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Introduction

1   Writing in 1977, George Harris observed that 'serious Kurdish conflict, therefore, now appears to be a thing of the past' (Harris 1977: 124). Yet Kurdish nationalism has proved to be a resilient and resourceful force. Paralleling the rise of militant Kurdish mobilization in Turkey and the formation of an embryonic Kurdish state in North Iraq has been the proliferation of scholarly interest in Kurdish identity. In this article, I take a critical look at several assumptions underlying the current scholarship on Kurdish nationalism. Primarily, I question those analysts who rely on two principal dichotomies: the dichotomy of ethnic nationalism versus civic nationalism and the dichotomy of state versus society. Neither of these two approaches adequately captures the richness and ambiguity of Kurdish political identity in Turkey. Also, I suggest organizations rather than ethnic groups should be the focus of scholarly analysis. Finally, I argue that those studies which operate within the confines of these two dichotomies and conceptualize ethnic groups as unitary actors with well-defined demands and goals do not engage the most interesting questions. To demonstrate that this is so, I offer a number of examples of how the politics of Turkish and Kurdish nationalism interact and affect the construction of ethnic identity at a popular level. How does Turkish nationalism respond to Kurdish nationalism's challenges to its legitimacy? Why are electoral results in Kurdish-populated areas of Turkey not more closely correlated with the ethnic identity of voters? In other words, what factors explain ethnic defection, that is, voters' support for parties that explicitly oppose 'the national aspirations of the ethnic group with which they identify'? (Kalyvas 2008: 1048). What factors explain the seemingly perplexing choices of the Kurdish nationalist movement? I would like to offer tentative answers to these questions. The conceptual

approach put forward in this article may contribute to a more refined understanding of the trajectory of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey.

I. The Turkish State and Kurdish Nationalism

2   Many studies of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey are based on two dichotomies. First, these studies generally share the assumption that civic nationalism is 'more virtuous and liberal' than ethnic nationalism', which is 'generally seen as dangerous and exclusive' (Wolff 2006: 52). Many scholars argue that Turkish nationalism, which is perceived to promote Turkic ethnicity at the expense of other ethnic groups, fostered and radicalized ethnic Kurdish nationalism. Next, scholars tend to analyze the interaction between the Turkish state and Kurdish-speaking citizens of Turkey through the lens of a binary state-society distinction. Several examples suffice to show how these two dichotomies underline assertions regarding the evolution of Kurdish nationalism. David McDowall suggests that any modern history of the Kurds must focus on 'the struggle between the Kurdish people and the governments to which they are subject' (McDowall 2000: 1). Michael Gunter claims, 'Kurdish nationalism largely developed in the 20th century as a stateless ethnic reaction against the repressive "official state nationalisms" of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria' (2007: 15). The Turkish state's discriminatory, violent, and exclusive policies have had a decisive influence in shaping contemporary Kurdish nationalism (*e.g.*, Yavuz 2001: 1; Smith 2005). In a similar vein, Martin Van Bruinessen argues that state repression in Turkey actually contributed to 'the strength of what it tried to destroy, Kurdish culture' (Van Bruinessen 2003: 57). Hamit Bozarslan also conceptualizes the relationship between the Turkish state and Kurdish-speaking groups as being antagonistic and conflict-ridden. '[T]he relations of domination between the state and the Kurds would involve *systematic* persecution, marginalization and humiliation of Kurdishness' since 1925' (Bozarslan 2003: 187). The Turkish state's coercive and assimilationist practices such as compulsory Turkish-language education and military service together with experiences of discrimination as workers in Turkish cities have contributed to the formation of a radicalized Kurdish nationalist identity (Saatci 2002). Likewise, state policies that ignore the Kurds in official historiography and impose the symbols of Turkish nationalism over Kurdish landscape have stimulated a chauvinistic Kurdish nationalism (Canefe 2002; Öktem 2004). Analyzing the rise of the PKK in the 1980s, Kurdish intellectual Altan Tan claims that the brutal 1980 coup was the primary factor explaining popular support for the PKK (Tan 2009: 399).

3   Such arguments, which reduce the evolution of Kurdish nationalism to a reaction to ethnic Turkish nationalism and violent and discriminatory state policies, have not gone unchallenged. The ethnicisation of bureaucracy that has caused ethnic conflict in many newly independent countries has not been pervasive in Turkey (Wimmer 1997). Many ethnic Kurds have achieved positions of influence and power within the bureaucracy and are integrated into Turkish society (Cornell 2001). Furthermore, it has not been empirically demonstrated that 'the ethnic definition of Turkish nationalism *preceded*, and was causally linked to, the development of Kurdish "counternationalism"' (Somer 2004: 241). Martin Van Bruinessen also notes that the role of violence in the Kurdish question is overstated and observes that many Kurdish elites have been willing to be co-opted into the political system and to downplay their Kurdish identity (Van

Bruinessen 1999b). The most spirited challenge comes from Metin Heper, who argues that the Turkish state's policies towards its Kurdish citizens cannot be characterized as being assimilationist and repressive (Heper 2007: 6). He argues that existing studies of Kurdish nationalism cannot explain 'the periods of relative peace and quiet in the state-Kurd relationship' (p. 181). According to Heper, Turkish nationalism is primarily of a civic nature, 'those who professed loyalty to the state were considered a Turk, irrespective of culture, religion, and language,' and 'supplemented by cultural nationalism', which entails that citizens who 'internalized the constellation of ideals, values and attitudes that give rise to a 'we' feeling have been considered real Turks' (p. 184). Hence, 'Turkey has constitutionally adopted civic nationalism…one could become a real Turk to the extent to which one adopted the ideals, values, and attitudes of the ethnic Turks' (p. 179).

4   Ironically, Heper's empirical discussion contradicts his central claim that the Turkish state has not practiced policies of assimilation toward the Kurds. For instance, he states, 'unless a person declared his/her being a Kurd publicly and demanded political rights for the Kurds, the state has not made an issue of Kurdishness' (p. 118). He continues, 'names of villages with Kurdish names were given Turkish names and parents were forbidden to give Kurdish names to their children' (p. 163). Similarly, he observes, '[a] person could go on speaking his/her mother tongue; however, if that person also spoke Turkish and gave his/her children Turkish names and adopted the mores of ethnic Turks, s/he, too, would have met the nationality condition' (p. 92). All these practices that are documented by Heper are examples of forceful assimilation, which entails that an ethnic group's language and culture are institutionally marginalized in favor of another ethnic group that is larger in numbers and controls the state. To adopt the terminology of Mann, the Turkish state policies towards the Kurdish-speaking people involved institutional coercion, policed repression, violent repression, and unpremeditated mass killings (Mann 2005: 12). The latter strategy was applied to suppress the Dersim rebellion in the late 1930s (Olson 2000; Bulut 2005) and conquer Dersim, an 'internal frontier' where indigenous groups in a peripheral region resisted centralization and homogenization (Yiftachel 1996).

5   Plenty of primary sources amply document how the coercive state policies have left lasting legacies of discrimination and alienation among considerable segments of the Kurdish people (*e.g.*, Anter 1999: 31-34, 361; Cemal 2003: 15-34, 373-379; Ekinci 2004: 94-97; Kaya 2003: 24-39, 143-150). This legacy still persists. In the words of an old man from Batman whose son joined the PKK, 'I am paying my taxes, fulfilling my military service, yet I don't have the same rights. I cannot express my identity freely.'[1] Furthermore, Heper sterilizes the impact of state policies on the Kurds by ignoring how Kurds are perceived and treated differently from ethnic Turks (*e.g.*, Yeğen 1999; Jongerden 2004/2005; Ülker 2007).[2] He is silent about the indiscriminate violence that targeted the Kurds in the early years of the Republic and again during the 1980s and 1990s (*e.g.*, Alınak 1996: 74-93). Indiscriminate state violence has been the primary reason for why ordinary people join insurgent organizations in many political conflicts (Ganguly 1996; Goodwin 2001: 235). Inevitably, he fails to understand how state policies have fostered a deep sense of injustice and grievance among many Kurdish-speaking citizens.

6   Curiously enough, Heper still operates within the frameworks of the dichotomy of ethnic nationalism versus civic nationalism and the dichotomy of state versus society,

and focuses on ethnic groups rather than organizations in spite of his criticism of the previous literature on Kurdish nationalism in Turkey. First, Heper uses ethnic labels in an uncritical and ahistorical fashion. For instance, he writes, 'the Turks came to the conclusion that the Kurds had tended to stray away from the ideals, values, and attitudes 'they had come to share with the Turks', and in the process, their secondary identity could replace 'their generic primary identity of being a Turk' (p. 10). Heper writes as if ethnic groups are unitary actors pursuing clearly defined goals. In fact, the complicated relationship between ethnic groups, which are not monolithic and homogenous actors, and organizations that claim to represent ethnic interests should be critically analyzed to make sense of the dynamics of ethnic relations (Brubaker 2002). The interests of the ethnic constituency are not always compatible with the interests of the ethnic organization. Second, the Turkish state has not been a monolithic actor and its policies have been fundamentally affected by its interaction with autonomous social actors, especially after the transition to multiparty rule in 1950. While Heper actually recognizes that the civil and military approaches to the Kurdish question differ substantially (p. 179), he does not systematically analyze the causes and implications of these differences. Third, the discussion of whether Turkish nationalism is ethnic or civic is not very productive. The ethnic vs. civic nationalism dichotomy has very limited analytical value in understanding the patterns of ethnic conflict in Turkey. Civic nationalism 'is not necessarily a better or a worse kind of nationalism', it 'advantages majority cultures', and 'has some very strong assimilationist and possible exclusivist tendencies' (Wolff 2006: 52-53). Hence, on the one hand, the authors who emphasize the ethnic elements of Turkey cannot really explain how millions of Kurdish-speaking citizens voluntarily adopt Turkish identity and avoid any identification with Kurdish nationalism. On the other hand, scholars who insist on civic or at least non-ethnic aspects of Turkish nationalism overlook the fact that millions of Kurdish-speaking citizens have strong grievances against how the state and media treat them. Turkish nationalism has been too ambivalent and characterized by conflicting tendencies to be categorized either as ethnic or civic.

An Ethnic Boundary-Making Approach and Kurdish Nationalism

7   A more promising approach to the study of nationalisms is suggested by Fredrik Barth, who argues, 'the critical focus of investigation...becomes the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses' (Barth 1969: 15). According to Andreas Wimmer, 'ethnicity is not primarily conceived as a matter of *relations* between pre-defined, fixed groups...but rather as a process of *constituting* and *re-constituting* groups by defining the boundaries between them' (2008: 1027). The process of ethnic boundary-making involves many different strategies. In the case of nation building, state elites either 'redefine an *existing* ethnic group as the nation into which everybody should fuse' or 'create a new national category through the amalgamation of a variety of ethnic groups' (p. 1032). While the first strategy is called 'incorporation', which captures the fundamental aspects of nation-building in Turkey, the second is known as 'amalgamation'. The creation of a national identity on the basis of a majority ethnicity inevitably involves the creation of minorities who are 'perceive[d] as too alien or politically unreliable for incorporation or amalgamation' (1034). From this perspective, the formation of a unified Kurdish category that transcends linguistic, tribal, and regional differences has partially been a product of the Turkish Republic.

8   The predominant mode of Turkish nationalism entails the 'incorporation' strategy of ethnic boundary making that marginalizes all ethnic identities other than Turkish. Public recognition and political representation of other ethnic identities is prohibited because this is perceived to undermine national unity and foment polarization. At the same time, this strategy has aimed to enlarge the boundaries and transform the content of Turkishness. Several examples will be informative. İlker Başbuğ, Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) argues, '[t]he constitutional recognition of ethnic identities aims to undermine the nation-state. Nobody should expect Turkey to administer policies that target a certain ethnic group in political arena. This may bring the country to polarization and decomposition'.[3] In a speech delivered to the Turkish Staff Officers' School on April 14, 2009, he argues against that the idea that political violence in Turkey can be described as ethnic conflict.[4] According to him, the PKK unsuccessfully attempts to generate ethnic tensions and violence. Many citizens with Kurdish and Zaza origins are members of the TSK and were martyred in the fight against the PKK.[5] All citizens, regardless of their ethnic identity, are equal according to law. Başbuğ approvingly cites Heper and notes that there was no ethnicity-related violence from 1938 to 1984. He even refers to findings from a public opinion poll indicating that an overwhelming majority of Kurds and Zaza express their emotional attachment to Turkey. He concedes that ethnic identities can be freely expressed at the individual level but should not have any place in politics. Başbuğ argues that 'politicization of ethnicity' generates instability and violence in Lebanon, Iraq, and the Balkans.[6] Deniz Baykal, the leader of the CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*), similarly pursues the 'incorporation' strategy. He argues that Turkishness should be perceived as the national identity of Turkey, and that it does not prevent Turkish citizens holding other ethnic identities. At the same time, he opposes constitutional recognition of ethnic identities.[7]

9   Prime Minister and leader of the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's construction of Turkish nationalism is both similar to and different from the views of Başbuğ and Baykal. On the one hand, he also perceives Turkishness as a broad category that encompasses multiple ethnic identities. 'Turks, Lazs, Kurds, Circassians, Georgians share the citizenship of Turkish Republic and are all our brothers.'[8] On the other hand, he is more willing to publicly acknowledge the historical distinctiveness of the Kurdish identity. He argues that this distinctiveness does not necessarily undermine the unity between the Turks and Kurds since they have a long history of cooperation and share similar cultural values, which tend to be based on their common belief in Islam. In this sense, the Turks and the Kurds do not just happen to live in the same territory, but have established close bonds through their interactions, struggle against common enemies, and being members of the common Islamic culture. Hence, Erdoğan adopts a position that is characterized by both 'incorporation' and 'amalgamation' strategies, and aims to undercut the appeal of Kurdish ethnic nationalism. Since the Turkish state should not be seen as a monolithic and static entity, these competing interpretations of Turkish nationalism have evolved and became more articulate over time with the state's attempts to counter the challenge of Kurdish nationalism.

10   The Kurdish nationalists pursue several strategies of ethnic boundary making in response to these constructions of Turkish nationalism. They argue that the characterization of Turkish nationalism as civic is no more than a facade to perpetuate the domination of the Turkish ethnicity. Primarily, they draw narrower boundaries of

ethnic identity in an effort to identify the Kurds as a separate nation from the Turks. Wimmer labels this type of ethnic boundary-making as 'contraction' (p. 1036). Emine Ayna, co-chairperson of the DTP (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*), offers primary examples of an ethnic entrepreneur employing such a strategy in her speeches. She reduces Kurdishness into a certain type of political identity. In a speech delivered in Varto on December 2, 2008, she argued,

> No one who becomes a candidate of the AKP can say, 'I am a Kurd'. This is not acceptable because the AKP's policies deny the Kurds. Whoever becomes an AKP candidate is not a Kurd even if she says 'I am a Kurd'. This does not mean that we are practicing ethnic politics. The AKP and the ones who claim that there is a single nation [Turkish nation] in this country practice ethnic politics.

11   She further argued in an electoral rally in March 2009 that the true measure of Kurdishness is support for the DTP.[9] Hence, an individual would not count as an authentic Kurd if she votes for parties other than the DTP. Ayna's strategy may be self-defeating and has the unwanted consequence of contracting the appeal of Kurdish nationalism because it does not only draw a sharp boundary between the Kurds and other ethnic groups in Turkey, but also qualifies the meaning of Kurdishness by restrictive political criteria.[10] Ayna's definition of Kurdish ethnicity stands in sharp contrast to the multidimensional and ambivalent ways in which Kurdish-speaking citizens of Turkey articulate and experience their identities. The fluid nature of Kurdish identity in contemporary Turkey is well documented (*e.g.*, Van Bruinessen 1999a: 23-360). Even during the heydays of the conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK, ethnic identity did not necessarily determine political allegiance (cf. Kalyvas and Kocher 2007).

12   Other Kurdish nationalists pursue an ethnic boundary-making strategy that is called 'transvaluation' (Wimmer 2008: 1037). They explicitly challenge the normative hierarchy established by Turkish nationalism and argue that Kurds should have equal symbolic status and political power. An earlier example is found in the work of the Cemilpaşazade brothers, who argue that the Turks were uncivilized people who invaded a Kurdish civilization (Malmisanij 2004). The argument that the Kurds were cheated after the Independence War has a long history among Kurdish nationalists.[11] Ahmet Türk, the co-chairperson of the DTP, frequently mentions in his speeches how the 1924 Constitution established an autocratic political system and denied Kurdish identity despite the fact that the Kurds were crucial for the success of the Independence War led by Atatürk.[12] He now demands that this injustice should be redressed by the enactment of a new constitution that offers recognition to the Kurdish identity. He delivered segments of his February 24, 2009, address to the DTP parliamentary group in Kurdish in order to criticize the prohibition of other languages than Turkish in official spaces. This provides a striking example of how the Kurdish nationalists respond to the state elites' claim that Kurdish identity is not suppressed in Turkey.

13   The strategy of 'transvaluation' also entails contesting the hegemonic historiography. Kurdish nationalists reinterpret key historical events of the early Republican years. They have glorified the Sheik Said Rebellion of 1925 and the Dersim Revolt of 1937 in an attempt to establish continuity in the Kurdish resistance to repressive and domineering state authority. Besides, the Kurdish nationalist movement has a tendency to interpret all conflicts in which Kurdish-speaking people are involved as hate attacks that target the Kurds specifically because of their ethnic identity. For instance, a group attacked

Kurdish houses in rural Kyrgyzstan in late April 2009 after allegations that a Kurd raped a four-year old girl. According to Kurdish news agency ANF, the attacks were ethnically motivated and aimed to expel Kurds from the village and seize their properties.[13] This tendency to ethnicize conflict is consistent with the observation that '[t]he ethnic nature of the conflict is always contested and not intrinsic to the act itself; it emerges through after-the-fact interpretative claims' (Brubaker and Laitin 1998: 444).

14   In parallel to the strategy of 'transvaluation', Kurdish nationalists also legitimize political violence by arguing that restrictions on Kurdish identity would not have been lifted if not for the PKK's armed struggle. They insist that the PKK has restored dignity to Kurdish identity and prevented its further humiliation.[14] In a speech delivered in Lice on August 13, 2008, Necdet Atalay, now mayor of Batman, declared:

> We were ashamed of our Kurdishness 30 years ago. How happy for these people [PKK militants], they have taught us how to live with pride. Now, no Kurd is ashamed of her Kurdishness. To the contrary, every Kurd is proud of her identity. This struggle entailed tremendous sacrifices. I hail these honorable individuals in your presence.

15   The Kurdish nationalists do not only contest Turkish nationalism, but also try to articulate a crystallized and homogenous notion of Kurdish identity. Yet, Kurdish identity is formed, articulated, and lived in many different ways that make it very difficult for Kurdish nationalists to mobilize all ethnic Kurds under their banner. Particularly interesting is how some people speaking the Zaza dialect of Kurdish object to be classified as Kurds and pursue their own version of the 'contraction' strategy. The city of Elazığ, which has a large Zaza population, organized a very well-attended protest against 'PKK terrorism' on October 24, 2007. The participants, many of who are Zaza Kurds, shouted, 'We are all Turks, we are all Mehmets [a generic name given to soldiers of the Turkish army]'. A middle-aged person, employed in a state institution in Bingöl, remarks, 'The PKK aims to manipulate Zazas. They argue that Zazas are Kurds. We are different. Why don't Zaza establish Zazaistan then? Kurds should help us then.'[15] Other Kurds resist the Kurdish nationalist narrative of ethnic identity for more mundane reasons. In the words of a high-ranking representative of the DTP in Istanbul, 'Many [Kurdish] parents do not want their children to be politicized and join our party. They prefer them to have good education, secure decent jobs and stay away from trouble. For this reason, we are unable to fully mobilize our potential'.[16]

16   For many ethnic Kurds, there is no rigid boundary between Kurdish and Turkish identity, which remain compatible with each other. The fusion of identities cannot be solely explained by forced and involuntary assimilation. Several examples can be illuminating. A Kurdish businessman who frequently commutes between Diyarbakır and Iraqi Kurdistan, who was detained for sympathizing with the PKK when he was a student at Dicle University in Diyarbakir in the 1980s, makes the following comment:

> We speak Turkish to each other even if there is nobody among us whose mother language is not Kurdish. This is not because we have to, but because we like to. I also speak Turkish with my children. They need to have a good command of the language if they would like to be successful in life. Their future is in Turkey, not here [Iraqi Kurdistan].[17]

17   Another Kurdish tradesman from Diyarbakır, who was imprisoned in the infamous Diyarbakır military prison for his sympathy to Ala Rizgari, a Kurdish organization, in the early 1980s, wants his five children to be fluent in Turkish. In fact, his youngest child, a 9-years old girl, does not speak Kurdish at all. While he becomes emotional

when he sees the Kurdish flag and soldiers in Iraqi Kurdistan and deeply admires the Barzani family, he strongly believes that his children's future lies in Turkey.

18   Social stigma attached to the Kurdish language and identity also leads many Kurdish-speaking individuals to hide their ethnic origins and adopt new public postures. A social-democrat engineer in the western town of İzmir observes, 'We have a brilliant engineer in our office. I know he is a Kurd but he walks to the balcony whenever he speaks to his parents in Kurdish. He does not want us to hear him speaking Kurdish'.[18] A person who is an amateur film director and owns a video shop in Muş explains to a visitor that Kurdish albums and films have fewer sales than Turkish ones. Yet, almost all of his customers seem to be interested in the Kurdish products.[19] A Zaza Kurd who was born in a village near Palu, a district of Elazığ, now lives in İzmir after retiring as a bank manager. His two daughters have no knowledge of his mother tongue, which he refuses to speak. He deeply admires the achievements of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. These are examples of a 'positional move' that involves an individual changing his or her identity in order to escape negative connotations associated with the original ethnic group. Such 'long-term ethnic switching' entails strategically motivated changes in language, custom, manner, and dress (Nagel and Olzak 1982: 129), and does not challenge the sociopolitical hierarchy between ethnicities (Wimmer 2008: 1039). People who voluntarily eschew or downplay their Kurdish identity have many motivations, especially since negative stereotypes of Kurds are pervasive.

19   At the same time, many Kurdish-speaking citizens also emphasize that they are treated as second-class citizens and deprived of their rights. A barber who also works a security guard in Dicle University in Diyarbakır relates that his great-grandfather participated in the Erzurum Congress in 1919 as a representative of Van. He complains:

> My great-grandfather used to address Atatürk as Field Marshal. Now look at our situation. They treat people who recently emigrated from Bulgaria better than us. They even treat Afghan refugees who were given housing in Diyarbakır better than us. Yet we will fight for this state if a war erupts, not the Afghans. We do not discriminate against anybody. We do not want to be discriminated against. We are the owners of this country.[20]

20   These specific examples suggest that ethnic boundary making is a more promising approach to the Kurdish question than the dichotomy of ethnic vs. civic nationalism. Two reasons for this conclusion can be cited. First, the relationship between Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms cannot be adequately captured as the resistance of the latter to the domineering attempts of the former. This relationship is interactive and dynamic, and both nationalisms continuously mold each other. For instance, the 'transvaluation' strategy pursued by the Kurdish nationalists has made the Turkish nationalists explicitly accept Kurdishness as a respected ethnic identity. The state elites are now at pains to emphasize that nobody is discriminated against because of ethnic identity and that all ethnic identities deserve equal treatment. [21] State TV now broadcasts in Kurdish, and universities will soon have Kurdish language and culture departments. This explicit recognition of Kurdishness as a legitimate source of public identity represents a sharp break from previous discourses that denied its existence. In particular, Prime Minister Erdoğan articulates a discourse that has some elements of the strategy of 'amalgamation' and focuses on common values shared by ethnic Turks and Kurds. At the same time, the Turkish nationalists do not recognize the Kurds as a nation with the collective right of self-determination, and accuse the Kurdish nationalists for being divisive. In response, the Kurdish nationalists repeatedly reject

this accusation and try to emphasize their commitment to Turkish-Kurdish unity. Second, Kurdish nationalism, as well as Turkish nationalism, is not monolithic and includes several competing strategies. Nationalists on both sides strive to draw rigid boundaries while ethnic identities tend to be fluid and permeable at popular level. They try to impose sanctions over behavior that is deemed to be inappropriate from a nationalistic view. Consequently, ethnic categories do not automatically involve certain types of political orientation and behavior. The relationship between ethnic identity and ethnicity-oriented political action needs to be explained, rather than to be assumed.

II. Electoral Competition and Kurdish Nationalism

21   Perspectives that conceptualize the relationship between state and society primarily in antagonistic terms ignore the role of electoral dynamics and cross-ethnic interactions in the evolution of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey. Elections often blur the distinction among state and non-state actors and fundamentally shape the nature of their interaction (Migdal 2001). Social actors affiliated with political parties participate in the elections and vie with each other for control over the ethnic constituency. Even highly autonomous state actors, such as the TSK and the judiciary, may become responsive to popular demands for greater respect for human rights. The judiciary, more specifically lower courts, is more inclined to punish security forces who commit human rights violations on occasions when civil society activists mobilize the legal system, public opinion, and international linkages (Tezcür 2009).

22   The results of Turkish elections have not been closely correlated with the ethnicity of voters, and political parties have engaged in appealing to the ethnic identity of voters only to a limited extent (Horowitz 2000: 318-332). In fact, ethnic identity does not automatically determine voting in Turkey. As the performance of the AKP in the 2007 elections demonstrate, centrist and multiethnic political parties espousing moderate platforms can be very successful (cf. Reilly 2002: 167). The parties that claim to represent national interests of the Kurds have never received more than 7 percent of the vote, even if Kurdish-speaking citizens are estimated to make up 14 percent of the population (Koc *et al.* 2008).

23   In Turkey, elections have helped to co-opt local Kurdish elites, to expand legal space for contentious Kurdish activism, and to shape the nature of competition among Kurdish political actors. First, electoral competition since 1946 has contributed to strategic alliances between Turkish political parties and Kurdish religious, tribal, landed, and capitalist elites. The latter have consolidated their authority and commanded vast patronage resources in exchange for delivering votes to the former. This mutually dependent relationship between the state and local elites has been an important factor in preventing elections from becoming agents of socioeconomic change for many years (Beşikçi 1992: 53-56). At the same time, electoral processes have been an important force that offers ethnic Kurds avenues of political representation and power within the system.[22] A prominent example would be the long albeit intermittent parliamentary career of Abdülmelik Fırat, the grandson of Sheik Said who led the most important Kurdish rebellion in the early years of the Republic (Kaya 2003). Other important examples include Yusuf Azizoğlu who served as Health Minister in the early 1960s, and Şerafettin Elçi, who was a minister in 1979.[23] These Kurdish politicians were not

immune from slanders demonizing their Kurdish ethnicity. For example, Kamuran İnan, who challenged Süleyman Demirel for the leadership of the Adalet Partisi in the 1970s, complains that his ambition was thwarted as his opponents highlighted the fact that he is from the 'East'.[24]

24   Second, elections have also contributed to the expansion and resiliency of the Kurdish contentious political action. In 1967 the public rallies sponsored by the TİP (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*), which gained parliamentary representation in the 1965 elections, provided the first instance of Kurdish identity being openly politically articulated since the repression of the rebellions in the late 1930s (Gündoğan 2005).[25] Since the early 1990s, Kurdish nationalists have made use of the electoral opportunities to make symbolic and policy demands from the political system, reach domestic and international audiences, gain protection from state repression, and command material resources (Watts 2006). Electoral participation also helped Kurdish nationalists form inter-ethnic alliances with varying degrees of success, most notably in the 1991 elections. Not surprisingly, military interventions that suspended elections and destroyed legal avenues for Kurdish demands generated spirals of radicalization. The 1971 coup led to the proliferation of clandestine and conspiracy-oriented organizations.[26] Similarly, the 1980 coup significantly contributed to the appeal of the PKK's militancy (Romano 2006). [27]

25   Finally, electoral participation has not only generated opportunities for the Kurdish nationalists but also exposed them to fierce competition. In fact, the behavior of the Kurdish nationalist movement at critical junctures would be puzzling unless one takes the effects of electoral competition on the movement into consideration. After being sentenced to the death penalty in June 1999, Abdullah Öcalan announced that the armed struggle had fulfilled its historical mission and asked the PKK militants to withdraw from Turkey. Meanwhile, the EU-induced reform process brought one of the most ambitious democratization periods in modern Turkish history. While authoritarian practices persisted, legal and political opportunities for non-violent Kurdish mobilization were unprecedented. Yet, Öcalan and the PKK decided to renew armed struggled on June 1, 2004. The reescalation of violence inevitably derailed the reform process and contributed to a deterioration of the human rights situation. In this context, the PKK's decision to return to arms becomes understandable only when one analyzes how the PKK's control over its Kurdish constituency was threatened by the rising appeal of the AKP. It was not a coincidence that the PKK remobilized its armed forces few months after the March 2004 local elections when the AKP won in many Kurdish provinces. The PKK intensified its attacks after the July 2007 parliamentary elections when the AKP increased its share of the Kurdish vote at the expense of the DTP. [28] The PKK tactically moderated its behavior and announced ceasefires only after the 2009 local elections when the DTP made significant gains. Hence, partial democratization had the unintended consequence of radicalizing the Kurdish nationalist movement when it threatened the movement's control over its constituency (Tezcür 2011). Ironically, the reformist AKP has become a greater concern to the Kurdish nationalists than the TSK. Hence, the primary goal of the PKK violence was to perpetuate control over the constituency (cf. Bozarslan 2000).

26   Competition among Kurdish nationalists is as important as competition between the Kurdish nationalists and multiethnic parties. Kurdish nationalism in Turkey is not synonymous with the PKK and its ancillary legal organizations.[29] In fact, Kurdish

nationalism has been represented by at least two competing tendencies since the early 1960s, when expanding political liberties enabled public expressions of Kurdish identity and culture. The fifty Kurds that were imprisoned by Adnan Menderes's government in 1959 included many figures that later became influential political leaders.[30] They were not a unified group, but were divided along religious and political lines (*e.g.*, Anter 1999: 164-169; Miroğlu 2005: 173-177; Çamlıbel 2007: 145-164). The first Kurdish nationalist organization to be set up after the suppression of the Kurdish revolts in the early Republican Years was the TKDP [*Türkiye Kürdistan Demokrat Partisi*]. The TKDP, established in 1965 and inspired by the Barzani movement, competed against left-oriented Kurdish activists. [31]

27 Since the 1990s, Islam has increasingly provided a medium through which many Kurdish nationalists express their grievances and aspirations.[32] The Kurdish Islamists are represented in a diverse set of organizations ranging from the AKP to civil society associations such as the Med-Zehra group (Atacan 2001), Mazlum-Der [*İnsan Hakları ve Mazlumlar İçin Dayanışma Derneği*], established in 1991, and Mustazaf-Der [*Mustazaflar İle Dayanışma Derneği*], established in 2004, and to militant organizations such as Hizbullah, which fought a bloody war against the PKK throughout the 1990s (Faraç 2001). Ex-Mazlum-Der members and current AKP parliamentarians İhsan Arslan and Abdurrahman Kurt, both of whom represent the province of Diyarbakır, have been influential in the making of the AKP's Kurdish policy. According to Kurt, Erdoğan refers to Islamic bonds between the Turks and the Kurds when he says 'there is a single nation in Turkey'.[33] Obviously, his configuration of Kurdish identity is very different from the DTP's and has strong Islamic connotations. The Kurdish Islamists have taken advantage of the opportunities presented by the AKP government, which saw the former as an effective antidote against the secular Kurdish nationalist movement. The Kurdish Islamists hoped that the AKP would reduce the TSK's political autonomy and expand the scope of public expressions of religious rituals, symbols, and discourse. They were instrumental in mobilizing grassroots support to the AKP in the 2007 parliamentary elections, and are the only group that has matched the mass-mobilization capacity of the secular Kurdish nationalists. For instance, the Kurdish Islamists organized a huge rally in Diyarbakır to protest Israel's attack against the Gaza Strip on January 4, 2009.

28 The competition between the Kurdish Islamists and the secular Kurdish nationalist movement has occasionally turned violent. For the latter, the rise of the AKP and the Kurdish Islamists posed an existential threat to its claims of being the authoritative representative of Kurds in Turkey. In Yüksekova, a town where the secular Kurdish nationalist movement is the dominant actor, the AKP and Kurdish-Islamist associations were subject to repeated attacks.[34] The local branch of Mustazaf-Der was ransacked on March 24, 2008, and the AKP office was bombed on August 14, 2008. Political tensions continued to increase before the critical March 2009 local elections. In a separate incident, hundreds of PKK sympathizers attacked a local Islamist association in Adana on February 1, 2009.

29 The Kurdish-Islamists can be as radical as the secular nationalists in their political views and demands. An important publication that disseminates Kurdish-Islamist ideas is the monthly magazine *Mizgîn,* which has been published in both Turkish and Kurdish since August 2004.[35] While the journal, based in Diyarbakır, is highly critical of the Turkish state's policies toward the Kurds, it also keeps a distance from the Kurdish nationalist movement. Furthermore, the journal criticizes the Islamic movements for

being insensitive to Kurdish suffering while condemning violence in Palestine and Afghanistan. It is affiliated with Toplum-Der (*Toplumsal Hakları ve Değerleri Koruma, Eğitim, Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği*, established in 2004). The political proposals and analyses of the magazine are ambitious and assertive. The journal argues that federalism is the best solution to the Kurdish question, and that confederalism and independence should be also considered as viable options (Hocaoğlu 2009: 8).[36] The March 2009 issue has a 'Great Kurdistan' map that includes territory from six countries (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Azerbaijan, and Armenia). Kurdistan is labeled as 'a country looted on all sides,' 'a country everywhere under occupation,' 'a country whose land is covered in blood and tears,' and 'a country that abounds in illegal murders.' Not surprisingly, a judge ordered the confiscation of the issue. The April 2009 issue of the journal has a cover that shows a combined map of 'Great Kurdistan' and remaining regions of Turkey, which are separated by a white border, under the title of Federation. [37] The leading article in that issue argues that the most sensible solution to the Kurdish question is the formation of a grand federation that includes Turkey and all areas in the region with a Kurdish majority.

III. Inter-Ethnic Influences and Kurdish Nationalism

30   As a final point, perspectives that exclusively conceptualize the relationship between the Turkish state and Kurdish community as an unbroken lineage of hostilities miss the interactions that have been crucial to the formation of Kurdish nationalist identity and movements in Turkey. The PKK pursues a complex and ambivalent stance when it identifies its historical precedents and allies. The PKK neither condemns all Turkish political activism as being hostile to the Kurds nor glorifies all past Kurdish political activism. Its historiography tends to dismiss the DDKO (*Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları*), the organizational source that was central to the flourishing Kurdish political activism in the 1970s, as being irrelevant and insignificant. Instead, the PKK traces its lineage back to the Turkish rural guerrilla groups that mushroomed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The PKK's embrace of the iconic figures of Turkish left and discourse of inter-ethnic cooperation in pursuit of common goals has its origins in the 1960s, when a new Kurdish intelligentsia participated in leftist political activism. 'During this decade a Kurdish national movement was reconstructed through the inter-ethnic, institutionalized, and legal framework of the radical left', and has left a lasting impact on the ideological premises of Kurdish nationalism (Watts 2007: 76).

31   According to Cemil Bayık, a senior PKK figure, the PKK has restored dignity to socialism.[38] The PKK declared May as the 'month of martyrs' and May 18 as the 'day of martyrs' in its 1st Conference in 1981. May 18 is the day when Haki Karer, an ethnic Turk and a close companion of Abdullah Öcalan, was murdered by a rival Kurdish organization in Antep in 1977. Along with Kemal Pir, another ethnic Turk and PKK leader who died in hunger strike in September 1982, Karer represents the unity between the Turkish and Kurdish peoples in their common struggle.[39] Their participation in the PKK is a testimony to the insurgent organization's commitment to peace between Turks and Kurds and Turkey's unity.[40] The 'martyrs' who are embraced by the PKK also include Deniz Gezmiş, Hüseyin İnan, and Yusuf Arslan, the leaders of the THKO (*Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu*), who were executed on May 6, 1972, and İbrahim Kaypakkaya, the leader of TİKKO (*Türkiye İşçi Köylü Kurtuluş Ordusu*), who was

murdered on May 18, 1973.[41] Mahir Çayan, the leader of THKP-C (*Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi*), who was killed with nine of his companions in a firefight with the security forces on March 30, 1972, is also considered a hero in the PKK discourse. The deaths of these iconic figures of the Turkish left are periodically commemorated by the PKK and its ancillary organizations. The PKK's speeches and discourse are full of references to their ideals and struggles. According to Duran Kalkan, a senior member of the PKK leadership, Öcalan has burdened the legacy of Turkish leftist militant groups that were crushed by the March 12, 1971 coup. Kalkan criticizes the Turkish left for failing to cooperate with the PKK in its resistance to the September 12, 1980 coup.[42] For Ali Haydar Kaytan, another senior PKK member, the tragic fate of Gezmiş and Çayan has deeply influenced Öcalan's decision to engage in politics.[43]

Conclusion

32   The argument that Kurdish nationalism has been ethnicized and radicalized in reaction to the repressive and assimilationist policies of the Turkish state contains much truth. Nonetheless it falls short of shedding light on the ambivalences and pluralism inherent in Kurdish political identity in Turkey. It leads to a biased understanding in the sense that certain expressions of Kurdish identity are prioritized and others ignored. I suggest that the deconstruction of this argument opens up an avenue for understanding how Kurdish nationalism has evolved in Turkey. First, the ethnic vs. civic nationalism dichotomy does not capture the complexity and dynamic nature of how Turkish and Kurdish identities are constructed and interact with each other. A boundary-making approach to ethnic identity presents a richer conceptual framework to make sense of how Kurdish nationalism challenges Turkish nationalism and aims to impose uniformity over the experience of Kurdishness. The question of how various boundary-making strategies generate and redefine new identities, shape nationalist discourses, and change state policies demands further research. Second, a rigidly conceived state vs. society dichotomy underestimates how varying interactions of state and society have been central to the formation of Kurdish political identity in Turkey. In particular, a rigid state-society dichotomy overlooks the importance of electoral competition in shaping the strategies of Kurdish nationalists who have been deeply concerned with threats to their political hegemony from other Kurdish actors. Finally, studies that prioritize ethnic groups as the primary actors in the political process fail to examine the dynamic relationship of ethnic organization and their ethnic constituencies. Hence, it is important to recognize ethnic organizations *qua* organizations primarily concerned with their own survival. They may sometimes sacrifice the interests of the very ethnic constituencies they claim to represent when the requirements of political survival contradict their declared political function.

33   These three conceptual suggestions may help develop answers to important questions regarding Kurdish political identity in Turkey. In this article, I make some preliminary attempts to engage with such questions. First, why is it that so many Kurdish-speaking citizens of Turkey do not articulate their identity in the 'ethnic' sense that is demanded by the Kurdish nationalist movement? For sure, the coercive and assimilative practices of the state provide a partial answer to this question. At the same time, hegemonic Turkish nationalism has been ambivalent and porous enough to allow many Kurds to pursue ethnic boundary-making strategies such as 'positioning' and 'transvaluation'.

These strategies do not often correspond to strategies employed by the Kurdish nationalist movement. Pluralism and fluidity has been central to identity construction and boundary-making despite the armed conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK. The recognition of this plurality also provides some valuable insights into the question of why electoral results are not perfectly correlated with voters' ethnic identity in Turkey. The Kurdish Islamists, who have considerable grassroots support, do not necessarily share the priorities of the secular Kurdish nationalist movement. While they often engage in alliances with multiethnic political parties such as the AKP, they are not just pawns of the Turkish state and the AKP. They pursue their own autonomous interests. Finally, why does the PKK often act in ways that are inconsistent with its declared goals of expanding the rights of the Kurds, as exemplified in the PKK's radicalization at a time of increasing democratization in Turkey? One needs to focus on how electoral competition jeopardizes the Kurdish nationalist movement's control over its constituency and the logic of organizational survival to come up with a satisfactory answer to this question. Hence, one needs to overcome the state vs. society dichotomy to systematically analyze competition between the Kurdish nationalists and the AKP over the Kurds.

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NOTES

1. Personal communication, Batman, June 2007.

2. Reports prepared by the leading politicians of the early Republican era clearly shows how the state perceived the Kurdish citizens as potentially destabilizing elements and developed policies to diminish their 'Kurdishness' (Karabekir 1995; Öztürk 2007; Uluğ 2007; Akçura 2008).

3. He was then Commander of the Land Forces. Reported by *Milliyet*, September 28, 2006.

4. The violence in Turkey since 1984 can be described as 'ethnic conflict' not because the Turks and the Kurds fight against each other, but because violence is perpetrated 'across ethnic lines, in which at least one party is not a state (or a representative of a state), and in which the putative ethnic difference is coded [...] as having been integral rather than incidental to the violence' (Brubaker & Laitin 1998: 428).

5. For state policies that distinguish between Kurds and Zaza in an effort to limit the appeal of Kurdish nationalism, see Van Wilgenburg (2009).

6. The full text of the speech is available at http://www.tsk.tr/10_ARSIV/ 10_1_Basin_Yayin_Faaliyetleri/10_1_7_Konusmalar/2009/ org_ilkerbasbug_harpak_konusma_14042009.html

7. Speech delivered by Baykal in his address to the CHP's parliamentary group on August 11, 2009.

8. Speech delivered by Erdoğan in his address to the AKP's parliamentary group on August 11, 2009. This speech was crucial in setting the tone of Prime Minister's 'Kurdish initiative' in the summer of 2009.

9. In a speech delivered at a DTP electoral rally in İdil, a district of Şırnak. Reported by Radikal, March 14, 2009.

10. Curiously enough, Ayna is not fluent in Kurdish and cannot deliver her public speeches in that language.

11. For example, see Epözdemir (2005).

12. This argument is also central to Türk's defense in front of the Constitutional Court on September 16, 2009. At the time of writing, the Court was still considering if the DTP shall be banned.

13. Reported by Fırat News Agency (ANF), April 27,2009. Available at http://www.gundem-online.com/haber.asp?haberid=71471.

14. A communiqué published on November 27, 2008, the 30th anniversary of the PKK's establishment, claims that the PKK has created a new type of person who is full of hope, free, and proud of her identity out of a nation that was forgotten and had lost its will.

15. Personal communication in Bingöl, August 2, 2008.

16. Personal communication in İstanbul, June 18, 2007.

17. Personal communication in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan, November 19, 2007.

18. Personal communication in İzmir, July 17, 2007.

19. Personal communication in Muş, August 3, 2008.

20. Personal communication, Diyarbakır, October 19, 2007.

21. For example, the CHP leader Deniz Baykal repeatedly emphasizes that 'ethnic identity is a source of pride'. Reported by Sabah, June 5, 2008.

22. The fact that Iraq lacked an effective parliament and strong mass parties for most of its history was one of the important factors that left the Barzanis without any options other than armed struggle. For a self-narrative of the Barzanis' struggle, see Barzani (2005).

23. In 1961, the Interior Minister attacked Yusuf Azizoğlu for pursuing policies favoring the Kurds (Kürtçülük). Azizoğlu denied the charge, and, in a parliamentary speech, declared that he was an authentic Turk. In 1979, Şerafettin Elçi declared that 'I am Kurd and there are Kurds in eastern Turkey'. After the 1980 military intervention, he spent 30 months in prison.

24. İnan (2007). Ironically, Kurdish nationalists accuse him for denying his ethnic identity.

25. These rallies definitely had an ethnic dimension. Ethnic Arabs and Azeri Turks did not support the rallies. Interview with Ümit Fırat, August 4, 2007. Available at http://www.bianet.org

26. These organizations were highly critical of electoralism. For example, see 'Kürt Halkının Anti-Sömürgeci Ulusal Demokratik Mücadelesinin Seçim Siyaseti', Rizgari 3, May 1977, pp. 107-127. Available at http://www.lekolin.org

27. At the same time, one should not underestimate the pervasiveness of ethnic grievances before the coup. For instance, see Howe (1980).

28. Many Kurdish public figures who are not affiliated with the AKP concede that the party has been more accommodative of Kurdish identity than other Turkish political actors. Personal communication with Esat Canan, Ankara, October 11, 2007.

29. It should be added that the PKK has not been a monolithic organization, but has fiercely suppressed all dissent by violence (Marcus 2007).

30. Their imprisonment and trial is known as '49'lar' ('the 49ers') because one of the detainees died before the trial. They were arbitrarily imprisoned to repress embyronic Kurdish cultural activism. After the military coup of May 27, 1960, these Kurds were left of out the general amnesty. Their trial dragged on for years before all were acquitted.

31. The first leader of the TKDP was Faik Bucak, who was murdered in 1966. His son Sertaç Bucak was the chairman of the Kurdish nationalist Hak ve Özgürlükler Partisi (HAK-PAR) from 2006 to 2008.

32. Hence, Islam no longer only plays a binding role for the Turks and the Kurds, as Cizre Sakallıoğlu (1998) claims.

33. Personal communication with Abdurrahman Kurt, Ankara, December 13, 2007.

34. Similar attacks also occurred in the city of Hakkari, the capital of the same province. For instance, the AKP office in the city was bombed on November 1, 2008, a day before the visit of Prime Minister Erdoğan, and a truck that belonged to a student dormitory operated by an Islamic community was set on fire on the night of January 4, 2009.

35. The website of the magazine is http://www.mizgin.net

36. For instance, see May 2009 issue of Mizgîn.

37. While the April 2009 issue of the journal was also confiscated, I was able to purchase a copy in Yüksekova in early June 2009.

38. Reported by ANF (Fırat News Agency), December 1, 2008.

39. See the interview with Ali Haydar Kaytan by Rojhat Laser, ANF, May 17, 2009. Available at http://www.gundem-online.com/haber.asp?haberid=72306.

40. See the interview with Cemil Bayık, ANF, May 20, 2006. Available at http://www.gundem-online.com/haber.asp?haberid=12764.

41. One can also add Sinan Cemgil, another THKO founder, who was killed in a firefight with security forces alongside his two friends on May 31, 1971.

42. See the interview with Duran Kalkan, a PKK leader, ANF, May 15, 2009. Available at http://www.gundem-online.com/haber.asp?haberid=69527.

43. See the narrative of Ali Haydar Kaytan. Reported by Hasan Güneş, ANF, November 25, 2008.

ABSTRACTS

This article argues that the evolution of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey is more ambivalent and nuanced than is usually acknowledged. This claim is based on three interpretive approaches: 1) the primary actors in national politics are conceptualized as organizations, rather than as ethnic groups; 2) a boundary-making approach to ethnic identities is more promising than an insistence on an ethnic versus civic nationalism dichotomy; and 3) state-society relations are better understood in terms of a series of interactions among state actors and social actors than in terms of a global dichotomy of state and society. These three approaches may help develop answers to important questions regarding political identity in Turkey. First, why do so many Kurdish-speaking citizens fail to articulate their identity in the terms demanded by the Kurdish nationalist movement? Second, why are the electoral returns in those areas of Turkey with large numbers of Kurdish speakers not more closely correlated with the ethnic distribution of the population? Finally, why does the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) often act in ways that are inconsistent with its declared goals of defending and expanding the political and civil rights of the Kurds?

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