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**Transnational Community Politics in the Diaspora:  
Agenda and Agency Building Experiences of the Kurds from Turkey in the UK**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis draws a picture of Kurdish diaspora politics, focusing on the community in London. Political activities carried out by the Kurds are contextualised within the framework of diasporas as transnational non-state actors, through their strong physical and psycho-social ties to their homeland, while they live in their 'hostland.' This work is in pursuit of understanding the attempts and strategies of the Kurds from Turkey in the UK to advance their interests as an ethno-national diaspora, and the extent to which these strategies and mechanisms provide the diaspora Kurds with necessary means to survive as a politically active group.

The security concerns of the Kurdish activists have productive and destructive results for the Kurdish diaspora. The main negative outcome is the deepening of the already existing fear of politics that has been prevalent in Turkish society, including the Kurds, seemingly the most politicised segment of society since the 1980 military coup. The pressure of order-building through legal political activity and civic engagement pushed the Kurds into the pursuit of rights in various aspects of life that were conventionally seen as part of low politics; issues of secondary importance vis-a-vis national liberation, including gender equality, ecologism, social welfare, education, socialisation and cultural development, rather than issues of high politics, such as the PKK's status, disarmament, political recognition, or autonomy.

Local politics of the UK are perceived as positive, while its higher level policies and foreign policy are seen as mostly negative and "not Kurds-friendly". The diaspora Kurds emphasise negative dimensions of British state in relation to

world politics and international relations. I argue that as a response to this negativity, the British Kurds pursue a survival strategy to beat “structure” with their "creative proactive agency" in the diasporan sphere, especially in local politics to which they attach more value and hope.

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## GLOSSARY

**Apo:** Popularly used shortened version of the first name of the imprisoned PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan

**bakur:** Kurdish word for "north", referring to Turkish Kurdistan as northern Kurdistan

**başur:** Kurdish word for "south", referring to Iraqi Kurdistan as southern Kurdistan

**cemevi:** Alevi's place of worship where religious and cultural rituals called "cem" are carried out

**govend/halay:** Kurdish/Anatolian folk dance traditionally done by forming circles

**heval:** Kurdish word for "friend", referring to a "comrade", usually a Kurdish comrade fighting for or supporting the Kurdish ethno-national movement

**jin:** Kurdish word for "woman"

**kesk u sor u zer:** Kurdish words for "green, red and yellow" symbolising the Kurdish national movement as colours forming the Kurdish flag

**Newroz:** Kurdish spring festival comprising cultural and political elements of Kurdish nationalism

**rojava:** Kurdish word for "west", referring to Syrian Kurdistan as western Kurdistan

**rojhelat/rojhilat:** Kurdish word for "east", referring to Iranian Kurdistan as eastern Kurdistan

**serok:** Kurdish word for "chief" or "leader", usually referring to Abdullah Öcalan as "Kurdish national leader"

**ülke/welat:** Turkish and Kurdish words denoting "country" or "homeland"

**Türkleşme (Turkification):** assimilation into Turkishness

**Türkiyelileşme (Turkey-fication):** broadly-based agenda of the Kurdish political movement towards a voluntary integration of the Kurds into the socio-political structure of Turkey, while preserving a distinct ethno-national identity, in this case, the Kurdish identity.



## ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)
BDP	Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi)
CHP	Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)
CUP	Committee of Union and Progress (İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti)
Day-Mer	Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre (Türk ve Kürt Toplumunu Dayanışma Merkezi)
DTK	Democratic Society Congress (Demokratik Toplum Kongresi)
DTP	Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi)
El-Com	Elbistan Community Centre (Elbistan Toplum Merkezi)
FED-BIR	Kurdish Federation in the UK (Britanya Kürt Dernekleri Federasyonu)
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education in England and Wales
Gik-Der	Refugee Workers Cultural Association (Göçmen İşçiler Kültür Derneği)
Halkevi	Kurdish and Turkish Community Centre (Mala Gel)
HDP	Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi)
HUDA-PAR	Free Cause Party (Hür Dava Partisi)
KCC	Kurdish Community Centre
KOMKAR	Kurdish Advice Centre
KON-KURD	Confederation of Kurdish Associations in Europe
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq
KSSO	Kurdish Studies and Students Organisation
MHP	Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi)
PJAK	Kurdistan Free Life Party (Partîya Jîyana Azad a Kurdistanê)
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê)

PSK	Kurdistan Socialist Party (Partîya Sosyalîsta Kurdistan)
PYD	Democratic Union Party (Partîya Yekîtîya Demokrat)
TBMM	Turkish Grand National Assembly (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNPO	Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization

## LIST OF MAPS, FIGURES & PHOTOS

<b>Figure 1:</b> Diaspora agency and international interactions.....	39
<b>Map 1:</b> Areas of majority Kurdish settlement in Southwest Asia. Source: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.....	65
<b>Photo 1:</b> Kurdish Community Centre (KCC) hosting “Miss Ecuador 2012” beauty contest in its community hall in Haringey.....	87
<b>Figure 2:</b> DayMer's Logo.....	109
<b>Figure 3:</b> Kurdish Community Centre Logo.....	109
<b>Figure 4:</b> DayMer’s 22 <sup>nd</sup> Culture and Arts Festival Poster.....	111
<b>Photo 2:</b> Banner of the Presidential Candidate, Selahattin Demirtas at Lee Valley Athletic Centre, London.....	115
<b>Figure 5:</b> Demirtas Presidential Election Rally Leaflet in 3 languages, Turkish, English and Kurdish.....	116
<b>Photo 3:</b> Demirtas making his speech to several thousands, Presidential Election Rally, London.....	117
<b>Photo 4:</b> Turkish Kurds asking for donations for Rojava/Syrian Kurdistan. On the donation boxes is written: "All donations are for <i>our</i> people in Rojava", Presidential Rally, London.....	119
<b>Photo 5:</b> Gultan Kisanak, the Co-chair of pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) from Turkey as the keynote speaker of the 9 <sup>th</sup> Zilan Kurdish Women’s Festival jointly organised by the Roj Women's Association, the Kurdish Community Centre and Halkevi.....	12

- Photo 6:** Gultan Kisanak, Co-chair of pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) visits the London Alevi Cultural Centre and Cemevi (Alevi Temple) in Hackney.....130
- Photo 7:** Madimak Alevi Massacre of 1993 Commemoration and Panel Discussion organised by the Halkevi Kurdish and Turkish Community Centre, Hackney.....133
- Photo 8:** Roj Women Association activists joined by Nursel Aydogan, pro-Kurdish BDP MP for Diyarbakir, Turkey, the guest speaker at the 10<sup>th</sup> Kurdish Women’s Festival organised by the Kurdish Community Centre, marching to raise awareness about human rights issues of Kurdish women on the streets of North London.....134
- Figure 6:** Facebook Event Invitation for the “PKK’s 34th Anniversary Celebration” at the Kurdish Community Centre, Haringey, 27 November 2012.....150
- Photo 9:** “Youth Branch of the Kurdish Community Centre greets the Olympic Torch for the 2012 London Olympic Games in Wood Green, London holding a banner saying “Freedom for Ocalan, Status for Kurdistan” .....156
- Photo 10:** “Commemoration of Martyrs: in the Memory of PKK Comrade *Agir*” of the Kurdish Cause at the Kurdish Community Centre.....160

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### CHAPTER I:

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
A) Research Question.....	1
B) Rationale, Aims and Objectives: Why Kurdish Diaspora Politics Matters.....	1
C) Diaspora as a Significant Unit of Analysis.....	5
D) The Contribution of this Work: Thematic Dimension: 'Identity' versus 'Power'.....	7
E) The Kurdish Diaspora in the Process of Formation and Flourishing.....	14
F) Time and Political Context.....	20

### CHAPTER II:

<b>LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>24</b>
A) Spatio-Temporal Dimension: The Concept of Diaspora and its Use for the Kurds.....	24
B) Agency of Diasporas as Non-State Actors in Transnational Politics.....	28
C) The Particularity of the UK Case: A Hybrid Approach to Diaspora Agency?.....	31
D) Theorising non-Western Experiences of Diaspora Politics.....	40

**CHAPTER III:**

**METHODOLOGY.....43**

A) Researching Diaspora Politics in the Vernacular.....43

B) Challenges, Limitations and Opportunities.....47

C) Positionality/Reflexivity.....49

D) Linguistic Strategy and Trust Building.....52

E) Ethical Concerns.....54

**CHAPTER IV:**

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.....58**

A) Stranger at Home: A Brief Look at Migration and the Kurdish Issue from the Ottoman Era to the Early Republican Era (1870s-1940s).....58

B) Contemporary Turkish and Kurdish Migration (1950s-1970s).....70

C) The Military Coup Period and the Rise of the PKK and Armed Conflict (1980-2000s).....76

**CHAPTER V:**

**DIASPORA AGENCY AND NATIONAL/TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS.....83**

A) Creative Agency-Building and Struggle for Legitimacy.....83

B) Grassroots Agency and the Denial of Representation.....	92
C) Cross-disciplinary Quests: Need for an Anthropology of International Relations.....	98

**CHAPTER VI:**

**DIASPORA COMMUNITY AND ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL POLITICS.....105**

A) Diaspora's Diaspora, from Kurdistan to Turkish Cities and then the UK	105
B) A Symbolic Assessment of Diaspora Texts: Intertwined and Divergent....	107
C) Conflicting Symbols of Homeland(s): Turkey vs. Kurdistan.....	108
D) "Shaking Hands" in Different Colours.....	111
E) Upbeat Grassroots Political Activism in London.....	113
Balance of Tendencies: Trans-border, Intra-Kurdish and pro-Turkey- fication.....	113
Women's Activism in the Kurdish Diasporic Space.....	119
Women's Festival Named After Female Kurdish Guerrilla "Zilan" .....	123
Aleviness and Kurdishness in the Diaspora: Between Contestation and Reinforcement.....	128

**CHAPTER VII:**

**VISIBILITIES AND ALLIANCES AS PRIORITIES ON THE AGENDA.....138**

A) Challenging the Invisibility of Kurdishness Abroad.....138

B) From Local to Transnational.....148

C) Predominance and Unity in the Prioritisation of Leadership: *Apoism*.....154

D) Civic Participation as a Defensive Strategy in a Securitised Europe.....160

**CHAPTER VIII:**

**CONCLUSION.....175**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY.....179**



## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

### **A) Research Question**

This work attempts to draw an overall picture of the Kurdish diaspora politics with particular focus on the community level in London. In so doing, the political activities carried out by the Kurds from Turkey is contextualised within the framework of diasporas as non-state actors in transnational politics, through their strong physical and psycho-social ties to their homeland, while living in a 'new homeland.' Hence, this work is in pursuit of possible means to understand the following question: "What are the attempts and strategies resorted to by the Kurds from Turkey in the UK to advance their interests as an ethno- national diaspora and to what extent have these strategies and mechanisms provided them with the necessary means to survive as a politically active group?"

### **B) Rationale, Aims and Objectives: Why Kurdish Diaspora Politics Matters**

This thesis proposes to examine the Kurdish question from the perspective of diaspora. One might question the validity of evaluating the Kurdish question based on diaspora as a unit of analysis. Does diaspora mean a lot for the Kurdish question? If we consider that those who are settled in their homelands constitute the majority of the Kurds, would it not be more accurate to base the solution of this ethno-national problem on the 'native' Kurds who live in the mainland, Kurdistan? Is it not fallacious to look at this subject from the point of view of those who live outside the mainland, for one reason or another?

However legitimate or meaningful these questions may be, they fail to notice an important point in understanding how the aforementioned century-long ethno-national issue, namely the Kurdish question, has evolved over the years and come to the state it is in today: the role and nature of diaspora. Here a viewpoint comes to the fore as one of the common mistakes which limits the concept of diaspora to the Kurds who migrated, or were forced to immigrate, out of *Turkey* to foreign countries. In the technically narrow reading of diaspora, it can be said that what comes to mind is a Kurd who lives outside Turkey, for instance, a Kurdish refugee from Diyarbakir who lives in Germany, or a Kurd who lives outside Iraq, for example, a Kurdish asylum seeker from Sulaymaniyah who lives in Sweden. However, whether by state-led *forced migration* or by different economic, societal, political factors-based *voluntary or involuntary migration*, large numbers of Kurds –despite not moving away from the nation-states in which they resided– have experienced *minoritisation*<sup>1</sup> away from the villages, towns or cities in which they were born. Iraqi Kurds, as a result of a late 1980s campaign aiming to displace and massacre the Kurds, which the Saddam regime named Anfal, had to migrate to cities of Iraq without a sizable Kurdish population.<sup>2</sup> A state-led purge forced the Kurds to abandon their villages in Eastern and South-eastern Anatolia regions during the period from 1984 to 1999,

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<sup>1</sup> Barzoo Eliassi, "National conflict reflected in diasporas: the quest for recognition among Kurdish youth in Sweden," *Open Democracy*, 21 December 2011, accessed on 10 January 2015 via <https://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/barzoo-eliassi/national-conflict-reflected-in-diasporas-quest-for-recognition-among-kur> Eliassi's take on the minoritisation experiences of the Kurdish youth in the diaspora discusses their double or even triple-layered obstacles compared to experiences of migrant groups that are dominant ethnicities in their home towns i.e. Turks, Persians, Arabs: "What makes Kurds different from Persian, Turkish and non- Palestinian Arab migrants in the West is that the Kurds come from a minoritized position in the Middle-East into a new minoritized position as Muslims, Middle Easterners and "wogs" in an ethnically divided Swedish society. While scholars have mainly focused on the structural and patterned inequalities that have privileged Persians, Arabs and Turks and marginalized the Kurds, few have accorded attention to how everyday interactions between these dominant groups and the Kurds reproduce and perpetuate these inequalities through individual actions and strategies."

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Genocide in Iraq: The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds," *Middle East Watch Report* (1993): 36-37.

when the conflict between The Turkish Armed Forces and PKK was very intense. Vast numbers of Turkish Kurds, estimated to be millions, had to migrate to cities such as Istanbul and Izmir in Western Turkey, inhabited mostly by Turks.<sup>3</sup> In general, in this period of time under the influence of economic instability and political securitisation, it would not be incorrect to state that the political atmosphere was even more overwhelmingly dark for the Kurds –those who were displaced as well as those who remained in their homeland. Studies examining –in the frame of the concepts<sup>4</sup> such as *social exclusion* and *new urban poverty* in particular– the societal, cultural and class-related aspects of the spiral of problems caused by the aforementioned phenomenon of *internal displacement*<sup>5</sup> contain perhaps unwittingly the nucleus of the idea and experience of diaspora. Territoriality<sup>6</sup> plays a central role in nation-state nationalism and the majority of counter-nationalist uprisings, or in other words the struggles faced in the process of legitimising the authority over territory by equating the nation or the ethnic group with the territory. It results in the "triumph" of the stronger object (usually the

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<sup>3</sup> Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies, "Turkey Migration and Internally Displaced Persons

Survey" (2006). See also Middle East Report, "Forced Evictions and Destruction of Villages in Turkish Kurdistan," April-June 1996 and Ayse Betul Celik, "I Miss My Village!: Forced Kurdish Migrants in İstanbul and Their Representation in Association," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 32 (2005): 137-163.

<sup>4</sup> Alp Kanzık, "The Kurdish Migrants in Yenibosna: 'Social Exclusion,' Class and Politics," MA thesis (Bogazici University, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> "Internally Displaced People," The UN Refugee Agency, accessed on 14 November 2014 via <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c146.html>. The term was used with reference to 'Internally Displaced People' (IDP) in accordance with the terminology accepted by the UN refugee Agency's (UNHCR). UNHCR states that internally displaced people are among the world's most vulnerable people due to the fact that they have not crossed international borders to find sanctuary and instead remained in their home countries, having to endure severe violation of rights. Furthermore, UNHCR points out that at the end of 2011 the number of internally displaced people was estimated to be 26.4 million around the world.

<sup>6</sup> For an interesting analysis from the perspective of psycho-politics (political psychology/psychiatry) of the role of the concept of territorialisation in ethnic/national conflict, the seminal work of Prof Vamik Volkan from Virginia University is quite enlightening. In his political psychiatry approach Volkan explained the roots and the logic of ethno-national conflict from the standpoint of human evolutionary development and the existential relation established between human being and territory. See Vamik D. Volkan, *Cyprus: War and Adaptation: A Psychoanalytic History of Two Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1979).

dominant nation-state) displacing/removing the relatively weaker object or the ethno-regional community from that territory. Accordingly, various practices including forced migration, ethnic cleansing, assimilation and genocide usually give birth to the formation of ethno-national diasporas most of which are politically active. Here the problem of defining or describing almost all ethno-national diasporas is certainly valid in the case of the Kurdish who are considered to be one of the largest stateless nations<sup>7</sup> in the world. In this context, while there are those who place the birth of the Kurdish diaspora and emergence of its early members around the end of the nineteenth century<sup>8</sup>; there are others who, without relating this displacement to a nationalist interpretation in the modern sense, link it to the migration of Kurdish people from their traditional region, namely Kurdistan, to different parts of the Empire. The centuries-long presence of the dense Kurdish population around the Cihanbeyli and Haymana plateaux in the Central Anatolia Region in a way indicates the characteristics of the Kurdish diaspora as a historical diaspora<sup>9</sup>.

It is possible to understand diaspora as a journey in accordance with all these historical and geographical transitions and ruptures. What is meant here is certainly

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<sup>7</sup> Gerard Chaliand, ed., *A People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 1993). Also see Bahar Baser and Ashok Swain, "Stateless Diaspora Groups and their Repertoires of Nationalist Activism in Host Countries," *Journal of International Relations* 8, no.1 (2010): 37-60.

<sup>8</sup> Influential Kurdish intellectuals such as Ahmet Riza who attended the Young Turk Congress in Paris as well as others with the experience of Egypt are noteworthy. Also the fact that the first Kurdish magazine *Kürdistan* was published by young Kurdish intellectuals in Cairo gives us the opportunity to compare the political and intellectual functions of early modern Kurdish diaspora with today's. Gülseren Duman, "The Formations of the Kurdish Movement(s) 1908-1914: Exploring the Footprints of Kurdish Nationalism," MA thesis (Bogazici University, 2010): 40-42.

<sup>9</sup> Khalid Khayati, interview by Salam Saadi, "Expert Discusses Kurdish Diaspora In Europe," *Rudaw*, accessed on 5 March 2012 via <http://www.rudaw.net/english/interview/4494.html>. In the interview, Kurdish diaspora expert Khayati discusses policies of exile and settlement throughout history whereby the Kurdish population was banished from their territory by the conflicting Iranian Safavid and Ottoman Empires. According to this viewpoint, the fact that large Kurdish communities lived for example in Khorasan region, far away from Iranian Kurdistan which is situated in Western Iran or in Konya, far away from Turkish Kurdistan is a reflection of this long- established history of diaspora.

not a physical journey in order to leave the homeland. The communities trying to become a nation in diaspora circles also take a journey of identities. Indeed, diaspora is the result and product of migration; however, on a deeper level it is also the very journey itself. From another angle, it is the embodiment of the inner journey of the self. It is the adventure of seeing, or being forced to see, through recreating, oneself from the outside. While this situation is, for many, a painful experience, whilst it is being lived, it serves as an important school given its contributions. In a world where one is let outside the mother's womb and forced to join the world of "fathers", it can be said that the concept of diaspora<sup>10</sup>, with its meanings of "to be spread across", "to be forced to leave" or at least "to go involuntarily", is the concrete state of one of the world's most natural laws in the language of social science. This concept enables the migrant to reproduce his/her homeland which is left behind as a vulnerable land, either burning or under possible threats whenever that particular homeland is recalled. The Kurdish diaspora presents examples of a political activism that catches fire from these sparks and grows by joining other fires in its perimeter.

### **C) Diaspora as a Significant Unit of Analysis**

Historically, diasporas were groups of people who fled or migrated from their country involuntarily, mostly due to political reasons including ethnic and religious oppression faced in the sending country.<sup>11</sup> However, recent decades have witnessed a change in the definition of diaspora, due to the increase in the number of

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<sup>10</sup> Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2008): 21; Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 9.

<sup>11</sup> Cohen (2008): 21; Osten Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas: A Comparative Study of Kurdish Refugee Communities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).

international migrants, including massive groups leaving their countries for economic and other reasons.<sup>12</sup> Yet they have also become part of the "diasporic public sphere" which is regarded as a "transnational space" that enables diasporic groups to have a certain influence on the politics of the sending and host countries, as well as the new transnational politics operating with the facilities of global communication via online and satellite broadcasting means.<sup>13</sup> These new mechanisms of communication and joint action also create new values, ideas, and economic and political power resources for the diasporic circles themselves. Therefore, the scope of political science and international relations, both in theory and practice, requires a broader framework, including non-state actors, namely ethnic and religious communities, lobby groups, non-governmental organizations and, in our case, diasporas. That will likely bring about a complementary reading of world politics, since global means of communication and networking no longer permit nation-states to be as 'sovereign' as they used to be about a century ago. In that respect, the Kurdish case is a recent and striking example of the effectiveness of diasporas in both sending and receiving countries' policies, via a politics of recognition, as they struggle to have their ethno-national identity recognised. Formation of TV channels, local community centres based in the sending country, as well as networking and operating globally in various areas ranging from political rights to linguistic studies, culture to charity, are among the activities of diasporas.

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<sup>12</sup> Sheffer, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, *Transnational aspects of the Kurdish question*, working paper Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (Florence: European University Institute, 2000); Menderes Candan and Uwe Hunger, "Nation Building Online: A Case Study of Kurdish Migrants in Germany," *German Policy Studies* 4, no. 4 (2008): 125-153; Amir Hassanpour, "Satellite Footprints as national borders: Med-TV and the extraterritoriality of state sovereignty," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18, no.1 (1998): 53-72; Kira Kosnick, "Exit and Voice Revisited: the Challenge of Migrant Media" (working paper, Goethe University, 2008); David Romano, "Modern Communications Technology in Ethnic Nationalist Hands: The Case of the Kurds," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 35, no.1 (2002): 127-149.

All these fields and the transnational sphere through which the Kurdish diaspora operates has strong political implications, both for the sending countries like Turkey and Iraq, and receiving ones like Britain and Germany. In addition, the issues of political and cultural rights of Kurds that is heavily sought by the Kurdish diaspora may have certain influence not only on the policies of any one single receiving nation-state, but also on the European Union which promote the above-mentioned rights of the Kurdish minority of Turkey through its institutional texts, like progress reports on the candidate country and other suggestions by the EU commissioners, and bodies like the European Parliament. Turkey, as a candidate to be a full member of the Union, has amended a good number of its laws and constitution in line with these ethnic demands proposed both by Kurds in Turkey and in the diaspora. Therefore, the Kurdish question in Turkey is now also an issue of transnational politics that also relate to the diaspora which, in this sense, stands as a significant actor in contemporary international relations.

#### **D) The Contribution of this Work: Thematic Dimension: 'Identity' versus 'Power'**

In general, the scholarly literature on the Kurdish diaspora differs from that on the Kurdish question, which generally concentrates on the conflictual relations between states and sub-state actors. This difference occurs in three ways: by the volume of the works, the disciplinary backgrounds and major themes of these works, and the methodologies they use.

Most of the literature on the Kurdish question relies on "meta-narratives" that focus on the power relations among 'big actors' of the problem, including nation-

states vis- à-vis militant groups and international organisations that exert sanctions on the former forces. In this vein, societal dynamics underlying the problem and issues that relate to such aspects as culture, identity, class and the like are not given enough attention in several major reference books.<sup>14</sup>

As for the Kurdish diaspora literature, a good deal of it builds on the very 'grassroots' of the problem. It sheds light on the formation and operation of diasporan communities along with the processes of ethnic and cultural identity construction, political participation and ideological shifts.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, this literature is rich in evaluating new forms, strategies and spheres of nation/community building via global mechanisms summarised under the title of 'transnationalism'.<sup>16</sup> The transnational activities and networking of the Kurdish diaspora have also been studied in relation to how this transnationalism operates. In this respect, the emphasis is usually put on media activities, especially those in 'cyber space'.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, there is a common flaw in the literature. That is to say, power relations that are manifest in the multiple layers of diasporic politics in the Kurdish case are understudied, if not totally ignored. This is more so especially when the

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<sup>14</sup> Kemal Kirisci and Gareth M. Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-state Ethnic Conflict* (London: Frank Cass, 1997); Henry J. Barkey, *Preventing Conflict over Kurdistan* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Mustafa Akcinar, "Re-Invention of Identity: The Case of Dersim Community Association in Berlin" (Master's dissertation, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, 2010); Mino Alinia, "Spaces of Diasporas: Kurdish Identities, experiences of otherness and politics of belonging," PhD thesis (Goteborg University, 2004); Ann-Catrin Emanuelsson, "Diaspora global politics: Kurdish transnational networks and accommodation of nationalism," PhD thesis (Goteborg University, 2005); Khalid Khayati, "From Victim Diaspora To Transborder?: Diaspora formation and transnational relations among Kurds in France and Sweden," PhD thesis (Linkoping University, 2008); Judith B. Peralta, "The Kurds in Canada: A Question of Ethnic Identity," MA dissertation (Carleton University, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Wahlbeck, "Transnationalism and Diasporas: The Kurdish Example," paper presented at the International Sociological Association XIV World Congress of Sociology, Montreal, July 26 - August 1, 1998; Wahlbeck, "The Concept of Diaspora as an Analytical Tool in the Study of Refugee Communities," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28, no.2 (2002): 221-238; Khayati (2008); Kosnick (2008).

<sup>17</sup> Candan and Hunger (2008); Hassanpour (1998); Kosnick (2008); Romano (2002).



volumes of the works on the Kurdish diaspora are considered. Whereas those works on the identity dimension of the diasporan Kurds are abundant, each numbering hundreds of pages and being substantial studies; other studies regarding the power relations among different actors through various groups and levels overall comprise a few dozens pages, usually based on descriptive or argumentative accounts.<sup>18</sup>

This differentiation can also be made with regard to the disciplinary aspects of the literature on the Kurdish diaspora. The dissertations and other large academic works are mostly created within the frameworks of sociology and the humanities that use qualitative social science methodologies with references to such fields as anthropology, ethnography, oral history and the history of memories. On the other hand, those short works on the Kurdish diaspora which focus on internal power relations are mainly in fields such as political science, international relations and security studies. Despite the fact that both categories make use of qualitative methodology, the latter falls short of extensive field researches and thus culminates in short papers. To make it clear, these essays prefer a supposedly easy and short-cut route to reflect upon the Kurdish diaspora's role in international politics; basically, they introduce a historical reading of the causes that gave birth to the Kurdish diaspora and depict its current situation in the international arena.

A rare example of a comprehensive book on the Kurdish diaspora in Britain is "Kurdish Refugee Communities: the Diaspora in Finland and England" written by the Finnish sociologist Osten Wahlbeck<sup>19</sup>, based on the findings of his doctoral

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<sup>18</sup> Andreas Blatte, "The Kurdish Movement Ethnic Mobilization and Europeanization," paper presented at the EUSA 8th International Biennial Conference, Tennessee, 27-29 March 2003; Vera Eccarius-Kelly, "Political Movements and Leverage Points: Kurdish Activism in the European Diaspora," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 22, no.1 (2002): 91-118; Michael M. Gunter, "Transnational Sources of Support for the Kurdish Insurgency in Turkey," *Journal of Conflict Studies* 11, no.2 (1991): 7-29, accessed on 16 September 2011 via <http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/ICS/article/viewFile/14947/16016>.

<sup>19</sup> Wahlbeck (1999)

dissertation.<sup>20</sup> Yet it is preoccupied with the sociological aspects of diasporic identity and the internal organisation of the Kurds. Their role in power relations in transnational politics is missing. Moreover, his work builds on a comparative study of the Kurds in England and Finland that makes it hard to focus on the British case. He also attempts to cover the Kurds from different countries of origin (Iraq, Turkey and Iran), whereas a special emphasis on those diaspora Kurds originating from Turkey is missing. This would enable us to have a wider insight into the political context and prospects of Turkey's Kurdish question, which definitely has different characteristics from those experiences of the Iraqi, Iranian or Syrian cases. The conceptual framework Wahlbeck deploys is quite beneficial, especially his use of such notions as the "transnationalism" and "deterritorialisation" of the Kurdish diaspora. However, this work and his other related articles construct the very concept of diaspora as a tool to analyse "refugee" communities,<sup>21</sup> which remains too restrictive to understand the complexity of the Kurdish diaspora community with a variety of legal and social situations in which its members live.

Another extensive and valuable research on the Kurds in Britain was carried out by Sarah Keeler.<sup>22</sup> Based on a fieldwork with Kurdish migrants and refugees in a multi-ethnic London community, Keeler discusses diasporic identity relying on her observations on Kurdish food culture in London. "In particular, [she] explores the ways in which food becomes a marker of ethnic difference and a means of imagining

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<sup>20</sup> Osten Wahlbeck, "Kurdish Refugee Communities: the Diaspora in Finland and England," PhD thesis (University of Warwick: 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Wahlbeck (1997; 1999; 2002).

<sup>22</sup> Sarah Keeler, "Hackney's "Ethnic Economy" Revisited: Local Food Culture, "Purity," and Politico-Historical Articulation of Kurdish Identity," in *Traveling Cultures and Plants: The Ethnobiology and Ethnopharmacy of Human Migrations*, edited by Andrea Pieroni and Ina Vandebroek (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007a); Keeler, "'There has been enough crying and now I want to dance!': Belonging, Cosmopolitanism and Resistance in London's Kurdish Diasporic Spaces," PhD thesis (University of Kent, 2007b).

and maintaining identity boundaries within the Kurdish diaspora.”<sup>23</sup> She suggests that for Kurds, particularly at the individual level, both positive and negative aspects of the migratory experience can co-exist.<sup>24</sup> In doing so, Keeler stands against positioning Kurds as passive victims of persecution and a victim diaspora. Similarly, in her PhD thesis Keeler argues that younger generations of Kurds reared mostly in diaspora are not merely victims of geopolitical forces beyond their control, they are active actors in diverse social, cultural and political situations.<sup>25</sup> She reveals that young Kurds are affected daily by contesting forces of individualism and collectivity and express a desire for western liberal ideals of hybridity and cosmopolitanism.<sup>26</sup> While I do not underestimate the role of cosmopolitan identities in the everyday lives of individuals in the diaspora, it is not the main focus of my thesis. In this regard, my work differs in the unit of analysis where I take leading community centres as main policy makers of the Kurdish diaspora. It is particularly because this is a politics thesis where political activism is evaluated in relation to the major narratives of the Kurdish ethno-national problem and issues pertaining to it within the diasporan space.

A political science perspective requires an attempt to understand the political significance of the Kurdish diaspora and its validity as an actor through a wider level of conceptualisation, which includes the broader Kurdish community with some sort of ‘diasporan political consciousness.’ Obviously there are ethical and moral dilemmas and problems that arise from setting such an approach, especially when writing a thesis of politics and international relations based on the consequences of mostly bitter experiences of an ethno-national community. However, it is very

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<sup>23</sup> Keeler (2007a): 166.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>25</sup> Keeler (2007b): 3-5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

difficult to avoid such handicaps as a researcher, regardless of disciplinary background, due to the nature of the topic which cannot ignore painful aspects concerning the processes of the making of a diaspora.

Taking time and political context into consideration, it should be noted that Wahlbeck's research was conducted at a time when the influx of the Kurdish refugees to Europe was at its peak. My research is conducted at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, in an environment in which Kurdish identity has already become relatively free in Turkey, as a prerequisite for its longstanding EU membership.<sup>27</sup> After the arrest of Abdullah Ocalan, the Kurdish militant leader, in 1999, the Kurdish question started to be discussed in terms of democracy and human rights within the framework of the EU process, rather than Kurds' secession from Turkey.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, this important development had a strong impact on diaspora activism. Accordingly, post-1999 Kurdish diaspora deserves a closer look. Hassanpour and Mojab explains it as follows:

[Following Ocalan's arrest] Within hours, the diaspora reacted with massive demonstrations attacking the embassies and consulates of Turkey and states that were were thought to have helped the abduction. The immediacy of the response, its organised nature, and its scope (Kurds from all countries), range /from Sydney and Vladivostok to Vancouver), and militancy (occupation of embassies and self-immolation) stunned observers (Kutschera, 1999; Millot and Semo, 1999). The new diaspora of the Kurds seemed to be much more powerful than its actual size and dispersion would indicate.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Bilgin Ayata and Deniz Yukseker, "İnkâr Siyasetinden "İdare" Politikasına: Kürtlerin Zorunlu Göçü," *Birikim*, no.213 (2007): 42; V. Firat Bozcalı, "Türkiye'nin Kürt Sorunu: 1999-2007," *Birikim*, no 225 (2008): 13; Seref Kavak, "The Democratic Society Party as a 'Party for Turkey': Official and Grassroots Politics of a Changing Identity (2005-2009)," MA thesis (Bogazici University, 2010): 10; Bahar Sahin, "Türkiye'nin AB Uyum Süreci Bağlamında Kürt Sorunu: Açılımlar ve Sınırlar," in *Türkiye'de Çoğunluk ve Azınlık Politikaları: AB Sürecinde Yurttaşlık Tartışmaları*, ed. Ayhan Kaya and Turgut Tarhanlı (Istanbul: TESEV, 2005); Mesut Yegen, "Müstakbel-Türkten Sözde Vatandaşa: Cumhuriyet ve Kürtler," lecture at Osmanlı Bankası Arşiv ve Araştırma Merkezi, Istanbul, 23 May 2009, accessed on 13 September 2011 via <http://www.obarsiv.com/pdf/MesutYegen.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Gunter, "The Continuing Kurdish Problem in Turkey after Ocalan's capture," *Third World Quarterly* 21, no.5 (2000): 854.

<sup>29</sup> Amir Hassanpour and Shahrzad Mojab, "Kurdish Diaspora," in *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures around the World, Volume I*, ed. Melvin Ember et al. (New York: Springer, 2005), 221.

In this period, the problem turned from being one of bloodshed to a legal-political debate. This change implied a certain transformation within the Turkish state and Turkish society. Here the effect of the 1999 Helsinki European Council, which declared Turkey a 'candidate country', is also crucial. Henceforth, the main dynamic of Turkish politics turned out to be EU membership as a state-policy. A huge legislative effort was made, including comprehensive constitutional amendments in 2001 and 2004, new Civil and Penal Codes and eight reform packages and breaks in taboos, like the abolition of capital punishment, the learning of local languages and dialects, broadcasting in these languages, the dismissal of Martial Law, etc. On the other hand, this adoption and implementation of major political reforms has come to a halt in recent years, and the armed conflict with the PKK has flared up. Accordingly, the EU Commission's annual Progress Report on Turkey as a candidate country lists a long chain of flaws and backlashes relating to this issue<sup>30</sup>. One should also note the possible effects of the regional developments in the Middle East known as the Arab Spring, which revived the idea of Kurdish autonomy for the other three parts of Kurdistan, rather than only that of Iraq, which had already become a Kurdish autonomous region. In this setting, the stances of the Kurdish diaspora towards politics and their political agenda normally differ today from those of the 1990s and even early 2000s. All these factors can be seen as major motives for new research in this field.

In the course of this thesis, my emphasis is mainly on what the Kurdish diaspora *does*, rather than what the Kurdish diaspora *is*. Since this is a political study,

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<sup>30</sup> "Turkey Progress Report 2012," European Commission, accessed on 2 November 2012 via [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2012/package/tr\\_rapport\\_2012\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2012/package/tr_rapport_2012_en.pdf).

I am not focusing on the intra-group structure of the diaspora from a sociological perspective, covering dimensions relating to class, gender, age etc. Yet this study can potentially contribute to the gap in the diaspora literature where it can intersect with the literature on community politics, social movements, and interest group mobilisation in a multi-level setting as part of the wider Europeanization literature on contextualising the political strategy of diaspora.<sup>31</sup>

### **E) The Kurdish Diaspora in the Process of Formation and Flourishing**

The Kurdish diaspora acquired its first significant grass roots in the 1960s from among the Turkish nationals who migrated to Western Europe, to fill gaps in the labour market. Afterwards, in the aftermath of the 1980 coup d'état in Turkey which intensified the political upheaval concerning the Kurds and the Turkish Left in particular, the Kurds did not hesitate to carry their activism to the West.<sup>32</sup> This process was accelerated by means of asylum seeking and illegal immigration and lasted from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s.<sup>33</sup> Throughout the 2000s, when the Kurdish question started to be recognised increasingly by the Turkish, Middle Eastern and other world governments, the Kurdish diaspora had already become one of the world's biggest ethno-national diasporas<sup>34</sup>. The Kurdish diaspora became a

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<sup>31</sup> Bahar Baser, "Kurdish Diaspora Political Activism in Europe with a Particular Focus on Great Britain," *Diaspora Dialogues for Development and Peace Project*, (Berlin: Berghof Peace Support, 2011); David Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movements; Opportunity, Mobilization, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Nicole F. Watts, *Activist in Office: Kurdish Politics and Protest in Turkey* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010); Kerim Yildiz, *The Kurds in Turkey: EU Accession and Human Rights* (London: Pluto Press, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> Bilgin Ayata, "The Politics of Displacement: A Transnational Analysis of the Forced Migration of Kurds in Turkey and Europe," PhD thesis (John Hopkins University, 2011): 141-45.

<sup>33</sup> Baser (2011): 7-10.

<sup>34</sup> Hassanpour and Mojab (2005): 214-223; Cohen (2008) 5; Wahlbeck (1999); Sheffer (2009): 1, 110.

more widely discussed topic during this period of time,<sup>35</sup> during which it was believed that the Kurdish question came closest to being solved.

In relation to its role in the Kurdish movement, the significant current position of the Kurdish diaspora certainly did not occur overnight. As an outcome of the experiences of leaving the homeland, particularly in the last thirty years, Kurdish political and cultural activism achieved a virtual Renaissance through and among the diaspora groups in the West. In many European cities such as Paris, Stockholm and London, the rise of prominent artists, experts and practitioners in Kurdish language, literature, history and music, as well as their attaining of the opportunities to let their voices be heard, allowed these Kurdish intellectuals to overcome the obstacles they had to face in their homeland and revive various components of their Kurdish identity. Subsequently, the Kurds, through the diaspora, started to reach a wider audience not only in their homeland but also across the world. They succeeded in drawing the attention of politicians and civil societies both in the countries where they settled and in third countries<sup>36</sup>.

When we look at the cultural field broadly, what made the diaspora important was two-fold: first, to be able to encounter Kurds and the Kurdish language in various artistic forms, from novels to poetry, folk music to rap, and second, to support in this matter their kin who remained in the homeland (for instance Turkey or Iraq) with inspiration and motivation, as well as man-made materials and artefacts. Experiencing 'Kurdishness' as a right in Western European countries was

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35 There are many intellectuals with conservative, centre-right and especially liberal tendencies who argue that in spite of its risks and hardships and compared to the earlier times in Turkey, generally, the potentiality of solving the Kurdish question are greater given the state of internal politics and the regional factors. For a good example of this, see Gokhan Bacik, "Turkey's Negotiations with the PKK: Contents, Dynamics, Risks, and Possible Outcomes," *The German Marshall Fund of the United States*, March 28, 2013. For a relevant work of the same author, see Gokhan Bacik, "The Rise of Identity Politics in Turkey," *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, no.23 (2010): 47-59.

36 From this angle, at the levels of the state and the civil society we can say that the Kurdish diaspora circles carry out stateless nation diplomacy as a lobbying activity.

fundamental to this. In addition, promise of a certain level of welfare for migrant communities made by governments in these countries, as well as these governments' efforts to try to include these communities in society, was also important. Additionally, Western European mainstream multiculturalism regarding migrant groups and especially ethnic minorities meant having a supportive, facilitative and motivating effect on the Kurdish diaspora, just as on other migrant communities.

Like the cultural field, for the Kurdish diaspora, Western European countries were also at the forefront in carrying out activities linked to political organisation and identity politics. They enabled setting up associations, working for recognition of language and identity and changing perceptions about appeals for asylum seekers who were wrongly detained or charged in antidemocratic ways.<sup>37</sup> This convinced the Kurds of the potential of diaspora politics and, accordingly, a substantial amount of work began in this field. The first Kurdish television channels were set up in Europe when they were banned in Turkey. One of the first of these was the London-based MED-TV.<sup>38</sup> This time within European borders, a non-state type of lobbying similar to that of 'government in exile' enabled the activities of the Kurdish political movement to expand and deepen.

'Government in exile' is a term which refers to "a temporary government moved to or formed in a foreign land by exiles who hope to rule when their country is liberated".<sup>39</sup> Similar to the concept of 'government in exile', the Kurdish Parliament in Exile [Parlamana Kurdistanê Li Derveyî Welat (PKDW)] was founded in The Hague in 1995 by the PKK and other leading Kurdish bodies and individuals close to the PKK-

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<sup>37</sup> Hassanpour and Mojab (2005): 219.

<sup>38</sup> Alinia (2004): 91-2. Also see Hassanpour (1998).

<sup>39</sup> "Government-in-exile", Princeton University WordNet, accessed on 9 April 2016 via <http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=government-in-exile>.



oriented Kurdish movement.<sup>40</sup> This 'parliament in exile' was an important step towards creating a political wing of the Kurdish national struggle trying to operate in the European transnational space.<sup>41</sup> Gurbey states that:

On 23 January 1995, the PKK handed a declaration to the International Red Cross and the Foreign Ministry of Switzerland, in which it stated that the International Red Cross is granted entry into the war regions to be able to monitor that the Geneva treaty and its supplemental protocols are being adhered to by the PKK. With this diplomatic step, the PKK intends to be internationally recognized as a warring party and demands that Turkey abide by the Geneva Convention.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, the founding of the Kurdish Parliament in Exile marked a turning point in the development of the Kurdish national struggle.<sup>43</sup> In this context diaspora politics reflects important elements of ethno-national conflicts taking place in the homeland. The Kurdish Parliament in Exile experience shows the role of the diaspora institutions in promulgating political agenda items imported from the homeland.

Large meetings, demonstrations and festivals with national/political themes or motivations attended by tens of thousands of people took place in European metropolises.<sup>44</sup> All of these activities drew the attention of the European public towards the Kurdish community which, by that time, was beginning to attain a relatively noticeable population and influence within European borders.<sup>45</sup> In the securitised Europe of the post-September 11 period, the Kurds, who had been seen as 'an ethnic vote' earlier – mainly during elections, especially local elections –

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Gunter, *The A to Z of the Kurds* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 112-3.

<sup>41</sup> Gulistan Gurbey, "The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in Turkey Since the 1980s," in *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in the 1990s: Its Impact on Turkey and the Middle East*, ed. Robert W. Olson (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Hassanpour and Mojab, 221.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

started to be approached in the context of preserving the public order and security within some European countries. This can be seen, for instance, in how much government authorities worry about some protests turning into inter-ethnic tension among the Kurds and Turks in European countries, especially when the Kurdish conflict intensifies in Turkey and the Middle East. Baser examines the conflicts between Turkish and Kurdish diaspora communities and gives Sweden as one of the exceptional cases where pervasive conflict between the two sides is not observed, whereas in most other countries these two groups have had some violent conflicts:

Due to the lack of violent encounters, the relationship between Turks and Kurds in Sweden has received little academic or media attention. Moreover, it has not attracted the attention of hostland policy makers, as it is not considered a threat to domestic security. In other countries, such as Germany, the spill-over of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict has been seen as a threat to public order due to clashes between the two groups, including violent demonstrations that have led to altercations with the police, arson attacks, and attempts at lynching.<sup>46</sup>

This situation ran parallel to the period of shutting down of Kurdish television channels one after another, or enforcing restrictions on them due to their 'relations with terrorist organisations'. Directing the demonstrations specifically at the Kurds, and in contrast to previous terms, trying to inhibit as elements of crime the use of flags and posters bearing the PKK logo or pictures of its leader, Abdullah Ocalan, increased dramatically following the USA and the EU's decision to recognise the PKK as a terrorist organisation. In the meantime, the Kurdish diaspora abandoned<sup>47</sup> its 'Kurdish parliament in exile' formula and instead adopted the roof organisation system,<sup>48</sup> the confederation of civil society organisations.<sup>49</sup> This way, as opposed to

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<sup>46</sup> Bahar Baser, "Diasporas and Imported Conflicts: Turkish and Kurdish Second-Generation Diasporas in Sweden," *Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security* 3, no.2 (2013a): 106.

<sup>47</sup> Bahar Baser, *The Kurdish Diaspora in Europe: Identity Formation and Political Activism* (Istanbul: Bogazici University, 2013b): 23.

<sup>48</sup> "The Confederation of Kurdish Associations in Europe," accessed on 14 November 2013 via <http://www.kon-kurd.org>.

the old formula, it may be that the Kurdish diaspora organisations preferred to act seemingly as a less political and more cultural confederation. It is possible to notice in the sources that support this study the influence of the community centres and platforms<sup>50</sup> related to and working with FED-BIR (Kurdish Federation in the UK), the British representative of this umbrella organisation across Europe. That is largely due to the fact that the activities of these community centres and platforms dominate Kurdish diaspora politics. FED-BIR is one of the constituents of KON-KURD (The Confederation of Kurdish Associations in Europe), which has ten federations and one hundred seventy-five unions affiliated to it.<sup>51</sup> These organisations address the specific needs of Kurdish communities, encouraging their cultural, social and diasporic identity.<sup>52</sup> Ugurlu's study on "Identity Formation and Community Organization among Kurdish Diaspora in London" suggests that Kurdish community organisations are places for socialisation, friendship settings, an exercise in ethnic identity awareness and counselling, strengthening their users' social networks, all of which also help support the Kurdish cause transnationally, as previous studies indicate.<sup>53</sup>

Despite all of its transnational mobilisation ability and potentialities, the Kurdish diaspora has also experienced, in recent times, the problem of being a stateless nation diaspora. In this new era of struggle with state and supra-state

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<sup>49</sup> Baser (2013b): 34-45. In addition to its new functions in mobilising diasporic communities, Baser discusses in detail KON-KURD's (The Confederation of Kurdish Associations in Europe) – the Belgium-based umbrella organisation of European PKK-leaning Kurdish associations that have become dominant in (especially Turkish) Kurdish diaspora politics – lobbying activities directed at EU institutions and governments.

<sup>50</sup> Kurdish Community Centre and Halkevi - Kurdish and Turkish Community Centre, Roj Women's Association - Kurdish & Turkish Women's Centre and Ozgur Roni Youth Platform are the most prominent of the aforementioned communities and platforms.

<sup>51</sup> "The Confederation of Kurdish Associations KON-KURD calling Kurds to 8 September festival," *E Kurd Daily*, accessed on 5 July 2015 via <http://ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2012/9/turkey4132.htm>.

<sup>52</sup> Omer Ugurlu, "Identity Formation and Community Organization among Kurdish Diaspora in London," *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 1, no. 1 (2014): 22.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 22, 24, 27.

actors, where power is prioritised, it can be argued that there is a relative decline in the agency of the Kurdish diaspora in terms of its effectiveness. However, when we take into account the span of the intellectual and organisational space of the diaspora, together with its flexible legal positioning, it should be noted that the diaspora still has an important role in the Kurdish movement's transformation and effectiveness. Therefore, as far as the solution of the Kurdish question is concerned, I find it necessary to analyse diaspora as a unit that should not be overlooked. Therefore, I explore the subject of 'Kurdishness' and its politics through the experience of diaspora based upon the rarely analysed example of the Kurds in the UK which is a part of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe.

## **F) Time and Political Context**

Key features of the Kurdish question in the last decade shape the context of my study of this problem. I argue that this context has two fundamental dynamics: *Turkeyfication* and *Kurdistanisation*, both of which refer to re-imagination, reproduction, and realisation of the political geography of the Kurds from Turkey. These two tendencies, rather than sharply narrating the zeitgeist of two different periods, belong to the same timeframe, even though one of these dynamics occasionally becomes more prominent than the other, and can be traced simultaneously in relation to the same actors.

In the period following the imprisonment of Abdullah Ocalan, leader of the PKK, the mainstream Kurdish movement in Turkey, rather than in terms of Kurdish separatism, the Kurdish question started to be discussed more than ever within the

framework of democracy, human rights advocacy and Turkey's European Union candidacy.<sup>54</sup> In this period, political violence was abandoned as a political discussion ground, and this made significant contributions to the transformation of the Turkish state and public's attitude. Also important in this transformation was the fact that Turkey was given the status of a 'candidate country' by the European Union in the 1999 Helsinki European Council meeting. Because, as seen later, European Union candidacy was the main driving force behind Turkey's political reformation, it would shape state policies and discussions in the following ten years. Developments such as key constitutional changes, i.e. the abolition of the death penalty, regulations concerning civil law and penal law, various regulations regarding education and broadcasting in languages other than Turkish, and the annulment of the state of emergency in Kurdish cities, all took place in this new period. At the same time, political reforms and their practical effects were disrupted in recent times, while military action against the PKK and the securitising of state policies started to come to the forefront.<sup>55</sup> However, when discussing the character of the Kurdish question today it is also necessary to consider the reshaping of the Middle East following the 'Arab Spring'. It should not be disregarded how in the three other parts of the Kurdistan geography outside of Iraq this process strengthened the idea of autonomous or empowered Kurdish administrative regions. In this context, we can say that the political agenda of the Kurdish diaspora – just as in the Kurdish movements in the homeland – continues in a different tone and with different contents, compared to those of the 1990s and even the 2000s. I should also add that,

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<sup>54</sup> Gunter (2000).

<sup>55</sup> European Union Commission's "Turkey Progress Report 2012" discusses shortcomings concerning this.

while I was analysing the Kurdish diaspora politics in London, I always had the aforementioned regional-political conjuncture at the back of my mind, with its spatial and temporal dimensions.

To conclude my introduction, I would like to present briefly the content of the subsequent chapters of the thesis. Chapter I, the introduction, covered the main research questions, rationale, aims and objectives of this research, and demonstrated why Kurdish diaspora politics matters.

Chapter II is the literature review. It delves deeper into diaspora as a concept and its use for the Kurds, and discusses the agency of diasporas as non-state actors in international relations. Chapter III explains the methodology adopted in this research.

Chapter IV introduces a brief historical background of the Kurdish Question and the Kurdish migration that has given birth to the Kurdish diaspora and affected the state of its dynamic politics. This chapter comprises a periodisation of the Kurdish question and Kurdish migration from the Ottoman Empire to the Early Republican Era of Turkey, followed by Contemporary Turkish and Kurdish migration waves to Europe from 1950s to 1970s. Then comes the period between 1980 and 2000s, namely the post-military coup era to the rise of armed conflict between the Kurdish militia and the Turkish army.

The following three chapters reflect the findings of my field research in London. Chapter V is about diaspora agency and national/transnational politics, creative agency building and struggles for legitimacy. This chapter takes a closer look at the agency of the Kurdish diaspora's grassroots and the strategies to survive institutionally in the British/European public sphere. In this chapter, I also suggest

that there is a need for cross-disciplinary approaches, in particular, anthropology of international relations in the study of diaspora politics.

Chapter VI evaluates the role of the Kurdish diaspora community in London and tries to understand its engagement in local politics in the host country. Kurdish political activism with a diverse agenda is introduced in this chapter. A balance of tendencies between trans-border, intra-Kurdish and pro-*Turkeyfication* dynamics is discussed. The religious identity of the Alevi minority, very common among the Kurds in London, and Kurdish women's activism in London's diasporic space are paid particular attention, as they are both strong grassroots motives.

Chapter VII focuses on priorities of the Kurdish diaspora's agenda in the UK. In this regard, the question of (in)visibility of the Kurds and alliances they form with other communities. The interconnectedness of local and transnational observed in Kurdish diaspora politics, especially in the recent struggle for autonomy by Syrian Kurds, is one of the major findings of this chapter. This chapter also looks at Kurdish mobilisation for national struggle reinforced by the strong motive of *Apoism*, which implies the predominance and unity in the prioritisation of national political leadership around imprisoned Kurdish militant leader Abdullah Ocalan. Civic participation as a defensive strategy in a securitised Europe is another major finding of this chapter.

Chapter VIII includes the conclusion and suggestions for further research concerning various aspects of the Kurdish diaspora politics and the future of the Kurdish Question.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **A) Spatio-Temporal Dimension: The Concept of Diaspora and its Use for the Kurds**

Diaspora has been used instrumentally to refer to various ethnic groups attempting to lobby the governments and civil societies of the countries that they migrated to, in terms of their group interests and demands, especially relating to their countries of origin. Kurds have also been regarded as a diaspora group due to their experience of oppression and denial in their hometown(s). As we have seen, like their counterparts in Iraq, Iran and Syria, Kurds from Turkey have experienced devastating migration movements, especially for the last three decades, due to two major events in the modern Turkish Republic: the military coup of 12 September 1980 and the ongoing armed conflict between the PKK (the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party) and the Turkish army. This process of "low-intensity conflict" left the Kurdish population of eastern Turkey caught in the crossfire. The state, having already denied Kurdish identity as a result of its nation building strategy, lost its trust in relation to its Kurdish minority with oppressive policies directed at them by the military regime. The situation was exacerbated by the militarisation of the predominantly Kurdish regions in the 1990s' conflictual atmosphere. As we saw, more than 3000 villages were depopulated by the state authorities and hundreds of thousands of Kurdish villagers had to flock into the suburban areas of metropolises like Istanbul, Izmir, Adana, Mersin etc.<sup>56</sup> Some others migrated to Europe seeking political asylum. Both in the 1980s and 1990s, the waves of Kurdish migrations

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<sup>56</sup> Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies, "Turkey Migration and Internally Displaced Persons Survey" (2006).



from Turkey were mostly towards major Western European countries, such as Germany, France, the Netherlands and the UK. The migration to the UK is the focus of this work. Before looking at the situation of the Kurdish diasporan community in the UK, it would be beneficial to revisit the term 'diaspora' as an analytical tool, to explain the situation of various migrant groups including Kurds, through the changing usage of the word in different phases and contexts.

The word *diaspora* originates in the Greek translation of the Bible and has two major meanings; "to sow"<sup>57</sup> and "to spread"<sup>58</sup>. It has been used predominantly to refer to the exile of the Jews from ancient Babylon until recently.<sup>59</sup> However, its use as an academic term and theoretical concept has evolved to a great extent, especially with the diversification of the studies of social phenomena such as migration, asylum-seekers and multiculturalism, through various disciplines including sociology, labour economics, political science, international relations and anthropology.

Considering the diaspora literature in general, the time dimension stands in tandem with macro-political trends in the social sciences. In this respect, until the late 1980s - even in some rare cases in 1990s - relevant works have been produced within the conceptual framework of *international migration* and with a heavy stress on the *labour* and *economic development* aspects of migration, in tandem with the *zeitgeist* of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>60</sup> Then studies with the 'diaspora' title and/or related

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<sup>57</sup> Sheffer (2009): 9.

<sup>58</sup> Cohen (2008): 21.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>60</sup> Melech Epstein, *Jewish labor in USA: an industrial, political and cultural history of the Jewish labor movement* (New York: Ktav, 1969); James Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel poverty and female emigration, 1830-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1979); Arthur W. Helweg, *Sikhs in England: The Development of a Migrant Community* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979).

terminology started to be written and this rising curve accelerated and indeed boomed in the 1990s<sup>61</sup>, seemingly foreshadowed by the introduction of *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* (first published in 1991). This was a brand new interdisciplinary journal concentrating on the theory and practice of diasporas. This period was marked by the end of the Cold War and the flourishing of debates on the rights of ethnic, religious minority groups and identity politics, especially in the multicultural societies of Europe and North America.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, the study of ethnic groups living in receiving countries other than their home country was often defined under the diaspora category. Some researchers have gone even further in defining various groups of people as diasporas, despite the fact that they did not forcibly leave their hometown, including labour/proletarian diasporas like Indentured Indians, Chinese, Turks, and Italians, ‘imperial diasporas’ like the British, ‘trade diasporas’ like Lebanese, Chinese, and Venetians, and ‘deterritorialized diasporas’ like Caribbean peoples, Parsis, and Roma.<sup>63</sup> However, in many of the later works produced on diasporas, especially in the late 1990s and then 2000s, the concept ‘diaspora’ has often been used in the sense named by Cohen as ‘victim diasporas’<sup>64</sup>, giving examples like Jews, Africans and Armenians, and

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<sup>61</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural identity and diaspora’, in Jonathan Rutherford (ed) *Identity: community, culture, difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990): 222-37; William Safran, ‘Diasporas in modern societies: myths of homeland and return’, *Diaspora* 1, no. 1 (1991): 83-99; Ronald Segal, *The Black Diaspora* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995); Darshan Singh Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora: the search for statehood* (London: UCL Press, 1999); Nicholas van Hear, *New diasporas: the mass exodus, dispersal and regrouping of migrant communities* (London: UCL Press, 1998); Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (eds), *Migration, diasporas and Transnationalism* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1999).

<sup>62</sup> Michael Keating and John McGarry, ‘Introduction’ in *Minority Nationalism and the Changing International Order*, Michael Keating and John McGarry (eds.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>63</sup> Cohen (2008): 18.

<sup>64</sup> Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal, ‘Citizenship and identity: living in diasporas in post-war Europe?’ *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23, no. 1 (2000): 1-15; William Safran, ‘The Jewish diaspora in a comparative and theoretical perspective’, *Israel Studies* 10, no. 1 (2005): 37-60; Helena Lindholm Schultz, *The Palestinian diaspora: formation of identities and politics of homeland* (London: Routledge, 2003); Khachig Tololyan, *Redefining diasporas: old approaches, new identities: the Armenian diaspora in an international context*, Occasional paper (London: Armenian Institute, 2002); Wahlbeck (2002); UNHCR

suggesting that such groups as Irish and Palestinians be included, with the premise that "Many contemporary refugee groups are incipient victim diasporas but time has to pass to see whether they return to their homelands, assimilate in their host lands, creolize or mobilize as a diaspora."<sup>65</sup>

As for the spatial dimension of the diaspora literature, we should bear in mind that there can arise the question of a researcher's subjective relationship with a diaspora. This relationship can be divided roughly in two categories:

a) Authors sharing the ethnic origin of a certain diaspora: Diaspora researchers with Jewish descent: Cohen, Safran, Sheffer, Schnapper; Kurdish descent: Khayati, Kavak; Armenian descent: Tololyan; Sikh descent: Singh, Tatla; Hindu descent: Parekh; Arab descent: Hourani; Caribbean descent: Hall, Gilroy etc.

b) Authors that do not have the same ethnic origin with that of the diaspora they study: Wahlbeck and Ostergaard-Nielsen on Kurds; Chailand on Armenians; Harold, Hinnells and Williams on South Asians; Werbner on Pakistanis.

In line with the conception of victim diasporas mentioned above, it can be argued that the Kurdish diaspora fits well in the category of incipient victim diaspora, due to the fact that huge numbers of Kurds have left their homeland involuntarily and their diasporic history is relatively recent. On the other hand, it should also be noted that, unlike many other diasporas, Kurds have left their country of origin but without an official state of their own, which has caused them to be referred as a

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*Global Trends 2006*, Geneva: United Nations High Commission for Refugees, accessed on 15 September 2011 via <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/STATISTICS/4676a71d4.pdf>

<sup>65</sup> Cohen (2008): 18.

"stateless nation" or "people without state."<sup>66</sup> Overall, I am using the term 'Kurdish diaspora' in its least restrictive sense, which Sheffer calls *ethno-national diaspora*, exemplified by numerous groups, from Koreans in Los Angeles to Turks in Berlin, Russians in Estonia to many other scattered groups like Chinese, Jews, Palestinians, Africans, Romanians, Poles, Kurds, Armenians. As Sheffer states, these groups "reside outside of their countries of origin, but maintain contacts with people back in their old homelands."<sup>67</sup> Sheffer clarifies the conception of 'ethno-national diaspora' in his broad definition:

An ethno-national diaspora is a social-political formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries. Members of such entities maintain regular or occasional contacts with what they regard as their homeland and with individuals and groups of the same background residing in other host countries. Based on aggregate decisions to settle permanently in host countries, but to maintain a common identity, diasporans identify as such, showing solidarity with their group and their entire nation, and they organize and are active in the cultural, social, economic, and political spheres. Among their various activities, members of such diasporas establish trans-state networks that reflect complex relationships among the diasporas, their host countries, their homelands, and international actors.<sup>68</sup>

The rationale behind this detailed description of the term 'ethno-national diaspora' will be prevalent in the course of this study to evaluate the Kurdish case.

## **B) Agency of Diasporas as Non-State Actors in Transnational Politics**

The strengths and limits of the agency of diasporas as actors of transnational politics and hence international relations vary according to different academic traditions that reflect upon certain macro-geographically divided political

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<sup>66</sup> Chaliand (1993); Kirisci and Winrow (1997): 3.

<sup>67</sup> Sheffer (2009): 1.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

differences. Both theoretical and practical evaluations of diaspora as a *political* actor have been positively evaluated in the North American tradition of political science and statecraft. On the other hand, the overall Western European evaluation of diasporas' political roles and functions has been primarily within the boundaries of domestic political participation, particularly in relation to yardsticks of social cohesion that imply socio-economic integration into migrants' new homelands.<sup>69</sup> Mainly, we talk about academic scholarly traditions, but the interactions between state policies and academic traditions are usually very obvious, especially in the case of social-political issues concerning migrants, integration and multiculturalism. After making this distinction between American and European political and academic perceptions of diasporas' political agendas, Ostergaard-Nielsen emphasises the European multiculturalist approach to keep the diasporas hosted by them as 'immigrants' that should potentially incorporate themselves into the host land's political objectives, rather than emerge as ethnic lobbies with agendas of homeland politics, as in the case of the US.<sup>70</sup> One should note that Ostergaard-Nielsen's observations mostly rely on Continental Europe and Scandinavian countries, and she acknowledges that, even there, each country has certain contextual features that makes it different from others in the same continent. However, it would not be too far-fetched to build categories based on certain common characteristics in political and academic streams across geographies. My research on the case of the UK has quite interesting features that link and intertwine with both the North American/Anglo-Saxon tradition and European practices and norms. That's why, for instance, diaspora

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<sup>69</sup> Eva Ostergaard-Nielsen, "Diasporas in Global Politics" in William Wallace and Daphne Josselin (eds.) *Non- State Actors in Global Politics* (London: Palgrave, 2001): 231-232.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

communities are more active in official political lobbying in British state circles than in several Continental European examples, while being less powerful and less explicit compared to their counterparts' lobbying practices in the US Congress, Senate and political parties. Although political activities of diaspora communities usually go beyond national boundaries and create their own spaces, institutional context of the host country affects these activities. Ishkanian states:

Civil society is no longer confined to the borders of the territorial nation-state. Mary Kaldor argues, the end of the Cold War and increasing global interconnectedness have provided like-minded groups in different parts of the world opportunities for addressing demands not just to their respective states, but to global institutions and other states.<sup>71</sup>

Taking this whole picture into consideration, it would not be too hasty to conclude that the academic traditions looking into diasporas directly reflect the above-mentioned difference in perspective and disciplinary adjustments. Whereas diaspora has widely been evaluated within the 'softer' social sciences of sociology, anthropology and geography in the European academic literature, it has also been studied with the lenses of political science and international relations in the American academia, with strong emphasis on certain aspects pertaining to foreign policy ethnic lobbying towards governments<sup>72</sup>, in addition to the 'low politics' issues that are also examined in the European tradition. As discussed earlier, this inter-continental academic divergence may be a result of differences in the understanding and design of politics and society and the juxtaposition of the two. In the same vein, diasporas and diaspora politics remain part of societal dynamics for one stream, the European tradition, and of international relations and foreign policy for

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<sup>71</sup> Armine Ishkanian, "Diaspora and Global Civil Society: The Impact of Transnational Diasporic Activism on Armenia's Post-Soviet Transition" in *Central Asia and the Caucasus: Transnationalism and Diaspora* (eds.) by T. Atabaki and S. Mehendale (London: Routledge, 2005): 6.

<sup>72</sup> Yossi Shain and Aharon Barth, "Diasporas and International Relations Theory," *International Organization* 57, No.3 (2003): 449-479.

the other, the American tradition, which is a significant difference to keep in mind when theorising the agency of diaspora in international relations and transnational political spheres that encompass our daily lives. Shain and Barth make an important contribution to the study of diasporas and international relations by incorporating the former into the latter. They benefit from different theoretical approaches of international relations by focusing on diasporas as independent actors who actively influence their homeland (kin-state) foreign policies. Shain and Barth argue that diasporic influences can best be understood by situating them in the 'theoretical space' shared by constructivist and liberal streams of international relations theory; both of which emphasise the impact of identity and domestic politics on international behaviour.

### **C) The Particularity of the UK Case: A Hybrid Approach to Diaspora Agency?**

The UK's House of Commons formally recognised the Anfal Campaign and Halabja Massacre as genocide against the Kurds committed by the Baath regime in Iraq and agreed to encourage governments, the UN and the EU to officially recognise it. Would the UK Parliament be so concerned as to particularly gather at a session for the recognition of the Halabja Massacre as Genocide of the Iraqi Kurds under the Saddam Regime in Iraq in 1988<sup>73</sup>, if the Iraqi Kurdish regional government did not have a say on the oil produced and infrastructure/construction sectors taking place in Iraq where British companies have (and would strive to) a major presence? The UK government

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<sup>73</sup> The Kurdish Genocide: Achieving Justice through EU recognition, UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization), accessed on 12 June 2017 via [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/d-iq/dv/03\\_kurdishgenocidesofanfalandhalabja\\_/03\\_kurdishgenocidesofanfalandhalabja\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/d-iq/dv/03_kurdishgenocidesofanfalandhalabja_/03_kurdishgenocidesofanfalandhalabja_en.pdf)

and parliament have not been as vocal on the plight of the Kurds in Syria or Turkey, for instance, which do not possess such natural resources or potential market opportunities.

At the parliamentary debate on the recognition of the Kurdish genocide in Iraq, Jeremy Corbyn MP for Islington North, a constituency of London with a large number of Kurds mostly from Turkey, stated:

One hopes that we will be able to draw attention to what happened in Iraq in 1988. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) pointed out, she and I were both Members of this House at that time and we both frequently raised the issue, including in the British media. Although the lack of knowledge among much of the public is understandable because of how the media failed to report things, we must be honest that it took a long time for most of the media and the political establishment in this country to cotton on to what was happening to the Kurdish people in Iraq. To be honest, a lot of British Government policy was blindsided by their obsession with supporting Iraq against Iran in the dreadful Iran-Iraq war and Britain's considerable economic interests in Iraq at the time, not least in oil exploration and exploitation and so on. We must have a sense of deep self-criticism about the process.<sup>74</sup>

The British context seems to demonstrate certain properties of the American approach to diaspora political lobbying in the sense of economic pragmatism wherever possible. In this vein, understanding the agency of diaspora in politics may require us to search for a hybrid approach to agency in international politics. This hybrid approach to diaspora agency is influenced by three main components: host-state agency, home-state agency and institutions.

Home-state agency is the agency of the sending country of a particular diaspora. In many cases of ethno-national diasporas, the policies of the home-state may function as a detrimental factor to the interests of the diasporic group that fled

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<sup>74</sup> Resolution date 28 February 2013, UK House of Commons, accessed on 12 June 2017 via <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm130228/debtext/130228-0003.htm>



that country. In that case, the role of home-state agency in the formation of diaspora agency can be a negative one. However, this may be counterproductive to the expectations of the sending country, as the foreign policy of the home-state against a diaspora may further motivate that particular diaspora to make greater attempts to survive those policies and make counter moves in the form of diaspora political activism in the host-country. The Turkish state's engagement with ethno-national diasporas like the Kurdish and Armenian diasporas can be given as examples for this. When theorising diaspora transnational political activism, Low writes:

Within the context of political transnationalism (Bauböck 2003, 720), the diaspora engages with transnational practices, such as raising funds for their home country electoral candidates, forming alliances with their home country political associations, active involvement in political campaigns, and creating their own hometown civic committees.<sup>75</sup>

Host-state agency is the political agency of the receiving country. Host-state and society both influence and are influenced by the diaspora that they are hosting. Diasporas that constitute large populations are seen as voting blocs by politicians during election campaigns, not only for the elections in home countries, but also host countries. The debates on multiculturalism, integration, social security, education and well-being often have references to immigrants and diasporans in receiving countries. Political trends and social dynamics of the host country shape the identity and politics of the diasporan individuals living there. Moreover, foreign policy priorities and its conduct by the host-state may have direct outcomes determining its policies towards a particular diaspora it hosts and towards the foreign country that particular diaspora

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<sup>75</sup> Choo Chin Low, "Malaysian diaspora philanthropy: transnational activism, mobilization and resistance, *Diaspora Studies* (2017): 3.

originates. Therefore, the political agency of host state is significantly influential on the shape and depth of diaspora agency, and diasporas may have some influence on the foreign policy of their host state.

Finally, the third component shaping diaspora agency in international politics is institutions that comprise regimes, norms and customs, as well as tangible entities including intergovernmental organisations/supranational bodies, transnational communities and long-term cooperations. I am borrowing the term "institutions" from neo-liberal institutionalism, which is a theory of international relations alternative to neo-realist theory of inter-state political setting.<sup>76</sup> I should note that, in this context, I do not use the buzzword "neo-liberal" in the sense of a mode of production or economic ideology. In his article on neoliberal institutionalist theory of international relations, Stein problematises the use of the word "neoliberalism" as a label rather than an analytical tool; yet he still cannot avoid using it, as it constitutes the core of a dominant mainstream theory of international relations scholarly field, as well as in the domain of policy.<sup>77</sup>

In international relations theory, neoliberal institutionalist theory is used rather to emphasise the role of non-state institutions in international politics as a response to neo-realist theory, which sees states as the only actor in international relations by claiming that states act as independent actors with

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<sup>76</sup> Arthur A. Stein, "Neoliberal Institutionalism" in *The Oxford Handbook on International Relations*, (eds) Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008): 201-202.

<sup>77</sup> Stein states that "The moniker of neoliberal institutionalism is a product of scholarly branding and product differentiation... Just as everyone uses a computer but typically not for computing, and even as we talk about game theory though it is not a theory of games, so this chapter will talk of neoliberal institutionalism. Ironically, those who use the label never address whether the "liberal" qualification means that there is an "illiberal institutionalism," or whether it is possible to talk of institutions and not be a liberal. Unfortunately, scholarly literature in the field revolves around labels and "isms," and so this chapter will use the common parlance of international relations even though it is essentially about institutions in international politics." Ibid., 202.

full autonomy.<sup>78</sup> Regarding diaspora agency, neoliberal institutions basically constitute the entirety of tools, norms, international organisations, and regimes based on patterns of international law, institutions and customs that regulate the negotiations relating to conflicts, collaborations and several other sorts of interactions among diasporas, host-state's and home-state's agencies in the conduct of foreign policy in a transnational context.

Although neo-liberal institutionalism attributes agency to non-state actors, hence diasporas, it is still a state-centric approach to international relations and focuses mainly on the state system as the primary unit of analysis. It uses "game theory" to suggest that institutions can provide mutually profitable outcomes, in other words institutions can facilitate a win-win situation for the actors which are mainly states but also non-state ones.<sup>79</sup> The earlier focus of this theory was on international organisations, especially regarding the post-World War II era which gave birth to concrete entities with a physical presence. These *organisations* were defined as "a formal arrangement transcending national boundaries that provides for the establishment of institutional machinery to facilitate cooperation among members in the security, economic, social, or related fields."<sup>80</sup> Theorists of international relations have broadened the conceptualisation of institutions by emphasising the role of international *regimes* that are defined as "principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge in a given issue-area."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>79</sup> Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>80</sup> Jack C. Plano and Roy Olton, *The International Relations Dictionary* (Kalamazoo: New Issues Press, Western Michigan University: 1979): 288.

<sup>81</sup> Stephen D. Krasner, "Structural causes and regime consequences: regimes as intervening variables, *International Organization* 36 (1982): 185.

This can include anything from international free trade regimes to international environmental regimes, human rights regimes to immigration and refugee regimes that are closely related to diaspora agency. At this point, the high level of interactions between domestic politics and international politics should be noted. As international relations has domestic roots and domestic consequences, international institutions, regimes and norms also have a closely interactive relationship with what is known as "domestic politics", which is getting increasingly harder to separate from the former. The interactive relationship between domestic politics and international institutions, including organisations and regimes, are dealt with precisely by Stein:

...domestic political institutions must typically be supportive of membership, and thus we can talk of the domestic political requisites of joining international institutions. Further, there must be domestic support for subsequent compliance as well... But international institutions also affect domestic ones. First, because there are often domestic requisites to joining international institutions, membership conditionality has an important effect on internal political arrangements. Secondly, since membership in an institution subjects a state to continuing restraints, joining one has the affect both of locking in domestic changes and of making credible a domestic commitment to a particular policy path. Thirdly, international institutions may provide a degree of legitimacy and make difficult domestic changes more palatable by providing political cover. In these cases, domestic actors come to frame their arguments in terms of international institutions.<sup>82</sup>

In the case of diaspora agency, this is particularly important. The political, social, economic and cultural demands made by diasporas, both via diaspora individuals and communities, shape, in their limited capacities, the policies, agendas or at least decision-making processes of international institutions, regimes and norms, in addition to shaping the policies of their home-state and host state. The opposite is valid too. Diaspora agency is also shaped by the

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<sup>82</sup> Stein (2008): 214, 215.

influences of international institutions, norms and regimes especially in the case of international law, international organisations and their approaches to issues pertaining to immigrant groups and diasporas. In that respect, one cannot consider diaspora politics merely as a direct duplication or reflection of homeland politics echoed in hostlands. Therefore, in order to have a better understanding of diaspora agency and diaspora politics, one should look beyond the home-land vs. host-land axis, and include the third dimension - international institutions and regimes- into the equation. This third dimension of diaspora agency is of great importance concerning the experiences of Kurdish diaspora activists in London that I interviewed. In the upcoming sections of this thesis, it will be more apparent that the Kurdish diaspora activists underline their perception of insecurity and vulnerability, due to the pressures of international institutions and regimes, EU, NATO and evolving international regime on "terrorism".

To sum it up with a concrete example, the Turkish state and the British state interact and influence one another both as individual states and as members or candidates of common international organisations, treaties, regulations and regimes. At the very same time, domestic and foreign policies of these two countries have certain influences on the Kurdish diaspora on many levels. Finally, within the third dimension, international organisations including the UN and the EU, through their regulations, and NATO, through its political and military priorities and actions, and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), through its rulings and legal jurisprudence, influence the agency of the Kurdish diaspora, the ways it operates and evolves. With its very existence, demands and struggles, along with many other diasporas and non-state actors,

Kurdish diaspora contributes to the formation, reproduction and re-negotiation of the norms, values and practices that constitute the international institutions and regimes, although as a non-state actor its power is relatively little. Key events, human tragedies and other occasions are of critical importance to the members and/or prospective members of the imagined transnational community of diaspora. Usually this transnational mobilisation functions as catalyst to the formation of diaspora identity. In his article, Sokefeld counters accusations of essentialism regarding diaspora identity:

...the development of diaspora identity is not simply a natural and inevitable result of migration but a historical contingency that frequently develops out of mobilization in response to specific critical events. Diaspora [...] is not an issue of naturally felt roots but of specific political circumstances that suggest the mobilization of a transnational imagined community. The focus of mobilization in the formation of diasporas effectively encounters essentializing concepts of diaspora.<sup>83</sup>

Although one can argue that diasporas have their own agencies, the role of the agency of host-state, home-state and international institutions cannot be ignored. In the figure below, I try to portray the tripartite mechanism that diaspora agency is affected by in the international arena. It shows how diaspora politics, identity and mobilisation are shaped as a result of interactions among diaspora's own agency with agencies of three other actors that constitute arguably dominant elements of the international system:

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<sup>83</sup> Martin Sokefeld, Mobilizing in transnational space: a social movement approach to the formation of diaspora", *Global networks* 6, no. 3 (2006): 280.

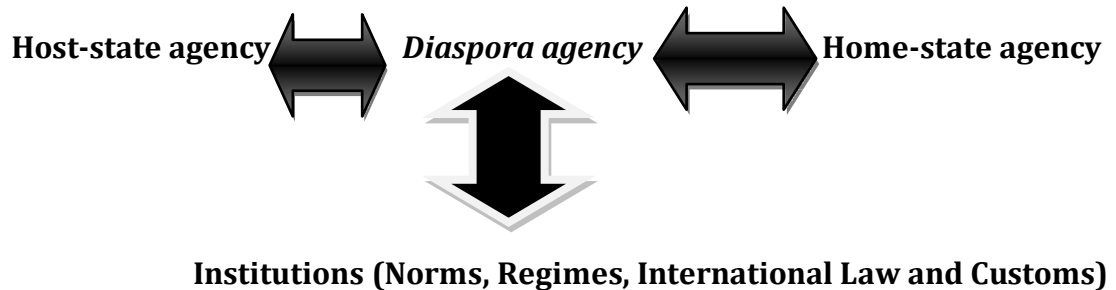


Figure 1: Diaspora agency and international interactions

Here it should be noted that scholarly production of theoretical approaches to international relations is not free of foreign policies of states and intergovernmental institutions. As Steven L. Lamy puts it, neo-liberal theory of international relations vs. neo-realist theory of it has been the dominant debate around the paradigm of the contemporary international system.<sup>84</sup> Lamy emphasises that this neo-neo debate are "more than just theories, [they] represent paradigms or conceptual frameworks that shape individuals' images of the world and *influence research priorities and policy debates and choices.*"<sup>85</sup> Whereas neo-liberalism refers to neo-liberal institutionalist theory in the scholarly domain of international relations, in the policy world, Lamy suggests that it means something different:

A neo-liberal foreign policy promotes free trade or open markets and *western democratic values and institutions*. Most of the leading Western states have joined the US-led chorus, calling for the 'enlargement' of the community of democratic and capitalist nation-states. There is no other game in town, the

<sup>84</sup> Steven L. Lamy, "Contemporary mainstream approaches: neo-realism and neo-liberalism" in John Baylis and Steve Smith, eds., *The Globalization of World Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 183.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184. Emphasis mine (S.K.).

financial and political institutions created after the Second World War have survived and these provide the foundation for current political and economic power arrangements. These are the institutions created by policy-makers who embrace neo-liberal or realist/neo-realist assumptions about the world.<sup>86</sup>

#### **D) Theorising non-Western Experiences of Diaspora Politics**

The West-centric approach to diaspora studies almost as a whole brings about an analytical question: To what extent are the overall Western approaches to diaspora agency of the US, UK and Continental Europe models suffice when it comes to the need to investigate non-Western and Southern experiences of diaspora politics and agency-building processes?

Millions of Syrian refugees or “guests” (in the non-recognising discourse of certain refugee regimes in some Middle Eastern countries and Turkey), many of whom have fled the civil war in Syria following the Arab Spring, provide a good example of refugee communities beyond the West. Can we still evaluate this case in same way that we do the Poles or Palestinians migrating to Western Europe, or do we need to consider the far deeper historical, socio-cultural and regional relations among the Syrian state, Syrian migrants and the host state and societies that are located in its immediate vicinity such as Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey? The hierarchical positioning of Turkey and Turkish migrants vis-à-vis Germany or of Indian migrants and India vis-a-vis the UK, or of former Yugoslavs in Sweden, does not parallel the nature of the relationship that the Syrians have with their neighbouring countries in the Middle East. In other words, Middle Easterners flee to yet another Middle Eastern setting which can be considered relatively better off and stable. Although they also face serious socio-

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 184. Emphasis mine (S.K.).



economic problems in their host land, one can argue that these problems do not emerge from a huge cultural “difference”, but are associated rather with similarity or minimal cultural distance in those areas, unlike the huge disparities between migrant groups and their host societies in western host lands.

In the case of the Kurdish diaspora, this requires us to broaden the scope and tools with which to understand it. Kurdish communities historically spread around different parts of the immediate vicinity of their homelands, either through coercive imperial policies under the Ottoman and Persian dynasties, or for socio-economic reasons. In this vein, the study of the Kurdish diaspora can be reshaped paying a greater focus to the diasporic experiences of, for instance, Kurds in Mersin, Antalya, Ankara, Istanbul, Baghdad, Damascus, Tehran, Yerevan, Baku, Jerusalem or Bishkek.

The need for new ways of examining diasporas and diaspora politics seems to be relevant in the case of many other non-Western cases, including African diasporas scattered in Africa and Asia (rather than in North America or Europe that constitute the major focus of the academia) and same goes for South American, Mediterranean, Eastern European and Asian experiences as host-lands rather than mainly being seen as homelands. Therefore, a non-Western academic involvement on these diverse countries would seem to be required. Again, in this case, the politics of theorising diasporas inevitably comes to the surface, yet the point is the direction of this power-based relationship<sup>87</sup> among the researching bodies and subjects of diasporas and their home-lands.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> John Baylis and Steve Smith, eds., *The Globalization of World Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000): 240. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>88</sup> There have been studies of refugee communities in neighbouring countries, the studies of Afghan and Pakistani refugees can be given as an example. See World Development Report Background Note,

On the other hand, the very idea of universalism and human rights based on the assumption that the universal lies in “western values” and certain European ways of democratic experience makes it difficult to launch new theoretical/methodological approaches to the study of diasporas and migrants.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### A) Researching Diaspora Politics in the Vernacular<sup>89</sup>

This research is based on a 15-month-data collection period between June 2012 and September 2013 and it employs a qualitative approach. Although it benefits from ethnographic methods, I cannot claim to have conducted a full-fledged ethnography which requires *immersion* of the researcher in a social setting in which the community under study lives in the field, during the time that the fieldwork is done, to have a better understanding of a particular group.<sup>90</sup> The research is mainly based on 20 in-depth interviews, casual participant observation, field notes and photos that I took; as well as social media accounts, publications and websites of Kurdish diaspora associations/community centres among others.<sup>91</sup>

The field-site in which I have studied the Kurdish diaspora community is the Haringey and Hackney boroughs of London, which is the most cosmopolitan city of Britain and is thus capable of providing a "fertile" ground for my research. London is a special place in and of itself in terms of diaspora activism. First of all, among the British cities, it hosts the greatest number of diasporan Kurds.<sup>92</sup> Secondly, political and cultural activities assumed by the diasporan Kurds are most institutionalised and intense in this metropolis compared to any other city in the United Kingdom. I chose the northern borough of Haringey and eastern borough of

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<sup>89</sup> "Vernacular politics" is a phrase I am borrowing from the American anthropologist Jenny B. White, *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey: A Study in Vernacular Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002). Yet, it was originally used in the work of the Canadian political philosopher Will Kymlicka. See Will Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism, Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>90</sup> Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 465.

<sup>91</sup> In the course of this study, I use the words "association" and "community centre" interchangeably, to refer to the diaspora institutions run by the Kurds from Turkey in London.

<sup>92</sup> The number of the Kurds living in London is not exactly known, as the Kurdish ethnicity is not included in the population census in the UK. So there are only estimations in a very wide range between 100,000 and 200,000. Greater London Authority, *Turkish, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriot Communities in London* (London: Greater London Authority, 2009).

Hackney, as they are two of the areas populated with the largest number of Kurds from Turkey and thus host the two largest and most influential diaspora associations of Kurds from Turkey, the *Kurdish Community Centre*<sup>93</sup> and *Halkevi/Mala Gel Kurdish and Turkish Community Centre*<sup>94</sup>, founded respectively in 1987 and 1984. Among these organisations, Halkevi was founded by activists from within the Turkish left; however, over time its administration was later taken over by Kurdish refugees and immigrants who came to London in large numbers. Although both organisations identify their vision and objectives mostly as a charity organisation which aims to further improve the integration of the Kurdish (as well as Turkish and Turkish Cypriot) community in British society, their functions cannot simply be reduced to it. They can be also considered civil society organisations, pursuing political activities most of which are based on ethnic diasporan demands and expectations regarding the century-old Kurdish Question, voiced by many Kurdish refugees from Turkey arriving in the UK in the last three decades. Apart from these two associations, I have had the opportunity to make observations on several other diaspora associations, community centres and thematic platforms, including the Day-Mer Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre, the Komkar Kurdish Advice Centre, the Roj Women's Association, the Kurdish and Turkish Women's Rights Association, all of which I have been keeping in mind as background information while writing this thesis.

As part of the qualitative fieldwork, I conducted 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews, each lasting about two hours, with key persons involved in political activism in the Kurdish diaspora in London, as well as occasional

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<sup>93</sup> Kurdish Community Centre Website, accessed on 1 November 2012 via <http://www.kurdishcentre.org/kcc/about-us.html>.

<sup>94</sup> Halkevi Kurdish and Turkish Community Centre Website, accessed on 1 November 2012 via <http://www.halkevi.org.uk/about-us>.

participant observation with first and second generation diaspora members over a period of 15 months. By mentioning "key persons", I do not exclusively refer to "board members" of the associations. Key persons can be individuals with varying degrees of political participation in the organised activities of diaspora institutions. Although some key activists are also board members of the associations, there are several other key diaspora members who take part in the diaspora's political activities, in leading or secondary roles, who are not board members, but "ordinary members" of the association. Shain and Barth put diaspora members into three categories; core, passive and silent members:

Core members are the organizing elites, intensively active in diasporic affairs and in a position to appeal for mobilization of the larger diaspora. Passive members are likely to be available for mobilization when the active leadership calls upon them. Silent members are a larger pool of people who are generally uninvolved in diasporic affairs but who may mobilize in times of crises.<sup>95</sup>

In this study, I focus on core members and passive members mentioned by Shain and Barth. Representatives and active attendees of the diaspora associations constitute the majority of the people that I formally interviewed. Several others whom I had informal conversations with will henceforth be called "informants".<sup>96</sup> In line with the ethnographic methodology, I preferred conducting 'semi-structured' interviews with open-ended questions. Alan Bryman chooses the word "qualitative interviewing" to refer to both unstructured and semi-structured interviews, in contrast to quantitative interviewing and counts several advantages of qualitative

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<sup>95</sup> Shain and Barth (2003): 452.

<sup>96</sup> I use the word "informant" to refer either to the people I had a conversation with/interviewed casually, or to the people I interviewed formally or informally as a whole. I usually mean the latter in this study; unless otherwise implied to refer to the formal interview.

interviewing; i.e. the great emphasis it puts on the interviewee's point of view. He defines semi-structured interview as such:

The researcher has a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered... but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply. Questions may not follow on exactly in the way outlined on the schedule. Questions that are not included in the guide may be asked as the interviewer picks up on things said by interviewees. But, by and large, all the questions will be asked and a similar wording will be used from interviewee to interviewee.<sup>97</sup>

Following this definition, Bryman describes this interview process as "flexible" and further explains the rationale behind qualitative interviews that is parallel to my motive to employ ethnographic methods to study Kurdish diaspora politics:

...the emphasis must be on how the interviewee frames and understands issues and events-that is, what the interviewee views as important in explaining and understanding events, patterns, and forms of behaviour.<sup>98</sup>

In addition to formal and informal interviews, on many occasions, I visited my field site and stayed there for a few days for each visit, in my capacity as a "participant observer". In other words, I did not only 'observe' the experiences and developments in the field, but also attempted to 'participate' in the political and cultural activities of the diasporan individuals. In addition to my interviews with key activists in the Kurdish diaspora and various individuals who take part in these activities with varied frequencies, the numerous festivals, demonstrations, commemorations and panels that I have attended as an observer between 2010 and 2013 in the UK create the backdrop for this thesis. I had the opportunity to take snapshots of political experiences in the flesh-and-bone of people by sharing the same milieu and spending time both casually, as well as in scheduled events, with diasporan Kurds with whom I had already been familiar since September 2010, which was when I

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<sup>97</sup> Bryman, (2012): 470.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 471.

moved to the UK for my studies. In this regard, I attended *Newroz*, the Kurdish spring festival enriched with cultural and political elements of epic heroism which ascribe to Kurdish nationalism. Additionally, there were popular demonstrations, media and NGO events and cultural activities I attended that were held by the Kurdish diaspora community in London. In the process of analysing field data, I realised that this research provided me with a range of political/social themes and strategies embedded in the Kurdish diasporic space in the UK. Yet, due to the scope and constraints of this work, I will be able to introduce only a selected number of them that are vital for my research.

## **B) Challenges, Limitations and Opportunities**

I found the participants of my research through Kurdish community centres as well as festivals, panel discussions and demonstrations. Some key figures in the community centres were helpful, in the sense that they functioned as *sponsor* who facilitated my access to the field, introducing me to their board members as well as ordinary members. However, this seemed risky to me. Taking into consideration that key members are usually the ones in leading positions in decision-making processes of a particular organisation, I was aware that their full guidance might lead to *biased sampling*. Therefore, I tried to reach diaspora members by different means. In this regard, I tried to build rapport with random visitors to the community centre on the occasions I went there. This was, at times, casual; at other times, scheduled. Festivals, political protests, panel discussions were among other settings where I met several diasporan members and conducted informal interviews or agreed to conduct formal interviews for later. Actually, the role of building strong relationship with informants

cannot be reduced to a tool for access to more participants. It contributes to contextualisation of the field findings by making it possible to make connection between seemingly unrelated things encountered on the occasions beyond formal interviews of the fieldwork.

...the intimacy developed with informants is very important because it helps the ethnographer depict people not as one-dimensional research subjects, but as rounded individuals (Amit 2000: 2-3). At the same time, it enables the researcher to see crucial connections between totally unexpected – and seemingly separated – things, events and practices. This is where fieldwork has the measure of all other research methodologies.<sup>99</sup>

In general, in the course of the fieldwork there are two positions for the researcher; participant observer (insider) and non-participant observer (outsider) (Kusow, 2003: 597). One of the frequent questions coming to my mind during my field experience was whether I was an *insider* or *outsider*. The degree of insiderness seems to be not as advantageous as someone who has the opportunity to stay in the fieldsite constantly during the whole period of time that the field research is conducted.

At the time of my field research I was not living in London, but in Birmingham. In this context, my position as a researcher and participant observer was subject to certain limitations, especially regarding interpersonal politics. My methodology, also negatively affected by financial and time-related issues, was limited by the short periods of time I could spend in London during the fieldwork. These limitations prevented me from penetrating interpersonal politics with the subjects of the field, the diasporan Kurds in London. For instance, on several occasions, the interviewees consistently refused to openly discuss their politics. Nevertheless, the deeper we

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<sup>99</sup> Brian Moeran, "From Participant Observation to Observant Participation: Anthropology, Fieldwork and Organizational Ethnography", *Creative Encounters Working Paper*, No. 1 (2007): 15.



went into conversation and off the record, the more they showed signs of relief and trust in me as a researcher. Actually, I realised that the more frequently I visited my informants, especially when I did more participant observation in the public events they organised or attended, the more approachable they were and felt more comfortable to share their political views with me. On such occasions, however, my position in the field may have floated between that of a researcher and a fellow Kurd/diaspora Kurd, or even a fellow *heval*.<sup>100</sup>

### **C) Positionality/Reflexivity**

Through the whole long process of years before, during and after this field experience, I could not help but question, re-imagine and re-produce my own individual and collective identities, as I was then in an extraordinary setting. I was living outside Turkey for the first time in my life. Yet, as a Kurd born in Istanbul, a Turkish majority city in Turkey, and born in a family with hardly any sympathy for the Kurdish identity, let alone for the Kurdish political movement, during the doctoral study abroad, I spent longer among the diaspora circles, through cultural and political events, Kurdish festivals and demonstrations, than I had in my entire life.

On the one hand, this was about my own reflexivity, subjectivity and public performance; on the other hand, this was affecting the way my interviewees, friends and acquaintances were regarding me. At some point, a prominent diaspora activist with left-wing political outlook, who was one of my informants, and a Turkish friend of mine with centre-right political views, met at a political conference. While they

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<sup>100</sup> The Kurdish word "heval" literally means "friend", but in the political context that the Kurds use it, it refers to a "comrade", usually a Kurdish comrade fighting for or supporting the Kurdish cause with sympathy for the Kurdish ethno-national movement.

were having a conversation about their common friends, they discovered that they both knew me. The Kurdish activist used the word "bizim Şeref" (our Şeref) to refer to me and my Turkish friend told me that this made him angry. I realised that I did not think about my ethnic, national or urban identities when it comes to making friends and building social relations. Then I realised that I was developing a new identity within the diaspora, as I was also then living abroad and re-imagining my "Kurdishness" and following the political events in my homeland carefully.

In my case, though, the "imagined homeland" is even more complicated. I was born and raised in a Turkish majority city (Istanbul); my parents and sibling were born in a province located in the north-east end of the country (Ardahan); during my field research I was living in Birmingham and making frequent visits and staying over for two-three days each time among the Kurdish diaspora community in London; my perception of homeland was becoming hybrid and dynamic. One thing was clear: I was developing more of a political consciousness about the rights, liberties and experiences of the Kurdish community. Moreover, I realised that the deepening of the Syrian Civil War and the emergence of autonomous Kurdish political entities in Rojava Kurdistan (Western Kurdistan) in Northern Syria had an impact not only on my informants, but also on me. The highly problematic and hostile policy of the Turkish government against the struggle of the Kurds in Syria fighting the jihadists and ISIS, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, was frustrating, as I was observing the protests of the Kurds in London and following the news on the internet. Therefore, I lived in my *imagined diaspora*<sup>101</sup> in the contexts of two host lands, Birmingham and London and formerly in Istanbul, which is not seen as a historical homeland. Now my

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<sup>101</sup> Pnina Werbner, *Imagined Diasporas among Manchester Muslims* (James Currey, 2002). Also see, Joel Kuortti, *Writing Imagined Diasporas: South Asian Women Reshaping North American Identity* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007): 3-7.

political imagination of homeland was a dynamic one, comprising Istanbul first and foremost; then, Qorevang village in Ardahan, a small yet cosmopolitan city in the Caucasus region of Turkey bordering Georgia and Armenia; being Kurdish, mainly relating to Syrian Kurdistan, which I have never seen. I had not been interested in Syrian Kurdistan as part of my imagination of "homeland" up until the Syrian Civil War and the emergence of the Rojava entity.

I attended various events of the Kurds in London, not only political, but also social, cultural, culinary and artistic, before I started my fieldwork. This was both due to curiosity and my search for my own personal cultural roots; and for the sake of having joy and pleasure in artistic, cultural and social events concerning a special interest in folk traditions and culture. This motivated me to learn more about the Kurdish diaspora culture and politics as a researcher.

Moreover, as I had just recently moved to the UK, the climate, food, socio-cultural life, and consumption and leisure practices of this country gave me a culture shock. In order to pass that early transitory period in relatively easier conditions, I tried to hold on to Turkish and Kurdish spaces of eating out, leisure and socialising in Birmingham and London. Especially in London, many prominent restaurants, barber shops, off-licences, coffee shops that were run by the Turkish speaking community were actually owned by ethnic Kurds. Therefore, I found myself entering the field naturally while walking around London. As the Kurdish diaspora in the UK is a relatively recent one, comprising mostly first and second generation members, the lower level of integration of the Kurds in the host land reinforces the dynamics surviving an ethnic economy and accordingly a pattern of socialisation, consuming and producing in a closely-knit space and through mechanisms of identity formation

and protection. Kurds from Turkey in London socialising with their compatriots, including Kurds and Turks, makes it possible for Kurdish spaces to survive in London. As these were public places located in the vicinity of Islington, Haringey (Green Lanes), Hackney (Dalston), Edmonton Green etc., it was easy for me to familiarise myself with the field.

#### **D) Linguistic Strategy and Trust Building**

Difficulties in gaining trust and rapport building were fuelled by suspicious news about the political murder of three Kurdish women, who were key diaspora activists, in Paris, on 9 January 2013. One of them, Sakine Cansiz, was one of the co-founders of the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party), which is the armed wing of the dominant Kurdish movement both in Turkey and the diaspora. This murder, thought to be committed by the Turkish Intelligent Service (MIT), caused great shock, anger and fear among diaspora members in London. Even before this murder, the fear among diaspora Kurds of the Turkish Intelligence spying activities was present.

As a matter of fact, my informants may have distrusted individuals in the Turkish speaking community. The access of a new-comer into a new group and setting requires a process of confidence and trust building. This process may have been easier for me, as I was also of Kurdish descent, still, it was not an automatic acceptance. I could feel the curiosity and some suspicion, if not total distrust towards me, as someone speaking Kurdish at an intermediate level. My main language is Turkish with no sign of Kurdish accent. I conducted the interviews mainly in Turkish and used English to clarify some of the questions, if the informant did not understand the question in the first instance; but this was rare. Moreover, I happened to use some Kurdish phrases, words and exclamations during the interviews, depending on the

interaction between me and the informant and the context that led me to do so; yet this was also rare. In this regard, I found myself, at times, struggling between "Turkishness" and "Kurdishness", in the sense of my linguistic strategy to conduct the fieldwork in a Kurdish setting. I should note that a large portion of the Kurdish community and activists in London were originally from the province of Maras, a multicultural city in the Mediterranean Region of Turkey. The demographic structure of that city, as well as the socio-political hierarchy and regime of linguistic assimilation in Turkey, the sending country, can be observed in the linguistic features of the diaspora community in the UK, the receiving country.

Among the diaspora individuals and key activists, Turkish was the main language of communication and mobilisation. Kurdish was not ruled out completely, though. There were Kurdish language courses taught at the Kurdish Community Centre, both for children and adults. Nevertheless, there were only a few classes which corresponded to a very small proportion of the large Kurdish community in London. Therefore, my informants and the large masses I observed in panel discussions, demonstrations, festivals and daily activities on various occasions, spoke mostly Turkish and sometimes Kurdish, frequently using the former as the main language and mixing it with phrases and words from the latter. Even if they spoke exclusively Turkish, I could observe traces of Kurdish accent in their spoken Turkish at varying levels, depending on their level of education and mode of interaction with Turkish individuals. A third influence was the British-English accent in their Turkish. This was the case, especially, for the second-generation Kurds in London. Therefore, they spoke Turkish with several Kurdish words, with the influence of English pronunciation and intonation. As for me, as the interviewer or participant observer

and a fellow Kurd interacting with these people, I was lacking these aspects. I did not speak very good Kurdish; I did not have any Kurdish accent in my Turkish and I was not British. As a result, I felt nervous about whether or not I would be given access to the field by my informants; especially in the earlier stages of my research.

In addition to the linguistic, cultural aspects of my "impression management"<sup>102</sup> in the field, I also hesitated to locate myself in the "right" position politically. I have always been supportive of individual and collective rights and demands of people including the Kurds. Yet I was not coming from a family background with sympathy for the Kurdish movement or any sort of Kurdish organisation. Therefore, when approaching my informants, I wanted to demonstrate my sympathy and support for their righteous endeavours for rights and liberties. However, as a political practice and public performance, this was very new to me.<sup>103</sup> In order to avoid hypocrisy and political inconsistency, I saw this research process also as an opportunity to understand my own political tendencies, meanings and values, in other words, myself.

## **E) Ethical Concerns**

A major methodological question that came to my mind during this fieldwork was its ethical dimension. Ethical concerns about social research are crucial, due to reasons relating to the positioning and security of the participant and researcher, and the

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<sup>102</sup> For a discussion on impression management in ethnography, the problems and dilemmas it causes, despite its possible contributions in an overt research in which researcher's identity as a researcher is not hidden, see Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (London: Routledge, 2007): 66-73.

<sup>103</sup> My earliest public personal encounter with the Kurdish political movement started in 2008, when I decided to conduct a qualitative research on the Democratic Society Party (DTP), the then major legal Kurdish political party in Turkey which was, in the course of my master's research, closed down by the Turkish Constitutional Court, based on allegations of separatism with reference to its alleged links to the PKK.

knowledge intended to be generated as a result of this interactive process between the two. In this context, research ethics is not only an issue of the responsibility of the researcher to the participants, but also to the knowledge he/she produces and the inner journey that he/she has. This research process made me re-think and re-imagine several elements of my already existing identities, while adding some new dimensions to them as a result of my interaction with the members of the group under study.

As for the practical ethical issues, in all stages of this research, as an interviewer, a participant observer and a fellow human being, I strove to abide by the rules of confidentiality and anonymity of my informants. I started off the research by revealing my identity, first as a researcher, before building a strong relationship with them, and I avoided covert research practice at all stages of the field research. Yet, often during the interviews, I felt the need to remind my informants that I would use pseudonyms instead of their real names, so that they could feel physically and psychologically secure. Due to sensitive political aspects of this research, I tried to understand their position as the ones "under study" and respected their decisions on the amount and nature of information they were willing to share with me, or hide from me.

I was building rapport and meeting Kurdish diaspora members, not only for interviews, but also for non-political events, including concerts and casual friendly gatherings. This was particularly important, as I was trying to get involved in the daily lives of the Kurdish diaspora community to understand their practices, values and meanings through their everyday experiences, which is an important contribution of ethnographic methodology and anthropological approach to social

research in a broader sense. The ethical concern about the dilemma emerging from this engagement can be summarised with a situation of "offering friendship in return for information."<sup>104</sup> Was I exploiting the good intentions of my informants in their friendly encounters with me that we were building outside the institutional spaces of community centres and other venues? This may be part of a broader epistemological question. What are the sources of knowledge and how do our personal, inner and outer engagements with individuals and groups affect and guide our knowledge of the world? At what point is knowledge individual, interpersonal and when does it become social and public? These questions can be expanded to several other concerning individual and social psychology of conducting social research, its tools, devices, techniques, methods and ultimate aims. I cut it short to reflect layers of my experiences, researching the diaspora here, to remind the reader of some ethical and methodological problems one can face in his/her engagement in such contexts. Keeping in mind the ethical dilemma is always there, I tried to keep a minimum of professional distance that would allow me to gain adequate observation and recording of data.<sup>105</sup>

On the other hand, I wanted to understand the daily lives of my informants as much as I could. I also had to make an effort to have a balance. For instance, I joined *halay/govend*, Kurdish folk dance circles, that took place at several events organised by the associations. I made several friends that are part of the Kurdish diaspora during these dance sessions. Traditionally it is usual to join in the *halay/govend* circles during celebrations without any prior arrangements or even without knowing anyone in the circle. As a result of these shared experiences of joy and excitement in a

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<sup>104</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson (2007).

<sup>105</sup> David M. Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step-by-step*, (Sage Publications, 2010): 37.



dance circle, singing and laughing together, I felt a higher level of trust that several diaspora had in me. Accordingly, I thought, they opened up to me and started to be more willing to accept me into their inner social/political circle. That seems parallel to my being accepted into the dance circle by them. Despite the entire ethical dilemma, I felt at ease as I was sure that I danced with them not because I wished to get more information from them. I always loved joining public events with music, culture and folk dance. As a child I used to join similar Kurdish dance circles at the wedding ceremonies with my family and relatives who were Kurds too.

Moreover, I never pursued a covert research so that I could guarantee an ethical responsibility to my field and the participants. I often reminded my informants that I am a researcher who tries to understand the Kurdish diaspora politics in London. The more open I was, the easier it was for me to access the field, build rapport with my informants and have a balance of socialisation and conduct of research in the course of the field adventure.

## **CHAPTER IV: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

This chapter focuses on the historical background of Kurdish migration and aims to unveil the dynamics that led the Kurdish population to migrate throughout history, for a better understanding of modern Kurdish migration to the Western world, especially in the post-1980 period, to the present.

### **A) Stranger at Home: A Brief Look at Migration and the Kurdish Issue from the Ottoman Era to the Early Republican Era (1870s-1940s)**

The people of Kurdistan have been asking the same questions since the 19th century: who are we, where is this place? The answers given bring new problems. This place is our home, these people are our neighbours. So far the questions and their answers are logical, but other questions disturb the frail equilibrium: If this place is our home, why are we treated as guests? If we are guests, what is the position of these people? Are they also guests, or are they the actual hosts and we are staying here temporarily? These and other questions and concerns lie at the heart of the Kurdish question, and express the issues of the Kurd who is treated "like a stranger in his own home."

The Kurdish people are one of the ancient peoples of the Middle East, like the Arabs, Jews and Persians, among others. Seeing the Kurds living in their native land as a minority is an oft-repeated mistake, if it is not a by-product of an intentional

political position. The fact that the Kurdish population is dispersed in the land has been effective in the formation of this perception of Kurds as a minority group. Even if this has been the reason behind the perception, "minority" is an inappropriate word to refer to a people with a population of 30-35 million that was historically divided between different states as part of regional power share. There are various arguments regarding the roots of Kurdish people going back to antiquity and it is widely agreed that Kurds have been living in the region as an autochthonous people, in other words, a group of people native to the land where it currently lives. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, the known history of the Kurds goes back to the seventh century, when they converted to Islam:

The prehistory of the Kurds is poorly known, but their ancestors seem to have inhabited the same upland region for millennia. The records of the early empires of Mesopotamia contain frequent references to mountain tribes with names resembling "Kurd." The Kardouchoi whom the Greek historian Xenophon speaks of in *Anabasis* (they attacked the "Ten Thousand" near modern Zākhū, Iraq, in 401 BCE) may have been Kurds, but some scholars dispute this claim. The name Kurd can be dated with certainty to the time of the tribes' conversion to Islam in the 7th century CE.<sup>106</sup>

It would be beneficial to follow the political divisions and geographical dispersion of the Kurds from the work of Ismail Besikci, who has a significant body of work on the Kurdish issue, with particular expertise in colonialism and tribal sociology. Besikci emphasises that Kurds have been 'divided, dissected and shared through imperialist and colonialist policies'.<sup>107</sup> Particularly these divisions deprived Kurds even of minority rights and resulted in their very existence being denied in Turkey. According to the official position of the Republic of Turkey until recently, "there is no

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<sup>106</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed on 22 January 2015 via <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/325191/Kurd>

<sup>107</sup> Ismail Besikci, *Devletlerarasi Somurge: Kurdistan* (Istanbul: Alan Publications, 1990): 17.

nation by the name of Kurds, everyone is Turkish."<sup>108</sup> The results of these policies were such that Kurds were denied their right to speak their native tongue and their demands for rights were disregarded.

The Kurds not being allowed to create a sovereign state has become the focal point of imperial powers and their politics of divide and rule. This strategy of divide and rule was most observable between 1915 and 1925. According to Besikci, in the first quarter of the 20th century, 'it is Kurdistan that is divided and the Kurdish people that are dispersed'. Eppel explains the dividedness of Kurdistan by emphasising both internal and external dynamics and points to the crucial role of British imperial policies:

During the First World War and thereafter, when the map of the Middle East was redrafted, states were established in the Fertile Crescent, and the Armenian Republic became part of the USSR, the Kurds had no leadership which could fill a role similar to that held by the Hashimite emirs in Hejaz in the emergence of the Arab national movement and the development of Arab nationalism during and immediately after the First World War... Admittedly, Shaykh Mahmoud Barzinji in the Sulaymaniyya area had been developing supra-local ambitions from 1918 and had even, at times, adopted nationalist terms. Nonetheless, he did not succeed in becoming a dominant force or in imposing his sovereignty on the Kurdish tribes in Southern Kurdistan and creating a power which would be attractive from the standpoint British interests. Following an internal debate, British officials and policy-shapers decided not to recognize him as the ruler of Kurdistan and favoured the annexation of Southern Kurdistan –the Mosul area- to Iraq, whose Arab majority the British had themselves created. During the years in which the map of the Middle East was drafted following the First World War, these were decisions made by British officials and statesmen who preferred to preserve the existence of Turkey and Persia...<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>109</sup> Michael Eppel, "The Demise of the Kurdish Emirates: The Impact of Ottoman Reforms and International Relations on Kurdistan during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no.2 (2008): 237.

The strategy of divide and rule was not only about annexing land, but also about cultural and ethnic assimilation. During the Republican era, particularly, the single party rule, Kurdish people learned their history and past only to the extent that official history allowed, since the official history of the Republic was being shaped by the ideology of 'one nation, one state.'<sup>110</sup> For this reason, Kurds had to write, interpret and read their own history, as it is always possible for Kurdish history to be distorted or abused if written by outside authorities with a will to power exertion, and this may become the basis for colonialist interventions. This special condition of the Kurds causes two different reactions from two different groups within the Kurdish society. The first group is the one that constantly tries to prove its existence and in every environment gives the message 'I am a Kurd, not a Turk', either verbally or through its actions, and this category includes pacifists as well as those who try to prove their existence through political violence after the founding of the PKK. The second group consists of people who are estranged from their own Kurdish identities.

The founding of the Turkish Republic was a turning point for the Kurds. They fought the War of Independence together with the Turks and shared their victory. However, the Treaty of Lausanne, signed on 24 July 1923, which is considered the founding document of modern Turkey, in regard to its recognition as a sovereign and independent state by the international community, did not recognise the Kurds, let alone grant any sovereignty or autonomy to the Kurdish people. The Treaty of Lausanne was signed by Turkey, as the successor to the Ottoman Empire, and by the Allies, including Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, Romania and the Kingdom of

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<sup>110</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and the State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (New Jersey: Zed, 1978): 10.

Serbs, Croats, Slovenes. This treaty recognised the borders of the modern state of Turkey and the previous demands of autonomy for Turkish Kurdistan and secession of Turkey's territory to Armenia was dropped.<sup>111</sup> One of the most important issues of the Lausanne peace arrangements concerned Mosul. Mosul was mostly populated by Kurds, rather than Turks. The question is whether there was a Kurdish representative for a city with such significance for Kurds. The answer is both yes and no. Zulfu Tigrel Bey, the congressman representing the Kurdish province of Diyarbakir, was appointed by Mustafa Kemal Pasha to represent the Kurds. He was a member of the Ottoman Parliament from the Committee of Union and Progress. After the Armistice of Mudros on 30 October 1918, he was exiled by the British and subsequently returned to Ankara as a Diyarbakir congressman of the Turkish National Congress.<sup>112</sup> The fact that he was of Kurdish descent does not mean he was representing the Kurds, as the demands of the Kurdish people were ignored in these discussions. Following the information that Besikci gives us, Lausanne meant colonisation of the Kurds by imperialist powers using the divide and rule strategy. The Turkish people, having secured their rights through the treaty, did not make any mention of Kurdish rights of sovereignty and freedom. Therefore, a Kurdistan unprotected on its borders became vulnerable to harassment by regional and global powers. Thus, Lausanne can be thought of as a breaking point for the relations between Turkey and Kurdistan.

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<sup>111</sup> For the full text of the treaty, Lausanne, UK Treaties Online, Treaty Series No. 16 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1923) accessed on 23 June 2017 via <http://treaties.fco.gov.uk/docs/pdf/1923/ts0016-1.pdf>.

<sup>112</sup> İsmail Göldaş, *Lozan, Biz Türkler ve Kürtler* (Istanbul: Avesta Publications, 2000): 36-37.

The nineteenth century was a time when regions with no particular owner like Kurdistan were easily colonised. The region included Kars, Ardahan and Batum, constituting the north-eastern border of the Empire and hosting a sizeable Kurdish population. While not being able to establish a state since the Ottoman Empire, the Kurds have managed to retain their culture and language. A significant portion of the Kurdish people has always insisted on their rights of sovereignty through rebellions and uprisings, which continue to this day. However, the uprisings during the time of the Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic were far from being calls for sovereignty; rather, their reasons were economic and they resulted from not being able to adapt to what the new system had created.

The Kurdish people historically rejected paying taxes and sending soldiers to the army through uprisings.<sup>113</sup> The Ottoman Empire had responded to the uprisings by forced migration of any groups, including Turkish *gocer* (nomadic) tribes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in order to consolidate its hold on the region and to strengthen its central authority. Thus, the forced migration of the Kurds is generally seen as a result of the Kurdish uprisings.

Despite being one of the oldest established peoples of Mesopotamia, Kurds have not been able to establish a strong political presence, and as a result of this were often forced to migrate from the region systematically. Among all the powerful states in the region, the Kurdish people have been vulnerable as a result of being in a state of limbo. A clear example of the harm inflicted upon them is the Halabja Massacre on 16 March 1988, during the Iran-Iraq War, and similar incidents during the invasion of

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<sup>113</sup> Halil Inalcik, "Centralisation and Decentralisation in Ottoman Administration" in *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History*, ed. Thomas Naff and Rogers Owen (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977): 27-52.

Kuwait by Saddam Hussein at the time of the Gulf War on 2 August 1990. During these conflicts the Kurds were subjected to massacres and were forced to migrate.<sup>114</sup> The politics of forced migration imposed on the Kurdish people can be traced back to the Ottoman-Persian rivalry in the Near East. With their lands divided between the Ottoman Empire and the Persian Empire, the Kurds were forced to migrate to places unknown to them.

The forced migration policies that started during the Ottoman Empire continued with the founding of the Turkish Republic. During the expansion of the Ottoman Empire into Europe, a power vacuum had shown itself in its eastern territories, including the Kurdish regions, which resulted in Iranian raids towards them. At this point, Kurdish *asirets* (tribes), who were loosely controlled by the Ottoman administration, came in to play an important role as protectors of Ottoman interests in the eastern borders of the empire after an agreement between the two parties.

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<sup>114</sup> Murat Özer, "Kürtlerin Zorunlu Göçü-1", *Haksöz* 145/146 (2003).





Map 1: Areas of majority Kurdish settlement in Southwest Asia. Source: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

Kurdish tribes on the borderline between the Ottomans and Persians were going to protect the Ottoman lands from Iran's expansion as part of their alliance<sup>115</sup> with the former. As a result, Kurds were to incur the wrath of both Iran and the Ottomans, because of their location and their affiliations.

In November 1914, Kurds living on the Iranian side of the border (in Urmiye and Xoy) sided with the Ottomans in the war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. This choice resulted in the Kurds being displaced by the Russian army and most of them were forced to migrate to Mosul (in today's Iraq). The war between Russia and the Ottomans meant that Russians moved towards Northern Kurdistan (Turkish Kurdistan), resulting in the forced migration of many Kurds from several

<sup>115</sup> The agreement between the Ottoman Empire and the Kurdish tribes is best described as "tacit contract." See Hamit Bozarslan, "From Tacit Contract to Rebellion (1919-1925)," in *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, Abbas Vali, ed., (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 2003).

provinces with significant Kurdish populations, including Kars, Erzurum, Erzincan and Van.<sup>116</sup> According to Erdem, in this period, relocation policies of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) were also instrumental in the forced migration of the Kurds to the western provinces, and their forced assimilation. He estimates the number of the Kurds that were subjected to forced migration by this policy of the CUP as 1.5 million.<sup>117</sup> Writing about the migration of the Kurds, Abdurahim Rahmi (Zapsu), writer for the early Kurdish nationalist journal *Jîn*, published in Istanbul in 1918-1919, holds, "Is it possible to read without feeling the sense of catastrophe, the disappearance of a whole village population, leaving only ten people behind? What happened to these people, how did they disappear?" Rahmi, who had also experienced forced migration himself, expresses this in poetry through a child's mouth:

I am left an orphan with no mom and dad,  
They demolished my house leaving me homeless,  
Faithless heathen have killed my father,  
I have become a beggar in front of my enemies,  
I opened my hands today  
Wolves on two feet attacked the sheep,  
I am now a nomad, going from door to door,  
I want a loaf of bread just to live,  
They show no mercy, just wrath.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Ilyas Erdem, "Kürde Yine Göç Düştü", *Ozgur Politika* Daily, 4 September 2013. (Accessed on 21 January 2015) via [http://www.ozgur-gundem.com/?haberID=82617&haberBaslik=K%C3%BCrt%E2%80%99e%20yine%20g%C3%B6%C3%A7%20d%C3%BCrt%C5%9Ft%C3%BC%20%20%20%20&action=haber\\_detay&module=nuce](http://www.ozgur-gundem.com/?haberID=82617&haberBaslik=K%C3%BCrt%E2%80%99e%20yine%20g%C3%B6%C3%A7%20d%C3%BCrt%C5%9Ft%C3%BC%20%20%20%20&action=haber_detay&module=nuce)

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Translated by me (S.K.)

In some sources, it is estimated that between 1915 and 1916 800,000 Kurds were forced to migrate and, after many died on the road, there were only 250,000 - 300,000 Kurds left. Deprived of all their possessions, the Kurds suffered from hunger and bad conditions during their forced migration.<sup>119</sup> Talat Pasha, the Ottoman Minister of Interior, who supervised the Armenian Genocide in 1915 and 1916<sup>120</sup>, also played a role in the policies of relocation targeting Kurds. He sent a cipher telegram to the province of Diyarbakir on May 2, 1916, which demonstrates his plan to assimilate Kurds into Turkishness:

..It is not permissible to send the Kurdish immigrants to the southern regions such as Urfa. Because they will either become Arabised or retain their ethnicities there, therefore they will remain useless and harmful. They should be relocated to other areas as mentioned below...<sup>121</sup>

As can be understood from the words of Talat Pasha, the Kurds were intended not to retain their identities in the places to which they migrated and, for this reason, the places were chosen specially. Furthermore, influential Kurds and the rest of the people were to be relocated to separate places. The Ottoman Empire would not let Kurdish people leave despite the uprisings. While Arabs and other minorities left the Ottoman Empire one by one, the state did not allow the Kurds to leave the Empire and decided rather to engage in forced migration. This was because letting the Kurds go their way would have had catastrophic consequences. To give up on the Kurds would have meant giving up on the Kurdistan region. In other words, it was for geopolitical reasons. Large portions of the territories Ottoman Armenians used to live

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<sup>119</sup> [http://www.kimsoran.com/emkine\\_k%C3%BCrtler.htm](http://www.kimsoran.com/emkine_k%C3%BCrtler.htm) (Accessed on 21 January 2015).

<sup>120</sup> Ara Sarafian, *Talaat Pasha's Report on the Armenian Genocide*, (London: Gomidas Institute Series, 2011): 5.

<sup>121</sup> Dogan Baris Abbasoglu, "1916 Diyarbakir Tehciri", *Ozgur Politika* Daily, 3 December 2011 (Accessed on 24 June 2017 via <http://yeniozgurpolitika.org/index.php?rupel=nivis&id=765>).

were overlapping with those of the Kurds. Therefore, as the Armenians were subjected to forced migration and mass killings by the Empire in 1915 and 1916, most of the region they occupied was left to the Kurds. After losing a significant part of its population during wars, the Ottoman Empire did not have enough people to relocate to its eastern and south eastern provinces. As for the Ottoman approach to the Kurdish uprisings and demands, the Empire considered them manageable, in contrast to its harsher attitude toward its Christian populations.<sup>122</sup>

Kurds have been under severe pressure posed by the state policies of the late Ottoman era, and the plight of the Kurds worsened in the early Turkish Republic via legal and institutional mechanisms of nation-state building process. This homogenisation process was carried out in a variety of ways, ranging from policies of a unified education system with the *Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu* (the Law of Unification of National Education) in 1924, to the forced migration and settlement policies justified with the *İskan Kanunu* (Relocation and Resettlement Law) enacted in 1934.<sup>123</sup> We can also add more coercive implementations of Turkification policies taken up in the early Republican period, such as the harsh suppression of local unrests in the predominantly Kurdish regions.

The injuries of the forced migration were intensified with further injuries. Kurdish people who were separated from their relatives and families had to face new prohibitions. The Relocation and Resettlement Law no. 2510 issued in 1934 held that those whose native tongue was not Turkish could not establish new villages,

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<sup>122</sup> Ayşe Adli, "Ulus Devlete Göç," *Aksiyon*, 11 November 2013. In order to support this argument, Adli refers to her conversation with Mesut Yegen, a professor of sociology working on the relations between Turkey and the Kurds.

<sup>123</sup> For more information on the history of forced migration and settlement of the Kurds, see İsmail Beşikçi, *Kürtlerin Mecburi İskanı* (Istanbul: Yurt Kitap Yayın, 1991).

neighbourhoods, workers and artists associations. While parents and their unmarried children were accepted as a family, married children of these parents were sent away to different cities. While other forced migrants could return their homelands after a period of ten years, those coming from the eastern provinces could not go back unless a special law was issued by the government.<sup>124</sup> The law that was completed with these prohibitions clearly showed the state's intent. The Kurdish people were to serve Turkish nationalism and the nation-building process by giving up their identities and forgetting who they were. As a result of assimilation, Kurds were not to become unified and create uprisings again, and would have to learn to live the fate that was designed for them.

Top-down Westernisation and Turkification policies that intensified with the Republican era caused unrest among certain segments of the Kurds in Turkey. The Sheikh Said rebellion that took place in 1925 in Turkish Kurdistan was an example of this. This rebellion aimed at reviving the Islamic caliphate with certain elements of Kurdish nationalism.<sup>125</sup> The rebellion was suppressed and its supporters were given capital punishment. The first forced relocation of the Republic was realised after this rebellion, exiling many Kurds towards Central Anatolia and cities to the west of Turkey. With the relocation law issued on May 31, 1926, the Kurds were forced to migrate to regions and cities that were predetermined by the state. The enforcement of this law was in the hands of local administrators and this often resulted in injustices and personal grievances, the ultimate result of which was the increasing insecurities and reactions it created. It was not only the Kurds who reacted to the

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<sup>124</sup> Adli (2013).

<sup>125</sup> Hakan Ozoglu, *From Caliphate to Secular State: Power Struggle in the Early Turkish Republic* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011): 147.

new rules and regulations of the new Republic, with each new law receiving opposition from certain segments of the public. However, the Kurds were the segment of the society that was suppressed most strongly. A salient example of this harsh response was the Dersim Massacre in 1938, a response to Kurdish Alevi rebellion in the province of Dersim, (renamed as "Tunceli", in modern day Turkey). The Dersim Rebellion was brutally suppressed with the bloodshed resulting in the deaths of at least around 10,000 people, including many civilians.<sup>126</sup> Those who were thought to be related to the uprising were forced to migrate after the issuance of the *Tunceli Law* in 1937.

The Single-Party period under the Republican People's Party (1923-1946) witnessed a high level of nationalisation and nationalist policies and approaches, which were already apparent in almost all spheres of life. The effects on the Kurdish people started to show.

In a nutshell, given that the Kurdish question is inextricably linked to nation-building and therefore to the issue of territoriality, the Kurds had to leave their lands either by force or by involuntary methods. This naturally caused a sense of loss, pain and deprivation, but it also resulted in an effective and powerful diaspora, which remotely supports the Kurdish nation-building process and has the recognition of the international community.

## **B) Contemporary Turkish and Kurdish Migration (1950s-1970s)**

Western European countries, damaged during World War II, entered into a growth and development process in the 1950s. However, these countries did not have

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<sup>126</sup> Paul J. White and Joost Jondergen, *Turkey's Alevi Enigma: A Comprehensive Overview*, eds (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003): 198.

enough of a labour force to operate their mines and manufacturing industry. They tried to meet the labour requirements from neighbouring European states. Turkey began exporting labour largely from rural areas to Europe in 1961 with an agreement with West Germany. Later on, similar agreements were signed with Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, France and Switzerland as well.

The export of labour from countries where manual labour is dominant to the countries where industry and capital were required had economic, social, political and cultural impact. In the first stage of the labour migration, men who passed the required health check were allowed entry. In 1974, Turkish migrant workers obtained the right to bring their families to their workplace as agreed, "Family Reunification Law", signed with the Federal Republic of Germany. When the labour imports from Turkey stopped in the 1970s, immigration to Europe continued through family reunification, marriages, and illegal immigration. The immigration continued into the 1980s, mostly through political asylum seekers, including leftists, Alevis, a Muslim minority group and then Kurds, with the gradual militarisation of the ethnic conflict in Turkish Kurdistan after the 1980 military coup in Turkey.

In the 1960s, Turkish workers who moved to Western European countries were unskilled, unprofessional and uneducated. Therefore, they had serious adjustment problems in their host countries (and they still have in some countries). When they first went to these countries, their stay was considered temporary; however, generally they did not return to their homeland. There were several reasons for that. One reason was the economic problems back in their homelands. They were mainly peasants and unskilled labour from rural and not from the coastal regions of Turkey, where a broader range of sectors including service sector, tourism

and industry existed. The second important reason was that their families were in Western countries and their children started their education there. The opportunity for a better future for these children in Western European countries was another reason. Political reasons were also at stake. As Kalaycioglu et. al. states: "Even though migration is done by a single individual, it is not an individual process. The remaining family, relatives and communities are all affected by all aspects of the migration."<sup>127</sup> Icduygu explains the wider effect of migration that goes beyond the migrants themselves, by providing estimated numbers of migrants and their acquaintances affected by this process, which seems to be significant in the case of migrants from Turkey:

Starting with the outflow of a few Turkish migrants in late 1961, there were by 2011, when the population of Turkey itself was over 73 million, more than 3.5 million Turkish migrants in Europe, some 100 thousand Turkish workers in the MENA [Middle East and North Africa] region, some 60 thousand settlers in Australia, and over 75 thousand workers in the CIS [Commonwealth of Independent states] countries. There were also more than a quarter million Turkish migrants in Canada and the United States. Thus, at any one time during these years, some six per cent of the Turkish population was abroad. And when we consider that some 40-50 per cent of the early emigrants returned permanently to Turkey, it would appear that a sizeable minority of the present Turkish population has had a direct experience of emigration, and an even larger proportion has had - through the emigration of a close relative or friend - an indirect experience.<sup>128</sup>

The immigration from Turkey to Europe entered a new phase after the September 12, 1980, Military Coup. The first groups attacked by the military power were leftist people and trade unionists. As a result of the coup's policies which disregards human rights and rule of law, many academics, artists, unionists, and members of leftist

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<sup>127</sup> Sibel Kalaycioglu, Kezban Celik and Fatma Umut Bespinar, "Gitmek mi Zor Kalmak mı?": Avrupa'ya Erkek Göçü ve Geride Kalan Kadının Gözünden Göç Deneyimi," *Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi / Journal of Faculty of Letters* 27, no. 4 (2000): 128. Translated by me (S.K.)

<sup>128</sup> Ahmet Icduygu, "50 Years after the Labour Recruitment Agreement with Germany: The Consequences of Emigration for Turkey," *Perceptions* 17, no. 2 (2012): 12.



organisations sought political asylum and took refuge in Western European countries. This time, an important segment of the refugees were qualified and skilled professionals.

The third phase of mass migration started after the 1984 attacks of the PKK which marked the outbreak of the armed conflict between Kurdish guerrillas and Turkish soldiers. In addition to Kurdish activists struggling for their liberation movement, many others who were ordinary Kurds from predominantly-Kurdish eastern and south-eastern provinces in Turkey were caught in the crossfire between the state and the PKK, and they sought political asylum in Europe. During this process, the Kurds of Turkey mainly took refuge in Western and Northern European countries and in the United Kingdom. Kurds continued their political endeavours in these countries as well. Thus, a dynamic Kurdish diaspora was established in Europe. Kaya and Ugurlu explain this long-distance nationalism in through diaspora political activism as:

The Kurdish diaspora, although they stayed far away [physically] from the ethnic conflicts in the Middle East, has been one of the most important actors in the conflict. One of the greatest desires of the Kurdish diaspora, without any doubt, is to prepare the ground for the Kurds to be an actor in the new world order. In this respect, Europe has become an area where the Kurds re-enter the identity struggle. Many social networks have been created to revive Kurdish nationalism, in particular and to draw attention to the war that goes on in the homeland. Television channels, newspapers, magazines and academic institutions were established in order to keep the "Kurdish consciousness" alive and provide support for the "Kurdish cause."<sup>129</sup>

During the first migration wave, men who migrated to Western Europe as a labour force had to leave their wives and children back in the country. This situation needs

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<sup>129</sup> Ilhan Kaya and Omer Ugurlu, *Ulusotesi Milliyetcilik Baglaminda Avrupa Kurt Diasporasi* (Istanbul: UKAM Yayinlari): 195. Translated by me (S.K.)

to be re-addressed and considered in the context of gender relationships and interactions.<sup>130</sup>

On the other hand, the interaction with the host society has been a very painful process. The migrant worker communities took their cultures, traditions and religion from their homeland and brought them to Europe, a safer environment to flourish. However, the migrants had to create spaces where they could practise their everyday lives and make their own syntheses of their already existing norms and values with the new ones they face in the host land. As time went on, immigrants shaped the migration process into a new understanding of life. Thus, they created a new transnational identity.

A new immigrant community was born with the migration of wives and children and new areas and institutions have been formed accordingly in the country of settlement. Coincidentally, in Turkey migration began from rural to urban areas in 1960s, while the urban population steadily increased as the rural population decreased. This internal migration began in Turkey primarily due to economic reasons, much like the labour migration to Western Europe. Industrialisation which began in 1950s has concentrated in the western Turkish cities and in Istanbul in particular. Although the industry was a foreign-dependent assemblage industry, a labour force was needed and this had an effect on the increase of migration from rural areas to big cities. In rural areas, due to the agricultural mechanisation and the development of the agricultural industries, the need for labour has decreased. Furthermore, the profits from agricultural products are relatively low. In addition to

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<sup>130</sup> For an edited volume covering cross-cultural and gendered experiences of migration, see Sibel Safi and Seref Kavak (eds) (foreword by Heaven Crawley), *Gender and Migration: Critical Issues and Policy Implications* (London: London Centre for Social Studies Publications, 2014).

these economic reasons, social and cultural factors like polygamy and high rates of childbirth, especially in the predominantly Kurdish eastern and south-eastern regions, strengthened the economic reasons of migration from rural areas to urban areas.

Turkey cannot reach the level of industry of the West due to the foreign-dependent industry. This also reduces profitability. As a result, salaries of workers coming from rural areas and working in the industry are relatively low. However, this problem has been partly addressed when more than one person in the family has started to work and the salaries combined in a single pot. The extended family has thus determined the future of immigrant families.

Economic migration within the country is not limited to the Kurds. Turkish people mainly from the Black Sea region and Central Anatolia have also migrated to Istanbul and other cities in the west of Turkey for the very same reasons. Another reason for internal migration is that universities and big hospitals were, in the past, located only in big cities. Many families migrated to the big cities for better education or facilities relating to vital issues such as health, well-being and socialisation. Istanbul has had the biggest share of these migrations. In this respect, as throughout history, Istanbul continues to be a centre of attraction in all areas during the period of Republic of Turkey as well.

Internal migration has affected the biggest cities like Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir at first. The urbanisation of the rural population which was started with squatting has been as painful as it was for those who went to Europe for work. Uneducated and unprofessional rural people, who migrated to cities seeking better living conditions, received more income gradually and achieved social change,

development and progress. While the ratio of the population who lived in rural areas in Turkey was 75 per cent in 1950, it was only 22.7 per cent in 2012.<sup>131</sup> During this rapid urbanisation period, internal migration to the big cities mostly came from the Black Sea and Central Anatolia regions, and, to some extent, from the western countryside. Following the the 1980 military coup and the beginning of the PKK's armed struggle in 1984, the pressure on the Kurds in the eastern and south-eastern regions increased and the Kurds were forced to migrate to western cities like Istanbul. Due to the increase of the Kurdish population in the western Turkish cities, the Kurdish question has begun to be experienced more in these cities as well.

### **C) The Military Coup Period and the Rise of the PKK and Armed Conflict (1980-2000s)**

Just as in the case of the migration to Europe, the migration that started with unqualified people without a profession became an economic, cultural, social and political power after the families settled in the big cities of the West. Thus it was only then it was realised that the Kurdish problem, which was assumed for years to concern Eastern and South-eastern Anatolia only, actually concerned the entire country. This stemmed from the fact that any problem not effecting the west of Turkey, Istanbul in particular, was not considered to be a state problem. For example, in Turkey –which is located on an active seismic zone– despite the dozens of earthquakes following the disastrous Erzincan earthquake in 1939 (earthquakes in 1943 in Ladik-Samsun, 1944 in Gerede-Bolu, 1957 in Abant-Bolu, 1961 in Varto-Muş, 1970 in Gediz–Kütahya, 1971 in Bingol, 1976 in Muradiye–Van, 1983 in Erzurum,

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<sup>131</sup> The World Bank Web Page, accessed on 20 January 2015 via <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL>

1992 in Erzincan), necessary precautions were not taken in the country against the damage done by the earthquakes. It was not until the 1999 Izmit Bay earthquake that affected Istanbul severely that Turkey started to take effective and active precautions against earthquakes and prepare and implement relevant legislations and regulations. Similarly, when the Kurdish question was felt strongly in the western Turkish provinces and especially in Istanbul, it was then understood to be the most important problem of the country at large. Certainly here we cannot ignore the power and influence of the internal diaspora of the Kurds who had migrated to western Turkish cities. The Kurds who migrated from villages to cities quickly started to become politicised. Between the 1960s and 1980s the pro-Kurdish political stream maintained its institutional presence mainly within the Turkish left.<sup>132</sup> With the left movement's loss of power after the the 1980 military coup the Kurdish movement transformed into a movement of Kurds by approaching the nationalist line. The militant Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its leader Abdullah Urbanisation<sup>133</sup> played important roles in this transformation. The armed conflict of the PKK which started in the Kurdish region in 1984 marked a cornerstone in the evolution of the Kurdish question. The PKK that carried out armed struggle in the mountains also started to influence civil Kurdish politics in the cities.

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<sup>132</sup> MPs of Kurdish descent supporting a socialist agenda took part in the TIP, Turkish Labour Party (1961-1971). It was an important experience regarding both the early politicization of the modern Kurdish ethno-national movement in formation and popularisation of a legal socialist political party for the first time in the history of Turkey. It is important to note that among the young Kurdish activist and politicians that joined the TIP, many were students of boarding schools and universities. They migrated from Kurdish villages or smaller towns to larger Kurdish cities, notably Diyarbakir, and western Turkish cities like Istanbul. In this context, migration has a significant role in network-building and politicisation of the Kurdish intellectuals and activists which can be seen as turning point for the formation of the Kurdish ethno-national movement in Turkey. For a detailed analysis, see Ahmet Alis, "The Process of the Politicization of the Kurdish Identity in Turkey: The Kurds and the Turkish Labour Party (1961-1971)", MA thesis, (Bogazici University, 2009): 68-72.

<sup>133</sup> Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the armed wing of the Kurdish national movement in Turkey, also had experience of migration and politicisation in the leftist circles from a predominantly Kurdish town in eastern Turkey, (Urfa) to the western Turkish city, Ankara in 1966-1968 for high school education; to Istanbul and Ankara in 1971-1984 for university education which turned into a longer period of political mobilisation.

After the the 1980 military coup, masses of the Kurdish activists and the Turkish left were subjected to systematic torture in military prisons. This pressure and the torture in the prisons, instead of diminishing the inmates' political consciousness and resistance, increased them, and this resistance led to a new movement, spreading across the country. Within the same period, thousands of Kurds were forced to migrate to western cities of Turkey or abroad (mainly Western Europe) due to arrests, years-long detentions, executions and forced expatriations. Waves of internal migration caused socio-cultural problems in the host cities. Especially since 1990, the Kurds who migrated in masses to the southern and western Turkish cities have been dealing with issues regarding their established relations, sense of belonging, conflict with the society, comprehension and transition. Naturally, this interaction has deeply affected Turkish society in the west. It is also natural that the Kurds, having been exiled from their homes by force, went directly into a new struggle for basic needs in European cities in which they arrived, including housing, employment and education. Danis analyses political and socio-economic motives of Kurdish migration to Europe and emphasises how the political dimension of the Kurdish migration to Europe is covered up in Turkey:

While the environment of mistrust feeding the ethnic conflict in the Southeast was a driving force behind the migration of the Kurds to Europe, it provides an "opportunity to migrate" for those who made that decision due to financial difficulties at a time when Europe put an end to work-force migration. Even though the migration of the Kurds as well as the Assyrians, the Chaldeans and the Yezidis who also left Turkey has always been a topic covered up by a widespread defensive reflex, it is a fact that this situation gave birth to important results. For those from Turkey in Europe this population movement which was ignored in Turkey resulted in their differentiation in terms of political identity and "discovering" of their ethnic and sectarian identity. Furthermore, political activities of "the Kurds in the diaspora" led to the recognition of the PKK's armed struggle and of the Kurdish problem and to receiving financial support in Europe. The reflection of all these occurrences

unfortunately did not turn into a serious discussion [in Turkey] beyond the expression "they humiliate us in front of Europe!"<sup>134</sup>

Danis' perspective is important in the sense that it shows how monolithic, top-down homogenisation of a "nation" leads to adverse effects in the diasporic communities originating from that sending society. In other words, not recognising the existence of ethnic and religious groups in their host lands, or denying them their rights and liberties in the sending country, may backfire and cause further ethnic, sectarian and religious differentiation and divides sought by diasporas of those same groups in receiving countries.

The Kurds, who have been living with the pressure of assimilation from the states to which they belonged for centuries, faced a new threat of assimilation with the mass migrations. However, together with the PKK's armed struggle the Kurds' (both natives and migrants in the Western cities) political struggle helped them overcome the pressure of assimilation; they also strengthened the Kurdish mobilization and identity by institutionalising their ethno-national movement. From the early 1980s through to 1990s, the PKK organised itself not only in the military field, but also in the civil society and legal political arena, through parties and urban mobilisation efforts. Urbanisation of Turkey at large followed, in a parallel line, by the urbanisation of the Kurdish political movement via migration and diasporisation.

After 1990, the conflict in the region intensified and when the state could not cope with the PKK they resorted to destroy the Kurdish villages – burn them to the ground. During this period an internal migration took place from the east to the west.

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<sup>134</sup> Aslı Didem Danis, "Yeni Göç Hareketleri ve Türkiye-1," *Birikim Journal*, no. 184-185 (2004): 6. Translated by me (S.K.)

Western Europe also had its share from this wave of migration. This time the Kurds went to Europe as political refugees. The Kurds who migrated to Europe quickly started working as the PKK's missionaries, as it were, by being organised in a short period of time in the countries in which they settled. The refugees began to get their voices heard by getting the support of their compatriots who had previously migrated to Europe for economic reasons. At the same time, these organisations prevented the one-sided propaganda of the Turkish government by drawing attention to the PKK and the Kurdish Question and putting them on the European agenda. In addition, they provided financial support for the PKK by various means in European cities they lived in, to contribute to the "national cause." These means included fundraising campaigns and donations accepted by the PKK. Concerning the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden, Baser states that 'the PKK encouraged Kurdish immigrants to pay their "revolutionary tax" and also recruited Kurdish youths, as they did in other European states.'<sup>135</sup> These associations in Europe produced several publications, such as magazines in Kurdish, as well as founding TV channels, thus enabling the Kurdish language to flourish. Therefore, European Kurdish diaspora is not only one of the important forces of the political activism of the PKK, but also a powerhouse for the broader Kurdish movement that pursues cultural, linguistic and social goals, not limited to a narrow nationalist agenda.<sup>136</sup>

The end of the Baath regime in Iraq, as a result of the US-led invasion in 2003, paved the way for a new environment for Iraqi Kurds, as well as Kurds in the neighbouring countries and the diaspora. In 2005, the Iraqi Kurds established a

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<sup>135</sup> Bahar Baser, *Diasporas and homeland conflicts: A comparative perspective* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015).

<sup>136</sup> For an early analysis of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany and its activities in the transnational space see; Thomas Faist, "Transnational social spaces out of international migration: evolution, significance and future prospects," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 39 (1998): 213-247.



constitutionally recognised entity called "the Kurdistan Regional Government" (KRG) which was formerly only de-facto autonomous.<sup>137</sup> The KRG has a parliament, elections, government, state institutions, army, currency, flag and a national anthem. Thus, it could be argued that at least a semi-independent Kurdish state has been established in Iraq. Undoubtedly, this has had a huge impact on the Kurdish movements of historical Kurdistan. The Kurds, as political actors, have now reached an inter-governmental level. The headquarters of the PKK militants, who are engaged in armed struggle in Turkey, are located in the Qandil region of the KRG as well. Surely these developments have contributed to the consolidation of the influence of the PKK as a key player in the region.

Before the popular uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) ignited a vicious civil war in Syria in 2011, Kurds were usually considered within the framework of minorities—with the exception of the autonomous KRG in northern Iraq. A major consequence of the ongoing Syrian Civil War has been a radical change in the global perception of Kurds as Kurdish political struggle for self-rule in Syria has so far successfully established three autonomous cantons (i.e., Jazira, Kobani, Afrin) — in January 29, 2014. This was a huge political development fondly referred to by sympathisers of the Kurdish political movement as the “Rojava Revolution” or the “Kurdish Spring.”<sup>138</sup> Until the emergence of two de-facto independent Kurdish polities in northern Iraq and Syria, the conventional minority status of Kurds stood as

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<sup>137</sup> The first article of the Iraqi Constitution dated 2005, while guaranteeing the integrity of the country, also defines it as a 'federal' state. More importantly, article 4, paragraph 3 of the Iraqi Constitution, which references directly and openly the Kurdish administrative unit, states that the official federal associations of the 'Kurdistan region' use the two official languages (Arabic and Kurdish) of the country. [http://www.iraqinationality.gov.iq/attach/iraqi\\_constitution.pdf](http://www.iraqinationality.gov.iq/attach/iraqi_constitution.pdf) (Accessed on 13 November 2013).

<sup>138</sup> Evangelos Aretaios, "The Rojava revolution," *Open Democracy*, 15 March 2015, accessed on 21 March 2015 via <https://www.opendemocracy.net/north-africa-west-asia/evangelos-aretaios/rojava-revolution>

a major obstacle before the recognition of “Kurdish nationhood” even in certain provinces where they constitute the undisputed majority (i.e., parts of east and southeastern Turkey, northern Iraq, northern Syria, and parts of northwestern Iran).

As for the situation in Turkish Kurdistan, March 21, 2013 marked the start of a peace process between the PKK and the Turkish Army which had started in 2011 with the series of meetings of Turkish officials and the jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in Imrali Prison in Turkey.<sup>139</sup> Accordingly, PKK militants were supposed to go abroad with their arms, and Turkish government was supposed to reform the constitution and make laws for a sustainable peace and consolidation of democracy in Turkey, which would guarantee the rights, liberties and political demands of the Kurds. Nevertheless, the resolution process could not bring out the expected outcomes and the insurgency resumed. The ruling AKP (Justice and Development Party) government did not respond to the demands from the Kurdish side, such as the recognition of Kurdish identity and assignment of constitutional rights, democratisation of Turkey, reinforcement of local governance, removal of political pressure, including a general amnesty for political prisoners.

In light of the recent developments in the greater Kurdistan and the Middle East at large, it may be anticipated that political instability and clashes in the region may have long term effects on the pace and the motives of Kurdish migration to the West. Accordingly, the migratory movements of the Kurds within the Middle East and to Europe may influence the content and the tools of transnational politics of the Kurdish diaspora.

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<sup>139</sup> Huge Pope, "Turkey and the PKK: A peace process without end goals?" *International Crisis Group*, 23 November 2014, accessed on 27 November 2014 via <http://blog.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/2014/11/23/turkey-and-the-pkk-a-peace-process-without-end-goals/>

## CHAPTER V: DIASPORA AGENCY AND NATIONAL/TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS

### A) Creative Agency-Building and Struggle for Legitimacy

Most of the Kurdish activists I have talked to in London emphasised the negative, or at least balanced, approach of the UK authorities towards Kurds and the Kurdish cause. They were explaining this in relation to the British state policy not to ruin its relations with Turkey and the international economic and political system, while preserving their good relations with the Kurds. Most diaspora activists showed their disapproval of and frustration about this 'balanced' policy of the UK. However, there was a shift when it came to their perception of the British local government and their engagement with the Kurdish people and the organisations in the UK. They wholeheartedly praised both their own civic engagement with the local government in London and the welcoming and supportive approach of those councils and public institutions toward the Kurdish associations' projects in London.

S: How successful do you think is your informing them about the projects here in yielding results?

D: Local governments, municipalities, for example, are politicians, are they not? They are chosen people. However much we go to them, they come back to us just as much. This is not about the UK only because the Kurdish Community Centre is not an introverted, closed organisation. It is extroverted, open to everybody. For example we have very good relations with Haringey Council. If we hosted a reception here they would come; we can go to them for a reception or a meeting to be informed, because this is an endeavour done together. We are not forming here a commune [sic] life. Here, we are together with the public, with the government, local government, in order to make life easier for the people here as much as we can. Is that not the responsibility of municipalities?

S: Yes. Then what kind of difficulties do you come across while providing this not 'commune' but closely tied-together life?<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Delal (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 10 June 2012

Here one can observe the role of political culture and the changing nature of policy implementation between different nation-state traditions, in our case, between Turkey and the UK. Whereas a highly centralised and state-controlled government model is still dominant in Turkish politics, a relatively highly individualised, decentralised *governance* model is valid for British politics, where local politics constitute the core of greater public policy in which grassroots organisations and lay people are taken more into consideration. As a result of this difference, I believe, the Kurdish diaspora activists show greater sympathy, content and optimism when they talk about their relations with British local government, as opposed to their negative and bleak perception of British foreign policy as self-interested and based on *realpolitik*:

S: What did you observe as an association, as an individual? What did you observe personally? Or maybe with members of parliament (MPs)? At the local or national level... With politicians, institutions, what kind of difficulties do you face when forming relationships?

D: Look, there is a very beautiful thing here. If you speak English well and have a good head on your shoulders you do not experience difficulty with anyone here. Because whether it is a member of parliament, the chosen ones, or let us skip the members of parliament, from the council to the lords at the top... Unfortunately [sic] people here do not have that arrogance as in our country. People here know. They know their responsibilities. They do not try to be a hero just because they have become members of the parliament. With their public –just as our BDP MPs, the chosen ones' acting with their public – MPs here act with their public. When you meet a member of parliament here you do not have to, like, button up, move your head down and bring your hands in front of you. ... Because the man [sic] is aware of this: you brought me to this position. You chose me. My mission is to satisfy your needs. This is my mission. Those here know this. The system here makes sure this is known.<sup>141</sup>

Apart from the structural advantages that local government in the UK provides with Kurdish diaspora associations, unlike the state-based obstacles that the Kurdish NGOs are facing in Turkey, we should not underestimate the role of community agency and, even more than that, of the individual agency of diaspora members.

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<sup>141</sup> Delal (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 10 June 2012

Delal's formula for her success along with her institutional endeavours in London is quite telling in this regard. She feels the need to underline how important it is to be positive, optimistic and proactive in civic engagement efforts and charitable work vis-a-vis government authorities when she demands to be provided with certain facilities, promotion and incentives:

S: For example, can you act as comfortably as the settled communities here, the individuals in the society or as the institutions formed by the settled community? Do you really get the same conditions?

D: If you work for it why would you not get it? In my opinion, yes. I am a positive person. Let me tell you why I am positive: if I want something I do it. It is important to want it. And why you want it. Today let us say that I will open a charity shop in the name of Heyva Sor. I will ask for the council's support. If the council gives it to Oxfam, to Council Search, to here or there, it has to give support to me too. That is why I can open that shop. Do you understand what I am saying? Why would they turn it into a problem? This place does not have the understanding of the politicians in Turkey. I do not do anything bad here. This community centre does not do anything bad in this country; instead, it does very good things – looks after its own community. The municipality helps to satisfy our needs. In our women's projects there is employment, education, a lot of things... As it is how can there be bad blood between us and the local government or why would it prevent me?<sup>142</sup>

Here I would argue that diaspora individuals, and through them their associations, are building up *creative* agency as personas and institutions. This creative agency may be thought to emerge from their bitter experiences as members of a people historically deprived of certain rights, liberties and opportunities. However, I would argue that creative agency is beyond the language of “victimisation” that cripples the diasporan community by seeing them as passive victims of persecution, as individuals and as an entity as a whole. Diasporan individuals have the chance to be more creative and proactive in producing novel things and opportunities; material

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<sup>142</sup> Delal (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 10 June 2012

and psychological well-being and new spaces<sup>143</sup> they acquire by being away from the threats and subjection they encounter in their homelands. In this vein, despite keeping their reservations about the host country circumstances, due to their disadvantages as newcomers in the host society, all my informants sounded very confident and proactive in initiating innovative and diverse projects, and in having these adopted by the British local government.

This creative agency they are building up proactively helps diasporan Kurds to identify themselves as British Kurds much more easily than they would have done otherwise, if they kept complaining about the system and spent time grieving about their pains rather than finding remedies of their own that they create themselves.<sup>144</sup> What is very significant here is the fact that the more proactive and creative that agency-building of diasporans gets, the higher degree of legitimacy they potentially gain. This is manifested in their numerous activities, from local ethnic festivals to events and activities of universal solidarity relating to super-diverse themes including women's rights, children's ecological rights, rights to the city, indigenous peoples' rights, class-based socio-economic problems beyond the UK, Turkey and the Middle East. My informants from Kurdish associations in London mentioned the organisations they worked in collaboration with, including other migrant groups such as Somalians, Tamils, and Ecuadorians so and so forth.

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<sup>143</sup> For a detailed discussion of "the diasporic public sphere" based on a the study of British Pakistani Muslims in Manchester and the alternative spaces they create that go beyond national public sphere, see Werbner (2002): 15, 251-276.

<sup>144</sup> Appadurai describes diasporic public spheres as "phenomena that confound theories that depend on the continued salience of the nation-state as the key arbiter of important social change." Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 4.



Photo 1: Kurdish Community Centre (KCC) hosting “Miss Ecuador 2012” beauty contest in its community hall in Haringey<sup>145</sup>

The Kurdish Community Centre (KCC) activist sharing the photo above explains the broadly-based mission and vision of the KCC: “the Kurdish Community Centre has assumed the role to bridge different cultures in the Haringey region. Ecuadorians held their Miss 2012 beauty contest at our community centre.”<sup>146</sup> This is a very simple and humble yet very creative activity of the Kurdish diaspora institutions. The Kurds in this case show their solidarity with other migrant groups living alongside them in the same locale and present their agency in a very creative way in such non-political grassroots level activities, although they are a highly politicised group themselves. Ecuadorians, Somalis, Tamils, Turks, Indians, Arabs and several other national groups that the Kurdish diasporans are working hand in hand with do represent a sort of nuanced integration into British society, while showing greater

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<sup>145</sup> Photo taken by a London-based Kurdish activist whose facebook profile name is "Kurdish Centre," 8 July 2012.

<sup>146</sup> Translated by me (S.K.)

sympathy for minority groups that are thought to be more vulnerable to the effects of socio-economic difficulties here. Therefore, they attempt to beat “structure” with their creative proactive agency in the diasporan sphere. From the point of view of the British establishment and politics, these efforts of the Kurds in the UK seem to be invaluable as they contribute to the “community cohesion” agenda of the government with their own initiatives and productive grassroots activities.

*Community cohesion* is a term referring to the policy of integration with a nuanced version of multiculturalism which argues that the multiculturalist idea of differences within the society should not be reduced to ethnicity; rather it should focus on broadly-based issues including sexual orientation, gender, faith, disability, nationality and other forms of identities, as well as that of ethnicity. The term was first used by Ted Cante as a new policy paradigm in response to the riots and local unrest in England in 2001.<sup>147</sup> After the riots in 2011, the debates around this policy have revived. Rather than ethnic/racial differentiation and parallel lives within the society, this policy emphasises shared values, a common vision and sense of belonging for all communities. It can be argued that community cohesion policy was welcomed by the British government not only due to its identity dimension; this policy was important particularly because it encouraged proactive participation of communities in civil society by contributing to the social well-being of the British society through charitable activity, donations and raising awareness.

Hence, with their creative agency, the Kurdish diaspora in the UK finds itself in a much more legitimate position in the eyes of the British elites and the British public rather than being perceived as merely a political group of people lobbying the

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<sup>147</sup> Ted Cante, *Community Cohesion: A Report on the Independent Review Team* (London: Home Office, 2001). For a revised and extended later work by the same author, see, Ted Cante, *Community Cohesion: A New Framework for Race and Diversity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).



government about harsh political problems such as the Kurdish struggle and the upheavals in the Middle East. One of my interviewees, Mahsum, commented about the legality and legitimacy of political parties while he was speaking about the relations of the Kurdish community associations with British political parties and actors. He was saying:

M: We have connections. That is, with mayors, members of parliament, the police, other non-governmental organisations that I mentioned, even with political parties we are in dialogue. For example, when we organise our congress we invite the mayor. When we organise our congress...<sup>148</sup>

Then comes the very interesting point he makes:

M: Because we are in Haringey here, we invite the mayor of Haringey. Again, we invite political party representatives. We do not make a distinction between this party and that party. We invite the political party representative who represents, especially in parliament, the existing *legal* parties, all political representatives.<sup>149</sup>

As a diaspora activist who once fought for the Kurdish cause as a PKK guerrilla fighter on the Kurdish mountains and was thus labelled a 'terrorist' by various hegemonic states including Turkey,<sup>150</sup> US,<sup>151</sup> UK<sup>152</sup> and the European Union (EU),<sup>153</sup> Mahsum is perhaps trapped in a contradiction. He is coming from the background of illegal struggle and he still does not defy the militant PKK, but on the contrary identifies with it, as he sees it as a "national liberation movement." In addition, the PKK has

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<sup>148</sup> Mahsum (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 1 September 2013

<sup>149</sup> Mahsum (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 1 September 2013

<sup>150</sup> Ic Isleri Bakanligi Emniyet Genel Mudurlugu Terorle Mucadele Dairesi Baskanligi Website, accessed on 5 May 2015 via <https://web.archive.org/web/20130114042731/http://www.egm.gov.tr/temuh/terorgrup1.html>

<sup>151</sup> US Department of State Website, accessed on 5 May 2015 via <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>

<sup>152</sup> Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations (London: Home Office, 2013): 14.

<sup>153</sup> Council of the European Union Website, accessed on 5 May 2015 via <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/fight-against-terrorism/terrorist-list/>

always considered itself a revolutionary movement and has not turned down the armed struggle as a major means of politics in the Middle East. In the last two decades, the PKK decided to transform its struggle strategy from an armed movement to a broader movement, including legal political actors such as the founding legal political parties competing in local and nationwide elections both in Turkey's Kurdish and Turkish majority provinces and establishing other legal civil society institutions, like the *Demokratik Toplum Kongresi* (DTK)<sup>154</sup> among others. Yet the PKK did not abandon arms and even in this period of cease-fire, due to the peace process with the Turkish state in 2013 and 2014, never did degrade its three-decade old armed struggle as illegitimate. So Mahsum's over-emphasis on their relations with legal parties in the British political arena sounds rather interesting coming from a revolutionary PKK guerrilla's point of view. Obviously, this is not solely related to Mahsum's personal insight as a pro-PKK activist, but is more linked to the securitised public space of post-9/11 Europe by which they as diaspora activists have to abide. This is also a striking indicator of the illusion that, as soon as the diaspora activists reach their host country in Western Europe, they feel perfectly free to do whatever they aspire to politically, without thick walls and securitising borders.

In this context, in the squeezed space of the diaspora activists there are some factors at play. The role of non-state actors in the international political arena is underestimated theoretically by the scope of international relations, as it is still largely based on major actors especially states, in the first instance, and intergovernmental alliances and their institutions, in the second. Nation-states which

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<sup>154</sup> Democratic Society Congress was founded in Diyarbakir, Turkish Kurdistan on 30 October 2007. It declared unilaterally "democratic autonomy" of the Kurdish people in Turkish Kurdistan in 2011 which caused controversy in the Turkish public. For a detailed analysis see Seevan Saeed, *Kurdish Politics in Turkey: From the PKK to the KCK* (New York: Routledge, 2017): 102-115.

still decide the main framework of trade, economic relations, legality and illegality in all sectors are seen as more important than small scale non-state actors, one of which is diasporas.

Another factor for this strong emphasis on legality by diaspora activists is perhaps related to the issue of *representation*. I speak of representation in terms of security concerns relating to risks, threats and challenges faced by the activists and the associations they are affiliated to, and second, in terms of representing their (im)personal views, a performative act in the way they want to appear on the stage. When I asked my informants from Kurdish diaspora circles about the attitude of the British authorities towards the Kurds in the UK, they often underlined the balance of power relations among the UK state policy, the Kurds and Turkey:

A: ... as I stated before, the Kurdish issue is Turkey's issue but Turkey is an ally of this country. They are allies in NATO, in joining the European Union, supposedly a candidate country, United Nations and in many other international institutions they are allies, acting together... The operations in Afghanistan included. Therefore, Turkey is important for this country. They care about Turkey's interests in terms of their own interests. As such they do not want the Kurds here to have an issue with the Turkish state.

S: Do they pursue a balance?

A: Balance... They pursue a big balance. Whenever the Turkish state has issues with this country, economic or political, when they have certain issues with regard to the military, in my opinion they hold the Kurdish issue against the Turkish state. But if they are on good terms with the Turkish state, if they do not have any issues, they ignore the Kurds. Not saying anything against the Kurds takes its source from their constitution. Because [it] advocates universal democracy for them; declaring and claiming to bring democracy to the world, led by themselves to spread... They have certain things in their laws. Therefore, if they were to implement policies about the Kurds, they would clearly contradict their laws and discourses. This is why yes, maybe they do not ignore the Kurds, and maybe there is nothing towards the Kurds... But just as in Turkey, where the state wants from the Kurds to be the compliant individuals of a compliant society, what is wanted from the Kurds here is to be integrated, compliant individuals of a compliant society... As the Turkish

state wants, individuals who do not object, question, defend their rights; who submit, surrender...<sup>155</sup>

Quite clearly, the Kurdish diaspora activists tear down the cliché portraying the hostland as a completely free and cosy safe haven embracing the ones oppressed who have fled their homeland. The political, economic, military and strategic relations between the host state and home state are a major reason for this. Diaspora agency and activism is also affected by the international politics of both the host state and home state that they develop through formal or informal alliances within supra-national organisations like the EU and intergovernmental military/security pacts like the NATO. In this context, Aram's emphasis on "balance of power" among the actors shaping diaspora politics is instrumental to understand the nature of world politics in a multilateral setting.

## **B) Grassroots Agency and the Denial of Representation**

It may be true that the increasingly securitised space against the sympathisers of armed groups in Europe has a strong impact (mostly a curbing one) on the activism of diaspora circles linked to the Kurdish guerrilla movement; the grassroots of this ethno-national group in Europe seem to be much more radical than the diaspora activists struggling on their behalf. What my informants see as the will and demands of the Kurdish people counts a lot at this point.

A large number of Kurdish people in diaspora are under the direct influence of the PKK as a national liberation movement and a legitimate "political representative" for themselves in their own words. Therefore, it is quite understandable to hear some of my interviewees telling me about the Kurdish people visiting their associations in

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<sup>155</sup> Aram (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 18 July 2012

London asking for activism to protest the ongoing threats against the Kurdish people and pro-PKK cadres in Turkey. In this vein, the *discourse of spontaneity* of pro-PKK protests and events reflecting and emerging from the voices of the Kurdish masses in London makes sense, especially for someone who had the opportunity to see similar support for the PKK, as an armed and political group in the homeland, Kurdistan/Turkey. I use the word "discourse of spontaneity" to describe the narratives of the Kurdish diaspora activists who claim that most of the activities they organise, especially pro-PKK protests, demonstrations and events take place solely in a spontaneous way with the initiative of ordinary Kurds in the diaspora, rather than the encouragement of key diaspora activists. In general, these "spontaneous" events are the ones with more political motives than cultural ones, especially those relating to sensitive issues of warfare, conflict and legitimacy of the PKK as a "national liberation movement." The discourse of spontaneity is perhaps part of a strategy of division of labour decided by the diaspora activists. In other words, perhaps, they want to show that they leave the space of sensitive issues and high politics as the domain of "ordinary Kurds" in London. In this regard, one can understand why the diaspora activists that I interviewed preferred to present their associations more as "cultural centres" mainly carrying out charitable and cultural work, rather than political activism or lobbying.

As part of the above-mentioned strategy, perhaps, the categories of "ordinary Kurds," "the people," "the Kurds" are less vulnerable ones to immediate threats and accusations, as they are abstract. Nevertheless, institutional activity organised by diaspora associations are under direct control of the public and the media which may keep them accountable as supporters of "PKK terrorism." One of the prominent youth activists of the Kurdish Community Centre (KCC), Cafer, explained the agency of the

ordinary Kurds that support the PKK and therefore, shape the activism of the diaspora, especially concerning strong reactions and demands about protesting against anti-Kurdish policies in Turkey and the Middle East:

S: Well, what activities, events does an ordinary citizen take part in more here in London? Which activities draw more attention? Which activities do not?

C: It is interesting that PKK still has influence over the populace here. That is in terms of topics outside here. Through the media, through different things [tools] it commands the populace here.

S: Commands the grass roots here, how?

C: For example, incidents happen occasionally. For example, the public has demands like these. At the end of the day we as an association are not PKK's representative. But because we are a Kurdish association, the public comes and expects such a thing from us. Expects such a demand [sic]. They say, "Look, there is an attack against the PKK, we need to take precautions."

S: The average citizen here?

C: A Kurd, here at the Kurdish Community Centre we are effective in relation to Kurds. *But the PKK is more effective over the Kurds here than we are. That is not in terms of being a representative [of the PKK]. For example I go spend time among the [ordinary Kurdish] people. Nobody asks me about the activities of this community centre. They talk about PKK's politics.*<sup>156</sup>

S: Are you referring to the Kurds who came here?

C: Yes, the ones who came here... Apart from this, as it is I am a representative of youth. I go to colleges, universities, weddings, funerals, shops. For example, let us say that I form a football team. I need a sponsor. I go to a restaurateur [sic]. There, [what I would say] it is not directly "I need a sponsor"; instead we converse a little. When I look, I see his language is the language of the PKK, PKK's politics. That is, there still are many organisations here that lead the political life of the Kurds – but it is the PKK [for them]. That is, besides current legal topics, in cultural topics, the PKK is effective here. *Despite not being its representative. At least not that I know of.*<sup>157</sup> The public, you realise, follows the agenda very well. For example, most of the time there are only a few people at the Kurdish Community Centre. When Selahattin Demirtas<sup>158</sup> came, I was inside the [Kurdish Community] Centre, I did not have that kind of feeling

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<sup>156</sup> Emphasis mine (S.K.)

<sup>157</sup> Emphasis mine (S.K.)

<sup>158</sup> Demirtas is the leader of the BDP, Baris ve Demokrasi Partisi (Peace and Demokrasi Party) and the HDP, Halkların Demokrasi Partisi (Peoples' Democratic Party), the last two of subsequent legal pro-Kurdish political parties inspired by doctrines of the PKK.

[that a lot of people would attend the event at the KCC] but I came that day and saw; it was full. That is, there was no space.<sup>159</sup>

Cafer, like his colleagues in the diaspora associations, seem to be happily sharing the agency of policy-making between diaspora activists/institutions, on one side, and ordinary Kurdish people in London, on the other. For a political group claiming to be a national liberation movement, this is an essential point to underline, as populism does inevitably lie at the heart of success of such political streams. On the other hand, the impact of the securitised European public space of the post-9/11 world can be easily sensed in the cautious discourse of some diaspora activists, especially in our conversation about the relationship between the PKK, which is banned in the UK, and the diaspora associations which are legal, yet are inspired by the politics of the PKK:

S: Both of the diaspora associations, the Kurdish Community Centre and the Halkevi are in line with the PKK, are they not?

K: we, as associations, don't do anything ourselves according to the ideological, political line of thought of any political movement. For us, if [they] are Kurdish, came from Kurdistan, we must be sensitive towards that geography and prioritise the freedom of our community. We see ourselves as responsible, sensitive like this. We try to fulfil the responsibilities that we have for the Kurdish public to live justly, equally, freely. The Halkevi is also a sensitive association on these issues, as am I. But in the end [we/they are] two separate associations, independent from each other. We, I repeat, do not represent a political party ideologically, politically. We are not an ideological, political representative of any party. We do not operate on their [PKK's] behalf. We do not have the right to act in their [PKK's] name anyway.

S: It is not hard to see that the people who come here are more PKK's grassroots, let us suppose that if they lived in Turkey they would vote for BDP, call Apo<sup>160</sup>, *Serok*, their leader.

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<sup>159</sup> Cafer (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 14 April 2013

<sup>160</sup> "Apo" is the shortened version of the first name (Abdullah) of the PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan, who is in jail in Turkey. Serok means literally translates as "chief," yet, in this context, it is used to refer to the exclusive position of Ocalan in the dominant Kurdish national movement, that reveres him as their "leader," "founding father" and "national hero." Among the dominant Kurdish nationalist movement from Turkey, it is only Ocalan, who is referred to as "serok" whereas all other guerrilla leaders and legal politicians of the same movement are usually referred to as "heval", which means "friend," and "comrade" in Kurdish.

K: They can come; we cannot tell them not to come. At the end of the day, the vast majority of the people who come to our association sympathise with the PKK and try to support it in a way. And many of those maybe paid the price because of the PKK. That is, about Kurdishness, they paid a price regarding the PKK. Either they were arrested by the Turkish state, subjected to torture or spent years in prisons. Or people from his or her family, relatives were killed, fell as martyrs. As I said, the vast majority of the people who come to our association sympathise with the PKK. We cannot go ahead and say to them, "You cannot sympathise with the PKK. If you do, you cannot come to our association or cannot sympathise with other Kurdish parties, you cannot come if you do." [It is] a Kurdish association, our door is open to everybody. But an association that makes more thing [sic] [of] the people from Turkish Kurdistan, from Northern Kurdistan, that carries out activities. But this does not mean that we are not an association for the Kurds from the other parts of Kurdistan.<sup>161</sup>

S: What are the expectations of the people who come here of this association?

Y: The expectations of people who come here of this association are mainly to seek help for their issues. Let me say, the issues here: Health issues, education issues, sheltering issues, welfare benefits issues. Apart from these, I do not know... judicial issues that can arise. Again, for example, our contributions in solving the problems for those who do not speak the language by translating for them... There are a lot of expectations in this regard. Social, cultural, sporting activities directed at young people... There are expectations like these from us. But at the same time, in this country, we are expected to be sensitive towards the events happening in Kurdistan. Our people do not see us as an association responsible only for what happens in this country. They see us, at the same time, as an association that needs to show responsibility towards issues in the country that we came from. They have expectations like these. In case of issues in the country, say a massacre or an attack, our people strongly suggest and demand of us to show a reaction here. They criticise us when we do not do it.<sup>162</sup>

S: Were you as an organisation influential in the protests for Roboski<sup>163</sup>?

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<sup>161</sup> Kemal (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 25 April 2013

<sup>162</sup> Yusuf (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 9 April 2013

<sup>163</sup> Roboski Massacre which is also known as "Uludere airstrike" took place on 28 December 2011 near the Turkish-Iraqi border where 34 male Turkish civilians (mostly boys and young men) were killed by the airstrike of the F-16 jets of Turkish Air Force due to false intelligence provided with the Turkish government that supposedly aimed to target the PKK guerrillas crossing the border from Iraqi Kurdistan through to Turkish Kurdistan. It caused public indignation in Turkey and abroad, particularly, among the Kurds. Peter Beaumont, *Guardian*, "Turkish Air Strikes Kill Dozens of Villagers near Iraq border," 29 December 2011, accessed on 13 May 2015 via <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/dec/29/turkish-air-strikes-iraq-border>



H: Absolutely. For example in that Roboski massacre protest, I saw many Kurds there whom I do not know personally or are familiar with. At the protest... Again, for example, regarding the conditions of the PKK and the public's leader Ocalan's isolation, the public here have great concerns.

S: Is this often on the agenda? There are many announcements about this on Facebook.

H: Yes. People are rightly concerned about Ocalan's health and security. Therefore, they want to be informed. But there are no conditions for being informed. And people even started to discuss whether he is alive or not. For this reason our people are sensitive and they respond accordingly. Many events were organised regarding this. There has been a demand for our association to lead these events. We cannot be irresponsible to these demands. If the people who come to our association see Ocalan as their leader and are concerned about his health and security it becomes an inevitable responsibility for us to be concerned about him and be sensitive about the issue. Therefore we have tried and still are trying to lead these events. Notifications were handed out regarding Ocalan's health and safety. Notifications were handed out, meetings were held, and will be held. If Ocalan's isolation conditions get severed and if he cannot be heard from, I am sure the Kurds here will display their concerns with far greater reactions.<sup>164</sup>

Here, the general atmosphere and concerns that my interviewees are reflecting are more of a squeezed psycho-social and political mood between legality and legitimacy; nation-state boundaries and statelessness. Kurdish diaspora activists, despite numerous facilities and opportunities in the transnational diasporan sphere, still do face the thick walls of nation-states and barriers of legality in accordance with international legal and political regimes. Charges of terrorist activity, for instance, seems to be one of the biggest fears among diaspora circles based on the accusation that they have organic ties with the PKK which is banned in the UK and all over Europe. Furthermore, there is the dilemma of civility in the case of the members of the pro-PKK Kurdish diasporans. The Kurdish diaspora activists are civilians and carry out civic, social, political activities which are legal. However, their support for

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<sup>164</sup> Huseyin (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 12 June 2013

the PKK as a "national movement" and a "political party," albeit an illegal party, puts the diasporan Kurds in a limbo situation. How major nation-states and international organisations sees the PKK does not match the way that the Kurdish diaspora activists see it. In the context of an ethno-national movement, operating in the transnational space, one can see why many diaspora activists feel the need to use a more "inclusive" and participative language when they talk about the agency of the Kurdish masses who ask for events and agenda items to be put on the top of the priorities of the Kurdish community centres in London, rather than- as my interviewees claim- the Kurdish diaspora associations themselves deciding on them.

### **C) Cross-disciplinary Quests: Need for an Anthropology of International Relations**

The seemingly controversial academic field 'the anthropology of international relations' has been a relatively new invention, trying to bring some novelty into research techniques and methodologies used in the study of international relations and anthropology, broadening the epistemological borders of the two disciplines combined. Although this effort has been made mainly by scholars coming from anthropology<sup>165</sup> <sup>166</sup> and sociology,<sup>167</sup> backgrounds which I would call grassroots social sciences, I would suggest that the researchers of international relations and global politics need this sort of opening even more, given the vicious cycle of its major debates on such issues as "human nature" and "state-centred agency and actor

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<sup>165</sup> Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Iver B. Neumann, "International Relations as a Cultural System: An Agenda for Research", *Cooperation and Conflict* 28, no. 3 (1993): 233-264.

<sup>166</sup> Pnina Werbner, "Notes from a Small Place: Anthropological Blues in the Face of Global Terror", *Current Anthropology*, 51, no. 2 (2010): 193-221.

<sup>167</sup> Johan Galtung, *Mainstream vs. Counter trend in International Relations Theory: On the Linkage between Cosmology and Epistemology* (New Jersey: Princeton University, 1986).

problem” in international relations theory. Despite its novelty and possible opportunities, not many authors have written authoritatively on the critical marriage of these two disciplines. Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Iver B. Neumann published one of their articles on the topic and they explained their understanding of the “anthropology of international relations” in the article titled “International Relations as a Cultural System” as follows:

... a comprehensive agenda for research, where models of thought and research methods originating from social anthropology are applied to the field of international relations, which has traditionally been the domain mainly of political scientists. We suggest a number of possible anthropological approaches to the investigation of cultural aspects of international relations in the contemporary world. The aim is, on the one hand, to contribute new analytical perspectives to international relations, and, on the other hand, to open up a new field of inquiry in anthropology. A tactical intent can be added to our theoretical concern with cultural issues in international relations.<sup>168</sup>

I would like to name this approach, the entire framework I am using to looking into diaspora politics in the case of the British Kurds. Do we need to go towards an anthropology of international relations in the sense that the diasporan individuals in London are behaving or controlling their political behaviour vis-a-vis the international system? When I asked them questions about their political activism in London or even in a small neighbourhood of London, they felt the need to underline the difficulties, the hardship related to the international political system. For instance, they frequently mentioned NATO policies or the UK-Turkey strategic political and economic relations in relation to the greater structures of the EU, NATO and even the Western alliance deeply rooted in the Cold War world order that situated Turkey within the western capitalist bloc alongside the US, UK and Western

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<sup>168</sup> Eriksen and Neumann (1993): 233.

Europe. Then, they usually elaborated on how the Kurds have been squeezed between UK and Turkey relations and their mutual interests as two nation-states, as well as concerning their positioning within other international, inter-governmental and supra-national political structures mentioned above. In other words, when a Kurdish student or activist in London was telling me about the opportunities and limits of her/his individual political activism, he/she was feeling compelled to talk about the problems within and emerging from the international political system and how sovereign nation-states are abusing their powers as major actors pursuing the self-interests of their nations at the cost of the democratic deficit for others:

S: Actually I think this is a general thing. The majority of the foreigners who come to this country come from the countries previously colonised by the British Empire. While some of these colonies became independent by fighting for it, some of them still maintain good relations with their former coloniser despite being independent. That is, even though these countries fought against this country [the UK] and gained independence, they established good relations afterwards. We can give India, Pakistan and many African countries as examples. Therefore, many of them are countries that gained independence but then became dictatorships. And against these people who came here, to their former coloniser, having escaped dictatorship. I think the same politics is at work, that is, the politics regarding the Kurds. Because for this country, that is the UK government, in my opinion, this is my personal opinion, what is important is their own interests. What are these interests? Economic interests, political interests, military interests. I do not mean the interests of its public, mind you. I do not mean the interests of the UK public. I mean the state's interests. For this reason as far as their interests are concerned they can very easily cooperate with dictators; they can very easily suspend democracy. But whenever they have a conflict of interest, they would become the biggest apostle of democracy. They would say they are enemies of dictatorship.<sup>169</sup>

The experiences of the British Kurdish diaspora activists in London clearly demonstrate how lonely the Kurdish diaspora remains as a non-state actor vis-a-vis the unchallenged state-centric nature of the international system, even in this highly

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<sup>169</sup> Sinem (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 7 July 2012

globalised era. My informants emphasised their isolation not only as a community via their institutions in the eye of state institutions, but also as Kurdish individuals sensitive to their homeland issues in their everyday lives. This fact itself should drive us into a deeper inquiry into the anthropology of international relations concerning political matters that non-state actors are involved in. Methodologically speaking, resorting to such major tools as ethnography and its subfields make us benefit from anthropological research in an attempt to reflect layers of the lives of a certain group of people. When we are talking to a group of individuals with such a high level of politicisation and rich socio-political experience, we observe a resistant actor, an ethnic or political group isolated from the political structures and multiple contesting agencies built in strong hierarchy, based on geo-political and economic variables. In this case, we observe the triangle of events that reflect the uneven power relations between state actors and a stateless diaspora concerning events taking place in the homeland of the diasporan group and its (in)visibility in the hostland:

S.K: Yes, what did we say? How do the institutions in this country, the politicians approach the Kurds as far as you can see?

S: Now as you know over the course of Mr Abdullah Ocalan's solitary confinement we prepared dossiers, brought them to many official institutes such as the Association of Journalists, the Red Cross, the Ministry of External Affairs. Solitary confinement is actually unacceptable. This is not just a case for leadership. You are all alone on an island, think of the island as a country OK? Look at it that way, it has seriously its own laws now. Consider it as a country, you lock up a person to a country and isolate him from everything. Does it look like an acceptable situation? When we present this, put the Roboski massacre in the dossier, the massacre in Uludere... besides, this exile policy against the Kurds, that is, it was applied very well after the Van earthquake. That "we are doing it, what else do you want?" mentality in the aftermath of the Van earthquake. Many things like this that we can call wrong, bad or inhumane or things a state should not do. When we present these to the authorities there is a shock stemming from not knowing (!); of course not very convincing I must say, honestly.

S.K: Their not knowing?

S: I do not find this to be believable. But regardless of that, when you constantly constantly, constantly, push forward like "what are you going to do now that you know?" mentality should arise. This is actually a type of politics. Here or in the world, except for the societies that only sleep or inhumane societies that do not bother to do anything, everybody knows what the Kurds are going through there. Everybody knows. There is this thing called the Internet.<sup>170</sup>

Sara's complaints about the deliberate ignorance or indifference of the British authorities toward the Kurdish national cause and human rights issues of Kurds in the homeland reminds me of the hegemony debate that Eriksen and Neumann carry out in their article on anthropology of international relations where they also touch on hegemony and power relations while looking at the interplay between domestic regimes and foreign policies:

Any comparative study of political regimes runs the risk of being caught up in the normative perceptions and perspectives of the hegemony; in a sense, the social sciences, including anthropology, form part of the legitimizing structure of the hegemony (Ashley, 1988)... The strength of anthropology in this respect lies in the sensitivity to contextual variables, enabling us to understand the regimes of contemporary nation-states in a language more sophisticated than often functionalist and behaviouralist terminology of US quantitative political science (Pye and Verba, 1965)... The general question to be posed here is: how does the type of political government in a nation-state influence its foreign policy? One dimension which needs to be explored comparatively by anthropologists is that of popular participation in domestic politics, or the relationship between state and society. If a regime is faced with a legal, vocal opposition; if it risks being confronted with popular demonstrations, petitions and a poor rating at polls, it must take measures unnecessary for a totalitarian or otherwise authoritarian regime. Nation-states where the bulk of the population is well integrated at a national level are usually more closely monitored by their citizens than those which are poorly integrated. How can this influence their participation in international society?<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Sara (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 6 July 2013

<sup>171</sup> Eriksen and Neumann (1993): 256.

In a nutshell, the reluctance of the dominant regional actors (Iran, Turkey, Syria, Iraq) to recognise the Kurds as a distinct 'nation' with a right to rule themselves or even to decide their own fates without external pressures from global actors like the US, NATO, the EU, the UK etc., lies at the heart of the Kurdish question. This is very much linked to the predicaments of the Kurds, deriving from their lack of an equal status as a political entity in the age of nation-states.

It may sound like an oxymoron to call the framework I am suggesting "the anthropology of international relations". Anthropology looks at the human phenomena based on human behaviour and human emotions and their interactions and thus the human itself (anthropos). On the other hand, international relations looks at social phenomena from a top-down grand narrative perspective that takes big actors into account and focuses on international politics or global affairs. There is a clear differentiation of levels and units of analysis between anthropology and international relations. Therefore, one can think that an anthropology of international relations essentially holds serious epistemological contradictions. However, it does not, especially in my experience of the study of the Kurdish diaspora, because the individual stances and encounters of diaspora activists and members are very much interconnected with the international system's forces and the dynamics imposed upon them. How the British government manages the British Kurds' politicisation, when they question the legal system in Turkey, or when they show their support or sympathy toward the PKK operating in Turkey, a political actor which is outlawed in the UK, and how UK-Turkey relations are affected negatively, if the diaspora increases its support to a visible level and if it risks Turkey's or the UK's stability, are all interrelated. An anthropology of international relations is vital when looking at the

ethno-national problem of a non-state actor who has now been increasingly transnationalised after three decades of clashes and new transborder developments.



## CHAPTER VI: DIASPORA COMMUNITY AND ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL POLITICS

### A) Diaspora's Diaspora, from Kurdistan to Turkish Cities and then to the UK

Recent migration research has used the concept of 'circular migration' to refer to the movement of people who keep migrating back and forth to the homeland, unless they feel satisfied in that particular hostland, especially relating to labour and socio-economic wellbeing conditions.<sup>172</sup> Diasporan individuals who are unsatisfied with circumstances in their subsequent destinations feel the need to migrate from one hostland to another to be provided with better conditions. Therefore these migrants constitute what I call a *diaspora's diaspora*. A diaspora's diaspora is a state of successive migration which is frequent among the Kurdish migrants I have interviewed.

Several of the diasporan Kurds I met in London had already been in the diaspora even before coming to the UK. Azad, who is originally from Mus, in Turkish Kurdistan, moved to Kutahya, a western Turkish city, to attend boarding school. While I was interviewing him, he kept using 'we' to refer to the Kurdish students at the high school dormitory and mentioned that this marked "their" early phase of politicisation as Kurdish youth. This kind of ethno-politicisation is quite similar to that of the Kurdish high school and university students moving to Istanbul and Ankara in 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, forming the early Kurdish movement through student activism, subsequently coming out as prominent politicians or opinion leaders. The diverse line of student activism and politicisation from the "1950s Kurdish revival" to the Kurdish socialist awakening of 1960s-70s within TIP (The Turkish Labour Party) up to the *Apoist* movement of

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<sup>172</sup> *International Organization for Migration Report Series 4* (Geneva: IOM, 2008)

late 1970s that would later establish the PKK, has numerous examples supporting the impact of migration, on politicisation in the sense of ethno-regional consciousness, despite the fact that their migration movement was usually one that remained within Turkey and Kurdistan's neighbouring regions<sup>173</sup>

The internal diasporisation of the Kurds from Kurdistan to Western Turkey enabled them to enter into a preparatory step before they got into the usual diaspora experience in a completely foreign country, in our case, the UK. Education, schooling and labour processes function in this way for Kurdish migrants, so they do not feel a huge culture shock when they leave their small village or town for, say, Istanbul before they migrate to London. On the other hand, this early diasporisation experience within the diaspora's diaspora pattern, gives Kurdish migrants first-hand knowledge and control of the process of being excluded from the majority community and culture. Therefore, I would argue this sort of a double diaspora<sup>174</sup> experience is a catalyst for faster and deeper politicisation of Kurdish migrants. Several informants from the Kurdish diaspora community in London stated that they had this sort of a double diaspora experience, especially moving from bottom to top economically, like moving from Malatya to Gaziantep and then to London, or from Maras to Istanbul and then to London.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Alis (2009): 68-71.

<sup>174</sup> Double diaspora as a term is used to imply an ethnic, racial or religious group "that has gone through two successive diasporas". As Wacks states, it has usually been used to refer to "Indians from Tanzania (who then scatter throughout the Anglophone nations of the developed world), to Haitians (diasporic Africans who form a new diaspora as Haitians in France, Canada, and the US), to Israelis (who returned from diaspora to Zion, then scattered again)." See, David Wacks, "What is Double Diaspora?"(2011), accessed on January, 25, 2015 via <http://davidwacks.uoregon.edu/2011/03/21/double>. However, I am using double diaspora as a simple term to refer to having to leave first the homeland and then the hostland for a second hostland. Therefore, I use the term double diaspora interchangeably with what I call *diaspora's diaspora*. (S.K.)

<sup>175</sup> Taylan (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 22 May 2013

## **B) A Symbolic Assessment of Diaspora Texts: Intertwined and Divergent**

This section is designed to carry out thematic analysis as a convenient way of evaluating data based on the epistemological premises of phenomenology, as opposed to a positivist understanding of acquiring knowledge. In other words, I am adopting a qualitative research methodology which concentrates on the human experiences and dynamic nature of human circumstances in the course of Kurdish lives, without reducing them to abstract forms or numbers. Elliot et. al. explain that the aim of qualitative research is “to understand and represent the experiences and actions of people as they encounter, engage and live through situations.”<sup>176</sup>

As for analysing texts, I would agree with the view that not only human beings but also the texts they produce and the contexts that constitute them are alive and dynamic, sometimes talking for themselves, exceeding the influences of their authors or initiators. Therefore the study of texts, I would suggest, should be taken as seriously as the study of their creators, since the texts are being produced and re-produced by their readers over and over through various processes and mechanisms. At that point, studies that relate -one way or another- to discourse analysis<sup>177 178 179</sup> are beneficial in having a critical evaluation attempting to reveal the power structures and relations inherent in daily routine and social practices that we encounter. Bearing in mind that discourse analysis could potentially provide a more sophisticated and deeper insight, I am combining it with certain thematic headings here to be able to take

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<sup>176</sup> Robert Elliott, Constance T. Fischer, and David L. Rennie, "Evolving guidelines for publication of qualitative research studies in psychology and related fields" *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* 38 (1999): 215.

<sup>177</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>178</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>179</sup> Kenneth J. Gergen, *An invitation to Social Construction*. (London: Sage, 2002).

more practical and “flexible” steps.<sup>180</sup> Accordingly, I am benefitting from alternative sources including logos and posters displayed on the web pages of the diaspora associations. After all, ‘texts’ are not necessarily pieces of writing, but rather various combinations of daily circumstances, images and effects that we create or that shape our milieu.<sup>181</sup> In this context, images, colours, sounds, symbols and various other forms of personal and collective expression might be of help to understand politics hidden in everyday life, details to which we may not be paying much attention. The questions of what is “politics” and what is “political” also shape our way of looking at such data, including symbols. As Verdery defines politics as “a form of concerted activity among social actors”<sup>182</sup> by rightly asserting that “politics is not restricted to the actions of political leaders,” it is interesting to evaluate alternative data to reproduce our “universes of meanings” by mindfully engaging with symbols and messages we receive from ordinary material.

### **C) Conflicting Symbols of Homeland(s): Turkey vs. Kurdistan**

In the case of diasporas, symbols and their interpretation can be implicitly or explicitly political. For instance, traditional music of the homeland may evoke cultural imaginations of homeland, or maps redrawing the boundaries of the ethno-national diaspora, may help diaspora members reproduce their political imaginations of homeland. In all cases, these symbols will have dynamic meanings depending on the perceptions and worlds of meanings of each diaspora member. I have evaluated several texts produced by Kurdish diaspora organisations. Here, I

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<sup>180</sup> Virginia Braun, and Victoria Clarke, “Using thematic analysis in psychology” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, n. 2 (2006): 77-101.

<sup>181</sup> Hulya Bartu, *A Critical Reading Course*, (Istanbul: Bogazici University Press, 2002).

<sup>182</sup> Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

will present some examples from selected material produced by the KCC and the DayMer Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre. This evaluation is based on the web pages of the diaspora associations and chooses to look at the “About Us” sections in them which describe the aims and roles of these institutions. Therefore, the themes prevalent in these online documents are analysed with a comparative perspective, since they represent different political stances and organisational strategies, as well as having certain features and goals in common.

Based on the information given on their websites, as part of the facilities that these two diaspora associations provide, we could count their role in advice and information for their communities including refugees and asylum seekers, covering education, employment, benefits, housing, health, immigration, ESOL classes, interpreting service, educational support, cultural and sports activities, relief from poverty and prevention of youth from crime, among many others.

At the very top, each web page welcomes us with two different maps representing seemingly conflicting insights of the associations:



Figure 2: DayMer's Logo



Figure 3: Kurdish Community Centre Logo

As seen in Figure 2, DayMer’s logo consists of two shaking hands that constitute the territory of Turkey in the background. In contrast to DayMer’s logo’s message of coexistence within the territorial integrity of Turkey with the

agreement of "two sides" symbolised by shaking hands, the KCC logo reflects a more trans-Turkey union, or at the very least cooperation among the Kurds, from within the boundaries of four sovereign states, Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. And whereas the logo of DayMer uses a plain white background on the map of Turkey, KCC's logo consists of the 'tricolor' of the "Kurdish nation" *kesk u sor u zer* (green, red, yellow) and the very symbol of *roj* (sun) regarded as inevitable elements of a future Kurdish flag by the Kurdish nationalists. In that respect, one can draw the conclusion that DayMer is rather interested in the problems and issues of Kurds and Turks from Turkey, whereas the KCC has its focus exclusively on the Kurds from entire *Kurdistan*, a virtual homeland of the Kurds who identify themselves with their ethno-national belonging, rather than a civic identity that relates them with the greater societies they used to live in, including Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Therefore, such seemingly decorative details as symbols, signs and colours used in the texts and platforms of diasporan associations may imply certain meanings that they attribute to their identity and "homeland", as well as the scope and scale of populations that they work with and for.

Furthermore, the names of the two associations back up the symbols used in their logos and the possible meanings attached to them. DayMer stands for Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre according to its home page. However, other pages mentioning its activities reveal the fact that its name is also used as Turkish/Kurdish Community *Solidarity*<sup>183</sup> Centre. On the one hand, they claim to provide solidarity within Turkish and Kurdish communities. On the other hand, they aim to reinforce solidarity between Turkish and Kurdish communities living in London. As for the KCC, which stands for Kurdish Community Centre, the

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<sup>183</sup> Emphasis mine (S.K.)

emphasis is exclusively on Kurds regardless of their being from any of the four sending countries shared by the 'Kurdistan' geography.

#### D) "Shaking Hands" in Different Colours

Although the two associations contrast in their outlook regarding their perceptions of 'homeland' and interest areas, they have commonalities in their goals. Arts and culture is one of these areas. On the advertisement of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Culture and Arts Festival organised by DayMer, its logo is displayed to express the distinctiveness of the cultures of Kurds from those of Turks, despite the fact that they both originate in Turkey. In this logo, those two shaking hands are painted in two different colours:



Figure 4: DayMer's 22<sup>nd</sup> Culture and Arts Festival Poster

From a *bicommunal*<sup>184</sup> perspective, Figure 3 may be implying the recognition of two distinct *peoples* in Turkey: Kurds originating in Eastern Turkey symbolised by the colour yellow, while Turks by white, shaking hands in an agreement or reconciliation. One should note that the use of two separate colours does not necessarily mean a segregated or ethnicised space divided into two sides. We can draw this conclusion from the fact that the more Turkish-populated western 'hand' is surrounded by yellow lines, perhaps, symbolising the extension of Kurdish population to western Turkey, just as the more Kurdish eastern 'hand' is firmly grasped by 'fingers' in white, symbolising the Turkish population and, perhaps, their interest in the predominantly Kurdish east.

This allegorical picture has some implications for the refusal of a hierarchical positioning between Kurds and Turks, as the ultimate solution to the ongoing ethnic problem is a peaceful polity. Keeping in mind the context of the poster, which is a "culture and arts festival," the protection of culture and rights to develop one's own language and culture appear as possible expectations. The diasporan individuals who live in the host (British) society still have their links with the sending (Turkish) society, not only in a real sense through such means as visits 'home', and by their relatives to the 'new home', but also in an imaginary sense through various occasions like cyber networking and interaction with the wider Kurdish diaspora groups living in other parts of the diasporan space, i.e. Germany, France and so forth.

The handshake can be interpreted in another way. The two colours - white and yellow - are not contrasting but very similar, complementary shades. This also

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<sup>184</sup> Merriam Webster Dictionary defines "bicommunal", as "involving or including two distinct communities of people : of, relating to, or being a society composed of two distinct or separate communities often with conflicting interests." Merriam Webster Dictionary, accessed on 23 May 2016 via <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bicommunal>



reflects and helps convey the message being portrayed. Particularly, taking into consideration that an internal armed struggle emerging from an ethno-national problem has been going on in Turkey for more than three decades, the interpretation of major symbols of a diaspora association representing a hybrid identity of Turks and Kurds can be understood in the context of peace-building regarding a political imagination of the homeland and solidarity among the two communities in the hostland.

### **E) Upbeat Grassroots Political Activism in London**

#### **Balance of Tendencies: Trans-border, Intra-Kurdish and pro-Turkey-fication**

The strong link between diaspora and homeland political agendas can be observed in the case of the Kurdish diaspora in the UK very clearly as the century-old Kurdish Question is still there in the Middle East and Turkey. Turkey's presidential election, the first of its kind to elect the president based on popular vote as against the earlier fully parliamentary system, provides us with a good example for this strong interplay between diaspora and homeland politics. The ruling AKP government's amendment of the voting law making it possible to vote from abroad made this transfer of homeland political issues to the diaspora via elections more dynamic and vibrant. In the 2014 presidential election campaign, the then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited several European cities as part of his election campaign, as did Selahattin Demirtas, the co-chair of HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party), the latest pro-Kurdish political party in Turkey. However, Demirtas visited the European cities neither for a local or parliamentary election, nor as the representative of the pro-Kurdish party. This time he came as a candidate for the Presidency of the Turkish Republic. This marked a very remarkable moment

in the history of the modern Turkish Republic.

The contentious politics of identity pursued by the Kurds in Turkey lasted for nearly a century, during which they experienced different methods and means and political inclinations, including the guerrilla fight for secession to form a united and independent Kurdish state comprising four parts in Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran, to consider reconciliation with the Turkish state, to have a democratised Turkey that would provide Kurds with autonomy and several rights, while keeping the country united.

The Kurdish movement tried several other means and strategies in line with the national, regional and global conjunctures of the time. During the post-Cold War period, especially well into the late 1990s and then gradually through 2000s, the main strategy of the Kurdish movement in Turkey has evolved into what is called Turkey-fication (*Türkiyelileşme*), which meant the renunciation of the earlier secessionist agenda replaced by a united, yet democratic, Republic of Turkey, which would also grant some sort of autonomy to the Kurds. This preference of the Kurdish movement reflects both pragmatic and principled dimensions. On the one hand, the positioning of the Kurdish movement vis-a-vis the main actors of the Turkey and the Middle East has reflected certain pragmatic aspects, most visibly in its relations with the ruling AKP government. On the other hand, the pro-Kurdish actors especially those in the legal sphere, such as the BDP and its successor HDP, and NGOs like DTK etc., have followed the very inclusive path of Turkey-fication in an attempt to reach out to almost all disadvantaged groups and segments in Turkey, from workers to Muslim and non-Muslim minorities, women to LGBTIs, ecologists to political dissidents, rather than exclusively emphasising the problems of Kurds, although they constitute the vast majority of their electorate

base. In this vein, the Presidential candidacy of a pro-Kurdish MP coming from the Kurdish movement to serve the entire society of Turkey is the peak of the Turkeyfication attempts of pro-Kurdish actors. We should note that Demirtas and his party, HDP, during the presidential election campaign insisted on referring to him as “*halkların ve deęişimin adayı*”, the candidate of peoples and change; peoples in plural form, in order to imply that he will be the guarantee for a pluralist multi-ethnic society, rather than the current status quo of a strictly unitarian nation-state based on assimilation into Turkishness. Therefore, regardless of the results of these elections, Demirtas symbolised the further stage of pro-Turkeyfication, yet democracy and autonomy-seeking characteristics of the mainstream Kurdish political movement in Turkey.



Photo 2: Banner of the Presidential Candidate, Selahattin Demirtas at Lee Valley Athletic Centre, London<sup>185</sup>

Rallies in several European cities have been strongly supported by Kurdish diaspora activists in these countries including Germany and Switzerland. In this regard, homeland politics was actively and dynamically imported into the

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<sup>185</sup> Blue banner (in Turkish) "Halkların ve Deęişimin Adayı" (Candidate of Peoples and Change); red, yellow and green banner (in Kurdish) "Silav Ji Bu Şoreşa Rojava!" (Greetings for Rojava Revolution!). Photo taken by me (S.K.), Lee Valley Athletic Centre, Edmonton, London, 20 July 2014.

hostland by homeland political elites and the ordinary members of the Kurdish diaspora in London were mobilised during the election campaign. In the UK, the community page *Sen de Gel, İngiltere*<sup>186</sup> (Come join us, UK) was created on Facebook just before Demirtas came to London, and within a few days hundreds of people had subscribed to it and published humorous videos to publicise the rally in Edmonton Green's huge outdoors leisure centre, Lee Valley. Several thousands of people from all walks of life, mainly Kurds but others too, like Turkish leftists, Alevis, democrats and Turkish Cypriots, even some English people living in different parts of the UK (most of them from London as well as from other cities like Birmingham, Manchester, Cardiff, and Stoke-on-Trent etc). So, the publicity of Demirtas's "I am Going... Are You Coming?" Rally has been achieved by means of social media, smart phones, peer groups and other diaspora familial and neighbourhood networks.

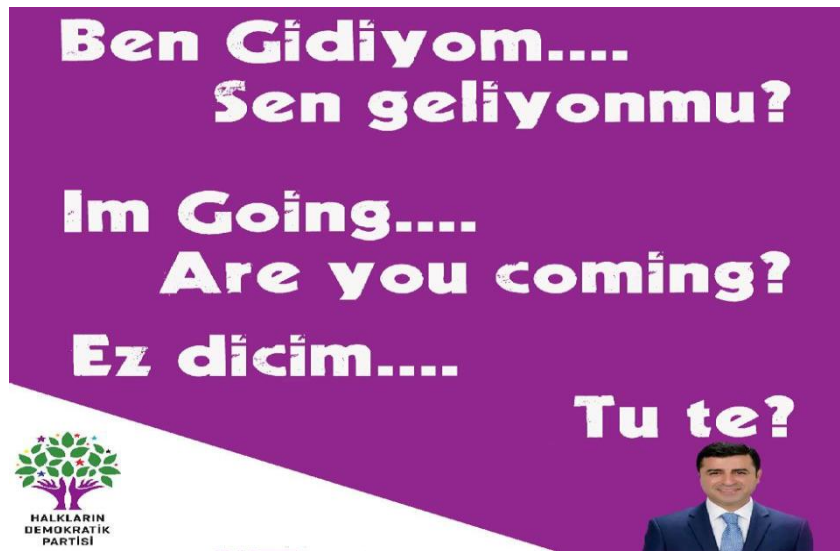


Figure 5: Demirtas Presidential Election Rally Leaflet in 3 languages, Turkish, English and Kurdish.

Many non-Kurdish people originating from Turkey yet living abroad, which we can

<sup>186</sup> "Sen de Gel İngiltere", accessed on 19 July 2014 via <https://www.facebook.com/DemirtasLeaValley>

call *Turkiyeli Diasporasi* “Turkey-origin diaspora”<sup>187</sup> have also welcomed Demirtas's presidential bid especially based on the democratic and secular character of pro-Kurdish political actors as a reaction to the ruling AKP's and the then PM Erdogan's increasingly authoritarian conservative government in Turkey that appeared to oppress almost all social and political opposition groups, as well as being more and more corrupt.



Photo 3: Demirtas making his speech to several thousands, Presidential Election Rally, London<sup>188</sup>

Despite the non-ethnic discourse of Demirtas and the HDP, especially concerning the elections for the Presidency for the entire Turkey, there were certain issues where the Kurdish dimension of the rally was obvious, including Rojava (Western Kurdistan/Northern Syria), the ongoing civil war in Syria and its impact

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<sup>187</sup> I use this term in the context of migrants/diaspora communities originating from Turkey, regardless of their ethnic or sectarian background.

<sup>188</sup> Photo taken by Aledin Nisebin, Kurdish language teacher at the Kurdish Community Centre in London and shared by Mark Campbell, an Irish human rights activist supporting the Kurdish cause, on his facebook page, Lee Valley Athletic Centre, Edmonton, London, 20 July 2014. (There were many people waving the flags of the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Kurdish parties across the Middle East, especially those of the PKK and its sister organisations (PYD of Syrian Kurdistan/Rojava, and PJAK of Iranian Kurdistan) and posters of Abdullah Ocalan, all over the rally area.)

that on the Kurds and other groups living in Syria and its vicinity.

Although the Kurds in the diaspora do not oppose to the Turkey-fiction attempts of the Kurdish movement, which is obvious from the way they support Demirtas's candidacy for the Presidency of Turkey, people have still been very keen on their ethno-national agenda, *Kurdistani politics*. Typical slogans of the Kurdish movement were prevalent in the chants and appraisal of the PKK, Kurdistan and the PKK leader, mainly by emphasising the "leader of the nation", by shouting, as "Biji Serok Apo!" (Long live Leader Apo!) could be easily heard from the crowds whenever they got excited as they listened to Demirtas's speech. However, the crowds' chants with stress on the PKK and the Kurds did somehow fade away with auto-censorship of (probably) the staff in the organising committee and those diasporan individual activists within the audience. I thought they were trying to be careful not to annoy/scare the groups of people who supports Demirtas's candidacy as president of Turkey, those non-pro-PKK or even non-Kurdish supporters of Demirtas may have been scared away, if they were exposed to a strictly pro-PKK image of Demirtas as a potential president of the entire Turkey, where the PKK is still seen as a "terrorist organisation" both legally and by the majority of Turks.



Photo 4: Turkish Kurds asking for donations for Rojava/Syrian Kurdistan. On the donation boxes is written: "All donations are for *our* people in Rojava", Presidential Rally, London.<sup>189</sup>

### **Women's Activism in the Kurdish Diasporic Space**

My first visit to a Kurdish diaspora association started with the help of a Kurdish university student in London, a young woman in the diaspora, Ruken<sup>190</sup>, who had been living in the UK for five years. She was born in Diyarbakir, the largest city in Turkish Kurdistan, but she was raised in Adana, a Turkish majority Mediterranean city where several thousands of Kurdish immigrants live. Therefore, she and her family had already experienced being in the diaspora, as they left their hometown in Kurdistan even before coming to the UK. She came to the UK as a political refugee after her elder sister “came down from the mountain”, where she had served as a Kurdish guerrilla fighter for the PKK and then settled in the UK as a refugee. As a social sciences student, she was trying to engage in political activities, especially in

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<sup>189</sup> Photo taken by me (S.K.), Lee Valley Athletic Centre, Edmonton, London, 20 July 2014.

<sup>190</sup> Ruken (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 9 June 2012

those fields relating to human rights issues. I met her on a London-based Facebook group called “Kurdish Studies and Students Organisation”<sup>191</sup> that connects Kurdish students from all over the world. She kindly agreed to put me in touch with some of the prominent figures among diaspora circles in London, as well as younger activists engaging in activities carried out individually and collectively via diaspora associations or alternative platforms.

We agreed to meet at a protest event she planned to attend concerning the highly controversial anti-abortion statements made by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the then Prime Minister of Turkey. The demonstration was not organised exclusively by Kurdish associations, yet the largest share and influence was obviously that of Kurdish groups. In addition to Kurdish organisations the like Kurdish Community Centre, Halkevi, and Roj Women, there were Turkish socialist/left-wing and feminist groups attending, as listed on the flier and in the press release of the demonstration. Among those associations were: Avrupa Demokratik Kadin Hareketi (European Democratic Woman Movement), Sosyalist Kadinlar Birligi (Socialist Women’s Union), El-Com (Elbistan Community Centre), Day-Mer Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre, Yeni Kadin (New Woman), Gik-Der (Refugee Workers’ Cultural Association), YCKM (Yuz Cicek Acsin Kultur Merkezi, a diaspora association inspired by the MKP (the outlawed Maoist Communist Party of Turkey) and Nurhak Cultural Centre (an Alevi hometown association).

The caption of the press release of the demonstration was “To the Policies of the Prime Minister and the Government of Turkey that Target Gender Equality, Women’s Bodies, Reproductive Rights, and Sexual Rights, Our

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<sup>191</sup> Kurdish Studies and Students Organisation (KSSO) Facebook Group, accessed on 17 September 2014 via <https://www.facebook.com/groups/janroj/>



Response is a Resounding NO!" The press release gave a long list of participating institutions which are raising their voices strongly against a possible legal regulation to ban abortion, which is seen as a "violation of women's human rights to health and life and to make their decisions about their own sexual and reproductive health and rights". These women were condemning what they regarded as a male-dominated and male-led policy, as "another manifestation of conservative policies that does not view women as equal individuals."<sup>192</sup>

This demonstration reveals a key feature of diaspora politics: "transnationality". Although these activists do not live in Turkey anymore, they pursue a political activism that directly relates to the human rights issue in their sending country. The whole protest is about a human rights issue in Turkey and not the UK. On the other hand, the universalistic language these mostly socialist feminist women use make it easier for them to link their homeland-based activism to the hostland, the UK, and even beyond to any other country in the world where women's rights are violated, regardless of their race, religion, or class. In addition, these activists successfully link this gender-based issue to other major political debates going on in Turkey and the Middle East, especially to those issues relating to the Kurdish question, children's rights and rights to education. The stress on the overlapping plights of women and the Kurds is obvious in the content and language of the protest's press release and its motto. Here is an extract from it:

... Isn't the Prime Minister (Erdogan), the person who said to the poor villager who was there with his mother and made a complaint about their situation: "Go away from here taking your mom with you!" Isn't the Prime Minister, the person who openly threatened the Kurdish women and

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<sup>192</sup> "Londra'dan Kurtaj Yasagina Tepki," accessed on 8 July 2014 via <http://acikgazete.net/ingiltere/2012/06/10/londra-dan-kurtaj-yasagina-tepki.htm?print>

children by saying “We will confront them in the necessary way regardless of the fact that they are women or children?”... Isn't Erdogan the person who said at his party's recent Women's Congress: “Every Abortion is an Uludere” (a Kurdish town where the Turkish F-16 jets killed 34 Kurdish civilians in an airstrike that had supposedly aimed at “terrorists” on 28 December 2011<sup>193</sup>) (S.K.)<sup>194</sup> and caused huge controversy! ... Obviously, this is not just Erdogan's personal opinion. This is also the misogynous opinion of the bigoted state mechanism and their centuries-old colonial societies and of their male-dominated mentality... Abortion is not murder! Right to abortion is a woman's right to decide whether to give birth and her right to decide on her life. We say NO to the system that tries to take woman under their control once again by confronting them with bigoted understandings and superstitions and that tries to subjugate woman by implementing policies on her body. Our body is our right! Keep your hands and *words* off our bodies! Abortion is a right, *Roboski is a massacre!*

As touched upon shortly in the previous chapter, Roboski is the name of the Kurdish village in Uludere district of Sirnak, the Kurdish city in southeast Turkey. The terms “Roboski Massacre” and “Uludere Air Strike” are interchangeably used to denote the notorious killing of Kurdish civilians by the jets of Turkish Armed Forces, on 28 December 2011. While the former underlines the Kurdish character of the area and hence the Kurdish identity of the people killed by the state, the latter uses the Turkish name for the Kurdish district instead of “Qileban”, the Kurdish word used by the local people. Here, the differentiation of terminology and language preferred by Kurdish women activists is important. While Erdogan as an authoritarian conservative politician tries to control and suppress opposition groups with arguably most effective of politicisation and activism, women and the Kurds, Kurdish diaspora activists, perhaps, employ the strategy of “killing two birds with one stone.” On the one hand, they oppose what they consider male-dominated politics and social patriarchy, by condemning Erdogan's willingness to ban abortion

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<sup>193</sup> The Economist, “The Kurds and Turkey: Massacre at Uludere”, 9 June 2012, accessed on 21 January 2015 via <http://www.economist.com/node/21556616>

<sup>194</sup> Emphasis mine, (S.K.)

, on the other, they criticise his policy against the Kurds, which seems to be more of a pragmatic than a democratic one, bringing about emancipation and sustainable peace. In this context, key events like massacres, government-led operations and other state policies that are based on violence and harsh measures create another space for diaspora activists to be more visible and raise their voices via protests and public events. I would argue that the ability to define an incident by giving it a particular name is part of politics and political activity. In this respect, diaspora Kurdish women challenge the policies of Erdogan, by addressing above-mentioned village in its original version in Kurdish, as opposed to the official name in Turkish that Erdogan insists using. Moreover, he does not call the Kurdish civilian losses caused by the military jets a massacre, and diaspora activists challenge this by naming it a massacre and condemning Erdogan's speech that equates abortion with a massacre.

### **Women's Festival Named After Female Kurdish Guerrilla “Zilan”**



Photo 5: Gultan Kisanak, the Co-chair of pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) from Turkey as the keynote speaker of the 9<sup>th</sup> Zilan Kurdish Women's

Festival jointly organised by the Roj Women's Association, the Kurdish Community Centre and Halkevi<sup>195</sup>

The second biggest festival after Newroz, the Kurdish Spring Festival, that the Kurdish diaspora organises and celebrates in the UK is a women's festival called "Festivala Zilan" (the Zilan Kurdish Women's Festival), named after a heroic martyred Kurdish female guerrilla fighter of the PKK. During my field research I had the chance to attend these annual festivals organised by branches of the Kurdish Community Centre and Halkevi, the Kurdish and Turkish Community Centre, as well as the Roj Women Association, another pro-PKK diaspora association.

The women's festivals were all arranged and presented and mostly attended by women, mostly Kurdish as well as Turkish, English, British African, and East European, among others. The presentations were tri-lingual: Turkish, Kurdish and English. The music and other cultural activities of the event were mainly related to Kurds and Kurdistan, i.e: folk dance performance with Kurdish traditional dress, Kurdish music concerts, drama performances demonstrating the plights of Kurdish women not only against the state but also patriarchal male hegemony within their own community and beyond it. Apart from the cultural and social dimensions of the women's festival, the political aspects have always been very strong; each year one or two prominent Members of Parliament (usually a female politician) from the pro-Kurdish party in Turkey come to London as the special guest and keynote speaker of the Kurdish Women's Festival at the Kurdish Community Centre. The public speech of the pro-Kurdish MP from Turkey is followed by a large public Question-and-Answer

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<sup>195</sup> Photo taken by me (S.K.), Kurdish Community Centre community hall, Haringey, London, 28 June 2012.

session, where there is a harsh debate on the Kurdish Question. In accordance with the *zeitgeist* of the last few years, the Kurdish Women's Festivals taking place in London have witnessed vibrant debates around the Kurdish peace process between the state and the PKK in Turkey, as well as issues relating to the freedom of Syrian Kurdistan and their autonomy, and the situation and role of women with the greater framework of gender perspective in the resolution of those issues. There is one inevitable focus in the community centre during women's festivals, as well as other events: The status of Kurdistan (Turkish Kurdistan) and freedom for Ocalan and the wider PKK cadres.

At the festival hall, slogans (in Kurdish) around the stage and the conference hall were quite diverse: "Ji Ocalan re Azadi, Ji Qirkirina Gele Kurd re Na!" (Freedom for Ocalan, No to Massacre of the Kurdish People!) and "Ji Qirkirina Jine re Na!" (No to Women's Massacre), Bedena min e, biryara min e! (It is my body and it is my decision!) referring to the Turkish government's efforts to criminalise abortion, "Em jin in, ne namuse tu kesi ne!" (We are women, we are nobody's honour!), "Em ne namusa tu kesine, Namusa me azadiya meye!" ("We are nobody's honour, our honour is our freedom!)." The slogans and the main themes prevalent during the Kurdish women's festival in London reflect the strong sense of feminism the Kurdish movement carries as one of its distinguishing features vis-à-vis Turkish politics, or even Middle East politics in general. The struggle for emancipation and freedom by Kurdish women has been so powerful, however, in response to patriarchal structures they suffer in Kurdistan. Hence, the main body of the pro-Kurdish actors in Turkey has always been bound by Kurdish female voices. The PKK as a vanguard party for of the Kurdish national movement has been very

encouraging and on certain occasions has compelled Kurdish men to accept their female counterparts as equals, so that they can create a healthier Kurdish nation with the support of independent, strong women.

The most tangible example is the co-chairship mechanism that has been suggested by the PKK leader Ocalan and then enforced literally in all party posts, from local governments to metropolitan municipalities, from the party's neighbourhood organisations to province administrations. Each post has a female and a male co-chair, which is still unique in Turkish politics and even in most western European cases, let alone the Middle East. Another solid example of women's participation in power-sharing and politics from the mains Kurdish movement in Turkey is the gender quota and its relatively successful implementation. In the Turkish Grand National Assembly's (TBMM) 23<sup>rd</sup> legislative term, the proportion of women MPs to the whole number of MPs was only 9 per cent. However, the pro-Kurdish party DTP's women MPs constituted 38 per cent of the number of DTP MPs, whereas the other 3 political parties AKP, CHP<sup>196</sup> and MHP<sup>197</sup> had much lower ratios respectively: 9 per cent, 8 per cent and 2 per cent.<sup>198</sup> In the legal political arena, the Kurdish movement in Turkey has demonstrated a syncretic green, socialist, feminist ethno-national ideology which emerges from its outlawed armed forces, the PKK's ideological transformation under Ocalan's doctrines in the cause about four decades. The PKK presents an interesting militia force comprising men and women together as "warriors of

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<sup>196</sup> Centre-left, Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)

<sup>197</sup> Ultra-nationalist, Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Movement Party)

<sup>198</sup> Seref Kavak, "Kürt Siyasetinin 2000'li Yılları: "Türkiyelileşme" ve Demokratik Toplum Partisi" (Kurdish Ethno-politics in the 2000s: Turkey-fication and the Democratic Society Party) in Büşra Ersanlı, Günay Göksu Özdoğan and Nesrin Uçarlar (eds.) *Türkiye Siyasetinde Kürtler (Kurds in Turkey's Politics)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2012a): 166.

freedom” and of “revolution”. The very nature of the militia as a male-dominated, “masculine” and right-wing domain has been challenged by the Kurdish movement, as they justify female participation in the PKK as part of building a new life based on eco-feminist communal principles where, they argue, equality of men and women would exist in harmony with nature and other nations.<sup>199</sup>

Certain aspects of male dominance in social and political life usually function as an obstacle to women’s participation in politics, which has been the case for Kurdish women in Turkey, as well as in the grassroots of pro-PKK actors that are known to give relatively greater space to feminist movement within its circles. I did come across this during a previous field research in Istanbul among Kurdish women active in the Democratic Society Party (DTP) circles, the pro-Kurdish party of the time, taking place in 2009-2010:

As I asked (Berivan) how it would be possible that many traditional women could join demonstrations and conferences held by the party, she gave a comparative response with regard to the entire picture of women in Turkey: “Those who are beaten most terribly by the system are women. Indeed, the pressure on women is much greater in [sic., among] Turks; it is smaller in the DTP.” Berivan’s concerns about the strict patriarchal structure of the society were also relevant for [sic.] Fatih’s statement: “It is women who hold our party upright. We bring our sisters, mothers and our wives into politics so that they will learn about society and equality.” Men, namely husbands, fathers or brothers, are the main obstacle before or catalyst for woman’s integration into political life, as it is clear from the expression ‘*we bring*’ [that] my male informant uses. According to Caglayan, this adoption [sic., incorporation] of Kurdish women [in] to the public realm is only possible by purifying women from their sexuality, which is seen [as] dangerous and/or dirty, and sending them into the *dava* [the Kurdish cause] after this purification.<sup>200</sup>

However problematic the situation of women in the Kurdish national movement is,

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<sup>199</sup> Handan Caglayan’s work on the women issue in the Kurdish movement presents a critical approach to the “women emancipation” within the greater Kurdish movement. Handan Caglayan, *Analar, Yoldaslar, Tanrılar: Kurt Kadin Hareketinde Kadınlar ve Kadın Kimliğinin Oluşumu* (Istanbul: İletişim Publications, 2007): 195.

<sup>200</sup> Kavak, (2012a): 99.

as Caglayan states elsewhere<sup>201</sup>, it should not be ignored that the political participation of Kurdish women, despite being instrumentalised “for the sake of the Kurdish cause” in some respects, has helped these women to give shape to the direction and political agenda of the pro-Kurdish party towards a broader space that deals with other aspects of life that also interest women. When it comes to the gendered experiences of Kurdish people in the diaspora, the core of the problem still remains the same, yet with certain improvements that make a difference, especially for women’s participation and agency. The possible effects of Aleviness, a heterodox Muslim sect followed by the majority of the Kurds living in London,<sup>202</sup> should be taken into account in that respect. The possible impact of Alevi culture and faith on British Kurds is not restricted to women’s problems; it has broad repercussions on other fields of social and political life, including its scope and ways of protest.

### **Aleviness and Kurdishness in the Diaspora: Between Contestation and Reinforcement**

Religion or faith-based identity is usually seen as a rival identity that may challenge or complement ethnic identity of individuals. For instance, many conservative Sunni Muslim Kurds identify themselves with Islam and/or the *ummah*, the universal Islamic brotherhood/sisterhood. This is the case for many Alevi Kurds who prefer to identify themselves with Alevi faith and culture initially, and Kurdish ethnic identity afterwards.<sup>203</sup> Therefore, one may think that religious identity plays a highly obstructive role promoting loyalty to the Kurdish cause among Kurds in the diaspora. Although that may be partly true for certain segments of British Kurds, still

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<sup>201</sup> Caglayan (2007): 227.

<sup>202</sup> Ipek Demir, “Battling with Memleket in London: The Kurdish Diaspora's Engagement with Turkey”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38, no. 5 (2012): 824.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 824.



large parts of politically active Kurds in the UK see both identities as important to them. Considering the fact that the large numbers of the politically active Kurds in London are of the Alevi faith group, the combination of these two disadvantaged identity groups, the Kurdish and the Alevis, create a deeper sense of injustice for the people belonging to them. Religious identity, in this case the Alevi identity (a heterodox minority faith group compared to Orthodox Sunni groups among the Kurds as well as Turks), functions as a catalyst to protest culture and the activism of the Alevi Kurds who constitute a very large part of the Kurdish activists in London. According to the Britain Alevi Federation, which is an umbrella organisation for Kurdish and Turkish Alevi organisations in the UK and has branches in several UK cities including London, Glasgow, Coventry, Croydon, Harrow, Bournemouth, Nottingham, Doncaster, Hull, Sheffield and Edinburgh, there are approximately 300,000 Alevis living in the UK.<sup>204</sup> This estimation about the overall number of Alevis in the UK may sound a bit too high. Yet it should be noted that it includes Alevis of both Kurdish and Turkish background. It is very significant that a huge portion of this population is estimated to be Kurdish, if not the vast majority. Based on my observations and interviews with the Alevis, Kurds and Alevi Kurds in London, this faith-related factor seems to be of great importance to understand the protest culture and activism strategies, as well gender-related aspects of diaspora activism in the UK.

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<sup>204</sup> Britain Alevi Federation Website, accessed on 26 January 2015 via [http://www.alevinet.org/SAP.aspx?pid=About\\_en-GB](http://www.alevinet.org/SAP.aspx?pid=About_en-GB)

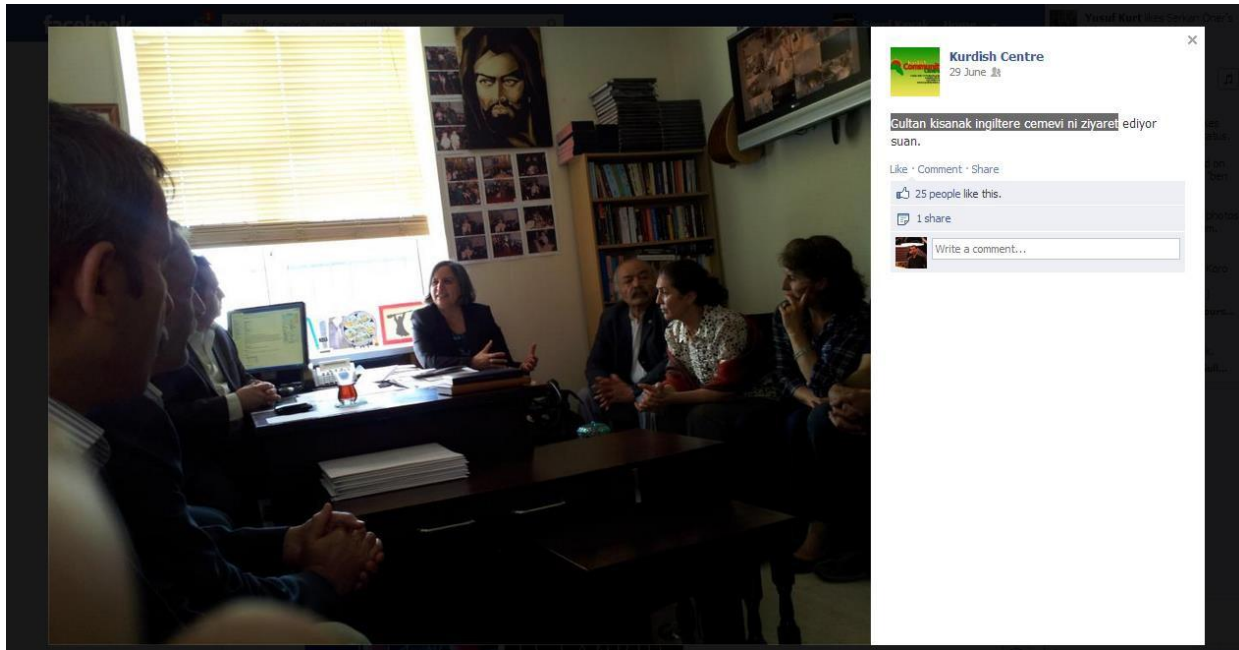


Photo 6: Gultan Kisanak, Co-chair of pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) visits the London Alevi Cultural Centre and Cemevi (Alevi Temple) in Hackney<sup>205</sup>

The way Kurdish women mobilise and the occasions on which Kurdish women organise, shape, decide and present a social, political or cultural activity is beyond equal compared to their male counterparts in the diasporic space in London. Women are visible more often on the front stage of Kurdish diaspora circles in London as well as off-stage. The reason for this strong female participation in the diaspora compared to the Kurdish movement in the homeland there may be several explicit and implicit reasons, like the abundance of formal facilities for women as well as men in civil society and in other societal domains, compared to the Middle East. One factor, though, seems to me to be often underestimated in the case of British Kurdish diaspora from Turkey: Aleviness (Elewi/Alawaite). Large parts of diasporan Kurds, as well as Turks, in London are of Alevi religious-cultural background which may possibly be

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<sup>205</sup> Photo taken by a London-based Kurdish activist whose Facebook profile name is "Kurdish Centre," Alevi Cultural Centre and Cemevi, Hackney, London, 29 June 2012.

considered to open up relatively more spaces to women's participation in social life, due to a more egalitarian interpretation that this faith group has with regard to gender equality and the co-existence of men and women in civic and religious spaces in everyday life. This is symbolically manifested in the Alevi religious rituals/dances practised jointly by women and men side by side and face-to-face with each other in the same hall, especially in Turkish and Kurdish Alevi traditions. Most of my Alevi informants, men and women, emphasised this non-segregating practice and philosophy of Aleviness, in particular as an advantage the Alevi communities have compared to other communities in most parts of the Middle East. In the case of the British Kurdish diaspora, this factor seems to be valid and the motivation arising from membership in the Alevi community among Kurds and Turks seems to support this relatively fair and equal space-sharing and decision-making in their socio-political circles in London.<sup>206</sup>

Dedeoglu describes the Turks, Kurds and Turkish Cypriots in the UK as the "injured communities of Turkey", as "the migration of these groups was due to deep socio-economic upheavals, conflicts and violence imposed upon certain groups who received injuries because of their religious and ethnic identities."<sup>207</sup> The migrants from Turkey (in the UK) that have suffered the gravest religious and ethnic injuries are from the Alevi and Kurdish communities, although there are other groups. The larger migrant populations in London coming from certain Alevi

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<sup>206</sup> For a detailed study of Alevi communities originating from Turkey, their identity construction, group formation and struggles for recognition in the diaspora in Europe, particularly in Germany, see; Martin Sokefeld, *Struggling for Recognition: The Alevi Movement in Germany and in Transnational Space* (Berghahn Books, 2008). Also see, Ruth Mandel, *Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging in Germany* (Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>207</sup> Saniye Dedeoglu, *Migrants, Work and Social Intergration: Women's Labour in the Turkish Ethnic Economy*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). Chapter 4 of this book is particularly helpful to understand why these communities feel "injured" and how these injuries are reflected in the Turkish speaking communities' ethnic economy in London.

and Kurdish-dominated districts of certain cities with symbolic associations such as Maras, Malatya, Sivas, Bingol, Dersim and Kayseri, reflect the ethnic and sectarian characteristics of these “Injured communities” of Turkey.

However, as already mentioned, the persecution and other aspects of the bitter past experienced by the Alevi minority in Turkey also function against their loyalty to Kurdish ethnicity at times. Some Alevi Kurds identify primarily as Alevi rather than Kurds. I attended a panel discussion taking place at the Halkevi Kurdish and Turkish Community Centre in Hackney concerning the Commemoration of Madimak Massacre (named after the hotel where the Alevi intellectuals were staying and were killed by an arson attack during an Alevi festival) committed by radical fundamentalists in Sivas, Turkey, on 2 July 1993. During the commemoration event, one of the young Kurdish male informants, whom I had already met at the 9th Annual Zilan Women Festival at the Kurdish Community Centre in Haringey, criticised the Alevis harshly, including Kurdish Alevis, his own community. He complained bitterly that “many Alevi Kurds in the UK do not acknowledge their Kurdishness and they substitute it with their religious identity”. He was finding this “unfair”, as the “Kurds are being persecuted as well as the Alevis”, so “both of these communities should be taken into account”, as “the Kurdish and Alevi identities should not be mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they should reinforce each other’s activism and protest.”<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Hasan (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 2 July 2012.



Photo 7: Madimak Alevi Massacre of 1993 Commemoration and Panel Discussion organised by the Halkevi Kurdish and Turkish Community Centre, Hackney<sup>209</sup>

Several members of the Kurdish diaspora I interviewed in London found it more convenient not to consider ethnic and religious/sectarian identities as hierarchically ordered. They preferred to see all sorts of injustices as unfair and all identities as precious and equal. My Kurdish informants (mostly of Alevi background), however, underlined the interconnectedness and harsher characteristics of multiple-layered discrimination experienced by certain groups: Alevi Kurds, Kurdish women, Alevi women, Kurdish workers, Alevi Kurdish workers and Alevi Kurdish women and the like. A Kurdish Community Centre activist I interviewed used the motto: "I am Alevi, I am Kurdish and I am a woman."<sup>210</sup> Another of my Alevi Kurdish interviewees touched on the issue of sexual orientation and strongly emphasised marginalised sexualities, mentioning homosexuals as another important group being oppressed by the

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<sup>209</sup> Photo taken by a London-based Kurdish activist whose Facebook profile name is "Kurdish Centre," Halkevi Kurdish and Turkish Community Centre, Hackney, London, 2 July 2012.

<sup>210</sup> Fatma (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 19 September 2012.

hegemonic patriarchal and heteronormative system, adding the LGBTI to the chain of disadvantaged groups in addition to ethnicity, faith and class:

B: ...Do you know what sort of a thing homosexuality is? On top of it, if she/he is also a Kurd... She/he would be oppressed first because she/he is a homosexual; second because she/he is a Kurd; third because she/he is coming from second/third class. Erm... let's not name it as "oppressed" but because she/he is second/third class citizen.

S: In regard to sexual orientation?

B: In regard to the problematic approach to her/him. These people are marginalised in so many ways. Maybe this should be one of your further research topics, in my opinion. Really tough... On top of it, if it is a woman, then she will be oppressed for a fourth time. What if we are talking about a homosexual woman. Even harder...<sup>211</sup>

Photo 8: Roj Women Association activists joined by Nursel Aydogan, pro-Kurdish BDP MP for Diyarbakir, Turkey, the guest speaker at the 10<sup>th</sup> Kurdish Women's Festival organised by the Kurdish Community Centre, marching to raise awareness about human rights issues of Kurdish women on the streets of North London 212



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<sup>211</sup> Berfin (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 3 June 2013

<sup>212</sup> Photo taken from Roj Women Website, accessed on 28 June 2013 via <http://rojwomen.org/>

Some of my informants that are active in women's branches of the Kurdish diaspora associations have expressed their concern about familial problems and how they affect not only women, but also children and men. It was quite interesting to observe that the concerns of Dilan, a young feminist Kurdish Alevi woman, about the maintenance of “family discipline” and the “stability” of community members through a healthy family life, were not very different from the concerns of Kurdish migrants coming from a conservative background. I started to find it more understandable, though, after I heard so often from many London Kurds and Turks that the rate of criminal offences and suicide is particularly high among Turkish and Kurdish youth in London. Most of my informants highlighted the fact that parents lack a healthy communication and interaction with their children, in addition to structural problems that second-generation migrants are facing in the UK that influence the sense of alienation of Turkish and Kurdish youth in London. Therefore, weak family bonds and inadequate knowledge and devotion of parents to their children, and hence a need for “family discipline,” is usually stressed by my informants in London:

...For instance, there are so many projects to *improve* the society at Halkevi. Or to put it this way: there are so many projects and efforts to *serve* the society. For example: consultancy services. Most of our (Kurdish) institutions give consultancy services. These are very important. Because, they (migrants) come to this country and one of the biggest problems of our society which I also criticise a lot is that they don't make any effort to learn English. They just arrive here and work. Of course this doesn't only affect language. I believe, the family discipline is affected very badly too. They lose a lot of things because of such concerns as to work harder and harder to get economically much better off. For instance, family discipline within that family... For instance, our children... Think that if the father works 20 hours a day and that mother looks after the child alone... And a weak mother... When I say “weak”, I mean a mother who can't give much to her child in terms of education. As the father is also inadequate in terms of education, both parents do not make an effort to improve themselves in terms of education when they come

to this country... Indeed, there are big opportunities. But we are such a society thinking like: "What else can I gain in terms of benefits from the government, in terms of economic gain? How can I be more powerful?" They lose with all those concerns.<sup>213</sup>

However, the core difference, in Dilan's critique, between the weak woman who does not know about life in general and child rearing, in particular, and the insufficient father that has little or no knowledge about child-raising, is that this type of father leaves all the burden of family maintenance to the females in the family. Moreover, the Kurdish women activists stress that women are important, not solely due to their status as mothers, but also as strong, independent individuals in the community and the greater society where they are supposed to partake as equals, in this case as Londoners:

S.K: So what is the role of the Kurdish Community Centre and Halkevi?

A: The role of the Kurdish Community Centre and Halkevi: They are both the same. They work for the community and to support and, you know, to advise and to bring people together... Or maybe try to support the Kurdish people to integrate. There is lots of things. There are lots of reasons. One of the things -a lot of projects are taking place actually- to support the Kurdish people to integrate into London. Because it's very hard for people that have come from a village and they can't speak any other language than Turkish or Kurdish. So, when they come here you need to get them some sort of support in a way to actually become part of the community in general, in London. And the Roj Women actually empower Kurdish women, to support them in many ways actually. Not just like integration or .... But things like domestic violence, things like supporting employment, career and trying to find things for them to -you know- make use of their time. Because a lot of women that come to London to carry on their lives, they immigrated, whatever, most of them come from an uneducated background. So that's very important. Kurdish women in particular come from an uneducated background. So they have always been oppressed by their partners, let's say. In many ways actually, so... So when they come here Roj Women tries to do something for them to support them in many ways.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Dilan (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 15 March 2013

<sup>214</sup> Asmin (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 27 March 2013



Many answers were heavily loaded with critiques of gender problems and with strong emphasis on the importance of the empowerment of women through civic engagement projects and free training facilities. This was a key message stressed by interviewees about the role of their diaspora association in general. It shows the rapid progress and a positive shift of the mindset by the Kurdish community in the diaspora. On the other hand, it demonstrates the vastness of problems that are gender-related within the greater Kurdish community, both in the homeland and the host country. All in all, the opportunities of the hostland, especially enabling civil society to be more powerful in such serious matters as gender equality and the like, seem to make Kurdish diaspora women more powerful, in having a stronger agency in decision-making and agenda-building processes in their community.

## CHAPTER VII: VISIBILITIES AND ALLIANCES AS PRIORITIES ON THE AGENDA

### A) Challenging the Invisibility of Kurdishness Abroad

Kurds in the diaspora are generally regarded as an "invisible" community.<sup>215</sup> From this standpoint, in spite of having a significant presence in terms of the space they occupy, the distribution of their population, as well as the effectiveness of their activities, one complaint of Kurds in London was the issue of not being referred to as Kurds, not being "recognised" as Kurds. Here I analyse the "invisibility" of the Kurds as various discourses and practices that fail to recognise or misrecognise<sup>216</sup> Kurdish individuals, either intentionally and directly, or unintentionally and implicitly. Charles Taylor argues that politics of recognition is a fundamental right to heal the "wounds" of social groups that experienced exclusion in various ways, such as non-recognition, or generally misrecognition, by being attributed negative qualities. Moreover, Taylor states that misrecognition has a deeper meaning than merely not giving the respect to one who deserves it. In other words, misrecognition can at the same time "inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition

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<sup>215</sup> Pinar Enneli, Tariq Modood and Harriet Bradley, *Young Turks and Kurds: A Set of 'Invisible' Disadvantaged Groups*, (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2005).

Also see, Russell King et al., *'Turks' in London: Shades of Invisibility and the Shifting Relevance of Policy in the Migration Process* (Brighton: University of Sussex, Sussex Centre for Migration Research Working Paper No. 51, 2008).

Also, Jane Holgate, Anna Pollert, Janroj Keles, "To whom do I turn when I am invisible? The experiences of

Kurdish workers who have problems at work" (Conference paper at the British Sociological Association Annual Conference, Cardiff, UK, 15-17 April 2009).

Also, Demir (2012): 815.

<sup>216</sup> Charles Taylor *et al.*, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1994): 26.

is not just a curtsy we owe people. It is a vital human need."<sup>217</sup>

While the political system and the established societal acceptance of Turkey place at the central axis the notion of not recognising Kurds, different communities originating from Turkey who migrate to foreign countries – despite the erosion of the notion of assimilation vis-a-vis diaspora – in actual fact reproduce these reactions. In other words, sometimes non-recognition and at other times homogenisation policies of the Turkish state, exercised towards its own citizens, go beyond the national territorial boundaries and become transnational. Turkish and Kurdish immigrants carry their homeland identities, influenced by the political culture of modern Turkey, with them to their new countries of settlement. In other words, political and cultural discourses rooted in the homeland as well as counter arguments to these discourses are transmitted to the hostland and reproduced there with new experiences of diaspora communities. Politically active diasporan Kurds, just like the Kurdish movement in Turkey, function as significant elements that break the routine of Turkish politics. They deconstruct<sup>218</sup> official Turkish identity, so as to make Kurdishness visible and/or increase its currently limited visibility. Immigrants from Turkey and of Turkish origin, meanwhile, experience the process of recognition/non-recognition that they started to face in Turkey differently, as well as adjusting their positions towards this process. In the matter of visibility/non-visibility of the Kurds, there is another decisive element

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>218</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). Even though the concept of *déconstruction*, which was introduced by Jacques Derrida in the 1960s, is in actual fact, a linguistic philosophical approach that primarily finds its home in literary theory, I use it here in order to refer to a political activism. In addition to holding subject to criticism by decomposing with its practical equivalents the Turkish (in fact according to some, being from Turkey) identity presented to the Kurds as 'a definition of common citizenship cleansed from ethnic implications', we can read in the context of deconstruction their efforts to create alternatives by themselves, as well as with the people of neighbouring countries.

other than Turkish state politics. This element, despite being seen as the most external, in fact accounts for the most important factor, the fact that states that achieve official/political recognition and their policies are still the most effective institutions and actors in the world. For instance, in terms of its own interests, the asymmetry in the state of the UK's approach towards the Turkish nation-state and its approach towards the Kurds from Turkey, who are considered an "ethnic" community, a "minority" without status, is very striking. Aside from bilateral economic relations, it is possible to say that in the context of the strategic relations with international organisations such as NATO and the European Union, compared to the Kurds from Turkey, the perception of Turkey from the viewpoint of the UK is by far at the forefront. Kurdish activists I interviewed in London are in agreement on this and on their complaints about it. The Iraq-Kurdistan Regional Government's acquiring certain economic and political power, by virtue of its official recognition by the 2005 Iraq Constitution, paved the way for the de facto recognition of Iraqi Kurdistan. However, in contrast with the Kurds from Iraq whose interests are beneficiary to the British government in terms of economic energy and infrastructural sectors, it is not possible for the Kurds from Turkey, who do not have a recognised status, separate from Turkey, to be as effective in the UK as is the Turkish government. Therefore, reading the diaspora of the Kurds from Turkey vis-a-vis the Turkish state entails exploring the struggle for power, as actors compete in an asymmetrical relation, a situation enforced by the nation-state system.

When we consider the practices of silencing and non-recognition in the academic field, which can also be seen as a natural consequence of the international system, we can understand why the Kurdish diaspora's struggle with this problem occurs. In Europe, and especially the UK, it is a fact that the main axis surrounding the debates of the academic and political circles on immigrant communities and minorities is maintained particularly around the (lack of) success of multiculturalism based on religious diversity.<sup>219</sup> In a context where even Turkish immigrants, who are seen as belonging to a higher category than Kurds, become invisible under the generalisation of Muslim immigrants, the invisibility of the Kurds from Turkey, who are reduced to a lower category among the "Turkish speaking communities", is intensely felt. For when a "Muslim immigrant" or "Muslim minority" is mentioned, what comes to mind, especially in the UK, is mainly South Asian Muslims. Politics and information technologies prioritise Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian Muslim communities. Therefore, in this picture, Kurds put up a fight for recognition not only against the official ideology brought to them from the "homeland" by their old –compatriots – the Turks– but also against the UK political and social apparatus dealing with immigrant communities.<sup>220</sup>

It is necessary here to present some aspects of how this struggle takes form at its base, taking the example of London, in order to understand the shape and direction of the efforts of the Kurdish diaspora on how to respond to the 'Kurdish question'. For example, "Turkish" children who take the British General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams also have the right to take a paper in Turkish. In comparison, it is important to see the Kurdish activists' efforts towards

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<sup>219</sup> Demir (2012).

<sup>220</sup> GCSE in Kurdish Campaign Website, accessed on 3 November 2013 via <http://kurdishgcse.org/>

recognition concerning the Kurdish language as separate from "Turkish-speaking communities", by running campaigns in support of GCSE in Kurdish in which emphasises their right to their native language.<sup>221</sup> It is evident that the Kurds in London, for various reasons, speak more Turkish than Kurdish in their daily lives. This is why I believe that it would not be incorrect to say that the main priority in the efforts of Kurdish Londoners is to get the group recognised through their native language, thus enhancing the security of their identity, rather than simply improving their linguistic or exam success. Another example of the efforts of the Kurdish diaspora in the UK for visibility and recognition are the campaigns that recommended to register in the 2011 census, in addition to "any other white" or "British" (if those were the marked categories), "Kurdish" in the blank space following the list of ethnic categories. We can say that this campaign too challenged the existential anxieties of identity and invisibility.<sup>222</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the plight of the Kurds with regard to their invisibility as an ethnic/national group is reproduced in the diasporic spaces. Neither the wider society and the state of their sending country, nor the receiving country, recognise their distinct identity, mostly due to the lack of a status for the entire Kurdish people, and this situation continues to be a big problem that affects the Kurds who come from all four parts of Kurdistan.<sup>223</sup> Consequently, diasporan Kurds are recognised in official and even academic papers under the categories of "Turkish", "Iraqi", "Iranian" or "Syrian". The invisibility handicap experienced by

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<sup>221</sup> GCSE Campaign: "Empowering the Future Generation of Kurds" Website, accessed on 3 November 2013 via <http://www.kssso.org.uk/2012/02/05/kurdish-gcse-campaign-empowering-the-future-generation-of-kurds/>

<sup>222</sup> "Census 2011: Make Yourself Visible as Kurdish", accessed on 3 November 2013 via <http://www.kssso.org.uk/2011/02/22/census-2011-make-yourself-visible-as-kurdish/>

<sup>223</sup> It should be noted that even the Kurds from Iraq, who achieved a significant level of autonomy by virtue of being recognised as the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and accordingly hold psycho-social advantages compared to the Kurds from other parts of Kurdistan, are still recognised officially in the UK as "Iraqi" or "Iraqi citizens".

the Kurds as a result of being a diaspora without a nation-state is observed in the detailed research report of the Greater London Authority about "Turkish speaking communities".<sup>224</sup> In some academic circles, Kurds in Europe, in our case in Britain, are put into the same basket with ethnic Turks from Turkey and Turkish Cypriots, all of whom are referred to as "Turkish speaking communities,"<sup>225</sup> which is a reductionist categorisation, if not discriminatory. It is necessary to problematise this categorisation for the Kurds who speak Turkish, not because it is their native language, but because they are obliged to do so. We can consider this categorisation to be a case of misrecognition rather than non-recognition. Here I must add that I heard many complaints about this misrecognition problem from the Kurdish activists I interviewed in London.

On several occasions over the course of my research, and in some other instances since I moved to the UK, I observed that Turkish migrants whom I knew or encountered, almost without exception, all define Kurdish migrants according to a relation based on their nationality, referring to the nation-state that they (the Kurds) left behind, despite the fact that the Kurds are an ethnic group that Turks are closest to and know best. In this context, ethnic Turkish migrants define the Kurds from Turkey as "Turkish" and the ones from Iraqi Kurdistan as "Iraqis" or "Northern Iraqis", although they know they are neither Arab, nor Turkmen, but definitely Kurdish. For instance, a kebab shop named after the biggest Kurdish city in Turkey "Diyarbakir" that is owned by a Kurdish migrant is referred to as "Turk kebapcisi" (Turkish kebab shop) by almost all of the Turkish migrants I met in London.

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<sup>224</sup> Greater London Authority, *Turkish, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriot Communities in London* (London: Greater London Authority, 2009), p. 7.

<sup>225</sup> Originally referred to as the 'Turkish Speaking Communities', this phrase turns into 'Turks in the UK' in daily language and especially among the Turkish migrants.

These attempts at "homogenising" the Turkish nation even outside Turkey can be interpreted as a reproduction of the "Turkification" policies of the modern Turkish nation-state, internalised by its citizens of Turkish origin.<sup>226</sup> Therefore, any positive value including of cuisine and business acumen is attributed to "Turkishness," which impels Kurds towards assimilation even in the diasporic space. This leads to certain reactive responses by the diasporan Kurds. As the political and physical environment they now live in is quite different from, and relatively more 'tolerant' than, that in their sending country regarding their ethnic identity, they do not even feel the need to emphasise and promote "Türkiyelilik" (being part of the society of Turkey), as opposed to "Türklük" (Turkishness) that connotes ethnicity. In other words, we can call this a reflection of the internalisation of the modern republic's Turkification policies by a significant part of the population at the level of its transnational diaspora.

One highly critical aspect of this issue concerning (non)recognition and invisibility is hidden in these daily and, on the surface, ordinary examples that need to be inspected carefully. If positive values and meanings are to be attributed to Kurds in many different areas of their lives, in terms of their cuisine which is capable of becoming a brand, and various fields based on vocational skills in particular, this is done so as to emphasise Turkishness, making it independent

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<sup>226</sup> I first came across such terms as *homogenising the nation* and *Turkification* in the various works of Ayhan Aktar, a Turkish sociologist working on the nation-building processes especially in late Ottoman and early Republican Turkey with special emphasis on non-Muslim minorities. Ayhan Aktar, "Cumhuriyetin ilk yıllarında uygulanan 'Türkleştirme' Politikaları" in *Tarih ve Toplum*, no. 156 (1996): 4-18; Ayhan Aktar, *Varlık Vergisi ve 'Türkleştirme' Politikaları* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000); Ayhan Aktar, "Turkification' Policies in the Early Republican Era" in *Turkish Literature and Cultural Memory* edited by Catharina Duft (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009): 29-62. Also see Mesut Yegen's work that investigates the evolution of "Kurdishness" and ethnic/non-ethnic citizenship vis-à-vis Turkish state discourses and practices; Mesut Yegen, *The Turkish State Discourse and the Exclusion of Kurdish Identity, Turkey: Identity, Democracy, Politics* (London: Frank Cass, 1998). In this respect, the impact of "ideological apparatuses" of the state, in an Althusserian sense, should be noted: Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* translated by Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971): 127-188.



from the fact that these aforementioned individuals are Kurdish. Instead of referring to successful examples that deserve praise or positive comments as "Kurdish music", a "Kurdish restaurant", or, for example, "a successful Kurdish student", it has become virtually a rule to present them as "Turkish music", a "Turkish restaurant" and "a successful Turkish student".

Despite the strong assimilation in Turkey being questioned and corroded by Kurds who struggle to assert their identity in the diaspora, it is rather difficult for this struggle to succeed against the dominant-nation dynamics, especially under the circumstances of a competitive and integrationist market. The market is on the side of the powerful, and the one perceived to be weak will either lose whatever power it still holds, or fade away completely, unless it agrees to be part of the powerful. In her study of Kurdish male migrants' reconstruction of their ethnic identity through food in the ethnic economy of Hackney, East London, Sarah Keeler makes interesting observations confirming some of my observations on the Kurdish migrants especially in Haringey, North London. Keeler states:

The realities of "people needing to earn a living" can often be seen to conflict with possible desires to express loyalty to, or assert identification with, a particular sense of "Kurdishness". Placement within the ethnic economy, and variable positionality according to differences of age, gender, or social class internal to the so-called "Kurdish community", can also lead to considerable ambiguity in the ways and means considered possible or desirable for expressing ethnic identity. At such times, the lives of informants became interstices for cross-cutting sentiments and pragmatic concerns relating to livelihoods and beliefs about identity, with food culture serving to bridge these tensions.<sup>227</sup>

As a case in point, we can look at the state of Kurdish migrants who, despite strongly opposing the assimilation of their Kurdish identity, give names to their businesses such as "Turkish Delight", "Turkish restaurant" or "Turkish

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<sup>227</sup> Keeler (2007a): 174.

barber," due to understandable reasons ranging from wanting to be accepted to adopting the name of the bigger part that is seen as more prestigious, in order to compete successfully in the market. On the other hand, when you come across these same migrants on other occasions and find the opportunity to converse on a one-to-one basis, when they feel comfortable enough to trust you beyond their commercial concerns and when they sense that you are from the "inside", you see that they are highly critical of Turkey. My thoughts on this were confirmed at the Newroz celebrations organised by the Kurdish associations in London, when I came across a group of Kurdish shopkeepers whom I observed to be in a similar situation and knew personally, and saw them enthusiastically waving flags bearing the national Kurdish colours of green-red-yellow (*kesk u sor u zer*), which has become a political symbol.<sup>228</sup>

Based on her fieldwork, Keeler discusses the identity issues of Kurds in Hackney by emphasising the role of ethnically demarcated economic setting that they work in, and explains how this setting shape their strategies of becoming "Kurdish", the difficulties of this process and ambiguities created by it. Keeler states that:

Certainly, among Kurds in Hackney, only the most well established entrepreneurs can "afford" to display highly visible signifiers of particularly politicized "Kurdishness," or, as one informant explained to me: "Most people wouldn't risk putting this [flag or maps of Kurdistan] up, because they'd be afraid to lose their Turkish customers, who they need for business."<sup>229</sup>

One of the reasons for this apparent contradictory behaviour can be explained with what I call *hegemonic willingness*, which is inspired by Gramsci's concept of

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<sup>228</sup> The aforementioned event took place on 24 March 2013 at the Newroz festival in Finsbury Park, London. "Newroz 2013 Celebration of Kurdish New Year in London" accessed on 11 November 2013 via <http://www.citizenside.com/en/photos/culture/2013-03-24/76651/newroz-2013-celebation-of-kurdish-new-year-in-london.html#f=0/686467>

<sup>229</sup> Keeler (2007a): 175.

consent.<sup>230</sup> Being defined by the dominance of others as something other than what you are, without your consent, causes a negative response. We can see this in the context of diaspora, where this pressure is relatively less and at least not direct, as a state of accepting by consent a kind of hegemony under a community which is bigger, as well as closer, in terms both of culture and communication. On the other hand, this hegemonic willingness that the Kurds in the diaspora perform can be interpreted as a strategic act that they proactively choose. In the context of diaspora, this choice of Kurds leads to strategic alliances with the Turks, who are fellow migrants in London. Keeler discusses this complex set of relations created through social antagonism, alliance and ethnic resistance through the "language of food":

...whenever Kurds in the diaspora perceive attempts to obscure their identity in anyway, cultural practices and traditions call upon this history of oppression and inform the relations with Turks in the migratory setting, with whom there is a considerable degree of interaction (particularly in commercial encounters within the ethnic economy) and an equally high level of social antagonism. However given the pragmatic demands for solidarity required to access resources made available through agencies such as local government, the Home Office or the Refugee Council, Kurds do at times ally themselves with their better-established Turkish counterparts. This means that, rather resulting in open conflicts at the community level, the social antagonisms tend to be somewhat latent and usually expressed informally through verbal asides and digressive social encounters. In the course of conducting fieldwork, the most commonly used vehicle for expressing such resentments was through the language of food.<sup>231</sup>

This situation also brings to mind the principal motifs of the seemingly contradictory general state that Kurds from Turkey are in, in the diaspora. It reminds us that they are cutting ties with Turkey, but also battling with it and

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<sup>230</sup> Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds., *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London: ElecBook, 1991): 145.

<sup>231</sup> Keeler(2007a): 171.

demanding rights, while missing the "homeland", which is conceptualised by Demir in terms of the "battlefield" metaphor.<sup>232</sup> In my opinion diasporan Kurds continue this struggle not only against Turkey, the "Turks" and the British public, but also against themselves and their own contradictions regarding their individual and collective subjectivity. The struggle with the latter will be effective in determining the borders and tone of the visibility of the Kurds.

## **B) From Local to Transnational**

One of the most critical suggestions towards answering the Kurdish Question by the mainstream Kurdish political movement, which corresponds for the most part to the grassroots of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK; which is recognised as a terrorist organisation by the US, EU and Turkey) in Turkey, as well as legal political parties that succeed one another such as the Democratic Society Party (DTP) and the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), is a demand, a "request for status" by the Kurds for the integration of an autonomous administrative model in Turkey.<sup>233</sup> Even though Kurdish politics officially explain this situation as a non-ethnic project<sup>234</sup> aiming to make the administrative structure manageable, in different contexts and in conversations and discussion outside of the official party statements, the Kurdish dimension of the issue is also stated. They, however, still openly and strongly support 'Turkiyelilesme' (Turkey-fication) of the Kurds *as Kurds*, while denouncing the earlier demands for secession from Turkey and proposing a solution to the Kurdish Question through the recognition of the

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<sup>232</sup> Demir (2012).

<sup>233</sup> Kavak (2012a): 172-174.

<sup>234</sup> For a detailed study on the subject see Büşra Ersanlı and Halil Bayhan, "Demokratik Özerklik: Statü Talebi ve Demokratikleşme Arzusu" (Democratic Autonomy: Request of Status and the Desire for Democratisation) in Büşra Ersanlı, Günay Göksu Özdoğan and Nesrin Uçarlar (eds.) *Türkiye Siyasetinde Kürtler (Kurds in Turkey's Politics)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2012): 203-250.

Kurdish identity and rights within the current territorial borders of Turkey<sup>235</sup>. While the boundaries of "Kurds" in this desire for voluntary integration or Turkeyfication are not very clear, the goal is to value the acknowledgement of a Kurdish identity and of rights in relation to this identity.<sup>236</sup>

Yet the picture changes somewhat in the diasporan space. Although most of the politically active diasporan Kurds I have come across in London are almost exclusively BDP supporters, their discourse regarding their link to 'being part of Turkey' is weaker than their fellow Kurdish 'comrades' in Turkey. They refer to Kurdish-populated areas in Turkey in a number of ways on different occasions as *kuzey/bakur* (north), meaning "Northern Kurdistan" *Turkiye Kurdistan* (Kurdistan of Turkey). However, when they talk about their informal daily routines, like visiting Turkey to spend their holidays in their hometown, i.e. Maras or Dersim, they describe it as "Turkey". Yet, when it comes to a political issue, they insistently name their hometown as "Kurdistan", *ulke/welat* (the country), or at least indirectly they refer to it with demonstrative pronouns such as *ora/orasi* (there) rather than Turkey. Therefore in several cases diasporan Kurds are squeezed between naming their hometown in their cultural and imagined political boundaries, namely "Kurdistan", and official formal names like *Turkiye* (Turkey). They can display more freely their Kurdishness and the fact that they are coming from *Kurdistan*, as opposed to coming from *Dogu* or *Dogu Anadolu* (East [of Turkey]

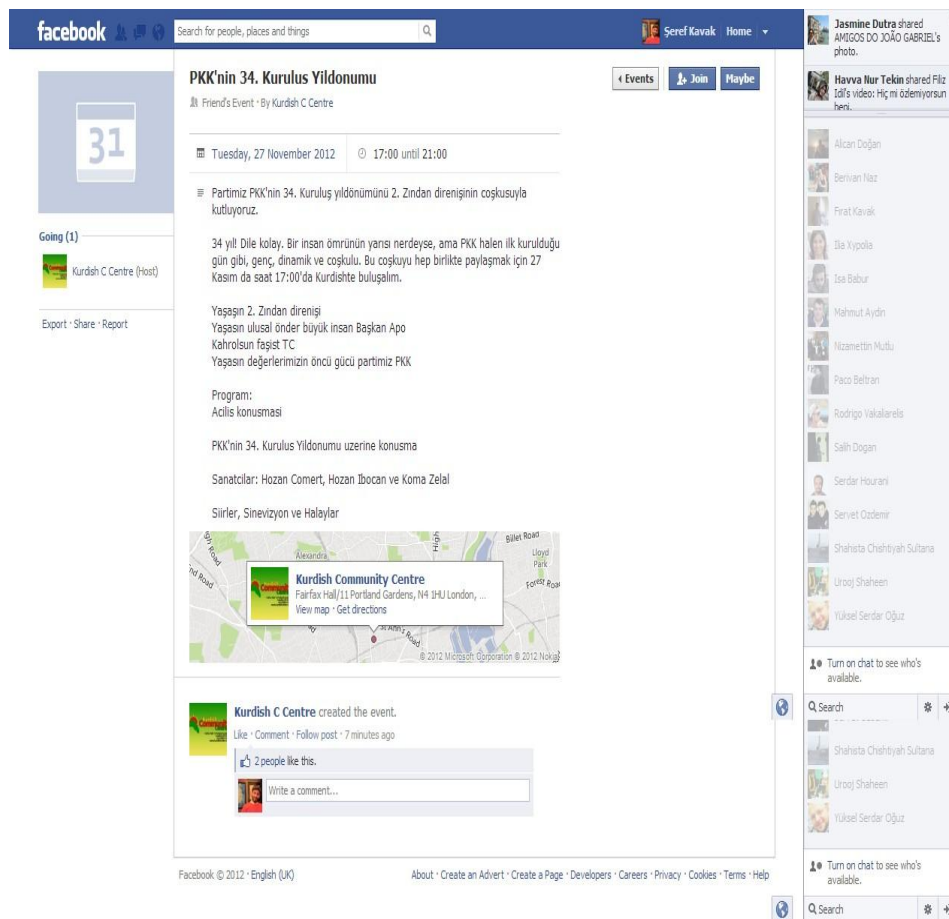
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<sup>235</sup> My earlier works have touched upon the question of "Turkeyfication" (*Turkiyelilesme*) dealing with it particularly based on the internal dynamics of the Kurdish legal political party the Democratic Society Party (DTP), its voters; and MPs' approaches to the question of 'ethnic identity vs. national integrity' see Seref Kavak, *Kurdish Ethno-political Transformation in Turkey: Between Ethnic and Non-ethnic Political Agenda*, (LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012b); Seref Kavak, *The Democratic Society Party as a 'Party for Turkey': Official and Grassroots Politics of a Changing Identity (2005-2009)*, MA thesis, (Bogazici University, 2010).

<sup>236</sup> Kavak (2012b): 66-70.

or Eastern Anatolia). However, on the occasion they encounter Turkish migrants, they are not as free and comfortable to utter their ethno-national identity, possibly because they might be intimidated and face accusations relating to allegations of links with terrorism.

Figure 6: Facebook Event Invitation for the “PKK’s 34<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration” at the Kurdish Community Centre, Haringey, 27 November 2012<sup>237</sup>



<sup>237</sup> "PKK'nin 34. Kurulus Yildonumu", event Invitation by a London-based Kurdish activist whose Facebook profile name is "Kurdish Centre", 27 November 2012

This caution is also related to global policy changes towards the concept of "terrorism" that also influenced the UK. After the 2001 Terrorism Act in the UK, the PKK was listed as a terrorist organisation by the British authorities. King *et al.* state that "Kurds from Turkey who claim asylum in the UK stating persecution due to their membership of, or association with, the PKK, could risk imprisonment under the Terrorism Act. At the same time the Kurdish television station MED-TV, which broadcasts from the UK, was closed down by the British government due to breaches of impartiality and claims that it incited people to commit criminal acts".<sup>238</sup> According to that study, all these events are indicators of "how diaspora politics and the struggle for Kurdish national recognition have the potential to escalate into a sensitive political issue between the UK and Turkey."<sup>239</sup> When I asked my interviewees and informants what they thought about the stance of the British authorities towards the Kurds from Turkey, they all responded in a similar manner, complaining about the political, national, interests-based relations the UK has established with Turkey, which in the end causes underrating of Kurdish political demands regarding the Kurdish issue in Turkey. Baser's findings from his 2010 fieldwork on the mobilisation of the Turkish and Kurdish diasporas in Germany and Sweden are echoed in European countries in the concerns with "terrorism" and "being associating with crime" that I encountered in the UK. This restricts the radius of action and mobilisation of the Kurdish diaspora.<sup>240</sup> Accordingly, the solution to the state-PKK conflict and the Kurdish Question in Turkey should be evaluated in relation to both local and global political developments. This is of great importance concerning the shape

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<sup>238</sup> King et al. (2008): 11.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Bahar Baser (2013b): 40-41.

of things to come in the lives not only of those who live in Turkey, but also of others who live in the diaspora.

One of the strategies that the Kurds in London employ to survive as 'political Kurds' is to attempt to build indirectly mostly imaginary contacts with their "homeland" through diasporan political debate and activism. The debates mostly centre on the sending country (the countries that share the Kurdistan geography) and the 'homeland *within* homeland"<sup>241</sup> which refers to the non-recognised 'Kurdish homeland' within Turkey and even beyond its boundaries. In that respect, the recent developments in the Middle East which have been called "the Arab Spring" have had a certain influence on the hopes and expectations of the Kurdish diaspora in the UK. This can be observed in their use of daily phrases referring to different parts of "Kurdistan". Before the Arab Spring the use of the geographical wording 'Southern Kurdistan' for the Kurdistan region in Iraq and 'Northern Kurdistan' for East and South-East Anatolia regions in Turkey, was already common. Along with the already popular usages of north (bakur), south (başur) and to a certain extent east (rojhelat) Kurdistan, the increasing usage of Rojava (west), when referring to Syrian Kurdistan, and the focus on Rojava, are undoubtedly related to the period of the Arab Spring awakening. The public uprising in Syria against the Asad regime has enabled Syrian Kurds to hold

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<sup>241</sup> Tanıl Bora, "Milli Coğrafya'ya Bakmak" (Looking at the National Geography) *Birikim Magazine*, 26 October 2006, accessed on 13 November 2013 via <http://www.birikimdergisi.com/birikim/makale.aspx?mid=223> Tanıl Bora's use of the phrase "homeland within homeland" which he borrowed from İsmail Habib Sevük's work *Yurttan Yazılar (Writings from the Homeland)* differs from the context in which I use the concept here. Bora uses "hometown within hometown" within the framework of Sevük's, as one of the nationalist writers of the republican regime, "building a national picturesque with geographic romanticism". "Vatan içinde vatan" (hometown within hometown), as how I used it in English for the first time in a 2012 migration conference without being aware of its previous usage by Sevük point to the Kurds' dual-nation perception, the indecision about their sense of belonging to a broad community and the dualism in their ongoing efforts in creating a collective identity.



power in northern towns of Syria and this is a source of inspiration for diasporan Kurds, as well as Kurds in Turkey. Many of my informants and diasporan friends on social media started using the word *Rojava* (West), when referring to Syria's Kurdish-populated towns very frequently, and in an over-optimistic way, as if that region had already been recognised as part of a Greater Kurdistan like its Iraqi counterpart. The "victories of fellow Kurds in the Rojava Kurdistan" were always on the agenda among diasporan activists and media circles, and in cultural/national festivals. When we examine all this regional restructuring that effectively started reshaping Kurdish nationalism, along with the initially secretive but later (after Newroz 2013) public peace talks between the government and the imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, the whole affair becomes particularly tangled. As a case in point we see the Turkish state's indecisive and confused politics against the growing possibility of the Syrian Kurdish administration gaining a status similar to that of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq. This new situation developing in the lead of the Syrian Kurdish movement's *Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat* (PYD; The Democratic Union Party), which is the closest relative and companion of the PKK-leaning Kurdish movement in Turkey in terms of ideology, institutions, linguistics and culture, condemns the Turkish state, which is preparing to make peace with the PKK, to an indecisive historical reflex.<sup>242</sup> The *de facto* recognition, at least to a certain extent, of Iraqi Kurdistan, which was previously ignored by being referred to as "Northern Iraq" instead of "Iraqi Kurdistan", and whose legal political actors were belittled as tribe leaders, followed its increasing importance in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq, as well as the establishment of good commercial and political relations yet to be implemented in

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<sup>242</sup> Cengiz Çandar, "Kürtler İçin Yeni Dönem- 'Devlet' İçin Rojava Dersi" (New Era for the Kurds- Rojava Lesson for the 'State'), *Radikal*, 24 July 2013.

the case of Syrian Kurdistan. However, when peace with Kurds in Turkey is on the agenda, and when the aforementioned characteristics of the Syrian Kurds with regard to Kurds from Turkey, as well as their global and regional conjuncture being considered of vital importance, a reasonable approach to the Rojava (West Syria) problem becomes apparent. As has been frequently stated recently, the Kurdish Question, beyond being a local issue that its four parts face separately, now contains the attributes a broader Kurdistanism and macro-regional internationalism and transnationalism. This is why we must search for the solution in a new transnational vision.

### **C) Predominance and Unity in the Prioritisation of Leadership: *Apoism***

Kurdish diaspora politics in the UK is carried out by various organisations run mostly by Kurds and some groups consisting of Kurds and Turks of leftist background as well (for instance, the DayMer Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre run by socialists and the Kurdish Advice Centre close to the Kurdistan Socialist Party *PSK*). The majority of the activists and lay members are of Kurdish origin. The DayMer Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre in particular is a good example of this hybridisation. Furthermore, in addition to the compatriot associations and the London Cemevi (Djemevi) founded by those who came from towns populated by Alevi Kurds, we can also see non-governmental organisations concerned with issues and/or subjects such as women, environment, social justice and participation, which also provide substantial support in relation to aspects of the Kurdish Question on the diaspora platform. Among all the Kurdish diasporan associations, the two that are prominent in terms of both members and capacity to mobilize the Kurds, the Kurdish Community Centre and Halkevi. What makes these

two organisations relatively more influential can be traced to their sympathy and support for the PKK cause among quite sizeable numbers of Kurds from Turkey during its deepening struggle for nearly three decades.

In parallel with the movement dominating the politics of the Kurds from Turkey, being a PKK-leaning Kurdish movement, the prioritised position of the strong "leadership" in this movement is also evident in the diaspora. In other Kurdish movements, it is evident that the growing popularity of, for example, Kemal Burkay at Komkar or historical or contemporary political figures from Iraqi Kurdistan, leads to their acceptance as charismatic leaders able to evoke in the public strong feelings of excitement and admiration. However, the reasons for what makes the PKK-leaning Kurdish movement different in this regard are: the prioritising of the "leadership" idea in both theory and practice; the formulating of an ideology around this idea; and the acceptance of this ideology for the most part by the movement's grassroots.

We can see in the diaspora the reflections of the processes taking place in the homeland in varying shapes and at different scales. At this point, it is noticeable that the leadership of the PKK embodied in Abdullah Ocalan, aka *Apo*, functions almost as a spiritual motive for the political mobilisation of diasporan Kurds from Turkey. Therefore, many diasporan activists use their tools of publicity and participation with strong and direct references to Ocalan himself as a 'national leader'. In the Facebook invitations to any event, including festivals, protests, panels and outreaches, two items are inevitably used: the colours green, red and yellow (*kesk-u-sor-u-zer*) symbolising 'Kurdish nationhood,' and Ocalan's picture as the complementary element to the 'national unity' and 'solidarity' around the personality and ideals of the leader. This, in addition to the PKK flags implying

*serhildan* (revolutionary uprising). Naturally, in this picture, it should also be acknowledged that there is a case beyond revering Ocalan as a cult figure, to look to his identity and his ideals as a leader. This case can be attributed to the need for a father figure in order to rid the nation of a sense of sorrow, empowering them to believe they can play an effective role in overcoming their condition of being a "stateless nation". For this reason, it is important to note that Ocalan's being a priceless figure for the grassroots of the Kurdish movements cannot be explained as a mystic as cult or an obsession; instead, at the very most, it resides in the PKK's being perceived to be the leading, nation-building party, or simply the Kurdish "vanguard party"<sup>243</sup>.



Photo 9: "Youth Branch of the Kurdish Community Centre greets the Olympic Torch for the 2012 London Olympic Games in Wood Green, London holding a banner saying "Freedom for Ocalan, Status for Kurdistan"<sup>244</sup>

As a case in point, in most of the posters used in Kurdish diaspora events

<sup>243</sup> Ali Balci, *The PKK-Kurdistan Workers' Party's Regional Politics: During and After the Cold War* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): 126.

<sup>244</sup> Photo taken by a London-based Kurdish activist whose facebook profile name is "Kurdish Centre", Wood Green, London, 25 July 2012

Ocalan's (or other prominent PKK figures) pictures are complemented by PKK flags which have become, as mentioned above, a symbol of national revolutionary uprising. Therefore, the fact that diasporan politics usually operates through "transnational"<sup>245</sup> means and mechanisms is also apparent in the primary position attributed to, and major motivation deriving from the 'leader' of the major Kurdish movement. As Demir suggests, Kurds' 'battle with their '*memleket*'<sup>246</sup> (their sending country which has sovereignty over the Kurdish hometown) [and in my view all the *memlekets* including other parts of Kurdistan in Iraq, Iran and Syria as well] are 'contingent upon the developments' taking place in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. In this vein, significant developments in Turkish politics and those of the Middle East, and more generally Kurdish activisms emerging proactively or in an oppositional manner in Turkey, also affect diasporan activists and thus the nature of their activities. The increase in the velocity and pace of the activism and the struggle within the homeland also gives momentum to diaspora activism. This activism that I call *upbeat political activism*, apart from its organising aspects, can be thought of as drawing its motivational power from the idea of leadership and the legitimacy that comes with it. From this perspective, in diasporan circles, we can see that the leader is positioned in such a way as to have the best interests of his or her people rather than his or her own. For instance, politically motivated hunger strikes started on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2012 by Kurdish prisoners, many of whom are BDP members and are accused of ties to the PKK. These were a very telling example of this activism. Protests have taken place in various central sites in London, i.e. Trafalgar Square, the Prime Minister's

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<sup>245</sup> Wahlbeck (2002); Bruinessen (2000).

<sup>246</sup> Demir (2012).

Office, the Foreign Office, the Turkish Embassy, and Wood Green Station. They draw the attention of the public to the situation of solitary confinement of the PKK leader, who has been given a life sentence and banished since his arrest in 1999 to a small island near Istanbul called Imrali. These protests highlight the fact that Ocalan has not been able to, or (according to Turkish authorities) has not accepted to see his advocates. Once approximately 700 political prisoners accused of PKK links started a hunger strike on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2012, Kurdish activists started to publicise this immediately on social media and through personal communication means, including phone texting and news-making on the weekly *Telgraf* released by Halkevi, the Kurdish Turkish Community Centre. In the later phases of the hunger strike in the Turkish prisons, when it reached 40 days, several Kurdish activists in London started a four-day hunger strike in solidarity with their comrades in Turkish prisons.<sup>247</sup> Other demands voiced by the hunger strikers and the diasporans included the Kurdish language rights in education, courts and other public spaces in Turkey. Yet the main focus and emphasis has been on the release from solitary confinement of Ocalan, and, for some, “freedom for Ocalan”.<sup>248</sup> This motto had been repeated on several other occasions where the diasporan activists marched for - in their own words - “the rights of the Kurdish people,” which are usually summarised in their slogan “Freedom for Ocalan, Status/Peace for Kurdistan.” The diasporan activists in London who were on hunger strikes in solidarity with those in Turkey were wearing T-shirts with

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<sup>247</sup> Peter Marshall, "Kurds go on Hunger Strike in London," Demotix, 25 October 2012, accessed on 1 November 2012, via <http://www.demotix.com/news/1548345/kurds-go-hunger-strike-london#media-1548335>.

<sup>248</sup> "London: Hundreds protest in solidarity with Kurdish hunger strikers", The Exeter Daily, 20 October 2012, accessed on 1 November 2012 via <http://theexeterdaily.co.uk/news/uk-news/london-hundreds-protest-solidarity-kurdish-hunger-strikers>.

various slogans on them: "The peace envoy is at Imrali" refers to the PKK leader at Imrali prison, which implies, firstly, that they expect the Turkish state to genuinely involve Ocalan in a peace process in the ongoing Kurdish conflict, and, secondly, that they regard Ocalan as 'serok' (the leader of the Kurdish people).<sup>249</sup> When observed at the time of the 2013 Newroz, the latest peace period, it is evident that these demands previously seen as "wishful" or "dreaming" had in actual fact already started to be taken seriously and to be responded to by the Turkish state. It is also evident that the Turkish public can now respond to this sensitive issue with a relatively less hostile reaction.

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<sup>249</sup> For critical analyses of 'leadership' in the Kurdish movement and the PKK from two different stances see  
Alice Marcus, *Blood and Belief, the PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence* (New York: New York University Press, 2007)  
Ali Kemal Ozcan, *Turkey's Kurds; A Theoretical Analysis of the PKK and Abdullah Ocalan* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006)

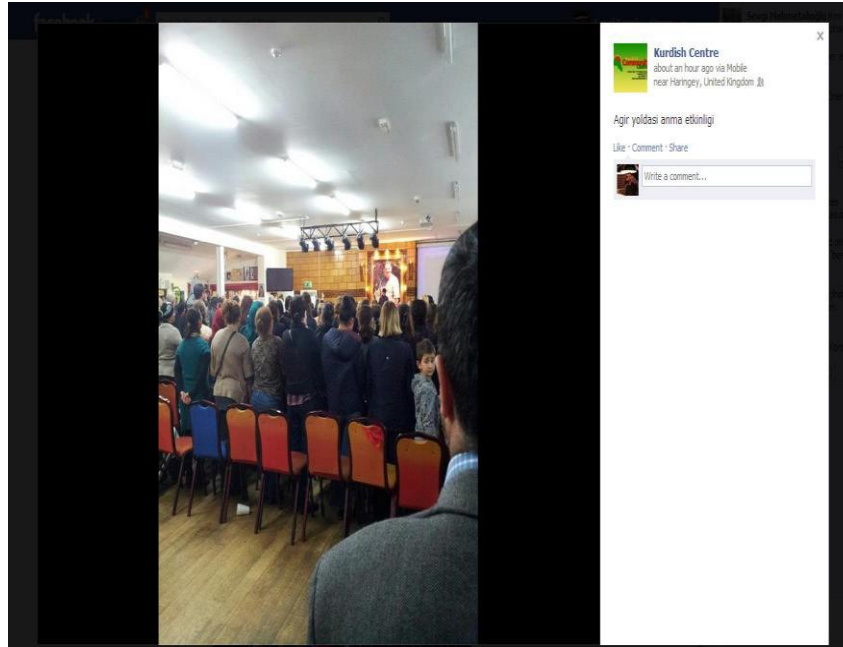


Photo 10: “Commemoration of Martyrs: in the Memory of PKK Comrade *Agir*” of the Kurdish Cause at the Kurdish Community Centre<sup>250</sup>

#### D) Civic Participation as a Defensive Strategy in a Securitised Europe

My informants, most of whom actively take part in the struggle for the Kurdish cause, reflect a common concern and plight that they have been experiencing in a securitised post-9/11 world. In other words, they avoid being labelled as ‘terror’ sympathisers by supporting the Kurdish cause and seeing the PKK as a freedom movement rather than merely a guerrilla group, let alone a “terrorist organisation”, in spite of the strict US, EU and Turkish labelling on it as such. This post-9/11 conceptualisation of terror as a broader framework has

<sup>250</sup> Photo taken by a London-based Kurdish activist whose facebook profile name is “Kurdish Centre”, Kurdish Community Centre, Haringey, London, 14 October 2012. This commemoration ceremony was also covered in transnational, pro-PKK, pro-Kurdish newspaper *Yeni Ozgur Politika*, published in Germany and distributed all over Europe. The news coverage was appraising the sacrifices this guerrilla fighter made, starting from his joining the PKK as a university student from Europe in 1993 and then fighting until he died in 1998. As the martyred *Comrade Agir's* immediate family lives in London in the diaspora, they attend the ceremony alongside some 600 diasporan Kurds, gathered at Kurdish Community Centre in Haringey. *Yeni Ozgur Politika*, accessed on 20 January 2015 via <http://www.yeniozgurpolitika.org/index.php?rupel=nuce&id=13995>



intimidated not only the PKK movement itself, but also various levels and manifestations of the Kurdish movements asking for further rights and political demands for the Kurdish people. Experiences of several diaspora activists I have talked to reflected this quite clearly, especially when I asked questions about the status and political links of their community centres and diaspora associations in London. In general, my informants strove to detach their associations from almost any form of “political” activity. They rather preferred to highlight the community services and cultural affairs aspects of their centres:

N: Who come and go... Of course it comes to mind when you say a community centre. For example they come to make use of the services; they have expectations like this. Services, what are these? English courses for example. Many people come here and register for our English course. Activities, and what are these, let me tell you again; culture, arts, education...<sup>251</sup>

The reasons behind this oversimplification of the role of Kurdish diaspora associations can be best observed in Nursel's words, when she mentions the obstacles she encountered as a Kurdish folk dance teacher at Halkevi:

N: As a folkloric dance instructor I can say that I had many troubles.

S: Such as?

N: Umm.. For there to be students, for them to have continuity. Some used to say "I have exams. My family gets angry with me because of it. They say I should pay attention to my exams more than I do my folkloric dance practice. That is why they do not want me to go". First. Second, they want to keep their children away because this is a political association.

S: How do they put that into words?

N: “You cannot go there. They brainwash you...”

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<sup>251</sup> Nursel (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 10 September 2013

S: But the people who come here, that is the Kurds, are mostly Alevi Kurds. There is an evident exclusion of them from the society, and are these not people who were oppressed precisely for those "political reasons" they are fearful of? Is this not an odd situation?

N: Exactly exactly.. But there is also this. You say, "This is not an issue. Even if you come to the class you will not teach in two hours". I came across parents who say "You are not doing anything worthwhile, you do not need to go!" There were parents I argued with face-to-face. "You are doing something wrong", or "We should keep our children away from these things", they said. We already live in a foreign country. We can at least see each other, hold onto each other by engaging with these activities, doing things together. Sustain our culture.

S: When you say these things (she interrupts)

N: It can elicit the opposite reaction sometimes.

S: Are the families concerned for their children's participation due to political reasons close to the Kurdish movement?

N: Sometimes I have children from among them like this: children from families who did not say they were Kurdish, Turkish or Alevi or who identified as Sunni Turks despite being Kurdish. Or I had many other students who attended my classes. This caused me a lot of problems. The parents would phone me and one family in particular phoned me and spoke in a very threatening manner... Like, "I do not want my child to go there. We are not Kurdish, we are this, we are that" etc. there were families like this among them. But sometimes I think I battled very well to be honest. And I had students among them who continued for five-six years despite having these problems. And I took them to cultural arts festivals in Germany, in different countries.<sup>252</sup>

Nursel's experiences as the folk dance teacher of the Halkevi are full of descriptions of handicaps and resistance from the parents of the Kurdish children in London to. This reveals another aspect of political imports from the homeland politics. The citizens of Turkey, including the Kurds even in a greater scale and deeper fashion due to harsh ethno-national oppression, were already politico-phobic in their homelands. Now in London, these people, who were already

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<sup>252</sup> Nursel (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 10 September 2013

frightened to partake in any form of political activity, still avoid talking of politics and showing their political hats. However, they have found other means and strategies to survive as homo-politicus. In this case, the London diaspora activists use softer terminologies and conceptions of diaspora politics that would not sound as 'political', as hardline political activity. In other words, they do politics, yet they attempt to sound as least political as possible, especially in the sense of high politics and institutional political bodies, such as the PKK, or illegal actors relating to it. That seems to be the very reason why the activists overemphasise the community centre civic participation aspect of their associations, while they are conducting a great amount of hardcore and upbeat political activism relating to issues of high politics, such as the civil war in Syria and Iraq, the danger of radical Islamism, the armed struggle of the Kurdish people in all parts of Kurdistan, global imperialism and invasions, racism, and the like.

When I asked him the ideological differences, if any, between Halkevi and the KCC, and if they are both ideologically in the same line as the PKK, Mahsum answered: "*We aren't on the same line as any political part*", which was a completely diplomatic yet rhetorical expression that did not convince me at all.

S: Well, how is the relationship between these two associations – the KCC and the Halkevi?

M: Halkevi, in the end, is an association founded by a community of people from Turkey and Kurdistan. An association very close to us. But we are two independent associations because we are both separate associations.

S: Are they not both in line with the PKK?

M: We, as associations, do not do nothing [sic] ourselves according to the ideological, political line of thought of any political movement. For us, if [they] are Kurdish, [if they] came from Kurdistan, we must be sensitive towards that geography and prioritise the freedom of our community. We see ourselves as responsible, sensitive like this. We try to fulfil the

responsibilities that we have for the Kurdish public to live justly, equally, freely. Halkevi is also a sensitive association on these issues, as am I. But in the end [they are] two separate associations, independent from each other. We, I repeat, do not represent a political party ideologically, politically. We are not an ideological, political representative of any party. We do not operate on their behalf. We do not have the right to act in their name anyway.<sup>253</sup>

When I asked this very same question to Sinem, one of my informants from the Halkevi, she even refused to answer my question and asked me about my own ideological thoughts.

S.K: Well, what are the political preferences of this association? Why do you think these preferences are important?

S: I have never been asked about political preferences before. You tell me what your political preference is so that I can understand the question.

S.K: It would not be right for me to say because I am doing the interview.

S: I got it, Okay. Then let us skip this question because I did not understand what you mean by political preference.

Then, she gradually softened her tone about my asking this question to her in my capacity as a researcher and gave indirect answers:

S.K: Let us say the principles of the association, ideologically?

S: First of all, of course to serve Kurdish society. This is our, Halkevi as well as Kurdish Community Centre's principle. To serve the Kurdish society, err, to develop the society. Of course..

S.K: These correspond more to practical needs, although ideal things, serving the society and all..

S: to hold the community together..

S.K: A little background, that is. With "What was your preference?" I did not mean conservative, nationalist etc.

S: Two associations serving socialist thought, socialist

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<sup>253</sup> Mahsum (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 1 September 2013

ideology...

S.K: What are your principles? For example, you are not conservative nationalist as an association. Or are you, why am I influencing? Maybe it is a conservative association, I do not know.

S: My own identity err..No no not a conservative association, not nationalist either. But of course [it is important] not to forget your own society, for example socialist, err, protecting your Kurdish identity. Err, like living in the diaspora, and not forgetting who you are, that is.<sup>254</sup>

In a similar fashion to that of Mahsum's answers, Sinem attempted to portray the Halkevi as more of a community centre that gives by and large civic community services like educational and cultural trainings to the Kurds in the UK to integrate them into British society. By emphasising that they are not political/ideological representatives of any party, the Kurdish diaspora activists are in a way trying to broaden their space of manoeuvre in an ever securitised European space, unlike that of the Middle East, where 'hard' power through arms and physical human power are the main variable and legitimising tools for order building.

On the one hand, the ever-securitising environment of the post-9/11 conjuncture imposes a harsh self-censorship on the pro-PKK diaspora discourse; on the other hand, there seems to be a gradual diversification of ideological streams within the pro-PKK Kurdish circles in London. For instance, there used to be only Abdullah Ocalan's portrait hanging on the wall of the performing stage of the KCC building in Haringey. However, in a recent visit to the KCC for a fundraising event for Kobane, I realised that the portrait has been modified at the performing stage of the main hall, by adding the portraits of several other figures of Kurdish leaders who have led the Kurdish liberation movements in other parts

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<sup>254</sup> Sinem (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 7 July 2012

of Kurdistan, with different political/ideological stances, including Shex Seid, Qazi Muhammed and Melle Mustafa Barzani. Nevertheless, I should note that none of the Kurdish national movements figures who are alive, such as Mesud Barzani, Jalal Talabani, Kemal Burkay etc. are included, except Ocalan, the jailed PKK leader. Here, the significance of the emphasis on the unity of the leadership within the Kurdish nation and its competing leaders can be very clearly observed, as I mentioned in earlier sections of the thesis. Still, this is an interesting sort of pan-Kurdish tendency, re-embraced on by the major pro-Kurdish diaspora association in the UK, and it can hardly be considered independent from the new phase of the ongoing Kurdish struggle in the Middle East, particularly against the ISIS aggression in Rojava, (Syrian Kurdistan) and Iraq.

M: We sometimes invite representatives of all the parties that have a place in Kurdish politics. They come and join the meetings and conferences here. This is only the Turkish Kurdistan [association]... For example, you see more often [references to] the PKK with regard to Turkish Kurdistan. But the PKK has a big influence on the other parts. Both in Southern Kurdistan and in Western Kurdistan for instance. The PKK is present in Eastern Kurdistan too. In Iran for example... The PKK has a big influence and force of attraction. The power to influence and attract people. And we invite people in those parts also to our conferences, events. And we also invite representatives of revolutionary, democratic Turkish associations, institutions in Turkey. For example, for this Zilan Festival we invited all the representatives of Turkish revolutionary democratic associations currently existing here. They also came and some made speeches. The same way, for example, when Sebahat Tuncel came, the deputy chair of EMEP came with her. They came again. There were those who came before. I cannot remember each name at the moment but we have receptions for them and they often attend. From the Syrian Kurds, for instance, our friends come and do things [sic] not just from a single party but, as I said, from many parties. For example a festival, a Kurdish Language Festival, was organised here. Many activists from around the world attended that festival, using social media. Not all of them were people supporting the PKK.<sup>255</sup>

While Mahsum was trying to show that the KCC is inclusive of all different

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<sup>255</sup> Mahsum (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 1 September 2013

political groups among the Kurds in the diaspora, he stresses the impact of the PKK in the other three parts of Kurdistan, in addition to Northern Kurdistan (Turkish Kurdistan). However, his answer itself reveals the fact that they are still mostly in touch with groups of people that are either under the direct influence of the PKK, or somewhat sympathising with it. The turnouts of the events at the KCC in London and the overall human capital visible there verify this fact.

It seems from my informants' answers and the actual events that I attended during my field experience in the pro-PKK Kurdish associations, that they have been relatively willing to include people from various ideological stances from other parts of Kurdistan. However, they appear to narrow down their focus on the pro-PKK movement, especially the Turkish Kurdistan stream of that movement. They do not seem to include other oppositional *Kurdish* movements from Turkish Kurdistan which, it can be argued, do not reinforce and reproduce the hegemonic leadership and organisation of the pro-PKK movement in the politics of Turkish Kurdistan.<sup>256</sup> In this vein, the Kurdish movements from neither right nor left of the ideological spectrum, for instance, federalist socialists gathering around KOMKAR of Kemal Burkay and conservative Islamic Kurdish groups like those aligning with Huda-Par (Kurdish Hizbullah), the pro-independence Islamic Azadi movement, are invited by the mainstream hegemonic Kurdish associations in the diaspora. Nevertheless, it would be very significant to note that the pro-PKK movement, in a similar manner to its politics at home, is quite eager in its diaspora political activism to be so inclusive as to welcome and encourage the Turkish leftists, socialists, democrats, seculars and feminists to join their circles, not just as

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<sup>256</sup> For the hegemonic power of the PKK and the pro-PKK movement in the diaspora see; Baser (2011): 17-18.

a PR campaign, but also to work together in actual everyday politics. The Kurdish diaspora activists are opening up to all those different non-Kurdish (mostly left wing Turkish) groups with full pride and systematic planning. What the mainstream Kurdish political movement in Turkey calls the “Turkey-fication project”<sup>257</sup> (Turkiyelilesme Projesi) is the theoretical and motivational source of this policy in the diaspora. While the PKK and the pro-Kurdish legal actors such as the DTP/BDP, then HDP, DTK etc., pursued policies embracing the entire society of Turkey in coordination with leftist, feminist and democrat segments of the Turkish public figures and groups and proactively named it the project of Turkey-fication, the mainstream Kurdish diaspora institutions and figures also followed this path and strove to include the above-mentioned groups in their circles. Several works illustrate various aspects of this intra-Turkey inter-communal (Kurdish and Turkish) political solidarity taking place in the diasporic space as well.<sup>258</sup>

As already mentioned, these sort of super-inclusive alliances have strong implications for homeland politics that in a way prevails over that of the hostland, namely diaspora politics. The PKK-oriented political actors, constituting the hegemonic core of Kurdish politics in Turkish Kurdistan, have seemed to be more eager to have direct and indirect alliances with the Turkish socialist actors in Turkey, rather than Kurdish actors with different political stances, especially with

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<sup>257</sup> Kavak (2012a): 157. When I interviewed major MPs and co-chairs of the pro-Kurdish parties DTP/BDP such as Ahmet Turk, Sebahat Tuncel, Sirri Sakik, as well as the party grassroots officials of all levels, during my fieldwork for my master's thesis, I heard about the “Turkeyfication Project” very often in a consistent way from almost all of my interviewees. Hence, it was quite in parallel to the official documents of the pro-Kurdish parties, as well as illegal yet dominant actors, such as the PKK and its leader and theoretician Abdullah Ocalan.

<sup>258</sup> Demir (2012); also, Bahar Baser, *Inherited Conflicts: Spaces of contention between second-generation Turkish and Kurdish diasporas in Sweden and Germany*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Florence: European University Institute, 2012.



political tendencies contesting those of the PKK, that can potentially threaten the status of the PKK movement as the *vanguard party*<sup>259</sup> of Kurdistan's revolution. In relation to this, pro-Barzani groups originating from Turkish Kurdistan and their currently fragmented followers in the legal political arena may constitute a threat to the already strong status quo in the power balance within Turkish Kurdistan, as they can be seen as external or at least temporary power holders, just as centre-left, centre-right and Islamist parties respectively CHP/DSP, DP/DYP and RP/AKP are. Therefore, one cannot read this alliance of pro-PKK Kurdish and left-wing Turkish groups' politics, exported from homeland to the diaspora, independently from the impact of the Turkey-fication experiences of Kurdish actors, especially in the last two decades, in Turkey and Turkish Kurdistan. The influences of the vanguardist ideology of the PKK can be observed on its followers in the diaspora. This is how Mahsum defines their responsibility to "educate their people" and "give them a true consciousness" as a movement/diaspora association's mission towards their people:

We have missions that we are responsible for, on the one hand, to educate the society about the issues occurring in his/her own country, to raise awareness and on the other to help them integrate into this country. These are responsibilities we are an association. We try to do these.<sup>260</sup>

This vanguardist leadership approach of the Kurdish movement towards Kurdish people reminds us of the positivist modernist project of the Republican elites of early Turkey, who founded the People's Houses (Halkevleri) as a means to

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<sup>259</sup> Vanguard party is a political/ideological term coined by Lenin. V. I. Lenin, *What is to be done* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1973). "We shall have occasion further on to deal with the political and organisational duties which the task of emancipating the whole people from the yoke of autocracy imposes upon us. At this point, we wish to state only that the *role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory.* (p.29).

<sup>260</sup> Mahsum (pseudonym), interview by the author, tape recording, London, UK, 1 September 2013

“educate the Turkish people, especially in the countryside, and give them a firm “consciousness” and belief in the Turkish republican revolution founded after the collapse of the Ottoman monarchy. The Halkevleri of the 1930s-1940s in Turkey had a left Kemalist/socialist fusion ideology that supported the ruling Republican People’s Party (CHP) and pioneered a left-wing positivist modernism to the un-enlightened masses of Turkey.<sup>261</sup> After the 1980 military coup Halkevi (People’s House) associations have been operating as community centres promoting civic engagement of the people, especially from lower classes; providing them free or very cheap courses on arts and sciences and supporting human rights and other democratic pillars of our time. They still keep their socialist, anti-imperialist discourse alive, up to the present. This Turkish-style socialist community centre system has been another example of the export of homeland politics to the diaspora, together with its original institutions and methods. The migrants coming from Turkey in the 1970s and in bigger numbers in the 1980s gave birth to the establishment of a Halkevi (People’s House) in east London to deal with the problems of Turkish migrants settled in the UK. Especially in the late 1980s, and well through the 1990s, Kurdish refugees outnumbered Turks and the Halkevi association then started to be seen more as a Kurdish diaspora association with socialist leanings inclusive of Kurds and Turks in the diaspora, to solve their immediate problems, as new settlers first, and then to help them to become voluntarily integrated into the socio-economic system of the UK and to be “conscientious” citizens and pro-human rights Kurds and Turks. Despite certain parallels to the origins of the Halkevis, the post-1980 Halkevis in the diaspora had a broke away from the Kemalist Turkish ideological hardline by

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<sup>261</sup> Halkevleri Website, accessed on 13 January 2015 via <http://www.halkevleri.org.tr/hakimizda>

embracing the Kurdish reality and naming themselves the “ Halkevi Kurdish and Turkish Community Centre ”.

The genealogy of this left-wing Kurdo-Turkish alliance in the diaspora can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s, when the early generations of Turks and Kurds settled in European cities, constituting a lower social class made up of labour migrants. Then the Turks and Kurds in those countries had to gather together for such issues as workers’ rights, migration- related deprivations and other daily life obstacles faced by minority communities. The migrants’ pursuit of justice and betterment of life qualities motivated the Kurds and Turks from Turkey to work hand in hand in certain migrant institutions and associations. The Halkevi Kurdish and Turkish Community Centre was the first of its kind of association, founded in London in 1984.<sup>262</sup> It started off as more of a Turkish socialist association in its infancy, but gradually evolved into a Turkish-Kurdish common ground where migrants from Turkey gathered in pursuit of their social, economic and political rights and demands in the UK. However, since the politically lively years of the 1990s, especially since the Kurdish population from Turkey poured into the UK in larger numbers than Turkish labour migrants, alongside the post-coup political refugees of the previous decade, the Halkevi has ended up being a Kurdish diaspora association attended mostly by Kurds from Turkey and Alevis of both Kurdish and Turkish background. Some of the associations of the Turkey-originated diaspora have had similar experiences as that of the Halkevi, such as the Day-Mer. The fact that the Day-Mer was founded in 1989, which was

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<sup>262</sup> Alessio D’Angelo, “Kurdish Community Organisations in London: a Social Network Analysis” (Middlesex University School of Health and Social Sciences, Social Policy Research Centre, Working Paper, n.2 (2008): 40.

quite a few years after the Halkevi's establishment, at a time when the Kurdish migration to Europe and hence to the UK was accelerating, has meant that the Day-Mer has focused on both Turkish and Kurdish communities.

Since its establishment, the DAY-MER has concentrated and put on the emphasis in its work especially on issues that the Turkish and Kurdish people encounter as people who live and work in London. In the early period of its establishment, when the largest influx of Turkish and Kurdish people to Britain was taking place, the DAY-MER concentrated on the problems of Turkish and Kurdish people regarding immigration, settlement and formation as an ethnic community.<sup>263</sup>

From the festivals, events and community services that the Day-Mer provides, one can tell they represent a bilingual, bi-communal and bi-cultural vision, recognising Turks and Kurds as separate, distinct groups, yet at the time in perfect solidarity. Their left-wing, mostly socialist, worldview feeds this solidarity strongly as it bases itself on universalist themes of freedom and equality of individuals and peoples. In this respect, rather naming the Day-Mer a Turkish or Kurdish diaspora association per se, I would coin the term *socialist solidarity diaspora* to describe the type of diaspora category the Day-Mer fits into best. Several informants I have talked to that have attended and been activist in Day-Mer circles have expressed their left (usually socialist), feminist or democrat identities rather than their ethnic (Turkish or Kurdish) or religious identity (Alevi, Sunni or atheist). Nevertheless, it is ultimately ethnic (Turkish and Kurdish).

Another factor in the Kurdish alliance with Turkish leftists in the diaspora is hidden in the hostland circumstances, in which both groups are, at best, minority groups, if not foreigners. Therefore, both Turks and Kurds in the diaspora feel that they need to gather together to form a strong and viable front against certain

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<sup>263</sup> Day-Mer Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre Website, accessed on 10 January 2015 via <http://www.daymer.org/content/about-daymer>

deprivations, for example, economic (the ethnic economy and its market appeals mostly to Turks and Kurds in the UK), political, social and cultural.

A final factor is related to the sectarian relations within Turkish society. The Alevi- Sunni relations among Turkish-speaking communities are thought to be much easier when the sides are more secular or left-wing. An Alevi Turkish citizen is usually politically in touch with secular and/or left-wing groups in Turkey. In a similar manner, the Kurdish diasporans of the UK, a large part of whom are known to be of the Alevi faith, naturally ally with Turks of socialist, secular, democrat or social democrat tendencies, rather than with conservative or Islamist Kurds, although they both come from the same ethnic background. The Alevi factor, unlike other parts of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe, is much more visible in the UK, considering the fact that the Alevi districts and villages are first senders of Kurds from Turkey, i.e. Elbistan, Pazarcik, Sariz, Nurhak, Dersim etc. Some of those Kurdish Alevi in the diaspora do not even prioritise their Kurdish identity, but wear their Alevi hat first, as they feel that they are discriminated against even more, as their *mazhab* (sect) is part of Islamic heterodoxy vis- a-vis the Sunni orthodoxy that is more common both among Turks and Kurds in the homeland.

The excessive security concerns of Kurdish activists have certain productive and destructive consequences for Kurds in the diaspora. The main negative outcome is the existing fear of politics prevalent also in Turkish society, to such a great extent that it includes the Kurds, seemingly the most politicised segment of society since the 1980 military coup. On the other hand, the extreme pressure of order-building through legal political activity and civic engagement has pushed the Kurds to demand their rights in various aspects of their life that were

conventionally seen as part of 'low' politics, or issues of secondary importance vis-a-vis the national liberation. This includes gender politics, ecological issues, social security and welfare issues, education and socialisation problems and cultural development issues, rather than 'high politics', such as the PKK's status, disarmament, political recognition and local autonomy.

## **CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSION**

This thesis has attempted to reflect on the overall picture of Kurdish diaspora politics with particular focus on community politics taking place in London. In so doing, the political activities by the Kurds from Turkey have been contextualised within the scope of a transnational politics of diasporas as non-state actors, moved by their strong physical and psycho-social ties to their homeland, even as they now live in a 'new homeland'. Only a few major themes relating to political activism have been discussed here, whereas several others have been left for further investigation, due to the constraints of scope and the context of this research. The diasporic experiences of political refugees from a socialist background, of both Turkish and Kurdish ethnicity, and of Alevis as a religious minority group comprising both Turks and Kurds, are explored in comparison with the plight of Kurds from Turkey. Finally, the self-positioning(s) and juxtaposition of the Kurdish diaspora communities from all four parts of the 'Kurdish homeland' can be compared, while touching upon the diasporan politics of the groups migrating from Turkey, which is a sophisticated example of a 'bridge function' based on Turkey's position as officially being a Western ally, on the one hand, and politically and culturally a blend of Southeast Europe and the Middle East on the other.

This work has examined the political expectations and practices of diasporan Kurds; however, due to the boundaries of this study, I could not touch enough on the points of differentiation and interaction concerning different Kurdish diaspora groups. The demand for a democratic regime where "the rights of the Kurds" are recognised in the broadest sense has emerged as the most essential point of commonality. A period of ceasefire and a "democratic solution" that can

lay the foundations of this new era is supported by virtually all of the groups in the diaspora. It should not be forgotten, however, that the optimism is located within an uncertain environment. Just as in the homeland, the wider masses observe the hope for peace (which I can say was received much more enthusiastically by women) with a critical eye and without separating it from the "realpolitik", these sentiments are also present in the diaspora. At the various discussion platforms that I attended, in different diasporan circles, I can say that there was serious criticism regarding the principles, that the then present peace process is based upon, demanding they be more lasting, just, realistic and transparent; and this criticism was expressed in a more open way compared to the level of discussions in Turkey. I would also like to emphasise particularly that I came across diasporan individuals who, in spite of their trust in the leader, nevertheless demanded at the level of public debate that this "leadership" be more transparent and accountable in this latest peace period.

Apart from the Turkish Kurdish diaspora group, it should be noted that there is a considerable diasporan activism from other parts of Kurdistan, Iraqi Kurdistan in particular. However, the cooperation of these groups with the Kurds from Turkey seems to be very limited. The socio-political and ideological stance of the diaspora of the Kurds from Turkey plays a role in this low level of cooperation between the two groups.<sup>264</sup> It is noticeable that for an ethno-nationalist diaspora, Kurds from Turkey residing in the UK are in much closer contact and cooperation with ethnic Turks who migrated to the UK, instead of connecting with the Kurds from Iraq more. Over the course of the "Turkey-

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<sup>264</sup> Ipek Demir and Welat Zeydanlioglu, 'On the Representation of 'Others' at Europe's Borders: The Case of Iraqi Kurds', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 18, no. 1 (2010): 7-23.



fication" (Turkiyelilesme) process which has accelerated in the past decade, the influence of the modifications of the homeland Kurdish politics concerning "ethnic politics" and ethnic party formation on diaspora politics may explain this peculiarity. Nonetheless, when we look at the political superstructure that experiences the Turkification process and claims to carry out such a "project" voluntarily, as well as its ethnic grassroots which criticises but continues to support this structure, the other half of this new political identification can be seen more clearly. The Kurds from Turkey, having been "integrated" and "Turkey-fied" for a relatively long time also started to experience the Kurdistan-ification (Kurdistanilesme) process more openly, in the past few years in particular. We cannot separate this new Kurdistanification that has been into Turkey's politics in pragmatic ways of deliberate eclecticism including "democratic-national unity", "democratic autonomy" and "democratic confederalism", from the dynamic reshaping of the Middle East and from the strategic neighbourhood relations. Trans-border regional actors of Kurdistan occasionally vary and they even sometimes take opposite sides. However, we can predict that this pragmatism will appear more as the main political instrument of the new-age Kurdish politics and its actors. While the discussion on a just and permanent solution for the century-long Kurdish Question continues, as has often been stated lately, beyond the allegedly disconnected local issues of the four different parts of Kurdistan, now it is necessary to employ broader Kurdistani, macro-regional international and transnational perspectives as well.

Therefore, we must seek wisdom in a new sort of transnational perspective, if we aim to bring a long-lasting solution to the Kurdish question. In this vein, it is

necessary for the Turkish state and society to encourage participation and multi-actor politics, and to speed up their implementation, more than ever, if they want to survive with minimum "damage" after the reshaping and meeting the status demands arising from Kurdistan, as well as the broader Middle East. In the case of Kurdish peace, it can be argued that a wide-scale consensus has been formed by actors ranging from diaspora to homeland; from regional dynamics to influential global powers. Consequently, it is crucial to discuss how to implement a system based on the distinctive properties of post-peace Kurdistan(s) via realistic models to ensure pluralist, participatory and decentralised governance.

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13 March 2012

Mr Seref Kavak  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
DW1.48  
Darwin Building  
Keele University

Dear Seref

**Re: 'Ethnic Lobbying as a Diasporan Political Strategy: The Case of Kurds from Turkey in Britain'**

Thank you for submitting your revised project for review.

I am pleased to inform you that your project has been approved by the Ethics Review Panel.

The following documents have been reviewed and approved by the panel as follows:

Document	Version	Date
Summary of Proposal	2	12 March 2012
Letter of Invitation	2	12 March 2012
Information Sheet	2	12 March 2012
Interview Questions	-	12 March 2012

If the fieldwork goes beyond the date stated in your application (August 2012) you must notify the Ethical Review Panel via Michele Dawson.

If there are any other amendments to your study you must submit an 'application to amend study' form to Michele Dawson. This form is available from Michele (01782 733588) or via <http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchethics/>

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact Michele Dawson in writing to [m.dawson@uso.keele.ac.uk](mailto:m.dawson@uso.keele.ac.uk)

Yours sincerely



PP Dr Nicky Edelstyn  
Chair – Ethical Review Panel

CC RI Manager, Supervisor