The invisibilisation of Kurdish: the other side of language planning in Turkey

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In: Conermann, S. & Haig, G. (eds.) *Die Kurden: Studien zu ihrer Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur*. Schenefeld: EB-Verlag (2003), pp. 121-150 (page breaks in this version may differ from the original)

1 Introduction

Since the founding of the Turkish Republic, successive governments have engaged in deliberate efforts to influence the language that Turkish citizens speak and write, and how they do so. By far the most prominent aspect of these campaigns is what is collectively termed the Turkish language reform, by which is meant the cumulative efforts to purify, standardize and enrich the Turkish language. From the very outset, the Turkish language reform has been characterised by highly symbolic and public acts of state. Atatürk himself was personally involved, a national language insitution, the *Türk Dil Kurumu* was established, and the status of Turkish as the state's sole official language was stamped into successive Turkish constitutions. Few of Turkey's reforms have commanded such long and intense public attention as the language reform has.

The language reform is a fine example of what is known as **language planning**, that is, "efforts to influence the behaviour of others with respect to the acquisition, structure or functional allocation of their language codes." (Cooper 1989: 45). The commonest, though not only, type of language planning is conducted by the representatives of a state and is directed towards the citizens of that state; I will restrict my use of the term to this type of language planning. It is notable that the above definition of language planning encompasses at least two aspects. First, there are efforts to effect changes in the form of the language itself (e.g. the words, the grammar, the orthography). This aspect is commonly referred to as **corpus planning**; the Turkish language reform has largely been concerned with corpus planning. Second, language planning encompasses efforts to influence the "functional allocation" of languages within the state, that is, the choice of languages or dialects which are used by citizens for particular purposes or contexts. I refer to this aspect of language planning, following Haugen (e.g. 1983), as **status planning**. Thus if a state decrees that all state education must be conducted through the medium of a certain language, this is an act of status planning, because it determines the choices citizens have in the languages they may use for certain functions. Turkey, like all states, has also engaged in status planning. For example, although a considerable proportion of the populace speak a language or languages different from Turkish (and considerably more did so at the founding of the Republic than do so now),

the sole language for all official purposes is, by state decree, Turkish, and other languages are largely excluded from official domains. The language most obviously affected by these measures has been Kurdish, by far the largest of Turkey's minority languages.

But whereas Turkey's efforts in the field of corpus planning took the form of an overtly-formulated strategy within the nation-building project, one which sought and received the active participation of the populace, the other side of language planning in Turkey, the exclusion of non-Turkish languages, has been less visible: Neither the motivation, nor the measures employed have been explicitly formulated in publicly accessible state directives. Furthermore, up until the 1990's, there was virtually no public debate on the matter, and certainly nothing to match the massive controversies surrounding corpus planning. Correspondingly, there is a complete lack of mention of these aspects in the vast literature on Turkey's language reforms.

This paper attempts to redress the balance by presenting a brief synopsis of what has arguably been state policy regarding the use and status of Turkey's largest minority language, Kurdish.[1] Such an enterprise is rendered considerably more complicated by the fact that, as mentioned, such policy has been characterised precisely by a **lack** of overt policy formulation, by indirect or masked reference, or systematic lack of reference to Kurdish, rather than positive assertions, officially formulated agendas, or public debate. I will nevertheless maintain that an official policy existed, but it needs to be reconstructed largely indirectly through the examination of the formulation of official documents, or state-sanctioned public discourse, across a considerable time frame.[2] I will refer to the policy as **invisibilisation**, a term that stems from Skutnabb-Kangas (2000: 354). It is of course a time-honoured strategy among nation states to maintain silence on minorities, as Héraud (1963: 22) points out. But invisibilisation, in the sense I use it here, implies more than mere silence. It can be informally defined as follows:

[1] It needs to be emphasised that the policy of invisibilisation affected **all** the minority languages of Anatolia, e.g. Laz and various varieties of Neo-Aramaic as well, and some readers may feel that the present paper unjustly ignores these issues. I am well aware of them, but my focus on Kurdish is dictated by the theme of this volume and by personal research interests.

[2] Similar conclusions on Turkey's policies have been reached by other linguists, although the perspectives and the terminology differ. From the point of view of linguistic human rights, the seminal work has been conducted by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and her associates — see especially Skutnabb-Kangas & Bucak (1995), Skutnabb-Kangas (2000: 514-522, *passim*), and further references therein. Balci (1994) and Havrest (1998) also contain useful material. On the Internet, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have published extensive documentation on violations of rights to freedom of expression and use of minority languages in Turkey. For a perspective more closely reflecting the Turkish state's standpoint (and with a correspondingly different selection of material), see Oran (2000) and Yağmur (2001).

Definition of invisibilisation

Invisibilistion is the deliberate removal, or concealment, of the overt signs of the existence a particular culture, with the aim of rendering that culture invisible. It is part of the logic of invisibilisation that the policy and its implemention remain covert, because overt formulation would mean increased visibility.

The main thesis of this chapter is that a remarkably consistent state policy of invisibilisation has been pursued with regard to Kurdish, and the bulk of the paper is concerned with martialling the available evidence in support of this claim, focusing on the way official discourse on the Kurds in Turkey has been, and continues to be, formulated.[3] The second thesis is that official policies on the Kurdish language should be seen as an organic element of language planning in Turkey, fuelled by the same desire for Turkish cultural homogenity and inspired by a long tradition of state intervention in the language habits of its citizens. A more balanced account of language planning in Turkey would therefore not be restricted to the highly publicised campaigns to modernize and Turkify the Turkish language, but also to the other side of language planning, the invisibilisation of non-Turkish languages.

2 The roots of invisibilisation: the role of Turkish nationalism in the new Republic

Prior to the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the Kurds were one of numerous minority groups that coexisted within the Ottoman Empire. The relationship of the Kurds to the Ottomans was complex, characterised by shifting loyalties, periods of cooperation and, towards the end of the Ottoman Empire, growing insurgence culminating in the Sheikh Ubaydallah rebellion of 1879. Nevertheless, the existence of the Kurds, their local organisational structures, their language and their homeland, Kurdistan, were never in any doubt and are well documented, for example in the seventeenth-century chronicles of Evliya Çelebi (cf. Bulut 1997). Indeed, even as late as the 1920's, the term *Kürdistan* aroused no particular offence in official documents (Yeğen 1999a: 114), although it has since been eradicated from official usage (see below). In the late nineteenth century, Kurdish intellectuals in Istanbul formed several political societies and published a number of journals in Kurdish (see Strohmeier, this volume). Thus in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Kurds possessed undeniable public presence as a distinct group within the Ottoman Empire, with their own political and cultural organisations. There is a general consensus that during this phase, Kurdish nationalism had its beginnings (White 2000: 58-59).

Of course over a similar period, Turkish nationalism was emerging as the major political force within the disintegrating Ottoman Empire. In the pre-Republican phase of Turkish nationalism, the attitude of the Turkish nationalists towards the Kurds, though not clearly

[3] For a broader view of how the state has chosen to refer to, or not to refer to, Kurdish matters see Yeğen (1999a, 1999b). Unlike the present chapter, Yeğen's work examines state discourse on Kurdish matters in general, without a particular focus on the language. Furthermore, developments after 1980 are not treated in any detail.

articulated, was certainly not outright negative. For example, as late as 1920, the *Felâh-i vatan grubu* ('Group for the salvation of the fatherland'), a political group dominated by Atatürk and the nationalists, formulated the *Misak-i millî* ('National Pact') which laid down the nationalists' aspirations in their struggle for independence. As Steinbach (1996: 109) notes, even at this late date the National Pact did not refer to the rights of the Turks, but to the rights of all "Moslem Ottomans", a formulation which clearly recognizes Turks and Kurds. A further indication of the ambivalent attitude of the pre-republican Turkish nationalists was revealed in an interview Atatürk gave to journalists in Izmir in 1923. In the course of the interview Atatürk openly discussed the possibility of autonomous Kurdish regions within the new state.[4] It was not until 70 years later, in the early 1990's, that such a solution was once again aired in public by a Turkish politician.[5]

However, after the ratification of the treaty of Lausanne in 1923 (see below), the victorious nationalists' attitudes to the Kurds underwent a fundamental and irrevocable shift: Essentially, there was no provision made for recognizing the existence of a distinct Kurdish minority within the new state. Kurdish schools and institutions were closed, publishing activity largely ceased (although it continued in the diaspora), and references to the Kurds, to Kurdish, to say nothing of Kurdistan, largely dried up in official usage. Steinbach (1996: 349) gives the following assessment of the official standpoint on the Kurds (my translation):[6]

> Ever since the founding of the Republic, Turkey's political elite have systematically attempted to deny that Kurds as an ethnic, linguistic and culturally independent people exist within the territory of the new state. At times bizarre arguments have been employed to dismiss the fact that within the state's boundaries there are millions of people with distinct cultural roots and whose native tongue is not Turkish. They have been declared "Turks", albeit linguistically and culturally primitive versions, for example "mountain Turks".

What motivated the about-turn in Turkish policy towards the Kurds? This is a question too complex to be dealt with in any detail here, but two factors that shaped the new policies deserve mention. First, the notion of minority as it was anchored in the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923. Second, the nation-building project embarked on by Atatürk and the nationalists. Let us deal briefly with the Treaty of Lausanne first, signed on 24. July 1923 by representatives of the Turkish nationalists and the allies. The treaty provided the internationally binding legal framework for the new State, laying down its borders and guaranteeing its sovereignty. It also contained a number of provisions for the non-Turkish minorities that were destined to become

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[4] The content of the interview was first made public in the journal *2000'e doğru* in 1987 (Şahin & Kaufeldt 2002: 242). See also Yeğen (1999a: 114-115) for additional material on the attitudes of the pre-republican nationalists to the Kurds.

[5] In 1993 then-Prime Minister Tansu Çiller stunned the nation with the suggestion of a "Basque model" for the Kurds, but this solution has been either ignored or rejected outright by Turkey's decision makers since.

[6] For similar conclusions see, among many others, Yeğen (1999a: 110), Bozarslan (1996) , or Ciment (1996: 145).

citizens of the Republic, including their rights to language use (articles 38-44). However, and this is the crucial point, "minority" was defined in terms of religion: only those groups who were not Moslems were treated as minorities. Thus the most important provisions for rights to language use applied only to the comparatively small minorities such as the Orthodox Greek Christians (most of whom later underwent forced resettlement to Greece), the few Armenians who had survived the pre-republican massacres, the Assyrian Christians, and the Jews. The vastly more numerous Kurdish minority, however, received no mention whatsoever and was thus bereft of any internationally binding legal protection.[7]

Such a narrow view of minority is of course incompatible with contemporary international legislation. However, it should be borne in mind that at the time of the Treaty, the allies would have perceived the new state as being a decidedly Moslem state. And if we recall that prior to the Treaty, at least a million Armenians had been permanently removed from their Anatolian homeland, it is perhaps understandable that the prime concern at that stage was the protection of non-Moslem minorities. Finally, as I mentioned above, prior to the Treaty there was little evidence that the Kurds were to become undesirable elements, i.e. little evidence that the new state would embrace ethno-nationalism as a central pillar of its ideology. The Treaty did, however, include a more general provision (Article 39) relating to the freedom of **all** citizens to use their native language,[8] but this has been consistently violated. The 80-year-old definition of minority given in the Treaty of Lausanne has had far-reaching consequences for policies on the Kurdish language, and indeed for minority policies in general in Turkey. It is on this basis that some Turkish politicians still maintain that there are "no minorities in Turkey", the term "minority" is largely avoided in official usage (see below), and indeed it has even been prohibited for political parties to assert the existence of minorities in Turkey.[9]

While the definition of minority in the Treaty of Lausanne provided the legal loophole, the ultimate motivation for the subsequent policies on the Kurdish language is to be sought in the ethno-nationalist underpinnings of Turkey's state ideology. The nationalists were well aware that the new republic was cross-cut with potentially disastrous fault lines along religious and ethnic boundaries. But whereas Islam had formed the core of the Ottoman Empire's power base, the nationalists insisted on the separation of state and religion (at least in theory). Thus religion could no longer function as the cohesive element that would bind the fragile state together. An alternative solution was some notion of "Turkishness", of ethno-nationalist identity. Turkishness has remained to this day a somewhat obscure construct, in which a supposed common ethnic, linguistic and cultural heritage is coupled with the legal notion of citizenship in a modern secular state.[10] Although the concept of Turkishness had been

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[7] On the Treaty of Lausanne and the status of minorities, see especially Rumpf (1993: 181-182).

8 Cf. Article 39: "No restrictions shall be imposed on the free use by any Turkish national of any language in private intercourse, in commerce, religion, in the press, or in publications of any kind or at public meetings. Notwithstanding the existence of the official language, adequate facilities shall be given to Turkish nationals of non-Turkish speech for the oral use of their own language before the Courts." (translation from the Colombia International Affairs Online, Special Section on the Middle East at www.ciaonet.org).

[9] Cf. The Law on Political Parties from 1983, discussed in Skutnabb-Kangas (2000: 515)

10 Cf. Kirişçi & Winrow (1998: 23): "It is still far from clear what the term 'Turk' actually signifies". Further discussion of the notion of "Turkishness" is found in Rumpf (2000: 172-174) and in Zentrum für Türkeistudien

developed by the Young Turks for several decades prior to the founding of the Republic, it had not trickled down to the bulk of the populace outside of the main centres. It was therefore imperative that it be consolidated and promulgated as rapidly as possible through all quarters of the new state. Turkey's famous reform programme can be seen as the monumental national project to sever links with the Ottoman heritage and traditions and erect in their place a new Turkish nationalism with a Western orientation, a process Yeğen (1999: 202) refers to as the *Türk millî kimliğinin inşası* ('the construction of the Turkish nationalist identity').

It is notable that the reform efforts targetted particularly the overt and visible aspects of culture: traditional Ottoman clothing was prohibited in favour of a Western style of dress, the Arabic alphabet was replaced by a modified form of the Roman alphabet (1928), Western-style naming conventions (e.g. christian names and surnames) and forms of personal address were introduced, as was the European calendar, words of Arabic and Persian origin were taken from the language and replaced by "pure" Turkish words, Ankara, a hitherto fairly insignificant town in the Anatolian steppes, was declared the capital city in place of İstanbul, with its centuries of Ottoman ballast. That which was considered unfitting for the new direction was, as far as possible, to be expunged from collective memory. Atatürk's comments on the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), a treaty which contained provisions for an Armenian and Kurdish state, but which was superseded by Lausanne, are characteristic of the uncompromising attitude towards undesirable symbols of the past:[11]

> The Treaty of Sèvres represents such an infamous death sentence for the Turkish nation that we never wish to hear of it from the mouth of a friend! Nor do I wish to hear it mentioned during this meeting. We cannot enter relationships of mutual trust with nations which have not banished the Treaty of Sèvres from their minds. In our eyes, such a treaty does not exist.

From the perspective of a nationwide Turkification project, the existence of minorities represents one of several obstacles to be overcome in the course of achieving the long term goal.[12] It seems fairly clear that the Turkish nationalists were committed to an equally uncompromising stand on minorities as they were to other symbols of the pre-republican era. İsmet İnönü, the right-hand of Atatürk, is quoted by Barkey & Fuller (1998: 10) as follows:

> "We are frankly [n]ationalist[s] ... and [n]ationalism is our only factor of cohesion. In the face of a Turkish majority other elements have no kind of influence. We must turkify the other elements of our land at any price, and we will annihilate those who oppose the Turks or 'le turquisme'"

(1998: 26-28). A critical examination of the Young Turkish roots of the concept, in particular the roles of language, ethnicity, religion and tradition, is Dabag (1996). More general treatment is available in the many standard works on modern Turkey, e.g. Steinbach (1996), B. Lewis (2002) or Zuercher (1993).

[11] My translation of part of a speech given by Atatürk in 1921, quoted in Atatürk (1981: 25).

12 See Bozarslan (1996), who argues that the superordinate goal of the Kemalist reforms was not so much modernization but Turkification.

3 Strategies of invisibilisation up to the 1970's

In the preceding section I have suggested that the primary motive for invisibilisation is to be sought in the desire to create a culturally homogenous Turkish nation, in part as a reaction against the perceived weaknesses of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire with its Islamic underpinnings. The existence of a distinct non-Turkish culture within the new Republic is bluntly at odds with this conception of nation-state. If it proves impossible to completely assimilate the carriers of a minority culture, an alternative solution is to remove, or conceal, the visible symbols of that culture. This is invisibilisation.

But just what constitutes a culture? This is a matter of ongoing debate, but it is fairly widely agreed that important defining features of any culture are those aspects that set it off from its neighbouring cultures. In the case of the Kurds in Turkey, there are undoubtedly aspects of material culture, of traditions and of belief systems which distinguish Kurds from Turks. But there are also a large number of similarities, borne of centuries of co-existence in similar geographical conditions, and in particular, of a common religion, Islam.[13] In terms of physical appearance too, there is no reliable means of distinguishing a Kurd from a Turk. Thus to the untrained eye travelling East Anatolia today, there is little to distinguish a Kurdish village from a Turkish one, or Kurdish people from Turks.

But in the area of language, the difference is radical. Turkish is a Turkic language, Kurdish is an Iranian language, part of the Indo-European language family. Although the two languages have undergone considerable mutual influence, the structural differences are such that a mixed or hybrid brand of Kurdish/Turkish is hard to envisage, and unkown to the present author.[14] Thus while Kurdish ethnicity may be mixed through intermarriage, or other facets of the culture may blend with, or assimilate to, a neighbouring culture, the Kurdish language remains irrevocably different from the Turkish language, with no blurring of the boundaries. The language thus carries the primary burden as a mark of otherness. My point is then that in the context of Turkey, the Kurdish language is the most salient emblem of Kurdish culture and identity (which is not to say that all people who claim Kurdish identity necessarily speak Kurdish; see van Bruinessen (1997) for a discussion of the complex issue of Kurdish identity). I suggest that this is the reason why the language itself has been a key target of policies of invisibilisation.

[13] But see Bruinessen (1989: 39-41) on inner-islamic religious distinctions between Kurds and Turks.
[14] See Haig & Matras (2002) for a short overview of Kurdish linguistics, and Dorleijn (1996) for discussion of Kurdish/Turkish language contact.

3.1 The 1930's: Physical assimilation

The minority languages of Anatolia have all declined rapidly over the past 60 years, and most now face extinction.[15] The Kurdish language, however, has proved more recalcitrant, if only due to the sheer size of the speech community (estimates range from seven to 12 million). Indeed Kurdish rebels have at times posed a serious military threat. In the 1920's, the Kurds reacted to the new course taken by the Turkish government in what later became known as the Sheikh Said uprisings in the Dersim region (the name has since been Turkified to *Tunceli*). This was a major military operation, in which over 50,000 Turkish soldiers were deployed, supported by air power (Olson 1995), and military action continued in the Kurdish regions of Turkey sporadically up until 1938. During these years, plans for mass resettlement of the Kurds were formulated, the best-known of which is the *Tunceli Kanunu* (1934), which foresaw resettlement of "non-Turkish" elements into predominantly Turkish areas, and vice versa. The aim of these campaigns was to accelerate the assimilation of the Kurdish minority (Steinbach 1996: 361-363).[16] However, such plans were not implemented wholesale, although deportation of 50,000 persons is reported to have followed the final uprising in Dersim in 1938. It is worth noting that the actual physical removal of minorities has a certain tradition in Anatolia. The Ottomans forcibly resettled large numbers of Kurds in the course of their military campaigns, and in the early decades of the last century both the considerable Armenian and the Greek populations were, albeit under very different circumstances, expelled wholesale from Anatolia.[17] It seems evident then that in the 1930's, official policy towards the Kurds aimed at assimilation of the Kurdish population and concommitantly, the eradication of the Kurdish culture and language.

3.2 Virtual assimilation

But despite crushing military defeats, mass resettlement, and the denial of rights to cultural expression, the Kurdish culture and language remained stubbornly and undeniably alive. For a state committed to an ideology of a homogenous populace, the existence of a minority too large to be rapidly assimilated poses a considerable dilemma. Out of this dilemma grew a policy I will term "virtual assimilation": officially, the Kurds did not exist, and overt symbols

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[15] On Laz see Kutscher & Genç (1998), on the Neo-Aramaic languages see Yonan (1978) and Jastrow (1994). For general information on minority languages in Turkey see Andrews (1989), Zentrum für Türkeistudien (1998) and Haig (2003).

[16] Other accounts (e.g. Yeğen 1999a: 137-139) refer to these legislative measures under the name of *İskan Kanunu* ('Settlement law'). A comparable policy was pursued by Saddam Hussein in Iraqi Kurdistan, where the Kurdish population was diluted by the forced resettlement of Arabs and Turkomans into the area.

[17] More recently, the flooding of vast areas of the Kurdish populated Southeast for hydro-electric power schemes has led to mass resettlement of the local populace. Jongederen (2001) argues that these schemes serve, among other things, this purpose. The guerilla warfare between the PKK and the Turkish army has also led to the destruction of thousands of Kurdish villages and an estimated two million people, predominantly Kurds, fleeing their homelands; Nigosian (1996: 42-43) argues that the depopulation of the Kurdish areas is a major goal of the military activity in the area.

of their existence were suppressed or removed from those domains where the state was able to exert its influence.

It is important to bear in mind that the policy of virtual assimilation has not, to my knowledge, been overtly formulated, or at least not in documents readily available to the public. A policy of "systematic cover-ups" (Steinbach 1996: 363) mean that reliable information on, for example, the Kurdish uprisings of the twenties and thirties, is difficult to obtain. The Kurdish regions were under emergency rule between 1925 and 1949, and indeed for much of the 80's and 90's, and foreigners were not permitted to travel there up to 1965 (Başkaya 1997: 78, 2nd fn.). Unsurprisingly, then, there is very little reliable information on the actual policies pursued with regard to the Kurdish language on the ground. But as Kirişçi & Winrow (1998: 14) note, a "dominant ethnic group will not usually admit that it is pursuing an official policy of assimilation, given the negative publicity that would then ensue."

As far as the survival of minority languages is concerned, it is well-known that their extinction can be brought about simply by denying them any form of official recognition, or any role outside of the domestic sphere. Such a policy may be more "effective" than overt prohibition because the latter heightens visibility and can engender direct resistance. Policies of systematic neglect and denial of recognition are amply documented from many parts of the world. Smolicz (1995: 242), discussing policies towards minority languages in Australia after the First World War, sums up the underlying assumptions of this approach as follows:

> Minority group members were permitted to make use of their tongues merely in a domestic situation and in the restricted area of ethnic clubs and possibly part-time, after-hours ethnic schools. This approach was generally based upon the assumption that linguistic transmission would be short lived and that a language restricted to the home would become extinct in subsequent generations, without "disturbing" the monolingual texture of society as a whole.

Official directives explicitly prohibiting the use of Kurdish do not, to my knowledge, exist, and as Rumpf (1985: 252-253) notes, no explicit ban on the language was formulated until the 1980's (see below). There were campaigns that the citizens should "speak just Turkish", and the state conducted extensive programmes to bring the benefits of Turkish civilisation to the most backward parts of East Anatolia.[18] But the official formulation of all these activities is in terms of "Turkish only" rather than "not Kurdish". Yeğen (1999: 123-124) cites a telling example, taken from the manifesto of the Republican People's Party (CHP, *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, Turkey's sole political party from the 1923 to 1945). In 1931, the manifesto stipulated that membership of the party was restricted to Turkish citizens who "have spoken Turkish" (*Türkçe konuşmakta bulunmuş*). Yeğen interprets the text as expressing "the party's desire to effectively restrict membership to persons whose native tongue is Turkish" (Yeğen 1999a:

[18] See especially Yeğen (1999a: 173-188) on the role of the state-run insitution *Türk Ocağı* and its successor, the *Halkevleri*, in bringing Turkish language and culture to East Anatolia.

124, my translation). Yeğen goes on to note that there is no overt prohibition of any particular language in the text; rather, we find a more veiled mode of expression which nevertheless achieves the end of excluding Kurdish speakers from membership in Turkey's sole political party. The practice of exclusion without overt mention is characteristic of official usage throughout the Republic's history, as we shall see. It is exactly what the logic of invisibilisation requires: A language that officially does not exist need not be explicitly forbidden and indeed, to do so would be tantamount to an admission of its existence. It would nevertheless be an oversimplification to claim that all reference to Kurds and Kurdishness simply ceased in the Republican era. In fact, state policies were considerably more subtle than stubborn silence, and over the years an array of strategies was developed for referring to Kurdish matters. In many cases, the terms "Kurd" and "Kurdish" do appear in official usage but crucially, they are supplied with a very specific set of meanings. Common to all such usage is a systematic avoidance of portraying the Kurdish question as an "ethno-nationalist cause" (Yeğen 1999b). Rather, if reference was made to Kurdishness at all, then in terms of religious fanaticism, backwardness, or even as a case of mistaken identity.

But there were also more direct measures of invisibilisation. Perhaps the most important is the replacement of non-Turkish place names, which affected the names of villages, rivers, mountains and other landmarks in East Anatolia. Today we find numerous villages with names like *Gölbaşı* 'At the lake', or *Yeni Köy* 'New Village', which are often replacements for former Kurdish or Armenian village names. The most prominent example of this practice is the official designation for Mount Ararat, which was re-named *Ağrı Dağı*. Likewise, legislation restricts the choice of personal names to names which are Turkish (although traditional Islamic names of Arabic origin, such as Abdullah, are acceptable), thus effectively prohibiting parents from giving their children Kurdish names.[19] Naming remains a controversial issue up to the present. In the predominantly Kurdish town of Batman, the mayor's plans to name streets after revolutionaries such as Mahatma Ghandi were overruled by the provincial governor, who went on to prohibit the use of Kurdish street names.[20] In 2001 the then-Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit urged authorities to avoid using Kurdish place names, claiming that they were part of a plot to create "an artificial separatist movement".[21] In a similar vein, certain expressions are banned from the names of political parties, e.g. "communist", or names that affirm ethnic differences. Thus the names of predominantly Kurdish political parties such as HADEP (*Halkın demokrasi partisi* 'People's Democracy Party') may not contain any overt symbol of Kurdishness.[22] Naming is of course a highly symbolic activity, one of the areas where a minority culture can assert its identity in a maximally visible, tangible and permanent manner (see e.g. Konstantinov 1992). It should

[19] See Skutnabb-Kangas & Bucak (1995), Balci (1994) and Haig (2003: 179)
[20] From an article by Simon Tisdall in *The Guardian*, 25.01.2001.
[21] AP press release (Ankara, 31.03.2001).
[22] Interestingly, the name "PKK" (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, 'The Party of the Workers of Kurdistan') is used in the Turkish media, but the PKK is considered to be a group of terrorists rather than a political party. The name PKK is never spelled out, appearing only in acronym form, and without a Turkish translation.

therefore come as no surprise that it has been a prime target for state policies of invisibilisation.

Another area where reference to Kurdish was consistently avoided is the academic study of local languages and dialects. Although the regional dialects of Turkish have been extensively documented, and many of them are spoken in areas where contact with Kurdish is rife, the topic of minority language influence was completely ignored in Turkish dialectology up until the early nineties (cf. Boeschoten 1991: 152; 175-176). There have, however, also been attempts to reinterpret minority languages as "Turkish dialects",[23] an enterprise we will touch on below. Fortunately, since the late 1990's a gradual shift is discernible, with researchers at some Turkish universities openly acknowledging the existence of distinct minority languages, and a trickle of publications has ensued. A major breakthrough in this regard was the publication of Andrews (1989), a comprehensive, scholarly, and impartial compendium of minority groups in Turkey, which has since been translated into Turkish.

The policy of invisibilisation developed in tandem with Turkey's nation-building project, in particular with two of the less auspicious episodes in Turkey's academic history: The Turkish History Hypothesis (*Türk Tarih Tezi*), and the Sun-Language Theory (*Güneş-Dil Teorisi*). Essentially, the *Türk Tarih Tezi* was an attempt to trace the origins of all the major civilisations of the Ancient World back to the Turks. Thus the Hittites, the Ancient Egyptians, and even the Greeks, were duly declared to be basically of Turkish origin. In a similar vein, The Sun-Language Theory declared Turkish to be the *Ur-Sprache*, to which all other languages can ultimately be traced. Both theories received the blessing of Atatürk himself and were afforded full state support; they were expounded in general reference works, were included in school curricula, and dominated scholarly work in the relevant fields throughout the 1930's. They were also extremely influential in the formative years of the Turkish History Society (*Türk Tarih Kurumu*) and the Turkish Language Society (*Türk Dil Kurumu*).[24]

The emergence of theories which create and foster the collective myth of ancient and splendid origins is a typical symptom of nation-building, and Kirişçi & Winrow (1998: 102-103) point out that during this phase, Turkish nationalism began to display some of the properties of a religion. But parallel to the aims of creating and consolidating national identity, such symptoms of nation building also work to exclude groups that differ in significant ways (e.g. language) from the common perception of the nation. This is particularly true of the Turkish History Hypothesis and the Sun-Language Theory, as Beşikçi (1991) has pointed out. For in claiming that the origin of all languages and cultures in the Near East were Turkish, the theories provided a pseudo-scientific justification for negating the existence of a Kurdish culture and language distinct from the Turkish ones. Although some contemporary commentators downplay the long-term effect of the two theories,[25] their

[23] See Selcan (1998: 95-101) on the efforts of Turkish linguists to re-interpret Zazaki, an Iranian language, as a Turkish dialect.

[24] The former was previously known as the *Türk Tarihi Tetkik Cemiyeti*, the latter as the *Türk Dili Tetkik Cemiyeti*.

[25] G. Lewis (2002: 72) suggests that interest in the Sun-Language Theory "evaporated the moment [Atatürk] died". Although this may be the case, it does not mean that the Theory did not continue to exert influence after

influence on official usage with regard to Kurdish remained palpable for many decades. The Turkish Historical Hypothesis acquired an additional twist through the application of anthropometrics, the quantitative analysis of various physical parameters of the Anatolian populace (e.g. circumference of the head, length of nose, eye colour etc.). A reported 64,000 persons were duly measured and the results published in various official documents into the 1940's. These efforts led to the not unwelcome conclusion that "in Turkey there exists racial unity".[26]

Bolstered by the results of the anthropometrical studies, the Turkish Historical Hypothesis paved the way for a brand of virtual assimilation more subtle and ultimately more demeaning than outright denial of existence. The official standpoint then became: there exists a group of persons who **mistakenly refer to themselves** as Kurds, but in fact they are Turks. Probably the most famous example of this policy, and one that has since entered the canon of common knowledge on the Kurds in Turkey, is the "mountain Turk" epithet, a label which was coined in 1936 by the governor of the Dersim region, army general Abdullah Alpdoğan (Kirişçi & Winrow 1998: 103). It is typical of official usage for a large part of the Republic's history. Consider for example the voluminous official *History of the Turkish Republic*, compiled by the Turkish Historical Society (*Türk Tarih Kurumu*), of which official translations into the major European languages are also available (I quote here from the German version, listed as *Geschichte der Türkischen Republik* (1935) in the bibliography).

There are just two mentions of the words Kurds / Kurdish in the book, both referring to events prior to the founding of the republic, and both relating to treacherous activities by Kurdish groups. In the parts of the book dealing with Republic, Kurds receive no explicit mention at all. But in the section recounting the Sheikh Said uprisings of the 1920's (see preceding section), Kurds are referred to as (1935: 239, my translation, emphasis added):

> […] inhabitants of the Eastern provinces **who are of pure Turkish origin**, but some of whom under the influence of political propaganda from abroad and through the degenerate politics of the Sultans have begun to consider themselves as non-Turkish.

In 1948, a book called *The Eastern Provinces and the History of Varto* by M. Şerif Fırat was published containing some patently absurd claims regarding the Turkish origins of the Anatolian Kurds.[27] In 1961, the book was reprinted by the Ministry of Education with a foreword by no less than the Commander of the Army, General Cemal Gürsel. Gürsel writes (quoted from Beşikçi (1991: 196), my translation, emphasis added):

Atatürk's death. For example, Hatiboğlu's claim (1986: 97) that "Turkish is the oldest written language in the world" (quoted in Lewis 2002: 42, fn. 3) is clearly inspired by the spirit of the Sun-Language Theory, as are the attempts to interpret the Iranian language Zazaki as a "Turkish dialect" (see fn. 23).

[26] These studies are reported in detail in Beşikçi (1991: 122-128), based largely on the book by Âfet İnan, *Türkiye Halkının Antropolojik Karakterleri ve Türkiye Tarihi, Türk Irkının Vatanı Anadolu* (64 000 kişi üzerinde yapılan Anket). Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu.

[27] *Doğu Illeri ve Varto Tarihi*. Istanbul: Şaka Matbaası, 1948. See Beşikçi (1991: 194-198) for details.

> […] all of Turkey's intellectuals will greatly benefit from reading this book, which has been published today in its second edition by our Ministry of Education. For this book proves once again that our citizens in East Anatolia who, because they speak a language that does not resemble Turkish believe themselves to be distinct from the Turks and who even we, through our ignorance, also believed to be not Turkish, are full-blooded Turks. And these claims are backed up by scientific evidence which cannot be refuted […]. **There is no race with an independent identity on the face of the Earth which could be called "the Kurds". The Kurds are not merely our fellow-citizens, they also belong to the same race as we do** […]

Dictionaries provide an excellent barometer of official usage on Kurdish matters. Even as late as 1979, the official Turkish dictionary (*Türkçe Sözlük*) still denied that the Kurds were ethnically distinct from the Turks. Consider the following definition of *kürt* 'Kurdish, Kurd' (my translation, emphasis added):[28]

> The name of a group/society **who are ethnically Turkish** but, having changed their language, (now) speak a degenerate form of Persian and inhabit Turkey, Iraq and Iran; the name of anyone belonging to this group.

If the Kurds are Turks who have "changed their language", the question arises as to why they hit on the name *kürt* for themselves. A number of solutions have been proposed, among the most fanciful being that the word *kürt* is an onomatopoeic rendition of the sound of frozen snow crunching under the footwear of inhabitants of mountainous regions (Başkaya 1997: 79). I leave the reader to form her own opinion on this type of linguistic speculation.

It is no accident that the most serious taboo surrounds the expression "*Kürdistan*", with its connotations of territorial rights for the Kurds. Whereas Sir James Redhouse's monumental *Turkish and English Lexicon* from 1890, the foundation of much modern Turkish lexicography, contained an entry for *Kürdistan*, it is absent from all modern Turkish dictionaries produced in Turkey that I am aware of. Interestingly, in the report of the judge who sentenced the leaders of the Sheikh Said uprisings to death we find explicit reference to the conspirators' alleged attempts to found an "independent Kurdistan" (Yeğen 1999a: 130). But all reference to this aspect, and in particular to the term "Kürdistan", disappears from the later official accounts of the uprisings, for example the history text quoted above. More recently, the politically correct means of referring to Kurdish nationalists' aspiriations to an

[28] "Kürt: Soyca Türk olup dillerini değiştirerek bozuk bir farsça konuşan Türkiye, Irak, İranda yaşayan bir topluluk adı ve bu topluluktan olan kimse." (Türkçe Sözlük (1979). Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu [reprint of the revised 6th edition of 1974]). More recent dictionaries either fail to list kürt and related entries (those approved for use in schools follow this pattern), or adopt a more moderate stance, dropping the claim that the Kurds are ethnically Turks. Fairly typical is the following (my translation): "Kurd: A group/society (topluluk) scattered across some of the states of the Near and Middle East; any person belonging to this group. Kurdish: The language spoken by the Kurds, usually close to Persian." (Püsküllüoğlu, Ali (1994) Arkadaş Türkçe Sözlük. Ankara: Arkadaş Yayınevi). Even today, however, Kurds are **never** defined in dictionaries as a "minority".

independent Kurdistan has been become *bölücülük* ‘separatism’, or simply *terör* ‘terrorism’. Turkish sensibilities on the use of the word *Kürdistan* even extend to references to the Kurdish areas outside Turkey, especially in North Iraq, which are never referred to as *Kürdistan* in official Turkish usage (see below).

3.3 Denigration

A variation on virtual assimilation is denigration. By denigration I mean that the offending entitity is overtly referred to, but by using terminology which devalues it by denying it a variety of positive attributes.[29] We have already encountered this in the form of reference to Kurdish as a "degenerate form of Persian". The current version of denigration employs a slightly different slant: the existence of Kurdish is acknowledged, but it is denied the full status of a language. The following text, taken from the official website of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, can be considered typical of the now-official standpoint:[30]

> What is frequently referred to as the "Kurdish language" cannot be depicted as "a single language" either linguistically or socially. Many scholars point out the fact that there are many different local languages and dialects that are in limited use in southeastern Turkey such as Zaza, Kırmanchi, Gorani and so on, which are only as close to each other as French, English and German. These local dialects are so dissimilar that people living in one village cannot even communicate with others from a neighboring village. As a result, the Turkish language has become the sole medium of communication throughout the country.[31]

Although the claim that Kurdish is "merely a dialect" has only relatively recently been elevated to the status of official doctrine, it is actually a well-established element in the repertoire of denigration, and is one of the most deeply-rooted and frequently expressed prejudices on Kurdish throughout the populace.[32]

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[29] Denigration is symptomatic of official usage on all aspects of the Kurds, as Yeğen (1999a) has pointed out. Thus references to the Kurds and the Kurdish problem are traditionally framed in terms of "backwardness", "religious fanaticism", "smuggling" etc. More recently "terrorism" and "drug trafficking" enjoy wide currency.

[30] See http://www.mfa.gov.tr/grupa/faq/default.htm. The quoted information on Kurdish may be found under the heading "Southeast Anatolia and terrorism".

[31] This assessment of extreme dialectal differences within Kurdish is not supported by factual evidence. My own impression is that the extent of dialectal difference among speakers of Kurmanjî Kurdish, the dialect spoken by the vast majority of Turkey’s Kurds (i.e. several million people) is no greater than in any other natural language spoken across a comparably large area, and probably less than most. Note also that Kurdish television broadcasting exists, and there are innumerable publications in Kurmanjî Kurdish, including text books, and dictionaries. All this would scarcely be possible if there did not exist a reasonably high degree of cross-region linguistic unity. The claim that inhabitants of one village "cannot even communicate" with those in the next is quite unfounded, unless the next village happens to speak a genuinely different language. In fact, Kurds from villages hundreds of kilometres apart can communicate in Kurdish, as Chyet (2003: xvi) confirms. But, given the conditions prevalent in Turkey, they will often choose not to do so.

[32] Balci (1994: 38-39) notes that it was used in 1991 by the then-minister of Cultural Affairs, Gökhan Maras, to justify banning labels written in Kurdish on Kurdish music cassettes.

While virtual assimilation and denigration are often treated as simply laughable, as for example the regularly ridiculed attempts of the Turkish state to define Kurds as "mountain Turks", their effects can be particularly damaging. Virtual assimilation provides the state with an alibi for systematic neglect. If an ethnic group or a language officially does not exist, any requests for rights to cultural expression can simply be ignored. Denigration also has very concrete consequences for implementing language rights for Kurdish speakers. For example, if Kurdish is not a "real" language, it can hardly be taught in schools. Likewise, legislation can be formulated in terms of "languages" so that dialects are effectively excluded from their scope. For the speakers themselves, policies of virtual assimilation and denigration represent a denial of identity, of value, and concommitantly, of self-esteem. Several authors have pointed out the deep feeling of shame minority language speakers experience with regard to their own language, a feeling directly engendered by the policies of the respective states.[33] Hamers & Blanc (2000) repeatedly stress the importance of "valorisation", the set of socially transmitted positive value judgements that are attached a language, in ensuring the survival of that language. A language that is valorised will be more likely to be transmitted to younger generations and cultivated by its speakers, while one that is not will have a significantly poorer chance of survival. It is a sobering fact that many Kurdish speakers have unconsciously and involuntarily adopted the state's negative attitudes to their native tongue, and in many cases fail to ensure its transmission to the next generation. Thus virtual assimilation and denigration, while perhaps less spectacular and less difficult to monitor than physical assimilation, have possibly contributed more to the steady decline in the use of Kurdish in Turkey over the years than more overt types of repression.

4 Policies on the Kurdish language from the 1980's onwards

Through the 1970's civil unrest had been growing in Turkey, and on September 12, 1980 the army staged a coup, the third in the country's short history, dissolving parliament and remaining in power until 1983. The interim military government was determined to crack down on any form of separatism, and adopted a hard line on minority matters. In 1982, a new constitution was passed along with accompanying legislation which included strict regimentation of language use. In these laws we find the strategy of virtual assimilation anchored in the most important legislative texts in the state. But these laws went a step further in that, for the first time, the use of Kurdish was effectively banned entirely, albeit without any overt mention of the Kurdish language.

This legislation has been discussed in detail elsewhere[34] and will only briefly be sketched here. The constitution itself declared that the mother tongue of all Turkish citizens was Turkish, and banned public use of "languages forbidden by law". Forbidden languages were

[33] For discussion see Hinton (2001: 9), for case studies see Bonner (2001), or Edwards (1992).
[34] See for example Skutnabb-Kangas & Bucak (1995), Rumpf (1985), Rumpf (1993), Haig (2003: 179-183), Havrest (1998: 151-162) and Balci (1994: 35-37).

then defined in another piece of legislation as follows: Any language that is not the first official language of a state that is recognized by Turkey. In this manner, the use of minority languages such as Kurdish, which is not a state language anywhere,[35] could be banned without actually having to name it (and at the same time, languages like English or Arabic could continue to be used in schools). Consequently, the terms "Kurd", "Kurdish", or for that matter "minority" simply do not occur in the official legislation regulating language use. The 1982 constitution clearly continues the tradition already discussed in connection with the *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*'s manifesto from 1931: exclude, but do not mention. But it goes further, in that it makes the use of certain languages a criminal offence.

As it turned out, the laws relating to forbidden languages did not remain in force for very long. In the early 1990's, the then-Prime Minister Turgut Özal inaugurated a more liberal stance on the Kurds and repealed the language laws in 1991. Essentially, Özal broke with many of the taboos that had veiled the Kurdish issue since the inception of the Republic. For example, in 1988, he publicly stated that his grandmother had been a Kurd who had spoken no Turkish. In 1992 he went as far as suggesting that radio and television broadcasting in Kurdish be permitted and that Kurdish could have some presence in schools (Kirişçi & Winrow 1998: 137). As a result of the somewhat more liberal climate, the early 1990's saw a brief flurry of sales of Kurdish books and magazines, and of music cassettes. Özal was even preparing to negotiate a cease-fire with the PKK, but his untimely death in April 1993 prevented further progress in this direction.[36]

In the aftermath of Özal's death, the conflict between the Turkish army and the PKK continued with unrelenting violence. As a result, official discourse on all matters Kurdish has increasingly been framed in terms of "national security" versus "separatism" and "terrorism". Within such a discourse space, non-violent demands for increased rights to cultural expression[37] can be either ignored completely, or condemned as separatist propaganda. Instrumental in these developments has been a set of of "anti-terror" legislation, installed in 1991, which involved a very broad definition of what would be considered "separatist propaganda". Under these laws, expression of a distinct Kurdish identity could be, and was, interpreted as terrorism and correspondingly penalised (see Skutnabb-Kangas & Bucak 1995, Muller 1996: 181-185).

Official government usage remains up to the present a fascinating window for monitoring state policies on the Kurds. For example, in 2001, the Interior Ministry issued a directive to TRT, the Turkish national broadcasting organization, containing a list of expressions to be

[35] Recent developments in Iraq have raised the possibility that Kurdish may at some point become the language of a state. However, the Turkish government has made it quite clear that they will not recognize a Kurdish state in North Iraq even if it should be established.

[36] See Gürbey (2000: 65-67) on Özal's contribution to Turkey's policies on the Kurds.

[37] Note that prior to Öcalan's capture in 1999, the PKK iself did not attach much importance to increased rights for cultural expression, preferring to pursue (ultimately illusionary) political and territorial goals. Indeed, Öcalan considered traditional Kurdish culture to be backward and the language, in its present state, inadequate. He has persistently used Turkish as a vehicle for spreading his own beliefs, a fact that is regularly repeated in official Turkish sources as evidence of the inferiority of Kurdish. It is therefore doubly ironic that a self-proclaimed champion of the Kurdish people has in fact contributed to the denigration of the Kurdish culture.

avoided in broadcasts, along with a "translation" of these expressions into the officially-sanctioned terminology.[38] The following examples from the directive are illustrative:

Expressions to be avoided	Officially sanctioned terminology
Uprising, Kurdish uprising, Kurdish national liberation war, Kurdish freedom struggle, Kurdish rebellion, armed uprising, rebellion	terrorist activities
Operation, cleansing operation	Search for terrorists and criminals
Kurdish, Kurdish Turks, Kurdish race, Kurdish citizen	Turkish citizen
Kurdish lineage, Kurdish origin, citizens of Kurdish origin, people of the Kurdish race	Turkish citizen/our citizens who are defined as Kurdish by separatist circles
Evacuated villages/burnt villages	Deserted villages, villages that have been deserted by the people.
Southeastern people, people in Southeast Anatolia, people in East and Southeast Anatolia	Our citizens living in the east of Turkey
The Kurdish Parliament-in-Exile	Meeting held under the control of the terrorist PKK organization
Low-intensity war	Counterterrorism
Kurdish leader/leaders	The tribe leaders/chiefs in northern Iraq.

Some of the themes evident in the directive should by now be familiar: the avoidance of expressions implying a distinct Kurdish ethnic identity, of reference to any form of politically legitimate representation of the Kurdish people. It is clear that this too is a form of language planning, one that carries undertones of Orwell's Newspeak, and would undoubtedly constitute a fascinating case-study in its own right. However, we will not pursue the implications here.

It is worth closing this section with an episode which like no other illustrates the powerfully symbolic role of language in constructing national identity, and the fundamental themes of invisibilisation. In March 1991 Leyla Zana, the newly-elected member of parliament for the Diyarbakır electorate, took her inaugural oath of loyalty in the Turkish parliament. After swearing the oath, she then spoke a sentence in Kurdish.[39] There was uproar

[38] The directive stems from http://www.haberturk.com/ and was translated and distributed via email by the Washington Kurdish Institute on April 10, 2001. The existence of the directive, and some excerpts from it, were also the subject of an AP press release (Istanbul) from April 6, 2001.

[39] There are conflicting reports on the content of Zana's short utterance. According to Amnesty International, it translates as: "I have taken this formality under duress. I shall struggle so that the Turkish and Kurdish peoples may live peacefully together in a democratic framework". The version used in the Ankara State Security Court accusation against Zana reads: "I am a Kurd, I will remain a Kurd forever. I am taking this oath compulsorily and under pressure. But I am still a Kurd, and I will remain a Kurd." (quoted in the Report of the Law Group

in parliament, with cries of "traitor" and "arrest her", and legal action was launched against Zana. She was initially protected through her parliamentary immunity, and continued to write and speak in Turkey and at international venues on the rights of Kurds. However, her parliamentary immunity was lifted in 1994, and she was put on trial for treason, later amended to membership of an illegal armed organization. Along with three other MPs, she was convicted and sentenced to 15 years imprisonment, which she is currently (2002) serving.

The actions of Zana and her colleagues struck at the very heart of the policy of invisibilisation. Not only did they assert the **existence** of Kurdish, they carried it into the most sacred domain of the state, the seat of executive power, from whence it had been totally banished for decades, i.e. they maximalised its visibility. Furthermore, their actions also involved a statement on the **status** of Kurdish: it is not merely a primitive dialect, restricted to the domestic sphere, but a fully-fledged language, capable of being deployed in the most solemn and official of contexts, the Turkish parliament. Finally, their actions meant **public exposure** of the invisibilisation policy itself. The swift and relentless reaction to the actions of Zana and her colleagues are a clear indication of the effectiveness of these challenges.

5 Kurdish and the state education system: the reforms of 2002

The most crucial area for the long-term survival of any minority language is state education. Most nation states systematically excluded minority languages from the state school system until well into the Twentieth Century, in the mistaken belief that monolingualism in the official language was desirable, and indeed necessary, for academic achievement and good citizenship (see Hamers & Blanc (2000: 320-248) for discussion and references). Schooling is the first opportunity a state has to exert pressure on language choices among its citizens. If children can be weaned off their native tongue at an early age, they are unlikely ever to acquire full competence in it, and thus, presumably, will have irrevocably lost the most powerful bond with their own culture. As Breton (1999: 95, fn.1) puts it, education policies have doubtless been "among the most important policies implemented to enforce linguistic assimilation." Assimilation policies through state education are amply documented in the histories of many countries.[40] However, more recently the fundamental shortcomings of these policies have been acknowledged, and in many countries other models are being implemented, where minority languages are afforded official recognition in the curricula.

What has been the Turkish policy on Kurdish in the education system? Briefly, Kurdish has been, and still is, denied any presence in the state education system, from primary school right through to university. Article 49(2) of the Turkish constitution states:

Delegation to Turkey on the Detention of Paliamentarians and the Proceedings to Ban the Democracy Party, available at http://kurdistan.org/leyla/crimetospeak.html). The minutes of the parliamentary session concerned note only that Zana spoke in an "incomprehensible dialect".

[40] See e.g. Hinton (1994) for North American policies on Native American Indian languages, Magga (1995: 220) for Norwegian policies on the Sámi minority, or Miller & Miller (1996) for Franco's policies on Catalan and Basque in Spain. For an overview see the extensive documentation in Skutnabb-Kangas (2000).

> No language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institutions of training or education. Foreign languages to be taught in institutions of training and education and the rules to be followed by schools conducting training and education in a foreign language shall be determined by law.[41]

In parts of Anatolia, the problem of "minority" children who did not speak Turkish was not just one of scattered individual children, but affected entire classes. Fascinating insights into the issue are contained in the Ferit Edgü's 1977 novel *Hakkâri'de bir mevsim* 'A season in Hakkari', which recounts the experiences of a Turkish school teacher sent to a primary school in Hakkari, in the heart of the Kurdish area of Turkey, where he is faced with an entire class who do not speak Turkish. In keeping with the prevalent policies of invisibilisation, the Kurdish language is never explicitly mentioned in the book.[42] Just what effect the suppression and stigmatisation of one's mother tongue in the school system has had on hundreds of thousands of Kurdish children, both in terms of intellectual and of emotional development, can only be gleaned retrospectively from eye-witness accounts (see material in Balci 1994, Hassanpour et al. 1996, Gündüzkanat 1997: 150-151).

In late 2001 and early 2002, students at a number of Turkish universities organised non-violent demonstrations demanding Kurdish language courses at university level.[43] Over 1000 people were put under detention in the course of the demonstrations, and the demands for Kurdish courses were refused. Nevertheless, the pressure on Turkey to meed the requirements of EU membership have led to some changes. In August 2002, the Turkish parliament passed a series of legislative reforms which, among other things, will permit minority languages to be taught in private institutions.[44] Yet even in this most recent legislation, the policy of invisibilisation makes itself apparent: In the entire text of the reforms, no mention is made of the Kurdish language whatsoever. Nor is the term "minority" used. Rather, reference is made to "languages and dialects used traditionally by Turkish citizens in their daily lives". In other words, the state policy on invisibilisation continues to make itself felt even in documents which ostensibly herald a major change of course.

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[41] Translation from the website of the human rights watch section on Turkey (www.hrw.org/press/2002/08/turkeyqa041902.htm).

[42] Originally published under the title *o* 'him', the book is now better known under the film title *Hakkâri'de bir mevsim*. In the film version, again no overt mention is made of the Kurds, or Kurdish, and this tradition is continued in more recent official reference to the film. For example, the section on Turkish cinema of the official website of the Turkish Directorate General of Press and Information describes the film as dealing with "the problems and struggles of an intellectual confronted for the first time with the hard life in Hakkari in Southeast Anatolia" (www.byegm.gov.tr/REFERENCES/TURKISH-CINEMA-2001.htm).

[43] See the report in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 30.01.2002, p. 11 "Der Aufschrei der Sprachlosen".

[44] Other important aspects of the reforms are the abolishment of capital punishment in times of peace and the lifting of restrictions on freedom of speech — see the European Commission's 2002 Regular report on Turkey's progress towards accession, Brussels, 09.10.2002 (esp. §1.2), available under: http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report2002/tu_en.pdf. An English translation of the full text can be found at: http://www.tuerkischebotschaft.de/de/archiv/2002/p0508022.htm.

As far as the actual content of the reforms is concerned, it is unlikely that they will have a very concrete impact on the use of Kurdish in Turkey, and they certainly fall short of any positive efforts to promote the language. Critics have pointed to the following weaknesses in the new legislation:[45]

1. Instruction in minority languages is only permitted at private institutions. In practice, this will restrict the teaching of Kurdish to the larger cities such as Istanbul. Few of the the Kurds remaining in their homeland will be able to marshall the necessary funds to open such an institution, let alone find sufficient paying students.
2. Only persons who have already completed eight years of compulsory schooling in the Turkish school system may attend minority language courses. This means that potential students will have passed the natural age for language acquisition by the time they are eligible to participate in such courses.
3. The curricula may not include cultural or historical content. The absurdity of language lessons devoid of cultural or historical content is self-evident. As Hinton (2001: 9) notes, "A language learned outside of its traditional cultural context will lack the ability to reflect the traditional culture".
4. Only instructors from within Turkey are permitted to teach at such institutions. This prevents, for example, Kurds from Sweden, who have already acquired extensive experience in teaching Kurdish, from utilising their experience in Kurdish language programmes in Turkey.

Taken together, these measures conspire to keep Kurdish out of the state system entirely, fail to provide any solid basis for Kurdish children to acquire literacy in Kurdish, prevent Kurds in the East from exercising any degree of cultural autonomy, and prevent (possibly more enlightened) persons from outside Turkey having any influence in the programme.

One might of course conclude that the reason for Turkey's refusing to afford Kurdish any recognition in state education lies in an antiquated commitment to monolingualism in education. Thus the problem would not be one of ideology, but of lack of awareness of recent developments in research on multilingual education. But in fact, Turkey is extremely progressive in this regard. There are numerous secondary schools in Turkey in which a large part of the lessons are held entirely in a foreign language (English, German or French). The most prestigious state universities in the country conduct all lectures in English (e.g. *Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi* in Ankara, or *Boğaziçi Üniverstitesi* in Istanbul). Furthermore, the representatives of the large Turkish minority in Germany have been campaigning vigorously, and with the support of the Turkish state, for increased recognition of Turkish within the German state school system.[46] The irony of this campaign can hardly escape the reader: the

[45] For additional details see Bernreuter (2002).
[46] Meetings were held at numerous venues throughout Germany to promote the campaign for increased representation of Turkish in German schools, and were attended by representatives of both states. For example, the meeting at the Max-Tau school in Kiel, 03.02.2001, was attended by Schleswig-Holstein's Minister for

Turkish state promoting the recognition of a minority language in another state's school system, while its own largest linguistic minority is consistently denied any presence whatsoever in state education. The organizers of the campaign for Turkish in German schools will doubtless have no objection to me quoting the slogan under which their campaign has been conducted: *Ana dil insan hakkıdır* 'the (use of) the mother tongue is a human right'.

There can be no doubt that the value of minority language education, and the feasibility of its implementation within a state education system, have been thoroughly recognized by the Turkish authorities. In parts of the education system, various types of multilingual education programmes have already been realised. The refusal to afford Kurdish any presence in education must therefore be motivated by quite different considerations.

6 Language planning in Turkey: the long tradition of state control of language use

Within the Kemalist reform programme, the reform of the Turkish language takes a central position, and was undoubtedly one of Atatürk's personal favourites. The aims of the reforms, which began in the 1920's, were to create a national standard language, maximally free of foreign elements, accessible to all members of society, easy to acquire, and rich and flexible enough to allow expression of any subject matter. The first, and perhaps most decisive step, was the replacement of the Arabic script with a modified brand of the Roman Alphabet in 1928. The symbolic significance of this move can hardly be exaggerated. The Arabic script is intimately linked to the Arabic language, which in the Islamic tradition is the sole legitimate medium for the sacred texts. Thus the script is one of the most powerful symbols of Islam, and for a predominantly Moslem nation to cast it off was quite unprecedented. Few other reforms testify so clearly the determination of the reformers to rid the nation of its Ottoman-Moslem heritage. But the reform of the Turkish language did not end with the change of script. The next phase involved the replacement of Arabic and Persian words and constructions with putatively pure Turkish elements. This aspect of the reform has continued, with varying degrees of intensity, up to the present, although more recently the reformers have targetted other foreign elements (e.g. English) for replacement. In general then, language reform in Turkey can be considered an example of what Thomas (1991) terms "xenophobic purism": The emphasis has been on creating a language which is maximally Turkish, i.e. maximally free of foreign elements.

The creation and cultivation of a Turkish national language has been an integral element of the political agenda of Atatürk and of all politicians since. It is no exaggeration to state that the language is a matter of national pride, concrete proof of the success of Kemalism and its superiority to the previous multi-ethnic and multi-lingual Ottoman Empire. In the extensive scientific literature on language planning, the Turkish language reform takes pride of place in the canon of standard examples, and is generally assessed as successful by scholars in the

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Education, Science, Research and Culture (Mrs. Erdsiek-Rave) and the Turkish Consulate General in Hamburg, Mr. Eryalçın.

field. It has recently been described as "the most thorough-going piece of linguistic engineering in history" (cover text from G. Lewis 2002).[47] Thus the Turkish language itself is not merely one of the defining elements of Turkishness, it is also a highly salient symbol, both within and outside the country, for the success of the Kemalist reform programmes.[48]

There are two conclusions to be drawn from the language reform. First, from the very outset the state recognized the central role of language as both carrier and symbol of national identity. Second, the very notion of language reform drew on the conviction that the state could, through centrally planned and implemented policies, manipulate the language behaviour of its citizens. It should be fairly obvious that precisely these two elements are behind the policy I have termed the invisibilisation of Kurdish. Ultimately, I propose that the invisibilisation of Kurdish should be seen as an integral component of Turkey's language planning: It too is a state-initiated operation, one that aims to regulate the choice that citizens have in the language they use for various activities, i.e. it is "status planning". In other words, cleansing the Turkish language of foreign elements, and coercing the citizens to speak only Turkish, are but two facets of one and the same enterprise. The simple fact is that at the inception of the reforms in the 1920's, a significant proportion of Turkey's population spoke a language different from Turkish, and the state needed to engage in a campaign to rectify the situation. State-initiated language planning has thus a long tradition in Turkey, as indeed in other young countries, such as Singapore, Indonesia, or Israel. But while the state's efforts to Turkify the national language have been highly visible, symbolic, and indeed celebratory, the state's efforts to manipulate language **choice** among its citizens have been conducted largely covertly. In this respect, Turkey's implementation of status planning differs markedly from that pursued, for example, in Singapore, where the campaign to "Speak Mandarin Chinese" (rather than regional dialects of Chinese) has been highly public, and the state has endeavoured to justify its aims to the populace (see Bokhorst-Heng 1999).

What is surprising to the present author is that the official silence on this aspect of language planning is echoed in the international scientific literature. To my knowledge, not a single study on language planning in Turkey even mentions the status planning aspects (this also applies the present author's earlier work, see Haig 1996). In other words, the unspoken assumption underlying the extensive literature on Turkey's language planning is that Turkey had a linguistically homogenous population, and the problems of language planning were thus reduced to corpus planning as it related to the Turkish language alone. It was not until the publication of Skutnabb-Kangas & Bucak (1995) that the other side of Turkey's language planning activities were brought to the attention of the international linguistic community, but their work is still generally ignored in the literature on language planning in Turkey.

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[47] The Turkish language reform has been treated in numerous scholarly studies, e.g. Heyd (1954), Steuerwald (1963), Levend (1972), Hazai (1974), Bazin (1983), Brendemoen (1990), Haig (1996) and G. Lewis (2002).

[48] It is, however, not the case that all commentators approve of all aspects of the language reform, and the outcome has not always been what was intended by the reformers — see G. Lewis (2002) for the most recent assessment of these issues. However, the vast majority are in agreement that the language reform has been an overall success.

7 Conclusions

According to one author, Turkey's policies on minority languages have aimed at "linguistic absorption of all people into Turkish" (Yağmur 2001: 421). Others refer to an "assimilation policy" (e.g. Gürbey 1996: 13), while still others are less diplomatic: the Turkish state is "actively killing" the Kurdish language (Skutnabb-Kangas & Bucak 1995). Whichever metaphor one prefers, the net result of absorption, assimilation or killing remains the same: the language disappears. Although this has rarely been stated openly by the representatives of Turkey's governments, a survey of the policies pursued on the Kurdish language over the past 70 years makes it abundantly evident that the desired result of state policy has been the disappearance of the language, either totally, or at least from all spheres of public visibility. A number of strategies have been employed, ranging from resettlement of the Kurdish speaking populace with the aim of accelerating assimilation, virtual assimilation, that is, the language is officially declared non-existent, or at least essentially not different from Turkish, and denigration: it exists, but it is not a real language, hence less worthy of maintaining and cultivating.

Taken together, the policies on Kurdish can be, and I argue should be, considered a form of language planning: deliberate efforts on the part of the state to influence how its citizens use language. Turkey is a country with a long-standing tradition of state intervention in language issues, but while the state's efforts to influence the form of the national language, Turkish, have been the object of intense scholarly interest, the complementary enterprise, the invisibilisation of Kurdish (and most other minority languages), has largely been ignored in the relevant literature, both within and outside Turkey. That too is a form of invisibilisation, one which the present paper attempts to counterbalance.

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