist Kin Policy in the Balkans and Transnational Kin Economics in the EU." *Journal on Ethnopolitics*

---

[95]   Isajiw, Wsevolod W., "Definition and Dimensions of Ethnicity: A Theoretical Framework," in *Challenges of Measuring An Ethnic World, Science, Politics and Reality: Proceedings of the Joint Canada-United States Conference on The Measurement of Ethnicity, April 1–3*, ed. Statistics Canada and U.S. Bureau of Census (Washington D.C.: U.S Government Printing Office, 1993), 406.

and Minority Issues in Europe 14, no. 3 (2015): 47–72. https://www.ecmi.de/file-admin/downloads/publications/JEMIE/2015/Ozgur.pdf.

"Bosniak." Joshua Project. Accessed December 14, 2018. https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/10953.

Boşnak Dünyası. "Sancak Günü Türkiye'de İlk Kez Kutlandı." December 6, 2019. http://bosnakdunyasi.com/aralik2018/#p=7.

Çoban, Mahmut. *Güzel Zamanlar Güzel İnsanlar*. Istanbul: self publication, 2013.

Çokbankır, Ercan. *Arnavutlar, Boşnaklar, Pomaklar: Balkan Türklerinin Kökleri*. Izmir: Etki Yayınları, 2008.

Demir, Yalçın Köksal. "Cemaatten Ulusa Boşnaklar." *Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 2 (July 2011): 71–88. http://acikerisim.ktu.edu.tr/jspui/handle/123456789/123.

Demirel, Muammer. "Türkiye'de Bosna Göçmenleri." *Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 12, no. 2 (July 2008): 285–306.

Emgili, Fahriye. *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar: Boşnakların Türkiye'ye Göçleri (1878–1934)*. Istanbul: Bilge Kültür Sanat, 2010.

Gündüz, Tufan. *Alahimanet Bosna: Boşnakların Osmanlı Topraklarına Göçü (1879–1912)*. Istanbul: Yeditepe Yayınevi, 2012.

Hamziç, Zeynep Işıl. "Marmara Bölgesi'ne Göç Eden Balkan Göçmenlerinin Yerleşim Yerleri." January 5, 2015, https://www.bosnakmedya.com/marmara-bolgesine-goc-eden-balkan-gocmenlerinin-yerlesim-yerleri/.

Hamziç, Zeynep Işıl. "Halilbeyli ve İstanbul'daki Okullarda Boşnakça ve Arnavutça Seçmeli Dersler Başladı." December 27, 2017. https://www.bosnakmedya.com/halilbeyli-istanbulda-ki-okullarda-bosnakca-arnavutca-secmeli-dersler-basladi.

Hobsbawm, Eric J. *Milletler ve Milliyetçilik: Program, Mit, Gerçeklik*. Translated by Osman Akınhay. Istanbul: Ayrıntı Yayıncılık, 2006.

Hoffman, George Walter. "The Evolution of the Ethnographic Map of Yugoslavia: A Historical Geographic Interpretation." In *An Historical Geography of the Balkans*, edited by Francis W. Carter, 440-464. London: Academic Press Inc., 1977.

Internethaber. "Boşnakça Yayın Başladı." Accessed December 14, 2020. http://www.internethaber.com/bosnakca-yayin-basladi-1074844h.htm.

İçduygu, Ahmet and Deniz Sert. "The Changing Waves of Migration from the Balkans to Turkey: A Historical Account." In *Migration in the Southern Balkans*, edited by Hans Vermeulen et al, 85–104. New York: Springer International Publishing, 2015.

Imamovic, Mustafa. *Boşnakların Tarihi*. Translated by Cenita Özgüner and Hüseyin Gül. Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2018.

Isajiw, Wsevolod W. "Definition and Dimensions of Ethnicity: A Theoretical Framework." In *Challenges of Measuring an Ethnic World, Science, Politics and Reality: Proceedings of the Joint Canada-United States Conference on the Measurement of Ethnicity*, *April 1–3*, edited by Statistics Canada and U.S. Bureau of Census, 407–427. Washington D.C.: U.S Government Printing Office, 1993.

Kaçapor, Sait. *Boşnaklar Türkiye'nin Sadık Vatandaşları*. Istanbul: Kastaş Yayınevi, 2014.

Karpat, Kemal. *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Etnik Yapılanma ve Göçler*. Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2013.

Kırbaç, Amra Dedeic. "Tarih ve Gelenek Bağlamında Türkiye'de Boşnaklar." *Uluslararası İnsan Bilimleri Dergisi* 9, no. 1 (2012): 696–711.

Kırbaç, Amra Dedeic. "Boşnakların Türkiye'ye Göçleri." *Akademik Bakış Dergisi* 35 (March/April 2013): 1–19.

Koç, Şevket. Interviewed in Istanbul, April 15, 2021.

Kolaşinli, Hayri. *Muhacirlerin İzinde: Boşnakların Trajik Göç Tarihinden Kesitler*. Ankara: Lotus Yayınevi, 2003.

Laguerre, Michel. S. "Digital Diaspora." In *Diasporas in the New Age: Identity, Politics and Community*, edited by Andoni Alonso and Pedro J. Oiarzabal, 49–65. Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 2010.

Maalouf, Amin. *Ölümcül Kimlikler*. Translated by Aysel Bora. Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2004.

McKay, Deirdre. *The Virtual Meets Reality: Policy Implications of E-Diasporas. Special Report*. Canberra: The Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2017.

Memic, Mustafa. *Karadağ Boşnak (Müslüman) Tarihi*. Istanbul: Kastaş Yayınevi, 2016.

Milliyet, "Türkiye'deki Kürtlerin Sayısı." June 6, 2008. http://www.milliyet.com.tr/turkiye-deki-kurtlerin-sayisi--magazin-873452.

Nabi, Yaşar. *Balkanlar ve Türklük II*. Istanbul: Cumhuriyet Kitapları, 1999.

Pacariz, Sabina. *The Migrations of Bosniaks to Turkey from 1945 to 1974: The Case of Sandzak*. Sarajevo: Center for Advanced Studies, 2016.

Prepol, Doğan. "Boşnak Toplumu Seçimlerde Birlik Olmalı." *Boşnak Dünyası*, December 9, 2019. http://www.bosnakdunyasi.com/yazarlar/bosnak-toplumu-yerel-secimlerde-birlik-olmali. http://bosnakdunyasi.com/kasim2018/#p=14.

Radikal. "Boşnaklardan Boşnakça Yayına Tepki." June 7, 2004. http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/bosnaklardan-bosnakca-yayina-tepki-713183.

Rüma, İnan. "Turkish Foreign Policy Towards the Balkans: New Activism, Neo-Ottomanism or /so What?" *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (2010): 133–140. http://turkishpolicy.com/article/406/turkish-foreign-policy-towards-the-balkans-new-activism-neo-ottomanism-orso-what-winter-2010.

Safran, William. "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return." *Diaspora A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 83–99. https://doi.org/10.3138/diaspora.1.1.83.

Sancaklı, Nusret. "Tarihi Gerçekler Işığında Göçmenler ve Diaspora Safsataları." December 11, 2016. https://www.bosnakmedya.com/tarihi-gercekler-isiginda-gocmenler-diaspora-safsatalari.

Schad, Thomas. *The Rediscovery of the Balkans? A Bosniak-Turkish Figuration in the Third Space between Istanbul and Sarajevo.* European Institute Working Paper Series. Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Publications, 2015.

Tekin, Cemile. "Yugoslavya'dan Türkiye'ye Göçün Nedenleri (1950–1958)." *Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 39, (2018): 249–261.

THE REMAKING AND UNMAKING OF MULTI-ETHNIC SPACES: DIYARBAKIR AND SOUTHEAST ANATOLIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

William Gourlay

Introduction

In late 2016, government-appointed trustees removed signs in Armenian, Syriac and Kurdish from municipal buildings in Diyarbakır and across southeast Anatolia.[1] These signs were the initiatives of Kurdish politicians who had only recently attempted to acknowledge the region's multi-ethnic history. Until the early 20th century southeast Anatolia had been an ethnic and religious patchwork. The early republican era saw efforts to "Turkify" the region through the reannotation of the map and the imposition of a national identity project that asserted ethnic – Turkish – unity. The military struggle against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) through the 1980s and 1990s gave urgency to the notion that ethnic uniformity was essential for national cohesion and the survival of the very state, thus discussion of ethnic diversity was quashed. From 1999, however, with the election of Kurdish-run municipalities across the southeast and the ascendance of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to government in 2002, the situation

---

[1] "Kayyım Belediyenin İlk İcraatı: Çok Dilli Tabeladan Ermenice ve Süryanice Çıkarıldı," *Agos*, December 9, 2016, http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/17211/kayyim-belediyenin-ilk-icraa-ti-cokdilli-tabeladan-ermenice-ve-suryanice-cikarildi.

changed. As EU accession processes began, the AKP embarked on reforms that allowed greater political space for minorities and spurred broader discussions about ethnic and national identities.

This article examines the circumstances of Turkey's minorities through the theoretical prism of Turkish nationalism and the ways that it has shaped conceptions of Turkey's national identity. Ernest Gellner articulates nationalism as a principle that demands that the "political unit and the national unit should be congruent."[2] Such a vision accords with the Republic of Turkey, which was premised on the "unity of language, culture and ideal."[3] In this formulation Turkish language and culture were the forges for unity, thus there was no space for ethnic diversity and Turkey's minorities were ignored or denied. This article, however, documents Turkey's re-imagining of the national identity in the 2000s away from a narrowly defined ethnic category to acknowledge ethnic and religious diversity. Given southeast Anatolia's multi-ethnic social fabric, and developments that have occurred there as political spaces and debates about ethnicity have vacillated, the region serves as a barometer of the minority experience in Turkey. For a time, it appeared that Turkey would reconcile itself with its multi-ethnic make up. Through the restoration of historic sites and increasing activity from political actors, cultural groups and everyday citizens, southeast Anatolia saw the remaking of multi-ethnic spaces. Following a series of political upheavals from mid-2015, however, the nationalist pendulum has swung back again. When conflict with the PKK re-ignited, the AKP and many within Turkish society resumed long-standing postures. In this milieu, unity is paramount and diversity regarded with suspicion, thus assertions of ethnic distinctiveness again incur hostility. The AKP's electoral alliance with the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) in 2018 indicates the resurgence of hegemonic nationalism in the political arena and means less space for minority actors.

This article thus analyses the cultural and political spaces for minorities in southeast Anatolia using a mixed, qualitative methodology

---

[2]   Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Maldon: Blackwell, 2006), 1.
[3]   Başak İnce, *Citizenship and Identity in Turkey: From Atatürk's Republic to the Present Day* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2012), 39.

including ethnographic observation as well as research in Turkish and English media reports and scholarship. The article first examines the historical background, focusing on the multi-ethnic mosaic of the region and early republican efforts to eradicate diversity in pursuit of ethnic unity. Observing changes in southeast Anatolia during the AKP's early years, the article examines discussions about national identity that arose as diversity in the region's historical and social makeup was acknowledged and spaces were (re)created for minorities. Inevitably, given persistent nationalist undercurrents, this attracted political backlash. The article considers such reactions, then it examines recent contractions in the political arena that have seen resurgent nationalist rhetoric and evaluates the implications for Turkey's minorities. In sum, the article examines the extent to which the experience of southeast Anatolia represents the thorough-going re-imagining of Turkey's national project and the re-embrace of a previously denied multi-ethnic socio-political fabric.

Ethnic diversity in the Republic of Turkey

The Republic of Turkey may have been conceived of as uniformly Turkish, yet Ümit Cizre observes that it inherited from the Ottoman Empire the "ethnic mosaic of the Anatolian rectangle."[4] That "mosaic" was not something founding elites wanted to countenance. Citizenship was conceived in a civic form, on the basis of *jus soli*,[5] but in practice Kemalist administrators and bureaucrats, intent on modernisation and Westernisation, delineated the boundaries of the nation in narrow ethnic terms, emphasising unity, holding it in place with an authoritarian nationalism.[6] The state and its citizens were defined by a trinity of at-

---

[4]   Ümit Cizre, "Turkey's Kurdish Problem: Borders, Identity, and Hegemony," in *Right-Sizing the State: The Politics of Moving Borders*, eds. Brendan O'Leary, Ian S. Lustick, and Thomas Callaghy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 244.
[5]   Ayhan Kaya, *Europeanisation and Tolerance in Turkey: The Myth of Toleration* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 47.
[6]   Çağlar Keyder, "Whither the Project of Modernity? Turkey in the 1990s," in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, ed. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 42.

tributes – Sunni, Muslim, Turkish[7] – and the institutions of state were mobilised to effect and ensure that paradigm. In the face of extant ethnic diversity, deemed an impediment to the development of a modern nation-state, "homogenization became an ideal, a model, and a policy."[8]

Homogenisation required a range of measures. Those not meeting or proving willing to conform to the Sunni-Muslim-Turkish paradigm would be subject to "ethnic, linguistic and religious purification."[9] The state made concerted efforts in this direction, resulting in considerable demographic upheaval. Eventually, this spawned a culture of denial, forgetting and indifference, where in order to maintain the façade of ethnic unity, the Turkish media, educational system and populace ignored the traumas visited upon the minorities of Anatolia.[10] Pervasive nationalist rhetoric meant that any remaining members of minority communities outside of the "official" minorities in Istanbul became objects of scorn or targets for retribution. Parallel to the philosophical underpinning of nationalist ideology, whereby ethnic unity was deemed essential to ensure state survival, minorities became associated with national security.[11] The very existence of the former called into question the latter.

Homogenisation – Turkification – became an imperative in southeast Anatolia due to the light Turkish imprint on the landscape and among the population. Indicative of the ethnic diversity of the city and province of Diyarbakır, Uğur Ümit Üngör documents early 20th century population records listing Armenians, Kurds, Jews, Yezidis, Kizilbash, Zaza, Syriacs, Greeks and Mahalmi Arabs.[12] Around the same time, the city and province of Van were home to sizable populations of Kurds

---

[7]   Kaya, *Europeanisation and Tolerance*, 13.
[8]   Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–50* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4.
[9]   Zeynep Gambetti, "Decolonizing Diyarbakır: Culture, Identity and the Struggle to Appropriate Urban Space," in *Comparing Cities: The Middle East and South Asia*, ed. Kamran Asdar Ali and Martina Rieker (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 98.
[10]   Ece Temelkuran, *Turkey: The Insane and the Melancholy* (London: Zed Books, 2015), 31, 140.
[11]   Dilek Kurban, *European Yearbook of Minority Issues*, Vol 4, 2004/5 (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 348.
[12]   Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey,* 12–17.

and Armenians, but relatively few Turks.[13] Meanwhile, the Tur Abdin plateau and territory south of Van was largely occupied by Syriacs,[14] and other provinces exhibited ethnic diversity including Mardin and Urfa (Kurdish, Arab, Syriac), as well as Bitlis, Siirt, Bingöl, Hakkari, Muş (Armenian and Kurdish) but a noticeable paucity of Turks.[15]

Urgent Turkification programmes did not necessarily make them effective[16] – southeast Anatolia became the locus of numerous rebellions against the modernising state. One domain where the state successfully imposed the new Turkified order was in the re-annotation of the map. In a process described as "toponymical engineering," administrators endeavoured to eradicate evidence of the diverse ethnic makeup of the population by removing topographical features in languages other than Turkish.[17] This process happened across Turkey but, again, south-east Anatolia, with its preponderance of Arabic, Armenian, Syriac, Aramaic and Kurdish place names, received particular attention. The proportions of place names that were changed varied across districts,[18] but those with high proportions of Kurdish speakers or large Armenian populations prior to 1915, saw the greatest changes.

In the 1980s, the emergence of the PKK, pursuing a military campaign for an independent Kurdistan, appeared to affirm long-held concerns that minorities represented a threat to the state. As southeast Anatolia was wracked by conflict, nationalist rhetoric gained currency across Turkey and a "dogma of unity" took hold. Political discourse was

---

[13] Justin McCarthy, *The Armenian Rebellion at Van* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006), 6–17.
[14] McCarthy, *The Armenian Rebellion at Van,* 16.
[15] Kerem Öktem, "The Nation's Imprint: Demographic Engineering and the Change of Toponyms in Republican Turkey," *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 7 (2008), https://doi.org/10.4000/ejts.2243.
[16] Senem Aslan, "Everyday Forms of State Power and the Kurds in Early Republican Turkey," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 1 (2011): 75–93, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743810001200.
[17] Öktem, "The Nation's Imprint."
[18] Senem Aslan, "Incoherent State: The Controversy over Kurdish Naming in Turkey," *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 10 (2009), https://doi.org/10.4000/ejts.4142. For more on the multi-ethnic, multi-confessional legacy of the Anatolia landscape see the inter-active map created by the Hrant Dink Foundation, which details Armenian, Syriac, Greek and Jewish sites. Hrant Dink Foundation, "Türkiye Kültür Varlıkları Haritası," accessed December 14, 2021, https://turkiyekulturvarliklari.hrantdink.org/.

notable for its distinct terminology: *birlik* (unity) and *beraberlik* (solidarity) upheld as essential and counterposed by the threat of *bölücülük* (separatism).[19] Allegiance to the "nation" became paramount, and talk of diversity or pluralism was deemed to undermine solidarity.[20] In this milieu, the manifestation of minority particularisms called into question the integrity of Turkey's national project and territorial sovereignty – the PKK's agenda only served to demonstrate that. State institutions thus clung to the notion that unity meant strength, and long-held Kemalist discourses of denial remained potent. In the eastern province of Varto, journalist Christopher de Bellaigue once encountered a local official who flatly asserted that there were no minorities in Turkey.[21]

As conflict with the PKK escalated and the "dogma of unity" solidified, minorities in Anatolia had to maintain low profiles lest their distinctiveness incur nationalist wrath. In an earlier period of heightened nationalist fervour during the 1974 crisis in Cyprus, many Syriacs, their loyalty called into question due to their Christian faith, had abandoned ancestral homes in the Tur Abdin for Europe or the relative safety of Istanbul.[22] In the state's military campaigns against the PKK, minority communities in the southeast were also caught up. From the mid-1980s, numerous villages across the southeast were abandoned or razed, and many people left the countryside for cities such as Diyarbakır, Istanbul and Ankara. The local Kurdish population bore the brunt of the conflict, but other communities also suffered. The Syriac exodus that had begun in 1974 continued, with many leaving Mardin to avoid getting caught in the crossfire.[23] In the Tur Abdin, Syriacs were caught between belligerents, not only state forces, but also the PKK and

---

[19]   Elise Massicard, "Claiming Difference in a Unitarist Frame: the Case of Alevism," in *Turkey beyond Nationalism: Towards Post-nationalist Identities*, ed. Hans-Lukas Kieser (London: I.B.Tauris, 2006), 78.

[20]   Kerem Karaosmanoğlu, "Revisiting the Self: Researching Minorities in Turkey," *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 3 (2008): 127–143.

[21]   Christopher de Bellaigue, *Rebel Land* (London: Penguin, 2010), 63.

[22]   Susanne Güsten, *Farewell to Tur Abdin* (Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center), 8.

[23]   Zerrin Özlem Biner, "Acts of Defacement, Memory of Loss: Ghostly Effects of the 'Armenian Crisis' in Mardin," *History & Memory* 22, no. 2 (2010): 78, https://doi.org/10.2979/his.2010.22.2.68.

Kurdish village guards.[24] A similar fate befell Turkey's remaining Yezidi communities in border regions.[25]

Turkey acknowledges ethnic diversity

In February 1999 Turkish agents captured PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, prompting the PKK to announce a ceasefire, the first of a series of political transformations. Also significant was the electoral victory of the AKP in 2002, bringing to an end a period of unwieldy coalition governments. From the outset, the AKP was distinctly different to the Kemalist-infused administrations that preceded it. The AKP appeared intent on a reform programme and a re-imagining of the national project that would reshape Turkey's politics and relationship with the EU. The AKP's ascension marked the emergence of an observant Muslim elite that subscribed to a national vision not solely defined by Kemalist-informed nationalism, but that paid heed to Turkey's Ottoman past, inherently diverse and different from prevailing exclusivist, nationalist orthodoxies.[26] In this sense, Turkey was stepping away from "majority nationalism" and, under AKP guidance, society became attuned to "diversity as an ideology."[27] The fact that the intensity had been removed from the PKK conflict allowed re-appraisals of the place of minorities and new political, rather than military, approaches to the Kurdish issue.

Turkey's expanded engagement with the EU also led to broadening discussions of national identity. In turn, this created new political milieus for minorities. Kemalist elites had adopted an insular posture, portraying Turkey as isolated and at risk of subversion by external and internal enemies, but now a new discourse positioned Turkey as a bridge between Europe, the Middle East and Caucasus. Conceiving Turkey as a link in a broader geopolitical chain represented a new external vision. Greater engagement with Europe, in particular, saw the diffusion of the

---

[24]   Güsten, *Farewell to Tur Abdin*, 9.
[25]   Peter Alford Andrews, *Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey* (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 1989), 118–119.
[26]   Jenny White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 19.
[27]   Kaya, *Europeanisation and Tolerance*, 88.

EU's "unity in diversity" discourse, which had internal implication in dispelling suspicions of and allowing more space for minorities.[28]

Given entrenched nationalist outlooks and historical narratives that portrayed minorities as unreliable, attitudes shifted only gradually to a point of "selective recognition."[29] Nonetheless, in contrast to the previously dominant "dogma of unity," discussion of "multiculturalism," "diversity" and "pluralism" became more widespread among political actors and state institutions.[30] The success of a memoir by Turkish lawyer Fethiye Çetin, in which she revealed learning of her previously hidden Armenian ancestry, demonstrated an appetite for and willingness to discuss topics of ethnicity and identity that had once been taboo.[31]

Legislative reform packages that protected minorities and upheld their rights to language, broadcasting, education and property were put in place in the early years of the AKP's tenure.[32] Statements from government figures matched these legislative measures. Former Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç remarked, "We are determined to solve [minorities] remaining problems (…) through mutual trust and cooperation." He added that minority communities were "integral parts of Turkish society."[33] Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also disseminated messages of openness and support for diversity. When I met a group of labourers in Mardin in 2013, conversation turned to the easy relations between ethnic groups in the city and the atmosphere of "*barış*" [peace] that prevailed compared to nearby Syria. I asked how this was possible. One man responded immediately, "Erdoğan!" as all nodded their approval. Further demonstrating the shift in politics and

---

[28] Kaya, *Europeanisation and Tolerance*, 16, 50.
[29] Derya Bayir, *Minorities and Nationalism in Turkish Law* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 3, 259.
[30] Clémence Scalbert Yücel, "Common Ground or Battlefield? Deconstructing the Politics of Recognition in Turkey," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 22, no. 1 (2016): 72, https://doi.org/10.1080/13537113.2016.1133862.
[31] The book is available in translation: Fethiye Çetin, *My Grandmother: a Memoir* (London: Verso, 2008.)
[32] Ioannis Grigoriadis, "Türk or Türkiyeli? The Reform of Turkey's Minority Legislation and the Rediscovery of Ottomanism," *Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 3 (2007): 425, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4284553.
[33] "Turkish Government 'Firm' on Solving Woes of Minorities," *Hürriyet Daily News*, March 3, 2012, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-government-firm-on-solving-woes-of-minorities-15169.

public debate, senior AKP minister Hüseyin Çelik remarked, during negotiations about the re-opening of the Halki Seminary in Istanbul, "One who is confident in their religion would be concerned about the religious liberties of others."[34] Çelik's comment illustrated a Turkey more self-assured in a political and societal sense. No longer were enemies perceived on every horizon; Turkey was comfortable to engage in dialogue, in good faith with those long perceived as the Other.

Re-emerging multicultural spaces in Southeast Anatolia

As the largest "minority," Kurds reaped benefits within Turkey's new political milieu. Kurdish politicians had grown increasingly active and assertive in southeast Anatolia after winning municipal elections in 1999. Changes soon became apparent as restrictions were lifted on public and political spheres. Newroz, the Kurdish New Year, was celebrated freely across the southeast from 2000; in later years it attracted the attendance of Turkish politicians and performances by famous musicians.[35] Meanwhile, the AKP brought an end to the "emergency rule" that had been in place in the southeast since the late 1980s, pushed through further reforms granting language rights, allowing the establishment of a Kurdish-language channel on TRT, the state broadcaster and, by 2009, set the groundwork for a "Kurdish opening."[36]

Diyarbakır became the locus of activity and activism. Directed by the Kurdish-run municipality, the Sur neighbourhood became a showcase of processes of re-appropriation to reverse decades of Turkification.[37] Beloved Diyarbakır author Şeyhmus Diken noted that despite the city's long association with Kurdish resistance to the Kemalist state, attempts to Kurdify the city would be as short-sighted as those to Turkify it had been, as they denied the historical presence and contribution of non-

---

[34]   "Turkey's Top Muslim Cleric Calls for Reopening of Greek Seminary in Visit," *Today's Zaman*, May 7, 2012, https://www.archons.org/-/today-s-zaman-reports-on-turkey-s-top-muslim-cleric-calls-for-reopening-of-greek-seminary-in-visit.
[35]   Cengiz Güneş, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey: From Protest to Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2012), 168.
[36]   White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*, 13.
[37]   Gambetti, "Decolonizing Diyarbakır," 99.

-Muslim populations including the Armenians and Syriacs.[38] Indeed, the multi-ethnic nature of the city is inscribed in its very walls, its architecture, including the churches of Surp Giragos (Armenian), Meryem Ana (Syriac) and Mar Petyun (Chaldean), and a sign of welcome in the refurbished *caravanserai* of Sülüklü Han, which greets visitors in six languages and four scripts. Many Diyarbakır Kurds I have met discuss these aspects of their city with pride, one university student telling me that a history of co-existence with non-Muslims was "our reality."

This sentiment resonates among Kurdish civil society organisations and political actors. Kurdish activists and administrators sought to rejuvenate Diyarbakir, previously known as a centre of conflict, and redefine it as a city of arts and culture, a process that involved acknowledging its multi-ethnic past. Through annual festivals under such banners as "Voices and Colours for Peace" and "Meeting of Faiths and Cultures" they recognised the different faiths and ethnicities that had once been prominent, and which, in the case of the Armenians, Chaldeans and Syriacs still clung on, despite all odds, in the venerable Sur neighbourhood.[39] Interviewed in 2008, the Kurdish mayor of Sur, Abdullah Demirbaş, stated, "I am not working for the Kurds; I am working for all people."[40] Under Demirbaş, the Sur municipality promoted a programme of *çok dilli belediyecilik* (multilingual governance), offering information in Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian and Syriac, with the intention of addressing constituents in their mother tongue and promoting mutual respect and understanding.[41] The municipality also instituted the "Assembly of the Forty," a mechanism for representatives of the city's diverse demographic groups – ethnic, religious and ideological – to participate in administrative decisions.[42] Through such measures, including the multilingual signs mentioned above, Diyarbakır shook off its reputation as a conflict zone and the trappings of imposed (Tur-

---

[38]   Cited in Gambetti, "Decolonizing Diyarbakır," 112.
[39]   Scalbert Yücel, "Common Ground or Battlefield?," 83.
[40]   Meline Toumani, "Minority Rules," *The New York Times Magazine*, February 17, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/17/magazine/17turkey-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.
[41]   Güneş, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*, 168
[42]   Scalbert Yücel, "Common Ground or Battlefield?," 85.

kish) homogenisation, thus allowing minority actors to participate in its cultural and political life.

An important element of this has been the increased visibility and acknowledgement of the Armenian population. Broadly speaking, Kurdish political figures have been willing to recognise and accept responsibility for the genocide visited on the Armenians in 1915, although by no means do all Kurds adopt such a position.[43] Some Kurds go further and purvey a narrative of kindred experience, whereby both Kurds and Armenians have been subjected to the violent responses of the Ottoman state and the Republic of Turkey, thus asserting solidarity with the much-diminished Armenian community.[44] Indeed, kinship extends beyond mere rhetoric for some: unknown numbers of Kurds are descended from so-called "hidden Armenians," who were rescued from the genocide and raised Muslim. Zerrin Özlem Biner relates meeting a Kurdish woman in Mardin who told of Armenians in her extended family and who claimed, "There is an Armenian-ness rooted in the origin of every Kurd."[45] As a milieu of multiculturalism gained momentum, Osman Baydemir, mayor of metropolitan Diyarbakır, made a plea in 2012 to Armenians and other minorities to return. Recognising the Kurds, Armenians, Chaldeans, Yezidis and other ethnic communities who had historically been present, he commented, "All of these people have a right to this city."[46] Yervent Bostancı, a musician who had left Turkey in the 1990s after being hounded for admitting his Armenian identity, was one who heeded Baydemir's call, returning to Diyarbakır.[47]

These developments followed the reopening of the Armenian Cathedral of Surp Giragos in Diyarbakır's Sur neighbourhood. The cathedral had fallen into disrepair after 1915 and the subsequent decline of the

---

[43] Biner, "Acts of Defacement, Memory of Loss," 78–81.
[44] Meline Toumani, *There Was and There Was Not: A Journey through Hate and Possibility in Turkey and Armenia* (New York: Picador, 2014), 126–127.
[45] Biner, "Acts of Defacement, Memory of Loss," 75.
[46] "Come Back, Diyarbakir Mayor Tells Armenians," *Hürriyet Daily News*, September 27, 2012, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/come-back-diyarbakir-mayor-tells-armenians-31096.
[47] "Master of Oud of Armenian Descent Announces Return to His Hometown, Diyarbakır," *Hürriyet Daily News*, March 30, 2013, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/master-of-oud-of-armenian-descent-announces-return-to-his-hometown-diyarbakir-43949.

Armenian population. A campaign instigated by Istanbul Armenians won backing from the local municipality and financial contributions from the Armenian diaspora, leading to a restoration project that saw the building reinstated to its former glory. In October 2011 the cathedral opened for the first Armenian liturgy in decades.[48] In June 2013 I attended a concert of Kurdish music, Turkish poetry and Armenian folk songs in the grand space of the cathedral. Concert goers told me, when I asked who was attending, that a range of ethnicities was present: Turkish, Kurdish and Armenian. During several visits to Diyarbakır up until 2015 it was apparent to me that Surp Giragos was a social and cultural hub in the busy Sur neighbourhood, while the nearby Chaldean Church of Mar Petyun and the Syriac Church attracted steady streams of visitors. When I first visited in the 1990s, all had been in varying states of neglect and dereliction. Now all were refurbished and their communities more visible and confident. None of this would have been conceivable in an earlier era when narrow nationalist visions held sway in Turkey.

Similar restoration projects occurred elsewhere in southeast Anatolia. A prime example is the Armenian Church of the Holy Cross on Akdamar Island in Lake Van. After being restored with state funds, the church was opened in 2007 as a tourist attraction. In 2008 I encountered a group of Iranian tourists at the church, among them ethnic Armenians. However, the church's reopening as a museum precluded its functioning as a place of worship, other than for annual liturgies that were allowed from 2010 as part of officially promoted "faith tourism" programmes.[49] While the opening of the church on Akdamar appears to demonstrate greater space for minorities, considerable controversies arose suggesting a more complex picture. Meline Toumani notes that an official booklet produced for the 2007 opening ceremony failed to disclose that the church was of Armenian provenance, blandly describing it as "Anatolian," while also describing the cultures, arts, peoples

---

[48]   Robert Hayden, et al., *Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites and Spaces* (London: Routledge, 2016), 189.
[49]   Defne Över, "Cultural Tourism and Complex Histories: The Armenian Akhtamar Church, the Turkish State and National Identity," *Qualitative Sociology* 39, no.2. (2016): 173–194, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-016-9323-x.

and, indeed, diversity, of the region as Anatolian, rather than attributing any specific ethnicity.[50] Of course, Armenian history and architecture are parts of the broader Anatolian fabric, but steadfast refusal to acknowledge that the church was Armenian appears to be deliberate obfuscation, and speaks of an unwillingness to confront both the ghosts of the past and current realities. Defne Över documents literature produced by the Culture Ministry highlighting extant art and architecture and that it cites as evidence of Turkey's long-standing "notion of respect and high esteem [for] other religions."[51] Such positions make good PR, but do not necessarily reflect long-standing state discourses and policies or the lived experiences of Anatolian minorities.

The experience of Akdamar echoes that of Mardin. From the early 2000s the Culture Ministry made concerted attempts to promote the city as an example of living cosmopolitanism, including nominating it as a UNESCO World Heritage site.[52] Famous for its distinctive architecture, Mardin is also notable for its ethnic mix, being home to Kurds, Arabs and Syriacs (and, like Van and Diyarbakır, relatively few Turks). Mardin was self-consciously promoted by the Turkish media, "as a kind of Babylon with a peaceful co-existence of its multi-religious and multi-lingual communities."[53] Ultimately, the UNESCO bid was unsuccessful, but the campaign expanded discussion of Turkey's minority communities and contributed to ideas of the "Turkish Orient," which represented a different depiction of Turkey to the mono-ethnic one that had always been portrayed. This was exemplified by the 2012 establishment of the Mardin Multi-lingual Multi-faith Choir, which brought together members of the different minority communities to sing in Turkish, Kurdish, Syriac, Arabic and Armenian. The choir master explained that members wanted to, "Introduce our ancient city,

---

50   Toumani, *There Was and There Was Not*, 146.
51   Över, "Cultural Tourism and Complex Histories," 180.
52   Zerrin Özlem Biner, "Retrieving the Dignity of a Cosmopolitan City: Contested Perspectives on Rights, Culture and Ethnicity in Mardin," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 37 (2007): 31–58, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0896634600004726.
53   Biner, "Retrieving the Dignity," 34.

where many civilisations live… We want everyone to be aware of the richness of Mardin."[54]

As at Akdamar, these developments were not without controversy, often used as window-dressing exercises to portray Turkey as a bastion of inter-communal benevolence and tolerance though little practical change was happening. Nonetheless, minorities in Mardin were able to more comfortably assert their identities than previously. This was true to varying degrees across Turkey. A process of the "normalising" of ethnic and religious diversity was under way in Turkey's public and political landscapes,[55] as was apparent in the daily life of the southeast. The Kurdish presence and Kurdish culture grew more visible in cities such as Diyarbakır; so too did certain aspects of the Armenian imprint on the southeast and the Syriac presence in Mardin and the Tur Abdin. In 1999 then Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit had urged Syriacs to return to the region, but it was only during the 2000s with the AKP's apparently more genuine welcome that members of the diaspora began to return in earnest.[56] As if to demonstrate this new milieu of inclusiveness, in 2012 a Syriac woman from Mardin, famed for her traditional weaving, won Turkey's "Woman of the Year" award,[57] and the Syriac community in Midyat began publishing a newspaper, *Sabro*, meaning "hope" in the Syriac language, the front page of the first edition confidently emblazoned with headlines, "*Biz'de varız. Tanımlanmak istiyoruz.*" [We are here too. We want to be identified.][58]

Re-imagining the southeast: hopes and fears

In the early 1990s I was warned by Turks against travelling east of Cappadocia. These warnings stemmed from safety concerns arising

[54] "Mardin Diller ve Dinler Korosu' Kuruldu'," *Haber 7*, December 18, 2012, http://www.haber7.com/muzik/haber/966296-mardin-diller-ve-dinler-korosu-kuruldu.
[55] United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *2016 Annual Report* (Washington, 2016), 202–204.
[56] Güsten, "Farewell to Tur Abdin," 10–11.
[57] "Nasra Çilli'ye Ödül," *Sabah*, March 3, 2012, https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2012/03/08/nasra-cilliye-odul.
[58] "First Turkish-Syriac Paper Hits the Shelves," *Hürriyet Daily News*, March 15, 2012, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/first-turkish-syriac-paper-hits-the-shelves-16039.

from the PKK conflict and the widely held conviction that the southeast was lawless. Some 20 years later I spoke to an arts administrator in Diyarbakır. A Turk herself, she organised cultural exchange programmes for students between western cities like Izmir and Canakkale and eastern ones like Diyarbakır and Mardin. She explained that every year she was oversubscribed with applications from students who were clamouring to visit the southeast. The region had undergone a shift in the Turkish collective imagination from a no-go zone prone to violence to a must-see.

The shift in perceptions of the southeast was largely due to the improving security situation as the PKK conflict subsided, but it also occurred alongside broader discussions about Turkey's national project and the place(s) of minorities therein. Turkish society developed a fascination with its south-eastern "backyard," a phenomenon that extended to the region becoming the location for several television series and a popular holiday destination.[59] For Turks this involved both the portrayal of and engagement with other ethnicities, the long-overlooked minorities, and their places of worship and socio-cultural milieu. Visiting the churches of Diyarbakır, I have commonly encountered Turkish tourists who appeared rapt by their unfamiliar surroundings and merrily took happy snaps of church interiors despite signs forbidding photography. Such instances do not indicate an overnight change in nation-wide attitudes to a position of acceptance of diversity and embrace of minority communities. In fact, it may be argued that part of the appeal of visiting the southeast was the frisson of danger that came with it, being a region associated with violence and terrorism, a realm that was a repository of ethnic "Otherness," by turns fascinating and terrifying, familiar yet foreign.[60] Nonetheless, extending what was acceptable for TV series and holiday destinations meant the possibility of previously unthinkable leisure activities and demonstrated a willin-

[59]   Ayşe Öncü, "Representing and Consuming 'the East' in Cultural Markets," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 45 (2011): 49–73, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0896634600001308

[60]   Francesco Marilungo, "The City of Terrorism or a City for Breakfast: Diyarbakir's Sense of Place in the TV Series Sultan," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 9, no. 3 (2016): 275–293, https://doi.org/10.1163/18739865-00903005.

gness to engage with an aspect of Turkey's historical legacy and social fabric that had been previously ignored or denied.

A corollary to Turkey's broader discussions about national identity and minorities was growing nostalgia for purported harmonious co-habitation in earlier eras. Often this related to Greek and Jewish communities in Istanbul,[61] but Kurds in the southeast also enthusiastically took up the idea. This gained traction in the inclusive milieu fostered by Kurdish-run municipalities, such as that in Sur, which encouraged multi-lingual governance, and others that installed multi-lingual signs on municipal offices. The warmth with which Kurds embraced Mıgırdiç Margosyan, an Armenian writer who grew up in Diyarbakır's Hançepek quarter in the 1940s, and championed him as a native son is indicative of this inclusiveness.[62] As noted earlier, Kurdish politicians and activists generally proved more willing than Turks to acknowledge the traumas that minorities endured in the early 20th century. In my experience, Kurds are also more willing to acknowledge ethnic diversity in their family histories. Numerous Kurds in Diyarbakır have related to me stories of Armenian or Yezidi ancestors, something that no Turk has ever done.

This sometimes extends to rose-coloured views of the past. Meline Toumani relates an encounter with a Diyarbakır Kurd who was convinced of an idyllic history of intercommunal fraternity.[63] Such interpretations of history gloss over pivotal events, when relations were anything but fraternal. It appears that historically, co-existence and daily interactions between Kurds, Armenians and others were the norm and the periodic intercommunal violence that broke out generally occurred within broader geopolitical upheavals.[64] Evocations of unrelenting inter-ethnic harmony do not tell the whole story. Nonetheless, even false evocations of history are a departure from the earli-

---

[61] Nicholas Doumanis, *Before the Nation: Muslim-Christian Coexistence and Its Destruction in Late-Ottoman Anatolia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[62] Margosyan's memoir of growing up in Diyarbakır, *Gâvur Mahallesi* [Infidel Quarter], first published in 1992, was translated into Kurdish in 1999.

[63] Toumani, *There Was and There Was Not,* 162.

[64] Sami Zubaida, "Religion and Ethnicity as Politicized Boundaries", in *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics,* ed. Faleh Jabar and Hosham Dawod (London: Saqi, 2006), 93–102.

er nationalist attempts at homogenisation and deliberate overlooking of the multi-ethnic make up of southeast Anatolia.

Meanwhile, a transformation also occurred in politics, as candidates from minority communities began to mobilise. Erol Dora, from Şırnak, became, in the 2011 election, the first Syriac elected to the Turkish parliament. In 2015, Feleknas Uca, from Diyarbakır, became the first Yezidi elected to parliament. Both Dora and Uca are members of the pro-Kurdish Halkların Demokratik Partisi (Peoples' Democratic Party; HDP), a party which, in 2015, ran on a self-consciously diverse ticket that featured not only Kurds and Turks, but also Armenians, Yezidis, Syriacs, Circassians and Alevis.[65] The HDP accentuated its acceptance of diversity, highlighting its vision of Turkey in a campaign video as "*hem çok renkli hem çok dilli*" ("both multi-coloured and multilingual").[66] Significantly, the HDP won considerable support from Turkish voters in the election of June 2015, a factor that led to a fall in the vote of the ruling AKP and demonstrated that some in the Turkish electorate were willing to view minority candidates as legitimate political actors.

This is not to say that all Turks welcomed such developments. The nationalist impulse remains strong. Some reacted angrily to shifting discourses on national identity and the higher profiles of minorities. In 2004, an advisory group appointed by the Prime Minister's office published "The Report on Minority Rights and Cultural Rights." Baskın Oran, a member of the group, reported a furious backlash including threats and insults from some. Oran relates that the report's discussion of the idea of *Türkiyeli* as an inclusive way to (re)define Turkey drew particular criticism on the grounds that any undermining of the primacy of Turkishness and acknowledgement of diversity would lead to state

---

[65] "Inclusive HDP Candidate List Aspires to Pass 10 Pct Election Threshold," *Hürriyet Daily News*, April 7, 2015, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/inclusive-hdp-candidate-list-aspires-to-pass-10-pct-election-threshold.aspx?pageID=238&nID=80731&NewsCatID=338.   It should be noted that inter-ethnic relations are not always amicable, as witnessed in accusations that HDP-aligned Kurds have appropriated land from some Assyrians in the Tur Abdin. See Güsten, *Farewell to Tur Abdin*, 23–24.

[66] "HDP'nin Seçim Videosu Yayında: İnadına Barış, İnadına Umut," *Diken*, October 16, 2015, http://www.diken.com.tr/hdpnin-secim-videosu-yayinda-inadina-baris-inadina-umut/.

disintegration.[67] Meanwhile, events such as the reopening of the church on Akdamar in 2007, provoked angry reactions from hard-line nationalists. Meline Toumani reports that the nationalist Büyük Birlik Partisi (Great Unity Party) bussed members into Van to protest the event.[68] In 2010, apparently in response to the first liturgy performed at Akdamar, members of the Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Movement Party), chanting "*Allah akbar*" and carrying Turkish flags, proceeded to pray in the remains of the Armenian cathedral in the ruined city of Ani.[69] Such actions, although appearing petty and spiteful to some, win applause from some Turks and indicate that disdain for and fear of minorities are entrenched in the Turkish polity.

Political spaces contract again

The momentum for a more inclusive Turkey, one that allowed space for minorities and acknowledged their historical legacy, has seemingly dissipated and apparent gains have been reversed. Clémence Scalbert-Yücel writes that Turkey has undergone the "rise and fall of a diversity wave."[70] The furious rear-guard actions of nationalist politicians mentioned above are evidence of an undercurrent of intolerance and paranoia that appears difficult to subdue. After hostilities reignited with the PKK in late 2015 nationalist rhetoric surged. But even earlier, while Turkey's national identity was being debated more openly, signs, such as the 2007 murder in Istanbul of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, indicated that change would be difficult to achieve and could be abruptly reversed. The obfuscation that surrounded the opening of the church at Akdamar, which was also subjected to stalling tactics regarding the installation of its cross and permission for services to be performed, was perhaps indicative of the sincerity – or lack thereof – of

---

[67] Baskın Oran, "Exploring Turkishness: 'Turkish' and Türkiyeli'," in *Turkey and the Politics of National Identity,* ed. Shane Brennan and Marc Herzog (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 23–37.
[68] Toumani, *There Was and There Was Not*, 146.
[69] "Turkish Nationalists Pray In Ancient Armenian Cathedral," *Radio Free Europe*, October 2, 2010, https://www.rferl.org/a/Turkish_Nationalists_Pray_In_Ancient_Armenian_Cathedral/2174492.html.
[70] Scalbert Yücel, "Common Ground or Battlefield?," 74.

state initiatives at fostering multiculturalism. These initiatives may have been useful for encouraging "faith tourism" but it appeared that the government intended to keep a rein on how much and what types of ethnicity were on show. Some argue that the AKP government devised a form of "acceptable diversity": it acknowledges ethnic minorities and grants them space to operate but only in ways that do not contradict its own agenda.[71] In the case of Akdamar, this amounted to the cathedral being touted as a symbol of inter-communal harmony and benevolence towards minorities, but not to granting the Armenian community the autonomy to use it as a place of regular prayer, or even to place a cross atop the spire.

The greatest challenge for the state and the AKP in this regard remains the Kurds. As the largest minority, they are most visible and vocal, and their struggle, both in political and military terms, attracts most attention domestically and internationally. The AKP made overtures to the Kurds since arriving in office, initiatives that were more concerted, and appeared more sincere than any from earlier administrations. The establishment of TRT6 meant Kurdish was heard on the national broadcaster for the first time ever and the lifting of emergency rule made palpable differences to citizens in the southeast. Discussions about broadening national identity had largely centred on allowing space to incorporate Kurds within any redefinition, but logically any broadening of scope extended to other minorities. A Kurd from Diyarbakır once declared to me that the Kurds had brought an end to the "politics of assimilation in Turkey," citing the increased visibility of Istanbul's Circassian community in the wake of the Kurdish political movement.

The pro-Kurdish movement also gathered the most political momentum. Pro-Kurdish parties had operated in Turkey, despite political and physical harassment, since the 1990s, but in the AKP era they came into their own. In the general election of June 2015, the HDP became the first pro-Kurdish party to pass a parliamentary "threshold" that decrees that any party winning less than 10 percent of the national vote is disqualified from holding seats. The HDP's championing of

---

71   Nick Danforth, "In Turkey, Obedience to the State Trumps Multiculturalism," *Muftah,* February 2, 2016, https://muftah.org/turkey-obedience-multiculturalism/.

multi-ethnic politics did not contradict the AKP's vision of a broader national identity, but the party mobilised very effectively, while also pursuing the re-appropriation of public spaces in the southeast, a process that Zeynep Gambetti described as "de-colonisation"[72] and adopting a strongly anti-AKP position. The HDP's success in June 2015 represented an electoral rebuke to the AKP and meant that the AKP lost its parliamentary majority, its vote falling almost nine percent from the 2011 election.

It was after this, and the re-ignition of the PKK conflict, that the AKP abandoned its pro-diversity discourse and reclaimed the baton of nationalist rhetoric. Debate rages about whether the government or the PKK were responsible for the resumption of hostilities, but the AKP has made no attempt to resume any form of negotiation with the PKK. There had been signs earlier that Erdoğan was adopting a less inclusive position. In 2005 he had stated that the "Kurdish problem" was "my problem too," but before the 2015 election he claimed there was "no such thing" [...böyle bir şey yok].[73] Such a standpoint indicated either a simplistic view of the political grievances of Turkey's Kurds or an unwillingness to make tangible steps to address them. Many Kurds argued that Erdoğan and the AKP's overtures for peace and talk of diversity and inclusiveness had been insincere from the outset.[74] According to this reasoning, they were merely window dressing to win Kurdish votes and consolidate Erdoğan's own position.

From mid-2015, military clashes spread across southeast Anatolia. Some Kurdish politicians must share the blame for their declarations of "autonomy," which heightened political tensions. The PKK adopted a new tactic of conducting military operations within cities, bringing the war to the doorsteps of residents and resulting in unprecedented physical destruction in urban locations. As violence flared, nationalist passions ignited. Turkish nationalist rhetoric echoed across the country.

---

[72]   Gambetti, "Decolonizing Diyarbakır," 99.
[73]   "Erdoğan'ın 'Kürt sorunu yoktur' açılımında geldiği son nokta: 'Var' diyen ayrımcıdır," *Diken*, April 28, 2015, http://www.diken.com.tr/erdoganin-kurt-sorunu-yoktur-aciliminda-geldigi-son-nokta-var-diyen-ayrimcidir/.
[74]   Ziya Öniş, "Turkey's Two Elections: The AKP Comes Back," *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 2 (2016), 144.

Amid the destruction visited upon some cities of the southeast, state security forces also graffitied buildings with messages asserting the racial superiority of Turks and the reach of the state.[75] These slogans were aimed at PKK militants but they cannot have failed to alarm everyday citizens of these cities and minority communities across Turkey. A presidential advisor also alleged that PKK militants were not circumcised, implying that they were in fact Armenian, in so doing rekindling nationalist arguments that cast minorities as untrustworthy.[76] Erdoğan later pushed a similar line claiming that the PKK and "Armenian brigands" were part of a "treason gang" working to undermine Turkey.[77] Thus discourse turned to a reliable list of usual suspects – those who were not visibly and vocally Turkish, i.e. the minorities – portraying them as the cause of the trouble that beset the nation-state.

This period effectively saw Turkish discourse and politics come full circle. Amid the tumult of resurgent violence in the southeast and the coup attempt of July 2016, opponents and critics of the government were dismissed as traitors or terrorists. Gone was the confident, inclusive, outward-looking Turkey of the early 2000s. As Ayhan Kaya had observed previously, the AKP reversed course on itself, adopting many of the traits, such as the co-optation of the judiciary and military, of earlier governments that it had once criticised.[78] This now accelerated and, as the statements above indicate, extended to suspicion of and scapegoating of minorities. The government also found that adopting a more nationalist position created electoral advantages. It entered a series of alliances with the nationalist MHP, attracting the votes of Turkey's nationalist rump to secure electoral victories from November 2015 and beyond. Previously, Erdoğan and the AKP had espoused a more inclusive and multicultural Turkey in courting a diverse constituency, but to do so now would jeopardise the nationalist vote on which it relied.

---

[75]   "Esedullah genelgesi," *Demokrat Haber,* November 21, 2015, https://www.demokrathaber. org/guncel/esedullah-genelgesi-h57528.html.

[76]   "Kuzu'dan ilginç açıklama: Teröristler sünnetsiz," *Hürriyet*, September 8, 2015, http:// www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/kuzu-dan-ilginc-aciklama-teroristler-sunnetsiz-30013152.

[77]   "Erdoğan: Gülenists, PKK, Armenian Brigands, YPG Tarred with the Same Brush," *Hürriyet Daily News*, June 17, 2016, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-gulenists-pkk-armenian-brigands-ypg-tarred-with-the-same-brush-100617.

[78]   Kaya, *Europeanisation and Tolerance*, 85.

The situation changed on the ground in the southeast, too. The government removed mayors of numerous municipalities claiming that as HDP members they were linked to the PKK.[79] This resulted in the installation of government-appointed trustees and, eventually, in the removal of the multi-lingual signs noted above. The tightening of restrictions on manifestations of minority identity became apparent in the closure of numerous Kurdish-language schools and media, the termination of a project to commemorate the Armenian-American writer William Saroyan in Bitlis, the closure of a multi-lingual kindergarten in Mardin and the arrest of its administrator.[80] The urban landscape of the southeast also suffered enormous damage, Şırnak and Nusaybin being reduced almost entirely to rubble. In Diyarbakır parts of the historic Sur neighbourhood were razed and appropriated by the state, including the Armenian Cathedral of Surp Giragos. Such was the destruction that, when looking at photos, Mıgırdıç Margosyan, who claimed to know the city "stone by stone," was unable to recognise his street or house.[81] Former mayor Abdullah Demirbaş wrote despairingly that years of work rebuilding the city's multi-ethnic fabric were being undone.[82] Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu remarked that the state would rebuild Sur, citing the earlier example of reconstruction in Toledo in Spain.[83] This suggestion received a scathing response from some locals.[84] Rebuilding Sur would allow a degree of top-down control that

---

[79]   "Turkey Removes Two Dozen Elected Mayors in Kurdish Militant Crackdown," *Reuters*, September 11, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-kurds-idUSKCN11H065.

[80]   Constance Letsch, "In Turkey, Repression of the Kurdish Language Is Back, With No End in Sight," *The Nation,* December 21, 2017, https://www.thenation.com/article/in-turkey-repression-of-the-kurdish-language-is-back-with-no-end-in-sight/.

[81]   "Mıgırdıç Margosyan Couldn't Recognize His Street Amidst Ruins," *Bianet*, April 25, 2017, https://bianet.org/english/politics/185871-migirdic-margosyan-couldn-t-find-his-street-in-ruins.

[82]   Abdullah Demirbaş, "Undoing Years of Progress in Turkey," *New York Times*, January 26, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/25/opinion/undoing-years-of-progress-in-turkey.html.

[83]   "Diyarbakır's Ruined Sur to Be Rebuilt 'Like Spain's Toledo,' Vows Turkish PM," *Hürriyet Daily News*, February 1, 2016, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/diyarbakirs-ruined-sur-to-be-rebuilt-like-spains-toledo-vows-turkish-pm-94615.

[84]   "Why Is Spanish Toledo Not Good Enough for Diyarbakir?" *Rudaw*, April 9, 2016, http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/turkey/09042016.

the government had never previously had over the city. This reflects the AKP's approach to multiculturalism and the manifestation of minority identities: the government is open to the idea of diversity, trumpeting it as a hallmark of the nation-state, but insists on maintaining control over its implementation and manifestation.

Conclusion

There has been considerable change in southeast Anatolia and to perceptions of the region and its people(s) in the Turkish consciousness. Once the target of assimilationist policies of military activity against the PKK, the region has undergone a transformation, experiencing greater visibility for its extant minorities, primarily Kurds, but also Armenians, Syriacs and others. Changes instigated following the ascendance of Kurdish municipal politicians and the AKP at the national level brought a new political dynamic. Minorities won more space and were attracted back to the region, and the region won a place in the Turkish public's imagination. The era of denial and forgetting of minorities may therefore be over, but the resumption of hostilities in 2015 between the state and the PKK, and the associated rekindling of nationalist discourse, mean that minorities must again maintain a low profile. Minorities are once more viewed suspiciously; political and societal discourse implores unity, meaning divergent opinions or identities are subject to harsh criticism. The degree to which the AKP now relies on the support of nationalists, and seeks to keep a tight rein on Kurdish politics, further restricts minorities' room to move, meaning little possibility of greater visibility or involvement in politics. If Diyarbakır is seen as a barometer of the situation of minorities in southeast Anatolia, it testifies to the uncertain state they find themselves in today. Only recently reinvigorated and showcasing its multi-faith, multi-ethnic fabric, parts of the city now lie in ruins, a casualty of Turkey's ongoing inability to create an open, inclusive socio-political sphere and national identity that allows all of its diverse citizens to prosper.

Bibliography

Andrews, Peter Alford. *Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey*. Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 1989.

Aslan, Senem. "Incoherent State: The Controversy over Kurdish Naming in Turkey." *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 10 (2009). https://doi.org/10.4000/ejts.4142.

Aslan, Senem. "Everyday Forms of State Power and the Kurds in Early Republican Turkey." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43 (2011): 75–93. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743810001200.

Bayir, Derya. *Minorities and Nationalism in Turkish Law.* Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013.

Biner, Zerrin Özlem. "Retrieving the Dignity of a Cosmopolitan City: Contested Perspectives on Rights, Culture and Ethnicity in Mardin." *New Perspectives on Turkey* 37 (2007): 31–58, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0896634600004726.

Biner, Zerrin Özlem. "Acts of Defacement, Memory of Loss: Ghostly Effects of the 'Armenian Crisis' in Mardin, Southeastern Turkey." *History & Memory*, 22, no. 2 (2010): 68–94. https://doi.org/10.2979/his.2010.22.2.68.

Çetin, Fethiye. *My Grandmother: A Memoir*. London: Verso, 2008.

Cizre, Ümit. "Turkey's Kurdish Problem: Borders, Identity, and Hegemony." In *Right-Sizing the State: The Politics of Moving Borders*, edited by Brendan O'Leary, Ian Lustick, and Thomas Callaghy, 222–252. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

"Come Back, Diyarbakir Mayor Tells Armenians." *Hürriyet Daily News*, September 27, 2012. http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/come-back-diyarbakir-mayor-tells-armenians-31096.

Danforth, Nick. "In Turkey, Obedience to the State Trumps Multiculturalism." *Muftah*, February 2, 2016. https://muftah.org/turkey-obedience-multiculturalism/.

De Bellaigue, Christopher. *Rebel Land*. London: Penguin, 2010.

Demirbaş, Abdullah. "Undoing Years of Progress in Turkey." *New York Times*, January 26, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/25/opinion/undoing-years-of-progress-in-turkey.html.

"Diyarbakır's Ruined Sur to Be Rebuilt 'Like Spain's Toledo,' Vows Turkish PM." *Hürriyet Daily News*, February 1, 2016. http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/diyarbakirs-ruined-sur-to-be-rebuilt-like-spains-toledo-vows-turkish-pm-94615.

Doumanis, Nicholas. *Before the Nation: Muslim-Christian Coexistence and Its Destruction in Late-Ottoman Anatolia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

"Erdoğan: Gülenists, PKK, Armenian Brigands, YPG Tarred with the Same Brush." *Hürriyet Daily News*, June 17, 2016. http://www.hurriyetdailynews. com/erdogan-gulenists-pkk-armenian-brigands-ypg-tarred-with-the-same-brush-100617.

"Erdoğan'ın 'Kürt sorunu yoktur' açılımında geldiği son nokta: 'Var' diyen ayrımcıdır." *Diken*, April 28, 2015. http://www.diken.com.tr/erdoganin-kurt-sorunu-yoktur-aciliminda-geldigi-son-nokta-var-diyen-ayrimcidir/.

"Esedullah genelgesi." *Demokrat Haber,* November 21, 2015. https://www. demokrathaber.org/guncel/esedullah-genelgesi-h57528.html.

"First Turkish-Syriac Paper Hits the Shelves." *Hürriyet Daily News*, March 15, 2012. http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/first-turkish-syriac-paper-hits-the-shelves-16039.

Gambetti, Zeynep. "Decolonizing Diyarbakır: Culture, Identity and the Struggle to Appropriate Urban Space." In *Comparing Cities: The Middle East and South Asia*, edited by Kamran Asdar Ali and Martina Rieker, 97–129. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Maldon: Blackwell, 2006.

Grigoriadis, Ioannis. "Türk or Türkiyeli? The Reform of Turkey's Minority Legislation and the Rediscovery of Ottomanism." *Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 3 (2007): 423–438. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4284553.

Güneş, Cengiz. *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey: From Protest to Resistance*. London: Routledge, 2012.

Güsten, Susanne. *Farewell to Tur Abdin.* Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center, 2016.

"Mardin Diller ve Dinler Korosu' Kuruldu," *Haber 7*, December 18, 2012. http://www.haber7.com/muzik/haber/966296-mardin-diller-ve-dinler-korosu-kuruldu.

Hayden, Robert, et al. *Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites and Spaces*. London: Routledge, 2016.

"HDP'nin Seçim Videosu Yayında: İnadına Barış, İnadına Umut." *Diken*, October 16, 2015. http://www.diken.com.tr/hdpnin-secim-videosu-yayinda-inadina-baris-inadina-umut/.

Hrant Dink Foundation. "Türkiye Kültür Varlıkları Haritası." Accessed December 14, 2021. https://turkiyekulturvarliklari.hrantdink.org/.

İnce, Başak. *Citizenship and Identity in Turkey: from Atatürk's Republic to the Present Day*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2012.

Karaosmanoğlu, Kerem. "Revisiting the Self: Researching Minorities in Turkey." *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 3 (2008): 127–143.

"Inclusive HDP Candidate List Aspires to Pass 10 Pct Election Threshold." *Hürriyet Daily News*, April 7, 2015. http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/inclusive-

hdp-candidate-list-aspires-to-pass-10-pct-election-threshold.aspx?pageID=238&n
ID=80731&NewsCatID=338.

Kaya, Ayhan. *Europeanisation and Tolerance in Turkey: The Myth of Toleration*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013.

"Kayyım Belediyenin İlk İcraatı: Çok Dilli Tabeladan Ermenice ve Süryanice Çıkarıldı." *Agos*, December 9, 2016. http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/17211/kayy-im-belediyenin-ilk-icraati-cokdilli-tabeladan-ermenice-ve-suryanice-cikarildi.

Keyder, Çağlar. "Whither the Project of Modernity? Turkey in the 1990s." In *Rethinking modernity and national identity in Turkey*, edited by Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, 37–51. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997.

Kurban, Dilek. *European Yearbook of Minority Issues*, Vol. 4, 2004/5. Leiden: Brill, 2006.

"Kuzu'dan İlginç Açıklama: Teröristler Sünnetsiz." *Hürriyet*, September 8, 2015. http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/kuzu-dan-ilginc-aciklama-teroristler-sunnetsiz-30013152.

Letsch. Constance. "In Turkey, Repression of the Kurdish Language Is Back, With No End in Sight." *The Nation*, December 21, 2017. https://www.thenation.com/article/in-turkey-repression-of-the-kurdish-language-is-back-with-no-end-in-sight/.

Marilungo, Francesco. "The City of Terrorism or a City for Breakfast: Diyarbakir's Sense of Place in the TV Series Sultan." *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 9, no. 3 (2016): 275–293. https://doi.org/10.1163/18739865-00903005.

Massicard, Elise. "Claiming Difference in a Unitarist Frame: The Case of Alevism." In *Turkey beyond Nationalism: Towards Post-nationalist Identities*, edited by Hans-Lukas Kieser, 74–82. London: I.B. Tauris, 2006.

"Master of Oud of Armenian Descent Announces Return to His Hometown, Diyarbakır." *Hürriyet Daily News*, March 30, 2013. http://www.hurriyet-dailynews.com/master-of-oud-of-armenian-descent-announces-return-to-his-hometown-diyarbakir-43949.

McCarthy, Justin. *The Armenian Rebellion at Van*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006.

"Mıgırdıç Margosyan Couldn't Recognize His Street Amidst Ruins." *Bianet*, April 25, 2017. https://bianet.org/english/politics/185871-migirdic-margosyan-couldn-t-find-his-street-in-ruins.

"Nasra Çilli'ye Ödül." *Sabah*, March 3, 2012. https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2012/03/08/nasra-cilliye-odul.

Öktem, Kerem. "The Nation's Imprint: Demographic Engineering and the Change of Toponyms in Republican Turkey." *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 7 (2008). https://doi.org/10.4000/ejts.2243.

Öncü. Ayşe. "Representing and Consuming 'the East' in Cultural Markets." *New Perspectives on Turkey* 45 (2011): 49–73. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0896634600001308.

Öniş, Ziya. "Turkey's Two Elections: The AKP Comes Back." *Journal of Democracy* 27 no. 2 (2016): 141–154.

Oran, Baskın. "Exploring Turkishness: 'Turkish' and Türkiyeli'." In *Turkey and the Politics of National Identity*, edited by Shane Brennan and Marc Herzog, 23–37. London: I.B. Tauris, 2014.

Över, Defne. "Cultural Tourism and Complex Histories: The Armenian Akhtamar Church, the Turkish State and National Identity." *Qualitative Sociology* 39, no. 2 (2016): 173–194. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-016-9323-x.

Scalbert Yücel, Clémence. "Common Ground or Battlefield? Deconstructing the Politics of Recognition in Turkey." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 22. no. 1 (2016): 71–93. https://doi.org/10.1080/13537113.2016.1133862.

Temelkuran, Ece. *Turkey: The Insane and the Melancholy*. London: Zed Books, 2015.

Toumani, Meline. "Minority Rules." *The New York Times Magazine*, February 17, 2008. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/17/magazine/17turkey-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

Toumani, Meline. *There Was and There Was Not: A Journey through Hate and Possibility in Turkey and Armenia*. New York: Picador, 2014.

"Turkey Removes Two Dozen Elected Mayors in Kurdish Militant Crackdown." *Reuters*, September 11, 2016. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-kurds-idUSKCN11H065.

"Turkey's Top Muslim Cleric Calls for Reopening of Greek Seminary in Visit." *Today's Zaman*, May 7, 2012. https://www.archons.org/-/today-s-zaman-reports-on-turkey-s-top-muslim-cleric-calls-for-reopening-of-greek-seminary-in-visit.

"Turkish Government 'Firm' on Solving Woes of Minorities." *Hürriyet Daily News*, March 3, 2012. http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-government-firm-on-solving-woes-of-minorities-15169.

"Turkish Nationalists Pray In Ancient Armenian Cathedral." *Radio Free Europe*, October 2, 2010. https://www.rferl.org/a/Turkish_Nationalists_Pray_In_Ancient_Armenian_Cathedral/2174492.html.

Üngör, Uğur Ümit. *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–50*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012.

White, Jenny. *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.

"Why Is Spanish Toledo Not Good Enough for Diyarbakir?" *Rudaw*, April 9, 2016. http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/turkey/09042016.

Zubaida, Sami. "Religion and Ethnicity as Politicized Boundaries." In *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics,* edited by Faleh Jabar and Hosham Dawod, 93–102. London: Saqi, 2006.

SURVIVING THROUGH TACTICS: THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY

A . B a n u H ü l ü r , Y u s u f E k i n c i ,
A . Ç a ğ l a r D e n i z

Introduction[1]

The uprising in Syria, initially starting in March 2011 as democratic protests against the regime and later transforming into a continuous war due to the intervention of neighboring countries and global powers, has killed hundreds of thousands of people and caused more than half a million injuries. As the war has become a massive humanitarian crisis with millions of people driven from their homes, Syria's neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq have faced an unprecedentedly large influx of asylum seekers. Almost half of the asylum seekers who arrived in Turkey are concentrated in border cities such as Gaziantep, Kilis, Şanlıurfa, Mardin, Hatay and Kahramanmaraş. Syrian asylum seekers who sought refuge in Turkey were settled in two ways: the first group were settled in refugee camps (temporary shelters), where they first lived in tents or container-cities established by the Turkish state. The second group settled either in cities bordering their homeland or on the peripheries of large metropolises. Some asylum seekers from the latter group determined their settlement country/city according to their existing family and kinship ties. It is important

---

to emphasize that those who could use their existing kinship networks and fellow-townsmenship ties have established support and solidarity mechanisms in order to cope with some of the problems they face in Turkey.

According to the statistics provided by Turkey's Directorate General for Migration Management established under the Ministry of Interior, the number of asylum seekers in Turkey reached 3,670,717 by May 19, 2021. While 56,447 are settled in temporary shelters, 3,614,270 people live outside refugee camps. Migration Management's figures indicate that the number of Syrian asylum seekers who live in the city of Gaziantep, both in and outside the temporary shelters, is 449,184, and the number of those who live in the city of Kilis is 105,653.[2] Migration Management's city-specific data does not have separate figures for those who live in "temporary shelters" and those who live "outside the temporary shelters." Rather, it only shows the total number of asylum seekers settled in each city. Of course, these numbers consist only of "registered" asylum seekers. If we were to add the number of unregistered asylum seekers to these figures, it could be safely assumed that the number of asylum seekers living in Gaziantep and Kilis provinces would be much more than the number given by Migration Management. Our field research has shown that many asylum seekers are unregistered (undocumented) and thus, the official numbers do not reflect the full extent of the reality of current asylum trends. It can be argued that the official statistics tend to underestimate the number of asylum seekers, taking into consideration only the registered ones.

Population estimates for asylum seekers vary—and usually differ from the official numbers—for two important and related reasons: asylum seekers' border-crossing practices and their unwillingness to be registered by the official authorities of the city they settle in. Only a small minority of asylum seekers cross the border with a valid passport and thus, only a small percentage of the entire population of asylum seekers registers with the official authorities in order to receive an identity card. According to their own testimonies, asylum seekers do not want to have

---

[2]   "Geçici Koruma," Turkey Ministry of Interior Directorate General for Migration Management, accessed May 25, 2021, https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638.

any record of the fact that they formally left Syria—a country where they believe Bashar al-Assad will never step down from his position. Some asylum seekers avoid any official record of both leaving Syria and being in Turkey. When we look at the statements of some participants, the fear caused by the Syrian secret service "Muhaberat" has a significant effect on whether or not asylum seekers register officially in Turkey. Thus, they often resort to illegal border-crossing practices and try to remain unregistered and undocumented.

There are many reports about asylum seekers published by various institutions in Gaziantep. However, these works rarely examine the sociology of everyday life. It is crucial that we conduct more sociological research about the daily life practices of asylum seekers in order to understand how they survive, what kinds of strategies they develop to survive, and how they navigate the legal system. Such research is also needed in order to examine asylum seekers' means of making a living, their relationships with fellow Syrian citizens as well with Turkish locals, the level of their Turkish language skills, their access to education, and their kinship ties and social networks.

This article aims to fill this gap in the literature by exploring Syrian asylum seekers' everyday life experiences and mundane coping and survival mechanisms through the critical lenses provided by de Certeau, Foucault and Bourdieu and their concepts of "field," "strategy," and "tactic." Syrian refugees who came to Turkey had to adapt to the culture and social environment of a different country and have developed tactics to adapt to the difficulties they faced. People living in Turkey have also responded with different strategies toward asylum seekers as the Turkish locals are affected socioeconomically by this migration. A new group arriving to settle into a new community may not be welcome at the required level and may face ostracism. In other words, the immigration experience for refugees frequently involves material poverty as the most common element of the downward spiral of ostracism.[3] Syrian

---

[3] Fikret Adaman and Çağlar Keyder, "Turkey'de Büyük Kentlerin Gecekondu ve Çöküntü Mahallelerinde Yaşanan Yoksulluk ve Sosyal Dışlanma. Avrupa Komisyonu, Sosyal Dışlanma ile Mücadelede Mahalli Topluluk Eylem Programı 2002–2006 [Poverty and Social Ostracism Experienced in Slum Areas and Collapsed Quarters in Big Cities in Turkey]," European Commission Local Community Action Program in Struggling with Social Ostracism 2002–2006,

refugees have difficulties in social life and work life, they have no social security, they must change their style of clothing, they experience the challenges of a different language, and it has been observed that the number of people working from home has increased.

These are the common problems facing Syrian migrants. The main goal of this article is to examine what kinds of challenges and difficulties Syrian asylum seekers face upon arriving in the cities of Gaziantep and Kilis, and what kinds of coping mechanisms they develop in order to solve their problems. In order to realize this research goal, the article asks: The arrival of an unprecedented number of asylum seekers in such a short period of time causes what kind of strategies to be developed among the residents and what kind of tactics for the refugees? What do asylum seekers do in order to adapt to these unfamiliar cities where they live as foreigners? What are the survival tactics adapted by asylum seekers? With specific regards to Gaziantep, what are the factors that hinder the processes of adaptation and acculturation of Syrian asylum seekers? What are the widely held local opinions, both positive and negative, about Syrian asylum seekers? How do these opinions interact with the "strategy" of the dominant culture? Do these opinions trigger conflict escalation, or do they result in harmony? Whether the "imagination" created around the asylum seekers finally continue to become a reality or became a practice defeated by reality? Building on these questions and drawing on the sociological theories of everyday life, this study aims to explore the life experiences and survival tactics of Syrian asylum seekers who settled in Gaziantep and Kilis provinces.

Methodology

The data in this article was obtained from our different research trips to Gaziantep and Kilis between January and March 2015. We greatly benefited from the theory of everyday life when we analyzed our findings on Syrian asylum seekers' life experiences, particularly from de Certeau's concepts of "tactic" and "strategy." The main aim of this

---

accessed June 13, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/2006/study_turkey_tr.pdf.

study is to qualitatively inquire and analyze the coping mechanisms and survival tactics adapted by Syrian asylum seekers. During our research trips, we conducted 115 face-to-face in-depth interviews with Syrian asylum seekers and locals from Gaziantep and Kilis.[4] Our in-depth interviewing technique relied on a semi-structured interview form. Our interviews with 115 participants took a total of 4.170 minutes. That is, the average duration of each call was 36.2 minutes. In addition to the interviews, we also conducted participant observation and analyzed various documents throughout our research. In this study, we utilized four basic sources for collecting data. These were: interviews, observations, documents, and audio-visual materials. At times, our research also benefited from new sources that cannot be categorized by this traditional quadruple categorization of data sources. For instance, in addition to our face-to-face in-depth interviews, we corresponded and communicated with some of our interlocutors through the WhatsApp application and social media platforms. Thus, we also utilized "online data collection."[5] We also developed and maintained friendships with our interlocutors on social media even after our field research, of course, with their consent.

During our interviews with Syrian participants, instead of directly asking what kinds of tactics they use to survive, we asked them from where, why, how, and through which channels they came to Turkey; what kinds of hardships they face here and how they cope; how they earn their living; what kinds of problems they have with official authorities and how they solve these problems; and what the relationships with their neighbors and with the local residents of Gaziantep and Kilis are like. During our interviews with the locals, we asked them what they do; what they think about Syrian asylum seekers; what kinds of changes they notice upon the arrival of Syrian asylum seekers; whether they observe any problems in regard to Syrian asylum seekers and if they had any suggestions for solving these problems. In addition to these pre-determined questions, we also asked other, spontaneous research-

---

[4]   The list of interviewees is on file with the journal.
[5]   John W. Creswell, *Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri: Beş Yaklaşıma Göre Nitel Araştırma ve Araştırma Deseni*, transl. and ed. Mesut Bütün and Selçuk B. Demir (Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi, 2015), 159.

related questions based on the context of the participants' responses and to the extent that our interview form permitted.

This study was conducted by three researchers. Our research team's proficiency in Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish and English enabled us to overcome the "language barrier" with Syrian interlocutors. Since Syrians who took refuge in Turkey have Arabic, Turkmen, and Kurdish ethnic origins, we conducted our interviews in one of those three languages, plus English (Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish) based on our interlocutors' mother tongues and/or which language they felt comfortable speaking. Our interlocutors' choice of interviewing language also made visible the differences among them based on their class, ethnicity, and level of sexual consciousness. For instance, educated middle-class Syrians chose to be interviewed in "*Fasih* Arabic" (classical Arabic), while those who came from lower class backgrounds preferred to be interviewed in "*Ammi* Arabic." On the other hand, upper-class and high-income class Syrians, as well as Syrian LGBTI individuals chose to carry out their interviews in English. The latter group's wish to eventually migrate to Europe and the cultural capital they possess that allows them to speak a foreign language comfortably, influenced their decision to choose English as the interview language. The asylum seekers with Turkmen and Kurdish origins, on the other hand, preferred to be interviewed in their native languages, regardless of their cultural capital and/or class backgrounds.

Asylum Seekers' Tactics against Locals' Strategies

If we were to use the theory of everyday life in our inquiry about how asylum seekers face new and unfamiliar territory in their daily lives and how they cope with the difficulties caused by this new life, Bourdieu's concept of "field" and de Certeau's concepts of "tactic" and "strategy" would be useful. According to Bourdieu, those who enter any given field earlier than others accumulate greater capital, since they have a greater capacity to grasp 'the rules of the game' or the conventions of the social situations they inhabit. Thus, they become the

dominant groups in the field.[6] Bourdieu argues that dominant groups in any given field have conservative reflexes, as they fight to protect and maintain their status in relation to the dominant values and social norms that define the field. For such dominant groups, the current state of the world is the way it ought to be.[7] Those who are newcomers develop novel strategies to overturn the established positions of dominant groups who came before them, and to challenge the doxa that enables such dominant groups to mobilize and reproduce their capital. On the other hand, those who seek to continue their own influence and power within the field employ a conservative strategy. Since capital is not fixed, a possible change within the field can cause dominant groups to lose their power to define, distribute and reproduce different forms of capital. Therefore, the status quo should be maintained.

New entrants to the field, on the other hand, pursue strategies of succession that are the attempts to gain access to dominant positions. Succession strategies show us how new entrants, who have entered the field in an unorthodox manner, may soon surrender to the charm of the dominant field and become complicit with the dominant orthodox discourse, consciously or unconsciously, in order to gain their own dominant positions. As Sabuktay points out, de Certeau pays attention to what is left unexplored in Foucault's theory of power. De Certeau is not interested in examining how Foucault's "microphysics of power" operates through subtle disciplining procedures. That is to say, he does not aim to analyze the production of power. Rather, he focuses on its "consumption," and in so doing, he analyzes a network of "anti-discipline."[8] De Certeau defines everyday life as a continuous composition of strategies and tactics that "nourish" within these strategies:

I call a "strategy" the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an "environment." A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper (*propre*) and thus serve as the basis

---

6   Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, transl. Richard Nice (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

7   Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 166.

8   Ayşegül Sabuktay, "Kızılay'da Gündelik Hayat ve Yöntem," *Mülkiye Dergisi* 32, no. 261 (2008): 47–48.

for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, "clienteles," "targets," or "objects" of research). Political, economic, and scientific rationality has been constructed on this strategic model.[9]

While Lefebvre explains the notion of everydayness as a multitude of ordinary social causes that repeat themselves constantly, for Harootunian everyday life is shared experiences of global capitalism that transcend cultural geographies and which gives rise to similar living conditions and lifestyles in different societies.[10] The sociology of everyday life also carefully examines the notion of strategy, which Foucault locates at the heart of power relations. Foucault defines strategies as the mechanisms brought into play in power relations and sees them as necessary and permanent conditions for a relationship of power to exist. For him, there are two forms of strategies: the strategy of struggle and the strategy of confrontation.[11] While power relations employ strategies of struggle, confrontation strategies are used by social agents and they often reach their limits with the victory of one of the two adversaries. What Foucault calls a strategy of struggle is indeed defined by Bourdieu as a domination strategy. Bourdieu argues that the dominant agents use domination strategy, consciously or unconsciously, as they reproduce and legitimate the social field that is an arena of conflict. Indeed, Bourdieu reminds us that sociologists should never abandon the task of exposing the workings of the social structures of domination.[12] For him, strategy is a specific product of practical reason, playing a crucial role in every social game. The good player in any given game is the one "who does at every moment what the game requires. That presupposes a permanent capacity for invention, indispensable if one is to adapt to indefinitely varied and never completely identical situations. This is not ensured by mechanical obedience to the explicit, codified rule (when it

---

9   Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
10   A. Çağlar Deniz, *Öğrenci İşi: Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Gündelik Hayatı: İstanbul Örneği* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2014), 42.
11   Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982), 793.
12   Ahmet Zeki Ünal, "Rahatsız Eden Bir Adamın Bilimi, Sosyoloji," in *Ocak ve Zanaat: Pierre Bourdieu Derlemesi*, ed. Güney Çeğin, Emrah Göker, Alim Arlı and Ümit Tatlıcan (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2010), 179.

exists)… [The good player] quite naturally materializes at just the place the ball is about to fall, as if the ball were in command of him—but by that very fact he is in command of the ball."[13] That is to say, a good player gains legitimacy in the game by pretending that he conforms with the established arrangements of the game, while also furthering his own interests.[14]

While Bourdieu emphasizes the intrinsic relation of strategies to social structures, Foucault locates strategies into a more relational framework. According to Foucault, "every strategy of confrontation dreams of becoming a relationship of power, and every relationship of power leans toward the idea that, if it follows its own line of development and comes up against direct confrontation, it may become the winning strategy."[15] Having written this, Foucault seems to have imagined a slight equality between power and agent. However, in Michel de Certeau's writings, everyday life appears to be a less equal arena. In this sense, de Certeau's theory of everyday is interested in unpacking what is left unexplored by Foucault's theory of power. Unlike Foucault, he is not interested in examining how the "microphysics of power" operates through subtle disciplining procedures. In other words, he does not aim to analyze the production of power. Rather, he focuses on its "consumption," and by doing so, he analyzes a network of "anti-discipline."[16] De Certeau defines the notion of strategy as "the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an 'environment.'"[17] As de Certeau describes, all of these actions are based on scientific rationality and thus, they are modern. How then do people who live within these strategic relationships act? According to de Certeau, they develop several tactics:

----

[13] Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).
[14] Ali Kaya, "Pierre Bourdieu'nün Pratik Kuramının Kilidi: Alan Kavramı," in *Ocak ve Zanaat: Pierre Bourdieu Derlemesi*, ed. Güney Çeğin, Emrah Göker, Alim Arlı, and Ümit Tatlıcan (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2010), 403.
[15] Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 794.
[16] Sabuktay, "Kızılay'da Gündelik Hayat ve Yönetim," 47–48.
[17] De Certeau, "The Practice of Everyday Life."

By contrast with a strategy (whose successive shapes introduce a certain play into this formal schema and whose link with a particular historical configuration of rationality should also be clarified), a *tactic* is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy. The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means to *keep to itself*, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection: it is a maneuver "within the enemy's field of vision," as von Büllow put it, and within enemy territory. It does not, therefore, have the options of planning general strategy and viewing the adversary as a whole within a district, visible, and objectifiable space. It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of "opportunities" and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep. This nowhere gives a tactic mobility, to be sure, but a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the moment, and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment. It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse. In short, a tactic is an art of the weak.[18]

The use of tactic can manipulate the cracks within a field of strategy and capitalize them to its own benefit. As opposed to the power that presupposes its own proper place or localized institution, tactics are amphibious in character, benefiting from the lack of a properly circumscribed place of their own. They operate within a territory that belongs to and is controlled by the enemy. Thus, a tactic is poaching, it is the "hunter's cunning," as de Certeau describes; it is an art of the weak. Such aesthetic acts of the weak have the potential to express themselves at any moment of everyday life. According to de Certeau, tactics are "trickery"; they are the totality of habits, actions and practices that allow people to adapt to new environments without difficulty and to get away with things easily:

Many everyday practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc.) are tactical in character. And so are, more generally, many "ways of operating": victories of the "weak" over the "strong" (whether the strength

---

be that of powerful people or the violence of things or of an imposed order, etc.), clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, "hunter's cunning," maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as war-like.[19]

The notion of "strategy" in Bourdieu's theory of "field," the "strategy of struggle" in Foucault's theory of power, and finally the notion of "tactic," which de Certeau defines as the actions of the weak and the subordinated, are indeed the aesthetics of resistance that are developed and employed in everyday life against domination and dominant groups' strategies. To sum up, "the space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus, it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power."[20] If we consider this discussion alongside Syrian asylum seekers' actions, attitudes and habits, it can be argued that "tactic" and "strategy" would be useful concepts from which to examine their everyday lives. Because Syrian asylum seekers, too, play on "a terrain imposed on [them] and organized by the law of a foreign power"—a terrain that belongs to the other. They are labeled as "other" in this unfamiliar terrain where they have to settle as a result of forced migration; they live under dire conditions and try to cope with poverty; and they are subjected to social exclusion and discrimination. These social realities inevitably force Syrian asylum seekers to "play tricks" and "play games" by making use of the cracks left open by the dominant strategies. As our research findings demonstrate, Syrian asylum seekers have to develop tactics at various moments and in various spaces of everyday life, and only through this aesthetic resistance and struggle for existence are they able to survive.

As previously mentioned, tactic is the art of the weak, and because it does not have "a proper spatial or institutionalized location," it only has to exist within the place of dominant groups' strategies.[21] Syrian asylum seekers try to adapt different tactics in the place of local residents, and within the confines of locals' strategies, in order to enact their own strategies. For instance, some Syrian women have started wearing a head-

---

19 De Certeau, "The Practice of Everyday Life."
20 De Certeau, "The Practice of Everyday Life," 37.
21 De Certeau, "The Practice of Everyday Life."

scarf in Turkey, although they had not used a veil (*hijab*) in Syria. After a murder in Gaziantep on August 11, 2014, in particular, Syrians had been socially lynched by the local community. Syrian women replaced their Syrian-style veils with Turkish-style veils. Similarly, some Syrian men have stopped wearing *jellabiyas*, traditional loose, lightweight men's garment, in public places. Such alterations in dress codes and styles can be interpreted as tactics developed by Syrian asylum seekers in order to keep a low profile among the locals and thus, to protect themselves from possible harassment. A similar and related tactic can be said to be employed by Syrian small-business owners, who run barbershops and restaurants that target largely Syrian customers, and who have started to put Turkish flags up in their shops. This functional tactic has enabled Syrian asylum seekers to protect themselves and their businesses from the nationalist rage of the locals. Indeed, during the above-mentioned period, the speeches of the Mayor of Gaziantep, Fatma Şahin, which harshly targeted Syrians living in Gaziantep made Syrian asylum seekers feel abandoned, insecure and targeted.[22] According to the findings of our interviews, Syrian refugees had to evacuate their homes and live in fear during this period. In addition, some young Syrian refugees attempted to establish a defense team called "el-Şebab." In the next section, we will analyze several examples that illustrate this aesthetic resistance and explore what kinds of tactics Syrian asylum seekers employ in the "place of the sovereign."

Depleting the Savings

The literature on migration and asylum has long shown that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers often utilize informal mechanisms, family ties, kinship relations, and social networks in order to solve problems and satisfy their needs during the processes of resettlement to a host country, integration into a new life, and adaptation to the norms

---

[22] "Fatma Şahin: Suriyelileri kampa taşıyacağız," *haber7com*, August 15, 2014, http://www.haber7.com/yerel-yonetimler/haber/1191110-fatma-sahin-suriyelileri-kampa-tasiyacagiz; "Fatma Şahin: Suriyeliler kurallara uymak zorunda," *haber7com*, August 20, 2014, http://www.haber7.com/yerel-yonetimler/haber/1192731-fatma-sahin-suriyeliler-kurallara-uymak-zorunda.

of the host culture.[23] New immigrants rely on their relationships with relatives, neighbors, and friends who were settled in the host country prior to their arrival. In so doing, they aim to cope with the difficulties of migration as well as reduce the costs of migration. These relationships also play a crucial role in facilitating new immigrants' integration into the host country. On the other hand, for those who do not have any connections and relations in the host country, and who are not familiar with the host country, immigration and settlement in a new country and adapting to a new culture can be extremely challenging.

Syrian asylum seekers use their family relationships and fellow-townsmenship ties during the early phases of their settlement into Turkish cities. On the other hand, we have seen that some Syrians, especially those who could not rely on their family and fellow-townsmenship ties, are indeed those who were already poor or had very little savings in Syria. This group was at the bottom of the social ladder in their settlement cities, and most of the time, they did not even have the means to satisfy their basic needs.[24] Upon their arrival, most of them had to live in parking lots, parks, and empty warehouses until they could find shelter or rent a house. It should be mentioned that some Syrians who settled in Turkish cities had brought all of their savings with them. However, after a while, they depleted their savings and have become poor/workers. They had to move into cheaper places and found employment as factory, agricultural or manual workers. For instance, Ammar, who migrated to Gaziantep from Aleppo one year ago, told us that "he had two hundred workers working under his supervision" in Aleppo. He found himself unemployed shortly after his arrival in

---

[23]   Sema Erder, *Kentsel Gerilim* (Ankara: Uğur Mumcu Araştırma Vakfı Yayınları, 2002), 43; Patricia Hynes, *The Dispersal and Social Exclusion of Asylum Seeker: Between Liminality and Belonging* (Bristol, UK: The Policy Press, 2011), 155–170.

[24]   During the first phase of our research, wastepaper and cardboard collecting was done almost exclusively by Syrian asylum seekers. Since the summer of 2015, the vast majority of those Syrians who used to work as waste-paper collectors were sent to refugee camps. Eventually, on January 15, 2016, the Turkish Ministry of Environment and Urbanization banned wastepaper collecting. According to this ban, businesses would be fined up to 140,000 TL for buying wastepaper from paper collectors. On the other hand, many Syrians still work in heavy, manual jobs such as construction and agriculture.

Gaziantep. He had relied on his savings for a while, and then he had to become a laborer:

In Syria, I was a shift boss in a textile factory. 200 workers were working under my supervision. I was a mechanical engineer. When I came to Turkey, I was unemployed for 5 months. During that time, we sold all of our belongings. I sold even the earrings of my wife and my daughter. I sold all that I had. Everywhere you go in Başpınar [the biggest Organized Industrial Site in Gaziantep] for job-hunting, they tell you "No." You have to know someone from inside [of that factory] to get hired. If you don't have any connections, they don't give you a job (Ammar, 39, from Aleppo, Arab, unemployed).

Those who were forced to flee Syria because of the war eventually depleted all of the savings that they had brought with them and became laborers. Some others, on the other hand, could not bear the consequences of moving in to a poor neighborhood and living a working-class lifestyle, and thus, had to return to Syria. For instance, Abdulmelik, the *imam* of a mosque in Emek district, where Aleppo's middle and upper-classes choose to live, told us that some wealthy Syrians from his mosque community had to either move in to a poorer neighborhood or return to Syria after they had depleted their savings:

We have Syrians in our religious community. Rent prices in this neighborhood were affordable before. But they rose after Syrians came. When rent prices became really expensive, some Syrians from our mosque community could not afford their rents and moved to other neighborhoods. Some of them even returned to their home country due to the costliness of Gaziantep. Wealthy people are used to living luxury lives; they cannot live in a poor city. They cannot endure it. They said they have their own houses there. They said life in Syria is cheaper (Abdulmelik, 36, local of Gaziantep, Imam).

As these conversations illustrate, survival tactics adapted by Syrians who depleted all of their savings are either contenting themselves with less or leaving for a different place, be it a poorer neighborhood or Syria. These tactics are largely influenced by Syrians' class habituses. We have observed that some asylum seekers become working-class more easily, because they live in poor neighborhoods and have the support of their relatives and social networks. However, those who live in middle and upper-class neighborhoods often prefer to return to Syria instead of living in a poor neighborhood. In other words, they take the risk of

returning to a warzone, since moving to a poor neighborhood would lower their class habitus.

More than One Family Member Goes to Work

In order to keep their expenses as low as possible, immigrants and asylum seekers employ various tactics such as finding cheap housing, putting restrictions on food consumption (in other words, malnutrition), and cutting down on education expenses by not sending children to school. They also use other tactics in order to maximize their earnings. Among these tactics the most common is that more than one family member, and especially children, goes to work in order to contribute to the family income. By putting as many family members as possible into the labor force, households try to increase their earnings.[25] This is one of the most common tactics adopted by Syrians in order to survive. For instance, fifty-five-year-old Abdullah from Aleppo earns his living by selling prayer beads and watches. When we asked him how his family affords the rent and their living costs, he told us: "My children work too. One of them is a tailor, and the other one is a plumber. Otherwise we wouldn't be able to survive." As this example illustrates, putting more than one family member into the workforce is a survival tactic for Syrian households who try to stay alive and earn their living in the field of a dominant strategy where rent prices are high, living costs are expensive, and cheap labor is pervasive. Ammar and Naser from Aleppo expanded upon this during our interviews:

In my sister's household, my sister, her husband and her brother-in-law work, so that they can earn their living. I have an acquaintance who has five sons. All of them work and they barely earn a living (Ammar, 39, from Aleppo, Arab, unemployed).

I am from Ebu Asker district in Aleppo. When the uprisings first started, I fled Aleppo and came here. I have been living here for two and a half years. First, I went to Jordan, then I came here. Turkey is better. We pay 650 TL for

---

25 Deniz Yükseker, "Kürtlerin Yerinden Edilmesi ve Sosyal Dışlanma: 1990'lardaki Zorla Göçün Sonuçları," in *Küreselleşme Çağında Göç: Kavramlar, Tartışmalar*, ed. S. Gülfer Ihlamur-Öner and N. Aslı Şirin Öner (İletişim Yayınları: Istanbul, 2012), 233–262.

the rent of our apartment, and 3500 TL for the rent of our store. We had paid another 30,000 TL for this store as a security deposit. Everyone who works here is family; my brothers and I, six of us, work here (Naser, 35, from Aleppo, Arab, confectioner).

As our interlocutors' answers show, the tactic of putting more than one family member into the work force can take different forms: family members can become partners in the same workplace, or they can become laborers in different workplaces. In either case, Syrian households often have no other choice but to adopt this "survival tactic" in order to earn their living. Most of the time all family members whose ages allow them to enter the workforce find jobs in order to contribute to the household income and pay for rent and food. Given that asylum seekers' monthly incomes, whether they are workers or street venders, are very low, one family member's income often fails to satisfy the household needs such as rent and living costs. Thus, for many households it is inevitable that more than one family member goes to work. It is in this context that children are also pushed into the workforce, often roaming the streets selling tissues or polishing shoes. The rising "child labor" among Syrian asylum seekers has become visible, as more Syrian children are forced to quit school and enter the workforce at very early ages in order to provide for their families. "Having sick or old fathers, having parents who cannot find employment, and having bad relationships with their families (or leaving their families)" are some of the reasons that push children into the workforce.[26] Many Syrian children whose fathers passed away as a result of the war, or who are still fighting in Syria, have to start working in Turkey. For instance, we met Mohammed, a nine-year-old Syrian boy, in the Yeditepe neighborhood near the University of Gaziantep. As we bought tissues from him, we also had a chance to listen to his story. Mohammed told us that he had to start selling tissues on the streets because he had to provide for his family after his father had died in the war. This need to make money has forced a vast majority of Syrian children and youth in Turkey to quit school. This need for money also forces many Syrian women to enter the labor

---

[26]   Yükseker, "Kürtlerin Yerinden Edilmesi ve Sosyal Dışlanma," 253.

force and tolerate a variety of unbearable situations in order to earn a living. Ammar explained this as follows:

Syrian women cannot work, they cannot even go shopping. As soon as a Syrian woman starts to work, she is subjected to harassment by Turks. But they don't harass Turkish women who work in the same workplace. I don't know why they think Syrian women are cheap. I would like to find a job for my sister. I would like her to support our family. But her co-workers start harassing her immediately, on the first or second day of work. When they see a Syrian woman on the streets or at work, they think that she does not have anyone and they start harassing her. Isn't it a pity that my sister had to quit her job on the second day of work when she understood that her employer was looking at her with anger or in a lascivious way (Ammar, 39, from Aleppo, Arab, unemployed).

Bourdieu's field theory reminds us that those who are newcomers to the field develop various new tactics to challenge the established doxa, while those who have dominant positions in the field employ conservative strategies in order to continue holding onto influence and power. The latter group wish to protect the status quo of the field.[27] In this sense, it could be argued that the tactics adopted by Syrian asylum seekers in Gaziantep and Kilis provinces in order to challenge and overturn the doxa are unlikely to work, and that most of the time the locals win using conservative strategies. These conservative strategies employed by locals may range from the exploitation of labor to sexual harassment. Worse still, these stories of labor and sexual exploitation may also be used by locals to spread gossip about Syrian asylum seekers and to target and criminalize them.

Street Hawking: A Placeless Tactic

The majority of the Syrian asylum seekers in the Gaziantep and Kilis districts work informally. They work in irregular and temporary jobs, are unregistered, often underpaid, and without social security. Since they do not have social security, it could be argued that Syrians are excluded not only from formal jobs but also from the labor market. A

---

[27]   Kaya, *Pierre Bourdieu'nün Pratik Kuramının Kilidi*, 401.

small minority of Syrians run their own business such as small stores (phone shops, *shwarma/doner* shops, restaurants, grocery stores) or small-size manufacturing shops (textile ateliers). Others who enter the workforce as laborers often work in factories, restaurants and cafes (as waiters and dishwashers), or on the streets (selling tissues and cigarettes, polishing shoes, collecting waste paper and cardboard and so on). Syrians often prefer street hawking so that they do not have to pay rent on a store. Street hawkers usually polish shoes and sell cigarettes, tissues, "smuggled tea," Syrian bread, vegetables and fruits. Among the products they sell, street hawkers bring cigarettes and "smuggled tea" from Syria via their social networks. It could be appropriate to interpret such practices of street hawking as a survival tactic adapted by Syrians in a city where the locals' strategies are dominant. The fact that rent prices are very high and unaffordable for low-income households makes street hawking a preferable job for Syrian asylum seekers. On the other hand, street hawking also has a strong potential to maneuver in the field of dominant strategies and to make use of the cracks left open by power.

It is this very ability to maneuver, as well as the knowledge of everyday life coming from the streets that enables street hawkers to make use of the cracks left open by strategy. In this sense, street hawkers always watch for opportunities for tactics, and this can make room for its existence with relative ease.

During one of our research trips to Gaziantep, we met a Syrian street hawker who was selling tea, Syrian bread, sugar and basic food items on sidewalks in the Gazikent neighborhood. His street hawking was indeed a "tactic" that he developed in order to earn his living and to survive in a place where dominant strategies and their laws rendered street hawking illegal. Syrian street seller Nadir speaks in Turkish, which he learned in one year:

My family is composed of my wife, three children, my mother, father and myself. My daughter is two years old, my oldest child is 6. I had a brother as well but he died a year ago. Some of them went to Aleppo, to Höllük. Höllük is a big place. A mixed society, there are Arabs, Turkmens, Kurds, Gırbats. I was a shoemaker. I am here for one year. Goods come from Syria. We bring goods in small amounts to avoid having problems. My customers are mixed, there are Turkish and Syrian customers both. Turks are not much. They were

few in the beginning but after they saw the goods they started to buy. We earn average 500-600 lira monthly. I live in a rented house. 400 lira. There is also electricity and water fees. It is very difficult. I do not pay AE fee for this location [*Authors' note: His stand is in front of a big market at* İnönü *street*]. They allowed me to stay here. (Nadir, 38, from Aleppo, Arab, Street seller)

It is not uncommon to see street hawkers in many neighborhoods of Gaziantep. They display the items they sell on sidewalks or on street stands. Street hawkers roam the city all day, leaking into the capillaries of everyday life. By making use of legal loopholes, they open vents for themselves to breathe in the city where the strategy of power is steady. Unlike the power that presupposes a steady, stable and "striated" space, which does not leave room for maneuvering, street hawkers exist in "smooth" spaces—because they are on the streets, they are "nomadic."[28]

Street hawking could be described as a way of earning a living that asylum seekers practice when they need to, especially when they are not able to find any other job:

I sell cigarettes on this sidewalk now. But two months ago, three of us from my family were working. Tailor, plumber, construction worker. Each of us were earning 200 or 250 TL per week. They've been sitting at home for two months now; but thank God, we are happy. All of us were working in construction sites from morning to night, but our money has been honestly earned. Now I am working. (Nezir, 55, from Aleppo, Arab, cigarette seller)

Nine-year-old Mohammed also told us that he contributes to his family income by selling tissues, adding that two of his brothers also work. He emphasized that this is how his family could afford their rent and food expenses. Mohammed has only been in Gaziantep for one year, but he speaks Turkish fluently. It would not be wrong to argue that this was a direct result of the time he has spent on the streets as a street hawker. As we mentioned before, street hawkers accumulate the knowledge of everyday life very quickly and thus, they learn the local language more easily than other immigrants.

---

[28]   Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, transl. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

The Latin Alphabet and the Turkish Flag:
The Unbearable Pragmatism of Being

Syrians who own their own stores and restaurants either use Latin letters in their signboards or put Turkish flags on their windows, so they can integrate themselves into the city and run their businesses. Some of these businesses are designed to target the needs of Syrian customers. For instance, most of the restaurants serve Syrian cuisine such as Syrian bread, Syrian-style *shwarma/doner* and *hummus*. After a district municipality banned all shop signs written in Arabic, Syrian shop owners started to use the Latin alphabet in signboards and changed the names of their shops.[29] For example, we visited a restaurant right across Yeşilsu Park in Gaziantep to conduct observational research. Looking at the restaurant's appearance and the price of the coffee we drank, we came to understand that the restaurant targets middle-income-class customers. There was a big Turkish flag in the window. We thought that they used this flag to attract Turkish customers. When we later asked the waiter, he explained that they put the flag up on Turkish Republic Day on October 29 last year, and have not taken it down since. Then we noticed that the owner of the restaurant and his employees were talking amongst themselves, irritated by us. We have met such irritation on many occasions during our field research. It is possible to say that the irritation may be due to refugees having a fear of "combat," commonly known as Syria's official intelligence service, and that as refugees they have a minority identity. When we finished our coffee, we told them in Arabic that we are researchers in order to ease their irritation and that "we are carrying out research on how Syrians cope with the difficulties faced in their daily lives." We provided this explanation simply to tell them that our purpose in this research is not political, and they have no reason to be upset. We showed our identity cards to the owner of the restaurant and left. We showed them our identity cards so they would understand who we are.

---

29   "Gaziantep'te Arapça Levhalar Kaldırıldı," *Gaziantep27.net,* August 29, 2014, http://www.sanalbasin.com/gaziantepte-arapca-tebalalar-kaldirildi-6269319/.

Many Syrian asylum seekers place Turkish flags, which is one of the most valued symbols in the country, in their shops or homes in order to attract Turkish customers as well as to make room for themselves in the market.[30] By doing so, they develop a "tactic" described by de Certeau as "victories of the 'weak' over the 'strong,' clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things." During our research, we observed several examples of this tactic. For instance, in Kilis, our local guide Metin, who introduced us to the field and informed us about different neighborhoods, took us to a barbershop run by a Syrian asylum seeker. We saw yet another Turkish flag in the window of this barbershop. These examples show us that Syrians use the flag of the dominant society as a survival tactic. Indeed, in these examples mentioned above, the Turkish flag serves as a "lightning conductor" against lynching and social exclusion.

Clothing, Appearance, and Tactic

Syrian asylum seekers' style of dress is an indicator of the Syrian identity they want to display in public spaces. The issue of clothing points us to a particular vulnerability: clothing style appears to be something that some asylum seekers can abandon easily, while for some it is an impossibility. This vulnerability is largely influenced by time, gender, and age. For instance, young Syrian men never give up their slicked-back long hairstyles, while young Syrian women more easily abandon their one-color Syrian-style veils that they use without undercap bonnets.

I know my hairstyle expresses my Syrian identity. Turks do not slick their hair back with gel. This is our taste. And even if I change my hairstyle, they would immediately understand from my accent that I am Syrian (Emced, 22, from Aleppo, Arab, salesman).

In most of our interviews, we were told that Syrian women abandon their Syrian-style clothes and veils and start to dress like local women

---

[30]   "Antepte Suriyeli Mülteciler Saldırı Olmasın Diye Türk Bayrağı Asıyor," *Evrensel*, July 26, 2019, https://www.evrensel.net/haber/383682/antepte-suriyeli-multeciler-saldiri-olmasin-diye-turk-bayragi-asiyor.

in the Gaziantep-Kilis district. We also had a chance to observe and confirm that this particular change in women's clothing and veiling styles is used as a tactic to hide their Syrian identity. It could be argued that women employ this tactic in order to protect themselves from the discontent with Syrian asylum seekers that is simmering among the local population, which might even result in violent attacks and assaults on the street. In other words, by hiding their Syrian identity, which is perceived by locals as "secondary," and which provokes the social exclusion and marginalization of asylum seekers, Syrian women protect themselves from possible verbal and physical assaults.

It should be mentioned here that some Syrian women embrace Turkish styles of dress and veiling their hair not to protect themselves from violence, but to evade inspection by the financial police. As we have mentioned, most of the businesses run by Syrians target Syrian customers. However, there are also some Syrians who plan to stay in Turkey permanently, and accordingly, start businesses designed to attract Turkish customers. Maya works in a restaurant that serves largely Turkish customers. When we asked her why she uses a Turkish-style veil, although she is Syrian, she said:

Because Syrians are not given work permits. We are not allowed to work. Sometimes the Department of Finance comes for economic inspection. We dress and veil like Turkish women so that the inspectors will not notice that we are Syrian. Because we too have to work. (Maya, 23, from Aleppo, Turkoman, waitress)

As Maya's answer demonstrates, Syrians are forced to hide their "Syrian" image to protect themselves not only from the local population but also from state bureaucracy. Hundreds of thousands of people who are allowed to live in urban centers are not recognized as refugees, so they are not given the necessary permits and the means to earn a living. Based on the interviews we had conducted before the one we conducted with Maya, we had come to think that Syrian women wear their headscarves in the Turkish style in order to hide their disadvantaged identity and prevent verbal or physical assault. However, upon our interview with Maya, we felt the urge to revise our opinion. Thus, we came to the conclusion that Syrian women sometimes alter the way

they wear their headscarves and embrace Turkish-style veiling in order to find employment. In this sense, it could be argued that a symbol that belongs to an excluded and unaccepted identity is abandoned, altered, or revised in favor of the dominant identity.

The tactic of assimilating clothing-styles into the dominant identity is adapted not only by Syrian women, but also by Syrian men. We have found that in particular elderly male adults have stopped wearing "jellabiyas," which is a traditional Arabic men's garment. For instance, Abdulmelik, the *imam* of a mosque in Emek district, told us that many Syrian men from his mosque community abandoned their jellabiyas:

> Syrian men too. After this incident happened, they have started to dress [modern] like local men. Syrian men changed their clothes. I used to see a lot of them in the mosque and outside, wearing jellabiyas. They don't wear it anymore. (Abdulmelik, 36, from Antep, imam)

In conclusion, Syrians living in Gaziantep and Kilis embrace local clothing and veiling styles as a tactic that enables them to protect themselves in public spaces as well as assimilate into the dominant cultural norms. They perform these clothing and veiling practices to hide their Syrian identity. That is to say, they abstain from using cultural symbols that would express their identity. If we were to use de Certeau's words, Syrians' clothing and veiling preferences best illustrate "clever tricks of the 'weak' within the order established by the 'strong,' an art of putting one over on the adversary on his own turf, hunter's tricks, maneuverable, polymorph mobilities (…) These practices present, in fact, a curious analogy, and a sort of immemorial link, to the simulations, tricks, and disguises that certain fishes or plants execute with extraordinary virtuosity in order to survive."[31] In this sense, it would not be wrong to argue that the tactics of "adapting to the dominant culture" developed by Syrians are simulations, tricks, and disguises—they are the "art of the weak."

---

[31]   De Certau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* 40.

Leisure Time and Relations with Neighbors

In Volume 1 of *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre ponders the notion of leisure in the context of the everyday. For him, "the relation between them is not a simple one: leisure and the everyday are at one and the same time united and contradictory, and therefore their relation is dialectical."[32] In the traditional sense, leisure cannot be separated from work. In the lives of peasants, for instance, work is merged with the everyday life of the family and leisure and thus, they have a dialectic relationship. With the advent of bourgeois society, however, these various elements and their meanings and relations have changed. For the modern man, leisure is the opposite of work, as it produces a "break" and offers liberation from the worries, necessities and obligations of everyday life. Modern man expects to find something in leisure that his "work" and his "family" or "private life" do not provide. Thus, a "world of leisure" comes into being "entirely outside of the everyday realm, and so purely artificial that it borders on the ideal."[33] The working modern man needs a "sharp break" from his work and craves compensation. He looks for this in leisure, which is seen as a passive life, entertainment or distraction. For instance, if a modern man sits in cafes, visits funfairs, watches television, paints, and watches sports or films, this demonstrates his craving for an illusion of escape from the reality of his everyday life—which is indeed alienation. To sum up, "leisure appears as the non-everyday in the everyday." In modern times, we work to earn our leisure and engage in all the leisure activities mentioned above, and leisure has only one meaning: to escape from work. Lefebvre describes this relation as a "vicious cycle."[34]

When one thinks about leisure and the everyday in relation to asylum seekers, however, one realizes that these examples of leisure activities that produce a "break" from the reality of everyday life are reserved largely for middle-class or bourgeoisie (or even for "settled" or "local" working-class people). The language barrier, financial difficulties, life

---

[32] Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life Volume I,* transl. John Moore (London, UK and New York, NY: Verso, 1991), 29.

[33] Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life Volume I,* 34.

[34] Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life Volume I,* 40.

struggles and trying to survive in a foreign country do not allow asylum seekers to engage in various "leisure activities." Quite the contrary, their leisure activities are limited to sitting at home, visiting relatives and neighbors, or going to a nearby public park.

Of course, when we discuss asylum seekers' relation to leisure, we must specify which asylum seekers we are talking about. For instance, it is hard to argue that those who work as laborers (mostly men) actually have "leisure activity," since they are forced to work long hours in order to earn a living and endure various problems as a result of their status as asylum seekers. Indeed, most of them work 12 hours a day without any days off. Therefore, if we were to make a generalization about leisure, we must take into consideration women and children asylum seekers who do not work.

Syrians spend their leisure time visiting their relatives, if they have any, or going shopping. Some of them also visit their Syrian neighbors. Most of them, however, mentioned that they do not visit their neighbors mostly due to language barriers. Ammar, for instance, told us that "they spend their leisure time mostly at home" because of language barriers. Yet, he also mentioned another reason for staying at home:

I have been here for one year now. All of my neighbors are Turks. There is no Syrian living here. I don't know who they [my neighbors] are. I don't have any neighbor relations with them. Neither my wife nor I go outside. You have to be able to buy, at least, bread if you want to go shopping. We don't go out because of our financial problems. (Ammar, 39, from Aleppo, Arab, unemployed)

Ammar's answer demonstrates that they spend most of their leisure time at home due to financial problems. This could be interpreted as a tactic. Given leisure activities' close relation with consumption, it could be argued that the poor develop this tactic of staying home during their leisure time. On the other hand, many of our interlocutors mentioned that they do not even have leisure time because of their working conditions. Furthermore, almost all the women and children who do not work spend their leisure time at home because of language barriers:

Their children do not really interact with local kids. For example, Syrians sit together in the park. Syrian children play together in one area, local kids from Antep play together in another area. Families too. They sit in groups and

don't interact with others. For instance, women don't have television at home, so they go out and sit in the parks. They literally escape from home, and I understand them. The only place they [Turks and Syrians] are together is the mosque. They pray side by side. Only in mosques do they interact with each other. (Nurettin, 47, Gaziantep, Neighborhood Chief)

When we asked, "How are your relations with your neighbors?" most of our Syrian interlocutors mentioned that they do not have any relations with their neighbors, adding that the language barrier is the first and foremost reason that prevents them from building relations with their neighbors. On the other hand, our research findings have showed us that another important reason why Syrians do not (or cannot) build close relations with their neighbors is pervasive urban myths that produce negative and exclusionary discourses about Syrians. These myths, in fact, are at once the results and the causes of social exclusion, as they produce and circulate negative discourses about Syrians.

During our interviews in Gaziantep and Kilis, the local population often highlighted their lack of trust for Syrians, mentioning that they have developed major "trust issues." "Not feeling safe" or, if we were to describe from a more existential point of view, "not feeling at home" is triggered by the perception that home is occupied by strangers. Furthermore, some of our local interlocutors also emphasized that they see Syrian asylum seekers as "traitors" who abandoned their home country instead of fighting for it. Their use of "traitor" leads to other forms of exclusionary discourses and practices that Syrian asylum seekers face in their everyday lives. At the end of the day, these accusatory and exclusionary discourses adversely affect both impersonal and neighborly relations:

It is a big sin to abandon one's country in the middle of war. This is what the Quran says too. To speak the truth, Syrians earned their country without a war. That's why, they don't fight for it; they escape. These are coward people. They have twenty children in one household anyway. They could say 'I don't care if ten of them would die.' I mean, they won their country without fighting for it; their country is given to them. That's why they don't fight for it now, either. (Fikri, 55, from Kilis, businessman)

One of our interlocutors from Gaziantep explained why they do not want Syrians by using a "home" metaphor: "Imagine you live with

five family members in your home. Would you accept five Syrians to your home? You wouldn't. How would you trust them? That home is your honor!" (Azat, 35, from Gaziantep, tradesman). When we asked him what he meant by "home," he said that he meant his "city," his "country," and his "motherland." "Not feeling at home," as well as the widely shared feeling of "being occupied," induces notions of "foreigner," an "other," and an "enemy," leading to social exclusion. That is to say, locals' fear that their "authentic" culture would be "occupied and defeated" by a foreign culture causes social exclusion of Syrians and sometimes even results in violence. According to the social thought that perceives certain segments of society as "the wild," "the weeds," the uncultivated, that threatens the order of a garden,[35] people that are "foreign" to us are meant to destroy our language, culture, and even our existence.[36] To sum up, neighborly relations between Syrians and local residents are hindered by such prejudices and exclusionary discourses.

Some Syrians, however attend Turkish language courses in order to overcome language barriers. For instance, Adem, who lives in Gaziantep (28, from Aleppo, Arab, English language instructor), told us that both he and his wife attend a Turkish language course run by the municipality's Youth Center nearby their home. Seventeen-year-old Rami, who lives in Gaziantep neighborhood (from Aleppo, Arab, unemployed), on the other hand, explained that he tried to attend hairdressing courses at the Hoşgör GASMEK Center, as he wishes to become a women's hairdresser. Rami was surprised when he was told that the course is designed only for female participants. Upon the advice of a Turkish acquaintance who helps Rami and his family with translation, Rami registered for the Turkish language course held by the same center. Eighteen-year-old Fettah (18, from Azez, Arab, worker) mentioned that he has both Turkish and Syrian friends with whom he plays billiards during his leisure time. It could be extrapolated from these examples that young Syrians, in comparison with middle-aged and older Syrian asylum seekers, are more capable of making friendships with Turks.

---

[35]   Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 57.
[36]   Yusuf Ekinci, "'Misafirlik Dediğin Üç Gün Olur': Suriyeli Sığınmacılar ve Sosyal Dışlanma," *Birikim dergisi*, no. 311 (2015): 48–54.

Conclusion

Our research findings demonstrate that Syrians develop various tactics in order to manage everyday life in a city where they live as foreigners. We argue that what de Certeau defines as tactics adopted by the "weak" in a place where the strategy is dominant are employed by Syrians in every realm of their everyday lives. Indeed, this could be seen as a natural reflex to "survive," to exist, because Syrians are well aware that the only way to survive amidst extreme poverty (life struggles), exclusion (being the unwelcomed "others" of society), and non-recognition by the existing laws (not having permission to work) is to play their own game within the field of the dominant group. Therefore, Syrian asylum seekers adapt and make use of these tactics as a "grip" on the streets, at home, in their neighborly relations, in hospitals, on buses and so on in order to survive.

The Syrian refugees who fled the war in their own country and migrated to Turkey discussed many of their issues with us, which we then examined. It has been determined that Syrian immigrants residing in cities have experienced problems being accepted, especially because they prefer the big cities, they are permanently in the position of being temporary guests.[37] According to another study, their economic anxiety, expectations before migration, the subject of religion, and the attitude of the locals toward them showed that Syrian immigrants have been psychologically and sociologically affected.[38] At the same time, the uncertainty of how long they will stay in the country affects cultural harmony. On the other hand, immigrants migrating from Syria to Turkey are causing problems with social acceptance and the number of immigrants is increasing, causing these problems to increase.[39]

---

[37] Sinem Yıldırımalp, Emel İslamoğlu and Cemal İyem, "Suriyeli Sığınmacıların Toplumsal Kabul ve Uyum Sürecine İlişkin Bir Araştırma," in *V. International Balkan and Near Eastern Social Sciences Congress 23–24 September 2017* (Kırklareli: 2017), 35, 107–126.

[38] Ayşe Şafak-Ayvazoğlu, Filiz Kunuroglu and Kutlay Yağmur, "Psychological and Socio-Cultural Adaptation of Syrian Refugees in Turkey," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations,* no. 80 (2021), 99–111, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2020.11.003.

[39] Mim Sertaç Tümtaş, "Toplumsal Dışlanmadan Vatandaşlık Tartışmalarına Suriyeli Kent Mültecileri," *Akdeniz I.I.B.F. Dergisi*, no. 37 (2018), 26–47.

In terms of studies on education, the majority of Syrian children are not going to school, which is a problem in terms of social harmony. In speaking with ten Syrian women who benefited from programs held by the Konya Metropolitan Municipality, we learned that the training was beneficial and helped them learn Turkish and better adapt. However, they said that they still cannot improve upon their neighborly relations because the indigenous people continue to have their biases.[40] According to another study, the findings from talks with teachers found that children migrating from Syria had a "language barrier," "cultural problems" and "discipline problems" in school. The "language barrier" is the main problem.[41] Another issue with Syrian immigrants is the problems that arise when they start a business. Many of the businesses of Syrian refugees contributing to production and commerce are unregulated, leading to unfair competition in the industry. At the same time, it is estimated that it threatens the security of the locals, and the number of child workers is increasing.[42] According to another study, unemployment is rapidly increasing in Syrian immigrant populations, and an effect on the labor market has been observed.[43] The use of Arabic letters on signage by Syrian immigrants who open businesses in Turkey creates tensions and reactions on the part of locals. The low paid jobs and exploitation they meet in their daily lives and work are part of the problems faced by immigrants.[44]

In this article, we have explored the basic tactics adapted by Syrians in order to survive: assimilating their traditional clothing and veiling styles into the dominant culture; putting up Turkish flags (the most valued symbol of the dominant identity) on their businesses and homes;

---

[40]   Özlem Duğan and Salih Gürbüz, "Suriyeli Sığınmacıların Sosyal Entegrasyonuna Yönelik Bir Araştırma," *Turkish Studies* 13, no. 26 (2018), 529–546.
[41]   Pelin Taskin and Ozge Erdemli, "Education for Syrian Refugees: Problems Faced by Teachers in Turkey," *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, no. 75 (2018), 155–178.
[42]   Salih Öztürk and Selen Çoltu, "Suriyeli Mültecilerin Türkiye Ekonmisine Etkileri," *Balkan Journal of Social Sciences* 7, no. 13 (2018), 188–198.
[43]   Oğuz Esen and Ayla Oğuş-Binatlı, "The Impact of Syrian Refugees on the Turkish Economy: Regional Labour Market Effects," *Social Sciences* 6, no. 4 (2017), 1–12, https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci6040129.
[44]   İhsan Çetin, "Suriyeli Mültecilerin İşgücüne Katılımları ve Entegrasyon: Adana-Mersin Örneği," *Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences*, no. 15 (2016), 1001–1016, https://doi.org/10.21547/jss.265320.

finding "under the table" informal jobs even in the absence of work permits; spending time on the streets, learning Turkish and gaining an instinctive familiarity with everyday life (street hawkers); making use of the cracks in public spaces left open by power; working under inhumane conditions without social security in order to adapt to the existing labor market; putting more than one family member into the workforce in order to save money for housing and living expenses; and attending Turkish language courses. As this study has tried to show, the more time Syrians have spent within the dominant field, the more they have gained familiarity with everyday life. Thus, although displacement made them feel "like a fish out of water," so to speak, Syrian asylum seekers have nevertheless learned how to play their own game and establish alternative ways of survival in the territory of the dominant.

Bibliography

Adaman, Fikret and Keyder, Çağlar. "Turkey'de Büyük Kentlerin Gecekondu ve Çöküntü Mahallelerinde Yaşanan Yoksulluk ve Sosyal Dışlanma. Avrupa Komisyonu, Sosyal Dışlanma ile Mücadelede Mahalli Topluluk Eylem Programı 2002–2006 [Poverty and Social Ostracism Experienced in Slum Areas and Collapsed Quarters in Big Cities in Turkey. European Commission Local Community Action Program in Struggling with Social Ostracism]." Accessed June 13, 2021. http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/2006/study_turkey_tr.pdf.

"Antepte Suriyeli Mülteciler Saldırı Olmasın Diye Türk Bayrağı Asıyor." *Evrensel*, July 26, 2019. https://www.evrensel.net/haber/383682/antepte-suriyeli-multeciler-saldiri-olmasin-diye-turk-bayragi-asiyor.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990.

Creswell, John W. *Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri: Beş Yaklaşıma Göre Nitel Araştırma ve Araştırma Deseni*. Translated and edited by Mesut Bütün and Selçuk B. Demir. Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi, 2015.

Çetin, İhsan. "Suriyeli Mültecilerin İşgücüne Katılımları ve Entegrasyon: Adana-Mersin Örneği." *Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences*, no. 15 (2016): 1001–1016.

De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

Deniz, A. Çağlar. *Öğrenci İşi- Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Gündelik Hayatı: Istanbul Örneği*. Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2014.

Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

Duğan, Özlem and Gürbüz, Salih. "Suriyeli Sığınmacıların Sosyal Entegrasyonuna Yönelik Bir Araştırma." *Turkish Studies* 13, no. 26 (2018): 529–546.

Ekinci, Yusuf. (2015). "'Misafirlik Dediğin Üç Gün Olur': Suriyeli Sığınmacılar ve Sosyal Dışlanma." *Birikim dergisi*, no. 311 (2015): 48–54.

Esen, Oğuz and Oğuş-Binatlı, Ayla. "The Impact of Syrian Refugees on the Turkish Economy: Regional Labour Market Effects." *Social Sciences* 6, no. 4 (2017): 1–12. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci6040129.

Erder, Sema. *Kentsel Gerilim*. Ankara: Uğur Mumcu Araştırma Vakfı Yayınları, 2002.

"Fatma Şahin Suriyelileri kampa taşıyacağız." *Haber7com*, January 15, 2016. http://www.haber7.com/yerel-yonetimler/haber/1191110-fatma-sahin-suriyelileri-kampa-tasiyacagiz.

"Fatma Şahin: Suriyeliler kurallara uymak zorunda." *Haber7com*, January 15, 2016. http://www.haber7.com/yerel-yonetimler/haber/1192731-fatma-sahin-suriyeliler-kurallara-uymak-zorunda.

Foucault, Michel. "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 775–795.

"Gaziantep'te Arapça Levhalar Kaldırıldı." *Gaziantep27.net*, January 3, 2016, http://www.sanalbasin.com/gaziantepte-arapca-tebalalar-kaldirildi-6269319/.

Hynes, Patricia. *The Dispersal and Social Exclusion of Asylum Seeker: Between Liminality and Belonging*. Bristol, UK: The Policy Press, 2011.

Kaya, Ali. "Pierre Bourdieu'nün Pratik Kuramının Kilidi: Alan Kavramı." In *Ocak ve Zanaat: Pierre Bourdieu Derlemesi*, edited by Güney Çeğin, Emrah Göker, Alim Arlı, and Ümit Tatlıcan. Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2010.

Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life Volume I*. Translated by John Moore. London, UK and New York, NY: Verso, 1991(1947).

Öztürk, Salih and Çoltu, Selen. "Suriyeli Mültecilerin Türkiye Ekonomisine Etkileri." *Balkan Journal of Social Sciences* 7, no. 13 (2018): 188–198.

Sabuktay, Ayşegül. "Kızılay'da Gündelik Hayat ve Yönetim." *Mülkiye Dergisi* 32, no. 261 (2008): 161–173.

Şafak-Ayvazoğlu, Ayşe, Filiz Kunuroglu and Kutlay Yağmur. "Psychological and Socio-Cultural Adaptation of Syrian Refugees in Turkey." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations,* no. 80 (2021): 99–111. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2020.11.003.

Taskin, Pelin and Erdemli, Ozge. "Education for Syrian Refugees: Problems Faced by Teachers in Turkey." *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, no. 75 (2018): 155–178.

Turkish Ministry of Interior Directorate General for Migration Management. "Geçici Koruma 2021 Verileri." Accessed May 25, 2021. https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638.

Tümtaş, Mim Sertaç. "Toplumsal Dışlanmadan Vatandaşlık Tartışmalarına Suriyeli Kent Mültecileri." *Akdeniz I.I.B.F. Dergisi*, no. 37 (2018): 26–47.

Ünal, A. Zeki. "Rahatsız Eden Bir Adamın Bilimi, Sosyoloji." In *Ocak ve Zanaat: Pierre Bourdieu Derlemesi*, edited by Güney Çeğin, Emrah Göker, Alim Arlı, and Ümit Tatlıcan. Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2010.

Yıldırımalp, Sinem, Emel İslamoğlu and Cemal İyem. "Suriyeli Sığınmacıların Toplumsal Kabul ve Uyum Sürecine İlişkin Bir Araştırma." In *V. International Balkan and Near Eastern Social Sciences Congress 23–24 September 2017*. Kırklareli: 2017.

Yükseker, Deniz. "Kürtlerin Yerinden Edilmesi ve Sosyal Dışlanma: 1990'lardaki Zorla Göçün Sonuçları." In *Küreselleşme Çağında Göç: Kavramlar, Tartışmalar*, edited by S. Gülfer Ihlamur-Öner and N. Aslı Şirin Öner, 233–262. Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002.

"SO WHAT IF I AM LAZ?": IRONY, MOCKERY AND HUMOR IN ETHNIC INTEGRATION AND INSUBORDINATION

Ayşe Serdar

In an interview which I conducted with a retired male Laz teacher in his sixties, we first talked about his childhood years. He recounted how they were disdained and beaten at primary school by their teachers for not knowing Turkish and speaking in the Laz language–*Lazuri nena*, or *Lazuri*–. Afterwards, he ended the interview with the following statements: "The Laz are an insubordinate people. Wherever they are, they become the ruling class, they have never been subordinated." What would seem as a contradiction to an outsider, that on the one hand he recalls a memory of oppression for speaking *Lazuri* and on the other he asserts that the Laz have never been oppressed, is in fact a common proclivity among the Laz.

In this study, I analyze how the Laz, an autochthonous people of the eastern Black Sea region in modern day Turkey, cope with the nation-state system that denied their ethnic distinctiveness by focusing on their use of irony, mockery and humor. Given the fact that the Laz is perhaps the most stereotyped and mocked category in Turkish public culture, I explore how the Laz reflect on ethnic jokes and proverbs based on the Laz stereotype. I look at how ethnic relations and power hierarchies produced by the nation-state system create situational ironies while the Laz seek to integrate themselves into the Turkish identity. In this analysis, how the Laz relate to and reflect upon the Lazuri occupies a central position because it has been the most crucial boundary-maker engendering the ethnic self of Lazness.

In my previous studies[1] based on a historical and empirical analysis of the Laz identity, I argued that the ethnic Laz both make and unmake their ethnic boundaries in the quest for different aims at the national and regional levels. The Laz both cross the boundaries of Turkishness so as to be integrated into the national category to avoid stigmatization and to access potential rewards provided by the nation-state system. They also contract from the boundaries of Turkishness to the boundaries of Lazness in order to activate a non-contentious or personalized ethnic self as a source of symbolic identity. By using the theories of boundary making[2] and constructivist understanding of ethnicity,[3] I suggest that the Laz fully integrated into the assimilationist Turkish nation-state system by means of a language shift and upward social mobility, while they reproduced a symbolic ethnic distinctiveness to reassert its status in informal regional/ethnic interactions and hierarchies.

In this study, I will present both of these strategies through the lens of irony and humor so as to search for more nuanced and less overt forms of integration and insubordination mechanisms. This offers an alternative reading of power and hierarchies that remains subtle and can shed light on elusive meanings, negotiations and fluidities. Irony is about a high degree of uncertainty and it threatens absolute power because it reminds us that claiming total transparency, certainty and

---

[1]   Ayşe Serdar, "Strategies of Making and Unmaking Ethnic Boundaries: Evidence on the Laz of Turkey," *Ethnicities* 19, no. 2 (April 2019): 335–369, https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1468796817739933; Ayşe Serdar, "Yerel ve Ulusal Ölçekte Lazlığın Etnik Sınırlarının Yeniden İnşası: Dil, Hafıza, Kültür," *Mülkiye Dergisi* 39, no. 1 (2015): 93–134; Ayşe Serdar, "Ethnic Languages, Multiculturalism and Assimilation," in *Complex Migration of Global Citizens*, ed. L. Mwanri and J. Maldenwaier (Oxford: Interdisciplinary Press, 2014).
[2]   Andreas Wimmer, "Elementary Strategies of Ethnic Boundary Making," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 6 (2008): 1025–1055, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01419870801905612; Andreas Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Richard Alba, "Bright versus Blurred Boundaries: Second Generation Assimilation and Exclusion in France, Germany and USA," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 20–49, https://doi.org/10.1080/0141987042000280003; Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár, "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences," *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (August 2002): 167–195, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.28.110601.141107.
[3]   Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference,* ed. F. Barth (Boston, MA: Little Brown and Company, 1969).

referentiality is absurd.[4] Irony shares the fluidity and context-dependency of all general concepts and invites us to reread in complex ways, not taking things at their word, looking for what is really meant.[5] In addition, situational irony refers to unexpected, unintended paradoxical outcomes or actions[6] which we can detect in the ways that ethnic minorities find themselves.

According to the existing sociological studies, humor can relieve tension in strained relationships, demonstrate social control by signaling what is considered outside the norm or support social cohesion. In other words, it can forge social bonds, "break the ice" between strangers, and create a closeness. At the same time, it can exclude not only those who do not get the joke, but those who are the target of it, leaving them feeling excluded, shamed or ridiculed. Humor is applied in the expression of conflict, struggle and antagonism.[7] Humor is characterized by a volatile substance. Jokes are not automatically funny. They first have to be negotiated as a joke, which is dependent on the setting and the context in which that joke is told.[8] In this regard, Billig draws our attention to the darker side of humor in the form of practicing ridicule, exclusion and performing a disciplinary role. In his critical approach, he locates humor in the operations of social power, in the form of mockery.[9] Ethnic humor reflects hidden hierarchies and a feeling of superiority. Ethnic jokes, which are popular in most societies, police moral boundaries by mocking groups who are peripheral–socially and often geographically–or seen as ambiguous by the dominant group.[10]

---

[4] Michael Herzfeld "Irony and Power: Towards a Politics of Mockery in Greece," in *Irony in Action: Anthropology, Practice and the Moral Imagination*, ed. J.W. Fernandez and M. T. Huber (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 2001).

[5] Claire Colebrook, *Irony: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2005), 3.

[6] Colebrook, *Irony*.

[7] Giselinde Kuipers, "The Sociology of Humor," in *The Primer Humor Research*, ed. Victor Raskin and Willibald Ruch (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), 361–398.

[8] Michael Pickering and Sharon Lockyer, "Introduction: The Ethics and Aesthethics of Humour and Comedy," in *Beyond a Joke: Limits of Humour*, ed. M. Pickering and S. Lockyer (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

[9] Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour* (London: Sage Publications, 2005).

[10] Christie Davies, "Ethnic Jokes, Moral Values and Social Boundaries," *The British Journal of Sociology* 33, no. 3 (September 1982), 384, https://doi.org/10.2307/589483.

Ironically, in many cases, mocking stereotypes were adopted over time by those same stereotyped groups and used against their more powerful detractors.[11]

A brief description of the Laz people and the Laz homeland

The Laz are considered a native people of the South Caucasia and the descendants of the ancient Colchis civilization. Lazuri is a member of the South Caucasian language group, along with Mingrelian, Georgian, and Svanetian and it is closely related to Mingrelian.[12] The Laz, who had long been Christians, gradually converted to Sunni Islam when their native homeland came under Ottoman rule in the 16th century.[13] The native homeland of the Laz in modern day Turkey is situated on a narrow coastline and its interior hinterland is in the eastern Black Sea region. It includes Pazar –Atina–, Çamlıhemşin –Vija–, Ardeşen –Arťaşeni–, and Fındıklı –Vitze– districts of Rize province; Arhavi –Arkabi– and Hopa –Xopa– districts of Artvin province. The Laz historically cohabit with the mono-lingual Turkish-speaking Hemshin people in the given districts of Rize province, and Hamshenian-speaking –a Western Armenian dialect– people in Hopa, Artvin. During the 1876–1878 Russo–Ottoman War, many Laz migrated toward northwestern Turkey, and settled in the western Black Sea and eastern Marmara regions. Since the 20th century, a continuous migration outwards to various cities, especially to Istanbul, has taken place. The Laz homeland is a rugged, lush topography with high precipitation, inconvenient for large scale agriculture and urbanization. Since there is no official data on ethnic groups in Turkey, we can only rely on estimates

---

[11]   Joseph Boskin and Joseph Dorison, "Ethnic Humor: Subversion and Survival," *American Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (1985): 81.

[12]   Rüdiger Benninghaus, "Lazlar," in *Türkiye'de Etnik Gruplar*, ed. P. A. Andrews (Istanbul: Ant Yayınları, 1992); Neal Ascherson, *Black Sea: The Birthplace of Civilization and Barbarism* (London: Vintage, 1996), 199–200; Anthony Bryer, "Some Notes on the Laz and Tzan (I)," in *Peoples and Settlement in Anatolia and the Caucasus 800–1900*, ed. Anthony Bryer (London: Variorum Reprints, 1988), 184.

[13]   İrfan Çağatay Aleksiva, "15-16. yüzyılda Laz nüfusu, Islamlaşma ve devletsizlik üzerine," last modified April 23, 2015, http://lazoba.blogspot.com.tr/2015/04/15-16-yuzylda-laz-nufu-su-islamlasma-ve.html.

and one reasonable approximation is that the Laz population is around 650,000, less than 1% of Turkey's total population.[14]

The Turkish constitution of 1924 reorganized the administrative division system and abolished the former Ottoman system of vilayets –provinces– divided into sanjaks. Lazistan sanjak, which approximately corresponded to the areas where Lazuri was spoken and part of Trabzon vilayet, was also abolished. Up until the 1990s, like other non-Turkish Muslim ethnic groups, the Laz were also exposed to the compulsory assimilationist policies of the state. The universalist and ethnically-blind principles of Turkish nationalism long denied the very existence of ethnic varieties and banned the use of non-Turkish languages. In Turkish public culture, the term Laz is often used to denote the entire population of the Black Sea region, regardless of their actual ethnic origins, and it appears as a denomination for a regional culture rather than being used as the exclusive name of an ethnic group. The colloquial designation of the Black Sea peoples as Laz dates back to the early Christian era.[15] In modern day Turkey, the confusion around the scope of Lazness has ironically come to mask or "soften" the existing and historic forms of ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity of the Black Sea region.

Today, most Laz, including cultural activists, avoid using the Lazistan term. Even though in the past Lazistan was the official name of a sanjak division under the Ottoman system, in the republican period, due to the long held denial of ethnic differences, the use of ethnic toponyms is politically risky and commonly connoted with separatism. At present, many Laz cultural activists substitute it with "Lazona"–place/garden of the Laz in Lazuri–a term coined by a Laz poet and used in a book published in 1991.[16] In this study, I use Lazistan, the Laz region, and the

---

[14] İsmail Güney Yılmaz, "Turkieşi doloxe de gale Lazepeşi nufusi-1," last modified, November 25, 2014, http://www.fikirkarargahi.com/turkiesi-doloxe-do-gale-lazepesi-nufusi/.
[15] For a detailed analysis of the designation of Black Sea peoples as the Laz, see Michael Meeker, "Black Sea Turks: Some Aspects of Their Ethnic and Cultural Background," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 2, no. 4 (1971): 318–345, https://doi.org/10.1017/S002074380000129X.
[16] İrfan Çağatay Aleksiva, "Laz entelleri arasında galat-ı meşhur olmuş yanlışlar. 1 Lazona," last modified December 25, 2012, http://lazoba.blogspot.com.tr/2012/12/laz-entelleri-arasnda-galat-meshur.html.

Laz homeland interchangeably to indicate the geographic area which has historically been inhabited by ethnic Laz.

Methodology

This study is based on both primary and secondary sources. In addition to examining available studies on the Laz identity and the extensive body of research on the history of Turkish nation-making, I conducted 45 semi-structured interviews by using snowball sampling between 2012 and 2015. Seven of my informants were involved in Laz cultural activism. Two thirds of the informants were living in the Laz region, 27 of them were women and 18 were men.[17] In this study, before quoting from the interviews I conducted, I provide some details on each informant, but intentionally avoid clearly identifying them to protect their anonymity. From 2012 to 2015, I actively attended several events held by Laz cultural organizations such as meetings, cultural events, and seminars. I observed and recorded debates among Laz users on social media, especially open Facebook pages on Lazuri. Although I am familiar with Lazuri from my family background, I am not able to speak or fully understand it. As a result, all interviews were conducted in Turkish.

Understanding the Language Shift:
"We just wanted our children to be successful and not to be humiliated"

Lazuri is classified by UNESCO as a definitely endangered language, as the intergenerational language transmission is very low.[18] How did Lazuri come to this pessimistic condition, while back in the middle of

---

[17]   The list of informants is given at the end of the article.
[18]   Bianet, "UNESCO: 15 languages endangered in Turkey," last modified February 22, 2009, http://bianet.org/english/english/112728-unesco-15-languages-endangered-in-turkey; Silvia Kutscher, "The Language of the Laz in Turkey: Contact-Induced Change or Gradual Language Loss?," *Turkic Languages* 12, no. 1 (2008), 82–102.

the 20th century, it was still considered a living language?[19] As I have analyzed elsewhere,[20] various carrot-and-stick mechanisms of the assimilationist nation-state and the structural transformation of the Laz community by modernization and urbanization processes contributed to the loss of Lazuri. After the 1950s, the generous state-sponsored tea cultivation in the region replaced subsistence agriculture and fishing, and facilitated the formation of a "state-oriented" mindset among the Laz. It also facilitated the widely experienced upward social mobility which accelerated the out-migration to cities in western Turkey and increasing educational levels among the Laz.[21] I suggest that the resulting erosion of Lazuri can be explained by Pierre Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital.[22] According to Bourdieu, linguistic capital, which he defines as competency in the legitimate language, provides its holder a profit of distinction. States and their educational institutions assign legitimacy to a language. Thus, linguistic competence is not just technical capacity but a statutory capacity with which its holders can speak an authorized, authoritative language, accredited speech, worthy of being believed. Given the fact that Turkish is the statutory and legitimate language in Turkey, and that speaking in non-Turkish –native– languages in public was practically criminalized until 1991, monolingual Lazuri speakers encountered the Turkish language as migrants in Western Turkish cities or at school in their native homeland on highly unequal terms.[23] Among the older generation, a collective memory still exists concerning the replacement of Lazuri with Turkish. They report that local school teachers and instructors implemented central state policies and prohibited speaking Lazuri by using both symbolic and physical violence. They were beaten by their teachers, forced to inform on each

---

[19] Bryer, "Some Notes on the Laz and Tzan (I)"; Nikolay Marr, *Lazistan'a Yolculuk* (Istanbul: Aras Yayınları, 2016).
[20] Serdar, "Strategies of Making and Unmaking Ethnic Boundaries."
[21]   Chris Hann, *Tea and the Domestication of the Turkish State* (Huntingdon: The Eothen Press, 1990).
[22] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).
[23] Meanwhile, almost all the toponyms were Turkified in the Laz region: Two of the towns and almost all the villages were given new Turkish names; and the names of the remaining towns were adjusted according to the Turkish pronunciation.

other and conditioned not to speak Lazuri either at school or at home.[24] In particular, the Laz working for the state bureaucracy and educated segments of the population resolutely adopted the Turkish language to praise themselves through Turkishness. By identifying speaking Turkish well with being modern and civilized, and considering it a necessary instrument for an upwardly mobile life, they stopped speaking Lazuri to their children. For example, a male informant, an engineer in his sixties, remembering the deprivation they suffered in the past, explained why he did not speak to his children in Lazuri by saying that "we just wanted our children to be successful, and not to be humiliated." Lazuri was increasingly confined to villages in the upper valleys and poorly educated families.[25] Through the integration with the assimilationist and universalist nation-state system, Lazuri lost the linguistic capital it once enjoyed in Lazistan and rapidly turned into a patois, an insufficient and illegitimate language in a wider linguistic market dominated by Turkish. Lazuri has survived mostly in the form of code-switching among bilinguals in private, emotional, informal spheres, in a way, in "the space of social intimacy."[26]

<div align="center">

Ironies of (un)speaking Lazuri:
"I don't know if speaking or writing Lazuri
can get you somewhere in Turkey"

</div>

In the past, the Laz sacrificed their language to be accepted into the realm of full-fledged Turkishness and performed very well at moving up social and ethnic ladders. Today, reformist attempts to revitalize Lazuri are still considered risky, unnecessary or too demanding. According to a report on the current status of Lazuri, based on a survey conducted with 450 ethnic Laz, 81% of the participants would like their children to take a Lazuri course at school and 69,1% stated that they would be

---

[24]   Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 49.
[25]   Increasing number of mixed marriages in which one parent is not Laz also contributed to the language shift.
[26]   Herzfeld, "Irony and Power," 64.

worried about the loss of Lazuri.[27] What has been observed is that although the Laz are principally prone to care about the future of Lazuri, most abstain from taking the necessary action for various reasons.[28] The current status of elective Lazuri courses at secondary schools expresses this paradoxical attitude. In 2012, elective courses, officially called "living languages and dialects," in language spoken by unofficial ethnic minorities in Turkey was made possible in the context of "the resolution process" concerning the ongoing Kurdish conflict. In the face of this new opportunity, many Laz shared their suspicions and outright opposition because they identified the teaching of Lazuri at school as a move that would liken the Laz to Kurds, identified with separatism and in contrast to the patriotism of the Laz.[29] In the 2013-2014 fall semester, for the first time three Lazuri classes were offered in the Laz region, mostly thanks to the individual efforts of certain teachers who worked to convince reluctant parents and hostile local school bureaucracies. After two years of an increase in the number of students enrolled, in the 2017–18 academic year not a single class was offered and it turned out to be "a right unclaimed."[30] Another gap between the expressed concern and actual indifference is the low interest in the recent publications in Lazuri, mostly printed by cultural organizations based in Istanbul. The local media in the Laz region is printed in Turkish and abstain from using Lazuri.[31] The apparent lack of interest in the public use of Lazuri in historical Lazistan can be related to the fact that a living language, actively spoken by an autochthonous minority in their ancestral homeland, is much more likely to be perceived as a potential threat by the state.

---

[27]   Belma Haznedar, *Türkiye'de Lazcanın Mevcut Durumu* (Istanbul: Laz Enstitüsü, 2018), 134–135.
[28]   For other witnesses of the same paradox, see Ayşe Çavdar, ed., *Gola Gza: Gola ile 10 yıl* (Istanbul: Heyamola Yayınları, 2016), 192–215.
[29]   Serdar, "Strategies of Making and Unmaking," 353–357; Serdar, "Ethnic Languages, Multiculturalism and Assimilation," 74–76.
[30]   Bülent Bilmez and İrfan Çağatay, *A Right Unclaimed: Elective Language Courses on Living Languages and Dialects in the Context of Language Rights. Laz Language Example (2012–2021). Summary* (Istanbul: Laz Kültür Derneği, 2021).
[31]   For an analysis of the print and social media of the Laz, see Özlem Şendeniz, *"Kimdir Bu Lazlar": Laz Kimliği ve Sanal Mekanda Lazca* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2020).

Based on the interviews I conducted, I argue that those who can speak Lazuri well but who are low in other forms of cultural capital are less likely to consider Lazuri a source of linguistic and cultural capital. In contrast, those who are more educated and living in urban areas and who possess cultural capital, nostalgically, culturally and/or politically are more likely to attribute cultural value to Lazuri. This group, however, compensates for the absence of Lazuri in their everyday lives with its symbolic uses rather than investing real time and energy for its survival.

A vivid expression of this paradox was shared with me in an interview. A primary school graduate waiter, bilingual, raised in an upper valley village first ironically described that his parents, grandparents and siblings are all "fortunately primary school graduates." He regretted not speaking a foreign language such as English, which would allow him to find work in the tourist towns of western Turkey. He noted that an elective Lazuri class was not a positive development and there is no point teaching "such things" at school; he thought it should be taught in the family: "I don't know if a Laz would need these words–Lazuri– in Istanbul, Antalya or abroad…I don't know if speaking or writing Lazuri can get you somewhere in Turkey…" When I asked which languages can do that, he replied by laughing, "Turkish, French" and went on saying that "when someone from abroad visits here, they don't ask you whether you can speak Lazuri, but they say 'do you speak English.' So as a second language, if we can speak English or French, would it not be better to respond to them, guide them, have a conversation with them? Even if I'd like to talk to you in Lazuri I cannot." On that point, of course, he was absolutely right. The contrast that we put forward was ironic. Me, a sociologist Laz who cannot speak Lazuri but praises it, while he, a fluent Lazuri speaker, wishes to be able to speak English with which he could be working in western Turkey with a better salary. In this kind of view, Lazuri is assessed as a mere medium of communication, as a means to an end and thus considered insufficient or unnecessary, devoid of linguistic capital convertible into other capitals.

Speaking (with)out accent and (un)marking ethnic-self: "the accent was something else…"

Goffman[32] suggests that the fear of embarrassment makes people conform to the existing social order. Drawing from Goffman, Billig adds that through humor and ridicule we learn to be embarrassed because we fear that others will laugh at us.[33] Visible and audible forms of distinctions function as stimulating forms of ethnic categorization and stereotyping in everyday life, which can be felt as embarrassment.[34] Likewise, for many Laz, speaking an accented Turkish is considered a source of discomfort and embarrassment and they sought to avoid it in search of outsiders' respectability. The Turkish vowels "ı," "ö," "ü" do not exist in Lazuri. It is commonly believed that when one speaks Lazuri as their mother tongue, she/he mispronounces Turkish words and disregards the vowel harmony rule of the Turkish language. It is interesting to note that a strong Black Sea accent is also common among other peoples of the eastern Black Sea region, including ethnically unmarked Turks who have been monolingual Turkish speakers for many generations. If monolingual Turkish speakers of the peripheral regions also have an accented Turkish, especially before the full-fledged penetration of the national education system and national media, then speaking Lazuri was wrongly associated with speaking accented Turkish. This reasoning could be another escape from the fact that it was not the accent but the political implications of speaking Lazuri which was avoided.[35]

Both speaking Lazuri and speaking an accented Turkish was identified with being marked as Laz: Being marked as a villager, ignorant and ethnically different in their encounters with Turks. So as to become ethnically unmarked, not to be stigmatized, or ridiculed, the Laz were

---

[32] Eric Goffman, *Interaction Ritual* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967).

[33] Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*.

[34] Howard Giles, "Ethnicity Markers in Speech," in *Social Markers in Speech*, ed. K. R. Scherer and H. Giles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 255.

[35] Speaking with a local/regional accent is not specific to Lazuri or Kurdish speakers. Monolingual Turkish speakers may also have regional accents. For similar experiences of university students speaking accented Turkish, see A. Çağlar Deniz, *"Öğrenci İşi": Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Gündelik Hayatı: İstanbul Örneği* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2014), 225–252.

prone to correct their accented Turkish. Although speaking Turkish with an accent was a concern particularly for the older generation, Laz university students coming to metropolitan cities can still be exposed to stereotypes and jokes when they speak with a mild accent. Some of the informants shared unpleasant interactions that made them feel embarrassment. A male dentist in his fifties recalled a typical expression of this situation. Back in the 1970s when he was studying at university in Istanbul, in his socialist oriented youth environment, he could hide his rural roots thanks to the common, left-wing style outfit that everybody could afford, but he could not escape from identity stigma because of his strong accent:

We used to make a great effort while trying not to blunder, and not let them find out that we were Laz. Back then, I did not know how to properly pronounce "communism." I was saying "*commonism*" this, "*commonism*" that, while people were sniggering at me. Why were they laughing at me? Then later, a close friend of mine told me that I was pronouncing it wrong, then I corrected it. So, because of the accent, some of our friends stayed away from us. The outfit was OK but the accent was something else. –The informant was laughing while recounting his memory–.

He chose to become unmarked by correcting his accent to avoid mockery and exclusion. On the other hand, not all Laz were willing to "correct" their accents. For some, their accent is a part of their ethnic identity and through that they can assert their true selves. A striking example of this kind of insubordinate attitude was shared with me in a focus group interview. A high school graduate, self-confident and witty woman in her late forties, living in a town in the Laz region depicted how she reacted when she had to attend an elocution class. In the group, her colleagues were familiar with her style and sometimes showed their support for her by their laughter. She proudly spoke Turkish with a Lazuri accent and described how terribly she felt about the elocution course, which she attended because she was working as an instructor at a public training center:

So what if I am a Laz? Though they send me to this elocution course, still, I am who I am. I told them "what do I have to do with elocution" (other participants were laughing at her). I did not want to learn a damn thing…They told us that we should be a role model to young people by our behaviors, by

our speaking. They sent all of us –instructors– to this course. Everyone else was speaking well. The teacher was obsessed with me. He was telling me that I should say tongue twisters. Gosh…in the end I got hot at the teacher, "elocution" I said, "what's the use?" I said. "This is who I am." "I do not want to take this elocution." I cannot speak –proper– Turkish. I do not want to. Take me as I am.

In the end, she said, she quit the course. As she recalled what she went through, she repeatedly emphasized that she did not want to "correct" herself, feeling they were forcing her to lose her integrity. Thus, she refused to "surrender" to the elocution course, turned her insistence into a symbolic act of insubordination against the hegemony of speaking correct Turkish. She refused to live with the "double consciousness" of minorities, that they take different attitudes in public and private realms.

The Laz themselves can judge and mock others for speaking an accented Turkish. In so doing, they construct such symbolic boundaries between themselves and their regional neighbors. I interviewed a mother in her late sixties and her daughter in her forties living in a Laz town. We were talking about how they perceive ethnic differences among the peoples of the Black Sea region. She told me that:

It is so hard to understand the way a villager woman in Trabzon speaks. It's because their Turkish is not right. They cannot speak correct Turkish. Their men speak better. Women cannot. Because they are villagers. But we are villagers too. We are villagers too!

At that moment, her daughter started laughing at her, while I was asking "so you say, still –despite being villager– you can speak correct Turkish?" Her daughter replied to me by laughing "yes, we can speak –correct Turkish– that is the distinction we have." The irony is that the mother was also speaking Lazuri accented Turkish. Her daughter was aware of this paradox. We all laughed at this ironic situation which reveals the fact that perceived accent is a question of familiarity, and a question of degree rather than an absolute scale. It produces stereotypes, symbolic boundaries, and a power hierarchy.

No laughing (ethnic) jokes:
"Are you Laz or are you a goose?"

In Turkey probably the most popular and ethnic/regional jokes are about "the Laz." Davies, in her comparative analysis of ethnic humor, mentions the Laz as an example of a "stupid" group in the case of Turkey.[36] As previously mentioned, the term "Laz" in Turkey does not necessarily refer to ethnic Lazness but often to a broader Black Sea identity. One can imitate a "Laz" by using a stereotypically accented Turkish and a few exclamatory words. Although the accented Turkish of the Laz and non-Laz of the Black Sea region are different, in the common stereotypical representation such nuances are ignored. In Laz jokes, the main male character is called "Temel," an ethnically unmarked figure speaking Turkish with a stereotypically fashioned Black Sea Turkish dialect.

Stereotypes do not necessarily draw from the contemporary context but they often inherit a past legacy of meanings and associations. Davies lists Pontic –Black Sea– migrants as an example of a "stupid" group in ethnic jokes in Greece.[37] Likewise, the image of the Black Sea peoples dates back to the pre-nation state times.[38] Even if in the past, they had a connection to social reality, they have now taken on a life of their own.[39] The Laz jokes produce strong stereotypes about the Black Sea people; they are quick-witted, often behave stupidly, have a rude manner and speak a strong and funny dialect; they have a remarkably long nose.[40] These stereotypes form the Laz jokes representing a cultural

---

[36]   Christie Davies, "Undertaking the Comparative Study of Humor," in *The Primer Humor Research*, ed. Victor Raskin and Willibald Ruch (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), 164.

[37]   Davies, "Ethnic Jokes, Moral Values and Social Boundaries," 385.

[38]   See, Meeker, "Black Sea Turks," 332–333. Meeker also notes that Pontic migrants are also called Laz (Lazoi) by other Greeks and attributed similar stereotypes.

[39]   Boskin and Dorinson, "Ethnic Humor," 82.

[40]   As an illustration of "Laz" or "Temel jokes," here, I share an example. This joke is shared with slight variations on the internet but in all versions the Laz characters are speaking with a heavy and stereotyped Turkish accent: Temel hates himself for being a Laz. He migrates to a Western country, and thoroughly changes himself. He undergoes surgery, and takes lessons and becomes a pianist. In his first concert, dressed in a proper suit, it is impossible to tell that he is a Laz. But, another Laz was in the audience, and congratulates Temel by shouting at him "my fellow countryman, bravo." Temel is surprised and wonders how this guy could tell that he was Laz. He asks: "I corrected my speech, I had a nose job, how come you could recognize me?"

hierarchy in which the peoples of the Black Sea are kept at the margins of acceptable social norms.

In everyday encounters, more than jokes, the Laz are exposed to a number of proverbs reproducing the Laz stereotype. To mention a few: "Laz reason is goose reason", "the goose flies, why not the Laz"; "Laz brain does not work after noon," In addition, consuming loads of anchovy –*hamsi* in Turkish– is stereotypically identified with Lazness, and "*hamsi kafalı*" meaning anchovy-headed is also used as a popular insult. "Are you Laz?" is sometimes uttered meaning "are you insane/ stupid?". "Laz contractor" is a generic term identified with a type of businessperson building low quality and ugly concrete apartments in cities. All these sorts of proverbs and expressions imply a "stupidity" or "strangeness" and some type of peculiarity and inferiority.

Pickering and Lockyer say that joking is a process of "negotiation" about the line between offensive and humorous that they call the "eth- ics" of humor.[41] Likewise, Billig states that an attempt at humor is processual and its's outcome is not certain.[42] If it is negated it is "un- laughter." Both of these approaches emphasize how the line between offensive and humorous are negotiated in relation to power relations and context. Among the Laz, both Laz jokes and proverbs, as well as confusion about ethnic and non-ethnic Lazness, receive mixed reac- tions. For many Laz, these jokes do not represent ethnically Laz people, but they do represent the traits, culture, and accent of the non-Laz peo- ples of Rize[43] and Trabzon provinces. The attribution of these jokes to other people of the eastern Black Sea is very common and it is a mecha- nism of symbolic boundary making.[44] For many others, the Laz jokes

---

The guy replies: "All other pianists pull the chair to themselves while sitting, but you first sat on the chair then pulled the piano to yourself." This typical joke constructs a stereotyped identity, and implies that even if Temel, the Laz, corrects his appearance or language, he can't escape from behaving like a Laz (for an analysis of the otherization in Temel jokes, see R. Aslıhan Aksoy Sheridan, "Temel Fıkraları'nda Ötekileştirme Boyutu," *Milli Folklor* 19, no. 75 (2007): 95–103.

[41]   Pickering and Lockyer, "Introduction."

[42]   Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*.

[43]   Pazar, Ardeşen, and Fındıklı districts of Rize are inhabited by Laz and Hemshinli people. But, when the Laz say *Rizeli* –people of Rize– they refer to the ethnically unmarked dwellers of Rize.

[44]   Serdar, "Strategies of Making and Unmaking," 350.

are relatively benign, after all, or even sympathetic and they represent some aspects of the Laz as clever, quick-tempered and witty people. In this case, the Laz can selectively self-attribute some "positive" aspects of these stereotypes. The case of the USA provides an insightful comparison in which white ethnic minorities participated in using laughter, the more pleasant parts of ethnic-generated humor to win friends, acceptance and material success, which shortened and enhanced their struggle to be accepted.[45] The Laz who are stereotyped by public culture are prone to create their own stereotypes about themselves by selectively attributing delightful aspects of the dominant stereotypes and reinforce a positive image of Lazness. This image, widely upheld by many Laz, emphasizes insubordination as an innate aspect of Lazness. Taşkın notes that Lazness is naturalized and stereotyped as being identified with the wild nature of the Black Sea, that they are dynamic, environmentalists, self-confident and cheerful. This increasingly popular approach, supported by the growing popularity of modernized Laz music at the national level, is best formulated in the following expression: The Laz are "rebels like the tempestuous waves of the Black Sea."[46]

In order not to appear disturbing, offensive or racist, ethnic jokes necessitate a sense of cooperation and intimacy between two sides. Otherwise they cannot function as humor.[47] Many Laz adopt an attitude of indifference, if not an enthusiastic approval, in the face of these jokes and proverbs. A young Laz research assistant, born and raised in the western city of Izmir, remembers that when he was a child he was frequently exposed to such jokes by a local "familiar" barber, who used to tease him by repeating the "are you Laz or are you a goose" proverb. This sort of "joke" necessitates "cooperation" and "intimacy" between two parties. According to the informant, that was the case. He thinks that being a Laz was not something similar to being Alevi or Kurd, in

---

[45]   John Lowe, "Theories of Ethnic Humor: How to Enter Laughing," *American Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1986):439–460, https://doi.org/10.2307/2712676.

[46]   Nilüfer Taşkın, *Bu bir İsyan Şarkısı Değil: Lazlar, Kimlik Müzik* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2016), 195.

[47]   Rogers Brubaker, Margit Feischmidt, J Fox, Liana Grancea, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 309–311.

a way more privileged because people could tell jokes about it; thus, as a kid, he never thought being Laz was something that different than being a Turk. What he suggests is a reading of the jokes in the political and cultural context of Turkey, in which some other forms of "otherness" face more negative and discriminatory attitudes and stereotyping compared to the Laz.

When negotiation is negated, attempted humor fails and what is uttered is not accepted as joke, but offense. A male engineer in his sixties recalled a memory of feeling offended about a "joke" broadcast on the radio and published in a national newspaper. Back in 1993 or 1994, while listening to a Black Sea radio station which usually played Black Sea songs, a programmer read a joke published in a national newspaper: "A water ox defecates on the road. Then, a car crosses over its sh.t. One half becomes Laz, the other half becomes Georgian." This ethnic joke conveys two messages: The apparent and the neutral one is the close ethnic kinship between the Laz and Georgian peoples. The second one is processual and needs a negotiation; one can feel offended if she/he interprets its message as "different color, same s.it." The informant vividly remembers how he felt offended when he heard this on a live radio show as a "joke," and how he organized his friends and they sent faxes to the newspaper in protest. Eventually, the newspaper published an apology on the front page. In 1998, while I was a university student, I heard the same joke from one of our favorite and sympathetic professors at the faculty. He always shared funny stories and jokes with us in his lectures. One day, he told the same "joke" in the class with his students. Once he had told us that he was an ethnic Georgian from the Black Sea region. When I heard this joke from him for the first time in my life, I remember I did not say anything. Regardless of the content of the joke, I still liked the idea of having "intimacy" and "kinship" with my professor. At that particular context and time, my motives for participating in the joke were higher than those for negating it –as I would do now– because it insults ethnic minorities and peoples in the given political and cultural context.

Ironies of conversions:
"The Hemshin are converted Armenians,
we the Laz are converted Mingrelians"

Ethnic jokes balance situations that would otherwise be tense and sensitive, or ease expressions of strain, categorizations that are not societally acceptable or openly said.[48] Jokes, proverbs and expressions used by the Laz and Hemshinli[49] in a mutual way reflect a similar kind of function and they play a significant role in the reproduction of the symbolic boundaries between these two groups. The Laz and the Hemshin people have historically been constitutive others for each other's ethnic self, shaping symbolic and sometimes social boundaries.[50] In their shared homelands, local-ethnic identification has always been determined by the question whether one is Laz or Hemshinli. According to Bellér-Hann and Hann, considering inter-marriages, similarities in culture, economy, their shared livelihoods in mountain pastures and mutual dependency, the presence of stereotypes that contradict these actually existing similarities enable groups to consider themselves distinct. These stereotypes are not always negative.[51]

The stereotypes, proverbs, expressions delineating the Laz-Hemshin distinction not only serve to reproduce symbolic boundaries, but also reflect the presence of ethnic separations that have been denied by the official ideology of the state. The fact that the ancestors of some of the Black Sea dwellers were Orthodox Greeks and Armenians has been officially censored; that a small number of people still speak

---

[48]   Brubaker et al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity*, 309.
[49]   For a brief history and assimilation/integration of the Hemshinli into the Turkish nation-state and society, see Hovann H. Simonian, "History and Identity among the Hemshin," *Central Asian Survey* 25, no. 1–2 (2006), 157–178, https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930600903247.
[50]   Barth, "Introduction."
[51]   Ildikó Bellér-Hann, "Hemshinli-Lazi Relations in Northeast Turkey," in *The Hemshin History, Society and Identity in the Highlands of Northeast Turkey*, ed. H. H. Simonian (London: Routledge, 2007), 347–348; Ildikó Bellér-Hann and Chris Hann, *Turkish Region: State, Market & Social Identities on the Black Sea Coast* (Oxford: School of American Research Press, 2001), chapter 8. Yet, Hopa districts stands out as an exception, in which Muslim Hemshin people speak a Western Armenian dialect and the Laz and Hemshinli relationship was more segregated and hierarchical than the one in Rize's Laz-Hemshinli districts, Serdar, "Strategies of Making and Unmaking," 350–351.

Romeika –an ancient Greek dialect– in upper valley villages in Trab-zon province, and a Western Armenian dialect in Hopa, contradicts the official denialism of Turkish nationalism.[52] Nevertheless, the Laz and Hemshinli can both speak frankly about each other's histories of religious conversion; though not always their own "conversion," since it is easier to point out others' conversions.[53] For example, a female informant in her late sixties answered my question who are the Hem-shin people in the following way: "the Hemshin are converted Arme-nians, we, the Laz, are converted Mingrelians." This simple expression in fact negates the long held official "Turkish history thesis" which claimed that the non-Turkish speaking Muslims of Turkey were in fact Turks who had forgotten their original roots and adopted foreign languages. Even if the pre-Islamic history of the Laz is fuzzy and su-perficial for most Laz, claiming close ethnic kinship with a Christian ethnic group –Mingrelians of Georgia are Orthodox Christians– in-dicates that officially outlawed historical facts have been transmit-ted across generations and have survived despite the overwhelming impact of the official state ideology on the ethnic Turkishness of the Laz. On the other hand, why do the Laz possibly use the expression "we are converts from Mingrelian"[54] instead of saying, "our ancestors converted from Christianity"? The Laz are not "converted" Mingreli-ans, but the Laz and Mingrelians are two ethnic groups whose ances-tors were very closely related. I suggest that this expression ironizes the actual conversion, and refers to the intimate knowledge of the in-group. In so doing, the Laz indirectly speaks of the conversion and substitutes religious conversion with ethnic conversion. As Her-zfeld says in group gestures and stance, "irony can express disaffection when more direct means are either too dangerous or require a degree of political awareness than is currently available." Given that "irony

---

[52]   See Yağmur Dönmez, "Ulus Devlet, Milliyetçilik ve Etnik Kimlik: Bir Çaykara Etno-grafisi" (PhD Diss., Ankara University, 2019).
[53]   For religious conversion and its implications in the Black Sea, see Michael Meeker, *Nation of Empire: The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) and Heath W. Lowry, *The Islamization and Turkification of the City of Trabzon (Trebizond) 1461–1583* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2009).
[54]   When I was a child, I heard the same expression from my family.

demands some degree of opacity, it flourishes in this rueful interior," in an "intimate zone foreigners are rarely admitted."[55]

Discussion: Towards a legitimate intimacy and an "Irony of Fate"?

In this study, I have argued that the Laz resort to irony, humor and mockery to cope with and sometimes negotiate the stereotypes, ethnic humor and mockery they encounter in their interactions with outsiders. I also suggest that the trope of irony, humor and mockery enabled the Laz to navigate in the national and regional hierarchies and reproduce their symbolic boundaries regardless of the common and ardent appropriation of Turkishness. In this discussion section, I reflect on the possible insights of the analysis I suggested as well as new directions of the Laz identity.

When subaltern or minority groups tell jokes about dominant groups or authority, they can implicitly challenge power hierarchies and express symbolic resistance.[56] Among the Laz, I have not encountered jokes mocking state authority or Turkishness, as we find in some other cases in similar situations.[57] A number of popular tales and anecdotes have been told with slight variation on the lived experiences of Laz children who faced symbolic and physical violence because of speaking Lazuri at school in the past. In these "tales," the domination is recognized and neither challenged nor mocked. The Turkish state and Turkishness in its abstract and national form are not, and perhaps cannot be mocked by the Laz, which points out that they do not develop a relationship of resistance against the state to which they feel belonging and loyalty. Nevertheless, the Laz do tell jokes and sometimes mock the perceived cultural differences and manners of other peoples of the

---

[55] Herzfeld, "Irony and Power," 68.
[56] Boskin and Dorinson, "Ethnic Humor," 93–97.
[57] For an interesting comparison among Slavo-Macedonians' use of jokes challenging the dominant Greek authority with some interesting similarities to the Laz case, see Riki Van Boeschoten, "Code-Switching, Linguistic Jokes and Ethnic Identity: Reading Hidden Transcripts in a Cross-Cultural Context," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 24, no. 2 (October 2006): 347–377, https://doi.org/10.1353/mgs.2006.0018.

Black sea region including ethnically unmarked ones –meaning monolingual Turkish speakers. By this sort of humor and mockery, they create symbolic boundaries and more subtly challenge the official ideology of the uniformity that was firmly imposed in the past and ongoing forms of the negation of ethnic diversity. In so doing, the Laz ironize their ancestral background and interrupt the imposed official categories and narratives. Lazuri in its surviving forms is still spoken as a medium of intimacy, by which the Laz exchange opinions about others; they entertain themselves with the joy of resorting to an intimate space. They are not, however, prone to defend the use or teaching of Lazuri in public realms. The public use of Lazuri threatens the negotiated boundaries of Lazness and its integration into the nation-state system.

On the other hand, more symbolic uses and appearances of Lazuri have become highly visible in the last decade. The increasing popularity of modernized forms of Laz music, both among Laz and non-Laz, and its highly visible performances in the urban sphere have transformed some of the old Laz stereotypes and polished more positive aspects. Laz music can be consumed and performed by younger generations who are monolingual Turkish speakers and it fits into the current limits of multiculturalism in Turkey.[58] Similarly, social media outlets have created a new medium and market for the symbolic consumption of Lazness. Particularly on Facebook, posting sometimes stereotypical content or ethnic songs and dances has become highly popular.[59] I argue that these new media have created a new type of ethnic capital which does not contradict the present day principles of Turkish nationalism and the Turkishness capital of the Laz. They have fostered new forms of legitimate intimacies which can be shared with non-Laz without embarrassment.

As a final point, I propose that perhaps the most remarkable irony concerning the way the eastern Black Sea region has been integrated into the modern Turkish state and society is that the Turkish

---

[58] On the role of Laz music and performance in urban settings, see Nilüfer Taşkın, "Laz: On the *Good* Citizens of Multicultural Turkey," in *Ethno-Cultural Others of Turkey: Contemporary Reflections*, ed. A. K. Gültekin and Ç. C. Suvari (Yerevan: Russian-Armenian University Press); Taşkın, *Bu bir Isyan Şarkısı Değil!*
[59] Şendeniz, *"Kimdir Bu Lazlar?,"* 237–270.

economic and political system has come to be dominated by a new generation of elites coming from this region.[60] People from the most stereotyped region of Turkey, the "Laz" in the sense of "Black Sea people," have become the ruling elites and fully integrated into the power and authority hierarchies. Considering the ethnic diversity of their ancestors, what does this trend possibly show us? The Turkishness[61] constructed by the assimilationist and universalist denial of the ethnic diversity of unofficial Muslim minorities has been accomplished by the actions of its citizens.[62] In the Black Sea region, many non-Turkish ethnic communities, including the Laz, took advantage of being Sunni Muslims, abandoned their politically threatening ethnic distinctions, appropriated the capital of Turkishness through their active performances, and coped with mockery and stigmas by ironizing differences and by negotiating, trivializing or selectively appropriating the imposed stereotypes. In an ironic way, linguistically, ethnically or ancestrally (Sunni Muslim) non-Turks have "out-performed" ethnic Turks in certain ways, in their search for acceptance as Turks, achieving upward mobility and avoiding forms of stigmatization. Can we call this a "fate of irony?"

---

[60]   As an example, according to a news following the 2019 local elections, in addition to the mayor of the metropolitan area, 75% of 39 district mayors of Istanbul are from the Black Sea region, and eleven are from Trabzon province. They are over-represented both in Justice and Development Party and Republican People's Party mayors. Halkın Habercisi, "İstanbul'da kazanan belediye başkanlarının %75'i Karadenizli," last modified April 10, 2019, https://www.halkinhabercisi.com/istanbulda-kazanan-ilce-belediye-baskanlarinin-ui-karadenizli.

[61]   For a recent insightful theorization of Turkishness as a contract in the Turkish nation-state system, see Barış Ünlü, *Türklük Sözleşmesi: Oluşumu, İşleyişi ve Krizi* (Ankara: Dipnot Yayınları, 2018).

[62]   A recent dissertation written by Dönmez provides insights on the complexity of the Turkish national integration. She argues that the ways in which bilingual Greek (an ancient dialect called Romeika) and Turkish speakers in Çaykara district in the province of Trabzon appropriate Turkishness reveal the ambiguity of Turkishness. The Turkishness of the locals contradicts the ideal types assuming the preciseness and determinateness of Turkishness through ethnic origin and language. The locals who embrace Turkishness in ways that is in excess or different than imagined by the official nationalism. The bilingual Greek-Turkish speakers integrated their "failures" into the ambiguity of Turkishness by being Muslims and for centuries having served as instructors of official Islam. Dönmez, "Ulus-devlet, Milliyetçilik."

Bibliography

Aksoy Sheridan, R. Aslıhan. "'Temel Fıkraları'nda Ötekileştirme Boyutu." *Milli Folklor* 19, no. 75 (2007): 95–103.

Alba, Richard. "Bright versus Blurred Boundaries: Second Generation Assimilation and Exclusion in France, Germany and USA." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 20–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/0141987042000280003.

Ascherson, Neal. *Black Sea: The Birthplace of Civilization and Barbarism.* London: Vintage, 1996.

Barth, Fredrik. "Introduction." In *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference,* edited by Fredrik Barth. Boston, MA: Little Brown and Company, 1969.

Bellér-Hann, Ildikó. "Hemshinli-Lazi Relations in Northeast Turkey." In *The Hemshin History, Society and Identity in the Highlands of Northeast Turkey*, edited by Hovann. H. Simonian, 52–99. London: Routledge, 2007.

Bellér-Hann, Ildikó and Chris Hann. *Turkish Region: State, Market & Social Identities on the Black Sea Coast.* Oxford: School of American Research Press, 2001.

Benninghaus, Rüdiger. "Lazlar." In *Türkiye'de Etnik Gruplar*, edited by Peter Alford Andrews, 311–320. Istanbul: Ant Yayınları, 1992.

Bianet. "UNESCO: 15 Languages Endangered in Turkey." Last modified February 22, 2009. http://bianet.org/english/english/112728-unesco-15-languages-endangered-in-turkey.

Billig, Michael. *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*. London: Sage Publications, 2005.

Bilmez, Bülent and İrfan Çağatay. *A Right Unclaimed: Elective Language Courses on Living Languages and Dialects in the Context of Language Rights. Laz Language Example (2012–2021). Summary*. Istanbul: Laz Kültür Derneği, 2021.

Boskin, Joseph and Joseph Dorinson. "Ethnic Humor: Subversion and Survival." *American Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (1985): 81–97.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.

Brubaker, Rogers, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, and Liana Grancea. *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008.

Bryer, Anthony. "Some Notes on the Laz and Tzan (I)." In *Peoples and Settlement in Anatolia and the Caucasus 800–1900*, edited by Anthony Bryer, 171–190. London: Variorum Reprints, 1988.

Çağatay Aleksiva, İrfan. "15-16. yüzyılda Laz nüfusu, Islamlaşma ve dev-letsizlik üzerine." Last modified April 23, 2015. http://lazoba.blogspot.com.tr/2015/04/15-16-yuzylda-laz-nufusu-islamlasma-ve.html.

Çağatay Aleksiva, İrfan. "Laz entelleri arasında galat-ı meşhur olmuş yanlışlar. 1 Lazona." Last modified December 25, 2012. http://lazoba.blogspot.com.tr/2012/12/laz-entelleri-arasnda-galat-meshur.html.

Çavdar, Ayşe, ed. *Gola Gza: Gola ile 10 yıl*. Istanbul: Heyamola Yayınları, 2016.

Colebrook, Claire. *Irony: The New Critical Idiom.* London: Routledge, 2005.

Davies, Christie. "Undertaking the Comparative Study of Humor." In *The Primer Humor Research*, edited by Victor Raskin, 157–182. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008.

Davies, Christie. "Ethnic Jokes, Moral Values and Social Boundaries." *The British Journal of Sociology* 33 (1982), 383–403. https://doi.org/10.2307/589483.

Deniz, A. Çağlar. *"Öğrenci İşi": Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Gündelik Hayatı: İstanbul Örneği*. Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2014.

Dönmez, Yağmur. "Ulus Devlet, Milliyetçilik ve Etnik Kimlik: Bir Çaykara Etnografisi." PhD Diss., Ankara: Ankara University, 2019.

Giles, Howard. "Ethnicity Markers in Speech." In *Social Markers in Speech*, edited by Klaus R. Scherer and Howard Giles, 251–290. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

Goffman, Eric. *Interaction Ritual.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1967.

Halkın Habercisi. "İstanbul'da kazanan belediye başkanlarının %75'i Karadenizli." Last modified April 10, 2019. https://www.halkinhabercisi.com/istanbul-da-kazanan-ilce-belediye-baskanlarinin-ui-karadenizli.

Hann, Chris. *Tea and the Domestication of the Turkish State.* Huntingdon: The Eothen Press, 1990.

Haznedar, Belma. *Türkiye'de Lazcanın Mevcut Durumu.* Istanbul: Laz Enstitüsü, 2018.

Herzfeld, Michael. "Irony and Power: Towards a Politics of Mockery in Greece." In *Irony in Action: Anthropology, Practice and the Moral Imagination*, edited by James W. Fernandez and Mary Taylor Huber, 63–83. Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 2001.

Kuipers, Giselinde. "The Sociology of Humor." In *The Primer Humor Research*, edited by Victor Raskin 361–394. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008.

Kutscher, Silvia. "The Language of the Laz in Turkey: Contact-Induced Change or Gradual Language Loss?" *Turkic Languages* 12, no. 1 (2008): 82–102.

Lamont, Michèle and Virág Molnár. "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences." *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (August 2002): 167–195. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.28.110601.141107.

Lowe, John. "Theories of Ethnic Humor: How to Enter Laughing." *American Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1986):439–460. https://doi.org/10.2307/2712676.

Lowry, Heath W. *The Islamization and Turkification of the City of Trabzon (Trebizond) 1461–1583*. Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2009.

Marr, Nikolay. *Lazistan'a Yolculuk*. Istanbul: Aras Yayınları, 2016.

Meeker, Michael. *Nation of Empire: The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Meeker, Michael. "Black Sea Turks: Some Aspects of Their Ethnic and Cultural Background." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 2, no. 4 (1971): 318–345. https://doi.org/10.1017/S002074380000129X.

Pickering, Michael and Sharon Lockyer. "Introduction: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Humour and Comedy." In *Beyond a Joke: Limits of Humour*, edited by Michael Pickering and Sharon Lockyer, 1–24. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.

Şendeniz, Özlem. *"Kimdir Bu Lazlar": Laz Kimliği ve Sanal Mekanda Lazca*. Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2020.

Serdar, Ayşe. "Strategies of Making and Unmaking Ethnic Boundaries: Evidence on the Laz of Turkey." *Ethnicities* 19, no. 2 (April 2019): 335–369. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1468796817739933.

Serdar, Ayşe. "Yerel ve Ulusal Ölçekte Lazlığın Etnik Sınırlarının Yeniden İnşası: Dil, Hafıza, Kültür." *Mülkiye Dergisi* 39, no. 1 (2015): 93–134.

Serdar, Ayşe. "Ethnic Languages, Multiculturalism and Assimilation." In *Complex Migration of Global Citizens*, edited by Lillian Mwanri and Jacob Maldenwaier, 71–88. Oxford: Interdisciplinary Press, 2014.

Simonian, Hovann H. "History and Identity among the Hemshin." *Central Asian Survey* 25, no. 1–2 (2006): 157–178. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930600903247.

Taşkın, Nilüfer. "Laz: The *Good* Citizens of Multicultural Turkey." In *Ethno-Cultural Others of Turkey: Contemporary Reflections*, edited by Ahmet Kerim Gültekin and Çakır Ceyhan Suvari, 145–162. Yerevan: Russian-Armenian University Press.

Taşkın, Nilüfer. *Bu bir İsyan Şarkısı Değil: Lazlar, Kimlik Müzik*. Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2016.

Ünlü, Barış. *Türklük Sözleşmesi: Oluşumu, İşleyişi ve Krizi*. Ankara: Dipnot Yayınları, 2018.

Van Boeschoten, Riki. "Code-Switching, Linguistic Jokes and Ethnic Identity: Reading Hidden Transcripts in a Cross-Cultural Context." *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 24 (2006): 347–377. https://doi.org/10.1353/mgs.2006.0018.

Wimmer, Andreas. *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Wimmer, Andreas. "Elementary Strategies of Ethnic Boundary Making." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 6 (2008): 1025–1055. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01419870801905612.

Yılmaz, İsmail Güney. "Turkieşi doloxe de gale Lazepeşi nufusi-1." Last modified November 25, 2014. http://www.fikirkarargahi.com/turkiesi-doloxe-do-gale-lazepesi-nufusi/.

Supplement

List of Informants

– Informant 1, 40 year old female, university graduate
– Informant 2, 33 year old male, university graduate
– Informant 3, 40 year old male, university graduate
– Informant 4, 64 year old male, university graduate
– Informant 5, 55 year old male, university graduate
– Informant 6, 50 year old female, university graduate
– Informant 7, 33 year old male, university graduate
– Informant 8, 61 year old male, university graduate
– Informant 9, 41 year old male, university graduate
– Informant 10, 28 year old female, university graduate
– Informant 11, 46 year old male, university graduate
– Informant 12, 60 year old male, graduate of a junior college for teachers
– Informant 13, 27 year old male, university graduate
– Informant 14, 48 year old male, high school graduate
– Informant 15, 41 year old female, primary school graduate
– Informant 16, 32 year old male, primary school graduate
– Informant 17, 23 year old male, university student
– Informant 18, 26 year old male, graduate student
– Informant 19, 21 year old female, university student
– Informant 20, 33 year old female, PhD student
– Informant 21, 53 year old male, university graduate
– Informant 22, 16 year old female, high school student
– Informant 23, 45 year old female, high school student
– Informant 24, 36 year old female, university graduate
– Informant 25, 27 year old male, university graduate
– Informant 26, 49 year old female, secondary school graduate
– Informant 27, 40 year old female, primary school graduate
– Informant 28, 43 year old female, high school graduate

   – Informant 29, 46 year old female, high school graduate
   – Informant 30, 66 year old female, primary school graduate
   – Informant 31, 77 year old male, graduate of a junior college for teachers
   – Informant 32, 59 year old male, junior technical school graduate

Focus group

   – Informant 33, 47 year old female, high school graduate
   – Informant 34, 50 year old female, junior technical college graduate
   – Informant 35, 50 year old female, primary school graduate
   – Informant 36, 47 year old female, secondary school graduate
   – Informant 37, 41 year old female, high school graduate
   – Informant 38, 34 year old female, high school graduate
   – Informant 39, 42 year old female, primary school graduate
   – Informant 40, 59 year old female, primary school graduate
   – Informant 41, 44 year old female, primary school graduate
   – Informant 42, 17 year old female, high school student
   – Informant 43, 63 year old female, secondary school graduate
   – Informant 44, 50 year old female, high school graduate
   – Informant 45, 50 year old female, secondary school graduate

RETURNING HOME: THE AMBIVALENT ASSYRIAN EXPERIENCE IN TURKEY

Abdulmesih BarAbraham

Introduction

The Assyrians (also known as Syriac Christians) are an indigenous Christian[1] ethnic people with the key region of their settlement being Tur Abdin in southeastern Turkey. Precarious security circumstances, a difficult economic and social situation coupled with discrimination due to the unfavorable legal status as a non-Turkish and non-Muslim minority caused them to leave their homeland and migrate to Europe with the beginning of the 1960s. This process of migration continued in several waves and over several decades.

As a result of emigration during the 15 years of the inner-Turkish conflict with the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party – Kurdish: *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*) the number of Assyrian Christians shrank from tens of thousands to a few thousand.

With an appeal formulated in a circular letter by Turkey's then Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit in 2001, the Turkish government encouraged Assyrians abroad to return to their former homeland in Turkey. Ecevit assured them that their security and rights as citizens would be guaranteed by the state.

---

[1]   Assyrians, as Christians, belong to different Churches of Syriac tradition which adopted Christianity in the first centuries of Christianization. Relevant Churches in Turkey are: Syriac Orthodox Church, Chaldean Church, Syriac Catholic Church, Assyrian Church of the East, and Syriac Evangelical Church.

At the beginning of the new millennium, the situation of the Assyrians in Turkey, and especially in Tur Abdin, seemingly improved. The end of the state of emergency in the eastern provinces and the application of rule of law in the wake of the reforms in the context of the EU accession process were the main reasons behind this improvement.[2] Many Assyrians who emigrated to Europe not only re-visited their former villages, but also began rebuilding churches and their houses. People started detailed inquiries to clarify the ownership of land and property after occupation and change of legal status. Associations were established in Europe to collect funds to rebuild homes in their villages. Initially organized return projects emerged. The village of Kafro (*Elbeğendi*) in Tur Abdin is such a village. Today there are more than two dozen villages that have embraced the example of Kafro and work towards the return of their former inhabitants.

The return process was politically re-ignited with the AKP government's so-called policy of "Assyrian opening" (*Süryani açılımı*) announced in 2014. This initiative was part of the democratization package announced during President Erdogan's prime ministry.[3]

This chapter will focus on the nature of the return experience of the Assyrians as an ethnic and religious minority in the Turkish political context.[4] It will briefly touch on the key reasons for migration by elaborating on the legal situation of the Assyrians in the Turkish Republic and on the circumstances that led them to become victims of the Kurdish conflict. Four selected cases will be described as examples to illustrate the administrative and legal challenges that returnees are confronted with, and that assurances from high-level political officials do not correspond to the real-world experiences of Assyrian migrants. The final section will elaborate on several return initiatives launched by Assyrian migrants from European countries concluding that despite

---

dozens of return projects, the Assyrians' experience of resettling in their former homes remains ambivalent and less encouraging, unless rule of law is fully applied in Turkey.

The Legal Situation of the Assyrians in Turkey

Analyzing the economic, socio-political, and religious reasons behind the mass migration of Assyrians to Europe, the Turkish scholar Ramazan Turgut identifies two key reasons for their exodus as both the trauma Assyrians went through after Sayfo (the genocide of 1915) and the lack of their official recognition as a constitutionally recognized community which would secure their minority rights. His study also discusses the impact that Turkey's various Cyprus operations (e.g., 1964, 1974), mandatory religious culture courses, and PKK and Hezbollah terrorist attacks in Southeast Anatolia had on the situation of the Christians.[5] Due to limitations of space in the following we will focus on but a few of these reasons.

All people living in Turkey are granted equal rights by the constitution, Turkey's minority policies were founded on the provisions of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. The treaty provides protection for all non-Muslim minorities, "successive Turkish governments since 1923 have interpreted the treaty in such a way as to guarantee protection only to three minority groups which have been defined as 'religious minorities' [and include] Armenian Orthodox Christians, Greek Orthodox Christians, and Jews."[6] As a result of this "narrow definition," Assyrians have been excluded from this definition and do not enjoy the same rights as the recognized minorities. This is an important distinction. Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic and until the 1990s, and as a consequence of the narrow interpretation of the Lausanne Treaty, teaching the Assyrian language was prohibited, schools and a

---

[5]   Ramazan Turgut, "Bir Halkın Göç Hikâyesi: Süryanilerin XX. yüzyılda Türkiye'den Avrupa'ya Göç Süreci," *Mukaddime* 7, no. 2 (October 2016): 275–294, https://doi.org/10.19059/mukaddime.81485.

[6]   Soner Önder, "Minority Rights in Turkey: Quo Vadis, Assyrians?," in *The Slow Disappearance of the Syriacs from Turkey and of the Grounds of the Mor Gabriel Monastery,* ed. Pieter Omtzigt, Markus Tozman, and Andrea Tyndall (Zürich and Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012), 99.

number of monasteries in Tur Abdin were closed; freedom of religion was severely limited. Assyrian identity was denied. Hence, repression and assimilation have been the continuous experience for Assyrians in Turkey which relegated them to third class citizens (after the Kurds who, as Muslims, enjoyed more rights) and which especially for the non-Muslim group ultimately resulted in an expulsion from their ancient homeland. In 1934, in the process of Turkification, Turkish family names were imposed on Assyrians by a so-called "law on family names" (*soyadı kanunu*).[7] Their villages, whose Assyrian cultural names held great significance, were renamed in Turkish.[8] In recent years, Assyrians in European countries have increasingly attempted to change the enforced Turkish family names back to their original Assyrian family names.

Since the founding of the Turkish Republic, Assyrians were not allowed to serve in public office or achieve higher ranks within the Turkish military. Often they were also discriminated against when appearing in front of authorities or in court due to a lack of Turkish language skills and for being non-Muslim. During their military service, they were often harassed and mistreated by fellow soldiers including their superiors.[9]

In the 1960s, as many European countries started to recruit workers from Turkey, a path to migration to Europe opened for Assyrians. Further waves of migration from Tur Abdin took place in the wake of the Cyprus conflict in 1974 and in connection with the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) as the Turkish media used the conflicts to spread religious and nationalistically motivated propaganda, putting the Christians in the country under enormous pressure.[10] During that time, Assyrian vil-

---

[7] Sebastian De Courtis, "The Syriac Heritage of Tur Abdin, contrasted perspectives in Turkey," trans. Yves Marie Stranger, May 2016, https://www.academia.edu/25234500/The_Syriac_Heritage_of_Tur_Abdin_contrasted_perspectives_in_Turkey, 6.

[8] Jan Bet-Sawoce and Abdulmesih BarAbraham, "Cumhuriyet tarihi boyunca Doğu ve Batı Asurlara Karşı Baskı, Zulüm, Asimile, Kovulma [Repression, Discrimination, Assimilation, and Displacement of East and West Assyrians in the Turkish Republic]," in *Resmi Tarih Tartışmaları 8: Türkiye'de Azınlıklar*, ed. Fikret Başkaya and Sait Çetinoğlu (Ankara: Özgür Universite Kitapliği, 2009), 221.

[9] Bet-Sawoce and BarAbraham, "Cumhuriyet tarihi boyunca Doğu,« 236.

[10] Ramazan Turgut, "Bir Halkın Göç Hikayesi," 283.

lages in Tur Abdin and in the Hakkari region were frequently attacked by Kurds. Turkish rural police (*Jandarma*) and the army often took no action for several days. The theft of livestock, the destruction of vineyards and fields, which were the basis of the existence of the majority of the rural Assyrian population, forced thousands to flee, mainly to European countries. As pressure on the community in Tur Abdin increased in the 1980s and 90s, many Assyrians applied for asylum in Germany and other Western countries, most notably Sweden.[11]

Victims of the Kurdish Conflict

The migration intensified once again after the military coup in 1980 and the subsequent militarization of the Kurdish provinces in the southeast in the context of the fight against the PKK.[12] In the course of its fight, the army established a system of village guards (*köy korucusu*) against the PKK, building it up as a paramilitary and heavily armed group. In every village, one or several loyal individuals were tasked with "protecting" the village by maintaining close ties with the nearest available military unit. Assyrians were pressured to take sides in a conflict that offered them nothing but punishment from one party or the other.[13] Assyrians in Tur Abdin, Hakkari, Şirnak and surroundings increasingly became caught between the ultimatums of the PKK on one hand, and the reprisals of the military and Kurdish village guards on the other. Both Turkish state and PKK fighters demanded their loyalty. "Whereas the former expected information on the actions of the PKK, the latter most often demanded shelter, silence and money."[14] Assyrians were either asked to provide assistance to the PKK, which prompted the razing of their villages by the military, or they were compelled to

---

[11]　Susanne Güsten, "The Syriac Property Issue in Tur Abdin," IPC–MERCATOR Policy Brief, Istanbul Sabanci University (July 2015), http://www.aina.org/reports/apita.pdf, 13.

[12]　Aryo Makko, "Living between the Fronts: The Turkish-Kurdish Conflict and the Assyrians," in *The Slow Disappearance of the Syriacs from Turkey and of the Grounds of the Mor Gabriel Monastery,* ed. Pieter Omtzigt, Markus Tozman, and Andrea Tyndall (Zürich and Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012), 63–72.

[13]　Makko, "Living between the Fronts," 70.

[14]　Makko, "Living between the Fronts," 70.

join the government's Kurdish village guards, which provoked violent attacks by the PKK. As Assyrians refused to become part of the *korucu* system, they were forcibly expelled by the military from several villages. This caused a massive exodus from the villages. The tension reached a climax in the 1990s with several cases of murder carried out by masked gunmen and state authorities against Assyrian villagers.[15] Influential individuals in the villages were killed or forced to flee so that sooner or later farmers and other folk, being no longer protected, were also compelled to abandon their villages. The terror felt by the community reached its peak in the 1980s and 1990s, when more than 50 Assyrians were killed in unsolved murders connected to politics.[16]

In February 1993, the State of Emergency Coordination Council decided that outlying settlements which might support the PKK should be evacuated, and it appears to have been routine for all or most of the houses in these villages to be burned.[17] Assyrian villagers who were driven out in this way were forced to sign statements saying that they had left because of PKK activity; this happened for example with villagers of Hassane in 1993. In 1995, the Assyrian village of Marbobo (*Günyurdu*) was abandoned due to continuous attacks carried out by the so-called Hezbollah, a Kurdish Islamist organization[18]. Although Marbobo was completely evacuated, the six Assyrian families moved to the neighboring Christian village of Qritho d'Ito. At least twenty Assyrian villages were evacuated in the late 1990s in southeast Turkey. Some of those villages were handed over to the village guards who took over the possessions of those who had been expelled.

As a result of emigration during the fifteen years of the inner-Turkish conflict, the number of Assyrians shrank from tens of thousands to a few thousand. Of these, less than 15,000 remain in the country today. Most have resettled in larger cities such as Istanbul while only about a couple thousand remain living in their ancestral villages in the southeast of the country. According to Isa Doğdu, a teacher at the monastery

---

15   Makko, "Living between the Fronts," 70.
16   Güsten, "The Syriac Property Issue in Tur Abdin," 13.
17   For an excerpt from a HR report, see "Amnesty International on Assyrian Human Rights in Turkey," *AINA*, accessed December 8, 2021, http://www.aina.org/reports/aiturkey.htm.
18   Makko, "Living between the Fronts," 71.

of Mar Gabriel, in the year 2000 "there were hardly any young people left in the [Tur Abdin] area except for a small number of little children too young to migrate on their own."[19] Besides those who migrated to other countries, there were a number of internally displaced people who had to live in neighboring villages. "As though displacement was not enough, there were times when some of these villagers were even forbidden cultivation of their fields. So, they had to depend on their relatives abroad for income to make a living."[20]

State Authorities' Appeal for Return followed by Reforms

At the end of the Kurdish conflict in 1999, the situation of the Assyrians in Turkey in the Tur Abdin region started to noticeably improve. After fifteen years, the state of emergency in the eastern provinces was lifted in 2002 and the application of rule of law in the wake of the reforms in the context of the EU accession process contributed to an improvement in the security situation. This development was the basis for the hope that the return of displaced people to their homeland was realistic.

Such hopes were spurred on by an appeal formulated in a circular by Turkey's then Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit dated June 12, 2001. The Turkish government officially encouraged Assyrians abroad to return to their former homeland in Turkey. The prime minister assured them that their security and rights as citizens would be guaranteed by the state. The Circular 2001/33 – 12 June 2001, Concerning Turkish Citizens of Assyrian origin, even published in English, announced that,

Turkish citizens of Assyrian origin who emigrated abroad on their own will as a consequence of intense terrorist activities in their region have reportedly been facing certain difficulties in returning to their homes in Turkey. It has also been claimed that they encountered certain restrictions in their efforts to return to their villages in exercising their real property rights and in visiting their relatives. It was also reported that they were not allowed to receive religious education and that foreigners were prevented from visiting Assyrian

---

[19]   Isa Doğdu, "How Realistic Is the Return of Syriac Christians to Tur Abdin" (Unpublished report, 2018), 1. I am grateful to Isa Doğdu who shared with me his insight formulated in an unpublished report.
[20]   Doğdu, "How Realistic Is the Return of Syriac Christians to Tur Abdin," 1.

villages. Certain administrative errors may have been made due to misinterpretations at local level. However, instructions have been given to the local authorities to act within the law.

Constitutional, legal and democratic rights of all Turkish citizens of Assyrian origin are under the full guarantee of the State. Our dear citizens who have settled in other countries for various reasons can return to our country and their villages without any difficulty or restrictions.

Bülent Ecevit, Prime Minister.[21]

In addition to Ecevit, the then Turkish President Ahmet N. Sezer penned a similar handwritten message[22] in the guest book of the Monastery, near Mardin, during a visit on June 6, 2001, saying:

I am very happy about the visit to the Monastery of Deyrulzafaran, the holiest place of the Syriac congregation, which is an inseparable part of our people. The contribution of the self-sacrificing, intelligent and nationally loyal members of the Syriac congregation to the development and welfare of the Turkish Republic is great. These days when the problems of our southeastern Anatolian region are coming to an end and a new economic development program is started this contribution becomes even more important.

It is my belief that the Monastery of Deyrulzafaran with its history of thousands of years will continue its tolerant and solidary attitude – as it has done in the past. In this belief I extend my warmest congratulations to all the members of the Syriac congregation.

Ahmet N. Sezer, President of State, June 6, 2001.[23]

---

[21]   Racho Donef, "The Assyrian Genocide and Article 312 of the Turkish Penal Code: The Case of an Assyrian Priest in Turkey (1)," *Assyrian Information Management*, September 26, 2001, http://www.atour.com/government/docs/20010926a.html.

[22]   The original, handwritten message can be inspected at the homepage of the monastery: "*Ulusumuzun ayrılmaz bir parçası olan Süryani toplumunun en kutsal yeri olan Deyrulzafaran Manastırı'nı ziyaret etmekten büyük bir mutluluk duydum. Özverili, yetenekli, devletine bağlı Süryani toplumunun bireylerinin Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sinin ilerlemesine ve yönencine katkıları büyüktür. Güneydoğu Anadolu Bölgesinin sıkıntılarının sona erdiği ve yeni bir ekonomik programın yürürlüğe koyulduğu bu günlerde katkıları çok daha değer kazanacaktır. Binlerce yıllık bir tarihi olan Deyrulzafaran Manastırı'nın eskiden olduğu gibi hoşgörü ve dayanışmaya öncelik veren tutumunu devam ettireceğine inanarak Süryani toplumunun tüm bireylerine en iyi dileklerimi sunarım.6/6/2001, Ahmet N. Sezer, Cumhurbaşkanı - Signature*". See "Article by Our President Ahmet N. Sezer - 31.12.2007," Deyrulzafaran Manastiri, accessed June 6, 2001, http://www.deyrulzafaran.org/turkce/detay.asp?id=76&kategori=HATIRA%20 DEFTER%DD.

[23]   Horst Oberkampf, "Almost a Miracle – Syriacs Are Returning to Their Homelands," In *The Slow Disappearance of the Syriacs from Turkey and of the Grounds of the Mor Gabriel Monas-*

Both messages, communicated by the highest state authorities, were seen as a new opportunity by Assyrians, although the questions of security, rule of law and human rights for the Christians remained pivotal. In the course of Turkey's preparation for accession negotiations with the European Union, the Turkish Parliament started to adopt several reform packages in order to meet the criteria set at the Copenhagen summit by the European Commission in 1993.[24] In addition to the economic criteria, the so-called "adoption of the Acquis Communautaire" assumed that the candidate has the ability to take on the obligations of membership - including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.[25] In addition, the political criteria required "that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities."[26]

Important decisions included the abolition of the state security courts, and thus the containment of the traditional political influence of the Turkish military, the abolition of the death penalty and the beginning of official radio and television broadcasts for minorities. At the EU summit in June 2004, the EU welcomed the initial reforms that had been implemented and officially opened the accession negotiations with Turkey, offering assistance in implementing demanded reforms. The Turkish government set up a working group to promote the implementation of the necessary reforms. Among other issues, the working group dealt with the introduction of first Kurdish language courses in Turkey and the rights of Christian minorities.[27]

---

tery, ed. Pieter Omtzigt, Markus Tozman, and Andrea Tyndall (Zürich/Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012), 129.

[24]   Erich Hochleitner, "The Political Criteria of Copenhagen and Their application to Turkey, Working Paper," Austrian Institute for European Security Policy, Vienna (August 2005), https://www.aies.at/download/2005/hochleitner4.pdf, 1.

[25]   Hochleitner, "The Political Criteria," 1.

[26]   Hochleitner, "The Political Criteria," 1.

[27]   Abdulmesih BarAbraham, „Assyrer - Warten auf Rückkehr," *Zeitschrift bedrohte Völker - Pogrom, Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker* 226, no. 4 (2004): 27, http://www.aga-online.org/documents/attachments/WartenAufRueckkehr.pdf.

Assyrians reacted favorably to the call made by the state authorities and closely followed the reform initiatives in the country.[28] Initial efforts focused on the clarification of land ownership after years of external squatters and occupation by neighboring Kurdish villagers. Village associations were established in Europe to collect funds for rebuilding efforts.

Foiling State Authorities' Decrees

The following selected cases are intended to demonstrate the stark contradiction of the repeated statements made by the highest state authorities since 2001, that "*constitutional, legal and democratic rights of all Turkish citizens of Assyrian origin are under the full guarantee of the State*" and that every effort will be made by the state to enable and support Assyrians who are willing to return to their home villages in southeastern Turkey.[29]

Case 1: The Turkish Parliament's Commission Report

A report published by the Turkish Parliament's Commission on Human Rights in 2003 claimed that the Assyrians "make demands for land" like the Armenians, and thus could pose a "potential danger" for Turkey. The commission's investigation was led by Resul Tosun, an MP from the ruling Islamic-conservative Justice and Development Party, AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*), who found that "there are only about 2,000 Assyrians left in Mardin and its surroundings, but about 60,000 Assyrians, who are currently living in the European states, are still registered as citizens in Turkey."[30] This showed that despite the promises made by Ecevit, the Assyrians as a non-Turkish minority continued to be viewed suspiciously by the various institutions of the state.

---

[28]   Hakan Samur, "Turkey's Europeanization Process and the Return of the Syriacs," *Turkish Studies* 10, no. 3 (September 2009): 327–340, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683840903141608.
[29]   See Prime Minister Ecevit's decree.
[30]   Racho Donef, "Assyrians in Turkey: Ethnic and Religious Recognition Revisited," *Assyrian Information Management*, August 28, 2003, http://www.atour.com/government/docs/20030828a.html; BarAbraham, „Assyrer - Warten auf Rückkehr," 28.

The Istanbul Branch of the independent Turkish Human Rights Commission (not connected to the Turkish Parliament) criticized the report and raised two key questions: Why had Assyrians from Mardin been forced to leave their country? Do people who have lived in Turkey for centuries and are Turkish citizens not have the right to buy land in their country? Tosun stated in the report: "let the Assyrians benefit from all kinds of human rights, but we recorded these developments so the state remains aware." According to Australian scholar Racho Donef, the underlying message seemed to be that "you may want to come back to Turkey, but we are watching you."[31]

Case 2: Occupation of the Assyrian Village of Sare

In 1994, the last Assyrian inhabitants abandoned the village of Sare (*Sarıköy*) in the province of Şirnak. There were over 30 Orthodox Assyrian families formerly living in Sare. The village guards were stationed and occupied Sare in agreement with the military. As the village was strategically located on an important route, the military utilized it as a "small guard post" against the PKK. Gradually, the Kurdish families of the village guards moved into Sare. In 2004, about 30 Kurdish families inhabited the abandoned houses which had been abandoned by Christians.[32]

With the gradual pacification of the southeast regions in the course of the end of the Kurdish conflict, interest grew on the part of Assyrians with regard to returning to their home village of Sare. However, the village guards denied them access to their homes and vehemently opposed leaving the village. References to Ecevit's aforementioned decree had no effect. Due to the intervention of human rights organizations, the governor (*Vali*) of Şirnak, Osman Güneş, issued an ordinance (226_4/2004 29) in May 2004, according to which the village guards had to leave Sare. Despite the passing of two ultimatums, the military refused to implement the governor's edict. The village guards were not only encouraged by the military to persist, but frequently intimidated

---

[31]   Donef, "Assyrians in Turkey."
[32]   BarAbraham, „Assyrer - Warten auf Rückkehr," 28–29.

the inhabitants of the neighboring Assyrian village of Bsorino (*Haber-li*). Governor Güneş even made a personal representation in Ankara to press ahead for the return of Sare to its legal residents. In addition, the then highest EU representative in Turkey, Hans-Jörg Kretschmar as well as the German Embassy in Ankara became aware of the problem and intervened. Ultimately, the villagers were able to move into Sare after having paid a sum of approximately 70,000 Euro to village guards to compensate them for leaving.[33]

Case 3: Turkey Arrests Assyrian for Rebuilding His Village

The Assyrian International News Agency reported in January 2018 that Petrus Karatay, a Chaldean Assyrian returning from Paris to his village Herbol (Aksu) in Şirnak's Silopi district, was detained for unknown reasons.[34] He was released after eleven days on the demand of his lawyers. Karatay, born in Herbol, was forced to migrate to France in the 1990s.

During the 1980s, Herbol was inhabited by approximately 4,000 people belonging to the Chaldean Church. When in the 1990s the village guards were imposed in the region, pressure increased on the villagers to abandon the village. Most went to France, Belgium, and Germany. Karatay's family emigrated to France. In exile, he presided over the Assyrian-Chaldean Association in Paris for many years. In the course of the pacification of the region, Karatay initiated efforts to return to his village and submitted an official request through Turkey's Consulate in Paris in 2009.[35] After a series of negotiations conducted in France and Belgium, it was agreed that 27 families would return to Herbol as part of the first stage of the return process.[36]

---

[33]   Information is based on an exchange with a former member of the Board of Society for Endangered People involved in the initiative to return Sare to the Assyrian owners.

[34]   Bar Daisan, "Turkey Arrests Assyrian for Rebuilding His Village," *Assyrian International News Agency*, January 20, 2018, http://www.aina.org/news/20180119205611.htm.

[35]   Daisan, "Turkey Arrests Assyrian for Rebuilding His Village."

[36]   The Turkish Newspaper Hürriyet reported that the "European Chaldean community has acted on the call of Turkey's Culture Minister Ömer Çelik to return to Turkey." ("Chaldeans embark on journey back to Turkey," *Hürriyet Daily News*, May 30, 2013, http://www.hurriyet-dailynews.com/chaldeans-embark-on-journey-back-to-turkey-47851.)

With the beginning of the so-called peace period with the PKK in 2013, Karatay finally returned to Herbol to discover that in the meantime his village had been confiscated by Turkey's Coal Enterprises. The village, its houses, cemetery and church had been buried under the mounds of excavation from the coal mines while the village guards exerted control over the village. A difficult struggle followed as Karatay planted thousands of trees in the village. Despite being openly threatened, he began constructing houses on his ancestral land. As these threats intensified, he appealed to the Governorship of Şirnak, the District Governor of Silopi and the prosecutor's office.[37] A massive fire in July 2015 burned the village completely.[38] The government rejected claims that the fire was set by soldiers, although according to what Karatay has told journalists, he had witnessed the fire being started by soldiers. The Newspaper Evrensel cited him saying: "The return of some peasants to the village made the state act this way."[39]

Case 4: The Property Issue

In her report, the German journalist Susanne Güsten shed light on the property issue[40] as one of the key obstacles for the return process of the Assyrians and points to a widespread expropriation of land in Tur Abdin triggered by the modernization of Turkish land registry records. Ironically, the Turkish state's land registry updates were supposed to modernize cadasters according to EU standards. In the course of the cadastral surveys, an inordinate amount of land was expropriated. Most villages, monasteries, or families in Tur Abdin have been impacted by these expropriations. People "returning from the diaspora often find

---

[37]   "Chaldeans embark on journey back to Turkey."

[38]   Hasan Akbaş, "Cudi Dağı'ndaki yangın Asurî köyünü de yaktı [Fire at Judi Mountain Burns also an Assyrian Village]," *Evrensel,* July 19, 2015, https://www.evrensel.net/haber/256283/cudi-dagindaki-yangin-asur-koyunu-de-yakti.

[39]   Akbaş, "Cudi Dağı'ndaki yangın Asurî köyünü de yaktı."

[40]   On this topic see also Markus Tozman, "Cadastral Registration of Lands and Preservation Orders in Turkey's SouthEast," in *The Slow Disappearance of the Syriacs from Turkey and of the Grounds of the Mor Gabriel Monastery,* ed. Pieter Omtzigt, Markus Tozman, and Andrea Tyndall (Zürich/Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012), 144–147.

that their land has been seized either by the state or by Kurdish tribes."[41] According to Güsten, the number of Assyrians in the diaspora affected by the expropriations is thought to be in the tens of thousands.[42]

Evidently, the cadastral updates were undertaken in Tur Abdin at a time when most of the owners were living in exile, as many landowners were absent from their properties during the formal updates. A great deal of Assyrian property was "registered either to the state or to third parties. The transfer of property to the state occurred firstly where registrars determined that land had lain fallow, i.e., not been worked, for 20 years, in which case property is deemed to have been abandoned and falls to the state treasury under Turkish law."[43] In addition, private property was seized by the state in cases where it was classified as "forested" by registrars, becoming automatically property of the state forestry.

The difficulties Assyrians face in regards to the property issue were noted in several European Commission progress reports. The 2014 report talks about "difficulties with property and land registration, especially in the southeast, as a result of the cadastral registration process. A number of court cases continued, concerning both private individuals and religious institutions. In October, members of the Syriac Catholic community applied to the ECtHR for the return of land that belonged to the former Patriarchate in Mardin, in southeast Turkey."[44]

According to Güsten, non-Muslims like Yazidis and Assyrians have been specifically targeted by this form of land grab because "Kurdish neighbors […] either registered it to their names or simply seized it... many people discovered their loss when attempting to return to the region. Some Syriac villages have been reduced to their core, with the surrounding farmland and vineyards stripped away, while the lands of other villages are held by Kurdish occupiers defending them at gunpoint."[45]

---

[41]   Güsten, "The Syriac Property Issue in Tur Abdin," 9–11.
[42]   Güsten, "The Syriac Property Issue in Tur Abdin," 9–11.
[43]   Güsten, "The Syriac Property Issue in Tur Abdin," 10.
[44]   EU Commission (EC), "Regular Report on Turkey's Progress towards Accession," Commission of European Communities, Commission Staff Working Document – 2014 Progress Report, October 8, 2014, https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/IlerlemeRaporlari/2014_progress_report.pdf, 59.
[45]   Güsten, "The Syriac Property Issue in Tur Abdin," 10.

In fact, a Turkish administrative procedure accepts a written declaration of three so-called local "experts" (*işbilir*)[46] for a land registration process to be carried out, resulting in the transfer of ownership in the absence of a deed title.[47] Many Kurdish neighbors benefited from this procedure and based on false declarations appropriated Assyrian land.

The annexation of land belonging to the monastery of Mor Gabriel is the best-known case that drew international attention by governments, parliaments and human right organizations. Its land has been claimed by the state treasury and the forestry, as well as neighboring Muslim villages; the monastery has faced various lawsuits since 2008. In collaboration with influential members of the ruling AKP, Kurdish chiefs of the villages neighboring the monastery, Yayvantepe, Eğlence and Çandarlı, initiated a questionable legal campaign against the monastery in 2008 in order to appropriate its lands. Using cadastral measurements as a pretext, the Turkish state, represented by its treasury, ramping up the legal conflict with the monastery in 2009 through additional lawsuits in which the state claimed more parts of the monastery land. In October 2014, the Turkish Foundations Council decided to return twelve of the thirty parcels of land contested between the treasury and the monastery. Eighteen other parcels remain disputed while the legal battle with the forestry has reached the European Court of Human Rights and related lawsuits continue.[48]

---

[46] The lawyer of the Syriac Foundations, Rudi Sümer, has been cited saying: "We do not generalize, but property of Assyrians was registered to other people. We are talking about valuable land in the center of Midyat. In the case of cadastral works, if there is no old and applicable deed title, registration is carried out according to the declaration of three local experts." See Uygar Gültekin, "Süryaniler kendi topraklarında yabancı oldular [Assyrians Became Strangers in Their Own Land]," *Agos,* September 29, 2017, http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/19410/suryaniler-kendi-topraklarinda-yabanci-oldular.

[47] Gültekin, "Süryaniler kendi topraklarında yabancı oldular."

[48] EU Commission (EC), "Regular Report on Turkey's Progress towards Accession," 59.

Return Initiatives

Kafro - Pioneering Return to Tur Abdin

One of the earliest return projects to Tur Abdin was initiated by the former inhabitants of Kafro who lived in Switzerland and Germany. Since its realization, this project and the village has gained attention in the media – even in Turkey.[49]

In 1994, most of the houses in "old Kafro" were abandoned and only a few families – out of 46 in the 1970s – remained in the village. A bleak situation that reminded the inhabitants of the year following Sayfo (the Assyrian Genocide of 1915), when about eight families, survivors of the genocide, returned to the abandoned village. In 1995 and according to an order by the Turkish Army, the village had to be completely abandoned due to the ongoing fight against the PKK. Gradually, "the village was plundered and nearly completely destroyed: even the church and the graves were not spared."[50]

The former villagers began to debate the advantages and disadvantages of a return from Switzerland and other European countries. Over seventy people from Switzerland, Germany and Sweden founded a village development association[51] to manage the return to their former homes. Initially, fourteen families decided to return to Kafro to rebuild their houses anew and to resettle there.

The village association applied for permission to resettle their village. For this purpose two representatives from Kafro joined the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Timotheus Samuel Aktaş to file an application and request permission from the Governor of Mardin to return to the village in February 2002. Temel Koçaklar, the Vali of Mardin, approved the return to Kafro on February 28, 2002, promising support in the

---

[49]   Murat Sofuoğlu, "Assyrians return to Turkey from Europe to save their culture," *TRT World*, September 5, 2017, https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/assyrians-return-to-turkey-from-europe-to-save-their-culture-10131; CNN Türk, "Süryani aileler Avrupa'dan Mardin'deki köylerine geri döndü," *CNN Türk*, July 13, 2017, https://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/suryani-aileler-avrupadan-mardindeki-koylerine-geri-dondu.
[50]   Oberkampf, "Almost a Miracle," 125.
[51]   See: Kafro, "Verein," https://www.kafro.info/verein/.

event Assyrians would return to their former village. "He agreed to help with the construction of a new road, the installation of electricity, telephone and water lines and with the building of educational facilities."[52] For the villagers, these promises created the necessary preconditions to gradually plan their return, build new houses and develop the essential infrastructure for the village. Construction in Kafro began in 2004; besides building new homes, the villagers also started renovations to the church. In 2006, the first villagers were able to move back from Germany and Switzerland to Kafro.[53]

Akitu Hotel – An Important Tourism Project

In July 2016, the Turkish Newspaper Hürriyet reported that an Assyrian dentist, Dr. Noran Debasso, who lives in Sweden, founded a grand hotel in Midyat, betting on the hope that the return of the Assyrians to their homeland would be permanent.[54] In 1980, Debasso migrated with his parents from the village of Ahlah (Narli) to Sweden. Years later, he returned to the land of his birth with an investment of 20 million Lira and built a 110-bed hotel on 10,000 square meters of space in Midyat, a wedding hall accommodating 500 people, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, sauna, and two separate conference rooms for 150 people, along with a restaurant and cafeteria.[55]

The Hürriyet article goes on to explain the social life and entertainment complex, which is called "Akitu," referring to the spring festival and Assyrian New Year. With that, Debasso established links to the ancient heritage of the Assyrians. The main entrance door of the complex "reminds of the entrance gate of Ishtar, the Goddess of Fertility and War in Assyrian mythology, and the Assyrian symbol and Palace Guardian Lamassu figures" are painted on the walls.[56]

---

52   Oberkampf, "Almost a Miracle," 130.
53   Oberkampf, "Almost a Miracle," 130.
54   Mehmet Halis, "Midyat'tan 36 yıl önce göç eden Süryani işadamından 20 milyon liralık yatırım," *Hürriyet*, July 15, 2016, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/midyattan-36-yil-once-goc-eden-suryani-isadamindan-20-milyon-liralik-yatirim-37309100.
55   Halis, "Midyat'tan 36 yıl."
56   Halis, "Midyat'tan 36 yıl."

The opening ceremony was held on May 2, 2017 and attended by Orhan Miroğlu, the AKP's deputy of Mardin, Mustafa Yaman, the Governor of Mardin, and Özgür Azad Gürgör, President of the Tourism and Hoteliers Association of Mardin, indicating the importance of the project beyond the Assyrian community and for regional tourism.[57]

Further Return Initiatives

In addition, there are several return initiatives to many villages in Tur Abdin and its surroundings. The affected regions are Beth Rishe, the Plain of Nisibis, the region of Beth Zabday, and the villages in central Tur Abdin including the chief town of Midyat. In the following, a few selected cases will be briefly described.[58]

The region of Beth Zabday includes the town Hazakh (Idil) along with the villages of Midin (Öğündük), Bsorino (Haberli), and Sare (Sarıköy). Hazakh and Sare show return activities.[59] People of Hazakh repaired the Church of the Virgin Mary and built a new guest house near the church, both of which were opened for service in 2008. As of 2019, there were eight Assyrian families in the town who lived in six newly built houses. Four of these families returned from Europe in the last decade, the other families are the town's old inhabitants. There were a couple of other families who had settled in the town a few years ago, however, they have returned to Europe due to the curfew of 2016 in the town.[60]

Central Tur Abdin encompasses the chief town of Midyat with its two dozen surrounding villages. The village of Enhil (Yemişli) only has six Assyrian couples living there permanently; however, it has the most visible activities in the region when it comes to building activities. The

---

[57] For a short report on the opening ceremony, see "Midyat akitu otel`e muhteşem açiliş töreni," *Artukluhaber*, May, 2, 2017, https://www.artukluhaber.net/haber/midyat-akitu-otel-e-muhtesem-acIlIs-toreni-28773.html.

[58] For this section, I rely on the most current unpublished report of rebuilding the villages of Tur Abdin; see Doğdu, "How Realistic Is the Return of Syriac Christians to Tur Abdin."

[59] Doğdu, "How Realistic Is the Return of Syriac Christians to Tur Abdin," 5.

[60] Associated Press in Cizre, "Turkey Eases Curfew after Assault on PKK Rebels Leaves Cizre in Ruins," *The Guardian*, March 2, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/02/turkey-kurdish-people-cizre-return-to-ruins.

villagers built over eighty new houses and repaired some thirty of the old ones. During the holiday season hundreds of people from Europe stay for a period of time between spring and autumn. Half a century ago, Enhil was one of the largest villages in Tur Abdin with a population of about 350 families (approximately 3000 people). The villagers also repaired several churches in the village.[61]

The area of Beth Rishe in Tur Abdin consists of seven exclusively Assyrian villages that were all, except one, evacuated in the mid-1990s due to the PKK activities in the area at the time. The aforementioned Kafro Tahtayto[62] (Elbeğendi) is part of this area.

Harabale/Arkah (Üçköy) is the only village in the Beth Rishe region that was not evacuated during the 1990s; twenty-five families (less than a hundred people) maintained their presence in the village. After the return movement, the village became one of the fastest growing and liveliest villages in Tur Abdin. The families who had stayed in the village built new houses. Half a dozen families returned from abroad and from Istanbul. As of 2019, the village had 270 people in sixty-eight families. The villagers repaired their churches of Mor Afrem and Mor Theodoros between 2009 and 2011. They built a new hall in 2014 which was finished in 2019. They also established a football field in the early 2000s for their young people. In the mid-2000s, the streets in the village were widened and cleared making them accessible by car.[63]

The villagers of Beth Debe/Badibbe (Dibek) made a great effort to rebuild their village, which had remained evacuated for more than a decade. Between 2006 and 2010, the villagers repaired thirty-five of their old houses and built eleven new ones. Except for winter, the village is full of villagers who visit from abroad and spend part of their year in the village. The village has over 120 people during the holiday season. Including the *mukhtar* (mayor) of the village, there are few permanently settled families in the village. The villagers repaired the

---

[61]   Doğdu, "How Realistic Is the Return of Syriac Christians to Tur Abdin," 5.
[62]   There are two Kafro villages in Tur Abdin and its surrounding regions: Kafro Tahtayto and Kafro ʿEloyto (upper Kafro – *Arıca*).
[63]   Doğdu, "How Realistic Is the Return of Syriac Christians to Tur Abdin," 2.

Church of the Virgin Mary and renovated the Monastery of Mor Yakup of Qarno near the village and opened it for service in 2014.[64]

The village of Arbo (Taşköy), one of the large villages of Tur Abdin, was completely abandoned in 1989. After remaining empty for seventeen years, in 2006 a new project focused on building eight new houses was started by some of the villagers intending to return. The houses were made ready for accommodation a year later and several families returned. During the summer season, the village is visited by over thirty people from abroad spending their holiday there. In the spring of 2018, a couple returned and settled in the village. The villagers renovated the Church of the Virgin Mary which was opened for prayer in 2014. Renovation work started in 2017 for the historical churches of Mor Dimet and Mor Shalito, which were re-opened for prayer in August 2018 with a large celebration bringing together people scattered around many countries – an event that marked a historic day for Arbo.[65]

Final Remarks

The call by then Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit and the initial EU related reforms did certainly encourage many Assyrians to seriously think about a return to their homeland. After years of insecurity and a state of emergency in the region, many considered revisiting their former villages and homes as these developments were discussed in ethnic media and associations through Europe. Even though security improved after 2000, the social and political situation in the southeastern region remained dissuasive for the most part. Village guards still remained in power and influential, mistrustfully watching the return activities of the Assyrians. This is also true for many Kurdish clan leaders in the regions who are in one way or the other linked to political parties in Turkey. As seen in the case of the property issue of Mar Gabriel, the initial lawsuits against the monastery were put into motion by Kurdish village chiefs and members of the ruling AKP party. Hence, the well-meant offers or

---

[64]   Doğdu, "How Realistic Is the Return of Syriac Christians to Tur Abdin," 2.
[65]   Doğdu, "How Realistic Is the Return of Syriac Christians to Tur Abdin," 3.

invitations of state leaders were counteracted by the existing political structures on the local or regional levels.

Particularly the property issue caused not only confusion, but also great injustice to the Assyrians with respect to re-registering their property. The handling and the results contradicted the Turkish government's assurances of support for return. The official assurance that the state would be helpful in all legal matters and that the returnees would be under the protection of the state did not materialize. Despite the decree by the Prime Minister, there still are discrepancies and inconsistencies in the highest level of politics which show that the gap between decrees and laws and their implementation is still wide, which has been illustrated in the selected examples.

The property issue has not only been discouraging for Assyrians and reaffirmed their mistrust in the administration. As Güsten concludes, it was also reminiscent of previous economic Turkification policies such as "the confiscation of the 'abandoned' property of the Christian population killed or deported in 1915–1920, the occupational bans of the 1920s and 1930s, the wealth tax in the 1940s, the looting and confiscation of Greek property in the 1950s and 1960s, and the seizure of church properties in the 1970s."[66]

Despite dozens of return projects, the experience of Assyrians with regard to resettling in their former homes remains ambivalent and less than encouraging. This is unlikely to change unless the rule of law is fully and consistently applied. In particular, the manner in which non-Muslim minorities are dealt with has to meet the standards of the European Union. The progress reports of the European Commission have been listing deficits for years. A formal recognition of the status of "non-religious minority" for Assyrian Christians would undoubtedly be an important step forward.

––––––––––––––

[66] "The Syriac Property Issue in Tur Abdin," 11.

Bibliography

"Amnesty International on Assyrian Human Rights in Turkey." *AINA*. Accessed December 8, 2021. http://www.aina.org/reports/aiturkey.htm.

"Article by Our President Ahmet N. Sezer - 31.12.2007." Deyrulzafaran Manastiri. Accessed June6, 2001. http://www.deyrulzafaran.org/turkce/detay.asp?id=76&kategori=HATIRA%20DEFTER%DD.

"Chaldeans Embark on Journey Back to Turkey." *Hürriyet Daily News*, May 30, 2013. http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/chaldeans-embark-on-journey-back-to-turkey-47851.

"Hükümetten Süryani açılımı." *Tigrishaber*, November 27, 2014. https://www.tigrishaber.com/hukumetten-suryani-acilimi-12358h.htm.

"Midyat akitu otel`e muhteşem açiliş töreni." *Artukluhaber*, May, 2, 2017. https://www.artukluhaber.net/haber/midyat-akitu-otel-e-muhtesem-acIllIs-toreni-28773.html.

Akbaş, Hasan. "Cudi Dağı'ndaki yangın Asurî köyünü de yaktı [Fire at Judi Mountain Burns also an Assyrian Village]." *Evrensel,* July 19, 2015. https://www.evrensel.net/haber/256283/cudi-dagindaki-yangin-asur-koyunu-de-yakti.

Associated Press in Cizre. "Turkey Eases Curfew after Assault on PKK Rebels Leaves Cizre in Ruins." *The Guardian*, March 2, 2016. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/02/turkey-kurdish-people-cizre-return-to-ruins.

BarAbraham, Abdulmesih. "Assyrer - Warten auf Rückkehr." *Zeitschrift bedrohte Völker - Pogrom, Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker* 226, no. 4 (2004): 27, http://www.aga-online.org/documents/attachments/WartenAufRueckkehr.pdf.

Bet-Sawoce, Jan and BarAbraham, Abdulmesih. "Cumhuriyet tarihi boyunca Doğu ve Batı Asurlara Karşı Baskı, Zulüm, Asimile, Kovulma [Repression, Discrimination, Assimilation, and Displacement of East and West Assyrians in the Turkish Republic]." In *Resmi Tarih Tartışmaları 8: Türkiye'de Azınlıklar*, edited by Fikret Başkaya and Sait Çetinoğlu, 151–251. Ankara: Özgür Universite Kitapliği, 2009.

CNN Türk. "Süryani aileler Avrupa'dan Mardin'deki köylerine geri döndü." *CNN Türk*, July 13, 2017. https://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/suryani-ailleler-avrupadan-mardindeki-koylerine-geri-dondu.

Daisan, Bar. "Turkey Arrests Assyrian for Rebuilding His Village." Assyrian International News Agency, January 20, 2018. http://www.aina.org/news/20180119205611.htm.

De Courtis, Sebastian. "The Syriac Heritage of Tur Abdin, contrasted perspectives in Turkey." Translated by Yves Marie Stranger. May 2016. https://www.academia.edu/25234500/The_Syriac_Heritage_of_Tur_Abdin_contrasted_perspectives_in_Turkey.

Doğdu, Isa. "How Realistic Is the Return of Syriac Christians to Tur Abdin." Unpublished report, 2018.

Donef, Racho. "Assyrians in Turkey: Ethnic and Religious Recognition Revisited." *Assyrian Information Management*, August 28, 2003. http://www.atour.com/government/docs/20030828a.html.

Donef, Racho. "The Assyrian Genocide and Article 312 of the Turkish Penal Code: The Case of an Assyrian Priest in Turkey (1)." Assyrian Information Management, September 26, 2001. http://www.atour.com/government/docs/20010926a.html

EU Commission (EC). "Regular Report on Turkey's Progress towards Accession." Commission of European Communities, SEC(2002) 1412. October 10, 2002. https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB_Iliskileri/Tur_En_Realitons/Progress/Turkey_Progress_Report_2002.pdf.

EU Commission (EC). "Regular Report on Turkey's Progress towards Accession." Commission of European Communities, Commission Staff Working Document – 2014 Progress Report, Brussels. October 8, 2014. https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/IlerlemeRaporlari/2014_progress_report.pdf.

Gültekin, Uygar. "Süryaniler kendi topraklarında yabancı oldular [Assyrians Became Strangers in Their Own Land]." *Agos,* September 29, 2017. http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/19410/suryaniler-kendi-topraklarinda-yabanci-oldular.

Güsten, Susanne. "The Syriac Property Issue in Tur Abdin." IPC–MERCATOR Policy Brief, Istanbul Sabanci University (July 2015). http://www.aina.org/reports/apita.pdf.

Halis, Mehmet. "Midyat'tan 36 yıl önce göç eden Süryani işadamından 20 milyon liralık yatırım." *Hürriyet*, July 15, 2016. http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/midyattan-36-yil-once-goc-eden-suryani-isadamindan-20-milyon-liralik-yatirim-37309100.

Hochleitner, Erich. "The Political Criteria of Copenhagen and Their application to Turkey, Working Paper." Austrian Institute for European Security Policy, Vienna (August 2005). https://www.aies.at/download/2005/hochleitner4.pdf.

Kafro "Verein." https://www.kafro.info/verein/.

Makko, Aryo. "Living between the Fronts: The Turkish-Kurdish Conflict and the Assyrians." In *The Slow Disappearance of the Syriacs from Turkey and of the Grounds of the Mor Gabriel Monastery,* edited by Pieter Omtzigt, Markus Tozman, and Andrea Tyndall, 63–72. Zürich/Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012.

Oberkampf, Horst. "Almost a Miracle – Syriacs Are Returning to Their Homelands." In *The Slow Disappearance of the Syriacs from Turkey and of the Grounds of the Mor Gabriel Monastery,* edited by Pieter Omtzigt, Markus Tozman, and Andrea Tyndall, 124–143. Zürich/Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012.

Önder, Soner. "Minority Rights in Turkey: Quo Vadis, Assyrians?" In *The Slow Disappearance of the Syriacs from Turkey and of the Grounds of the Mor Gabriel Monastery,* edited by Pieter Omtzigt, Markus Tozman, and Andrea Tyndall, 99–120. Zürich/Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012.

Samur, Hakan. "Turkey's Europeanization Process and the Return of the Syriacs." *Turkish Studies* 10, no. 3 (September 2009): 327–340. https://doi.org/10.1080/14683840903141608.

Sofuoğlu, Murat. "Assyrians return to Turkey from Europe to save their culture." *TRT World*, September 5, 2017. https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/assyrians-return-to-turkey-from-europe-to-save-their-culture-10131.

Tozman, Markus. "Cadastral Registration of Lands and Preservation Orders in Turkey's SouthEast." In *The Slow Disappearance of the Syriacs from Turkey and of the Grounds of the Mor Gabriel Monastery,* edited by Pieter Omtzigt, Markus Tozman, and Andrea Tyndall, 144–147. Zürich/Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012.

Turgut, Ramazan. "Bir Halkın Göç Hikâyesi: Süryanilerin XX. yüzyılda Türkiye'den Avrupa'ya Göç Süreci." *Mukaddime* 7, no. 2 (October 2016): 275–294. https://doi.org/10.19059/mukaddime.81485.

THE DIMINISHING AGENCY OF URBANISED ALEVIS AGAINST THE RISE OF POLITICAL ISLAM IN TURKEY

Özge Onay

Introduction

Turkish mob boss Sedat Peker, once a fervent supporter of the Justice and Development Party (AKP hereinafter), has been making online confessions in the form of a series of weekly videos about state-mafia relations since early May 2021, and recently posted a new video on YouTube, this time warning against an alleged plan to attack Alevis, a religious minority in Turkey.[1] He claimed that Mehmet Ağar, a former interior minister, was plotting an attack on a cemevi, the Alevi place of worship. Sedat Peker made it clear later on Twitter that the attack would be on a much larger scale than the one in 1995, when unknown perpetrators had opened fire with automatic rifles on coffee shops in

---

[1]   Though they are a minority, Alevis distance themselves from the notion of being a minority. Being registered as such frightens Alevis as they seek to avoid further marginalisation. Amongst many other reasons, one of the causes of the fear of marginalisation is founded upon the fact that Alevis do not adhere to orthodox Sunni Islamic practices, such as veiling women, fasting during Ramadan, and gendered segregated worshiping in mosques. It is this distinctiveness that has often resulted in the exclusions and culminated in major attacks targeting Alevi groups across Turkey. For more about this topic, see: Ulaş Tol, "Urban Alevism and the Young Alevis' Search for Identity," in *Istanbul Youth Mapping Series*, ed. Greg Bennetts, 14–36 (Istanbul: PODEM and the Berghof Foundation, 2017), http://podem.org.tr/en/researches/urban-alevism-and-the-young-alevis-search-for-identity/; Ayca Arkilic and Ayse Ezgi Gurcan, "The political participation of Alevis: A comparative analysis of the Turkish Alevi Opening and the German Islam Conference," *Nationalities Papers* 49, no. 5 (September 2021): 949–966, https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2020.49.

Istanbul's Gazi neighbourhood, which is predominantly occupied by Alevis.[2] The fact that Peker leaked such sensitive information to the media came as a complete bombshell given that the amount of public exposure and visibility of Alevis was for the most part entirely absent in the public sphere since the 15 July 2016 coup d'état attempt. In the aftermath of coup d'état attempt, Turkey imposed a state of emergency and in the course of which thousands gathered the streets to oppose the failed coup attempt and whose majority consisted of the urban poor, and the unemployed. They chanted takbir ('Allah is great') in harmony with continuous calls for prayer recited by mosques. Factions of such crowds also harassed Alevi neighbourhoods and used violence against conscripts, who were then allegedly mobilised and followed the AKP's call.[3]

Just a couple of years earlier in 2013, demonstrations were held in Gezi Park. It was a spontaneous urban protest movement assembling a diverse group of socio-cultural milieus in contemporary Turkey to protest the redevelopment of a park in Istanbul. The fundamental grievances which mobilised the Gezi protestors were by and large based on the Islamist government's top-down conservative politics and then Prime Minister Erdoğan's increasing authoritarianism. The Erdoğan administration and its immediate media collaborators, relying on sectarian politics in their tactics, recast the Gezi protests as an Alevi revolt, which successfully demonised Alevis in the eyes of the Sunni majority.

Only six years prior to the Gezi protests, following their victory in the 2007 general election, for the first time in its political agenda, the AKP initiated a dialogue with Alevi public leaders[4] calling it the Alevi

---

[2]   "Mafia Boss Peker Warns against a Possible Attack on Alevis," English Bianet, accessed June 3, 2021, https://bianet.org/english/society/244964-mafia-boss-peker-warns-against-a-possible-attack-on-alevis.
[3]   Gonenc Uysal, "The Failed Coup in Turkey: Prolonged Conflict in the State Apparatus," *E-International Relations*, September 21, 2016, https://www.e-ir.info/2016/09/21/the-failed-coup-in-turkey-prolonged-conflict-in-the-state-apparatus/, 8.
[4]   Bayram Ali Soner and Şule Toktaş, "Alevis and Alevism in the Changing Context of Turkish Politics: The Justice and Development Party's Alevi opening," *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 3 (2011): 419–434, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2011.604214.

Opening[5] (*Alevi açılımı*) to involve them in political processes to settle an entire range of Alevi demands, among which were the official recognition of the status of cemevis and the representation of Alevism in compulsory religious courses.[6] Despite a series of meetings taking place, the Alevis' demands were largely ignored and deflected under the intensification of the sectarian discourse of the AKP government.[7] It is particularly interesting to see the changing attitude of AKP governments with regard to Turkey's Alevis since they came into power in 2002.

Situated within a theory of agency/governmentality approach, this article seeks to unearth the AKP's political agenda that shifted from liberal-democratic to conservative-Islamism[8] over the past 19 years, and to what extent this shift in the AKP's political agenda portrayed Alevis as the "other" of Sunni Islam, therefore, relegating them to a status of exclusion vis-à-vis the state-favoured Sunni Islam as a form of governmentality. Based on empirical data, the article documents experiences found in the nuances of above mentioned tensions and crisis manifest in the lives of my respondents at the personal and structural levels. The article focuses upon three key themes including everyday life, institutional discrimination and the workplace to understand the ways in which first generation urbanised Alevis have faced the politicisation of Alevism, a tradition that the AKP has by no means invented, but has taken to a new level.[9] By presenting a series of accounts, the article illuminates a textured narrative around a range of precarities first gen-

---

[5] The Alevi opening process has mostly been driven by domestic incentives; arguably the issues addressed in the Alevi Opening reflected a party strategy to attract votes from the Alevi electorate. Once the AKP and the President Erdoğan entrenched their political position, their relationship with Alevis deteriorated. It is not surprising that Alevi relations with the Turkish state have attenuated noticeably in the third AKP term (2011–present), as the party has largely locked in majority support from other segments of the Turkish electorate. For more about this topic, see: Ayca Arkilic and Ayse Egzi Gurcan, "The Political Participation of Alevis."

[6] Soner and Toktaş, "Alevis and Alevism," 429.

[7] Ayfer Karakaya-Stump and Emrah Yildiz, "Alevizing Gezi," *Jadaliyya* (Mar 26, 2014), https://everywheretaksim.net/jadaliyya-alevizing-gezi-ayfer-karakaya-stump.

[8] Besim Can Zirh, "Euro-Aievis: From Gastarbeiter to Transnational Community," in *The Making of World Society*, ed. Remus Gabriel Anghel, Eva Gerharz, Gilberto Rescher, and Monika Salzbrunn (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015), 103-132, https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839408353-004.

[9] Karakaya-Stump and Yildiz, "Alevizing Gezi."

eration urbanised Alevis living in urban areas have experienced, and aims to broaden the understanding of the experiences of the Alevi community in Turkey.

Method

My first-hand experience as the child of the first generation urbanised Alevis informed my desire to explore to what extent has the politicisation of Alevism fused into the AKP government's Sunni sectarianism diminished the agency of the first-urbanised Alevis over the last 19 years. My own insider status facilitated access to the respondents, who were self-selected through my personal and professional network.[10] A total of eight semi-structured virtual interviews were conducted with first generation urbanised Alevis and under conditions of confidentiality, I have used pseudonyms to protect my respondents' anonymity.[11]

Purposive sampling is applied with the aim of generating insight and an in-depth understanding of the degree to which the growing tendency toward Sunni sectarianism and the shifting political agenda of the AKP in the urban context has impinged on my respondents, all of whom have lived their entire lives in Istanbul.[12] My second criterion was to reach out to those who have lived their adult years under AKP rule, hence have grown used to carrying the heavy burden of precarity as they were the first generation of urbanised Alevis who, through education, engaged in everyday life in one of the largest cities of Turkey. Unlike their parents, who upon migration to Istanbul in the 1960s mostly isolated themselves in their private spheres such as *gecekondu*[13]

---

[10] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners* (London: Sage, 2013), 56.
[11] Braun and Clarke, *Successful Qualitative Research*, 56.
[12] Braun and Clarke, *Successful Qualitative Research*, 56.
[13] Gecekondu means "shantytown," "favela" in Portuguese meaning "built in a night." In the 1950s, when mass migration to cities started, cities were the places of modernising elites such as bureaucrats and those from the military. Alevis built up their own gecekondus, remained inside their community and continued to consider themselves villagers due to low social mobility in the new context, *Glosbe,* s.v. "gecekondu," https://glosbe.com/en/en/gecekondu*; Tahire Erman, "Becoming 'Urban' or Remaining 'Rural': The Views of Turkish Rural-to-Urban Migrants on the 'Integration' Question," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30, no. 4 (1998): 541–61, http://www.jstor.org/stable/164340.

neighbourhoods, for fear of discrimination and violence,[14] the first-generation urbanised Alevis have been more active in the public sphere where they have engaged in urban life next to the Sunni majority.

Experiences of Stigma in Everyday Life

Despite constituting the second largest minority in Turkey, the Alevis' long-standing anguish and grievances due to their portrayal as practicing a heterodox version of Islam, are still commonplace if not intensified over the rule of the long-serving president Erdoğan's authoritarian and sectarian discourse.[15] Especially in the aftermath of Gezi Park protests, the government did not refrain from using the "Alevi riot" label to underline the "us versus them" discourse presented as a threat to "national unity and welfare," evoked and strengthened by a popular discourse of "us, the Sunnis, versus them, the others." Relying on sectarian cleavages, where the majority of the population is Sunni, actually determined the support of the Sunni majority for the AKP government. Against this background, social and political divisions forged between the Sunni majority and the "rest" have been aggravated, indicating an upsurge of a visible Islamic identity underpinned by the AKP's political-legal agenda. Having said that, prolonged conflict with the Alevis existed prior to the emergence of the AKP in 2002, but this time has been integrated into the governmental structures in order not to alienate the ultra-religious wing of its Sunni core supporters.[16]

An increasingly sectarian turn enshrined in the "Sunnification" of Turkish politics,[17] with no official approach toward the Alevi commu-

---

[14]   Cristina Cusenza, "Localist Cosmopolitanism: Alevism as a Rooted, Universal Discourse," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* IX, no. 3 (2017): 295–343, https://www.anthro.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/anthro/documents/media/jaso9_3_2017_295_343.pdf.

[15]   Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, "The AKP, Sectarianism, and the Alevis' Struggle for Equal Rights in Turkey," *National Identities* 20, no. 1 (2018): 53-67, https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2016.1244935.

[16]   Cemal Karakas, *Turkey: Islam and Laicism between the Interests of State, Politics, and Society*, PRIF Reports No. 78 (Frankfurt: Peace Research Institute, 2007), https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/71725021.pdf.

[17]   Arkilic and Gurcan, "The Political Participation of Alevis."

nity's long-standing demands[18] in sight, has materialised and played out in intentional and unintentional exclusionary and Aleviphobic attitudes with its relatively subtle forms in the day to day lives of the urbanised Alevi community. My interviews reveal the subtle discrimination and elusive stigma operative in the lives of first generation urbanised Alevis, and the ways in which they are intensely interwoven with the hassle of everyday life:

Alevi community has long been oppressed and marginalised yet the type of threats would shift depending upon the incident. Today, Alevis are still oppressed, however, I doubt that another Alevi massacre would happen in the 21st century. Even though similar tensions are still expected under the AKP government, the primary purpose of the AKP is to perpetuate its power and constantly reproduce it by politicising minorities like us, undervalue and underrepresent minorities in the face of perpetuating its political Islam. For us, being discriminated against would not be taken as a surprise if we were to face another hostility today, which we always face in our daily lives through getting sacked, being obliged to take religious courses at school and being discriminated against, regardless of where I am. (Cansu, 42 years old, Hotel Manager)

The next respondent similarly notes a sense of subtle contempt of Alevis operating in the hassle of the day:

My son was reprimanded in traffic due to listening to traditional Alevi folk songs in his private car, window down. Two men wearing Islamic clothing wanted my son to turn the music down saying that it is sinful. (Sevinc, 50 years old, Housewife)

A sense of eliminated agency and decision-making as a means of systematic disenfranchisement in everyday life is not a new phenomenon for the Alevi community. Though there is a great deal of literature addressing the Alevis' struggle for equal rights in Turkey in relation to their political and religious representations,[19] the covert and subtle nature of exclusion in everyday interactions of older Alevis appears to have

---

[18]   Demands including the denial of the official status of cemevis or the compulsory religious instruction in schools and textbooks solely on Sunni Islam.

[19]   .Soner and Toktaş, "Alevis and Alevism"; Karakaya-Stump, "The AKP, Sectarianism, and the Alevis' Struggle"; Omer Tekdemir, "Constructing a Social Space for Alevi Political Identity: Religion, Antagonism and Collective Passion," *National Identities* 20, no. 1 (2018): 31–51, https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2016.1247259.

been neglected, presumably on the basis of its nature as harder to pin down. Indeed, feeling like an outsider against a backdrop of the Sunni majority was made clear in my interviews:

I am 50 years old and still cannot peacefully share my Alevi identity unless I am surrounded with people who are somewhat related to me. Today's government, like it or not, maintains a 'divide and rule' politics so as to breach solidarity by abusing the rights of the Alevi community in the public sphere. As a matter of fact, I still feel keyed up in certain situations in Turkey. Not the least of my concerns is that the AKP government's misconceptions on Alevi's lack of fasting or going to the mosque makes me a false Muslim in their eyes. (Gokhan, 52 years old, Accountant)

In Gokhan's reflections on the visible difficulty of being a middle-aged Alevi person still lacking the privileges and inner comfort his Sunni counterparts enjoy, one can see the ways in which structures of government and their official identity disguised within Sunni Islamisation mediates the entitlement, reception and status of the first-urbanised Alevis in the current public sphere. For evidence of this we need to look no further than to the statement, "as a matter of fact, I still feel keyed up in certain situations in Turkey (…) today's government, like it or not, maintains a 'divide and rule' politics so as to breach solidarity by abusing the Alevi community's rights," where Gokhan simply demonstrates the constraints of the Sunni Islamic hegemonic power of the AKP government articulated in the questions of rights, subjectivity and the possibilities of agency.

While a variety of definitions of the term "agency" has been suggested, this article will use the definition put forward by Grossberg, who saw it as "a matter of action" and "the nature of change." In a broader cultural term Grossberg points out that questions of agency involve the possibilities of action as interventions in the processes by which reality is continually being transformed and power enacted.[20] As articulated by the above quotes, Alevi subjects' possibility to act appears to be limited, closed and reduced through the processes of representation by which Alevis have been portrayed as the antipode of Sunni

---

[20]   Lawrence Grossberg, "Identity and cultural studies: Is that all there is?," in *Questions of cultural identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, 87–107 (Sage Publications, Inc., 1996).

Muslims and associated with communism in certain milieus. These representations undoubtedly remain in the service of both Erdoğan and other members of the AKP in ways in which, on numerous occasions, sarcastic comments were made concerning the Alevi background of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who is the leader of the main opposition party, the Republic People's Party (CHP).21 Interestingly, however, at no point did Kiliçdaroğlu himself emphasise his Alevi background, nevertheless Erdoğan and the newspapers close to the AKP continued to highlight Kılıçdaroğlu's ethno-religious identity in a derogatory manner.22 Such an approach toward Kiliçdaroğlu and the Alevi community thereof, as a testimony to the intentional stigmatisation so deeply entrenched in politics and society, has arguably propelled first urbanised Alevis into the periphery of the society without a voice, as potential disrupters and the other of the mainstream Sunni Muslims in Turkey. To this end, the extent to which Alevis can backwash the negative claims and generalisations about their identity remains severely restricted in everyday life:

The Alevi community has always been marked out as heretics and hence we all ended up in neighbourhoods which are notably segregated from the rest of the city. Our parents did not face this in distant villages perhaps, only later did they acknowledge that they were the actual target when they had to head over to the municipalities, general register office or any public institution. I still am concerned that uncovering my identity would pave the way for my discharge at work or inhibit my promotion in some way, therefore I still hide it in the public space. (Zehra, 49 years old, Doctor's Assistant)

The feeling of having to hide one's Alevi identity was not as salient for the first comers to the urban centres as it is for their children today. In that sense, it has been stated by my respondents that covering up who they are in everyday life has amplified in tandem with the AKP government's growing sectarian discourse, especially over the last decade:

---

[21]   Karakaya-Stump, "The AKP, Sectarianism, and the Alevis' Struggle."
[22]   Bilgin Ayata and Serra Hakyemez, "The AKP's Engagement with Turkey's Past Crimes: An Analysis of PM Erdoğan's 'Dersim Apology'," *Dialectical Anthropology* 37, no. 1 (2013), https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-013-9304-3.

Some of my relatives who live in Samsun have recently begun wearing hijab to hide their Alevi identity. On the whole, in response to governmental and mainstream discrimination, we have to conduct ourselves so much so that we hide who we are in public, on the streets, in public organisations. Some of my neighbours do not even accept the *Asure*[23] I distribute. (Saniye, 47 years old, Housewife)

Navigating stigmatisation in everyday life is a nexus around which one can see the fundamental issues underlying the nature of governing practices in Turkey. Mobilising the sectarian card to solidify its conservative Sunni-Muslim support has been considered an effective form of governmentality for the current government in Turkey, where Sunni Islam is hegemonic, the headscarf functions, as illustrated by the above quote, as a symbolic manifestation of power.[24] Foucault's concept of governmentality goes beyond the narrow limits of state power to look at how societies employ more subtle methods of power exercised through a network of institutions, practices, procedures and techniques which act to regulate social conduct.[25] As is clear in Saniye's quote: "we have to conduct ourselves so much so that we hide who we are in public" is the reminder of the propagated public visibility of Sunni Islam under AKP leadership and its intention to reinsert its ideology of Sunni political Islam through its governmental practices such as "Islamic dress."[26] Marginalised and excluded in the public sphere under the growing influence of Islamic conservatism, my female respondents complained about the growing degree of verbal assault which they report encountering in everyday life because of the way they dress, one respondent explains this as follows:

---

[23] *Asure* (a traditional dessert served during Muharrem) is a part of broader Turkish culture, shared by Alevis and Sunnis alike.

[24] Gözde Orhan, "Religious Freedom Governance or Institutionalization of a Heterodox Religion? Turkey's Urban Policies with Respect to Alevi Population," *Peace Human Rights Governance* 3, no. 2 (2019): 193–214, https://doi.org/10.14658/pupj-phrg-2019-2-2.

[25] Jonathan Joseph, "The Limits of Governmentality: Social Theory and the International," *European Journal of International Relations* 16, no. 2 (2010): 223–246, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066109346886.

[26] Kerem Öktem, "Being Muslim at the Margins: Alevis and the AKP," *Middle East Report*, no. 246 (2008): 5–7, https://doi.org/10.2307/25164829.

One of those days I was walking through with a friend in *Eyup Sultan*,[27] we both wearing tank-tops as it was summer time. Two hijabbed women walked past us saying 'you both will burn in hell, we are taking control, fast and furious.' They literally assaulted us on the basis of our Alevism. (Zehra, 49 years old, Doctor's Assistant)

The above examples represent how the privileged position of Sunni Islam, with its concomitant hegemonic powers, perpetuate the Alevis' status as outsiders who became the target of the AKP government's political discourse reaffirming and legitimising a collective sense of "us" against "them." This, in turn, facilitates the rise of Sunni Islamic politics, unlike the early 2000s which focused on the recognition of differences leading up to the Alevi Opening, legitimised and deployed as a governmental policy today, attempts to disavow Alevis' actions and right to live according to their own values and beliefs in the public sphere- which is notably displayed through verbal abuse, hate speech and microaggressions evident in the interviews. That said, hostile attitudes and apparent discrimination excluding Alevis from the public sphere, empowered by the rise of political Islam, has permeated not only daily interactions, but has become deeply entrenched in the political ideologies and power structures of the AKP government.

Impact of Institutionalised Forms of Discrimination

Alevis have been experiencing downward mobility in all spheres of life, facing discrimination and stigmatisation, especially in relation to the Sunni population.[28] The post-1980 military coup facilitated the Turkish-Islamic synthesis where a long-standing religious neutrality was abandoned – which means that Sunni Islam has de facto been nationalised. This is a turning point in Turkish politics – the expansion of state-run religious services, the introduction of religious education as a compulsory subject in public schools, and the use of the Diyanet,[29] the

---

[27]   A conservative neighbourhood in Istanbul.
[28]   Ayşe Ayata, "The Emergence of Identity Politics in Turkey," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 17 (1997): 59–73, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0896634600002752.
[29]   In Turkey, Diyanet was established in 1924 to become the "protector of the Turkish state's understanding of secularism and Islam" yet turned into "a promoter with the task of spread-

state agency for religious affairs, for the promotion of national solidarity and integration. While othering Alevis has been brought into public sphere as part of recent politics centring around Sunni Islam and its professed orientation as monolithic,[30] it is not limited to subtle discrimination and microaggressions in daily life per se. The instrumentalisation of Sunni sectarianism which constantly pits Sunnis against Alevis operates not only on the mundane routine of everyday life but also on the institutional level,[31] which is evident in my interviews:

The Maras and Sivas massacres[32] have a huge impact on the way I feel towards Sunni people as a matter of fact. People can wear whatever they want, it is seriously none of my business, what I am afraid of is the perception of the people opposite to me about me. I always suppose that I will be disregarded in a government office due to my Alevi identity. I cannot trust my Sunni counterparts on the grounds that they would treat me badly. This perception has been imprinted on Alevis and the fact that we still hold on to such fears derives from the distance that governments set between Alevis and Sunnis, propelled by the disparity between the service Alevis and Sunnis get. When I reflect on the Sivas massacre, which took place only a couple of decades ago, I find myself contemplating the high possibility that such a terrible event might reoccur at any time today. (Gokhan, 52 years old, Accountant).

---

ing Turkish nationalism and Islamic moral values, solely based on Sunni Islam, both inside and outside Turkish borders, which bodes ill for the protection of Alevis' rights in Turkey and abroad." (Arkilic and Gurcan, "The Political Participation of Alevis.")

[30]   Öktem, "Being Muslim at the Margins."

[31]   Ihsan Yilmaz and Galib Bashirov, "The AKP after 15 Years: Emergence of Erdoganism in Turkey," *Third World Quarterly* 39, no. 9 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.144 7371.

[32]   Alevis were frequently attacked by radical nationalists and Islamists. One of these atrocities took place in Maraş province (officially Kahramanmaraş) in southern Turkey. It was a planned murder of Alevis during the week of 19–26 December 1978 since the doors of Alevi houses had been marked with red symbol weeks before the attack. The massacre lasted one week, 111 were killed, 176 injured, and 552 houses and 289 workplaces were destroyed. The Maraş massacre was not the only atrocity targeting Alevis, and outbreaks of communal violence between Sunnis and Alevis in Ortaca-Muğla (1966), Malatya (1978), Çorum (1980), Sivas (1993) and Gazi Mahallesi (1995) have radically shaped the formation and articulation of the extent of structural and institutional mistrust on the part of Alevis towards the state, engendering a deep enmity between the Alevis and state-led institutions. See: Ayhan Kaya, "AKP's Alevi Initiative," in *Europeanization and Tolerance in Turkey. The Myth of Toleration*, 132-56, Identities and Modernities in Europe (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137318190_5.

Still maintaining a sense of insecurity after the massacres addressed above, Gokhan still sees the possibility of societal and state discrimination against Alevis as tantamount to persecution or serious harm. The trauma of the aforementioned atrocities, transmitted across generations, still illuminate the extent to which Alevis maintain a sense of official discrimination due to a lack of protection from the governing bodies. Over the last two decades, the AKP's sectarian discourse has precipitated the long-standing concerns of Alevis who are systematically portrayed as the other of mainstream Sunni Muslims, undeserving of full security and citizenship rights. One of the first overt manifestations of this can be traced back to the campaign speeches of the 2010 referendum, in which Erdogan repeatedly complained of an alleged "domination of high judicial posts by a clique of Alevis".[33] The authoritarian and sectarian discourse as the approach of governmentality of the AKP is directed at Alevis through its means of institutions of the hegemonic discourse where the legitimacy of Alevis in high judicial posts was debated in a way that consolidated the Sunni-dominated discourse at the institutional level. This "internal enemy" status of Alevis has been intertwined with the AKP government's state control, for instance, limiting Alevis freedom of religion by perpetuating the unrecognised status of cemevis as Alevis' official places of worship.

The International Crisis Group reported in November 2016 that "Alevis have long standing demands and security concerns that AKP governments have not met." They have little representation in the upper echelons of the party, feel discriminated against on the basis that the whole range of Alevi demands for equality and justice appears to be unfulfilled.[34] It is clear, however, in my interviews that the likelihood of the official recognition of cemevis as places of worship is not independent of the AKP government's strategies to reach and "tame" the Alevi people. The extent to which Erdoğan and the AKP government remained seriously at odds with cemevis and its official recognition is manifest in Erdoğan's sectarian outbursts where he appeared to sun-

---

[33] Karakaya-Stump, "The AKP, Sectarianism, and the Alevis' Struggle," 56.
[34] UK Government, Home Office, "Country Policy and Information Note Turkey: Alevis, Version 2.0, accessed June 25, 2021, https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1008326/download, 13.

nify Alevism when he declared Alevism was not a religion and hence refused to recognise Alevis' places of worship.[35] In that regard, discussions around Alevis' places of worship were accommodated for the sake of political intrusion on the pretext of responding to the demands of Alevi citizens:

We always hear on the news 'a politician visited a cemevi today'; however, we have never heard of 'a politician visited a mosque.' Cemevis are manipulated as a political tool. In a way, Alevism has been deployed as a political agent through which the government refreshes its hegemonic power. (Yusuf, 53 years old, Journalist)

He goes on to state:

None of the institutions of Turkey, namely president of republic, prime minister, education minister, jurisdiction could represent me today; nor cemevis would represent me today given that cemevis are currently regulated similar to religious congregations. That is, cemevis have been institutionalised similar to a cult. (Yusuf, 53 years old, Journalist)

The first attempt to institutionalise cemevis as Alevis' official places of worship was enshrined in the Alevi Opening which commenced in 2009. The intention of the Alevi Opening[36] on the part of the then AKP government was to create an environment conducive to a deeper level of reconciliation related to issues such as the status of cemevis, the position of Alevi *dedes*[37] and the broader institutional problems expe-

---

[35]   Paul Benjamin Osterlund, "Turkey's Alevis 'under the Shadow of Military Tanks'," *Aljazeera*, May 1, 2015, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/5/1/turkeys-alevis-under-the-shadow-of-military-tanks.

[36]   Alevi Opening was initiated in a series of seven workshops by the government between June 2009 and January 2010 aiming to discover the demands of Alevis to determine policy parameters. In that regard, it was an unprecedented step in Alevi-State relations in the Turkish Republic, it was rather a reflection of the AKP government's declared commitment to further Turkey's democratisation. Though the AKP government was seemingly willing to reform, it was in reality acting in a way that was making a solution even more difficult to achieve. Amongst many others, the demands of Alevis, including official state recognition of the status of the cemevis and the removal of the religious category from national ID cards, has remained unresolved, see Arkilic and Gurcan, "The Political Participation of Alevis." Also Murat Borovali and Cemil Boyraz, "The Alevi Workshops: An Opening without an Outcome?," *Turkish Studies* 16, no. 2 (2015): 145–160, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2015.1043279; Tekdemir, "Constructing a Social Space".

[37]   A *Dede* (literally meaning grandfather) is a socio-religious leader in the Alevi community.

rienced by Alevis.[38] A series of meetings between the representatives of the Alevi community and the government took place without any concrete results; the disenfranchisement of the Alevis has only deepened under AKP rule in the forms of accelerated top-down Islamisation of broader Turkish society manifest in the corollary intensification of sectarian discourse.[39]

The upshot of all these then, as my interview shows, is that the AKP's Alevi Opening has a clear agenda to Sunnification:

The AKP's Alevi Opening was to consolidate its hegemony, it did not help Alevis by any means. It was for gaining votes from the Alevi community, by taking them in to the system for fear that when Alevis are excluded from the system, they are allegedly predisposed to Atheism and Communism. With that said, the Alevi Opening was in a sense to tame the Alevi community on the pretext of the democratisation of the Opening. They have nowhere near any respect for Alevi culture and opinions, our children have been exposed to Sunni Islamic courses at schools for decades, which is another form of oppression not found in a democracy. Through the Alevi Opening, the Alevi community were engulfed into the system of government so that they do not dissent against the enforcements of the government. (Serkan, 45 years old, Hotel Manager)

As obvious in the quotes above, for historical and theological reasons, Alevis consider the political expression of Sunni Islam, evoked in a range of different forms including sectarianism and nationalism-driven violence directed towards Alevis, mandatory religious courses based on Sunni Islam or constraints on Alevi religious ceremonies through financial and institutional deprivations, as a threat to their community's security and integrity.[40] A recurring mistrust, linked with the recurrence of traumatic experiences and still prevalent unkept promises has brought to light the deeply entrenched sectarian clashes today. To this end, the demands of the first-urbanised Alevis, surfaced within the agenda of the Alevi Opening, including an end to the compulsory building of mosques in Alevi villages and the removal from the school

---

38 Talha Köse, "The AKP and the 'Alevi Opening': Understanding the Dynamics of the Rapprochement," *Insight Turkey* 12, no. 2 (2010), https://www.jstor.org/stable/26331449.
39 Karakaya-Stump, "The AKP, sectarianism, and the Alevis' struggle," 54.
40 Soner and Toktaş, "Alevis and Alevism."

curricula of mandatory religion classes were not accommodated, ironically, however, contributed significantly to the government's political Islamic approach. In other words, this initiative, the Alevi Opening, was necessary to the point where the AKP government could substantially strengthen their hold on power, monopolised by political Sunnism as an attempt to maintain its "favourable" position with its Sunni core supporters.

The first generation urbanised Alevi community feel underrepresented at the institutional level much in the same way as in everyday life, as a result of this, in their own words "none of the institutions of Turkey" allegedly represent them today. This sense of anxiety, particularly for the first generation urbanised Alevis who have witnessed the shifting political agenda of AKP governments was common to all my respondents:

No doubt that I would never be able to have my religious affiliation stamped on my national identity card as an Alevi citizen, which by itself is already worrying for me. (Sevinc, 50 years old, Housewife)

To sum up, the AKP's Alevi Opening has long slipped from the agenda since the AKP opposed granting recognition to cemevis, it also never fulfilled the long ignored demands of Alevis including the promised justice for the 1993 Sivas massacre. This demonstrates that the Alevi Opening was an initiative, to seem friendly, used as a social engineering project by the AKP to gain the support of Alevis. A mainstream Sunni perspective was deployed in the evaluation of Alevi demands, for instance, on the status of cemevis, Diyanet ultimately led the push to stop the recognition of cemevis on the grounds that "allowing cemevis may be supporting the birth of a new religion."[41] As could be seen, the above questioning of Alevi demands in relation to equality at the institutional level has impinged on my respondents in ways in which they fully acknowledge that the current government will never recognise the agency of Alevi community, or evolve towards a policy of recognition

---

[41]   Ihsan Yilmaz and James Barry, "The AKP's De-Securitization and Re-Securitization of a Minority Community: The Alevi Opening and Closing," *Turkish Studies* 21, no. 2 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2019.1601564.

of difference.[42] In other words, Alevis are convinced that they are other-ised not only within the routine of daily life, but also underrepresented and silenced at the institutional level. The next section focuses on the divisions and tensions encountered across working environments.

Divisions and Tensions in Work Life

The workplace is often thought of as an ever-changing and stressful environment. Being subjected to the exclusionary classifications and the scrutiny of their co-workers, superiors, and customers, the extent of the stress and anxiety the first-urbanised Alevis have to endure at the occupational level is constitutive of the ways in which the deeply engrained prejudices against the Alevi community are also not absent in the workplace. Across the interviews, the respondents recounted the extent to which exclusionary hurdles they have had to overcome in the workplace impinged upon them:

I was pretty successful in my work, while having a small talk with some of my colleagues one day, I accidentally revealed I am Alevi. My manager called me out and said 'If I had known that you were Alevi, I would not have liked you and grown so accustomed to you.' This was so painful for me. My boss was a doctor also, and I was in my fifth year working as his assistant. He basi-cally could not associate me with all those derogatory statements about Alevis and wanted me to undo this image somehow. I do not like when people sim-ply want you to be just like them, follow their footsteps in every way. (Ceren, 42 years old, Doctor's Assistant)

In a similar manner, another respondent talked of how frustrating it is to be stigmatised because of his Alevi identity despite his high level of expertise in his job:

Especially when at work, I am concerned about discrimination and certain trigger events which can result in being dismissed from work and the problem of making ends meet. I have worked as a mechanic with my brother for years and witnessed and suffered insults and bullies in many ways because of my Alevi identity, though we were top notch mechanics. People would choose us out of obligation because they were happy with our labour. Still we were

---

42   Öktem, "Being Muslim at the Margins," 7.

perpetually questioned as to why we don't fast, pray in a mosque, we were treated as suspect people also. When you piece together all the sufferings and tensions due to your identity, you always know what they think of you behind the smiles. (Sahin, 52 years old, Mechanic)

A number of respondents indicated that at least to some extent they felt anxious and stigmatised in their places of work either by their colleagues, customers or superiors on the grounds of the unexpected "discovery" of their Alevism. Sahin's remark that he is "afraid of discrimination and certain trigger events which can result in being dismissed from work" is emblematic of the pervasive division still overwhelmingly ubiquitous in urban centres of Turkey today. In a similar vein, Ceren felt powerless in the face of her non-Alevi superior's prejudicial categorisation of Alevis based on unfounded derogatory statements[43] so much so that the only way to reverse it, she remarked, was to shed her Aleviness and conform to the Sunni majority by any means necessary. Accompanied by the social engineering of the Erdoğan government, underpinned in accordance with a conservative Sunni Islam, Alevis have long been recast as suspect people, heretics or impure and hence the possibility of resistance that assumes a subject standing entirely outside of and against a "well-established" structure of power[44] is deflected for the informants of this article. Incapable of reversing such misinterpretations, first-urbanised Alevis find themselves caught in precarious financial conditions, or confided to precarious positions and insecure employment.

Working as a journalist for decades, Yusuf narrates how his Alevi identity deprived him of his right to be involved in or have a voice in the undergoing restoration of a historical mosque in Divriği:

---

[43] One particular *derogatory* statement Ceren implicated while pointing to her superior's prejudices is the long standing disparaging phrase "*mum söndü*" (blowing out the candles), representing a widespread insult which accuses Alevis of sexual impropriety in cem gatherings that are not open to outsiders, as Alevi men and women worship together in contrast with Sunni tradition. See Hanoglu, Hayal, "Alevis under the Shadow of the Turkish Islamic Ethos," *Kürd Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 2020: 138, https://kurdarastirmalari.com/uploads/3_dosya/hayal_hanioglu1.pdf.
[44] Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, Questions of Cultural Identity (London: Sage, 1996).

Considering that I am from Divriği[45] is telling my Alevi identity without anybody asking about it, especially in public bodies. Divriği is such a historical town where there is an archaic mosque named Kale Mosque, built 30–40 years back from Ulu Mosque. What is unique about this mosque is it lacks minarets but while restoring this mosque, its special qualities were distorted. I reported this as a journalist and said that 'the mosque's originality was distorted' and protected the mosque as an Alevi and the ones who distorted the mosque were Sunni people. So that I reported this instance in the newspaper, the then Divriği deputy, an AKP member, called everyone out to Divriği to discuss this. The mayor also attended this meeting. The then Divriği deputy was annoyed at my presence in the meeting and attempted to kick me out of the meeting saying that I was uninvited. They did not like me being in that meeting as an Alevi, considered me an outcast who might have no bearing on an Islamic edifice, but my interest was in its historical value rather than its religious value. (Yusuf, 53 years old, Journalist)

AKP members as the dominant Sunni elite, the then deputies of Divriği, appear to disavow the voice and representation of an Alevi journalist which, without doubt, refers to the unwillingness of the then AKP deputies to subordinate themselves to the voice of their proxy, who will "speak for" them.[46]As is clear in the way Yusuf discussed "they did not like me being in that meeting as an Alevi, considered me an outcast who might have no bearing on an Islamic edifice," Sunni sectarianism as the powerful political tool AKP members have long deployed is a constitutive part of the AKP's ideology against which Alevis are positioned as the markers of false Islam, as the other of Sunni Muslims. The influence of this ideology on socio-political issues aside from restrictions in everyday life can be seen in practices which pave the way for intensified efforts in assimilating perceived separatist threats like Alevis as manifested, for example, in the establishment of mandatory religious education (based on the Sunni faith) in schools and in the increase in the construction of mosques in Alevi villages, mostly

---

[45]   The population of *Divriği* is predominantly Alevi today. See: "Divriği," Turkey from the Inside, accessed June 9, 2021, http://www.turkeyfromtheinside.com/who-was-who-in-turkey/a/42-places-to-go/279-dvr.html.
[46]   Hakkı Taş, "Can the Alevis speak? The politics of representation in early writings on Alevism," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 26, no. 3 (2015): 327, https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2015.1045177.

against the will of their inhabitants.[47] Subordinated by means of state structures of dominance as vital to the maintenance of Sunni sectarian ideology as a form of governmentality, Alevis are conveniently ignored and consciously prevented from any attempt to have a voice in matters such as the restoration of a mosque. By not inviting Yusuf to a meeting directly brought forth by his report, AKP officials in Divriği sought not to confer the power they hold on an Alevi journalist, removed his voice and representation from their political closure. On the whole, the common thread in three of the quotes is that widespread negation of Alevi agency in the public sphere and state institutions is also prevalent for first generation urbanised Alevis in the sphere of professional life. This discrimination and stigmatisation against them manifests itself through strong tendencies to marginalise Alevis from the Sunni Islamic mainstream, underlying the consolidated and legitimated Sunni Islamic political framework of the Turkish state.

Conclusion

After Sunnis, Alevis constitute the second largest religious community in Turkey. However, they have long been ignored by the Turkish state and a number of challenges remain to be sorted out to provide Alevis with the same social, political and legal status as Sunni citizens.[48] For the first time in February 1990, an open declaration, later became known as the Alevi Manifesto was designed and signed by Alevis and non-Alevis, academics, authors and journalists. The manifesto goes on to call for the recognition of the difference of the Alevi faith and culture, equal representation in education, in the media and in receiving their own religious services.[49] Thirty years on however, almost nothing has changed for the better. In 2009, the then prime minister Ahmet

---

[47] Markus Dressler, "Religio-Secular Metamorphoses: The Re-Making of Turkish Alevism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 2 (2008): 286, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25484003.
[48] Amanda Paul and Demir Murat Seyrek, "Freedom of Religion in Turkey – The Alevi Issue," EPC Commentary, January 24, 2014, https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/Freedom-of-religion-in-Turkey~1c965c; Soner and Toktaş, "Alevis and Alevism."
[49] Tahire Erman and Emrah Göker, "Alevi Politics in Contemporary Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 4 (2000): 102, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4284116.

Davutoğlu mentioned a new set of reforms to be unveiled, he referred to a new relationship between Alevis and the state, which would include steps to further the freedoms of Alevis but it similarly failed to materialise. Furthermore, after the rise of political Islam and its gaining of considerable electoral power over the last two decades, ethnic, religious and cultural differences between mainstream Sunnis and the minority Alevis have been further marked out and mobilised under AKP rule, as an instrument gearing towards sustaining and enhancing the party's support base in society.

Against this background, one could draw the conclusion that the challenges of the first-urbanised Alevis, as shaped under current political conditions, are far from rapprochement and negotiation today. Still treated differently and often labelled as non-Muslims, false Muslims or heretics, the Alevi community's exclusion and marginalisation in the urban context aggravates their downward mobility. That is, they are made to feel as though they are invisible, that they do not belong, and they are of no value[50] vis-à-vis the increasing Sunnification strategy of the AKP reinforced as a form of governmentality. This Sunni sectarianism as a political tool is played out in the routine of everyday life where the Alevi community's lifestyle is arguably diametrically opposed to the AKP's own interpretation of Islam. In this context, first-urbanised Alevis expressed a sense of exclusion and insecurity due to the absence of Islamic dress such as the hijab for my female respondents, or simply listening to Alevi folk music in the public sphere. This low sense of mobility is also clearly expressed in the sphere of professional contexts such as hiding one's Alevi identity in the workplace for fear of being sacked. Alongside this, the findings have illustrated that subtle manifestations of political Islam as a form of governmentality employed by the AKP, where power is exercised through networks of practices including the Alevi Opening initiative and through humiliating statements made by AKP officials about Kılıçdaroğlu due to his Alevi background, Alevis' varying demands for equality, security and moving past obstacles of

---

[50]   Katy Sian, "Being Black in a White World: Understanding Racism in British Universities," *Papeles del Centro de Estudios sobre la Identidad Colectiva* 2, no. 176 (2017): 1–26, https://doi.org/10.1387/pceic.17625.

prejudice were vilified rather than resolved. It then turned to the po-liticisation of Alevism and its associations such as cemevis to consoli-date the AKP's power in the face of its Sunni Muslim core supporters, whereas Alevis have been recast as an "internal enemy" or "potential traitors."[51] Beyond doubt, much remains to be done with regard to reconciliation with the Alevi community in Turkey, such as outstep-ping the religious-political agenda relying on Sunni Islamisation, given that it is only in the service of the visibility and representation of Sunni Muslims. "The government still does not accept Alevism as a legitimate belief," said Turgut Oker, the head of the European Alevi Federation, "Erdoğan is completely trying to make Turkey more Sunni."[52] In a sim-ilar vein, my respondents expressed various feelings of collective disen-franchisement and Islamist encroachment, as a result of which, their hopes for a better life in Turkey simply continue to ebb away under the nuances of the Sunnification discourse of the AKP.

Bibliography

Arkilic, Ayca, and Ayse Ezgi Gurcan. "The Political Participation of Alevis: A Comparative Analysis of the Turkish Alevi Opening and the German Islam Conference." *Nationalities Papers* 49, no. 5 (September 2021): 949–966, https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2020.49.

Ayata, Ayşe. "The Emergence of Identity Politics in Turkey." *New Perspectives on Turkey* 17 (1997): 59–73. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0896634600002752.

Ayata, Bilgin, and Serra Hakyemez. "The Akp's Engagement with Turkey's Past Crimes: An Analysis of Pm Erdoğan's 'Dersim Apology'." *Dialectical anthropology* 37, no. 1 (March 2013): 131–143. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-013-9304-3.

Borovali, Murat, and Cemil Boyraz. "The Alevi Workshops: An Opening without an Outcome?" *Turkish Studies* 16, no. 2 (2015): 145–160. https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2015.1043279.

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*. London: Sage, 2013.

---

[51]   Yilmaz and Barry, "The AKP's De-Securitization and Re-Securitization."
[52]   Patrick Kingsley, "Turkey's Alevis, a Muslim Minority, Fear a Policy of Denying Their Existence," *The New York Times*, July 22, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/22/world/europe/alevi-minority-turkey-recep-tayyip-erdogan.html.

Cusenza, Cristina. "Localist Cosmopolitanism: Alevism as a Rooted, Universal Discourse." *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* IX, no. 3 (2017): 295–343. https://www.anthro.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/anthro/documents/media/jas09_3_2017_295_343.pdf.

Dressler, Markus. "Religio-Secular Metamorphoses: The Re-Making of Turkish Alevism." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 2 (2008): 280–311. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25484003.

Erman, Tahire, and Emrah Göker. "Alevi Politics in Contemporary Turkey." *Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 4 (2000): 99–118. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4284116.

Erman, Tahire. "Becoming 'Urban' or Remaining 'Rural': The Views of Turkish Rural-to-Urban Migrants on the 'Integration' Question." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30, no. 4 (1998): 541–561. http://www.jstor.org/stable/164340.

Grossberg, Lawrence. »Identity and cultural studies: Is that all there is?« In *Questions of cultural identity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, 87–107. Sage Publications, Inc., 1996.

Hall, Stuart, and Paul Du Gay. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Sage Publications. London: Sage, 1996.

Hanoglu, Hayal. "Alevis under the Shadow of the Turkish Islamic Ethos." *Kürd Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 2020: 138–154, https://kurdarastirmalari.com/uploads/3_dosya/hayal_hanioglu1.pdf.

Joseph, Jonathan. "The Limits of Governmentality: Social Theory and the International." *European Journal of International Relations* 16, no. 2 (2010): 223–246. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066109346886.

Karakas, Cemal. Turkey: Islam and Laicism between the Interests of State, Politics, and Society. PRIF Reports No. 78. Frankfurt: Peace Research Institute, 2007. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/71725021.pdf.

Karakaya-Stump, Ayfer, and Emrah Yildiz. "Alevizing Gezi." *Jadaliyya* (March 26, 2014). https://everywheretaksim.net/jadaliyya-alevizing-gezi-ayfer-karakaya-stump.

Karakaya-Stump, Ayfer. "The AKP, Sectarianism, and the Alevis' Struggle for Equal Rights in Turkey." *National Identities* 20, no. 1 (2018): 53–67. https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2016.1244935.

Kaya, Ayhan. "AKP's Alevi Initiative." In *Europeanization and Tolerance in Turkey: The Myth of Toleration*, 132-156. Identities and Modernities in Europe. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137318190_5.

Kingsley, Patrick. "Turkey's Alevis, a Muslim Minority, Fear a Policy of Denying Their Existence." *The New York Times*, July 22, 2017. https://www.nytimes.

com/2017/07/22/world/europe/alevi-minority-turkey-recep-tayyip-erdogan.html.

Köse, Talha. "The AKP and the 'Alevi Opening': Understanding the Dynamics of the Rapprochement." *Insight Turkey* 12, no. 2 (2010): 143–164. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26331449.

"Mafia Boss Peker Warns against a Possible Attack on Alevis." English Bianet. Accessed June 3, 2021. https://bianet.org/english/society/244964-mafia-boss-peker-warns-against-a-possible-attack-on-alevis.

Öktem, Kerem. "Being Muslim at the Margins: Alevis and the AKP." *Middle East Report*, no. 246 (2008): 5–7. https://doi.org/10.2307/25164829.

Orhan, Gözde. "Religious Freedom Governance or Institutionalization of a Heterodox Religion? Turkey's Urban Policies with Respect to Alevi Population." *Peace Human Rights Governance* 3, no. 2 (2019): 193–214. https://doi.org/10.14658/pupj-phrg-2019-2-2.

Osterlund, Paul Benjamin. "Turkey's Alevis 'under the Shadow of Military Tanks'." *Alyazeera*, May 1, 2015. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/5/1/turkeys-alevis-under-the-shadow-of-military-tanks.

Paul, Amanda, and Demir Murat Seyrek. "Freedom of Religion in Turkey – The Alevi Issue." European Policy Centre (EPC) Commentary, January 24, 2014. https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/Freedom-of-religion-in-Turkey~1c965c.

Sian, Katy. "Being Black in a White World: Understanding Racism in British Universities," in *Papeles del Centro de Estudios sobre la Identidad Colectiva*, 2, no. 176 (2017): 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1387/pceic.17625.

Soner, Bayram Ali, and Şule Toktaş. "Alevis and Alevism in the Changing Context of Turkish Politics: The Justice and Development Party's Alevi Opening." *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 3 (2011): 419–434. https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2011.604214.

Taş, Hakkı. "Can the Alevis Speak? The Politics of Representation in Early Writings on Alevism." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 26, no. 3 (2015): 325–338. https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2015.1045177.

Tekdemir, Omer. "Constructing a Social Space for Alevi Political Identity: Religion, Antagonism and Collective Passion." *National Identities* 20, no. 1 (2018): 31–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2016.1247259.

Tol, Ulaş. "Urban Alevism and the Young Alevis' Search for Identity." In *Istanbul Youth Mapping Series*, edited by Greg Bennetts, 14–36. Istanbul: PODEM and the Berghof Foundation, 2017. http://podem.org.tr/en/researches/urban-alevism-and-the-young-alevis-search-for-identity/.

Turkey from the Inside. "Divriği." Accessed June 9, 2021. http://www.turkey-fromtheinside.com/who-was-who-in-turkey/a/42-places-to-go/279-dvr.html.

UK Government, Home Office. »Country Policy and Information Note Turkey: Alevis, Version 2.0.« Accessed June 25, 2021. https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1008326/download.

Uysal, Gonenc. "The Failed Coup in Turkey: Prolonged Conflict in the State Apparatus." E-International Relations (September 21, 2016). https://www.e-ir.info/2016/09/21/the-failed-coup-in-turkey-prolonged-conflict-in-the-state-apparatus/.

Yilmaz, Ihsan, and Galib Bashirov. "The AKP after 15 Years: Emergence of Erdoganism in Turkey." *Third World Quarterly* 39, no. 9 (2018): 1812–1830. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1447371.

Yilmaz, Ihsan, and James Barry. "The Akp's De-Securitization and Re-Securitization of a Minority Community: The Alevi Opening and Closing." *Turkish Studies* 21, no. 2 (2020): 231–253. https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2019.1601564.

Zirh, Besim Can. "Euro-Aievis: From Gastarbeiter to Transnational Community." In *The Making of World Society*, edited by Remus Gabriel Anghel, Eva Gerharz, Gilberto Rescher, and Monika Salzbrunn, 103–132. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015. https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839408353-004.

STRUGGLES AND DILEMMAS OF UYGHUR IMMIGRANTS IN TURKEY

Mettursun Beydulla

Introduction

The Ottoman Empire had a tradition of accepting refugees from various parts of the world. Asylum was given primarily to Muslims, but Jews and Christians were also welcome. This tradition continued into the Turkish Republican period, although considerations of ethnicity and language were substituted for religion. Over the last nine decades, Turkey has given refuge mostly to Turkic-speaking Muslims (with the exception of Syrian refugees, Bosnian and Albanian refugees from the Balkans), especially those facing persecution in their homelands. Large numbers of refugees from such disparate regions as the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Soviet Union Central Asian Republics, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China (East Turkistan), and Afghanistan have settled in Turkey. A smaller number have been accommodated from other regions as well. Aside from this tradition, concern for what Turks call "Outside Turks" (*Dış Türkler*) has long been an important feature of right-wing nationalist rhetoric. It can be argued that in the very formulation of "Outside Turks," which began to be popularized in the 1950s, Turkey can be seen as the natural protector of the "Outside Turks" interests. Both the tradition of accepting Turkic refugees and the big brotherly interest in the welfare of "Outside Turks," sometimes also termed "Captive Turks," have been prominent in conservative circles.

Already in the late 19th century, Turkey served as a model for East Turkistan nationalism. Uyghurs have long regarded Turkey as a model and a source of moral support and ideological inspiration. Turkey, a supporter of Uyghur aspirations in Xinjiang (East Turkistan), has also historically been a major destination for Uyghurs fleeing Chinese rule. During the great Turkic-Muslim rebellion (1864–1876) in Xinjiang against the Manchu-Qing Occupation, led by the Koqandi adventurer and opportunist Yaqub Beg, the Ottoman Sultan in Istanbul not only provided Beg's prospective state in Kashgar with weapons and military advisers, but also granted him the title of emir.[1] In the 20th century, Turkey became a haven for Uyghur nationalists fleeing Xinjiang after it had been taken over by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1949. Turkey was the most influential locus in the Uyghur diaspora in the twentieth century. Since the 1950s, Turkey has provided Uyghur activists a primary haven to help shape an East Turkistan independence movement.[2] The second largest presence in the diaspora resides in Turkey (about one million Uyghurs live mostly in Turkic republics in Central Asia), where Uyghurs claim ancestral links to the Turks. Moreover, Turkey's ancestral, historic, linguistic, and cultural ties made it the most attractive destination for Uyghurs looking to escape Chinese repression.

Viewing Uyghur immigrants as "Outside Turks" (*Dış Türkler*) has been an exceedingly volatile topic. At the core of the controversy is a concern with Turkish national identity and how to deal with all foreigners, not just Uyghur immigrants. A number of policy strategies have been attempted, including integrating the Uyghur population into mainstream Turkish society, and restricted citizenship and legal resident status. There are significant bureaucratic rules and unwritten regulations as well as vague and floating policies that individuals must navigate

---

[1]   Mettursun Beydulla, "Sources and Perspectives on Late Nineteenth Century Uyghur History," in *Conference Proceedings of the XVI Turkish Congress of History, September 22–25, 2010. History of Central Asia and Caucasia 2* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu [Turkish Historical Society], 2015), 206.

[2]   Yizhak Shichor, "Limping on Two Legs: Uyghur Diaspora Organizations and the Prospects for Eastern Turkestan Independence," *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 6, 48 (2007): 121, https://ca-c.org/article/4216.

in order to become citizens and legal residents of Turkey. Integration itself is an elusive, though contradictory, concept. For most Turks, integration has meant acculturating Uyghurs into Turkish society without any attention paid to pluralism or multiculturalism. The purpose of this essay is to raise and discuss several important issues that will contextualize the current Turkish view of integrating the Uyghur community as well as the Uyghur struggles and dilemmas. I will also describe and discuss pro-Uyghur and anti-Chinese mobilization in Turkey and the Chinese reaction and the attention they pay to this issue. This attention has affected Uyghurs in Turkey and the relationship between Turkey and China. Finally, I will discuss the new world order: Turkey's relations with China and its reflection on the Uyghurs and the Uyghur cause at home and in the diaspora.

I carried out a research project from 2013 to 2016, involving interviews with 200 Uyghur immigrants (including refugees), asking about identity, struggles and dilemmas and those interviews are the basis for this paper. The objective of this article is to illuminate the historic and ethnographic context of the exodus of Uyghurs from China to Turkey from the 1950s to the present, as well as their subsequent immigration to Europe and the United States. I intend to do this primarily by reporting the content of interviews with participants and eyewitnesses to those events who are currently living in Turkey. I also include updated information about Uyghur refugees and immigrants from around the world. Qualitative analysis reveals the differing historical and contemporary pathways of Uyghur migration to Turkey. This analytical perspective shows the nature of Uyghur migration to Turkey as it interfaces with the Turkish national project and how these perspectives have been shaped by recent periods of neoliberalism, authoritarianism and globalization.

Uyghur migration to Turkey and the struggle to survive

The Chinese Army entered Xinjiang in September 1949 after the victory of the Communist Party in the Chinese Civil War (1945–1949). Uyghur and other Turkic people's quest for independence was suppressed inside China; it was revived abroad after a number of Uyghur lea-

ders including Isa Yusup Alptekin and Mehmet Emint Bugra managed to escape, finally settling in Turkey. Uyghur migration has generally been in phases. In the first, Uyghurs fled China to neighboring countries, mainly to India (Kashmir), Pakistan, and Afghanistan, but also to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. In March 1952, Turkey, supported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), offered sanctuary to 2000 Eastern Turkistan refugees who had fled to India and Pakistan following the communist occupation. In 1953 Turkey accepted an additional 900 refugees. But in the 1950s Uyghurs were only offered a substitute, either temporary or permanent, for their occupied homeland. This Turkish policy persists to this very day. In 1965, Turkey accepted 235 immigrants from Yarkand, one third of a group of Uyghur refugees who had fled to Afghanistan in 1961. Their absorption had been made possible by a special program financed by UNHCR, at the request of the Turkish government. Like their predecessors, they were given citizenship and provided with housing. Uyghurs have continued to arrive in Turkey since the late 1960s, mostly on an individual basis.

In Xinjiang under Deng Xiaoping, the Uyghurs benefitted from a certain liberalization on the cultural and economic levels, with the re-opening of mosques and Uyghur-speaking schools.[3] After the 1980s, many Uyghur left China to study abroad or to go on pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca, never to return. In August 1982, Turkey accepted another group of several thousand refugees from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Many of them had escaped by crossing the border, now more open and less guarded. Then, with the fall of the Soviet Union, and bolstered by the independence of the neighboring Central Asian states, the dream of an independent Uyghur state came to life. However, this led to new political tensions. These tensions intensified in the 2000s in the international context of the "war on terror," which allowed Beijing to play on the so-called threat of Islamist Uyghur terrorism.[4]

Meanwhile, in Turkey, Isa Yusuf Alptekin, leader of the Uyghur diaspora throughout the Cold War, focused on a two-track approach to

---

[3]   Collin Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities and Globalization* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 126.
[4]   Dru Gladney, *Dislocating China: Reflections on Muslims, Minorities, and Other Subaltern Subjects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 365.

raise the profile of the Uyghur cause. First, he actively sought to culti-
vate relationships with Turkish political and military leaders with pan-
-Turkist leanings, most notably Suleyman Demirel and Turgut Ozal.
Internationally, Alptekin attempted to enlist support for Uyghur na-
tionalist claims through a broad appeal to anti-communist sentiments
in the Muslim world, the non-aligned developing world, and Taiwan.
In raising awareness for the Uyghur cause, he paid visits to many or-
ganizations such as the Muslim World League and the Arab League,
as well as attending the Bandung Conference in 1955, the Afro-Asian
Conference in 1965 and the World Congress of Islam in 1964.[5] One
of the first Uyghur organizations in Turkey was the East Turkistan Re-
fugee Committee (Doğu Türkistan Göçmenler Derneği Yayını), whose
journal was launched in the early 1950s. Later, the National Center
for the Liberation of East Turkistan was set up to promote culture and
participate in various political demonstrations, and to distribute nati-
onalist propaganda. In 1976, the Eastern Turkistan Foundation (Doğu
Türkistan Vakfı) was formed, officially committed to the preservation
of Uyghur cultural and social identity in China (and elsewhere), rather
than to the promotion of political independence.

The ideological divisions dominating Turkish political life throug-
hout the 1970s also affected these associations, which became "poli-
ticized" due to internal factions. Following the 1980 military coup in
Turkey, all associations, except for those in Uyghur, were closed. This
continued until the mid-1980s and was followed by a more politically
active period in political terms, when Uyghur immigrants gradually
became the Uyghur diaspora. *Doğu Türkistan'in Sesi* (Voice of East Tur-
kistan), Alptekin established a quarterly journal of cultural studies in
1984 in Turkish, English, and Uyghur. In 1992, the Eastern Turkestan
World National Congress was established in Istanbul, the first transna-
tional umbrella organization representing Uyghurs.

---

5 Jacob Landau, *Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation* (Bloomington: Indiana Uni-
versity Press, 1995), 118, 150; Yizhak Shichor, "Virtual Transnationalism: Uyghur Commu-
nities in Europe and the Quest for Eastern Turkestan Independence," In *Muslim Networks
and Transnational Communities in and across Europe*, ed. Stefano Allievi and Jørgen S. Nielsen
(Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 290.

Since 2010, Uyghurs have established many community organizations to facilitate their adaptation to life in Turkey, geared towards solving social and economic problems, easing the difficulties of transition and also aiming to alleviate the feeling of longing for their place of origin by providing a social and cultural life and network. Today, the Uyghurs have a large number of associations and foundations ranging from small solidarity associations concentrated in the big cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Kayseri, to more advanced organizations that can be called unions or coalitions. Based on unofficial information, Turkey now has about 180 Uyghur associations and organizations. Some work closely together; most work independently. Their purposes are eclectic and often with the sole idea of sustaining themselves, ensuring solidarity within their own immigrant groups, and preserving their identities through cultural activities. Some organizations such as the East Turkistan Education and Solidarity Association (Doğu Türkistan Maarif ve Dayanışma Derneği) are officially committed to the preservation of Uyghur culture and social identity, both in China and the diaspora, and openly promote political independence from China. Leaders are active in raising awareness for the Uyghur cause and have paid visits to many organizations both in Turkey and abroad. They have also visited high ranking Turkish officials including president Recep Tayip Erdogan and presidents of other political parties in Turkey. Doerschler[6] contends that immigrants motivated principally by economic concerns are likely to be "largely focused on material and status gains in the host country, leaving many quite detached from and disinterested in politics." By contrast, groups that were expelled or otherwise left reluctantly may pine for the day when they can end their "exile" by returning home. With stronger ties to their society of origin, they might well see themselves as duty bound to advance the interests of their homeland in a more political way in their temporary abode. They are attentive to events in their place of origin that "continue to have a bearing on the lives of friends, family, and other related minority or citizen groups".[7]

---

[6]   Peter Doerschler, "Push-Pull Factors and Immigrant Political Integration in Germany," *Social Science Quarterly* 87, no. 5 (December 2006): 1101, https://www.jstor.org/stable/42956597.
[7]   Doerschler, "Push-Pull Factors," 1102.

Starting in the1980s, and especially since 2009, there has been a new wave of immigrants who came to visit relatives, engage in trade, and study, many of them fleeing from Chinese persecution. The Uyghur ethnic networks in Turkey plays a significant role. They are characterized by a well-functioning extended family, an ethnic neighborhood, community-based groups, and self-help organizations. Initially, most Uyghur migrants who had arrived collectively tended to settle together, creating special quarters, Zeytinburnu, Sefaköy, Aksaray, Selim Paşa in Istanbul or Yasevi in Kayseri. The number of fundamentalists completely rejecting integration into Turkish society is very low. Most Uyghurs want economic integration and access to employment, health care, schooling and other social services; however, the desire for cultural and social integration is the least of their concerns. Hundreds of Uyghurs who seek asylum temporarily are settled across Turkey by the UNHCR. In addition to these, thousands of Uyghur refugees and immigrants are living in limbo in precarious situations.[8] Of the total population of Uyghurs living in Turkey, estimated at 50,000, at least 10,000 are refugees, plus 10,000 Kazakhs and Kyrgyz immigrants from Xinjiang living in Turkey. A number of Turkish politicians along with Turkish and Uygur scholars have speculated that the Uyghur population living in Turkey is about 320,000.[9] However, it should be remembered that although not numerically strong, in terms of political leverage for Turkey, "the Uyghurs of China" can be used as a bargaining chip between Turkey and China.

In the last couple of years, about 10,000 Uyghurs have applied for Turkish citizenship, but most of their applications have not been processed. Just before every election and when Uyghur activists visit them, high-ranking politicians make promises to solve issues of residency and citizenship, but invariably they do not keep their promises. Occasi-

---

[8] Mettursun Beydulla, "Experiences of Uyghur Migration to Turkey and the United States: Issues of Religion, Law, Society, Residence, and Citizenship," in *Migration and Islamic Ethics: Issues of Residence, Naturalization and Citizenship*, ed. Ray Jureidini and Said Fares Hassan (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020), 184, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004417342_011.

[9] Areeb Ullah, "Turkey to Block Anti-China Media to Dismay of Uighur Activists," *Middle East Eye (MME),* August 4, 2017, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-block-anti-china-media-dismay-uighur-activists.

onally, the Turkish government has organized a big feast and invited thousands of Uyghurs and high-ranking Turkish politicians to address Uyghur and Xinjiang problems including human rights violations. All of these events are delivered live to the Turkish people and the world. Some Uyghurs believe these kinds of events help the Uyghur cause, but a number of activists and intellectuals have stressed that this type of event plays to targeted audiences. They are used to gain support from the nationalist and religious forces in Turkey, toying with the Uyghur.

Currently, many Uyghurs do not have resident permits or even valid passports. Many Uyghurs live in Turkey "illegally" and their situation is uncertain and precarious. Hundreds of Uyghurs are living in detention houses or deportation centers (*Geri Gönderme Merkezi*) under the guise of being terrorist suspects. Uyghurs in Turkey believe they are innocent. A prominent Uyghur activist and community leader stressed it this way:

I don't understand this and I have a hard time explaining this to my fellow Uyghur brothers. First, I visited Abdulkadir Yapchan/Yapçan in the deportation center and he is a well-respected religious scholar, activist and community leader. (He has been in the deportation center since 2016).[10] Then I visited Amine Vahit in the deportation center in Selim Pasha Istanbul. I talked to her lawyer Mr. Zeynep and he told me that Amine is clean and innocent. Someone called the police and complained about her. So, she was arrested and put

---

[10] Abdulkadir Yapçan, who has been granted political asylum by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and has been living in Istanbul for 18 years. Yapchan escaped from China in 1998 reportedly the most wanted man in China, was accused of being a senior leader of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). Due to the Chinese government's lobbying and pressure, Turkey detained him in 2002 and 2008 but released him (Radio Free Asia, "Exiled Leader Claims China Is behind Turkey's Decision to Detain a Uyghur," last modified October 10, 2016, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/exiled-leader-claims-china-10102016155133.html). Turkey's Constitutional Court ruled on May 2, 2019 and ordered him freed from the deportation center. However, the next day the Istanbul Çağlayan 29th High Criminal Court issued a judgment in his renewed extradition case, but he was barred from leaving his neighborhood in the Küçükçekmece district of Istanbul (Abudulla Bozkurt, "Abdulkadir Yapuquan, China's Most Wanted Uighur, Freed in Turkey," *Nordic Monitor*, May 26, 2019, https://www.nordicmonitor.com/2019/05/abdulkadir-yapuquan-uighur-man-wanted-in-china-over-terror-charges-freed-in-turkey). On April 8, 2021, Istanbul Çağlayan Justice Palace dismissed his case, citing a lack of credible evidence (Radio Free Asia, "Turkish Court Rejects China's Request to Extradite Uyghur Religious Teacher," April 9, 2021, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/turkey-dismiss-04092021192932.html).

in a deportation center. She has two fatherless children. It is very sad. Do you think Allah can forgive us? We are persecuted and oppressed in China. But similar things are happening here in Turkey. It is because of Turkish bureaucracy and it is the fault of Turkish officials. Turkey is responsible for this in this world and in the next world. We will seek our rights and justice now and in the next world, in the name of Allah.[11]

The Turkish immigration experience has created two groups of Uyghurs, called *yerlik* (local) or *kona* (old) who were descendants of those migrating at earlier times (in the 1950s), and *yengi kelgenler* (newcomers), those who have immigrated since 1980. At first the cultural differences between these groups were significant. The *yerlik* were more Turkicized, more religious and looked down upon by the newcomers because of their ignorance of religion. The second and third generation, young Uyghurs who were born in Turkey and are better educated than earlier generations, perceive and experience more acutely the discrimination and the status of being outsiders. The second and third generations of Uyghurs in Turkey assimilated so rapidly that in fact, community activists worried about the dangers to Uyghur continuity posed by intermarriages, low levels of connection to the (East Turkistan) homeland, the loss of the Uyghur language, and other indicators of declining distinctiveness. Some communities have been dissolved as the younger generations, some of whom had already been Turkicized and lost their Uyghur cultural and linguistic identity, tend to leave their traditional encapsulated compounds seeking accommodation and employment. Consciousness of Uyghur ethnic identity is typically highest at the time of arrival and erodes over time and across generations. Newly arrived Uyghur are thus more likely to be tied to East Turkistan and, to the extent that they are capable of collective political action in the host society, to act on its behalf in the political realm. Time in Turkish society may also soften the sense of marginal status felt by Uyghur members as a whole. On arrival, a group's folkways, traditions, social practices, cuisine, language, and public behavior may mark them as outsiders.

---

[11] Abdusalam Karataş, "Gundem Icinden: Doğu Türkistan (Agenda: East Turkistan)," *TV5*, July 23, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/100008284862701/videos/2228935120725962/UzpfSTEwMDAwODI4NDg2MjcwMToyMjI4OTcoMDc3Mzg4NzMz.

Nonetheless, Alba and Nee[12] have documented the gradual erosion of ethnic consciousness over time in a manner consistent with the formulations of the concept and resistance to nativist elements. Religion, though less-commonly cited as a factor in receptivity, is undoubtedly part of the package.

For similar economic and professional reasons, since the 1960s many of Turkey's Uyghurs began immigrating to third countries such as Canada, Holland, and Scandinavian countries, but primarily to Germany. Paradoxically, it has been more difficult for them to assimilate and easier to maintain their identity in these countries compared to Turkey. Under these circumstances Germany, and later the United States, has become the central outpost and the most important base for promoting the cause of East Turkistan independence and Uyghur nationalism.

The Uyghurs in Turkey consider themselves to be Uyghur Turks, a Muslim part of the Umma, but they still try to retain their Uyghur culture. They generally have positive feelings towards Turkey, even those who have been subjected to unfair treatment, being ignored, ridiculed or treated differently. Most maintain ties with relatives in East Turkistan and even in the absence of such ties, they maintain an interest in Uyghur news, customs and a desire to revisit their homeland. They have formed various cultural and religious associations through which they have contact with other immigrants and refugees from East Turkistan and maintain an identification with the Uyghur community. Unfortunately, most of the Uyghur diaspora in Turkey have not been able to contact their families in East Turkistan since December 2016. E-mail, telephone and internet have been shut down by the authorities. Authorities have severely restricted Uyghurs leaving since the summer of 2017, in what Uyghurs believe is an attempt to keep the lid on stories that might be told about the ongoing repression inside Xinjiang. The Chinese government is conducting a mass, systematic campaign of human rights violations against Uyghurs and other Muslims in Xinjiang.[13] Dr. Abudreşit Celil Karluk

---

[12]   Richard Alba and Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[13]   HRW, "Eradicating Ideological Viruses China's Campaign of Repression against Xinjiang's Muslims," *Human Rights Watch*, September 2018, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/china0918_web.pdf.

(Professor at Yildirim Beyazit University, Ankara, Turkey) highlighted these issues in a press conference:

China has not only violated human rights in East Turkistan, China has violated human rights every place it can reach. Look at our room now, where are the media? Why is this room not full? These things clearly prove China's human rights violations of people here, in Turkey. China is using its lobby to violate Uyghurs' rights all over the world. East Turkistan has double the honor of Turkey as both Muslim and Turkish. Uyghurs are hopeless and powerless. My fellow Uyghur brothers in East Turkistan said, "Our ancestors fought against the invaders in the Battle of Gallipoli (Çanakkale Savaşı) and they were martyred there. We gave support and help to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. Where is Turkey now? Why is Turkey so silent during our difficult and dark time? Where is the fidelity of the Turkish people?" My fellow Uyghur brothers in Turkey asked me why if, "We have skills and are capable of working, why not give us a work permit? Why doesn't the Turkish government give us the same benefits they gave to Syrian refugees? Why don't they give us the same benefits they gave to Syrian students? Thousands of Uyghur students who came from East Turkistan and fled from Egypt are studying in Turkey now. Most of them don't have a scholarship and most Uyghur students can't communicate with their families, since communication is banned by the Chinese government. They can't receive any financial support from their parents. So, they aren't able to pay 5,000 TL– 30,000 TL tuition. In the end they give up school and a lot of them work for Turkish tourism companies as tour guides and interpreters for Chinese tourists in Turkey. We know thousands of Uyghurs whose residency permits and other problems are not solved in Turkey. When the dead body of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi washed up on the beach in Turkey, the whole world, including Turkey, was shocked and raised their voices. The same things are happening in East Turkistan, but Turkey and the rest of the world are silent. Why? Turkish musicians are performing Uyghur music and songs and making money. Hundreds of Turkish scholars are studying and teaching Uyghur language, literature, culture and history in Turkey. Where are these people? Why didn't these folks give voice to hundreds of Uyghur artists and scholars in jail? All of this makes us think. Obviously, we see the fear of China's huge impact on our Turkish and Muslim brothers and other humanity. I want to say one more thing. It would be very different and we would receive more attention and more support, if we held a conference about animal rights and dogs were killed in the street.[14]

---

[14]   Türk Ocakları, "Dogu Turkistan'daki Insan Haklari Ihlalleri Hakkinda Basin Açiklaması [Press Conference on Human Rights Violation in East Turkistan]," *Turk Ocaklar*, accessed Octo-

In August 2018, a United Nations panel reported that China had turned Xinjiang into "a massive internment camp." United Nations human rights experts expressed alarm over what they said were many credible reports that China had detained a million or more ethnic Uyghurs in the western region of Xinjiang and forced as many as two million to submit to re-education and indoctrination. Gay McDougall, a member of the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination said that "something resembling a massive internment camp, shrouded in secrecy, a sort of no-rights zone,"[15] had been created, and Uyghur human rights organizations reported that three to five million Uyghur, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz (mostly Uyghurs) were locked in the concentration camps. The "People's War on Terror" is directly linked to president Xi Jinping's broader moves to establish his personal authority, and to demonstrate absolute control over this key strategic region in order to ensure the success of the flagship BRI, of which Xinjiang is an important part. Current policies seek to quarantine Uyghurs from any foreign contact by targeting individuals who have promoted Uyghur language or culture, as well as people who resist, or are insufficiently enthusiastic about "security" and the "war on terror" campaign.[16] Now the United States, Canada, the Netherlands and UK parliaments and governments recognize that what happened to Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim people in Xinjiang is genocide. More than 50 recognized independent researchers into international law, Chinese ethnic genocide policy and Uyghur studies have conducted research and released their report. This report stated that Chinese authorities' treatment of Uyghurs meets every criteria of genocide under the United Nations 1948 Genocide Convention. This report concluded that China bears state responsibility for an ongoing genocide against the Uyghurs, in breach of the Genocide Convention. It included mass internment, mass birth-prevention strate-

---

ber 28, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=turk%20ocaklari%20dogu%20turkistan.

[15] Nick Cumming-Bruce, "U.N. Panel Confronts China over Reports that It Holds a Million Uighurs in Camps," *New York Times*, August 10, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/10/world/asia/china-xinjiang-un-uighurs.html.

[16] Rachel Harris, "Securitization and Mass Detentions in Xinjiang: How Uyghurs Became Quarantined from the Outside World," *Quartz*, September 5, 2018, https://qz.com/1377394/securitization-and-mass-detentions-in-xinjiang-how-uyghurs-became-quarantined-from-the-outside-world.

gy, forced sterilization, forcible transfer of Uyghur children to state-run facilities, and eradication of Uyghur identity, community, and domestic life, selective targeting of intellectuals and community leaders.[17]

The educational dilemma among the Uyghur in Turkey

Compared to Turkish youth, many young Uyghurs in Turkey are more likely to grow up marginalized in an economically deprived environment with restricted educational opportunities. For Uyghurs, including those from families who have been in Turkey for three generations, the most important issue is employment; they have a hard time competing with Turks. Above and beyond the discrimination to which they are subjected there is the accumulation of educational deprivation that begins with linguistic deficiencies. First-generation Uyghurs have a limited command of the Turkish language. These linguistic challenges have been identified as a major factor for the first generations, which is then reinforced by the Turkish school system and regulations that do not adapt to the needs of Uyghur children. Though Uyghurs are the single largest minority group in some counties such as Zeytinburnu and Selim Paşa in Istanbul and constitute the biggest minority of the population in some school districts, there are currently no teachers who can speak the Uyghur language. There are no initiatives to establish a bilingual educational system or language programs for Uyghur students and their parents.

Standard Turkish is not typically spoken in Uyghur communities in Turkey, especially while participating in social and cultural activities and at home. Many Uyghurs who are legal residents in Turkey (even naturalized citizens) will "fetch" a bride from inside their Uyghur community, Central Asia or from East Turkistan. (This was the case until recently; now there is an overseas travel ban from East Turkistan instituted by the Chinese government). These spouses often remain anchored at home for a number of years. This means they

---

[17]   Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, *The Uyghur Genocide: An Examination of China's Breaches of the 1948 Genocide Convention, March 2021*, https://newlinesinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/Chinas-Breaches-of-the-GC3.pdf, 3–5.

might spend most of their time at home, watching Uyghur DVDs, reading Uyghur novels and studying the Quran. Except for watching Turkish television programs, they will have virtually no exposure to Turks, Turkish society or their language. Given the recession in Turkey, such a process is likely to continue for a number of years when women have children. The children in turn will spend their formative years consuming Uyghur language and culture. To a large extent it is a vicious cycle.

Lacking economic independence, young Uyghurs are forced into a dependent relationship with their families and the larger Uyghur community that serves as their support system. Based on my study, the family ranked highest in the values held by Uyghurs, followed by the desire for true friendship, and a satisfying occupation. Most Uyghur first-graders do not master standard Turkish because they are raised in settings where mostly Uyghur is spoken. Most parents cannot participate in parent-teacher conferences or school meetings because their command of Turkish is limited. It is rare that such linguistic barriers can be surmounted in schools, and it is therefore a significant factor in the inability of Uyghur students to acquire knowledge in other subjects in school. In an interview, my informant Mr. Karahan touched on this important issue:

In elementary school, in the first and second grades, my daughter and son were not able to acquire knowledge in Turkish and other subjects at school. Their teacher and director of the school asked to meet me to discuss my children's situation. I was not aware of this until I met them. They told me that my children didn't talk and were very silent in the classroom. They got very low scores in all subjects. They thought my children might have mental and psychological problems. They recommended that I see a psychiatrist they knew. My wife and I were very worried. So, I took my children to that psychiatrist and he told us to speak Turkish at home all of the time and take time to help them with their homework at home. I agreed with him and we did what he said. My children are gradually doing better and their scores are improving at school. We did not hear any more complaints from the teacher and the school director. Now we are facing another serious problem: my children do not speak Uyghur at all at home. We speak Uyghur to them, and they reply in Turkish. They are in middle school now and they feel comfortable speaking Turkish and behave more like Turks, not Uyghurs.

I am worried and I feel awkward about this situation. I hope they will go back to being normal one day.

The Turkish educational establishment does not focus on the language problem of the Uyghur community. A number of my informants complained that their Turkish counterparts have more advantages in schooling and in job prospects in Turkey because of their connections (torpil) and untouchable social network, not just because of qualifications. A number of Uyghurs I interviewed complained about the poor quality of education in Turkey, especially the public schools and they said they wished to send their children to Europe or North America, if they would be able.

The social distance between Uyghur immigrants and the Turkish population has become larger, with the exception of the relatively small group of upper-middle class Uyghur immigrants, and a small cadre of technical and cultural intelligentsia, religious scholars and traders, who by virtue of their class position have closer contact with their Turkish counterparts. According to my study, the upscale Uyghur groups feel more at home with their Turkish counterparts than with the poor and marginalized members of the Uyghur community. So, we can see there is an emerging class-based rift within the Uyghur community in Turkey.

Turkish policy toward Uyghurs

The Turkish government has traditionally denied the diverse ethnic character of Turkey's population, which is the popular view of ethnicity in Turkey. People recognize the different heritage of their neighbors, identifying them as Circassians, Tatar, Kurdish or Laz with little tension arising. Uyghurs in Turkey who are the descendants of refugees from Xinjiang in the 1960s, are largely assimilated and consider themselves Turks rather than Uyghur or East Turkistanis. According to some of my informants, Turkish people generally called them "immigrants" (göçmen), even "Japanese" (Japon) or Chinese (Çinli) because of their different facial features, in particular their "almond eyes" (çekik göz). Some of my informants stressed that they felt extremely unhappy and even insulted by these descriptions and attitudes. They also mentioned

that the Turkish attitude and behavior have radically changed since the 1990s. These Uyghurs explained this change occurred because of the independence of the Central Asian republics, Turkey's subsequent policy change toward "Outside Turks," and public knowledge and awareness about Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples of Central Asia. For example, media such as TV and newspapers cover more news about "Outside Turks"; history and literature course materials have included more about "Outside Turks." The Turkish government awarded scholarships and encouraged "Outside Turk" students to study in Turkey. Thousands of students have come to Turkey from Central Asian Turkic republics and about one hundred from East Turkistan have come to study in Turkey every year since 1990. This number increased in the last couple of years and now thousands of Uyghur students from Xinjiang are studying in Turkey, although most don't have a government scholarship.

Government policy throughout the life of the Republic has aimed at the homogenization of the population of Anatolia based on Turkish cultural and linguistic norms. For Kemalists, this approach was crucial to the goal of the survival and long-term viability of the nation-state. In order to achieve this goal, Mustafa Kemal and the military/political elite equipped the state with a superior power over the civil society. Serif Mardin[18] put special emphasis on the statist and centralist character of the Republic in its founding years. Ottoman history demonstrated that external power exploited minority and nationality questions to advance Turkey's expansionist foreign policy goals. To avoid this problem, a new identity had to be created and disparate elements made to cohere.

The descendants of Muslim émigrés from East Turkistan were not exempt from legal pressure and propaganda. There was to be no education or publishing in Turkic dialects such as Uyghur. This had been undertaken so rarely as to be inconsequential. To prosper in society, it was important that an obvious non-Turkish identity be suppressed. More significantly, rural to urban migration and the tendency to inter-marry into the Turkish Sunni majority have played a key part in the assimilation

---

[18]   Serif Mardin, "Center and Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics," in *Political Participation in Turkey: Historical Background and Present Problems*, ed. Engin Akarlı and Gabriel Ben-Dor (Istanbul: Bogaziçi University Publications, 1975), 22.

process. Youths, especially those of the second and third generations, have failed to develop their knowledge of the Turkic or Uyghur languages of their forefathers, long gravitating instead to the prestige language of the state, Istanbul Turkish. Even the involvement of Uyghurs in local politics in Turkey can have the purpose of raising awareness of the Uyghur question and identity locally; for instance, advocating the recognition and use of Uyghur ethnicity, and demanding Uyghur language instruction in Turkish schools (thus far not successful). But crucially, it is also aimed at gaining support for the Uyghur struggle in East Turkistan. Having become Turkish citizens and voters, Uyghurs have started to engage in the political lobbying of Turkish political leaders on the issue of Uyghur rights in East Turkistan. Such forms of lobbying and generating support for the Uyghurs, unfortunately, have not put any pressure on China; it is a case of politicians giving lip service.

Chinese repression across borders: Anti-China mobilization among the Uyghurs in Turkey

Anti-Chinese sentiment among Uyghurs in Turkey has attracted the attention of Chinese authorities for a long time, and this attention has in turn affected and shaped mobilization. Uyghurs in Turkey have worked with "newcomers" or new Uyghurs or Kazaks from Xinjiang to distribute information to the rest of the world about Chinese human rights abuses. During the February 1997 riots in Ghulja, the July 5, 2009 Urumchi riot, and recent implementation of China's "re-education camps," for example, Uyghurs in Turkey have gathered eyewitness accounts of events in Ghulja, Urumchi and across Xinjiang from newcomers in Turkey and distributed these accounts to the world press both through news conferences and social media.

Radio Free Asia Uyghur Services has documented that Chinese agents have offered jobs to native Turks to collect information about Uyghurs in Turkey.[19] A number of my informants indicated that Chinese embassy or trade office staff are dedicated solely to mapping dissi-

---

19   Radio Free Asia, "Uyhgurlar Hakkide Melumat Toplash Uchun Hitay Bezi Turklerge Ish Teklipi Sunghan [Chinese Offer Jobs to Some Turks to Collect Information about Uyghurs in

dents and other Uyghurs including refugees and their activities in Turkey. Threats, often directed at family members still in Xinjiang, are the most common way the Chinese government has used to silence dissidents in Turkey, and a large number of refugees and immigrants still live in fear of Chinese authorities.[20] TRT World has documented that, "The persecuted community who are living in Turkey say Chinese authorities have recruited Uyghurs to watch over whether their behavior is 'suspicious' or opposed to the ruling Communist Party".[21] Therefore, most of the Uyghurs I interviewed asked me to keep their identities confidential, and a number of Uyghurs, including students, university lecturers, tradesmen, and housewives, refused to agree to an interview out of fear. A couple of them asked me to delete the recording after I finished the interview. Uyghurs live with fear and trauma because their families remain stranded in China's growing "re-education camps".[22] China is tearing Uyghur families apart.[23] As a consequence, a number of my interviewees would not socialize with other Uyghurs, especially Uyghur organizations and activists. They said that there was no way of knowing whether or not these people were connected to the Chinese Communist regime. A lot of my informants stated that the Chinese government was documenting demonstrations, identifying those involved in these activities, sending out threats and harassing Uyghurs and their family

————————————

Turkey]," last modified October 6, 2017, https://www.rfa.org/uyghur/xewerler/xelqara-xewer/xitaydin-turuk-yashlirigha-jasusluq-teklipi-10062017222809.html.

[20] Amnesty International, "Nowhere Feels Safe," accessed February 26, 2020, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2020/02/china-uyghurs-abroad-living-in-fear.

[21] TRT World, "Uyghurs in Exile Say China Is Spying on Them Worldwide," accessed June 14, 2018, http://www.etaa.org.au/uyghurs-in-exile-say-china-is-spying-on-them-worldwide.

[22] ABC, "Uighurs Live with Fear, Trauma as Families Remain Stranded in China's Growing 're-education Camps'," ABC's Asia Pacific Newsroom, October 6, 2018, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-24/uighur-community-in-australia-fear-reports-of-crackdown-in-china/9824554.

[23] Ivan Watson and Ben Westcott, "Cultural Genocide: How China Is Tearing Uyghur Families Apart in Xinjiang," *CNN*, November 15, 2018, https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/14/asia/uyghur-china-xinjiang-interview-intl/index.html; Fergus Hunter, "Detained and in Danger: The Tortured Australian Families Who Fear for Their Missing Loved Ones," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 17, 2018, https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/detained-and-in-danger-the-tortured-australian-families-who-fear-for-their-missing-loved-ones-20181115-p50g5q.html.

members still in Xinjiang.[24] The Chinese government used WhatsApp and WeChat to intimidate and surveil Uyghurs in Turkey.[25] These revelations then contribute to the widespread feeling among activists and many Uyghurs that Chinese authorities have eyes and ears everywhere. This, in turn, is a powerful obstacle to Uyghur diaspora mobilization in Turkey and the rest of the world. On September 15, 2018, a prominent Uyghur activist, community leader, president of East Turkestan Culture and Solidarity Association (Doğu Türkistan Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği) and former deputy president of the World Uyghur Congress, Sayit Tumturk, said:

Turkey does not allow us to establish a new independent organization for the campaign for East Turkistan independence because of China. But we have permission from the French authorities. So, we will establish our new organization in France between September 28 and October 1, 2019. Turkey's isolation by the international community and economic crisis has pushed Turkey close to China. China's economic, military and technological power and investments in Turkey are increasing its influence in Turkey; Turkey is also silent on human rights abuse in East Turkistan. Turkey is behaving and acting like a political ally of China. This is encouraging China's policy toward East Turkistan. I have been campaigning for human rights and democracy for East Turkistan for the last 30 years, peacefully and legally. Now our activity has been restricted by the Turkish authorities, especially since February 2018. I am very disappointed. I think and I hope this friendship between Turkey and China is temporary and not forever. The government controls the media and is hiding the real situation from the Turkish people. The Turkish people will not remain silent about the terrifying tragedy in East Turkistan. I have been warned by the Turkish authorities. I am afraid for my security and I am afraid of being arrested by the Turkish authorities. I think nobody can stop me. It is my moral and religious obligation. I will continue my liberty, freedom and independence campaign for East Turkistan with my fellow brothers. I am wil-

---

[24]   Borzou Daragahi, "We Can Reach You Wherever You Are: Uighurs Abroad Feel China's Reach," *The Independent*, November 12, 2018, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/china-uighur-repression-espionage-informants-muslim-terrorism-a8626526.html.
[25]   John Beck, "How China Spies on Uyghurs in Turkey. WhatsApp and WeChat Are Used to Intimidate and Surveil Uyghurs," *Coda Story*, February 13, 2020, https://codastory.com/authoritarian-tech/surveillance/uyghurs-turkey-whatsapp-wechat.

ling to become a refugee in a safe place such as Europe, if it is necessary. I hope for the best, and I am preparing for the worst.[26]

From September 28 to October 1, 2018, 200 delegates from 15 organizations in 20 countries attended the summit in Paris, France. They established the East Turkistan National Council (Doğu Türkistan Milli Meclisi) and the East Turkistan Independent Organization (Doğu Türkistan Bağımsızlık Teşkilatı) in Paris. Seyit Tumturk was elected as the president of the East Turkistan National Council.[27]

Turkey's relations with China and its impact on the Uyghurs

We cannot draw a full picture of the current and future situation and status of Uyghurs in Turkey unless we discuss Turkey's economic, military and trade ties with China. Relations between the Republic of Turkey and the People's Republic of China began on August 4, 1971. This change in position was tied to the change in the U.S. position towards China. President Nixon and his leadership's long-running adverse position toward China began to change in the early 1970s, leading many countries, including Turkey, to establish relations. However, little close cooperation occurred between the two countries in the 1970s and 80s. This situation changed after the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002. From June 24 to 29, 2009 Turkish President Abdullah Gül became the first Turkish president to visit China in 14 years. He called on Uyghurs to play the role of a "friendship bridge" between Turkey and China. The two sides signed $1.5 billion worth of trade deals. This was an important visit, but relations were then locked due to strong public reactions in Turkey against the Urumchi riot and massacre on July 5, 2009. (Hundreds of Uyghurs died and thousands were injured and disappeared, according to independent sources. Eyewitnesses set this number much higher). Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

---

[26]   Huseyin Tejelli, "Sheriqi Turkistan Musteqqilliq Herkiti [East Turkistan Independent Movement: Talk with Mr. Seyit Tumturk]," *Qerindashliq Situdisi*, accessed September 15, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/search/videos/?q=huseyin%20tejelli.

[27]   Ömer Aydin, "'Doğu Türkistan Milli Meclisi' Kuruldu," *Memleket*, September 30, 2018, http://www.memleket.com.tr/dogu-turkistan-milli-meclisi-kuruldu-1512118h.htm.

denounced what he called "savagery" and called on the Chinese government to "give up efforts to assimilate" Uyghurs. He announced to journalists upon his return to Ankara from the Group of Eight summit in Italy that the July 5 riot and massacre in China was genocide. There was no way to interpret this otherwise.[28] He also said in the G8 meeting that Turkey would bring the Uyghur issue to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the UN and AB's agenda. Just after the Urumchi massacre, Turkey gave citizenship to 3000 Uyghurs. It is an open secret that Erdogan supports a Xinjiang secession to become an independent East Turkestan "under Turkey's responsibility." In February 2012, then Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping (the current Chinese president) visited Turkey and reiterated the goal of increasing bilateral trade to $100 billion by 2020.[29]

In 2010, a "strategic partnership" between Turkey and China was forged. The partnership has rapidly deepened through agreements, such as the one signed in 2015 during the G20 summit in Antalya, which subsequently made Turkey part of China's BRI.[30] Turkey's currency, the lira, has lost about 40% of its value against the U.S. dollar and the euro since the start of 2018. The drop has been made worse by a row between Turkey and the United States that led to U.S. economic sanctions against Turkey. Turkey's gross external debt stock stood at $466.67 billion, more than half of its gross domestic product (GDP), 52.9%, at the end of March 2018, the Treasury announced on June 29.[31] China could play an important role in helping Turkey overcome this economic crisis. The Industrial and Commercial Bank of China in August 2018 provided a $3.6 billion loan package to the Turkish energy and

---

[28]   CNN, "Turks Criticize Chinese Treatment of Uyghurs," last modified July 11, 2009, http://https://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/europe/07/11/turkey.china.uyghurs/.
[29]   Today's Zaman, "Turkey, China Set Eyes on $100 bln Mutual Trade," last modified February 22, 2012, http://www.todayszaman.com/news-272194-turkey-china-set-eyes-on-100-bln-in-mutual-trade.html.
[30]   Xinhua, "China's G20 Presidency Aligns with Turkey's Priorities," last modified November 16, 2015, http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off_the_Wire/2015-11/16/content_37078424.htm.
[31]   Hurriyet Daily News, "Turkey's External Debt Stock Reaches $466.7 Billion in First Quarter," June 29, 2018, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-external-debt-stock-reaches-466-7-billion-in-first-quarter-133976.

transportation sector. One thousand Chinese companies are active in Turkey and Ankara is working to attract more Chinese tourists.[32]

Scholars claim that the Turkish support for the Uyghurs will weaken long-term bilateral relations,[33] as well as China's and Turkey's divergent policies regarding regional issues, such as China's handling of religious freedom in the Xinjiang region, and Turkey's attempt at seeking increasing economic relations with Taiwan, may impact the possibilities for potential cooperation between China and Turkey.[34] The impact of the Uyghur issue on China-Turkey relations may be large, as China suspects Turkey is harboring Uyghur terrorists and thus this may lead to difficult relations between the two countries.[35] Due to the shift in support away from the United States in the post-Cold War era, Turkey needs to diversify its security, military and economic interests through pursuing a "balance" towards China, the newly-emerging power.

At an unofficial level, emotional and hostile attitudes have prevailed. The public mood displayed varying degrees of hostility towards China over their persecution of Uyghurs and human rights abuse in Xinjiang, and politicians and government cannot stand aside. Turkish public opinion is split regarding opportunities with China and China's growing threat to its values and interests.[36] Left-leaning groups in Turkey favor China; Turks who are oriented towards Turkic or Muslim identity and values see China very negatively because of the Uyghur issue. The business community in Turkey sees China as the golden goose and they want to take advantage of China's economic growth. The Turkish go-

---

[32] Thomas Seibert, "Anxious Not to Offend China, Turkey Stays Mum on Treatment of Uighurs," *The Arab Weekly*, September 16, 2018, https://thearabweekly.com/anxious-not-offend-china-turkey-stays-mum-treatment-uighurs.

[33] Erkin Ekrem, "Türk-Çin İliskilerinde Uygur Sorunu [Uyghur Issue in the Relationship between Turkey and China]," *World Uyghur Congress,* March 10, 2015, https://www.uyghurcongress.org/tr/turk-cin-iliskilerinde-uygur-sorunu/.

[34] Selçuk Çolakoğlu, "Turkey-China Relations: Rising Partnership," *Ortadogu Analiz* 5, no. 52 (2013): 42, https://www.orsam.org.tr/d_hbanaliz/3selcukcolakoglu.pdf.

[35] Yizhak Shichor, *Ethno-Diplomacy: The Uyghur Hitch in Sino-Turkish Relations*, East West Center Policy Studies 53 (Honolulu: East West Center, 2009), https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/ps053.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=32351.

[36] Selçuk Çolakoğlu, *Turkish Perceptions of China's Rise*, Report No. 39. (Ankara: International Strategic Research Organization, 2014), 9.

vernment evaluates China as the balancing factor in world politics.[37] Officially, for example, Turkey has always pledged to help China fight Uyghur separatism and "terrorism." Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu stated in Beijing: "We take China's security as our security. We absolutely will not allow in Turkey any activities targeting or opposing China. Additionally, we will take measures to eliminate any media reports targeting China."[38] While on July 8, 2019 a letter signed by 22 countries was sent to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights which voiced concern about the oppression of the Uyghurs, including the use of internment camps, 37 countries defended China over the mass detention of Uyghur Muslims in a letter to the UN on December 6, 2019.[39] Turkey did not sign either of the letters. The official opposition in the Turkish parliament (CHP, IYI party and HDP) has twice requested the government condemn human rights violations in Xinjiang and send an independent investigation to the Xinjiang, but both times this was rejected by the Turkish government (AKP and MHP).

Turkey and China have pledged closer cooperation on judicial matters. To help nurture closer relations, eight Turkish prosecutors and judges are learning the Chinese language at the Public Security University in Beijing.[40] Yücel Oğurlu (law professor and rector of Istanbul Commerce University) touched on many of these factors at the nexus of law, immigration, Turkey's relationship with China, and Uyghur's status in Turkey:

Turkey must immediately show concern and put on its agenda the citizenship application of these 5–6 thousand Uyghurs who came to Turkey as students and traders.[41] China is proposing that communications with foreign

---

[37]   Çolakoğlu, *Turkish Perceptions of China's Rise*, 9.
[38]   Reuters, "Turkey Promises to Eliminate Anti-China Media Reports," August 3, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-turkey-idUSKBN1AJ1BV.
[39]   France 24, "37 countries defend China over Xinjiang in UN letter," July 12, 2019, https://www.france24.com/en/20190712-37-countries-defend-china-over-xinjiang-un-letter.
[40]   Anadolu Agency, "Turkey, China Justice Ministers Seek More Cooperation," November 14, 2018, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/turkey-china-justice-ministers-seek-more-cooperation/1310926.
[41]   Yücel Oğurlu, "Uygurlar'ın Vatandaşlığında İnsanlık Sınavını Kaybediyoruz… (I) [We Are Failing Our Test on the Uyghurs' Citizenship]," *Diriliş postasi*, November 17, 2018. https://www.dunyabulteni.net/analiz/uygurlarin-vatandasliginda-insanlik-sinavini-kaybediyoruz-h432888.html.

countries' ministries, institutions and universities be proof of its legitimacy. Any communication with China from a Turkish ministry or official, using the words they said on purpose or not, and for good intention, discussing China's security, territorial integrity, peace or terrorism, can be used against Uyghurs. As an example, the Turkish Public Administrations or justice departments, jurisdictions and financial authorities have nothing to learn from China, no lessons and no practical experiences. We should be aware that every compromise contributes to Uyghur oppression; we should be conscious of our obligation as humans and as the brotherhood of Muslims and Turks. After I saw the desperate situation, I felt a humanitarian and conscientious obligation to say the following: Uyghurs are human, if humans matter. Uyghurs are Muslim, if Muslims matter. Uyghurs are civilized, if civilization matters. Uyghurs are Turks, if Turks matter. The Chinese embassy and consulates have stopped renewals and extensions of Uyghurs' passports, and have not given passports to the newborn babies of Uyghurs in the last two years. Most Uyghurs' passports in Turkey are about to expire. They will be without any legal papers or identification… and then other serious problems will start, such as residency permits and student affairs processes… As Turkey, we should give these 5000–6000 Uyghurs citizenship or refugee status. They will not be able to go back to East Turkistan. They will be executed or put in jail as political criminals if they return. We should not evaluate their citizenship applications based simply on our foreign policy. We should go beyond this, and should evaluate their applications in light of history, faith, and humanistic values.[42]

China's strategy in Turkey is positively aimed at gaining political influence, security guarantees, furthering the BRI, an economic presence and access to natural resources. China wants to become one of the main economic powers in Turkey, and has made great strides since 2010. On balance, Turkey has been far more important for China, and predominantly for Xinjiang. Since Communist China took over Xinjiang in 1949, the Chinese government has always been concerned about separatism among Uyghurs. Inevitably, China's strategy and foreign policy in Turkey is determined by tactics and domestic politics, as a means to consolidate its control of Xinjiang and restrain the Uyghur independence movement in Turkey. Right now, China's major foreign

---

policy initiative is the BRI. Xinjiang is right in the middle, the hub of that infrastructure development plan. Therefore, the concern is that if Xinjiang is not stable, it could undermine all foreign policy initiatives.

Beijing expects BRI recipient countries such as Turkey, and particularly Central Asian states, to be loyal to the "One China" policy. This includes refusal to support the Uyghur cause, collaborating in the "hunt for dissidents" within the frame of anti-terrorism, limited relations with Taiwan, silence on the Uyghur and Tibetan issues, and (in some cases) alignment with China at the UN Security Council. Uyghurs have reportedly been arrested and harassed by Turkish authorities.[43] Thousands of Uyghurs seeking asylum have been waiting in Turkey for a number of years for resettlement to a third country. Also, hundreds of Uyghurs are living in Turkey without any legal documents. Turkey and China have signed an extradition treaty.[44] China is now using its growing diplomatic and economic clout to pressure the Turkish governments to deport Uyghurs. Turkey is also helping China repatriate Uyghurs by sending them to third countries from which they can be extradited by Beijing.[45] Exiled Uyghurs are fearful and do not feel safe in Turkey.[46]

Turkey signed a deal with China in November 2020 to buy 100 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine developed by Sinovac Biotech, to be delivered in batches. Based on the agreement, China was meant to deliver 50 million doses of the Sinovac vaccine to Turkey by the end of February, and the rest by the end of April.[47] However, shipments have

---

[43]   Amnesty International, "Nowhere Feels Safe."

[44]   Turkey - China Extradition Agreement, "Treaty on Extradition between the Republic of Turkey and the People's Republic of China," accessed May 13, 2017, https://www2.tbmm.gov.tr/d27/2/2-1798.pdf.

[45]   Gareth Browne, "How Turkey Is Sending Muslim Uighurs back to China without Breaking Its Promise," *The Telegraph*, July 27, 2020, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/07/26/turkey-sending-muslim-uighurs-back-china-without-breaking-promise; Kuzzat Altay, "Turkey Is No Longer a Safe Haven for the Uyghurs," *Foreign Policy*, March 2, 2021, https://foreign-policy.com/2021/03/02/why-erdogan-has-abandoned-the-uyghurs;Radio Free Asia, "Uyghur Mother, Daughters Deported to China from Turkey," last modified August 9, 2019, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/deportation-08092019171834.html.

[46]   Joanna Kakissis, "'I Thought It Would Be Safe': Uighurs in Turkey Now Fear China's Long Arm," *NPR*, March 3, 2020, https://www.npr.org/2020/03/13/800118582/i-thought-it-would-be-safe-uighurs-in-turkey-now-fear-china-s-long-arm.

[47]   Sadet Ergin, "Çin'den aşıların gecikmesinin nedeni Uygur Türkleri meselesi mi? [Are the Uyghur Turks Issue Reason for the Delay in Vaccines from China?]," *Hurriyet*, May 26, 2021,

been beset by delays and China is still 32 million doses short of meeting the February target. These promises never materialized in full or on time as China postponed the delivery of vaccines numerous times.[48] According to Bridge Beijing, by September 6, 2021, Turkey had received only 31.4 million vaccine doses from China.[49] Turkey has struggled to get vaccine. By September 15, 2021, there have been 6,737,641 infections and 60,606 coronavirus-related deaths reported in the country since the pandemic began.[50]

The shortages caused a heated debate in Turkish society and raised suspicions that China was delaying vaccine shipments to pressure Ankara to extradite Uyghurs living in Turkey to China, though Turkish and Chinese officials have denied any such pressure. With those deliveries repeatedly delayed, there is growing suspicion Beijing could be using the vaccines as leverage. Uyghur activists and many Uyghurs living in Turkey and around the world believe this is the reason behind the delays. They pointed to a treaty for the extradition of Uyghur Turks signed between Turkey and China in 2017 as a potential reason for the delay.[51] That treaty was ratified by China in December 2020 but has not yet been ratified by the Turkish Parliament.

---

https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sedat-ergin/cinden-asilarin-gecikmesinin-nedeni-uygur-turkleri-meselesi-mi-41818288.

[48]   Kareem Fahim and Karen DeYoung, "China Has Made Big Vaccine Promises. When They Come Up Short, Nations Struggle," *The Washington Post*, April 7, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/china-sinovac-turkey-coronavirus-vaccine/2021/04/06/f87bc1bc-93cd-11eb-aadc-af78701a30ca_story.html

[49]   Bridge Beijing, "China COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker," August 12, 2021, https://bridgebeijing.com/blogposts/china-gives-a-major-boost-to-global-distribution-and-access-to-covid-19-vaccines/.

[50]   Reuters, "World-Coronavirus-Tracker-and-Maps," last modified September 15, 2021, https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/countries-and-territories/turkey/.

[51]   Dake Kang and Suzan Fraser, "Turkey Uighurs Fear Sellout to China in Exchange for Vaccine," *AP News*, February 5, 2021, https://apnews.com/article/turkey-beijing-coronavirus-pandemic-ankara-china-c8b714974552c484c501a5784efc117a.

Conclusion

In Turkey, the widespread failure to respect cultural differences and thus the right to be different makes the development of successful immigration policies difficult. It is unlikely that affirmative action policies will be developed that would ensure Uyghur immigrants equal access to educational and occupational opportunities. If no action is taken, the socioeconomic disparities between native Turks and the Uyghurs will continue to grow. Turkey, facing a period of economic recession and a lack of resources, is likely to grow more dependent on outside resources and economic and technological support, especially from countries such as China. We can see from the last fifty years of the relationship between Turkey and China, that if Turkey receives more economic and technological support from China, the result will be increased suffering at home and in the diaspora in Turkey. Framing the issues in terms of assimilation and acculturation or exclusion and segregation may be helpful, but ignores the socioeconomic and political contexts. Among these policies are the priorities of "economic development," "fair distribution of equal opportunities," "participation in the political process," "raising the standard of education," and "engaging in serious dialogue." The best prescription is effective policies leading to an improvement of the educational and occupational standing of the Uyghur, providing them with a fair and accountable legal process and protection for citizenship, and residence or refugee status, which would go a long way toward their economic, cultural and social integration.

In response to the external forces that provide Uyghur nationalists within Xinjiang with moral and ideological support, the Chinese government has actively sought cooperation with Turkey in preventing citizens from promoting Uyghur nationalism inside Xinjiang and supporting a Uyghur independence movement abroad. The Chinese government has been especially successful in gaining such support through the establishment of strong economic, trading, and military relationships and mutual security guarantees with Turkey.[52] Turkey's economy

---

[52] In 2015, a Chinese consortium bought 65 percent of Turkey's third-largest container terminal, Kumport, in Istanbul, acquiring a pivotal position in container transportation. In January

has been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic, which has devastated its primary economic sector, tourism. As Erdogan tightens his control over the central bank and the courts, foreign reserves are shrinking, the trade deficit is rising, and the Turkish lira is plunging. On the Liberal Democracy Index compiled by the University of Gothenburg's V-Dem Institute, Turkey now ranks in the bottom 20.[53] China's economic and technological power and investments in Turkey aren't just increasing its influence; they are making Turkey far more reticent to speak out about Beijing's abuses, systematic oppression and atrocities in Xinjiang. Turkey is thus more vulnerable to Beijing's economic and political pressure and shares its wish to prioritize development over human rights.[54] China is now a major player on the world stage and because of this Turkey, as well as many other nations and international institutions, are afraid to hurl any criticism.

2020, a Chinese consortium bought 51 percent of the Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge connecting Europe and Asia across the Bosporus. China's Export and Credit Insurance Corp. committed up to $5 billion for Turkey's Wealth Fund, to be used for BRI projects. China is providing $1.7 billion to build the Hunutlu coal-fired power plant on the Mediterranean Sea. Turkey's Bora ballistic missile – modeled on the Chinese B-611 missile, introduced in 2017 and deployed in the Turkish military operation against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in May 2019 – is a product of bilateral defense cooperation, as was the participation of Chinese military officers in Turkey's Ephesus military exercise in 2018. Huawei's share in the Turkish market has grown from only 3 percent in 2017 to 30 percent in 2019. Another Chinese technology company, ZTE, took over 48 percent of Netas, Turkey's key telecommunications equipment manufacturer, in 2016. Netas manages pivotal projects including the new Istanbul Airport's telecommunications and the digitalization of national health data (Ayca Alemdaroglu and Teppe Sultan, "Erdogan Is Turning Turkey into a Chinese Client State, " *Foreign Policy*, September 9, 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/16/erdogan-is-turning-turkey-into-a-chinese-client-state). Alibaba bought a stake in Turkey's online retailer, Trendyol, in 2018 (Robert Stone, "How Coronavirus Pandemic Could Expand China's Footprint in Turkey," *Middle East Eye*, May 21, 2021, https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/how-coronavirus-pandemic-could-expand-chinas-footprint-turkey). One thousand Chinese companies are currently operating in Turkey. The China ambassador to Ankara, Deng Li, stated that China's investments in Turkey will reach $6 billion by 2021. Turkey's leading mobile phone operator Turkcell signed a $590 million long-term loan package with the China Development Bank (CDB) (Tuba Sahin, "Turkcell, China Development Bank Ink $590M Loan Deal," *Anadolu Agency,* August 10, 2020, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/turkcell-china-development-bank-ink-590m-loan-deal/1937231).
[53]   V-DEM Institute, "Autocratization Surges–Resistance Grows: Democracy Report 2020," University of Gothenburg, March 2020, https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/de/39/de39af54-0bc5-4421-89ae-fb20dcc53dba/democracy_report.pdf.
[54]   Alemdaroglu and Teppe, "Erdogan Is Turning Turkey into a Chinese Client State."

Acknowledgments

B i b l i o g r a p h y

ABC. "Uighurs Live with Fear, Trauma as Families Remain Stranded in China's Growing 're-education Camps'." ABC's Asia Pacific Newsroom, October 6, 2018. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-24/uighur-community-in-australia-fear-reports-of-crackdown-in-china/9824554.

Alba, Richard, and Victor Nee. *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.

Alemdaroglu, Ayca, and Teppe Sultan. "Erdogan Is Turning Turkey into a Chinese Client State." *Foreign Policy*, September 9, 2020. https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/16/erdogan-is-turning-turkey-into-a-chinese-client-state).

Altay, Kuzzat. "Turkey Is No Longer a Safe Haven for the Uyghurs." *Foreign Policy,* March 2, 2021. https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/02/why-erdogan-has-abandoned-the-uyghurs.

Amnesty International. "Nowhere Feels Safe." Accessed February 26, 2020. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2020/02/china-uyghurs-abroad-living-in-fear.

Anadolu Agency. "Turkey, China Justice Ministers Seek More Cooperation." November 14, 2018. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/turkey-china-justice-ministers-seek-more-cooperation/1310926.

Aydin, Ömer. "'Doğu Türkistan Milli Meclisi' Kuruldu." *Memleket*, September 30, 2018. http://www.memleket.com.tr/dogu-turkistan-milli-meclisi-kuruldu-1512118h.htm.

Beck, John. "How China Spies on Uyghurs in Turkey. WhatsApp and WeChat Are Used to Intimidate and Surveil Uyghurs." *Coda Story,* February 13, 2020. https://codastory.com/authoritarian-tech/surveillance/uyghurs-turkey-whatsapp-wechat.

Beydulla, Mettursun. "Experiences of Uyghur Migration to Turkey and the United States: Issues of Religion, Law, Society, Residence, and Citizenship." In *Migration and Islamic Ethics: Issues of Residence, Naturalization and Citizenship*, edited by Ray Jureidini and Said Fares Hassan. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004417342_011.

Beydulla, Mettursun. "Sources and Perspectives on Late Nineteenth Century Uyghur History." In *Conference Proceedings of the XVI Turkish Congress of History, September 22–25, 2010. History of Central Asia and Caucasia 2*. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu [Turkish Historical Society], 2015.

Bozkurt, Abudulla. "Abdulkadir Yapuquan, China's Most Wanted Uighur, Freed in Turkey." *Nordic Monitor*, May 26, 2019. https://www.nordicmonitor.com/2019/05/abdulkadir-yapuquan-uighur-man-wanted-in-china-over-terror-charges-freed-in-turkey).

Bridge Beijing. "China COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker." August 12, 2021. https://bridgebeijing.com/blogposts/china-gives-a-major-boost-to-global-distribution-and-access-to-covid-19-vaccines/.

Browne, Gareth. "How Turkey Is Sending Muslim Uighurs back to China without Breaking Its Promise." *The Telegraph*, July 27, 2020. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/07/26/turkey-sending-muslim-uighurs-back-china-without-breaking-promise.

CNN. "Turks Criticize Chinese Treatment of Uyghurs." Last modified July 11, 2009. https://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/europe/07/11/turkey.china.uyghurs/.

Çolakoğlu, Selçuk. "Turkey-China Relations: Rising Partnership." *Ortadogu Analiz* 5, no. 52 (2013): 32–45, https://www.orsam.org.tr/d_hbanaliz/3selcukcolakoglu.pdf.

Çolakoğlu, Selçuk. *Turkish Perceptions of China's Rise*, Report No. 39. Ankara: International Strategic Research Organization, 2014.

Cumming-Bruce, Nick. "U.N. Panel Confronts China over Reports that It Holds a Million Uighurs in Camps." *New York Times*, August 10, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/10/world/asia/china-xinjiang-un-uighurs.html.

Daragahi, Borzou. "We Can Reach You Wherever You Are: Uighurs Abroad Feel China's Reach." *The Independent*, November 12, 2018. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/china-uighur-repression-espionage-informants-muslim-terrorism-a8626526.html.

Doerschler, Peter. "Push-Pull Factors and Immigrant Political Integration in Germany." *Social Science Quarterly* 87, no. 5 (December 2006): 1100–1116. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42956597.

Ekrem, Erkin. "Türk-Çin İliskilerinde Uygur Sorunu [Uyghur Issue in the Relationship between Turkey and China]." *World Uyghur Congress,* March 10, 2015. https://www.uyghurcongress.org/tr/turk-cin-iliskilerinde-uygur-sorunu/.

Ergin, Sadet. "Çin'den aşıların gecikmesinin nedeni Uygur Türkleri meselesi mi? [Are the Uyghur Turks Issue Reason for the Delay in Vaccines from China?]." *Hurriyet*, May 26, 2021. https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sedat-ergin/cinden-asilarin-gecikmesinin-nedeni-uygur-turkleri-meselesi-mi-41818288.

Fahim, Kareem, and Karen DeYoung. "China Has Made Big Vaccine Promises. When They Come Up Short, Nations Struggle." *The Washington Post*, April 7, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/china-sinovac-turkey-coronavirus-vaccine/2021/04/06/f87bc1bc-93cd-11eb-aadc-af7870130ca_story.html.

France 24. "37 countries defend China over Xinjiang in UN letter." July 12, 2019. https://www.france24.com/en/20190712-37-countries-defend-china-over-xinjiang-un-letter.

Gladney, Dru. *Dislocating China: Reflections on Muslims, Minorities, and Other Subaltern Subjects*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Harris, Rachel. "Securitization and Mass Detentions in Xinjiang: How Uyghurs Became Quarantined from the Outside World." *Quartz*, September 5, 2018. https://qz.com/1377394/securitization-and-mass-detentions-in-xinjiang-how-uyghurs-became-quarantined-from-the-outside-world.

HRW. "Eradicating Ideological Viruses China's Campaign of Repression against Xinjiang's Muslims." *Human Rights Watch*, September 2018. https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/china0918_web.pdf.

Hunter, Fergus. "Detained and in Danger: The Tortured Australian Families Who Fear for Their Missing Loved Ones." *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 17, 2018. https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/detained-and-in-danger-the-tortured-australian-families-who-fear-for-their-missing-loved-ones-20181115-p50g5q.html.

Hurriyet Daily News. "Turkey's External Debt Stock Reaches $466.7 Billion in First Quarter." June 29, 2018. http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-external-debt-stock-reaches-466-7-billion-in-first-quarter-133976.

Kakissis, Joanna. "'I Thought It Would Be Safe': Uighurs in Turkey Now Fear China's Long Arm." *NPR*, March 3, 2020. https://www.npr.org/2020/03/13/800118582/i-thought-it-would-be-safe-uighurs-in-turkey-now-fear-china-s-long-arm.

Kang, Dake, and Suzan Fraser. "Turkey Uighurs Fear Sellout to China in Exchange for Vaccine." *AP News*, February 5, 2021. https://apnews.com/article/turkey-beijing-coronavirus-pandemic-ankara-china-c8b714974552c484c501a5784ef-c117a.

Karhan, Batur, 2014, personal communication.

Karataş, Abdusalam. "Gundem Icinden: Doğu Türkistan (Agenda: East Turkistan)." *TV5*, July 23, 2018. https://www.facebook.com/100008284862701/videos/2228935120725962/UzpfSTEwMDAwODI4NDg2MjcwMToyMjI4OTc-0MDc3Mzg4NzMz.

Landau, Jacob. *Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

Mackerras, Collin. *China's Ethnic Minorities and Globalization*. London & New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003.

Mardin, Serif. "Center and Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics." In *Political Participation in Turkey: Historical Background and Present Problems*, edited by Engin Akarlı and Gabriel Ben-Dor. Istanbul: Bogaziçi University Publications, 1975.

Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy. *The Uyghur Genocide: An Examination of China's Breaches of the 1948 Genocide Convention, March 2021*. https://newlinesinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/Chinas-Breaches-of-the-GC3.pdf, 3–5.

Oğurlu, Yücel. "Uygurlar'ın Vatandaşlığında İnsanlık Sınavını Kaybediyoruz… (I) [We Are Failing Our Test on the Uyghurs' Citizenship]." *Diriliş postasi*, November 17, 2018. https://www.dunyabulteni.net/analiz/uygurlarin-vatandasliginda-insanlik-sinavini-kaybediyoruz-h432888.html.

Oğurlu, Yücel. "Uygurlar'ın Vatandaşlığında İnsanlık Sınavını Kaybediyoruz… (I) [We Are Failing Our Test on the Uyghurs' Citizenship]." *Diriliş postasi,* November 19, 2018, https://www.uzerk.org/tr/uygurlarin-vatandasliginda-insanlik-sinavini-kaybediyoruz-i.html.

Radio Free Asia. "Exiled Leader Claims China Is behind Turkey's Decision to Detain a Uyghur." Last modified October 10, 2016. https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/exiled-leader-claims-china-10102016155133.html

Radio Free Asia. "Turkish Court Rejects China's Request to Extradite Uyghur Religious Teacher." April 9, 2021. https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/turkey-dismiss-04092021192932.html.

Radio Free Asia. "Uyghur Mother, Daughters Deported to China from Turkey." Last modified August 9, 2019. https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/deportation-08092019171834.html.

Radio Free Asia. "Uyhgurlar Hakkide Melumat Toplash Uchun Hitay Bezi Turklerge Ish Teklipi Sunghan [Chinese Offer Jobs to Some Turks to Collect Information about Uyghurs in Turkey]." Last modified October 6, 2017. https://www.rfa.org/uyghur/xewerler/xelqara-xewer/xitaydin-turuk-yashlirigha-jasusluq-teklipi-10062017222809.html.

Reuters. "Turkey Promises to Eliminate Anti-China Media Reports." August 3, 2017. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-turkey-idUSKBN1AJ1BV.

Reuters. "World-Coronavirus-Tracker-and-Maps." Last modified September 15, 2021. https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/countries-and-territories/turkey/.

Sahin, Tuba. "Turkcell, China Development Bank Ink $590M Loan Deal." *Anadolu Agency,* August 10, 2020. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/turkcell-china-development-bank-ink-590m-loan-deal/1937231).

Seibert, Thomas. "Anxious Not to Offend China, Turkey Stays Mum on Treatment of Uighurs." *The Arab Weekly*, September 16, 2018. https://thearabweekly.com/anxious-not-offend-china-turkey-stays-mum-treatment-uighurs.

Shichor, Yizhak. "Limping on Two Legs: Uyghur Diaspora Organizations and the Prospects for Eastern Turkestan Independence." *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 6, 48 (2007): 121. https://ca-c.org/article/4216.

Shichor, Yizhak. "Virtual Transnationalism: Uyghur Communities in Europe and the Quest for Eastern Turkestan Independence." In *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and across Europe,* edited by Stefano Allievi and Jørgen S. Nielsen. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003.

Shichor, Yizhak. *Ethno-Diplomacy: The Uyghur Hitch in Sino-Turkish Relations*. East West Center Policy Studies 53. Honolulu: East West Center, 2009. https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/ps053.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=32351.

Stone, Robert. "How Coronavirus Pandemic Could Expand China's Footprint in Turkey." *Middle East Eye*, May 21, 2021. https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/how-coronavirus-pandemic-could-expand-chinas-footprint-turkey).

Tejelli, Huseyin. "Sheriqi Turkistan Musteqqilliq Herkiti [East Turkistan Independent Movement: Talk with Mr. Seyit Tumturk]." *Qerindashliq Situdisi*, September 15, 2018. https://www.facebook.com/search/videos/?q=huseyin%20tejelli.

Today's Zaman. "Turkey, China Set Eyes on $100 bln Mutual Trade." Last modified February 22, 2012. https://defence.pk/pdf/threads/turkey-china-set-eyes-on-100-bln-in-mutual-trade.160963/.

TRT World. "Uyghurs in Exile Say China Is Spying on Them Worldwide." Accessed June 14, 2018. http://www.etaa.org.au/uyghurs-in-exile-say-china-is-spying-on-them-worldwide.

Türk Ocakları. "Dogu Turkistan'daki Insan Haklari Ihlalleri Hakkinda Basin Açiklaması [Press Conference on Human Rights Violation in East Turkistan]," *Turk Ocakları*. Accessed October 28, 2018. https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=turk%20ocaklari%20dogu%20turkistan.

Turkey - China Extradition Agreement. "Treaty on Extradition between the Republic of Turkey and the People's Republic of China." Accessed May 13, 2017. https://www2.tbmm.gov.tr/d27/2/2-1798.pdf.

Ullah, Areeb. "Turkey to Block Anti-China Media to Dismay of Uighur Activists." *Middle East Eye (MME),* August 3, 2017. https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/Uyghur-community-fear-plight-forgotten-media-blackout-take-places-1230193452.

V-DEM Institute. "Autocratization Surges–Resistance Grows: Democracy Report 2020." University of Gothenburg, March 2020. https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/de/39/de39af54-0bc5-4421-89ae-fb20dcc53dba/democracy_report.pdf.

Watson, Ivan, and Ben Westcott. "Cultural Genocide: How China Is Tearing Uyghur Families Apart in Xinjiang." *CNN*, November 15, 2018. https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/14/asia/uyghur-china-xinjiang-interview-intl/index.html.

Xinhua. "China's G20 Presidency Aligns with Turkey's Priorities." last modified November 16, 2015. http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off_the_Wire/2015-11/16/content_37078424.htm.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF TURKEY'S CIRCASSIANS AS A DOCILE MINORITY

U l a ş   S u n a t a

Introduction

Remembrance can be regarded as a social as well as a personal incident. More precisely, remembering "*our*" past is a social activity.[1] Halbwachs coined and initially developed the term "collective memory," referring to a body of knowledge about a past shared by a social group in a given present time.[2] In other words, it is a "representation of the past embodied in both historical evidence and commemorative symbolism."[3] Assmann also determined that "human memory is 'embodied' in living personal memories and 'embedded' in social frames and external cultural symbols (e.g., texts, images, and rituals) that can be acknowledged as a memory function insofar as they are related to the self-image or 'identity' of a tribal, national, and/or religious community."[4] Moreover, Schwartz argued that it is socially constructed to serve the recent needs of the group such as identity belonging, social cohesion, and group continuity.[5] Furthermore, Wertsch and Roediger underlined that it is

[1] Celia B. Harris, Helen M. Paterson, and Richard I. Kemp, "Collaborative recall and collective memory: What happens when we remember together?," *Memory* 16, no. 3 (2008): 213–230, https://doi.org/10.1080/09658210701811862.

[2] Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1925).

[3] Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the forge of national memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 8.

[4] Jan Assmann, "Communicative and cultural memory," in *Cultural Memories* (Springer, Dordrecht, 2011), 15–27.

[5] Barry Schwartz, "The reconstruction of Abraham Lincoln," in *Collective Remembering*, ed. David Ed Middleton and Derek Ed Edwards (London: Sage Publications, 1990).

not a static process, but covers "contention and contestation among people."[6]

There are various forms of collective memory which constitute oral history. Assmann and Czaplicka defined "communicative memory" or "everyday memory" as a form of collective memory differing from other fixed and materialized forms.[7] Collective memory is based on the historical perceptions of those who make up a social group and are also affected by intergenerational dynamics and the evolution of the related oral narratives. Moreover, there are discrepancies in how memory works among different people. The creation and transfer of memory affected by different factors also impacts the writing of history. Official historical records that tend to be different from the oral historical narratives of diasporic and minority groups are a version of history embraced by the victorious of a society as well as by its ruling elite. Alternatively, oral history, which has the potential to bring different perspectives on historical incidents, should not be overlooked. Still, collective memory in oral history is not independent from individual memory, but collective memory is memory shared by all group members.[8] Hence, typical narratives in the oral history of any given social group are significant indicators in socially constructing group identities. Structural contexts mainly shape the social construction of minority,[9] or diasporic identities; but the related social group as an agent activates collective memory and becomes involved in its own social construction. The social representation of history with the collective memory of diasporic and minority groups mostly concentrates on collective traumas.[10] In this study, we

6   James V. Wertsch and Henry L. Roediger III, "Collective Memory: Conceptual Foundations and Theoretical Approaches," *Memory* 16, no. 3 (2008): 318–326, https://doi.org/10.1080/09658210701801434.

7   Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65 (Sping–Summer 1995): 125–133, https://doi.org/10.2307/488538.

8   Eviatar Zerubavel, *Social Mindscapes: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology* (Harvard University Press, 1999).

9   Stephanie J. DiAlto, "From 'Problem Minority' to 'Model Minority': The Changing Social Construction of Japanese Americans," in *Deserving and Entitled: Social Constructions and Public Policy*, ed. Anne L. Schneider and Helen M. Ingram (SUNY Press, 2005), 81–103.

10   See Arthur G. Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Major Events in the American Century* (ME Sharpe, 1998); Aleida Assmann and Sarah Clift, *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity* (Fordham University Press, 2016).

examine the social construction of Circassian diasporic/minority identity in Turkey in relation to the historical deportation from their homeland through their collective memory. The Russian expansion in the 19th century brought about a massive forced migration of the indigenous peoples of the north Caucasia to the Ottoman Empire. Regardless of their ethnic groups such as Adyghe, Abkhaz-Abaza, or Ubykh, all north-western Caucasian peoples in diaspora are generally lumped together under the name "Circassians." Circassians are the peoples whose ancestors were forced to migrate from their native lands due to the Russian-Caucasian Wars. In the ensuing years Circassians were subject to several more forced migrations, but in this study we will examine the deportation most refer to as "the exile."[11] At that time, in 1864,[12] the Ottoman Empire admitted the Circassians into their territory. According to the reception and settlement policy of the Ottoman Empire, Circassian exiles were mostly relocated to Anatolia (Turkey), Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and the Balkans. While nationalist uprisings and World War I were weakening the Empire, Circassians showed their appreciation to the Ottomans for being granted permission to live in resettled regions. During and after the collapse of the Empire, Circassians struggled for national independence from their host countries and became a founding element of the newly established nation-states. Circassian peoples who did not want to lose their homes were once more highly motivated to protect their new abodes. Although they attempted not to lose their diasporic identity by preserving the habits of their former homeland, they belong to a minority in their new homes. After Kurds, Circassians are the second largest ethnic minority of the Turkish Republic, established in 1923. In addition to their numbers, they are mostly used by the state in the process of Turkification in a discriminatory man-

---

[11] There were also deportations during World War II, when around 600 thousand Chechens, the Ingush and Circassians were deported from the Caucasus to Siberia and Central Asia, and after their rehabilitation in 1956 approximately 50 thousand returned, which led to conflicts with the Russians who had taken over their territories.

[12] Ulaş Sunata, "Büyük Çerkes Sürgünü'nün 151. yılı: Acılar, talepler ve isyan," *Al-Jazeera Türk*, May 21, 2015, http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/gorus/buyuk-cerkes-surgununun-151-yili-a-cilar-talepler-ve-isyan; Ulaş Sunata, "Çerkeslerin Kolektif Hafızası: 21 Mayıs ve Ötesi," *Birikim Dergisi Güncel*, May 21, 2020, https://birikimdergisi.com/guncel/10111/cerkeslerin-kolek-tif-hafizasi-21-mayis-ve-otesi.

ner. Despite their controversiality in the national discourse, Circassians are known for their high degree of loyalty towards Turkey. Social constructivist theory examines the foundation of shared assumptions about reality and reveals the development of meanings that are jointly rather than separately constructed.[13] Public policies and discourses are critical to the social construction of minority identities and minority-majority relations, and mostly play out by highlighting the differences between "model minorities" and "problem minorities".[14] In this work, I prefer to use "docile minority" rather than "model minority", since the majority benefits from the binary opposition of minorities – either model or problem – by underlining "deserving and entitled" and the minority has more than a passive role in this social construction by addressing their group identity needs. This paper is related to the transmission of memory among Circassians regarding their stories of diaspora to the present and their mutual destiny in "becoming the docile minority" in their host societies. The main focus of this study is the social construction of the Circassian minority in Turkey.

In 2014–2015, I led a project entitled "Diasporas in Turkey: The Example of North-Eastern Caucasus," funded by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) (113K833). For this project my team and I performed a nation-wide study in a total of 12 cities, 23 districts and about 50 villages near the cities and created a considerable qualitative dataset including 129 oral history interviews with Circassians in Turkey. For this analysis, I re-read the transcripts of these interviews related to their immigration, reception and resettlement, and instrumentalization. I then examined critical oral historical narratives from the related dataset via content analysis in order to determine features of the minority identity construction with its historical milestones and to understand their relationship with the majority as well as with other minorities in Turkey.

---

[13]   Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz, "Social construction of reality," in *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*, ed. Ingrid Volkmer, Stephen W. Littlejohn, and Karen A. Foss (California: SAGE Publications, 2009).
[14]   DiAlto, "From 'Problem Minority' to 'Model Minority'," 81–103.

Circassians' Migration to the Ottoman Empire

As the autochthonous people of North-Western Caucasus, Circassians lived in their homeland located near the Kuban River and which stretched from the Kerch Strait on the shores of the Black Sea to Anapa and Tuapse north of the Caucasus Mountains. The Russian-Ottoman War of 1676–1681 had been won by the Russians, who then claimed the land on the shores of the Black Sea. In 1700 the Istanbul Treaty was signed between the Czardom of Russia and the Ottoman Empire and the Russians captured the Azov fortress. This served to increase Russian-Circassian tensions. Afterwards, the Greek Independence movement sparked the start of the next Russian-Ottoman War. It ended with the signing of the Edirne Treaty in 1829 and lead to the legal separation of Circassia from the Ottoman administration. When the Ottomans gave the Circassian fortresses on the Black Sea coast to Tsarist Russia as a part of the Edirne Treaty, the Russian occupation of Circassia gained legitimate ground in the international arena. Circassians who fought the Ottomans in the war were forced to leave their homeland. Circassians were either to be sent to the arid steppes of Russia as prisoners of war or were forced to migrate to the Ottoman Empire. Although Circassians resisted Russian occupation in the so-called Caucasian War of 1817–1864, the departures from their homeland, which started as small groups during the war, were a mass migration until the end of the 19th century. During this period, Russian troops systematically evacuated the villages in the Caucasus and the Russians colonized the Caucasus territory; to Circassians, this was done for the purpose of ethnic cleansing, and therefore almost all Circassians still call it the "Circassian exile,"[15] or "Circassian genocide."[16]

---

[15]   Nihat Berzeg, *Çerkes Sürgünü* (Ankara: Takav Matbaacılık, 1996).
[16]   Walter Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide* (Rutgers University Press, 2013).
Historical Circassian lands were called Kuban and Terek Oblasts until the end of Tsarist Russia and separated into two administrative units called Krasnodarsky Krai and Stavropolsky Krai and four autonomous governments – Adygea, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, and Abkhazia in the Soviet era. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, Abkhazia left the Russian Federation as an autonomous republic under Georgia and later declared independence to fight for its status as a separate country.

Shenfield determines "the number who died in the Circassian catastrophe of the 1860s could hardly, therefore, be less than one million, and may well have been closer to one and a half million."[17] Moreover, it is estimated that about 1.5 million Circassians had to leave their homeland,[18] although there have been varying estimates of the numbers affected by the exile. It has been claimed that more than 500 thousand people were directly killed by the Russians.[19] In addition, it has been calculated that at least one third of the Circassian immigrants died on the road and in their places of exile due to starvation and epidemics. According to the information obtained from General Katraçev from the Russian consul in Trabzon, the death toll is as follows: an average of 7 out of 70 thousand Circassians died en route to Batumi; almost 80 percent of the 25 thousand people travelling to Trabzon; and between 180 and 250 people died daily, an average of 200 people from the 110 thousand coming to Samsun; out of 5 thousand an average of 40 to 60 people died on the road to Trabzon, Varna and Istanbul.[20] The renowned Dutch author van Lennep, who had been in Samsun in 1864, wrote what he had observed regarding the immigrants; malaria spread very quickly among migrants as they adjusted to a new climate and an average of 700–800 immigrants died on a daily basis.[21] He went on to say that the survivors were sent to other ports and cities.

In fact, almost all Circassians read the Caucasian War as an invasion of the Caucasus between the years 1817–1864 by the Russian Empire with "tragedies of loss and sorrow."[22] It seems Circassian lands were

---

[17]   Stephen D. Shenfield, "The Circassians: A Forgotten Genocide?," in *The Massacre in History*, ed. Mark Levene and Penny Roberts (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), 154.

[18]   Seteney Shami, "Circassian Encounters: The Self as Other and the Production of the Homeland in the North Caucasus," *Development and Change* 29, no. 4 (October 1998): 617–646, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00093.

[19]   Almir Abreg, "Tehlike Çanları ve Umut Arasında Adıgeler," in *Geçmişten Günümüze Kafkasların Trajedisi* (Istanbul: Kafkas Vakfı Yayınları, 2006), 43.

[20]   Shenfield, "The Circassians: A Forgotten Genocide?"

[21]   Henry John Van-Lennep, *Travels in Little-Known Parts of Asia Minor: With Illustrations of Biblical Literature and Researches in Archaeology* (London: W. Clowes and Sons, 1870).

[22]   Madina Tekueva, Marina Gugova, Elena Nalchikova, and Andrey Konovalov, "The Meaning of Death for Adygs during the Years of the Caucasian War," *Journal of History Culture and Art Research* 7, no. 4 (2018): 313–323, https://doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v7i4.1852.

captured by Tsarist Russia and cleansed of Circassians as a result of "Russian colonization." Also, the Russians' annexation of the North Caucasus and the indigenous peoples of that area resulted in the ethnic cleansing of the Circassians. On May 21, 1864, Russian Czar Alexander II announced the end of the war. However, that day is a black page in the history of the indigenous peoples of the Caucasus. Similarly, 1864 is referred to as the year of exodus of Circassians from their homeland, the year of Circassian exile and genocide, even though the process spanned years. For them, May 21 also symbolizes the forced departure from their homelands, meaning exile and genocide. The memorial as a ritual for facing the history of Circassian displacement and remembering the related sorrows marks the anniversary of the shared memory of the Circassian peoples.

Although it started in small groups in the 1820s–1830s, it would not be wrong to say that the migration movements from the Caucasus to the Ottomans took place in two waves, 1850–1876 and 1877.[23] In the first wave, most of the Caucasian refugees journeyed by sea through the Black Sea ports (Samsun, Trabzon, Sinop, Batumi, Akçakoca, Giresun, Fatsa, İnebolu, Ereğli, Ayancık and Şile) and Istanbul; and some were scattered through Anatolia through Batumi and Kars. Caucasian migrants settled mainly in the regions of Giresun, Sivas, Kayseri, Ankara, Bolu, Sakarya, Kocaeli and İstanbul to the coasts of the Middle Black Sea and the West Anatolia region. Among these regions, Samsun, Ordu, Sakarya and Bursa are the important settlement areas. Still and since their early time in the Ottoman Empire, the Adyghe population, Circassians, in Turkey have mainly lived in the Uzunyayla region. Uzunyayla is a large plateau chain in the Central Anatolian region. It lies from northern to southern Turkey and partly covers Sivas, Kayseri, and Kahramanmaraş. There are about 80 Circassian villages and annual Circassian festivals in Uzunyayla.[24]

In the oral history fieldwork conducted in 2014, we came across similar narratives about the emigration of Circassians from Russia and

[23]   Ferhat Berber, "19. yüzyılda Kafkasya'dan Anadolu'ya yapılan göçler," *Karadeniz Araştırmaları* 31 (2011): 17–49.
[24]   Ulaş Sunata, "Diasporanın Sosyokültürel Hafızası Olarak Çerkes Köyü," in *Sosyokültürel Yönleriyle Çerkes Toplumu*, 9–48 (Ankara: Kaf-dav Yayınları, 2015).

the early resettlement which took place during the Ottoman period. For example, one typical narrative is as follows:

The first arrival was from Batumi, by boat, in 1865. From Russian provinces. During the wars with the Russians. Once they learned their secrets, they could not make it there, they were forced to flee to Turkey, because it is an Islamic country. They came from Batumi, over Trabzon, by ships and boats. Back then, these places were a part of Ünye. Once they arrived to Ünye they said, "we came to settle here, show us a land." They told them, "go and find any place you like and let us know." They found here, they settled here. For a long time, I mean for how many years they stayed here. They came to see that there are a lot of mosquitoes around. This time they went to the province (*eyalet*) again. They said "we wake up sick when we sleep at night. There is a strange sense of numbness. Show us someplace else." This time, my father's uncle, they were six siblings. Grand Hadji Mövlet gets on his horse and finds Hamamözü in Amasya after a long journey. Hamamözü is similar to the region they left in terms of climate. There is no humidity. He goes and says, "I want to settle here." They say okay "settle there." They go and settle there and bring his other five siblings. Only my father's family stays here. It is a long journey to Hamamözü, so they stay back here. The rest of the siblings stay in Hamamözü. Here, the mosquitoes hurt them very much. They were broken from malaria, swamps and mosquitoes. Then some of them move to Harşit Creek… For example, my grandfather drank dirty water from Harşit Creek during the Russo-Turkish war, he came here and died. When my father was 5–6 years old. My father's grandfather came from Caucasia. Hadji Hapuh. They were two brothers, Hapuh and Hatuh. […] Those who come after Hapuh stayed. For example, our lineage goes back to Hapuh. Hatuh remained in Russia. [They are still there!]. My uncle was captured by the Russians. My father's uncle I mean. They kept him for seven years. […] (KA-063, Samsun, Woman, 80)

As we see, Circassian collective memory includes suffering from great human loss. In spite of being forcibly removed from their homeland, Circassians do not prefer to talk about their failure during the war, probably since they see their warriors as an integral part of Circassian identity. Instead, they prefer to mention their feats of arms. As a matter of fact, the persecution narrative of Circassians is particularly dominated by loss linked to epidemics and road conditions. In other words, they remember their ancestors as forced immigrants who battled epidemics and the harsh conditions of the journey. It is still com-

mon for Circassian migrants to not eat fish as thousands of immigrants drowned in the sea as a result of sinking ships. Quotations below also display emphasis on challenges met while travelling or first settling in their new homes.

They were talking about their journey from Caucasia with great difficulty my dear. Some of them were thrown overboard, some made their way here, some were stranded during the journey… Some made it from the land and some from the sea, based on their final destinations. They referred to the journey as very difficult my dear. Who would think otherwise? They left everything behind, my child, everything. Back there, their situation was better, but they had no money, no land, no property… They wandered off here on their own. Nevertheless, they came as a family, in good condition, *Allah razı olsun* (may God be willing). If we were in the same predicament, we would have starved to death my child! I mean we are not handymen, but they were farmers, they were good farmers. My grandfather was doing well. (KA-208, Bilecik, Woman, 82)

Our grandparents said that 50 thousand Circassians died or were thrown overboard from ships during a 5–6 month period where they stayed on the shores of the Black Sea on their way from Russia. We were told about these stories. (KA-105, Kahramanmaraş, Man, 69)

They were broken from malaria, swamps and mosquitoes. (KA-063, Samsun, Woman, 80)

It is said that people were broken from mosquitoes and malaria. Many of our people were broken from the disease. They died of untreatable diseases. Actually, my mother's village, my father's village, they relocated to three different places. They scattered to escape from floods and water. First settlers still live here. We are the 5th generation here. It continues. For 150 years. (KA-053, Samsun, Man, 50)

Now our Circassians first settled in [the district] Niksar of the province] Tokat. My cousin talks about what he heard from his elders. Niksar was a mosquito-infested swamp back then. Some of our elders had died, they were distraught. They emigrated from there. On their way, they settled in Eğrap, which is a Circassian village. They did not like Eğrap either. Finally, they deliberated with some families from Caucasia and came here. This is a forested plateau, a beautiful place. That's how they settled here, over 130 years ago. (KA-158, Sivas, Man, 71)

During our interviews, most of our respondents reported memories concerning the experiences of the first-settlers. It is apparent that a considerable number of interviewees determined the movements around before they settled in their own village. It can be inferred that natural factors such as geography and climate played a significant role in this mobility.

What I remember is that they went through many difficulties. But they moved to many places. They first settled in a village […] in Kahramanmaraş. From there, they moved to [another village]. They stayed there with [their beautiful] horses because the land was more fertile. […] I mean that's how it is [laughs]. They moved around a lot. (KA-109, Kahramanmaraş, Woman, 76)

First, they came to Istanbul and stayed there for about 3–4 months. They moved to Adana from there. They stayed a long time in Adana. Due to malaria, it was swamp and reeds in Adana, Çukurova in those times, due to malaria many Circassians died. Afterwards – Circassians worked with horses – they came here and liked it. This is a plateau, beautiful and cold. Longer winters and shorter summers. They showed them some places. They did not like those. Then they came here. Abdülhamid gave them spacious land. That's how Uzunyayla was gradually established. (M-055, Kayseri, Man, 58)

Now for example, we cannot know the full history. If we are 70 years old, this is the village that was established 150 years, 170 years before. While we do not know how they got here but surely everyone came from Caucasia. They collectively settled in a village ahead of here […]. These villages were dispersed from there. […] Everyone used to be in the village. (KA-105, Kahramanmaraş, Man, 69)

[...] My grandfather, they first went to a village near Kavak [district of Samsun]. They did not want it. Our village is close to the creek. They settled there. My grandfather's father came later. [...] (KA-036, Samsun, Woman)

They had a chance to select their destination, but this selection took time, as they moved several times. In this early period of resettlement in the new land, they escaped swamps, reeds, malaria and mosquitoes. In addition, they preferred locations which were forested, with plateaus, mountainous and green, like their homeland.

[...] because Adana is a bit warmer, our villagers did not want to go there, they preferred the plateaus, so they settled in our village. (KA-121, Adana, Man, 75)

They were given land first in Istanbul and then in Düzce. They refused. They came all the way here. Now there is a place […] in Adana. It was empty and they gave it to us. There were a lot of flies back then, mosquitos. Our old hodja refused by saying that "you are letting us be preyed upon by the mosquitos." Water was not clean. There is a nice spring called Akpınar here. They came to that spring and we have been living, we have been allowed to live, *Alhamdulillah* (praise be to Allah). (KA-103, Adana, Man, 79)

Our arrival story, according to our elders, is a very broad one. We could not take it upon ourselves to learn it. But what we heard from hearsay is that Kabardians migrated to our village in 1864. They migrated to Düzce from Istanbul and to Kayseri from Düzce. Our group has moved from Kayseri to Tokat. On their way from Tokat, they spent the night. It was the Silk Road, so it had water, plenty of greenery, appropriate weather. Just like the weather in Caucasia. Our elders said "let's settle here if the governor allows us." They go down to talk to the governor with everything they have, their horses, the carriers, everything. They ask him that "we would like to settle here if you allow us." The governor accepted and said okay. He advised them to discuss, deliberate and cooperate to build houses. For example, this house is 112 years old. This is the earliest house that was built when we first settled here. Until this house was built, they lived in tents. They built the houses later. When they first settled, there were around 45–50 households. But they were separated as time passed; right now the number is around 15–20. This is how we coped, our way of settlement. (KA-010, Tokat, Man, 68)

Our ancestors came here by dying, they settled here. As you can see, Circassian villages are always mountainous and away from the city. For example, there is a village […] where the wolves can come down during the night. They all lived in such places. […] (KA-026, Samsun, Kadın, 18)

There was nothing here darling, in terms of life, in terms of humans. It is mountainous… but not quite, it was bushes or thorny, but they nevertheless liked it. They cleared the land of course. Then people started to come; it became a 45-household village. But very lively, very beautiful, respect and love towards one another… You know our Circassians, good and bad. They were a respectful people towards one another. We have had very good livelihood, very good friendships, neighbours my dear. Of course, we had, I could not imagine otherwise [...] (KA-208, Bilecik, Woman 82)

According to Pul, due to epidemics and for security reasons, it was preferred to place immigrants in rural areas and on farms that belonged

to foundations instead of city centers.[25] During the first migration wave, 80 percent of the immigrants died due to epidemics and it was thought that in this second migration wave it would be better for the Ottoman Empire to place the immigrants in the highlands.[26] Still, Eser says that the barely established Circassian villages were replaced by large Circassian cemeteries due to climate change and epidemics.[27]

Kind Reception and Resettlement

The Circassian relocation was of great importance to the Ottomans. The so-called "*hüsn-ü iskan*" (kind resettlement) is the key concept in the relocation of the Circassian peoples, which stood for an unproblematic settlement. Due to the small number of immigrants up to the 1850s, special institutions were not needed; housing was arranged by edict and municipalities were mostly left to deal with these works. However, increasing numbers necessitated the establishment of many committees, the first of which was *İdare-i Muhacirin* (Administration for Migrants/Refugees). The resettlement commissions worked closely with local administrators; in some areas, officers responsible for the settlement and also interpreters were appointed. The settlement of immigrants essentially consisted of providing them with land, subsistence allowances until they were permanently settled; and places where they could stay as guests. Taxes and military exemptions were granted until after their settlement. In order for the migrants to connect to the land and to be productive, they were given agricultural tools and animals. While preferential treatment diminished over time, the Ottoman Empire still provided shelter and grain for immigrants, agricultural land, seeds and oxen. In fact, Circassians describe the state as dealing with

---

[25]   Ayşe Pul, "1877−78 Osmanlı-Rus Savaşı Sonrası Beykoz'da Muhacirler İçin İskân Yeri Çalışmaları," *Tarih Okulu Dergisi (TOD)/ Journal of History School (JOHS)* 6, no. 15 (2013): 165, http://dx.doi.org/10.14225/Joh265.

[26]   Ahmet Halaçoğlu, *Balkan Harbi Sırasında Rumeli'den Türk Göçleri (1912−1913)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1994), 108.

[27]   Mehmet Eser, "Uzunyayla Bölgesindeki Çerkes Köylerinde Sosyo-kültürel Değişme," in *Türkiye Çerkeslerinde Sosyo-Kültürel Değişme* (Ankara: Kaf Der Yayınları, 1999), 55−142.

the settlement problems by providing positive responses to their demands.[28]

Our ancestors would say when we first came here the govenor told them "you want this land but think carefully. We can give you land in Kazva, in Geras outside of Tokat, in Niksar, in Erbaa." The elders went to investigate. Back then those places were swamps and mosquitoes were plenty. Our elders lived in airy, high places. They were living in clean air. When they saw the swamps and the mosquitoes, they refused. They said that this is the best place for us. What I am trying to say is that they were very kind towards us; they gave us what we wanted. According to what they say, we did not have any fights or quarrels. (KA-010, Tokat, Man, 68)

The fact that the administrators did not follow the settlements for a long time was a source of problems. Some administrators tried to solve problems independently. The financial obligations brought on by the settlements were covered by the state and local residents, philanthropists and notaries were also asked for help. The names of philanthropists were published in the newspaper to encourage others to donate. In the 1860s and 1870s, the increasing number of Circassian foundations also contributed to the resettlement of newcomers. Though it has been stated that local citizens helped the new immigrants in addition to state support, McCarthy, however, emphasizes the public's discomfort at having to help "these predatory Circassians."[29] Most affected communities, particularly Avşars, ran from the Circassians saying that "Blue-eyed Circassians. What they wear is leather, what they eat is corn, their eyes are like the sky." They say "A distinct beast has arrived. They would wear leather shalwar back then." During the course of my fieldwork I often heard variations of this expression in various regions in Turkey.

In the context of relocation, it has been observed that settlement units were to be *villages*. The Ottoman Administration for Migrants/ Refugees was more experienced during the second migration wave (1877) compared to the previous one. However, with the arrival of those previously settled in the Balkans, land shortages began to emerge. To

---

[28]   Pul, "1877–78 Osmanlı-Rus Savaşı Sonrası Beykoz'da Muhacirler İçin İskân Yeri Çalışmaları," 162.

[29]   Cited in Berber, "19. yüzyılda Kafkasya'dan Anadolu'ya yapılan göçler," 17–49.

organize the settlement, the *İskân-ı Muhacirin Talimatnamesi* (Regulations for Settlement of Migrants/Refugees) was published including 10 articles. The basic points emphasized were: settlements will be permanent, help from the locals will be demanded and due to the land shortage in rural areas, those who will be settled are those who have occupational skills. Migrants settled in urban centers in the second wave due to the increase in numbers and reactions from those who lived in the countryside, created migrant neighborhoods between the countryside and the city in Anatolian cities. In addition to the migrants who settled in small or abandoned villages, new settlements were also established for migrants. As can be observed in oral history narratives, the settlers thought that the lands that they were settling on were uninhabited and that they were establishing life on empty land. They mostly emphasize "this is our village."

When the peoples of the North Caucasus came to the Ottoman Empire, the Empire also met their need for soldiers and used them as a force against "separatist" minorities such as the Kurds, Balkan and Arab communities.[30] A part of the Adyghe was used as a military force against both Armenians who were rising for an independent state and to protect the Russian border. Moreover, they had problems in the area in adapting to the predominant Kurdish tribes in the region; to obey orders, do military service, pay tribute and adapt to certain traditions. This situation came to an end in 1908 as a result of the Young Turk's gaining control in the region. Whereas Caucasians settled in Western and Central Anatolia (mostly Abkhaz-Abazin and Adyghe) were living in better conditions.[31]

Hundreds of Circassian villages were populated on the vertical line from Samsun (northern Turkey) to Amman (Jordan). The location of villages was chosen in a line which borders diverse minority groups who were found to be an administratively problematic population in the

---

[30] Ayhan Kaya, "Circassian Diaspora in Turkey: Stereotypes, Prejudices and Ethnic Relations," in *Representations of the Other/s in the Mediterranean World and Their Impact on the Region*, ed. Nedret Kuran-Burçoglu and Susan Gilson Miller (Istanbul: The ISIS Press, 2005), 229.

[31] Georgi Chochiev, "On the History of the North Caucasian Diaspora in Turkey," *Iran and the Caucasus* 11, no. 2 (2007): 215, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25597334.

Empire.[32] Importantly, Circassians also recognize the instrumentalization of their ancestors by the Ottoman Empire against the "rebellious" minorities such as the Avşar people, Greeks and Armenians.

I do not know how they came but as exile. The Avşar people used to live here. When the Circassians came, they sent them someplace else. They themselves settled here. That's how it happened. […] (KA-099, Kayseri, Woman, 63)

Armenians used to live here, this was their settlement. We came whenever they left. (KA-161, Sivas, Woman 64)

There were Armenians here. Armenians were kicked out and the Ubykh people settled here. (KA-124, Kahramanmaraş, Woman, 75)

Armenians had to flee from here. I mean they were kicked out when the Circassians came. They kicked out the Avşars too. The Avşars were banished beforehand but our people kicked the Armenians as well as the Avşars out. (KA-179, Kayseri, Man, 85)

But the Avşars were using this place as a plateau. They would come during the summer, leave during winter. We did not have any issues with the Avşar people but Abdülhamid[33] had some problems. The Avşars think we took the land away from them but that's not the case. Abdülhamid placed us here, he gave us land. You know what the Avşar's were? They did not do their military service, they were treasonous, they were spies, they avoided taxes. Abdülhamid declared "Hit them, do not let the Avşar people be." Dadaloğlu[34] said, "If the declaration belongs to the emperor, mountains belong to us." They sought refuge in the Tauros Mountains. That's how they managed to escape. They repopulated afterwards. Otherwise they were broken just like the "15 incidents" and Armenian incidents (laughs). But we do not have any quarrels with anybody. [Abdül] Hamid banished them. It has nothing to do with Circassians, it was the state who banished them. They declared "Do not leave one Avşar alive, put all of them through the sword." They were massacred, they ran to the mountains. That's how they managed to escape. (M-055, Kayseri, Man, 58)

---

[32]   Sunata, "Diasporanın Sosyokültürel Hafızası Olarak Çerkes Köyü," 9–48.
[33]   Abdulhamid II, or Abdül Hamid II, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, ruled from 1876 to 1909. During his reign, the Ottoman lost the war with the Russian Empire (1877–1878), whereas he is remembered for his political decisions and modernization reforms and regular system as well as Pan-Islamism.
[34]   Dadaloğlu was a famous Avşar folk poet-singer.

They left Caucasia because the Russians were infidels. Otherwise it is a beautiful place. They banished them through force. They gave them land as migrants. […) It is a warm swampy land. They gave it as a plateau. They came here because of the cold weather. […] Yamaç was an Armenian village. They were banished after they were forcibly settled. The government had a hand in it too. […] They established a village near the Circassians. Then they were sent way, exiled. Just like how we escaped from Russia, they escaped here. They did not go willingly. They were made to go. Only one of them was left. A man who became Muslim later on. They married him to a Circassian. Hachurey. No one knew he was Armenian, not even himself. […] No matter what you are, you have to be Muslim. It is very bad to interact with non-Muslims. You cannot marry a Christian even if he is Circassian. It does not end with being Caucasian, you must be Muslim after all. (KA-112, Kahramanmaraş, Woman, 72)

Of course, they came here because they were Muslims. Our mosque did not have a community (*cemaat*). We loved to pray. We would go to *tarawih*. Thank God we had lots of men, women and elders. (KA-133, Kayseri, Woman, 80)

I heard that there were some infidels living here and that they kicked them out before settling here. I do not have much information. There were Greeks on the upper side of the village earlier. They kicked those Greeks out and then the Circassians settled. The Circassians kicked them out. Neither the Turks nor the Circassians embraced them. They always banished them. Then we acquired the lands. Their stone houses still stand today. Not only the Circassians but the Turks as well. In hodja's village there was a non-Muslim child working in construction and he was thrown off a building. They made them suffer very much. They devastated them, kicked them out. The elders are gone now, for example my aunt's mother-in-law in Karapınar [district of Konya], she knew about these things. She also took part in the mistreatment of the non-Muslims. (KA-024, Samsun, Woman, 50)

[These areas were empty back then.] Actually, there is a fountain at the center of our village. This was when the Armenians lived here. The area with the fountain was called the "Fountain of Migrants" (*Göçer Çeşmesi*). The ones who travelled to the plateaus, hunters would spend a few days in that area. When our people were coming here, they gathered at Kuzutepe [village of Göksun district of Kahramanmaraş]. When they were separating from there, they discovered this place. They came during the night. The sides we are seeing right now used to be forest areas. They cut down the trees during the night and built the house from wood. They settled by the fountain. Then the migrants and hunters were not able to come anymore. They were saying "the

Circassians have occupied the fountain, they would kill us if go there." That's how they seized it. (KA-105, Kahramanmaraş, Man, 69)

Whereas the Ottoman administration wanted to benefit from the "belligerent" temperament of the Circassian migrants in the military field, this temperament posed a threat to internal security on various occasions; discontent led to small-scale quarrels and the administration feared the possibility of bigger events and therefore tried to eliminate the attempts without using excessive force. There was an attempt at preventing through legislation the illegal activities of the immigrants, which grew in parallel with their discontent, via a ban on carrying illegal weapons. They were also obliged to sign papers that forced them to remain in place and their passports were confiscated. As a principle, the Administration for Migrants/Refugees frequently attempted to re-settle noble Circassian families from their slaves if they had any.[35] The migrants also voiced their threat of returning to Russia on several occasions. Interviewees who think the state policy of *scattered settlement* was conducted on purpose, talk about some of their acquaintances with whom they managed to stay in touch over the years.

My grandfather told me the stories of the exile with tears in his eyes. He would tell me Abkhazian wailings while telling me the stories. We were not able to understand but he would sometimes translate saying that "this is how much we suffered," especially internal migration devastated them. He tells me they came from Kalanç but they know nothing about settlement. To go through another exile from Kalanç to Hurdaz was also tiresome. To be forced to separate in the country where you painfully sought refuge was very difficult. I am thinking that yes, we sought refuge here but why are they separating us. Because there were people separated from the same family. (KA-026, Samsun, Woman, 18)

---

[35]   Traditional Circassian society was broken into strict castes. The highest was the caste of the "princes" and the lowest were slaves. The Circassian slave class was significant to the Ottoman Harem for several centuries, even before the Circassian influx around 1864. Although a declaration of Sultan Mahmud II in 1830 gave freedom to white slaves – mostly Circassians, Circassian slavery and the slave trade for not only Harem but also agriculture partially continued until the Turkish Republic, established in 1923. For more details, see Ehud R. Toledano, "Circassian Slavery and Slave Trade - An Ottoman Solution," in *The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression: 1840–1890*, ed. Ehud R. Toledano, 148–191 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

When the Circassians came from Caucasia, they settled from one place to another. They were scattered to mountains; they were scattered to meadows. Our grandfathers first came to Bursa. (KA-008, Tokat, Man, 85)

They were dispersed throughout Turkey. I guess with the mindset that if the Circassians are concentrated in one place, they would revolt. They were of course dispersed all around. The highest number was in Samsun during that time. I guess that number has decreased over the years. Pinarbaşi Kayseri for example. The highest number is there. Also, Göksun. There are 20–22 villages in Göksun. Additionally, there are a couple villages in Antalya too. This is the Circassian policy that they followed. They did not send big groups of people to the same place. Düzce for example, there are a lot of Circassians there too. (KA-105, Kahramanmaraş, Man, 69)

One of my sisters-in-law is in Istanbul, the other is in Dalaman, the other is in Eskişehir, two of them are in Bozüyük; they are all over the place. (KA-208, Bilecik, Woman, 82)

Since they were made to settle in various places, there are either one or two pure Circassian villages left. Let me say they are being mixed as well. (KA-49, Samsun, Woman, 27)

They were scattered all over the place. (KA-161, Sivas, Woman, 64)

Six thousand people came to Istanbul at first. They were scattered all over Turkey from that point. For example, Pinarbaşi, Yozgat or Samsun and Adana. That means either the government or the Circassians themselves wanted it so. I cannot know that for sure. (KA-121, Adana, Man, 71)

As I said, first they were settled according to the preference of Circassians, they were allowed to move places similar to Caucasia. [However] they were then dispersed with the aim of keeping them separate. They were placed amongst Turks and Laz people[36] to prevent them from unification. (KA-130, Kahramanmaraş, Man, 71)

A Docile Minority Construction for the Republic of Turkey

The Ottomans, reluctant to lose the Balkans to Russia's Pan-Slavism goal, first placed the Circassian communities as a force in this region. Almost half of the immigrants of the 1850s–60s (the majority are the

---

[36] Laz people, or Lazi, is another ethnic group in Turkey indigenous to the Black Sea region.

Adiges and Abazins) were placed in the territory of present-day Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia and northern Greece, against local liberalization movements.[37] After the defeat in the Russian-Ottoman War in 1877–1878, many Caucasians resettled to Anatolia, Syria and Palestine. Chochiev stated that the reason behind this was the pressure the Ottoman Empire received from European countries. Caucasians still live in the lands left from Yugoslavia today.

With the idea of Pan-Turkism, Circassians gained new social status in 1908 through the Young Turk Movement. With the transition from autocratic management to constitutional regime, the Young Turks granted equal rights to every Ottoman State citizen, regardless of their ethnic or religious ties. At the same time, minorities received cultural and political freedoms. Circassians played an active role in the ideological and organizational preparations during this process.[38] According to Chochiev, there was a motive for these preparations: The Caucasus is in a region that separates Turks from Asia Minor and Central Asia. The idea of Pan-Turkism would not be possible without including this region. Thus, encouraging Caucasian people to embrace Turkish ideas and allowing them to play a role in the processes became one of the government's most powerful pieces of propaganda. With the support of the Muslim Caucasians, the Young Turks demonstrated the importance they gave to the Circassian minority at every opportunity.[39] At the same time, those whose ancestors had been migrants were localized through the utilization of religion and nationalization in order to create a docile minority. This idea was constructed by the Ottoman Empire and to ensure order within the Empire and the Circassian minority, as well as to use them as a buffer in areas where other minorities were also settled in through the use of religious and nationalist propaganda. Circassian collective memory underlines their service to Islam and their belonging to Turkey as follows:

---

[37]   Chochiev, "On the History of the North Caucasian Diaspora in Turkey,"214.
[38]   Chochiev, "On the History of the North Caucasian Diaspora in Turkey,"217.
[39]   Chochiev, "On the History of the North Caucasian Diaspora in Turkey,"218.

Our arrival story is clear. We came during the 1860s. We first settled in Merzifon Tavşandağ. Then they came here and settled. They did farming, they served the country and the people. They served Islam. (KA-028, Tokat, Man)

They say that "this land is ours." I mean to say that "they kicked us out and they settled you here." They are fighting back against it. But three villages in Uzunyayla belong to the Avşar people. The rest were generally Turkmen and Alevi villages. Actually, the Ottomans put us there as a buffer zone. Because Avşars and Alevis were not getting along, so they put us there as a barrier. It cut the tensions like a knife. The Ottomans were actually smart with this. I mean they knew what they were doing. But it worked for us too because we worked with horses and these are all forested areas. (KA-097, Kayseri, Man, 64)

Circassians were used by the political and military elite to help create an ethnic and culturally homogenous society, subjecting them to the nation-state creation process in the 1920s.[40] Turkification policies were reinforced by Turkish history theory, "Sun-Language Theory" and educational laws.[41] In his study, Tekinalp[42] has identified ten ways to incorporate non-Turkish ethnic minorities into the political system through the example of Turkish Jews.[43] These include the Turkification of names, speaking Turkish, praying in Turkish at synagogues, Turkification of schools, sending children to Turkish schools, taking part in national events, living alongside Turks, including themselves in collective life, performing duties for the national economy, being aware of their rights. It is possible to say that besides non-Muslims, these conditions include many ethnic minorities such as Kurdish and Circassian communities. That is, Circassians in Turkey are confronted by the dominance of Turkishness and Islam in every aspect of life: the

---

[40] Kaya, "Circassian Diaspora in Turkey," 217–240; Ulaş Sunata, *Transnational Solidarity of Circassians in-between Caucasus and Middle East*, Conflict and Forced Migration (Studies in Symbolic Interaction, Vol. 51) (Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2019), 71–88, https://doi.org/10.1108/S0163-239620190000051004.

[41] This linguistic pseudoscientific hypothesis, known as the Sun-Language Theory, developed in the early period of the Turkish Republic and proposed that all human languages are descendants of one proto-Turkic primal language (İlker Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists against the West: The Origins of Linguistic Nationalism in Atatürk's Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 6 (2004): 1–25, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4289950).

[42] Metin Tekinalp, *Türkleştirme*, trans. Ö. Ozankaya (Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, 2001 (original work published in 1928)).

[43] Kaya, "Circassian Diaspora in Turkey," 228.

language spoken in the public sphere, citizenship, national education, industrial life and resettlement policies, etc.[44] Many Abkhazians who migrated to the Ottoman Empire continue in their Sunni Islam beliefs. Since the region was under Ottoman rule in the 1500s, many of the re-settled Abkhazians were Muslims. Today, many Abkhazians in Abkhaz are, however, Orthodox Christians.[45]

More statist and conservative Circassian individuals, thinking that they have adapted to Turkey; referenced their commitment to Turkey through the roles they played in the War of Independence in the early years of the Republic. At this point, there is an important Circassian community who define themselves as "Circassians as well as Turks." It would be important to say for the sake of analysis that these definitions are made with caution when speaking about the establishment years of the Republic, and with caution regarding their demands for speaking in their mother tongue. Although both points are formed by the older generation who are generally more conservative, it is possible to say that they are also included in the younger generation's points.

On the other hand, people who have more radical views and critical thinking criticize the Ottoman State, the settlement policy, the Turkifi-cation policies of the early years of the Republic (prohibition of mother tongue languages) and ongoing Circassian statist structure. This point of view comes more from the more critical younger generations who play an active role in associations and who are curious about history; while the political stance can be effective regardless of age group.

Discussion

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the influx of migrants/refugees from the Balkans, Crimea and the Caucasus to Anatolia start-ed. There are three distinct views on the Ottoman Empire's migrant/refugee acceptance policy. The first view is that the Ottomans accepted

---

[44]   Kaya, "Circassian Diaspora in Turkey," 229.
[45]   Frederik Coene, *The Caucasus: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2009), 56.

immigrants in the name of "Islam and humanity."[46] The second is that the Ottoman Empire was forced to accept migration despite not wanting it.[47] Nonetheless, this view does confirm to the view of encouraging immigration to increase population.[48] Lastly, the Ottoman administration saw immigrants as an asset and was therefore highly welcoming towards immigrants.[49] Although these views differ, behind the politics of a positive reception, there are four main targets all views can confirm: (i) improving swamps and adding them to agricultural lands, (ii) meeting the military needs of the army, (iii) buffering problematic regions, and (iv) the desire for the hegemony of the Muslim population.

Importantly, whereas the last two targets display two main ideologies - nationalism and co-religionism - leading to conflicts at that time, the latter is more decisive. In other words, the main population policy aimed at increasing the Muslim population in the Ottoman Empire and balancing problematic areas with newcomers, mostly Circassians. The Ottoman Empire utilized Circassians who had strong military traditions to suppress independence movements and riots.

The ideology and discourse of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis that emerged in the 1982 constitution resulted in Circassians gaining new meaning in the 1980s: the Circassian-Turkish discourse and Circassian nationalism emerged.[50] With regard to the discourse and idea of Caucasian Turks, Circassians were one of the most recent examples of the Turkification policy. The right-conservative group supported this discourse and maintained Turkish national history, further arguing that the Northern Caucasians were of Turkish-Islamic origins. Many North Caucasian thinkers opposed this discourse.[51] It can also be said that the nationalist atmosphere after the collapse of Soviet Russia and the wars

---

[46]   Pul, "1877–78 Osmanlı-Rus Savaşı Sonrası Beykoz'da Muhacirler İçin İskân Yeri Çalışmaları," 159–182.

[47]   Faruk Kocacık and Mehmet Eser, "Kafkasya'dan Anadolu'ya Göçler (Sivas İli Örneği)," *Zeitschrift für die Welt der Türken/Journal of World of Turks* 2, no. 1 (2010): 187–196.

[48]   Kemal Karpat, *Ottoman Population, 1830–1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

[49]   Berber, "19. yüzyılda Kafkasya'dan Anadolu'ya yapılan göçler," 17–49.

[50]   Kaya, "Circassian Diaspora in Turkey," 232.

[51]   Kaya, "Circassian Diaspora in Turkey," 232.

between some countries in the North Caucasus (Abkhazia, Georgia, etc.) have an effect on these ideas.

Co-religionist population preference is not only for the land of the Ottoman Empire but also valid for the Russian Empire. For example; while Russian and Kazakh dwellings spread through North-Western Caucasus as a result of the population transfer of the significant amount of Muslim nations in the Circassia and Abkhazia, the biggest buffer zone between Christian Armenian and Georgian lands, with wars and exile of survivors with forced migration, the shores of the Black Sea were emptied of Circassians and populated in particular with Armenian migrants aside from Russians and Kazakhs. This co-religionist re-settlement policy in their former homeland after Russian occupation stimulates Circassian aggression against the peoples connected to other religions, especially Armenians. Like the concept of "Caucasian Turks" with Turkish-Islam synthesis, there are "Circassian Armenians" in Orthodox beliefs. Although the population exchange is known only as part of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 between Greece and Turkey, it can be stated here that there is an unofficial agreement for a massive population exchange between Circassians and Armenians.

This work emphasizes the religious aspect of the social construction of the minority. Since their exile from their ancestral homeland, Circassians have jointly constructed their diasporic and minority identities based on religious dichotomy – to be or not to be Muslim – empowered by the socio-political context. The related public policies and discourses in the social construction of Circassian identity have exploited the binary opposition based on religion.

Bibliography

Abreg, Almir. "Tehlike Çanları ve Umut Arasında Adıgeler." In *Geçmişten Günümüze Kafkasların Trajedisi*, 39–58. Istanbul: Kafkas Vakfı Yayınları, 2006.

Assmann, Aleida, and Sarah Clift. *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*. Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2016.

Assmann, Jan. "Communicative and cultural memory." In *Cultural memories*, edited by Peter Meusburger, Michael Heffernan and Edgar Wunder, 15–27. Dordrecht: Springer, 2011.

Assmann, Jan, and John Czaplicka. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125–133. https://doi.org/10.2307/488538.

Aytürk, İlker. "Turkish Linguists against the West: The Origins of Linguistic Nationalism in Atatürk's Turkey." *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 6 (2004): 1–25. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4289950.

Berber, Ferhat. "19. yüzyılda Kafkasya'dan Anadolu'ya yapılan göçler." *Karadeniz Araştırmaları* 31 (2011): 17–49.

Berzeg, Nihat. *Çerkes Sürgünü*. Ankara: Takav Matbaacılık, 1996.

Chochiev, Georgi. "On the History of the North Caucasian Diaspora in Turkey." *Iran and the Caucasus* 11, no. 2 (2007): 213–226. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25597334.

Coene, Frederik. *The Caucasus: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2009.

DiAlto, Stephanie J. "From 'Problem Minority' to 'Model Minority': The Changing Social Construction of Japanese Americans." In *Deserving and Entitled: Social Constructions and Public Policy*, edited by Anne L Schneider and Helen M. Ingram, 81–103. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005.

Eser, Mehmet. "Uzunyayla Bölgesindeki Çerkes Köylerinde Sosyo-kültürel Değişme." In *Türkiye Çerkeslerinde Sosyo-Kültürel Değişme*, 55–142. Ankara: Kaf Der Yayınları, 1999.

Halaçoğlu, Ahmet. *Balkan Harbi Sırasında Rumeli'den Türk Göçleri (1912–1913)*. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1994.

Halbwachs, Maurice. *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*. Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1925.

Harris, Celia B., Helen M. Paterson, and Richard I. Kemp. "Collaborative Recall and Collective Memory: What Happens When We Remember Together?." Memory 16, no. 3 (2008): 213–230. https://doi.org/10.1080/09658210701811862.

Karpat, Kemal. *Ottoman Population, 1830–1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Pres, 1985.

Kaya, Ayhan. "Circassian Diaspora in Turkey: Stereotypes, Prejudices and Ethnic Relations." In *Representations of the Other/s in the Mediterranean World and Their Impact on the Region*, edited by Nedret Kuran-Burçoglu and Susan Gilson Miller, 217–240. Istanbul: The ISIS Press, 2005.

Kocacık, Faruk, and Mehmet Eser. "Kafkasya'dan Anadolu'ya Göçler (Sivas İli Örneği)." *Zeitschrift für die Welt der Türken/Journal of World of Turks* 2, no. 1 (2010): 187–196.

Leeds-Hurwitz, Wendy "Social Construction of Reality." In *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory,* edited by Ingrid Volkmer, Stephen W. Littlejohn, and Karen A. Foss. California: SAGE Publications, 2009.

Neal, Arthur G. *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Major Events in the American Century*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998.

Pul, Ayşe. "1877–78 Osmanlı-Rus Savaşı Sonrası Beykoz'da Muhacirler İçin İskân Yeri Çalışmaları." *Tarih Okulu Dergisi (TOD)/ Journal of History School (JOHS)* 6, no. 15 (2013): 159–182. http://dx.doi.org/10.14225/Joh265.

Richmond, Walter. *The Circassian Genocide*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2013.

Shami, Seteney. "Circassian Encounters: The Self as Other and the Production of the Homeland in the North Caucasus." *Development and Change* 29, no. 4 (1998): 617–646. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00093.

Shenfield, Stephen D. "The Circassians: A Forgotten Genocide?" In *The Massacre in History,* edited by Mark Levene and Penny Roberts. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999.

Schwartz, Barry. "The Reconstruction of Abraham Lincoln." In *Collective Remembering*, edited by David Ed Middleton and Derek Ed Edwards. London: Sage Publications, 1990.

Schwartz, Barry. *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Sunata, Ulaş. "Büyük Çerkes Sürgünü'nün 151. yılı: Acılar, talepler ve isyan." *Al-Jazeera Türk*, May 21, 2015. http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/gorus/buyuk-cerkes-surgununun-151-yili-acilar-talepler-ve-isyan.

Sunata, Ulaş. "Diasporanın Sosyokültürel Hafızası Olarak Çerkes Köyü." In *Sosyokültürel Yönleriyle Çerkes Toplumu*, 9–48. Ankara: *Kaf-dav Yayınları*, 2015.

Sunata, Ulaş. *Transnational Solidarity of Circassians in-between Caucasus and Middle East*. Conflict and Forced Migration (Studies in Symbolic Interaction, Vol. 51). Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0163-239620190000051004.

Sunata, Ulaş. "Çerkeslerin Kolektif Hafızası: 21 Mayıs ve Ötesi." *Birikim Dergisi Güncel*, May 21, 2020. https://birikimdergisi.com/guncel/10111/cerkesler-in-kolektif-hafizasi-21-mayis-ve-otesi.

Tekinalp, Metin. *Türkleştirme*. Translated by Ö. Ozankaya. Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, 2001 (original work published in 1928).

Tekueva, Madina, Marina Gugova, Elena Nalchikova, and Andrey Konovalov. "The Meaning of Death for Adygs during the Years of the Caucasian War." *Journal of History Culture and Art Research* 7, no. 4 (2018): 313–323. https://doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v7i4.1852.

Toledano, Ehud R. "Circassian Slavery and Slave Trade - An Ottoman Solution." In *The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression: 1840–1890*, edited by Ehud R. Toledano, 148–191. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Van-Lennep, Henry John. *Travels in Little-Known Parts of Asia Minor: With Illustrations of Biblical Literature and Researches in Archaeology.* London: W. Clowes and Sons, 1870.

Wertsch, James V., and Henry L. Roediger III. "Collective Memory: Conceptual Foundations and Theoretical Approaches." *Memory* 16, no. 3 (2008): 318–326. https://doi.org/10.1080/09658210701801434.

Zerubavel, Eviatar. *Social Mindscapes: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.

ONTOLOGICAL (IN)SECURITY AND THE KURDISH ISSUE IN TURKEY: THE USE OF SECURITY DISCOURSE (1925-1984)

Gökçe Balaban

Introduction

There is separatism in every field in our country. The most pervasive one among those is the one that is made under Kurdism.[1]

How could one account for the discourse of security used by Turkish state elites considering the Kurdish issue before 1984, when terrorist attacks by the Partiya Karkaren Kurdistani (PKK) had not yet begun, and hence there was no physical security threat against the state?[2] This article aims to answer this question from the perspective of ontological (in)security. According to ontological security theory, actors do not only seek physical security (such as the security of their body or territory), but they also strive for the security of their identity. To be ontologically secure, agents' self-identity should have certainty and continuity over time.[3] The actors' self is maintained through autobio-

---

[1] *Türkiye'de Yıkıcı ve Bölücü Akımlar* [Destructive and Seperatist Movements in Turkey] (Ankara: Kara Kuvvetleri Komutanlığı Yayınları, 1982), 43.
[2] The PKK is a separatist group that was formed with the idea of establishing an independent Kurdistan state in the Northern Kurdistan region. To this end, it started a terror campaign in 1984 in the south-eastern and eastern regions of Turkey.
[3] Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (London: Standford University Press, 1990).

graphical narratives – stories they tell to and about themselves[4], which give life to routinized practices.[5] Based on this approach, the article contends that after the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925, the constituting traits of Kurdish collective identity, such as the tribal and religious structure in the Kurdish region, and the Kurdish language, started to generate uncertainty in Turkish self-identity because these characteristics of Kurdishness disrupted and challenged the narratives about being a Turk. Uncertainty created ontological insecurity, which led to the use of security discourse by the state and the securitization of the traits of Kurdish identity.[6] Securitization also provided a legitimate basis for extraordinary measures like resettlement policies, imprisoning those who expressed their Kurdish identity, banning the use of the Kurdish language, and so on. Through securitization, state elites aimed to reinstate ontological security because it is through those extraordinary measures that Kurdish identity claims were suppressed, and this suppression served to strengthen the certainty and continuity of the Turkish self. This article will analyze both securitization (i.e. how Kurdishness was associated with the discourse of security), and its results (i.e. the extraordinary measures taken with regard to the Kurdish issue).

Taking 1925 as its starting point, this article concentrates on state discourses/practices in the Kurdish issue between 1925 and 1984, when there was no terrorism or direct security threat against the state, but the use of security discourse in the Kurdish issue was still high on the political agenda. This period will also be analysed in two sub-periods: first between 1925 and 1960, and second between 1960–1984. Before 1960, the state usually securitized the tribal and religious structures of Kurds since it saw those structures as important carriers of Kurdish

---

[4]   Jelena Subotic, "Narrative, Ontological Security and Foreign Policy Change," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 12, no. 4 (October 2016): 611.

[5]   Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2008).

[6]   Securitization occurs when an issue is presented as a security issue by state-elites. According to Weaver, security is a speech-act, meaning that it has a performative function. By uttering the word "security" state-elites move a particular development –in this case the Kurdish issue– into a specific area and claim a special right to use whatever means necessary to block it. See Ole Weaver, "Securitization and Desecuritization," in *On Security*, ed. Ronnie D. Lipschutz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 46–86.

identity.[7] This traditional structure started to lose its grip among Kurds after the second half of the 1950s, and new Kurdish intelligentsia, who emphasized their Kurdishness more vocally, rose in the city centers. Thus, what is seen in state discourse after 1960 is the association of the claims of Kurdishness and speaking/writing in Kurdish to the discourse of security by the state elites. From this perspective, it can be said that this study engages in a retrospective analysis and tries to explore historical discourses through a new lens. The article, however, should not only be considered historical research which aims to re-evaluate the past. The historical background presented herein could also shed light on the securitization of the Kurdish issue in today's political discourse. After all, ontological insecurity of the state was not replaced with physical security considerations when the terror attacks started in 1984. On the contrary, the PKK's separatist claims further generated ontological insecurity for Turkey because it disrupted the Turkish narrative, which envisaged Muslim groups assimilating into Turkishness through religious bonds.[8] Thus, this article could make a contribution to one's understanding of the Kurdish issue by bringing in the ontological security perspective for ontological (in)security concerns of the Turkish state have always been an active force in shaping state discourses and practices regarding the Kurdish issue.

The ontological insecurity of the Turkish state vis-à-vis Kurdish identity will be traced through Critical Discourse Analysis methodol-

---

[7]   One thing should be noted here: "security" as a term started to be used in political discourse after the 1960 coup d'etat in Turkey. Before that time, there was no direct reference to security in the state discourse vis-à-vis the Kurdish issue. However, as this article tries to show, Kurdish political and religious structures were always constituted as "obstacles" against the ideals of the Republic and hence were portrayed as threats against the identity of the new regime. As it will be demonstrated, one could also see that Kurdish tribal chieftains had been labelled as persons *threatening* the peace in their region and *damaging national interests* in the state discourse before national security terminology was popularized. For the history of national security terminology in Turkey see Gencer Özcan, "Türkiye'de Milli Güvenlik Kavramının Gelişimi [The Development of the Concept of National Security in Turkey]," in *Türkiye'de Ordu, Devlet ve Güvenlik Siyaseti* [Military, State and Security Politics in Turkey], eds. İsmet Akça and Evren Balta Paker (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2010), 307–351.

[8]   For terrorist attacks' triggering ontological insecurity see Amir Lupovici, "Ontological Dissonance, Clashing Identities, and Israel's Unilateral Steps towards the Palestinians," *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 4 (October 2012): 824.

ogy (CDA), with a specific focus on the "discourse historical approach" of Reisigl and Wodak[9], and the "social actor network" model of Theo Van Leeuwen.[10] Accordingly, the article applies CDA to the discourses used by the Turkish state officials/institutions vis-à-vis the Kurdish issue. Here the article should also clarify which texts are chosen for analysis and why, and how those texts are analyzed.

To address the first question, the article relies on the classification of "fields of action" used by Reisigl and Wodak.[11] Accordingly, "fields of action" are "the segments of the societal reality, which contribute to constituting the 'frame' of the discourse."[12] In terms of political action, Reisigl and Wodak define several fields of action which consist of different genres that altogether establish political discourses. The focus in this article will be on the political/executive/judiciary administration fields[13] and the field of law-making procedure, which includes different genres such as official reports prepared by state bureaucrats, speeches of heads of governments, laws, judicial decisions and prosecution charges. Analyzing various texts written/spoken by different agents and institutions of the state gives the reader an overall picture of state discourse on the Kurdish issue and helps to trace intertextuality between different state documents. Yet, since all texts could not be analyzed, specific focus will be on the texts that were written in "critical situations" which refer to the times when the institutionalized routines and self-identity of the state were disturbed.[14] Focusing on critical situations may give more insight on the state's approach towards the Kurdish issue as it is at those times that the state felt ontologically insecure and to overcome this, legitimized extraordinary measures by new discursive practices.

---

[9]   Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Anti-Semitism* (London: Routledge, 2011).
[10]   Theo V. Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[11]   Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination*, 35–41.
[12]   Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination*, 36.
[13]   In Reisigl and Wodak's work, this field is defined as political/executive administration only, yet since the judiciary is actively used to "manage" the Kurdish issue in Turkey, I also added the judiciary field to the analysis.
[14]   Steele, *Ontological Security,* 12. As it will be demonstrated, in the Kurdish issue, critical situations happened when Kurds emphasized their self-identity as a separate identity from the Turkish one and hence disturbed the autobiographical narrative of the state.

With regards to the second question, the discourse analysis conducted in this article integrates the socio-historical background of the texts (the context which rendered the texts possible), and the discursive strategies employed in them. As for the latter, the focus of analysis will be on referential strategies (how actors are represented), predicational strategies (what traits are attributed to those actors), and argumentation strategies (with which argumentation or legitimization are actors represented as they are in the texts). These strategies are important because they can demonstrate how Kurds are represented and how this specific representation was constituted as a threat against the Turkish self in the official discourse.

On the referential strategy side, the article relies on Van Leeuwen's "social actor network model" which presents an extensive analysis of how actors are included and excluded in the texts[15]. Considering the limits of the article, exclusion will be the center of attention because, as it will be seen, it is mainly through excluding Kurdish identity that the Turkish self aimed to overcome its ontological insecurity. Exclusion, according to Leeuwen, could take two forms: suppression and backgrounding.[16] Suppression happens when there is no reference to the social actor in question in the text; backgrounding happens when excluded actors may not be mentioned in a related action but they are mentioned elsewhere in the text.[17] In addition to showing the exclusion of Kurdish identity in state discourse, the article will also show what characteristics are attributed to Kurdish identity and how those traits are associated with the discourse of security.

The article begins by explaining the theory of ontological (in)security with a particular focus on why it is used to understand state-minority group relations. The second part briefly explores what Turkishness meant to the state elites during the establishment years, and thus shows how the Turkish self was constructed. This is necessary to understand how and why Kurdish identity was perceived and constituted as a threat to Turkish identity after the Sheikh Said rebellion. The third part ana-

---

15   Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice*, 23–55.
16   Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice*, 28–32.
17   Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice*, 29.

lyzes the securitization of the tribal and religious structure of Kurds between 1925 and 1960, which resulted in the resettlement of local notables within the country. The final part focuses on the securitization of Kurdish identity between 1960 and 1984. In this period, Kurds began to more vocally emphasize their Kurdishness, and this induced anxiety and generated ontological insecurity for the state. Since the source of the threat was the reiteration of Kurdish identity, the state constantly pressured those actors who were vocal in the Kurdish issue using trials, detentions and as will be seen, by banning the use of the Kurdish language.

Theoretical background: Ontological (in)security

The roots of ontological security lie in psychoanalysis and the term was first used by psychiatrist Ronald David Laing. According to Laing, an ontologically secure person is one who has a "sense of his presence as alive, whole and, in a temporal sense a continuous person."[18] An ontologically insecure person, on the other hand, "lacks the experience of his own temporal continuity and his/her identity and autonomy is under question."[19] Thus, for Laing two points come into prominence in defining ontological security: first, a person's sense of being as an entity will not be questioned; and second, this sense of being will have continuity in time. Continuity of self was also emphasized by Anthony Giddens, who further elaborated on the concept.[20] For Giddens, continuity is important because it provides the consistency crucial for self-identity.[21] Based on this, Giddens describes ontological security as the "confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action."[22]

---

[18]   Ronald D. Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 42.
[19]   Laing, *The Divided Self,* 42.
[20]   Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (London: Standford University Press, 1991).
[21]   Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity,* 92.
[22]   Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 92.

Both Laing and Giddens make an individual level analysis and use the concept to understand insecurities experienced by individuals. Starting from the early 2000s, the concept began to be used by IR scholars, who mostly applied the concept to the state level to understand the foreign policy behavior of states. Among those, Mitzen's and Steele's works are particularly important due to their role in shaping ontological security literature in IR.[23] Deriving from the works of Giddens, both scholars emphasize states' need to have consistent, stable concepts of self. [24] The stability and continuity of identity crucial for ontological security is provided by routines which stabilize identities, and which produce trust among the states.[25] The disruption of routines generates anxiety, which leads to a disconnect from the self and hence becomes a source of ontological insecurity.[26] Someone who suffers from anxiety must reform behavior in order to regenerate ontological security.

Despite those common points, Steele's and Mitzen's works diverge on the role of "external others" in the constitution of state identity. Mitzen takes an externalist approach and emphasizes the role of "others" in the formation of state identity and self-concepts within international society. On the other hand, Steele focuses on the internal dynamics of identity formation within the state. According to this view, a state's conception of its self-identity is "constructed internally through the development of autobiographical narratives, which are the narratives about self."[27] It is through those narratives that states link a policy to the conception of self and give their actions a meaning consistent with their identity.[28] The autobiographical narrative stabilizes the sense of self and provides continuity and certainty for identity. When a state

---

[23]   Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma," *European Journal of International Relations,* 12, no. 3 (September 2006): 341–370; Brent J. Steele, "Ontological Security and the Power of Self-Identity: British and the American Civil War," *Review of International Studies* 31, no. 3 (September 2005): 519–540.

[24]   Mitzen, "Ontological Security," 344; Steele, *Ontological Security*, 3.

[25]   Steele, *Ontological Security*, 3, 51; Steele, "Ontological Security and the Power of Self-Identity," 526; Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 346–347.

[26]   Steele, *Ontological Security*, 52.

[27]   Will K. Delehanty and Brent J. Steele, "Engaging the Narrative in Ontological (In)Security Theory: Insights from Feminist IR," *Cambridge Review of International Studies* 22, no. 3 (September 2009): 523.

[28]   Steele, *Ontological Security*, 10–11.

acts incongruently with its autobiographical narrative, it experiences shame, which also generates ontological insecurity along with anxiety.[29] Since this article analyzes Turkish ontological (in)security within domestic politics, it focuses on how Turkishness was constituted internally through autobiographical narratives, rather than its intersubjective formation vis-à-vis external others.

In both Steele and Mitzen's analyses, the state is granted personhood and the individual level is projected onto the state level. Thus, ontological security in those analyses is used to understand the relations between states. One may then ask whether it is appropriate to use ontological security to understand state – minority group relations, as is the aim of this article. To start with, it should be mentioned that the idea of "state as level of analysis" has also been found problematic by some scholars[30] who maintain that it is not the states or collective actors, but rather individuals living in the community who feel and experience ontological insecurity. This article, on the other hand, ascribes self-identity to the Turkish nation-state, but analyzes its ontological insecurity towards a minority group within the domestic context. This is not pointless when one looks at Jef Huysmans' pioneering work on the topic[31]. According to Huysmans, the role of the state is not only to mediate threats but also to mediate chaos, and the latter could be realized by giving meaning and intelligibility to relations with others and by bringing order to the environment, whereby an "acceptable degree of certainty" could be achieved[32]. However, strangers both *inside* and outside a society may articulate ambivalence and challenge the ordering activity, which relies on reducing uncertainty.[33] Thus, those strangers create the very chaos that states attempt to eliminate as a possibility. Since, according to Huys-

---

[29]   Steele, *Ontological Security*, 10–11.
[30]   Alanna Krolikowski, "State Personhood in Ontological Security Theories of International Relations and Chinese Nationalism: A Skeptical View," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 2, no. 1 (July 2008): 190–133; Stuart Croft, "Constructing Ontological Insecurity: The Insecuritization of Britain's Muslims," *Contemporary Security Policy* 33, no. 2 (June 2012): 219–235.
[31]   Jef Huysmans, "Security! What Do You Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier," *European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 2 (June 1998): 226–255.
[32]   Huysmans, "Security!," 241.
[33]   Huysmans, "Security!," 241.

mans, the mediation of order and chaos defines ontological security, those elements (insider and outsider strangers) which are ambivalent and which create uncertainty, hence challenging ontological security, must be eliminated, possibly through enemy construction in the language.[34] Thus, ontological insecurity experienced by the state leads to the securitization of strangers inside and outside society. From this perspective then, it is not inconsequential to use an ontological security framework to understand the Turkish state's (self-identity) securitization of the traits of Kurdish identity –"strangers" that are inside society.

The Turkish self in the early republican period

In order to understand actors' ontological security-providing behaviors, it is necessary to focus on their "formative stages of life" because, as Giddens mentions, it is at these times that basic trust, which refers to agents' confidence in the continuity of others, and self-identity emerges.[35] This article takes Turkey's formative stages as the early Republican period of the 1920s and 1930s, where there were various efforts to establish self-identity through constituting biographical narratives.

A close look at state discourses and practices in the 1920s and 1930s demonstrates that the main pillar of Turkishness was the religion of Islam. The first indications of the link between Turkishness and Islam could be seen during the period of the War of Independence between 1919 and 1922. In this time period it appears that the Turkish nation referred to all Muslim communities living in the Ottoman Empire. A parliamentary discussion in 1920 reveals this situation clearly. The deputy Abdulaziz Mecdi Efendi requested that parliament clarify the meaning of Turk. His question and the reactions from parliament are enlightening and aid in the understanding of the role of Islam in defining Turkishness:

As far as I understand, whenever Turkish history was mentioned in this platform, what is meant is various Islamic groups such as Turks, Kurds, Circassians, Laz, isn't it? *(The crowd shouts yes, it is, applauds)*. If this is not what

---

[34] Huysmans, "Security!," 242.
[35] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 38.

Turk means, I request the wording of Islamic elements instead of Turk during the speeches.[36]

The discussion reveals that the name Turk was used as an umbrella identity for all Muslim groups living in the country right before the foundation of the Republic. This belief also continued in the early Republican period and the new Turkish state saw the Muslim majority as its societal ground.[37] Another important consequence of this was that Kemalists started to view all Anatolian Muslims as Turks, an idea which would start the assimilation of non-Turkish Muslim groups into Turkishness.[38]

Yet, Islam was not the only criteria used to define Turkishness. The discourses and practices of the period reveal that language and culture were other essential elements of the Turkish self. Language and culture were seen as the cornerstones of the nation by influential thinkers such as Ziya Gökalp, whose ideas influenced the Kemalist elites in the 1920s. For him a nation "is not a racial or ethnic or geographic or political or volitional entity but is composed of individuals who share a common language, religion, morality and aesthetics; that is to say, of those who have received the same education."[39] Thus, for Gökalp, one could be accepted as a Turk if she is educated as a Turk, she could express herself in Turkish, and she shares the Turkish ideal.[40] In other words, for Gökalp, a nation is socialization through language and culture.

Gökalp's ideas can be traced in the state discourses of the 1920s and 1930s. The speech of Hamdullah Suphi, who was an influential spokesman of Turkish nationalism in the late Ottoman and early Republican period, during the parliamentary debate of Article 88 of the 1924 Constitution reveals the importance of language in Turkishness. Suphi

---

[36]   TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi [Turkish Grand Assembly, Minutes of Debates], Vol. 2, Session 10 (December 1920): 170.

[37]   Özlem Kaygusuz, "Modern Türkiye Vatandaşlığının Erken Öncülleri: Milli Mücadele Döneminde Vatandaşlığın Kuruluşu [The Early Antecedents of Modern Turkish Citizenship: The Construction of National Citizenship in National Struggle]," *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi* 60, no. 2 (2005): 195–217.

[38]   Soner Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who Is a Turk* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 102.

[39]   Ziya Gökalp, *The Principles of Turkism* (n.p.: Bill Archive, 1968), 15.

[40]   Gökalp, *The Principles of Turkism*, 16.

was against the categorization of Greeks and Armenians as Turks, since essentially they were not Turks. Yet, there was a way to become a Turk:

Someone (meaning a Jew), an old friend of mine, asked me "Could you please tell me, how can I become a Turk?" I said, "You can become a Turk." As long as Jews, who were expelled from Spain and came here with Spanish, accept (Turkish) language of the country…they could be Turks…Adopt Turkish culture. After that, we can call you Turk.[41]

Thus, according to Suphi, one could become a Turk if he/she speaks Turkish and adopts Turkish culture.

Although Gökalp's idea of nation was inclusionary, Kemalist nationalism took a more exclusionary character in the 1930s when ethnicity and race became important traits of Turkishness. The distinctiveness and superiority of the Turkish race vis-à-vis other nations was the dominant discourse of the 1930s and via legal amendments, ethnic Turks were made the privileged group within the nation.[42]

Lastly, modernization understood as Westernization could also be considered an important pillar of Turkishness in the early Republican period. As Keyman and Özkırımlı mention, "the primary goal of Kemalist elite was to 'reach the contemporary level of civilization' by adopting the main political, economic and ideological elements of Western civilization."[43] Indeed, according to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, this is so crucial that those who ignore civilization (read as Westernization) "will be drowning by the flood of it."[44] This process of Westernization not only started an institutional change but also dictated a new "modern" national identity, defined by rationalism, secularism and

---

[41]   TBMM, Zabıt Ceridesi [Turkish Grand Assembly, Minutes of Debates], Vol. 8/1, Session 42 (April 1924), 909.
[42]   Taha Parla and Andrew Davison, *Corporatist Ideology in Kemalist Turkey: Progress or Order?* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 68–80. In this period, non-Turks were excluded from some important public services such as being a government employee, which demonstrates the importance of ethnicity in defining Turkishness. See Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism.*
[43]   Fuat Keyman and Umut Özkırımlı, "The 'Kurdish Question' Revisited: Modernity, Nationalism and Citizenship in Turkey," in *Understanding Turkey's Kurdish Question,* eds. Fevzi Bilgin and Ali Sarıhan (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013).
[44]   The quote is from Atatürk's speech on the second anniversary of the victory of the War of Independence. *Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri Vol 2.* (Ankara: Divan Yayıncılık, 2006).

progress. This also meant the removal of old traditions and institutions which were mostly defined by religion and Islamic values[45]. As a result, the symbols and institutions that belonged to the Ottoman past such as *tekke*s (Islamic monasteries), *dervish* lodges and Muslim theological schools of *medrese*s were removed. Clearly, for Kemalist elites, these religious institutions were incompatible with their civilizing mission. As will be shown in the next section, this would be one of the main reasons for division between the Turkish state and Kurds who were strongly attached to religious institutions in their social lives.

Ontological (in)security and the securitization of Kurdish tribal and religious structure

Having argued that modernity as Westernization was one of the pillars of Turkish identity in the early Republican period, this section analyzes how Kurds' tribal and religious structure became (and was constructed as) a source of ontological insecurity for the Turkish self between 1925 and 1960. It will be argued that the Sheikh Said rebellion, which broke out in 1925, was a turning point here: the rebellion threatened the security of the new Republic, not only in the sense of traditional survival logic, but also in the sense of ontological security. The rebellion generated ontological insecurity in the Turkish self by challenging its stability and certainty. To reinstate ontological security, state elites first constructed these elements of Kurdishness (tribal and religious structure) as threats against the Republic in the discourse and later followed assimilationist policies towards Kurds by which they aimed to melt those elements of Kurdishness that destabilized Turkish self-identity. The resettlement of Kurds was an important part of this

---

[45]   Here, it should be noted that the struggle of the founding elites was not with Islam *per se*, but with the interpretation of it. Aiming for a secular society, Kemalist elites constrained the power of religion to organize societal and political affairs. Hence, founding elites politicized those societal forces who asked for more of a role for religion in society. They were labelled political reactionists who want nothing but a return to *seriah* rule. The republican regime's self-proclaimed duty here was to protect the "real" Islam (secular, progressive, national) against those reactionary forces in the society. For more on this topic, please see Umut Azak, *Tükiye'de Laiklik ve İslam* [Secularism and Islam in Turkey] (İstanbul: İletişim, 2019).

assimilation policy and this section also focuses on the forced resettlements of Kurds and the legitimization strategies used in those resettlements during the 1920s and 1930s.

After the War of Independence, Republican elites pursued nationalist policies with an intense centralization which resulted in the denial of political and social rights to Kurds. Yet, this did not mean that Kurds were perceived as "internal others" before 1925. As previously mentioned, the new state had been considered an entity for all the Muslim elements of Anatolia. A clear shift occurred in the state-elites' perspective towards the Kurds after the Sheikh Said rebellion. The rebellion led by Sheikh Said quickly spread in south-eastern Anatolia and rebels took control of several districts in a short span of time. The rebellion, in this sense, threatened the physical security of the state. But, maybe equally important, the rebellion also posed a great threat to the ontological security of the state because the rebellion disrupted the constituting characteristics of Turkish self-identity. As previously stated, the decision-makers in the early Republican period were in the process of constructing Turkey as a modern, secular state. They had also thought that Muslim groups could be assimilated into Turkishness due to their religious bond and Turkish culture and language could play an important role in this assimilation.[46] However, the religious character of the rebellion against the cultural reforms of the new Republic and the fact that the rebellion was led by a Muslim group that did not want to be assimilated into Turkishness created a serious rupture in the narratives of state elites. As a result, the state elites perceived the rebellion as a threat to the sense of self and to the Turkishness they were attempting to constitute. Thus, there was an existential threat; not only against physical security but also against the ontological security of the state.[47]

A close look at the final decision speech of the chairman of the Court of Independence, which worked as criminal courts after the rebellion, could be enlightening in this sense:

---

[46]   Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism.*
[47]   Gökçe Balaban, "Tracing Turkey's Security Discourses and Practices vis-à-vis the Kurdish Issue" (PhD diss., Middle East Technical University, 2016), 71.

Your political reaction and rebellion were destroyed immediately by the decisive acts of the government of the Republic and by the fatal strokes of the Republican army…Everybody must know that as the young Republican government will definitely not condone any cursed action like incitement and *political reactionism*, it will prevent this sort of banditry by means of its precise precautions. The poor people of this region who have been exploited and oppressed under the domination of *sheikhs* and *feudal landlord*s will be freed from your incitements and evil and they will follow the efficient paths of our Republic which promises *progress* and *prosperity*.[48]

The first thing that could be noticed here is oppositional predications: while the Republic, as an active agent, is presented positively as representing "progress and prosperity," sheikhs and feudal landlords are represented negatively, as social "evils" against the ideals of the Republic. Thus, a difference of identity is constructed here – positive self-representation vs. negative other representation. What is also notable here is that Kurdish identity was not mentioned anywhere in the text explicitly and thus suppressed. However, whenever the socio-political structure of Kurds is considered, it may be argued that the Kurdish identity is hidden in the text rather than excluded. By defining agents and processes against the Republic as political reactionism, sheikhs and feudal landlords, the text implicitly shifts the axis from this particular rebellion to Kurdish identity because all these characteristics, namely religion, sheikhs, and feudal landlords, were important constituent parts of Kurdish political and social identity.[49] For one thing, religious institutions like *medreses* and *tarikats* were important bearers of Kurdish national identity.[50] Especially, sheikhs of the *tarikats* became so influential in the 19th century that they started to arbitrate disputes between tribes.[51] The tribes and the tribal structure (feudality as expressed in

---

[48]   Ergun Aybars, İstiklal *Mahkemeleri (1920–1927)* (İzmir: Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1998) quoted in M. Yeğen, *Müstakbel Türk'ten Sözde Vatandaşa: Cumhuriyet ve Kürtler* [From Prospective Turk to So-Called Citizen: Republic and Kurds] (İstanbul: İletişimYayınları: 2006), 128, *emphasis added.*
[49]   Balaban, "Tracing Turkey's," 71.
[50]   Martin van Bruinessen, "Kurdish Society, Ethnicity, Nationalism and Refugee Problems," in *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, eds. Philip G. Kreyenbroek and S. Sperl (New York: Routledge, 1992): 33–67.
[51]   Bruinessen, "Kurdish Society," 33–67.

the text), on the other hand, had been the most influential political organization in the Kurdish region for centuries.[52] They were the political institutions with some measure of territorial integrity.

Thus, it can be argued that after the Sheikh Said rebellion, Turkish state elites became aware that Kurdish political, social and cultural identity would disrupt the biographical continuity of the Turkish state and would generate ontological insecurity, because, as the Sheikh Said rebellion demonstrated, Kurds did not want to be assimilated into Turkishness and into the modernity and secularity of the new state. If it was the characteristics of Kurdishness which threatened the ontological security of the Turkish self, then to eliminate this threat, those characteristics of Kurdishness that created uncertainty in this self would have to be eliminated.[53] Therefore, many policies in this period and later on aimed to eliminate and/or assimilate the social and cultural traits of Kurdish identity. Resettlement of the Kurdish population was one of those policies whereby state elites wanted to abolish the tribal structure and eliminate the power of sheikhs in the region, which were significant characteristics of Kurdish identity. Looking into the legitimization discourses of resettlement laws also sheds light on how ontological security concerns of the state played an important role in assimilating the Kurdish identity.

The resettlement of Kurds after the Sheikh Said rebellion

After the Sheikh Said rebellion, republican elites started to resettle Kurds within the country in which ontological security concerns played an important role. This was clear in the reports prepared by the government after the rebellion with the purpose of eliminating future threats that may arise in the region.

---

[52] Wadie Jwaideh, *Kürt Milliyetçiliği'nin Tarihi: Kökenleri ve Gelişimi* [The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development], trans. İsmail Çekem and Alper Duman (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1999).
[53] Balaban, "Tracing Turkey's," 72.

In September 1925, the government declared the "Reform Report for the East."[54] According to Article 9 of the report, the people who were thought to provoke and support the rebellion, or who were not found suitable to reside in the region by the government, would be transferred to specified neighborhoods in the west with their families. Immediately after the report, local elites and rich landholders were exiled from their territories and those territories were either distributed to peasants or seized by the Treasury Department.[55] What is striking here was that most of the deportees had not participated in the rebellion and what is more, some had even supported the state against the rebels.[56] Thus, resettlement could be considered an act of eliminating the power of landlords and sheikhs who were important carriers of Kurdish identity.

Another important resettlement law in this period was law No. 1097 – Law Regarding the Transfer of Certain Persons from the Eastern Regions to the Western Provinces – with which the government aimed to eliminate the feudal/tribal structure in the East.[57] In the justification part of the law, it was mentioned that there would be no *enlightenment* and *prosperity* in the region as long as these people and these groups – tribal chieftains and influential families – remained in the region. Here, it could again be seen that the republican elites used predication strategies with which they identified the republic with the positive values of enlightenment and prosperity against the "backward" character of Kurds. The tribal structure was presented as the carrier of this "backwardness" which should be dismantled. This logic reasserts the idea that one of the primary motives behind the resettlement policies in this period was eliminating the political and social characteristics

---

[54]   The report is an executive act which specified the policies of the state towards Kurdish populated region. For more, please see Mehmet Bayrak, *Şark Islahat Planı: Kürtlere Vurulan Kelepçe* [Reform Report for the East: Handcuff to Kurds] (İstanbul: Özge Yayınları, 2009).

[55]   Ercan Çağlayan, *Cumhuriyet'in Diyarbakır'da Kimlik İnşası (1923–1950)* [The Identity Construction of the Republic in Diyarbakır 1923–1950)] (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2014).

[56]   Çağlayan, *Cumhuriyet'in Diyarbakır'da Kimlik İnşası (1923–1950)*.

[57]   Bazı Eşhasın *Şark* Menatıkından Garp Vilayetlerine Nakline Dair Kanun [Law regarding the transfer of certain persons from the eastern regions to the western provinces], no. 1097, In TBMM, Zabıt Ceridesi [Turkish Grand Assembly, Minutes of Debates], Vol. 33, Session 76 (June 1927), 155–159.

of Kurdish identity which were threatening the modern/secular identity of the new Republic.

The Resettlement Law of 1934 was another important population transfer move in this period. One of the most important points of the law was the suppression of Kurdish identity which was subsumed under Turkish identity.[58] In the text, Kurds were described as "nomads who are *not culturally Turkish*"[59], "people whose mother tongue *is not Turkish*"[60], "people who are *not of the Turkish race*."[61] Thus, their defining characteristic was lacking Turkishness and this situation should be "fixed" by the reorganization of their residency based on loyalty to Turkish culture.[62] This could be seen as an attempt to restore ontological security on the part of the state. By implementing the resettlement law, Turkish decision-makers aimed to assimilate Kurdish collective identity into Turkishness by detaching Kurds from Kurdish spatiality and mixing them with the Turkish population. As a result, Kurds would lose their threatening characteristics by being assimilated into the identity of the Turkish self.

Even though the pressure on tribal structure and sheikhs diminished in the later years of the republic, it did not end completely. Whenever the state elites felt threatened by Kurdish identity, they resorted to population policies. One example was the transfer of tribal chieftains and sheikhs to a camp in Sivas right after the 1960 coup. A few months later, most of them were released except fifty-five tribal chieftains and sheikhs who were dominant in the region. With the "Compulsory Settlement Law" issued on 19 October 1960 as an additional law to the Resettlement Law of 1934, these people were transferred to the western part of Turkey.[63] In Article 1 of the law, it was mentioned that those who were transferred were threatening the peace of residents in the region and damaging national interests by using religion, traditions and

---

[58] *İskân* Kanunu [Resettlement Law], no. 2510, Düstur [Code of Laws], Third Set, Vol. 15 (June 1934), 1156–1175.
[59] *İskan* Kanunu, Article 9.
[60] *İskan* Kanunu, Article 11.
[61] *İskân* Kanunu, Article 7.
[62] *İskan* Kanunu, Article 1.
[63] 2510 Sayılı İskan Kanuna Kanuna Ek Kanun [Additional Law to the Resettlement Law no. 2510], no. 105 (October 1960).

foreign ideologies. The clause is important in the sense of labelling the Kurdish tribal chieftains as "threats" and agents that challenge peace and threaten national interests. In the following years, with the increasing frequency of the use of national security terminology by the elites, Kurds' ethnic consciousness would incrementally be labelled with security terms such as "separatism" and "threat".

Securitization of Kurdish identity between 1960 and 1984

From the perspective of state elites, assimilation seemed to be working for two decades after the 1930s. There were no rebellions during this time period and Kurdishness had not been publicly expressed. The silence was broken in 1959 with the "trial of 49s." In 1959, a group of Kurdish students and intellectuals protested a speech made by the Republican People's Party representative Asım Eren, who demanded the use of violence against Kurds in order to avenge the killings of Turcomans in Northern Iraq.[64] The students sent a letter of protest to Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and signed it "Kurds of Turkey." While the letter created unrest, it was not until the publication of Kurdish intellectual Musa Anter's poem "Qimil" in a Diyarbakır based magazine that the state took action against the signatories and intellectuals. The poem was in Kurdish, and was perceived as a satirical critique of the state, while it was also believed that the poem emphasized a "national revival" of Kurds.[65]

---

[64] In 1959 there was an attempted coup against General Abdulkerim Kasım, the Prime Minister of Iraq, by Arab General Sevaf. The coup started in Mosoul where Kurds were the majority. Abdulkerim Kasım had promised Mustafa Barzani autonomy for Kurds in northern Iraq and Barzani's troops supported Kasım against Sevaf's forces. Barzani was successful in suppressing this coup attempt. Later, Barzani harshly repressed the tribes who supported the coup and during these events two Turcomans were killed by Barzani's forces. See Ayşe Hür, "Kımıl Olayından 49'lar Davasına [From the Event of Quimil to the Case of 49s]," *Hak Söz Haber*, September 13, 2008, https://www.haksozhaber.net/kimil-olayindan-49lar-davasina-6614yy.htm.
[65] The poem was the story of a Kurdish peasant girl whose wheat crop turned into straw because of wheat bugs. At the end of the poem, Anter called out to the girl by saying: "Do not be sorry my sister, your brothers who are going to protect you from wheat bugs, sun pests, and all the other exploiters are rising now." (See Ayşe Hür, "*Kımıl Olayından*") Public opinion in

The first reactions against the letter and poem came from Turkish newspapers. When public reaction increased, the state took action and arrested fifty Kurdish intellectuals.[66] The public prosecutor charged accusations on Article 125 of the Penal Law, which specified that:

> those who try to put some or all part of state's territory under the sovereignty of a foreign country…., who tries to *separate* some parts of state's territory from state's authority is to be punished with aggravated life imprisonment.[67]

Even though it was Kurdishness which disrupted the state, Kurdish identity was not specified anywhere in the prosecutor's charge, and hence suppressed. Yet those who expressed Kurdishness were characterized as separatists threatening the state. If one thinks that language or the expression of Kurdishness could not establish a physical threat but only an ontological one, it becomes clear that ontological (in)security of the state was crucial in the securitization of the expression of Kurdish identity.

The trial of the Turkish Workers' Party (TWP) and its closure is also worth examining to see how the state reacted to the expression of Kurdish identity in the 1960s. From the beginning, the party attracted the interest of leftist Kurdish intellectuals whose presence also influenced the party discourse. In its first years, the party approached the Kurdish issue from the perspective of the economic inequality and economic backwardness of the East. Yet seeing the issue only from the economic perspective changed after 1966, when Kurdish groups became more influential in the party. At the party's fourth congress, the Kurdish issue was presented as an ethnic issue rather than an economic one. Accordingly, the party affirmed Kurdish existence against the denialist logic of

---

Turkey was that "wheat bugs, sun pests" referred to the Turkish state, and the brothers who are going to save the girl referred to Kurds, hence the poem was about the national revival of Kurds.

[66]   The reason why it is called "the event of 49s" despite the detention of fifty intellectuals is that one of the detainees lost his life while in custody.

[67]   Mülga Türk Ceza Kanunu [Abolished Turkish Penal Code], no. 765, Article 125 (March 1926).

the state and promised "to support the struggle of the Kurdish people to exercise all their constitutional rights."[68]

The clear expression of Kurdish identity and the emphasis on the constitutional rights of Kurds once more disturbed the self-identity of the state. Following the military memorandum in 1971, the party members were arrested and the party was banned because of the declarations made about the Kurdish issue. In the final decision regarding the party's ban, the Constitutional Court decided that the TWP had breached the first paragraph of the 57th Article of the Constitution which specifies that "the actions of the political parties should be in accordance with the principle of the *integrity* of the state with its territory and its nation."[69] Once again, the state labelled the expression of Kurdish identity a disrupting force against the state's integrity, constructing it as a separatist act in the discourse.

Another case worth looking into is the trial of the Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearts (RECH). The RECH was a legal network of clubs formed in 1969 with the objective of promoting Kurdish culture, enhancing solidarity among Kurdish youth, and fighting the feudal system in Turkey's Kurdistan region.[70] In October 1970, the leaders of the RECH were arrested and after the military memorandum, their trial was transferred to military court under the martial law command in Diyarbakır. The criminal charge of the military prosecutor against the members of the RECH is a clear reflection of the representation of Kurdish identity in the state discourse.

The prosecutor's charge begins by explaining the roots of Kurds and the history of Kurdishness[71]. Accordingly, the charge, relying on "historical data," tries to "prove" that Kurds' origins are traced back to

---

[68]   Tarık Ziya Ekinci, *Türkiye İşçi Partisi ve Kürtler* [Turkish Workers' Party and Kurds] (Istanbul: Sosyal TarihYayınları, 2010), 80–81.

[69]   Ekinci, *Türkiye İşçi Partisi ve Kürtler*, 93.

[70]   Mümtaz Kotan, *Yenilginin İzdüşümleri* [Footprints of Defeat] (Atina: Yunan Kürt Dostluk Derneği Yayınları, 2003), 280–281; David. McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2007).

[71]   The translation here was made directly from the court file which was published in the magazine of *Toplum ve Kuram.* See "Kürt Meselesi'nin Tarihi ile Yüzleşmek: DDKO Dava Dosyası'nda Türk Milliyetçiliği-Irkçılığı [Facing with the history of the Kurdish issue: Turkish nationalism-racism in the court file of RECH]," *Toplum ve Kuram* 2, (2009): 239–246.

Central Asia and since Central Asia is the homeland of Turkic tribes, Kurds are naturally Turks[72]. Kurds are Turks from the Oghuz tribe who migrated in 3000 B.C. to the territory they live in today and the language of the Kurds is nothing but Turkish. Still, even today most of the words that Kurmanji (a Kurdish group) use are Asian and Central Anatolian Turkish, but since they were neighbors with Armenians and Iranians, they were forced to use words from Armenian and Persian.[73] Deriving from the Turkishness of the Kurds, the prosecutor reached the conclusion that Kurdishness claims made by the RECH leaders could be nothing but the "provocation of the enemies" and those people "aim to destroy Turkey by undermining Turkey's national integrity."

This time Kurds were included in the text, but their inclusion was an attempt to reinstate the autobiographical narrative that all Anatolian people had Turkic roots. In addition, once more, Kurdishness was perceived and constituted in terms of security: its expression could be nothing but the provocation of the enemies who try to destroy the state's integrity and national unity. From the perspective of ontological security, Kurdishness as expressed by the RECH disrupted the story the Turkish state had been telling itself about its identity for the last three decades (that Anatolia was a land of Turks and Kurdish is not a separate language), and therefore generated ontological insecurity for the Turkish state. Thus, the very existence of the RECH became a threat to the

---

[72]   Despite the Turkish state's efforts to deny Kurdishness and its perspective of seeing Kurds as Turks, Kurds establish a distinct ethnic group in the southeastern and eastern part of Turkey, northern part of Iraq, northeastern part of Syria and northwestern part of Iran. Although there are debates about the ancestry of Kurds, since the 16th century there has been a consensus on both Ottoman and Iranian resources to call tribes living in this region Kurds. Those tribes were distinctive mostly because of their language: they neither spoke Turkish, nor Persian nor Arabic. For more on this topic please see Martin van Bruinessen, *Kürtlük, Türklük, Alevilik: Etnik ve Dinsel Kimlik Mücadeleleri* [Kurdishness, Turkishness and Alevism: Religious and Ethnic Identity Struggles], trans. Hakan Yurdakul (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000), 59.
[73]   It should be stressed that etymological studies do not support this argument. Many studies demonstrate that Kurdish belongs to the Indo-European language family rather than Uralic-Altalic, which Turkish belongs to. For more on the etymology of Kurdish please see Ernest Mc-Carus, "Kurdish Language Studies," *Middle East Journal* 14, no. 3 (Summer 1960): 325–335. Based on linguistic evidence, some scholars classified Kurds with the Iranian people, rather than with Asiatic groups, such as Turks. See Vladimir Minorsky, "Kurds and Kurdistan," in *Encylopedia of Islam, Vol. 5*, eds. Clifford Edmund Bosworth, Van Donzel, B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986): 447–449.

ontological security of the state, for it emphasized Kurdishness, and this is why the discourse of security was dominant in the prosecutor's charge.

Securitization of Kurdish identity further increased after the 1980 military coup. One example of this can be seen in a book prepared by the Turkish Land Forces Command in 1982 in which separatist and destructive elements were identified. According to the book, Kurdism was the most effective separatism in the country. The argumentation of this discourse bears similarities with the RECH trial. The book claims that there are no Kurds in Turkey and the word Kurd derives from the sound heard when walking on the thin layer of snow in the mountains.[74] This snow is called Kurdish snow or Kurdun, and that is why Turks living in snow-covered places are called Kurds. Since Kurds were Turks, those who emphasized Kurdishness were nothing but separatists.

The 1980 regime also took very harsh measures against the Kurdish language, since it saw Kurdish as a force that undermined "national security" and "public order." "The law on publications that will be made in languages other than Turkish" prohibited "expressing, publishing and spreading the thoughts on languages other than those mother tongues of the countries recognized by the Turkish state."[75] Without a doubt, the law aimed to prevent the use of the Kurdish language. It was clear in the purpose of the law that the state saw the Kurdish language as a threat to itself. Accordingly, the objective of the law was specified as the "protection of national security and public order"[76]. Describing the Kurdish language as a threat to national security once more demonstrates how securitization of Kurdish identity and the extraordinary measures that followed provided the state the ontological security it was seeking in the Kurdish issue.

---

[74]   *Türkiye'de Yıkıcı ve Bölücü Akımlar*, 43.
[75]   Türkçe'den Başka DillerdeYapılacak Yayınlar Hakkında Kanun [The Law on Publications that will be made in Languages Other than Turkish], no. 2932 (November 1983).
[76]   Türkçe'den Başka DillerdeYapılacak Yayınlar Hakkında Kanun, Article 2.

Conclusion

Since the intensification of violence on the part of the PKK, there is a tendency in Turkish state discourse to associate the Kurdish issue with terrorism. This article has tried to put forward that this specific discursive construction did not start after the terrorist activities of the PKK but long before it. Accordingly, since the Sheikh Said rebellion, the state relied on security discourse and the social, political and cultural characteristics of Kurdish identity were securitized, mostly by characterizing them with labels of "threats" and "separatism." The article argued that behind this securitization lies the ontological (in)security concerns of the state. Ontological security refers to the security of self-identity as opposed to the security of the body. The continuity in self-identity is crucial for actors' feelings of ontological security. From this perspective, the expression of Kurdish identity disrupted the continuity of the story that the Turkish self was recounting about who it was. For one thing, the Kurdish rebellions between 1925 and 1930 demonstrated that not all Muslim groups would be willing to assimilate into Turkishness and to adopt Turkish culture and language. What is more, the tribal structure and sheikhdom important for Kurdish socio-political identity also threatened the "modern nation-state" ideal of the new Republic. Thus, there was a group within the nation that did not want to be assimilated into Turkishness, and more importantly, the ethnic characteristics of this group threatened the new state's "modern" identity.

While this perception of threat led to the securitization of Kurdish identity in state discourse, it also affected the policies of the state towards Kurds. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Turkish state carried out a policy of forced resettlement by which the Kurdish population and Kurdish notables were transferred to western parts of the country. The aim was to suppress the ethnic traits of Kurds which generated ontological insecurity. After the 1960s, suppression took the form of arresting Kurdish people or closing Kurdish associations who publicly expressed their Kurdishness. With the 1980 military regime, emphasizing Kurdishness was considered equal to separatism and expression of the Kurdish language was banned by the regime with the aim of protecting national security.

Lastly, one may reflect on the relevance of this article to the ongoing Kurdish issue. From the ontological security perspective, it could be argued that the emphasis of Kurdishness by the PKK after 1984 may have generated further ontological insecurity for the Turkish state because of its disruption of dominant narratives. This has led to further securitization of the Kurdish issue. From the ontological security perspective, any solution of the Kurdish issue today requires establishing new narratives about Turkishness that would not see Kurdishness as a threat to itself. If Kurdish identity could be seen not as an internal other, but as a part of the self, with its distinctive character, ontological insecurity of the state towards Kurdishness may fall away.

Bibliography

2510 Sayılı İskan Kanuna Kanuna Ek Kanun [Additional Law to the Resettlement Law no. 2510], no. 105 (October 1960).

Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri I-III. Ankara: Divan Yayıncılık, 2006.

Azak, Umut. *Türkiye'de Laiklik ve İslam* [Secularism and Islam in Turkey]. İstanbul: İletişim, 2019.

Balaban, Gökçe. "Tracing's Turkey's Security Discourses and Practices vis-à-vis the Kurdish Issue." PhD diss., Missle East Technical University, 2016.

Bayrak, Mehmet. *Şark Islahat Planı: Kürtlere Vurulan Kelepçe* [Reform Report for the East: Handcuff to Kurds]. İstanbul: Özge Yayınları, 2009.

Bazı Eşhasın *Şark* Menatıkından Garp Vilayetlerine Nakline Dair Kanun [Law regarding the transfer of certain persons from the eastern regions to the western provinces], no. 1097. In TBMM, Zabıt Ceridesi [Turkish Grand Assembly, Minutes of Debates], Vol. 33, Session 76 (June 1927), 155–159.

Bruinessen, Martin van. "Kurdish Society, Ethnicity, Nationalism and Refugee Problems." In *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, edited by Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl, 33–67. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Bruinessen, Martin van. *Kürtlük, Türklük, Alevilik: Etnik ve Dinsel Kimlik Mücadeleleri* [Kurdishness, Turkishness and Alevism: Ethnic and Religious Identity Struggles]. Translated by Hakan Yurdakul. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000.

Cağaptay, Soner. *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who Is a Turk*. Oxon: Routledge, 2006.

Cağlayan, Ercan. *Cumhuriyet'in Diyarbakır'da Kimlik İnşası (1923–1950)* [The Identity Construction of the Republic in Diyarbakır 1923–1950)]. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2014.

Croft, Stuart. "Constructing Ontological insecurity: The Insecuritization of Britian's Muslims." *Contemporary Security Policy* 32, no. 2 (June 2012): 219–235.

Delehanty, K. Will and Brent J. Steele. "Engaging the Narrative in Onto-logical (In)Security Theory: Insights from Feminist IR." *Cambridge Review of International Studies* 22, no. 3 (September 2009): 523–540.

Ekinci, Ziya Tarık. *Türkiye İşçi Partisi ve Kürtler* [Turkish Workers' Party and Kurds]. İstanbul: Sosyal Tarih Yayınları, 2010.

Giddens, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity*. London: Standford University Press, 1990.

Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. London: Standford University Press, 1991.

Gökalp, Ziya. *The Principles of Turkism*. (n.p.): Bill Archive, 1968.

Huysmans, Jef. "Security! What Do You Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier." *European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 2 (June 1998): 226–255.

Hür, Ayşe. "'Kımıl' Olayından 49'lar Davası'na." *HakSöz Haber*, July 13, 2008. https://www.haksozhaber.net/kimil-olayindan-49lar-davasina-6614yy.htm.

İskân Kanunu [Resettlement Law], no. 2510. Düstur [Code of Laws], Third Set, vol. 15 (June 1934), 1156–1175.

Jwaideh, Wadie. *Kürt Milliyetçiliği'nin Tarihi: Kökenleri ve Gelişimi* [The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development]. Translated by İsmail Çekem and Alper Duman. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1999.

Kaygusuz, Özlem. "Modern Türk Vatandaşlığı Kavramının Erken Öncülleri: Milli Mücadele Döneminde Ulusal Vatandaşlığın Kuruluşu [The Early Antecedents of Modern Turkish Citizenship: The Construction of National Citizenship in National Struggle]." *Ankara* Üniversitesi *SBF Dergisi* 60, no. 2 (2005): 195–217.

Keyman, Fuat and Umut Özkırımlı "The 'Kurdish Question' revisited: Modernity, Nationalism and Citizenship in Turkey." In *Understanding Turkey's Kurdish Question*, edited by Fevzi Bilgin and Ali Sarıhan. Lanham: Lexington Books, 1997.

Kotan, Mümtaz. *Yenilginin* İzdüşümleri [Footprints of Defeat]. Atina: Yunan Kürt Dostluk Derneği Yayınları, 2003.

Krolikowski, Alanna. "State Personhood in Ontological Security Theories of International Relations and Chinese Nationalism: A Skeptical View." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 2, no. 1 (July 2008): 109–133.

"Kürt Meselesi'nin Tarihi ile Yüzleşmek: DDKO Dava Dosyası'nda Türk Milliyetçiliği-Irkçılığı [Confronting History of the Kurdish Issue: Turkish Nationalism in DDKO Case File]." *Toplum ve Kuram* 2 (2009): 239–246.

Laing, Ronald David. *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*. London: Penguin Books, 1990.

Leeuwen, V. Theo. *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Analysis*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Lupovici, Amir. "Ontological Dissonance, Clashing Identities, and Israel's Unilateral Steps towards the Palestinians." *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 4 (October 2012): 809–833.

McCarus, Ernest. "Kurdish Language Studies." *Middle East Journal* 14, no. 3 (Summer 1960): 325–335.

McDowall, David. *A Modern History of the Kurds*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2007.

Minorsky, Vladimir. "Kurds and Kurdistan." In *Encylopedia of Islam, Vol.* 5, edited by Clifford Edmund Bosworth, Van Donzel, B. Lewis, CH. Pellat, 438–486. Leiden: E. J: Brill, 1986.

Mitzen, Jennifer. "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma." *European Journal of International Relations*, 12, no. 3 (September 2006): 341–353.

Mülga Türk Ceza Kanunu [Abolished Turkish Penal Code], no. 765, Article 125 (March 1926).

Özcan, Gencer, "Türkiye'de Milli Güvenlik Kavramının Gelişimi" [The Development of the Concept of National Security in Turkey]. In *Türkiye'de Ordu, Devlet ve Güvenlik Siyaseti* [Military, State and Security Politics in Turkey], edited by İsmet Akça and Evren Balta Paker 307–351. Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2010.

Parla, Taha and Andrew Davison. *Corporatist Ideology in Kemalist Turkey: Progress or Order?*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004.

Reisigl, Martin and Ruth Wodak. *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Anti-Semitism*. London: Routledge, 2011.

Rumelili, Bahar. *Conflict Resolurion and Ontological Security: Peace anxieties*. Oxon: Routledge, 2015.

Steele, J. Brent. "Ontological Security and the Power of Self-Identity: British and the American Civil War." *Review of International Studies* 31, no. 3 (July 2005): 519–540.

Steele, J. Brent. *Ontological Security in International Relations*. London: Routledge, 2008.

Subotic, Jelena. "Narrative, Ontological Security and Foreign Policy Change." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 12, no. 4 (October 2016): 610–627.

TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi [Transactions of Proceedings of Turkish Grand National Assembly], Vol. 2, Session: 10. December 19, 1920.

TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi [Transactions of Proceedings of Turkish Grand National Assembly], Vol. 8/1, Session 42. April 20, 1924.

Türkçe'den Başka DillerdeYapılacak Yayınlar Hakkında Kanun [The Law on Publications that will be made in Languages Other than Turkish], no. 2932 (November 1983).

Türkiye'de Yıkıcı ve Bölücü Akımlar [Destructive and Seperatist Movements in Turkey]. Ankara: Kara Kuvvetleri Komutanlığı Yayınları, 1982.

Weaver, Ole. "Securitization and Desecuritization." In *On security*, edited by Ronnie D. Lipschutz, 46–86. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

Yeğen, Mesut. *Müstakbel Türk'ten Sözde Vatandaşa: Cumhuriyet ve Kürtler* [From Prospective Turk to So-Called Citizen: Republic and Kurds]. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006.

A B S T R A C T S

Anna Maria Beylunioğlu, Özgür Kaymak
The Perception of Minorities toward the Turkish State: The Case of Ethno-Religious Communities

The relationship between state and non-Muslim communities has been a delicate issue since the founding of the Turkish Republic despite the principle of secularism stated in its constitution. Against this background, the association of national identity with Sunni-Islam has been the main marker of inclusion/exclusion for national identity. Especially since 2002 when the Justice and Development Party (JDP) came to power, the debate with regard to freedom of religion and the rights of religious minorities came to the fore. Over the course of decades there have been numerous studies approaching the state's perspective towards religious minorities. However, there is a paucity of academic studies that focuses on citizenship experiences of the members of these communities through the course of their daily and social lives. In this article, we first provide a historical perspective of the state towards religious minorities from the establishment of the Republic until today, including the JDP period. In the second part of this study we aim to explore recasting perspectives of the non-Muslim minorities over the previous decade by taking the standpoint of the members of Greek Orthodox, Jews and Armenian communities. To this end, we conduct in-depth interviews with the members of these communities who reside in Istanbul. Finally, new negotiation fields which have been flourishing among these communities will be addressed.

Keywords: national identity, non-Muslim minorities, ethno-religious identity, religion-state relations, freedom of religion, civil society.

Melih Çoban
Caught Between the Notions of Ethnicity, Citizenship and Diaspora: The Case of the Bosniaks in Turkey

Along with many others, Bosniaks are an ethnic group within the contemporary Turkish nation with immigrant roots dating back to the last quarter of the 19th century. Constituting a significant ethno-demographic part of the Ottoman legacy within the modern Turkish nation, Bosniaks in Turkey have long refrained from

identifying themselves with a separate ethnic or cultural identity when confronted with the assimilationist cultural policies of the new nation state. But, while adapting themselves to Turkish culture and identity, Bosniaks have also preserved a collective identity of Bosniakness, mostly owing to the fact that their population in Turkey has been fed by continuous migration waves in different periods. The aim of this study is to analyze the problematic development of a Bosniak identity in Turkey with regards to the cultural assimilation processes and continuous migration waves and other factors on both foreign and domestic scales. Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that Bosniaks in Turkey do not yet constitute a Bosniak diaspora, but rather they can be regarded as a diaspora in the making.

Keywords: Bosniak, Turkey, identity, diaspora, citizenship, ethnicity.

William Gourlay
The Remaking and Unmaking of Multi-Ethnic Spaces: Diyarbakir and Southeast Anatolia in the 21st Century

Focusing on 21st century developments in southeast Anatolia, this article examines the circumstances of minority communities within the contexts of the shifting dynamics of Turkey's national project. Until the early 20th century southeast Anatolia was an ethnic patchwork. The early republican era saw efforts to "Turkify" through the promulgation of a national identity project asserting ethnic unity. From the 1980s, conflict with the PKK gave urgency to the notion that uniformity was paramount for national cohesion. In this milieu, ethnic diversity was suspect. Circumstances changed with the AKP government's 2002 ascendance and the earlier emergence of Kurdish municipal politicians. This article documents how thereafter the re-imagining of the national project away from an exclusive ethnic categorisation allowed acknowledgement and accommodation of ethnic and religious diversity across southeast Anatolia. The chapter analyses these events in light of a backlash by nationalist politicians, the 2015 re-ignition of the PKK conflict and the subsequent resurgence of nationalist rhetoric in the political arena. It appears a narrow, exclusive national identity is re-asserting itself. The article thus examines the extent to which the experience of south-eastern Anatolia represents the re-imagining of Turkey's national project and the embrace of a previously denied multi-ethnic socio-political fabric.

Keywords: Turkey, southeast Anatolia, ethnic identity, minorities, national identity, Justice and Development Party (AKP), nationalism.

A. Banu Hülür, Yusuf Ekinci, A. Çağlar Deniz
Surviving Through Tactics: The Everyday Life of Syrian Refugees in Turkey

The Syrian civil war and related migration affected Turkish border cities such as Antakya, Şanlıurfa, Mardin, Gaziantep, and Kilis. In this study, we explore the tactics and strategies developed by Syrian asylum seekers in order to cope with the prejudices and negative perceptions about Syrians commonly shared by locals. The findings of our research are drawn from the in-depth interviews we conducted with more than one hundred refugees, locals, and staff members of different NGOs. Our arguments and conclusions in this article are also the result of observations made during several research trips and a thorough examination of news about refugees in local and national media. Our field research lasted from August 2014 to February 2015, but the substantial part of this study was conducted between January and February 2015.

Keywords: *Syrian asylum seekers, sociology of everyday life, Gaziantep, Kilis, Turkey.*

Ayşe Serdar
"So What If I Am Laz?": Irony, Mockery and Humor in Ethnic Integration and Insubordination

This study argues that the ethnic Laz in Turkey resort to irony, humor and mockery to cope with and negotiate the stereotypes, ethnic humor and mockery they encounter in their interactions with outsiders. The trope of irony, humor and mockery have enabled the Laz to navigate the national and regional hierarchies and reproduce their symbolic boundaries regardless of the common and ardent appropriation of Turkishness. In so doing, the Laz can more subtly challenge the official ideology of uniformity. While the public use of Lazuri is still considered a threat to the negotiated boundaries of Lazness, new instruments present creative displays of their ethnic capital which do not contradict present day principles of Turkish nationalism, and offer a legitimate sharing of intimacy without embarrassment. The Laz, like other non-Turkish Muslim peoples of the Black Sea region, abandoned their politically threatening ethnic distinctions, appropriated the capital of Turkishness through their performances, and coped with mockery and stigma by ironizing differences and negotiating, trivializing or selectively appropriating the stereotypes imposed upon them. Ironically, they have "out-performed"

ethnic Turks in certain ways, in their search for acceptance as Turks, achieving upward mobility and avoiding forms of stigmatization.

Abdulmesih BarAbraham
Returning Home: The Ambivalent Assyrian Experience in Turkey

Discrimination and precarious living conditions in Tur Abdin, in southeastern Turkey, prompted Assyrians, indigenous Christian ethnic people to the country, to leave their homeland for Europe in the early 1960s. The process of migration continued for several decades and intensified with the militarization of the eastern provinces during the fight against the Kurdish PKK. Many Assyrian villages had to be abandoned. With an appeal formulated in a circular letter by Turkey's then Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit in 2001, the Turkish government encouraged Assyrians abroad to return to their former homeland, assuring them that their security and rights as citizens would be guaranteed by the state. At the beginning of the new millennium, the situation in Tur Abdin seemed noticeably improved. The end of the state of emergency in the eastern provinces and the application of rule of law in the wake of the reforms in the context of EU accession process contributed to this. Many of the Assyrians who emigrated re-visited their former villages, but also tried to rebuild churches and their mostly dilapidated houses. Clarification of ownership of land and properties after occupation and changes of legal basis became a key issue.

Özge Onay
The Diminishing Agency of Urbanised Alevis Against the Rise of Political Islam in Turkey

This paper critically examines the diminishing agency of the first-urbanised Alevi generation vis- à-vis the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and their sectarian agenda mediated by political Islam. The conceptual position is underpinned by Foucault's concept of governmentality and theory of agency in broader cultural terms. These theoretical frameworks interweave to present a rich and complex

set of snapshots that document the first-urbanised Alevi generation's decreasing possibilities of action in the urban context. Accordingly, the empirical data that informs this piece has been collected by a series of qualitative and semi-structured interviews with the first-urbanised Alevi generation, children of those who migrated to urban areas in the 1960s and wittingly or unwittingly kept their identities undisclosed to varying degrees. Those interviewed come from a range of different professional backgrounds, with the only common point being that they have spent their childhoods and adult years in Istanbul, Turkey. Through a close engagement with the empirical material, this paper addresses the effects of the AKP's Sunnification process centring around political Islam on the first generation urbanised Alevis and to what extent the systemic nature of this process attenuates or takes away their agency in the urban context. The account is focused around three key themes including daily life, institutional forms of discrimination and the workplace.

Keywords: political Islam, AKP government, urbanised Alevis, agency, governmentality.

Mettursun Beydulla
Struggles and Dilemmas of Uyghur Immigrants in Turkey

The social and economic integration of the Uyghurs into Turkish society reflects a problem to which policy makers have not yet found a response. Marginalized by the larger society and separated by linguistic differences and cultural and social life-styles, a significant proportion of Uyghurs, especially "newcomers" who have arrived since the 1980s, is in danger of becoming part of a "parallel society." This is reinforced by exclusion, inferiorization and "otherness," restricted educational achievements, uncertain citizenship, legal status limbo and low socioeconomic status. Pro-Uyghur, pro-independence and anti-Chinese government mobilization in Turkey has attracted the attention of Chinese authorities for a long time, and this attention has in turn affected and shaped mobilization in Turkey. The Turkey-China relationship is involved as well. The main goals of Chinese policy and strategy in Turkey are the security of "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region" (a.k.a. East Turkistan), access to natural resources, security of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and economic and technological investment. It means that China believes it must consolidate its control of "Xinjiang" (East Turkistan) and restrain the Uyghur independence movement in Turkey. China's economic and technological power and investments in Turkey are not just increasing its influence; they are making Turkey far more reticent to speak out about Beijing's abuses, systematic

oppression and atrocities in the "Xinjiang" (East Turkistan). China's geo-econo-mic strategy has resulted in political influence in Turkey that profoundly affects its Uyghur population.

Keywords: Uyghur refugees, Uyghur immigration, integration, Uyghur dilemma, Turkish policy, "Xinjiang" (East Turkistan), Turkish and Chinese relations.

UIaş Sunata
The Construction of Turkey's Circassians as a Docile Minority

The 2014 Sochi Olympic Winter Games revived memories related to the Cir-cassians' forced migration from their Caucasus homeland into the Ottoman Em-pire after 150 years. In that year, I conducted a considerable oral history project to understand the collective memories of Circassians in Turkey. The main focus of this study is, however, the social construction of the Circassian minority in Turkey. I examine their oral historical narratives related to their immigration, reception and resettlement, and instrumentalization. It is as important to place emphasis on the protected, multiplied and renewed sociocultural values of Circassians as it is to confront the history. I will examine the relationship between their diasporic identity and minority identity as well as their preferences in identity reproduction.

Keywords: Circassians, Adyghe, minority, diaspora, ethnicity, collective memory, social construction.

Gökçe Balaban
Ontological (In)Security and the Kurdish Issue in Turkey: The Use of Security Discourse (1925–1984)

How could one account for the discourse of security used by the Turkish state considering the Kurdish issue before 1984, when the terrorist attacks of the Partiya Karkaren Kurdistani (PKK) had not yet started, and hence there was no physical security threat against the state? This article aims to answer this question from the perspective of ontological (in)security. Based on Critical Discourse Analysis of state discourse, the article argues that the political, social and cultural traits of Kurdish identity created uncertainty in the Turkish self after the Sheikh Said re-bellion in 1925. Tribal/religious structures that were influential among Kurds and

the expression of Kurdishness as a distinct identity disrupted the autobiographical narratives about Turkishness, hence generating ontological insecurity for the Turkish state. To overcome this problem, the state relied on security discourse and securitized the traits of Kurdish identity, by which it felt threatened. As a result of this securitization, the state was able to legitimize the extraordinary measures taken against Kurds, such as forced resettlements. Securitization, in this sense, regenerated ontological security for the state, because the extraordinary measures served to suppress the Kurdish identity that threatened the certainty and continuity of the Turkish self.

Keywords: ontological (in)security, the Kurdish issue, security discourse, securitization, Turkey.

P O V Z E T K I

Anna Maria Beylunioğlu, Özgür Kaymak
Mnenje manjšine o turški državi: primer etničnih in verskih skupnosti

Vse od ustanovitve republike Turčije je kljub načelu sekularnosti, ki je zapisano v njeni ustavi, odnos med državo in nemuslimanskimi skupnostmi občutljivo vprašanje, povezovanje nacionalne identitete s sunitskim islamom pa glavni označevalec za vključenost v nacionalno identiteto ali izključevanje iz nje. Zlasti z letom 2002, ko je na oblast prišla Stranka za pravičnost in razvoj (JDP), je v ospredje stopila razprava o verski svobodi in pravicah verskih manjšin. Čeprav so v preteklih dveh desetletjih številne študije preučevale stališče države do verskih manjšin, pa je akademskih raziskav, ki bi se osredotočale na državljanske izkušnje pripadnikov teh skupnosti iz vsakdanjega in družbenega življenja zelo malo. Avtorici v prispevku najprej predstavita odnos države do verskih manjšin v zgodovinski perspektivi, od ustanovitve republike do danes, vključno z obdobjem vladavine stranke JDP. V drugem delu študije skozi poglede pripadnikov grške pravoslavne, judovske in armenske skupnosti raziskujeta, kako se je stališče do nemuslimanskih manjšin spremenilo v preteklem desetletju. V ta namen sta izvedli poglobljene intervjuje s pripadniki teh skupnosti, ki živijo v Istanbulu. V sklepnem delu raziskave pa obravnavata nova pogajalska področja, ki se uspešno razvijajo v teh skupnostih.

Ključne besede: nacionalna identiteta, nemuslimanske manjšine, etnično-verska identiteta, odnosi med religijo in državo, verska svoboda, civilna družba.

Melih Çoban
Ujeti med idejami etnične pripadnosti, državljanstva in diaspore: primer Bošnjakov v Turčiji

Ena izmed številnih etničnih skupin, ki živijo v sodobni turški državi, so Bošnjaki. Začetki njihovega priseljevanja segajo v zadnjo četrtino 19. stoletja. Kot pomemben etnično-demografski del otomanske zapuščine v moderni turški državi Bošnjaki, spričo asimilacijske kulturne politike nove nacionalne države, dolgo niso kultivirali ločene etnične ali kulturne istovetnosti. Toda hkrati s prilagajanjem turški kulturi in identiteti so ohranjali tudi kolektivno bošnjaško identiteto, predvsem zahvaljujoč stalnim migracijskim valovom, s katerimi se je v različnih obdo-

bjih napajala njihova populacija. Namen pričujoče študije je bil analizirati težavni razvoj bošnjaške istovetnosti v Turčiji z ozirom na procese kulturne asimilacije in neprekinjene migracijske valove ter druge dejavnike tako v okviru turške države kot tudi zunaj njenih meja. Izsledke raziskave lahko strnemo v sklep, da Bošnjaki v Turčiji zaenkrat še ne predstavljajo diaspore, je pa ta v nastajanju.

Ključne besede: Bošnjaki, Turčija, identiteta, diaspora, državljanstvo, etnična pripadnost.

William Gourlay
*Preoblikovanje in razgradnja multietničnih prostorov:
Diyarbakir in jugovzhodna Anatolija v 21. stoletju*

S poudarkom na razvoju dogodkov v jugovzhodni Anatoliji v 21. stoletju avtor v članku obravnava položaj manjšinskih skupnosti v kontekstu spremenljivih dinamik turškega nacionalnega projekta,. Do začetka 20. stoletja je bila jugovzhodna Anatolija mozaik etnij, potem pa so se v zgodnjem obdobju republike začela prva prizadevanja za poturčevanje s projektom nacionalne identitete, ki je zagovarjal etnično enotnost. V 80. letih prejšnjega stoletja se je zaradi konflikta s Kurdsko delavsko stranko (PKK) začelo odločno enačiti etnično uniformnost z nacionalno enotnostjo in v takem okolju je bila etnična raznolikost sumljiva. Razmere so se začele spreminjati leta 2002, ko je prišla na oblast Stranka za pravičnost in razvoj (AKP), in s predhodnim pojavom kurdskih občinskih politikov. V članku je dokumentirano, kako je pozneje odmik nacionalnega projekta od izključujoče etnične kategorizacije omogočil priznavanje in sprejemanje etnične in verske raznolikosti po vsej jugovzhodni Anatoliji. V članku so ti dogodki analizirani v luči silovite reakcije nacionalističnih politikov, leta 2015 spet razvnetega konflikta s PKK ter poznejše ponovne okrepitve nacionalistične retorike v politični areni. Vtis je, da se zdaj znova uveljavlja ozka, izključujoča nacionalna identiteta. Avtor v članku tako preučuje, v kolikšni meri je izkušnjo jugovzhodne Anatolije mogoče razumeti kot preoblikovanje turškega nacionalnega projekta in sprejemanje v preteklosti zavračanega multietničnega družbenopolitičnega tkiva.

Ključne besede: Turčija, jugovzhodna Anatolija, etnična identiteta, manjšine, nacionalna identiteta, Stranka za pravičnost in Razvoj (AKP), nacionalizem.

A. Banu Hülür, Yusuf Ekinci, A. Çağlar Deniz
Taktike preživetja: vsakdanje življenje sirskih beguncev v turčiji

Sirska državljanska vojna in z njo povezane migracije so prizadele turška ob-mejna mesta, med njimi Antakyo, Sanliurfo, Mardin, Gaziantep in Kilis. V študiji raziskujemo taktike in strategije, ki so jih razvili sirski prosilci za azil, da bi se lahko spopadli s predsodki in negativnimi predstavami o Sircih, ki so splošno prisotni med lokalnim prebivalstvom. Ugotovitve naše raziskave izhajajo iz poglobljenih intervjujev, ki smo jih izvedli z več kot sto begunci, domačini in uslužbenci raz-ličnih nevladnih organizacij. Utemeljitve in sklepi, podani v tem članku, so tudi rezultat opazovanj med več raziskovalnimi potovanji in temeljitega pregleda novic o beguncih, objavljenih v lokalnih in državnih medijih. Čeprav je naša terenska raziskava trajala od avgusta 2014 do februarja 2015, je bil večji del te študije opra-vljen med januarjem in februarjem 2015.

Ključne besede: sirski prosilci za azil, sociologija vsakdanjega življenja, Gaziantep, Kilis, Turčija.

Ayşe Serdar
"Pa kaj potem, če sem Lazijka?" Ironija, norčevanje in humor v etnični integraciji in uporništvu

Prispevek prikazuje, kako etnični Lazijci v Turčiji stereotipe, etnični humor in zasmehovanje, na katere naletijo v interakciji z nečlani svoje skupnosti, prema-gujejo z ironijo, humorjem in norčevanjem. S temi besednimi figurami se Lazijci uspešno prebijajo skozi regionalno in državno hierarhijo ter kljub splošno razširje-nemu in vnetemu usvajanju turške identitete poustvarjajo svoje simbolične meje, s čimer na bolj pretanjen način izpodbijajo uradno ideologijo enakosti in enotno-sti. Medtem ko javna raba lazijščine še vedno velja za grožnjo sprejetim mejam lazijske identitete, se skozi ta nova jezikovna sredstva ustvarjalno izraža etnični kapital lazijskega ljudstva, ki ni v nasprotju s sodobnimi načeli turškega naciona-lizma in ponuja možnost pristne intimnosti brez zadrege. Lazijci so se, tako kot druga neturška muslimanska ljudstva iz črnomorske regije, odrekli svoji politično ogrožajoči etnični drugačnosti, s svojim delovanjem so prevzeli kapital turštva, posmehu in družbeni zaznamovanosti pa se zoperstavljajo z ironiziranjem razlik ter s trivializiranjem ali selektivnim usvajanjem stereotipnih vlog, ki so jim bile vsiljene. Ironija je, da so v želji, da bi bili sprejeti kot Turki, v določenih pogledih

etnične Turke prekosili, saj se uspešno vzpenjajo po družbeni lestvici in izogibajo nekaterim oblikam stigmatizacije.

Ključne besede: Lazijci, narodnost, Turčija, ironija, humor, posmeh.

Abdulmesih BarAbraham
Vrnitev domov: ambivalentna izkušnja sirskih kristjanov v Turčiji

V zgodnjih 60. letih prejšnjega stoletja so diskriminacija in negotove življenjske razmere v Tur Abdinu v jugovzhodni Turčiji prisilile Asirce, avtohtono etnično skupino krščanske vere tega dela države, da so začeli zapuščati svojo domovino in se izseljevati v Evropo. Migracije so se nadaljevale več desetletij in naraščale z militarizacijo vzhodnih pokrajin v boju proti Kurdski delavski stranki (PKK). Številne asirske vasi so se izpraznile. Leta 2001 je tedanji turški premier z okrožnico pozval v tujini živeče Asirce, naj se vrnejo v svojo nekdanjo domovino, in jim obljubil, da jim bo država zagotovila varnost in državljanske pravice. Na začetku novega tisočletja je bilo opaziti, da so se razmere v Tur Abdinu vidno izboljšale. K temu sta prispevala odprava izrednega stanja v vzhodnih pokrajinah Turčije in uporaba načel vladavine prava v kontekstu reform, ki so bile izpeljane v okviru procesa pridruževanja Evropski uniji. Mnogi izmed Asircev, ki so zapustili državo, so spet obiskali svoje vasi ter v njih tudi poskušali obnoviti cerkve in svoje povečini propadajoče hiše. Ključni težavi, na kateri so naleteli, sta bili vprašanji opredelitve lastništva zemlje in nepremičnin po okupaciji ter spremembe v pravni podlagi.

Ključne besede: Asirci, migracije, manjšina, Tur Abdin, vprašanje lastništva.

Özge Onay
Zmanjšano delovanje urbaniziranih alevitov proti vzponu političnega islama v Turčiji

Avtorica v članku kritično obravnava vse manjše delovanje prve generacije urbaniziranih alevitov proti Stranki za pravičnost in razvoj (AKP) in njenemu sektaškemu programu, ki ga narekuje politični islam. Svoje konceptualno stališče utemeljuje v Foucaultovem konceptu vladnosti ter teoriji delovanja v širšem kulturnem smislu. Medsebojno prepletajoča se teoretska okvirja tvorita bogat in kompleksen nabor podob, ki dokumentirajo vse manjše možnosti delovanja prve

generacije urbaniziranih alevitov v urbanem okolju. Skladno z njima so bili empirični podatki, na katerih prispevek sloni, pridobljeni v nizu kvalitativnih in polstrukturiranih intervjujev s prvo generacijo urbaniziranih alevitov, tj. z otroki tistih, ki so se priselili v mestno okolje v 60. letih prejšnjega stoletja in so svojo identiteto nalašč ali nehote bolj ali manj skrivali. Izpraševanci prihajajo iz zelo različnih poklicnih okolij, skupno jim je zgolj to, da so otroštvo in odraslo dobo preživeli v Istanbulu, v Turčiji. Tesno navezujoč se na pridobljeno empirično gradivo, avtorica ugotavlja, kakšni so vplivi procesa »sunifikacije« stranke AKP, osredinjenega na politični islam, na prvo generacijo urbaniziranih alevitov in v kolikšni meri sistematičnost tega procesa krni ali zmanjšuje moč njihovega delovanja v urbanem kontekstu. Prispevek se osredotoča na tri ključne teme: vsakdanje življenje, institucionalne oblike diskriminacije in delovno okolje.

Ključne besede: politični islam, AKP-jevska vlada, urbanizirani aleviti, delovanje, vladnost.

Mettursun Beydulla
Težave in dileme ujgurskih priseljencev v Turčiji

Družbena in ekonomska integracija Ujgurov v turško družbo odraža težavo, za katero odločevalci še niso našli rešitve. Potisnjen na rob večinske družbe zaradi jezikovnih razlik ter drugačnih kulturnih in družbenih življenjskih slogov, je znaten del Ujgurov, zlasti »novih prišlekov« po letu 1980, v nevarnosti, da bo postal »vzporedna družba«. Izključevanje, podcenjevanje in »drugačnost«, omejeni dosežki v izobraževanju, vprašljivo državljanstvo, negotov pravni status in nizek družbenoekonomski položaj to možnost samo še povečujejo. Ujgurom in samostojnosti naklonjena ter proti kitajski vladi usmerjena mobilizacija v Turčiji že dolgo budi pozornost kitajskih oblasti, ta pozornost pa ima povratni vpliv na mobilizacijo v Turčiji in jo nadalje oblikuje. Z vsem tem so povezani tudi turško-kitajski odnosi. Kitajsko strategijo in zunanjo politiko v Turčiji narekujeta taktika in notranja politika s ciljema utrditi oblast nad »Xinjiangom« (Vzhodnim Turkestanom) in obrzdati ujgursko gibanje za samostojnost v Turčiji. Ne le, da Kitajska gospodarska in tehnološka sila ter vlaganja še povečujejo vpliv te države v Turčiji; zaradi njih je Turčija tudi precej manj pripravljena na glas govoriti o zlorabah Pekinga, o sistematičnem zatiranju in grozodejstvih v »ujgurski avtonomni pokrajini Xinjiang« (poznani tudi kot Vzhodni Turkestan). Kitajska geografsko-gospodarska

301

strategija ima v Turčiji politične učinke z globokimi posledicami za njeno ujgursko prebivalstvo.

Ključne besede: ujgurski begunci, ujgursko priseljevanje, integracija, ujgurska dilema, turška politika, »Xinjiang« (Vzhodni Turkestan), turško-kitajski odnosi.

UIaş Sunata
Konstrukcija turških Čerkezov kot pokorne manjšine

Zimske olimpijske igre v Sočiju leta 2014 so obudile spomine na Čerkeze, ki so 150 let poprej iz svoje domovine na Kavkazu prebežali v Osmansko cesarstvo. V tistem času sem vodila obsežen projekt o ustni zgodovini, cilj katerega je bil razumeti kolektivni spomin Čerkezov v Turčiji. Glavni poudarek pričujoče študije pa je družbena konstrukcija čerkeške manjšine v Turčiji. Preučevala sem njihove ustne zgodovinske narative, povezane s priselitvijo, sprejemanjem in prisilnim preseljevanjem ter instrumentalizacijo. Enako pomemben kot seznanjenje z zgodovino Čerkezov je tudi poudarek na njihovih zaščitenih, multipliciranih in znova oživljenih družbeno-kulturnih vrednotah. V prispevku analiziram odnos med diasporsko in manjšinsko identiteto Čerkezov ter njihove preference pri reprodukciji identitete.

Ključne besede: Čerkezi, adigejski jezik, manjšina, diaspora, narodnost, kolektivni spomin, družbena konstrukcija.

Gökçe Balaban
Ontološka (ne)gotovost in kurdsko vprašanje v Turčiji:
Raba sekuritarnega diskurza (1925–1984)

Kako lahko pojasnimo sekuritarni diskurz, ki ga je turška država uporabljala pri soočanju s kurdskim vprašanjem pred letom 1984, še preden je prišlo do terorističnih napadov Kurdske delavske stranke (PKK), ko torej državna varnost ni bila fizično ogrožena? Na to vprašanje skuša avtor v prispevku odgovoriti z vidika ontološke varnosti oziroma negotovosti. Na podlagi kritične analize državnega diskurza dokazuje, da so politične, družbene in kulturne poteze kurdske identitete po uporu šejka Saida leta 1925 v turško jastvo vnašale negotovost. Plemenske in verske strukture, ki so imele med Kurdi velik vpliv, in izražanje kurdstva kot ločene identitete so kazili avtobiografske narative o turštvu ter posledično turško državo

postavljali v ontološko negotovost. Država je skušala težavo rešiti s sekuritarnim diskurzom in sekuritizacijo lastnosti kurdske identitete, za katere je menila, da jo ogrožajo. S sekuritizacijo je upravičevala izredne ukrepe, ki jih je sprejemala zoper Kurde, denimo prisilno preselitev. Na ta način je obnovila svojo ontološko varnost, saj ji je z izrednimi ukrepi uspelo zatreti kurdsko identiteto, ki je ogrožala gotovost in kontinuiteto turškega jaza.

Ključne besede: ontološka (ne)gotovost, kurdsko vprašanje, sekuritarni diskurz, sekuritizacija, Turčija.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS /
O AVTORICAH IN AVTORJIH

ANNA MARIA BEYLUNIOĞLU

Anna Maria Beylunioğlu is a social scientist and trained as a professional chef. She completed her PhD at EUI in Florence, Italy and published book chapters and journal articles in the fields of religion-state relations, freedom of religion, religious minorities as well as several opinion pieces about food, politics, and society. She is the co-author of the book *Kısmet Tabii* (For Sure It Is Fate) published by istos publishing in 2021.

Anna Maria Beylunioğlu je družboslovka in šolana kuharska mojstrica. Doktorski naziv je pridobila na Evropskem univerzitetnem inštitutu (EUI) v Firencah, objavila pa je že več znanstvenih člankov v strokovnih revijah in zbornikih s področij odnosov med vero in državo, verske svobode in verskih manjšin ter številne mnenjske prispevke o hrani, politiki in družbi. Je tudi soavtorica knjige *Kısmet Tabii* (To je usoda, zagotovo), ki je leta 2021 izšla pri založbi istos.

ÖZGÜR KAYMAK

Özgür Kaymak completed her PhD with her dissertation titled "The Socio-Spatial Construction of Istanbul's Rum, Jewish and Armenian Communities" at Istanbul University. She has published in the fields of ethnic and religious minorities, identity construction of social groups, state-minority relations, women's studies and gender, including two books, several book chapters and journal articles, as well as opinion pieces. She is currently working on a project about the Armenian image in modern Turkish politics and society in collaboration with the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Her academic areas of interest are ethno-religious minorities, memory studies, family and marriage studies, gender and feminist theories. Dr. Kaymak teaches "Gender and Society" and "Introduction to Family and Marriage Studies" at MEF University.

Özgür Kaymak je doktorirala na Univerzi v Istanbulu z disertacijo »Družbeno-prostorska izgradnja grških pravoslavnih, judovskih in armenskih skupnosti v Istanbulu«. Na teme etničnih in verskih manjšin, gradnje identitete družbenih skupin, odnosov med državo in manjšinami, ženskih študij in študij spola je ob-

javila dve knjigi, več člankov v zbornikih in strokovnih revijah ter več mnenjskih prispevkov. Trenutno s Fundacijo Calouste Gulbenkian sodeluje v projektu, ki preučuje podobo Armencev v sodobni turški politiki in družbi. Raziskovalno se osredotoča na področja etničnih in verskih manjšin, spominskih študij, zakonskih in družinskih študij ter teorije spola in feministične teorije. Dr. Kaymak predava predmeta Spol in družba ter Uvod v zakonske in družinske študije na Univerzi MEF v Istanbulu.

MELIH ÇOBAN

Dr. Melih Çoban is an assistant professor at the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Marmara University. His research fields are political sociology, sociology of cinema, Turkish political history, ethnic and religious minorities in Turkey, and addiction studies.

Dr. Melih Çoban je docent na Oddelku za sociologijo na Fakulteti za znanosti in umetnosti Univerze v Marmari. Njegova raziskovalna področja zajemajo politično sociologijo, sociologijo filma, turško politično zgodovino, etnične in verske manjšine v Turčiji ter področje zasvojenosti.

WILLIAM GOURLAY

William Gourlay teaches Politics and International Relations at Monash University, Australia, and is a Research Associate in the Middle East Studies Forum at Deakin University, Australia. In 2016, he completed his PhD at Monash University, an examination of Kurdish identity in Turkey. His research interests include authoritarianism and issues of ethnicity, nationalism, and majority-minority relationships in the Middle East and Europe. His book *The Kurds in Erdoğan's Turkey* was published by Edinburgh University Press in 2020.

William Gourlay predava politiko in mednarodne odnose na Monashevi univerzi v Avstraliji in sodeluje kot znanstveni sodelavec pri Forumu za bližnjevzhodne študije na Deakinovi univerzi v Avstraliji. Leta 2016 je zaključil doktorski študij na Monashevi univerzi z disertacijo o pregledu kurdske identitete v Turčiji. Njegova področja raziskovanja vključujejo avtoritarizem ter vprašanja etničnosti, nacionalizma in odnosov med večinami in manjšinami na Bližnjem vzhodu in v Evropi. Leta 2020 je pri založbi Edinburgh University Press izšla njegova knjiga *The Kurds in Erdoğan's Turkey*.

A. BANU HÜLÜR

Assoc. Prof. Dr. A. Banu Hülür has been working at the Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University, Faculty of Communication, Department of Public Relations and Publicity since 2015. After completing her doctorate at Gazi University in 2014, she focused on research on new media, persuasion, advertising, consumption culture, and the sociology of migration, and published many international articles, book chapters, and papers in these fields. She is also the co-author of the book *Bizim Müstakbel Hep Harap Oldu* (2016, Istanbul Bilgi University Press) and the co-editor and chapter writer of the book *Yeni Medya ve Toplum* (2016, Literatürk).

Izredna profesorica dr. A. Banu Hülür je od leta 2015 zaposlena na Oddelku za odnose z javnostmi in oglaševanje Fakultete za komunikologijo, na Univerzi Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal. Potem ko je leta 2014 doktorirala na Univerzi Gazi, se je posvetila raziskovanju novih medijev, komuniciranja in prepričevanja, oglaševanja, potrošniške kulture in sociologije migracij ter objavila številne članke v mednarodnih publikacijah, znanstvene prispevke za zbornike in razprave s teh področij. Je tudi soavtorica knjige *Bizim Müstakbel Hep Harap Oldu* (2016, Istanbul Bilgi University Press) ter sourednica in avtorica prispevka v zborniku *Yeni Medya ve Toplum* (2016, Literatürk).

YUSUF EKİNCİ

Yusuf Ekinci was born in Hatay, Turkey in 1984. He completed his bachelor's degree at Kafkas University, his master's degree in Sociology at Gaziantep University, and his doctorate in Sociology at Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, in Turkey. He contributed as a co-author to the book *Bizim Müstakbel Hep Harap Oldu* (2016, Bilgi University Press), about the everyday life of Syrian refugees in Turkey. He still works as a teacher in Gaziantep, Turkey.

Yusuf Ekinci se je rodil v Hatayu, v Turčiji, leta 1984. Diplomiral je na Univerzi Kafkas, magistriral iz sociologije na Univerzi v Gaziantepu, doktorski študij sociologije pa opravil na Univerzi Yıldırım Beyazıt v Ankari. Je soavtor knjige *Bizim Müstakbel Hep Harap Oldu* (2016, Bilgi University Press), ki obravnava vsakdanje življenje sirskih beguncev v Turčiji. Še vedno dela kot učitelj v Gaziantepu v Turčiji.

A. ÇAĞLAR DENIZ

A. Çağlar Deniz studied Theology at Selçuk University (2002), wrote a MA thesis on Sociology of Religion at Gazi University (2006) and obtained his PhD in Sociology from Istanbul University (2013). He has served as a faculty visitor at Delaware University (2012–2013, USA), University of Ljubljana (2014, Slovenia), and Kırgız-Türk Manas Üniversitesi (2015, Kyrgyzstan). He has published several books on Turkish modernization, everydaylife, sociology of history, migration, and gender: *Türk Modernleşmesinde Düşümsel Dönüşümler* (Anahtar K., 2013), *Öğrenci İşi* (İletişim, 2015), *Hafıza Yelpazesi* (E, 2014), *Toplumsal Hareket Teorileri ve Ortadoğu İsyanları* (Orion, 2015), *Öteki Muhafazakarlık* (Phoenix, 2016), *Yeni Medya ve Toplum* (Literatürk, 2016), *Bizim Müstakbel Hep Harap Oldu* (Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2016). He acted as consultant on a documentary made by TRT based on his book titled "Öğrenci İşi." Since 2017 Deniz has worked with religious migrant groups and migrants. He is the moderator of a gender equality project focused on Syrian refugee men living in Turkey, conducted by Mavi Kalem since 2018.

A. Çağlar Deniz je diplomiral iz teologije na Univerzi Selçuk (2002), magistriral iz sociologije religije na Univerzi Gazi (2006), doktorski študij sociologije pa opravil na Univerzi v Istanbulu (2013). Kot gostujoči profesor je delal na Univerzi v Delawaru (2012–2013, ZDA), Univerzi v Ljubljani (2014) in Univerzi Kırgız-Türk Manas (2015, Kirgizistan). Je avtor več knjig na temo turške modernizacije, vsakdanjega življenja, historične sociologije, migracij in spolov: *Türk Modernleşmesinde Düşümsel Dönüşümler* (Anahtar K., 2013), *Öğrenci İşi* (İletişim, 2015), *Hafıza Yelpazesi* (E, 2014), *Toplumsal Hareket Teorileri ve Ortadoğu İsyanları* (Orion, 2015), *Öteki Muhafazakarlık* (Phoenix, 2016), *Yeni Medya ve Toplum* (Literatürk, 2016), *Bizim Müstakbel Hep Harap Oldu* (Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2016). Kot svetovalec je sodeloval pri pripravi dokumentarca, ki ga je družba TRT posnela po njegovi knjigi Öğrenci İşi. Od leta 2017 dela z verskimi migrantskimi skupinami in migranti. Kot moderator sodeluje v projektu s področja enakosti spolov, ki preučuje sirske begunce v Turčiji in ga od leta 2018 vodi Mavi Kalem.

AYŞE SERDAR

Ayşe Serdar is an Assistant Professor at Istanbul Technical University, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences. She received her PhD from Binghamton University, Department of Sociology in 2009. Her research interests include nationalism, ethnicity and social movements.

Ayşe Serdar je docentka na Oddelku za humanistiko in družbene vede Tehniške univerze v Istanbulu. Leta 2009 je doktorirala iz sociologije na Univerzi v Binghamtonu v ZDA. Njeni raziskovalni interesi vključujejo nacionalizem, narodnost in družbena gibanja.

ABDULMESIH BARABRAHAM

Abdulmesih BarAbraham has a Master of Science degree in Engineering from the University of Erlangen/Nürnberg. As an independent researcher he has published various scholarly articles on Assyrians. Among others, he is the author of "Turkey's Key Arguments in Denying the Assyrian Genocide," in David Gaunt et al. (eds.), *Let Them Not Return* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), and with Jan Bet-Sawoce, "Cumhuriyet Tarihi Boyunca Doğu ve Batı Asurlara Karşı: Baskı, Zulüm, Asimile, Kovulma, " in Fikret Başkaya and Sait Çetinoglu (eds.), *Minorities in Turkey* (Ankara: Özgür Universite Kitaplığı [Resmi Tarih Tartışmaları], 2009). He is also the author of "Safeguarding the Cross: Emergence of Christian Militias in Iraq and Syria," in Andreas Schmoller (ed.), *Middle Eastern Christians and Europe – Historical Legacies and Present Challenges* (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2018). Abdulmesih is the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of both the Yoken-bar-Yoken Foundation and the Mor Afrem Foundation, Germany.

Abdulmesih BarAbraham je pridobil magistrski naziv iz strojništva na Univerzi v Erlangenu/Nürnbergu. Ko samostojni raziskovalec je objavil več strokovnih člankov o Asircih. Med drugim je njegov prispevek »Turkey's Key Arguments in Denying the Assyrian Genocide« izšel v zborniku *Let Them Not Return* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017) Davida Gaunta in sodelavcev, v soavtorstvu z Janom Bet--Sawocejem pa je napisal članek »Cumhuriyet Tarihi Boyunca Doğu ve Batı Asurlara Karşı: Baskı, Zulüm, Asimile, Kovulma« za zbornik Fikreta Başkaye in Saita Çetinogluja *Minorities in Turkey* (Ankara: Özgür Universite Kitaplığı [Resmi Tarih Tartışmaları], 2009). Je tudi avtor prispevka »Safeguarding the Cross: Emergence of Christian Militias in Iraq and Syria« v zborniku *Middle Eastern Christians and Europe – Historical Legacies and Present Challenges* (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2018), ki ga je uredil Andreas Schmoller. BarAbraham je predsednik upravnega odbora tako Fundacije Yoken-bar-Yoken kot sklada Mor Afrem v Nemčiji.

ÖZGE ONAY

Özge Onay is a doctoral researcher at the School of Sociology at the University of York. Özge's PhD research focuses on the impact of Islamophobia in the daily lives of young British-Turks. She currently teaches as a Graduate Teaching Assistant on the module *Introducing Social Psychology* and has previously worked on two other modules, *Introduction to Sociological Theory* and *Division and Inequality: Race and Ethnicity* at the Department of Sociology. Özge is also a book reviewer and since 2020 has published three book reviews in the prestigious journal Ethnic and Racial Studies.

Özge Onay je raziskovalka na doktorskem študiju Fakultete za sociologijo Univerze v Yorku. Njeno raziskovalno delo se osredotoča na vpliv islamofobije na vsakdanje življenje mladih britanskih Turkov. Trenutno poučuje kot asistentka na modulu *Uvod v socialno psihologijo*, pred tem je delala na modulih *Uvod v sociološko teorijo* ter *Delitve in neenakost: Rasa in narodnost* na Oddelku za sociologijo. Onay je tudi recenzentka, od leta 2020 do danes so v ugledni strokovni reviji Ethnic and Racial Studies izšle že tri njene knjižne recenzije.

METTURSUN BEYDULLA

Dr. Mettursun Beydulla was born in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China (aka East Turkistan), went to Uyghur schools, studied two years intensive Chinese and graduated from university preparation courses at the Central Nationalities University in Beijing. He received a BA in Chinese history from Shaanxi Normal University in Xi'an and an MA in Turkish history and a PhD in Social/Cultural Anthropology from Ankara University, Turkey. He researched and taught Uyghur at the American University in Cairo in 2006, and was a visiting scholar in Harvard in 2007. Between September 2008–June 2013, he conducted research and taught Uyghur language, literature, and culture at Harvard and MIT. He taught Sociology and Anthropology courses between July 2013 and June 2016 at Fatih University, Istanbul and at the same time carried out a Uyghur diaspora project. He then taught Uyghur in the Diplomatic Language Services in Arlington, VA, and Turkish at the ICA Language Service. He was a 2020 EHLS scholar (National Security Education Fellow) at Georgetown University. Currently he is continuing his teaching, research and other work in the field of linguistics as an independent researcher and linguist in the Washington, D.C. area. His research and publication topics include: Uyghur national identity, social and identity change among the Uyghurs; Chinese socio-cultural practices in "Xinjiang"; Uyghur Diasporas; relations between "Xinjiang" and Central Asia; the social, linguistic, cultural, re-

ligious and institutional history of the Uyghurs and "Xinjiang"; and pan-Turkic culture. His has published one book and more than 10 journal articles and book chapters in English, Turkish, and Uyghur, including in the Central Asian Survey.

Dr. Mettursun Beydulla se je rodil v ujgurski avtonomni pokrajini Xinjiang na Kitajskem (poznani tudi pod imenom Vzhodni Turkestan), obiskoval ujgurske šole, se dve leti intenzivno učil kitajščine in na Osrednji manjšinski univerzi v Pekingu opravil pripravljalni program za vpis na univerzitetni študij. Diplomiral je iz kitajske zgodovine na Splošni univerzi province Shaanxi v Xi'anu, magisterij iz turške zgodovine in doktorat iz družbene/kulturne antropologije pa je opravil na Univerzi v Ankari, v Turčiji. Leta 2006 je delal kot raziskovalec in poučeval ujgurščino na Ameriški univerzi v Kairu, leta 2007 pa predaval na Harvardski univerzi v ZDA kot gostujoči profesor. Od septembra 2008 do junija 2013 je raziskoval ter poučeval ujgurski jezik, književnost in kulturo na Harvardski univerzi in Massachusettskem inštitutu za tehnologijo (MIT), med julijem 2013 in junijem 2016 predaval sociologijo in antropologijo na Univerzi Fatih v Instanbulu, hkrati pa je vodil tudi projekt o ujgurski diaspori. V Arlingtonu, v zvezni državi Virginiji, je nato poučeval ujgurščino in turščino za zaposlene v diplomatskih, vladnih in vojaških službah. Leta 2020 je bil izbran za najboljšega predavatelja angleščine kot jezika porekla (v Programu izobraževanja za nacionalno varnost) na Univerzi v Georgetownu. Trenutno nadaljuje poučevanje, raziskovanje in širše jezikovno delo kot samostojni raziskovalec in jezikoslovec v Washingtonu. Področja njegovih raziskav in objav vključujejo: ujgursko nacionalno identiteto, družbene in identitetne spremembe med Ujguri; kitajske družbeno-kulturne prakse v Xinjiangu; ujgurske diaspore; odnosi med Xinjiang in Centralno Azijo; družbena, jezikovna, kulturna, verska in institucionalna zgodovina Ujgurov in Xinjianga; vseturška kultura. Objavil je knjigo in več kot 10 strokovnih člankov in knjižnih poglavij v angleščini, turščini in ujgurščini, med drugim v Centralnoazijski raziskavi.

ULAŞ SUNATA

UIaş Sunata is a professor in the Department of Sociology at Bahçeşehir University. After completing a bachelor's degree in statistics and a master's degree in Sociology at the Middle East Technical University, she received a doctoral qualification in Sociology. Due to her success in migration research, she received an invitation from Germany's Institute for Migration Studies and Intercultural Studies (IMIS). She won the DAAD and Hans-Böckler Foundation fellowships and completed her PhD in sociology at the University of Osnabrück. Sunata has been working on migration and diaspora studies for more than 20 years and has two books published in Germany and one published in Turkey. In addition, she has

numerous academic articles published in journals with high international recognition. After evaluating the ever-increasing importance of migration and urbanization, Sunata founded Bahçeşehir University Center for Migration and Urban Studies (BAUMUS) in 2014 to further strengthen inter-disciplinarity and teamwork. Ulaş Sunata has completed a comprehensive project on diasporas in Turkey and has conducted research on the Circassian Diaspora, Syrian refugees, and Balkan migrants in recent years. In addition, her latest project, "Migrant Experiences Following the Pandemic, Work-Home Dynamics, and Domestic Relations: The Case of Immigrant Domestic Workers" has qualified for support from TUBITAK in 2021.

UIaş Sunata je redna profesorica na Oddelku za Sociologijo na Univerzi Bahçeşehir. Po opravljenem diplomskem študiju iz statistike na Bližnjevzhodni tehniški univerzi v Ankari je na isti instituciji tudi magistrirala iz sociologije. Zahvaljujoč uspešnim raziskavam o migracijah je prejela povabilo nemškega Inštituta za migracijske in medkulturne študije (IMIS). Po prejemu štipendije Nemške akademske službe za izmenjavo (DAAD) in Sklada Hansa Böcklerja je doktorski študij iz sociologije zaključila na Univerzi v Osnabrücku. Sunata, ki že več kot 20 let preučuje migracije in diaspore, je objavila dve knjigi v Nemčiji in eno v Turčiji. Številni njeni akademski članki so izšli v visoko indeksiranih mednarodnih strokovnih revijah. Zavedajoč se naraščajočega pomena migracij in urbanizacije ter za nadaljnjo krepitev interdisciplinarnega in timskega dela, je leta 2014 ustanovila Center za migracijske in urbane študije na Univerzi Bahcesehir (BAUMUS). Ulaş Sunata je izvedla obsežen projekt o diasporah v Turčiji, v zadnjih letih pa je vodila raziskave o čerkeški diaspori, sirskih beguncih in balkanskih migrantih. Njen najnovejši projekt, »Izkušnje migrantov po pandemiji, dinamike delo-dom ter družinski odnosi: Primer priseljenskih delavcev v gospodinjstvu«, je v letu 2021 podprl turški Znanstveni in tehnološki raziskovalni svet (TUBITAK).

GÖKÇE BALABAN

Gökçe Balaban is an Assistant Professor at the Department of International Relations, Istanbul Okan University. His research interests lie primarily in critical approaches to security and the political history of Turkey with a specific focus on the Kurdish issue.

Gökçe Balaban je docent na Oddelku za mednarodne odnose na Univerzi Okan v Istanbulu. Raziskovalno se osredotoča na kritične pristope do varnosti in na politično zgodovino Turčije, s posebnim poudarkom na kurdskem vprašanju.

UNDERSTANDING ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL MINORITIES IN TURKEY