

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

PUBLICS OF VALUE: HIGHER EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE ACTIVISM IN TURKEY
AND NORTH KURDISTAN

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

BY

PATRICK CHARLES LEWIS

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2020

Copyright © Patrick Charles Lewis

All rights reserved.

For Mesut, my first housemate in Istanbul and my first guide in Mardin

و

برای ساناز
که عشقش صبرش و پشتیبانیش
شرایط امکان این پروژه بودند

با این امید که روزی همدیگر را ببینید.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	v
Timeline	vii
Acknowledgments	viii
Introduction	1
Part I	
Chapter 1: Mardin Between Kurdistan and Mesopotamia	41
Chapter 2: Language, the City and the University in Mesopotamia	84
Part II	
Chapter 3: Tea, <i>Samimiyet</i> , and the National Public	129
Chapter 4: Cafe Culture in North Kurdistan	173
Chapter 5: Value Creation and Kurdish Public Formation in the <i>Pirtûk Kafe</i>	209
Part III	
Chapter 6: Teachers, Schools, and <i>Memurluk</i> in North Kurdistan	250
Part IV	
Chapter 7: Language and Publics of Value	299
Appendix	380
Works Cited	386

List of Figures

(All maps, photographs and screenshots from social and news media were made by the author)

Figure 1.1: Map of Mardin in Kurdistan and Upper Mesopotamia.....	42
Figure 1.2: Map of Mardin Province.....	43
Figure 1.3: Border infrastructure in Mardin province.....	55
Figure 1.4: Multilingual municipal signs in Mardin and Diyarbakir.....	66
Figure 1.5: Mardin's <i>Yeni Şehir</i> (New City).....	75
Figure 1.6: EU-supported heritage development in Mardin.....	78
Figure 1.7: Mardin Artuklu University Campus.....	81
Figure 2.1: Union membership calendars in the LLI.....	121
Figure 2.2: Turkish Ministry of Education approved Kurdish-language textbooks.....	124
Figure 3.1: <i>Kaçak çay</i> on sale in Mardin.....	133
Figure 3.2: <i>Kaçak çay</i> on menus in Beyoğlu, Istanbul.....	135
Figure 3.3: Screen-Shots from TRT1 News Report on <i>kaçak çay</i>	141
Figure 3.4: Tea and <i>samimiyet</i> meme.....	144
Figure 3.5: Davutoğlu and Önder's press conferences.....	157
Figure 4.1: New style <i>kafes</i> in North Kurdistan.....	189
Figure 5.1: Entrances to Kurdish book <i>kafes</i>	217
Figure 5.2: Instagram post on Kurdish books.....	227
Figure 5.3: Commercial, Kurdish-named <i>kafes</i> in Diyarbakir.....	231
Figure 5.4: Interior of a book <i>kafe</i> in Mardin.....	238
Figure 7.1: Twitter post on Kurdish translation.....	302
Figure 7.2: Multilingual political slogans on T-shirts.....	306
Figure 7.3: Kurdish Language Day celebrations in Mardin.....	323

Figure 7.4: Kurdish Language Day Instagram story.....	339
Figure 7.5: Kurdish Lessons on social media.....	344
Figure 7.6: Replies to Kurdish lesson on social media.....	345
Figure 7.7: Kurdish grammar correction in Instagram story.....	352
Figure 7.8: Instagram post with excerpts from Baran’s <i>Ferhenga Bişaftinê</i> (2017).....	356

Timeline

1923: Foundation of the Turkish Republic

1978: Foundation the PKK

1980: 12th of September Military Coup

1984: Beginning of PKK's armed insurgency

1992: Foundation of the Istanbul Kurdish Institute

1999: Capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan

2002: AKP's first electoral victory and beginning of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's rule as PM

2003: US invasion of Iraq

2007: Foundation of Artuklu University in Mardin

2009: Beginning of Kurdish Opening

2010: Foundation of the Living Language Institute (LLI)

2011: Beginning of the Syrian Civil War

2013: Official launch of the peace process, Gezi uprisings

2014: Election of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to Turkish Presidency, Battle of Kobane

2015: HDP success in June elections, break-down of peace process and outbreak of City War, ISIS bombings

2016: Final months City War; July 15th coup attempt; the beginning of Teachers' purge; dissolution of pro-Kurdish municipal governments

2018: Turkish General Elections

2019: Victory of pro-Kurdish parties in municipal elections in North Kurdistan and their dissolution for a second time.

Acknowledgments

My research in Mardin was made possible by the generous welcome and years of support of dozens of people, as well as the kindness of countless others around the city and the province. Kawa Nemir hosted me in his home my first two summers in Mardin while Safîh Qoser and Cûmhûr Ölmez taught me Kurdish. Mikail and Hatice opened their home to me, literally and bureaucratically, when I first needed a legal residence. For the many hours spent together in and between state offices on my account, I am eternally grateful. Bilal Korkut and his family hosted me many times in Nusaybin. Bilal was also responsible for many of my most propitious introductions and was always one of my most reliable sources of information about the city, Kurdistan, and Kurdish-language activism. He also became a good friend over this past half-decade and this project would have been much the poorer without his knowledge and help.

I am also indebted to the faculty at the LLI for their confidence and their willingness to take a chance on me. In particular, Dr. Mikaîl Bilbil, who personally arranged for my affiliation with the LLI my first two summers in Mardin; as well as to my advisor at the LLI, Dr. Mustafa Aslan, who was a steady presence and constant advocate at the LLI on my behalf. Finally, I am especially grateful to my classmates in the MA program during the 2017-2018 year, whose patience and encouragement mattered immensely to the outcome of this project – in particular, to Şafî, Mehdî and Şevîn who helped me so much during my first semester at the institute.

In another sense, this project is the culmination of more than a decade of study in Turkey. It is also, therefore, the product of the support of the dozens of friends, colleagues, and teachers who helped to lay on the foundation of which it was built. At Cornell, Deniz İpek and Ayşe Özcan first taught me Turkish; and Kora Bättig v.W. opened my horizons and first inspired in me the confidence and enthusiasm to take on a project such as this. In Istanbul, my friends and

comrades at *Mayista Yaşam* were my most important, practical introduction to education, social organizing, and politics in Turkey and pushed me to think of scholarship as political praxis.

I am likewise grateful to all of my professors at Sabanci University who first introduced me to the social sciences in Turkey and under whose guidance the origins of this project would emerge. Here, especially, I need to thank Şerif Derince, my first Kurdish teacher, and Ayşe Parla, Ayşe Öncü, and Banu Karaca – great teachers who also vouched early for my potential as a researcher and scholar. Again, I am deeply indebted to my many former classmates at Sabanci who have remained close colleagues and friends over the past decade, especially (but in no way limited to): Akanksha Misra, Armanç Yıldız, Aydın Özipek, Britt Van Paepeghem, Çiçek İlengiz, Duygu Ula, Emre Şahin, Ezgi Güner, and Sertaç Sen. Can Dölek deserves special mention for opening his home to me in Istanbul during my last two years of research in Turkey.

In Chicago, much credit must go to my committee: especially my chair, Sue Gal, who taught me how to think about language and the social world and whose careful reading and insightful comments made the final product much better. Francois Richard generously agreed to read much of this when it was still unformed and his early interventions were invaluable. He has also been a model for how to think about and teach social theory. John Kelly was always an encouraging and ever-erudite voice that pushed me to think beyond my preferred questions and to consider less-emphasized dimensions of my work. It is richer as a result.

This project would never have been completed without the friendship and collegiality of my many peers at the University of Chicago who made graduate school worthwhile as an intellectual endeavor and as a source of community. This list is too long to print in its entirety. But I must single out, without exception, my entire 2013 graduate cohort as well as the organizers and participants of the Semiotics Workshop. I need specially acknowledge fellow

members of my writing groups who commented on this work: Rebecca Journey, Janet Conor, Hiroko Kumaki, and Fadi Hakim. Kelly Mulvaney, Grigory Gorbun, Rachel Howard and, Roy Kimmey arranged for me to workshop portions of this project and both Myungji Lee and Hazal Çorak provided generative comments. Xelef Botan was always willing to think through my analyses with me and to answer my questions about Kurdish; his knowledge was indispensable at various points during this project's completion.

Other faculty and staff at the UofC have also played important roles in the development of this project: Kağan Arık introduced me to Turkic linguistics, and Helga Anetshofer, and Hakan Karateke taught me to read Ottoman. I also benefited from learning the basics of Arabic and Persian from Osama Abu-Eledam and Saeed Yousef. Darryl Li generously agreed to read this dissertation and I am grateful for his insightful comments questions. I would certainly have been lost many times over without Anne Chien, who over seven years did a hundred favors for me, big and small, and always knew the answers to my questions. Meredith Clason also went to bat for me twice with the Department of Education to obtain permission for me to study Kurdish in Kurdistan – no small administrative feat and a critical intervention in the development of this project.

Beyond the University of Chicago, Michael Chyet was also an important resource and a great Kurdish teacher. This work has also benefited immensely from comments offered over the years at various conferences, including from Attila Aytekin, Natalia Bermúdez, Ofra Bengio, Diego Arispe-Bazán, and Zeynep Devrim Gürsel. The project was made possible with generous funding from the Foreign Language and Area Studies Program, the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad (DDRA) Fellowship, and the National Academy of Education (NAEd) Spencer Dissertation Fellowship. As part of the NaEd-Spencer program,

Kathleen Hall, Douglas Sperry, and Frederick Erickson also provided important comments and advice.

Other contributions to this project were less direct, but no less important. GSU always provided a welcome and worthy distraction from this project and made graduate school a site of solidarity. A special thanks to all members of the 2014-15 organizing committee and to Tanima Sharma for getting me off-campus and involved in more meaningful projects. And, of course, to Jonah Simpson, Damien Bright, Sandy Hunter, Estefania Vidal Montero, Jamie Countryman, Ray Noll, and Inés Escobar González, for everything.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to my family, especially to my parents and my partner, Sanaz, for the love, understanding and unwavering support over the many years it took to complete this project; to Dicle and all of the Karabibers, who became like a surrogate family for me in Turkey; to Erdal and Nazlı, who opened up their home to me so many times in Diyarbakir over the past decade, wherever they were living; and lastly, to Adil, Vedat, Yunus, Arzu and Mesut, for their many years of friendship.

-Introduction-

This dissertation is an account of the first generation of Kurdish activists in Turkey to study or teach the Kurdish language in Turkish state institutions and their role in the formation of new Kurdish-language publics in the country over the past decade. As a matter of course, it is also a story of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict and the larger sociopolitical context of the peace process in the half-decade leading up to 2015 that created the political space for the rapid expansion of Kurdish media and education in Turkey during this period. Likewise, it is the story of the eventual failure of this process and the fallout that followed, documenting the effects of the ensuing political crisis on the recent trajectory of Kurdish-language activism and the lives of those who have participated in it. Just as importantly, however, this is an account of human creativity and of the many ways that my interlocutors realize the value of the Kurdish language in their everyday lives through the relationships they build with others.

On one level, the project seeks to reconsider the relationship between language activism and institutional Kurdish politics, working to contextualize the evolving character of this relationship with respect to broader transformations in the economy, politics, and public culture of Turkey and North Kurdistan over the past two decades. It explores, for example, how both Turkey's increasing integration into regional and global markets and related shifts in Kurdish and Turkish state discourses around the value of multiculturalism are reflected in new language ideologies informing Kurdish language projects' contestation of standard code. It also considers how new investments in state universities in Kurdistan have shaped the formation of a Kurdish professional middle class and the corresponding emergence of a Kurdish-language cultural industry. And it looks at how the status of many in this new professional class (as both Turkish state employees and Kurdish language activists) position them as transformative links in larger social value chains running between the Turkish state and Kurdish communities, at the same that it places them in a fraught position as mediators between and agents of competing political projects.

At another level, this dissertation is an attempt to understand how the Kurdish language is positioned by my interlocutors – primarily Kurdish students, educators, and media workers – as a medium of value in public life more broadly. It thus strives to better account for how this value is realized in distinct forms both as part of lived, face-to-face relationships and in relation to larger institutionalized value regimes – as constituted by Turkish state institutions, the market, official Kurdish politics, the university, the family, as well as peer groups and emergent, mass-mediated Kurdish youth culture. Examining everyday processes of semiosis and material exchange as they take place in classrooms, cafes, book stores, and on television and social media, I demonstrate how the value of language becomes transformed as it is realized in the context of different

institutional relationships. I describe, for instance, how the Kurdish language can take a monetary value, whether in the form of a non-transferable asset (e.g. a degree, a job, a writing contract) or a commodity (e.g. a text object such as a book or a glass of tea in a Kurdish book cafe). But just as significantly, I show how in many contexts language is transformed into tokens of other forms of social value – horizontal authenticity or hierarchal authority, as well as social solidarity and ‘samimiyet’ – that serve as the basis for most enduring face-to-face relationships among friends, family, neighbors, co-workers (and are likewise imagined to be the foundation of the national community) and on which, I argue, the commercial relations that structure the Kurdish language’s valorization as a commodity are also largely predicated.

In exploring how contemporary Kurdish language activists engage in processes of public making, this dissertation seeks to better account for the ways that their activism becomes linked to both ongoing political struggles and wider social transformations in contemporary Turkey and North Kurdistan. By ‘public making’, as I describe in detail below, I mean the interrelated semiotic and material processes through which people construct social relationships and mobilize these relationships for mutually coordinated social action. Moreover, I consider how such forms of collective public action work to conform to or undermine existing social value regimes. I thus also link acts of Kurdish public making to the promulgation of larger social and political value projects that seek to transform the ideologies and metrics through which wider Kurdish publics evaluate both linguistic practices and social practices more broadly. Arguing that the contestation of value projects and the construction and maintenance of social solidarity are interrelated social processes, this dissertation describes how Kurdish students and teachers participate in acts of public making as part of ongoing efforts to remake sociolinguistic relations in North Kurdistan and Turkey, both in the conservative sense implied by social reproduction and the transformative

sense understood by revolutionary social projects that are shaping public life in contemporary Kurdistan.

I. Context, Background and Ethnographic Perspective

Like any anthropological work, this project is the product of the events that it describes and the encounters and relationships that served to render these events legible and meaningful. Like almost any anthropological research project conducted in North Kurdistan over the past half-decade, it has been compelled to undergo fundamental reorganization. In my case, this reorganization was defined both by a basic rethinking of my research questions and objects of the study, as well as by a necessary reconsideration of my participation in and my position relative to the events and processes which I am trying to understand and describe here.

When the foundations of this project were being laid during my first years as a graduate student in Turkey, Kurdish-language media was flourishing and the Kurdish movement was in political ascendance – albeit still a relatively marginal and widely maligned force in Turkey’s political life. In 2009, as a response to Kurdish popular pressure and in a bid to win more Kurdish votes (and with the encouragement of Western governments) the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) government officially launched its *Kürt açılımı* (‘Kurdish opening’) – the name given by the party to a series of government policies designed to ease long-standing restrictions around the use of the Kurdish language in media and education: new Kurdish television channels opened including a dedicated state broadcaster (TRT Kurdî); new Kurdish-language institutions, educational foundations, and media organizations were founded or able to significantly expand their operations; and the government even showed a willingness to consider Kurdish-language education in Turkish state schools. In 2010, the Living Languages Institute (T: *Yaşayan Diller Enstitüsü*/K: *Enstituya Zimanên Zindî*) at Artuklu University in Mardin – the

primary site of my dissertation research where I also studied Kurdish for two summers before enrolling in an MA program in Kurdish language and linguistics between 2017-2019 – became the first academic institution in Turkey to offer state-recognized degrees in Kurdish-language education and to train, it was then promised, the first cohort of Turkey’s future Kurdish-language teachers – a reversal of more than a century of Ottoman and Turkish state policy.

Over this same period, the Kurdish movement reached the apex of its political influence and power in Turkey after decades of social unrest and a slow-burning armed insurgency led by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) – the most powerful institutional force in Kurdish politics in North Kurdistan. After winning back the Diyarbakir municipality in 2000, the Kurdish movement consolidated its control over municipal governments across Kurdistan over the next fifteen years, winning in 11 provinces in the 2014 local elections. In the June 2015 national elections, a new Kurdish-dominated electoral party won just over 13% of the vote nationally – blowing past the 10% electoral threshold that had historically held back pro-Kurdish parties - and won the majority of votes in 14 eastern provinces. In Diyarbakir, the largest city in North Kurdistan, the pro-Kurdish party won nearly 78% of the vote: results which, at the time, were taken up less as the outcome of a parliamentary election and more like the outcome of a national referendum –the culmination of decades-long social struggles and a multiyear political process. Whenever I had traveled in Kurdistan in those years, friends and others I met described a situation of what Lenin called ‘dual power’: not only did legal pro-Kurdish parties control all of the municipal governments, but as part of the peace process, the Turkish state was increasingly evacuating its security forces away from Kurdish urban centers into fortified bases in the hills, and PKK militants in civilian dress were operating relatively openly in both rural district centers and the working-class neighborhoods of North Kurdistan’s largest cities – a situation that was at

the time captured by the popular local observation that “PKK şehre iniyor, Devlet dağa çıkıyor” (The PKK is coming down into the city, the State is going up into the mountains¹). Following the 2013 Gezi protests, moreover, the Kurdish movement acquired both a newfound prominence and greater legitimacy in Western Turkey— albeit not one that was ultimately able to overcome entrenched patterns of anti-Kurdish sentiments in Turkey’s public culture – allowing it to significantly increase its vote-share in Western Turkey among leftists, social democrats, and progressives in the 2015 elections.

These were all developments that I both witnessed and participated in (in minor and insignificant ways) in the half-decade that I worked and studied in Turkey during and after college beginning in 2008. Firstly, as a largely curious by-stander who often tagged along with his Turkish and Kurdish university classmates and as a student the first official Kurdish-language class every offered at a Turkish university, and then in more institutional ways, as a volunteer teacher in a leftist-run educational cooperative in an ethnically and religiously mixed working-class district near my university in Istanbul, and later as a volunteer translator of articles and press releases by Kurdish and leftist journalists, NGOs and political organizations. I will not discuss these experiences further here (or at any point during the dissertation), but I share them now to acknowledge that on a personal level, my participation in these events played a formative part in shaping both my thinking and the direction that my life later took. More significantly for present purposes, they also provided some of the primary frames shaping the development of my political consciousness and my academic research commitments – as well as my understanding

¹ The ironic humor of the observation stemming from the fact that for years in Kurdistan ‘to go up into the mountains’ was a euphemism for joining the PKK and this saying thus emphasized the larger reversal in relations of power between the state and the Kurdish bloc aligned with the PKK that was imagined to be taking place. The saying also likely inspired the title for White’s (2015) book on the politics of the period.

of the relationship between the two. Importantly, this is a relationship that I have needed to continually rethink and whose changing contours are reflected in the final form of this project. Whereas before 2015 I had largely expected that my dissertation would be an account of the role of language politics in an ongoing, if deeply contested processes of social and political revolution in Kurdistan, it became instead a story about social resilience and the capacity of people to act in relation to others in a manner that allows them to continue to create and realize value from their language practices as part of larger Kurdish-language publics – even in the face of ongoing state violence, heightened economic precarity and patterns of entrenched social marginalization experienced by Kurdish-speakers in Turkey. At this dissertation’s foundation, therefore, is a certain sense of disappointment – perhaps fitting for a study on youth politics (Greenberg 2014) – but also a deep sense of admiration for the labors and struggles of my interlocutors and a conviction that these struggles also have value for us in our attempts to understand how we make social worlds with others.

The Collapse of the Peace Process: Eight months before the June 2015 elections, at the end of the first week October 2014, Diyarbakir, Mardin, and other cities in North Kurdistan were convulsed by days of unrest and violence precipitated by Islamic State’s advance on the city of Kobane – a Kurdish-controlled enclave on the Turkish-Syrian border. Over the previous summer, IS fighters had overrun Mosul (June 2014) and launched a genocidal attack against the Ezidi community around Sinjar (August 2014), before turning their fighters (and large, recently acquired an arsenal of US-made weapons captured from the Iraqi army) in September toward the small, self-declared autonomous Kurdish ‘canton’ nested between the Euphrates river and the Turkish border. Within three weeks, IS succeeded in enveloping the city, quickly pushing its lightly-armed Kurdish defenders from hundreds of surrounding towns and villages and forcing

most of the region's civilian population of 400,000 to flee into Turkey. Because the People's Protection Forces (YPG) – the Syrian Kurdish militia that comprised the bulk of the city's defenses – was an institutional off-shoot of the PKK, and because the Kurdish city sat directly on the Turkish border, many of the Kurdish fighters in the city had family connections to North Kurdistan. Meanwhile, in North Kurdistan, public opinion was horrified by what seemed to be the imminent massacre of the city's defenders and its remaining civilian population; and it was growing increasingly enraged by a credible public perception that the Turkish government was either offering outright support to the IS advance on Kobane, or at the very least was happy to stand by and watch it happen.

Starting in early October, following calls from actors from across Kurdish political and civil society, tens of thousands of Kurdish civilians flooded en masse from cities across North Kurdistan to the border zone by bus, car, and on foot. Thousands broke through Turkish border barriers to cross into Kobane and join directly in its defense. Tens of thousands more, mostly unarmed, engaged in pitched battles with Turkish police and soldiers that stretched for a dozen miles along the border on either side of the city – all in an attempt to keep access to the city open and prevent IS fighters from crossing to flank attack the city from across the border to the north. Thousands also went to volunteer in the camps that were set up around Suruç – the Kurdish-majority city on the Turkish side of the border that contained the main border-crossing to Kobane – to receive the hundreds of thousands of newly arriving refugees. Protests also quickly grew across North Kurdistan and in major Kurdish districts of Istanbul and other western Turkish cities. By October 7th, protests in Diyarbakir had turned into a popular insurrection that temporarily drove the police from the city's streets, leading to almost 50 deaths over two days – in part stemming from intra-Kurdish violence between supporters of the PKK and backers of the

Islamist (Kurdish) Hezbollah movement. The revolt was only suppressed after the declaration of martial law in the province and the arrival onto the streets of thousands of Turkish soldiers and tanks.

By the middle of October, the Siege of Kobane – as these events are later remembered in military history – had become a global media spectacle. Protesters in North Kurdistan and Turkey were joined by many thousands more in the other regions of Kurdistan (in Iraq, Iran, and Syria) and across the Kurdish diaspora in Europe and North America. As the fighting concentrated around the city in the first week of October, moreover, international media also began to broadcast the battle live on television from just across the Turkish border, arriving just as IS fighters took up positions around Kobane and began shelling the city center with mortars, and tank-fire and cannon.² At the same time, the Obama administration – which less than two months earlier had launched a new US-led bombing campaign against IS forces in Iraq and Syria following the massacres in Sinjar – was being relentlessly attacked in the US media for what, it was alleged, was its slow response to the crisis in Kobane and the ‘growing ISIS threat’. The administration, also under increasing pressure from the media and wider ‘US public opinion’ (i.e. likely voters who watch mainstream network and cable news channels) just weeks before the midterm elections, quickly decided to change tack: whereas during the first weeks of the fighting US warplanes were entirely absent from the skies over Kobane – in part, it was alleged, out of deference to Turkey, a NATO ally – by the second week of October the US military greatly stepped up its air campaign over the city. That same week, CENTCOM announced the US military’s ‘counter-ISIL’ operation would be henceforth be called ‘Operation Inherent Resolve’

² Tank-fire and cannon supplied in part by recently captured, US-manufactured M1 Abrams tanks and M198 howitzers – a fact often highlighted in IS propaganda videos at the time.

– thereby giving a name and a new mission to what was then only two-month-old US-led military intervention with an uncertain timeframe and few obvious objectives. Just a few days later, on the October 19th, US cargo planes dropped the first consignment of weapons and supplies to the PKK-linked defenders of the city and succeeded in pressuring the Turkish government to open a corridor along its border to allow fighters from Iraqi Kurdistan to reach Kobane. With the aid of US weapons and air-support, Kurdish fighters were eventually able to halt the IS offensive in the city and slowly turn the tide of the battle. But recapturing the province took many months and cost thousands of lives. Kurdish forces completely took back the city (now nearly completely destroyed by the fighting) only at the end of January. But the US military’s involvement did not end there. By the following May, Kurdish forces pushing east from Kobane and other Kurdish forces pushing west from Serê Kaniyê expelled IS from the border city of Til Abyad, thereby linking the two largest Kurdish-run cantons in Syria and giving PKK-linked militants backed by the US military complete control over the Syrian-Turkish border from the Euphrates to Iraq.³

At the time, the sudden and ad hoc (but near-complete) reversal in US Syria policy shocked many observers both in Turkey and the United States. The war in Syria was already three and a half years old. The PKK-linked YPG had taken control of and declared a project of ‘democratic autonomy’ in three, small predominantly Kurdish cantons along the Turkish border—Efrin, Kobane, Cizre (Qamişlo) – in July 2012 (more than two years before the US intervention in Syria) after a tense but negotiated hand-over from the Syrian regime (at the time the regime

³ As we now know, this campaign was only the opening phase of ‘Operation Inherent Resolve’ – which would eventually grow to include the US-support, for Kurdish-led recapture and occupation of Manbic and the entirety of Syria east of the Euphrates and resulted in the deaths of ten thousand US-allied Kurdish and Arab fighters, as well as tens of thousands more Syria civilians (in large part from US airstrikes). ‘Inherent Resolve’ is officially ongoing to this day.

was losing the war). But at the time this received little coverage in US media, where the project of Kurdish autonomy was roundly dismissed as a kind of puppet project of the Asad regime. Moreover, US government agencies had then classified the YPG as an offshoot of the PKK – an original member of the State Department's list of designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) since its creation in 1997*– and thus off-limits for any kind of US government support.⁴ Unsurprisingly, the rapidly expanding ‘partnership’ between the United States and the PKK-linked YPG⁵ put new strains on the US government’s relationship with Turkey, especially because the US had claimed for decades to be Turkey’s main partner in its fight against the PKK. In the first months after the US intervention both I and many I knew in North Kurdistan had hoped, somewhat naively it now seems, that the shift in US policy in Syria would be reflected in a different approach to Kurdish politics in Turkey, defined by a greater emphasis on securing a peace between two of its primary ‘partners’ in Syria – if more out of imperial self-interest than benevolence. This hope was greatly misplaced. Instead, US officials played a double-game, continuing to publicly and materially support Turkey’s war on the PKK while maintaining that its new partners in Syria (whom the US was now openly arming) had no links to the group – a policy that convinced no one, built little trust and ultimately functioned to precipitate the collapse of the peace process in Turkey.⁶

⁴Until that point the Obama administration had exercised influence on the war primarily through covert US support through the CIA for designated ‘moderate’ members of the predominantly Sunni Arab opposition. *The PKK is still a designated terrorist organization.

⁵ A year after the start of this paternership, in October 2015, the YPG was folded into a larger, multiethnic army (in which it was the largest contingent) re-branded as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

⁶ Of course there were also domestic factors, like the larger Syrian war and Turkey’s transformation into the primary conduit for foreign fighters and weapons entering Syria (with the help of the CIA and other foreign intelligence agencies) the AKP’s loss of its outright majority in the June 2015 elections, its shifting alliances from its base on the traditional center-right toward the quasi-fascist MHP party,; as well as, it must be said, the over-confidence of Kurdish

Six months after the lifting of the siege of Kobane and less than a month and a half after the Kurdish movement's triumph in Turkey's June 2015 elections – in the middle of my first full summer studying Kurdish at the LLI in Mardin – a 20-year old Turkish-born suicide bomber allegedly recruited by the Islamic State blew himself up in the middle of a crowd of Turkish and Kurdish university students in the border town of Suruç in the neighboring province of Urfa, killing himself and 33 others and wounding over 100 more. The victims were mostly members of two leftist student organizations. They had traveled from Istanbul and were holding a press conference announcing their intention of crossing the border into Kobane to aid in the city's reconstruction when the explosion occurred. The event sent shockwaves through Turkey at a moment when it was already entering a political crisis following the AKP's losses in the election the previous month; and the sight of so many young men and women murdered on camera, their final moments endlessly circulated on television and social media alongside old school photographs and interviews with distraught family and friends, drew public expressions of anger and grief from across large swaths of Turkish society.⁷ In North Kurdistan, this shock of the attack was doubly felt, both because these young women and men had been 'guests in Kurdistan', as one friend put it to me some days later, who had come to show solidarity with the Kurdish people, but also because this attack portended an emerging pattern of political violence

leadership in Turkey (in large part buttressed by their changing relationship with the United States), but US actions in Syria coupled with their complete lack of serious engagement with the changing situation in Turkey was undeniably a major factor in Turkey's political destabilization.⁷ Even some Kemalist politicians in western Turkey who would normally have shown little sympathy for any form of Kurdish politics in Turkey had, in previous months, publicly sided with the defenders of Kobane against the AKP government as the upending of the regional political order following the near contemporaneous collapse of Iraqi and Syrian central state authority and the rise of IS led to a corresponding reordering of alliances and the emergence of new political horizons. However, this shift did not survive the containment of IS in Syria and the beginning of the City War a few months later.

against the Kurdish movement and its supporters.⁸ “Tell everyone you know in the United States,” another friend told me later the day of the attack as we were all still outside at a nearby tea garden, “that Turkey is no different than ISIS. They did this together.” I remember feeling increasingly nauseous as we spoke. Not only, I later realized, from the dry summer heat, or the nervous consumption of black tea and cigarettes on an empty stomach, or even from the chest-constricting cloud of apprehension that seemed to have settled over the table and the entire country. But from what I now recognize as a swelling to consciousness that both my position and the meaning of my presence in Turkey and North Kurdistan, rather than something I could dictate through my own words and actions, was almost entirely out of my control and already changing irrevocably.

Over the next several months, the political crises in Turkey and North Kurdistan grew in intensity as the peace process quickly unraveled. Only a few weeks later, in early August, several Kurdish-controlled municipal governments made official (if largely symbolic) declarations of ‘local autonomy.’ That same month widespread fighting between PKK militants and Turkish security forces broke out across the countryside. By early autumn, the fighting had moved into the towns and cities of North Kurdistan. In Mardin, in the district center of Nusaybin, fighting did not come to an end until early July 2016, by which time entire neighborhoods were reduced to rubble and the majority of the city’s 100,000 inhabitants had been forced to flee. Across North Kurdistan, thousands of civilians, Kurdish militants, and Turkish security forces were killed and many hundreds of thousands forced from their homes over eight months of urban warfare. Then, the failed July 15th coup attempt the following summer resulted in a nationwide declaration of

⁸A bombing also occurred at a Kurdish political rally in Diyarbakir a few days before the June elections, killing 5 and wounding over 100. In October of that year, a twin-suicide bombing at a HDP election rally in Ankara would kill 109 and injure more than 500.

martial law – a pretext later used by the government to summarily expel pro-Kurdish municipal governments and to arrest scores of Kurdish municipal officials and MPs.

The Turkish government's increasing control of public discourse and the abrupt collapse of Kurdish political society in the face of renewed state violence – beyond its deeply traumatic effects on Kurdish society – had immediate and practical implications for this project. For one, it meant that many of the organizations and institutions that I had been interested in including in my ethnography had either been dismantled or gone underground (and, therefore, that it would be both impractical and ethically irresponsible to attempt to study them as such). On a more personal level, moreover, these events compelled me to reconsider what form a politically engaged scholarly project can take under such circumstances. Firstly, it made me ask what a concept like 'complicity' (Gomberg-Muñoz 2018) demands from an American anthropologist working with a historically criminalized community living under century-old regimes of colonial violence, at a moment when this community's self-declared aspirations for self-determination and autonomy have become so suddenly caught up with US imperial violence. This dissertation does not attempt to answer this question. But it has been shaped by it in several significant ways: on the one hand, the changing political conditions in Kurdistan have given me greater pause when considering the uneven relationship of power between Kurdish language activists and institutional Kurdish politics in Turkey, and the liability of the latter as among the most powerful actors in the current conflict. Out of both practical considerations and my growing unease about what it means to produce scholarship on the PKK (whether critical or positive) in the current context – especially as a white American anthropologist writing under conditions of ongoing US military occupation of Western Asia – I have not examined Kurdish political institutions except where some feature of their discourse or the actions of one of their public figures is both relevant

to and instructive of some other matter at hand. This dissertation is not a political sociology of the Kurdish movement nor does it offer an assessment of ‘official’ Kurdish politics beyond the basic observation (already obvious to anyone who has spent any time in North Kurdistan) that the PKK-led Kurdish movement both possess a deep base of popular support and legitimacy and that at the same time is often and harshly criticized for its policies and actions, even by its most ardent supporters. The questions, for example, of what exactly the PKK is— a ‘political party’, a ‘social movement’, a ‘second state’ – and to what extent its actions are in keeping with its official discourses are interesting problems and worthy of consideration. However, they are not the questions with which this dissertation will engage.

On the other hand, events since 2015 have also brought into sharper relief how my presence in Kurdistan over the past decade was made possible by a network of friends, colleagues, and acquaintances without whom this work would not have been possible. Some of the voices that appear in this dissertation I knew only as classmates or through our occasional copresence in cafes or reading circles. Many others hosted me in their homes or secured for me invaluable institutional affiliations (not without some personal risk). Many have also become colleagues with whom I’ve since worked on Kurdish-language projects. And some have also become close friends for whom I’ve developed a deep affection and lasting personal connections: we’ve become guests at each others’ weddings, co-mourners at family funerals, and celebrants at family births, as well as housemates and regular, welcome company over many happy and difficult years. All of this, too, has naturally made me reflect on how enduring relations of value between individuals come to produce feelings of obligation that escape easy characterization – a process of reflection that it is likewise traceable in the trajectory of this project. As is obvious to any anthropologist, a closeness to and an investment in that which one

studies carry with them benefits and liabilities. Certain biases become inescapable. This project was largely predicated on my participation in many of the projects I am describing and my inscription into the larger relations of value that make these projects meaningful. In recognition of the need for scholarly integrity, I acknowledge these biases here –if I do not exactly renounce them. Finally, although this dissertation is a product of collective work, I have been responsible for its assembly. Its insights, to the extent they are valuable, are largely due to the knowledge, care, and creativity of my many interlocutors. But since any institutional credit will accrue to me, so too must the accountability, and I am ultimately answerable for this project’s meta-perspective and its analyses.

A Note on Research and Translation: The roots of this project were laid during my first full summer spent in Mardin in 2015 and the dissertation draws, to a limited degree, on personal experiences during this and subsequent summer visits to the city where I also studied Kurdish for two summers before enrolling at the institute. Most of the research that went into this dissertation, however, was conducted over eighteen months in Mardin, Diyarbakir and Istanbul between October 2017 and September 2019, during which time I was also an enrolled student in the LLI’s Kurdish-language MA program where I completed my course work but did not finish the degree. All of the nearly two dozen recorded interviews that appear in this dissertation – quoted in blockquotes or in the form of dialogue (where an exchange between the author and an interlocutor is documented) – were recorded during this latter period, mostly with individuals, occasionally in pairs, and several times with groups of three or more. The majority of the interviews took place in cafes or private homes. Most were conducted in Mardin, but several were also done in Istanbul, Ankara, Diyarbakir, and Van. Quotations provided in dialogue tables or blockquotes are either from recorded interviews or print and electronic media (in which case

the source is cited). All translations from Turkish and Kurdish primary and secondary sources (including interviews, articles, online videos, books) were made by the author. All maps, photographs and screenshots from media were made by the author.

II. Theoretical Framework and Analytical Categories

Two primary scholarly approaches to public formation prevail in academic scholarship on North Kurdistan. The first is concerned with Kurdish nationalism ('its history, development and character') and, therefore, it approaches any Kurdish-language public making project, historical or contemporary, as *prima facie* a manifestation of Kurdish nationalist politics (cf. Olson 1991; Tezcür 2015; Yavuz 2001). This literature offers much of value in terms of historical knowledge, but its methodological nationalism pushes it toward two analytical impasses: the first is a causal tautology in which any process of Kurdish public formation, whether in the form of Kurdish-language media or formal Kurdish-language organizations, is cited as both evidence for and the cause of a proliferation of 'Kurdish national sentiment.' The second impasse emerges in this literature's myopic focus on the politics of nation-state sovereignty which reduces the multiplicity of Kurdish perspectives and voices to a single political impulse. To be clear, both Kurdish national sentiment and an assertion of the right to self-determination are important, historically constituted realities of public life in Kurdistan. But, also importantly, they are not the only realities, and, as this dissertation argues, there are other horizons of value beyond the nation-state shaping both Kurdish politics and public culture more broadly.

The second approach to Kurdish public formation in Turkey – more recent and more closely aligned with the hegemonic political discourse of institutionalized Kurdish politics in Turkey – examines the ideological evolution of the PKK in relation to the universalist public

making projects of global anti-capitalist radicalism and third-world internationalism (cf. Akkaya and Jongerden 2012; White 2015; Yarkin 2015). Focusing on the shifts in ‘official’ party discourse, this literature tells the story of an ideological transformation away from Marxist-Leninist anticolonial nationalism to a post-nationalist project of ‘democratic autonomy’ defined by an emphasis on ecology, feminism, and multiculturalism. Here, too, there is much that helps us better understand larger shifts in Kurdish political discourse in Turkey over recent decades, but this literature also tends to take this official discourse entirely at face value and to position it as representative of Kurdish politics and public opinion as a whole. It thus tends to ignore the existence of other discourses (even with the ‘official’ organs of the PKK) while positioning its western-facing (i.e. English language) public making projects as definitive of the party’s policies and political commitments more generally. This is not to suggest, importantly, that there not sincere and serious anticapitalists or radical feminists in the PKK – there certainly are, and the latter in particular have achieved both a global prominence and a degree of power in the party leadership in recent years that is undeniably impressive. Rather it to argue that the uptake of these discourses by wider Kurdish publics is highly uneven and not uncontested, and that the many of the longstanding political and affective attachments that Kurdish communities do have to the party are not articulated through these discourses at all. Moreover, importantly, this literature also tends to ignore how the PKK’s transnational public making projects have in part shifted in response to US and European military intervention in Northern Syria.⁹

⁹Transnational political mobilization entails as its objective successful participation in a transnational, multilingual processes of public making in which co-constituted forms of alignment (or, in the case of war and politics, ‘taking sides’) is the point. At its basis is a process of interdiscursive alignment through which social actors – individuals or organizations – engage in co-referential acts of identification and differentiation across multiple scales of social life. Political slogans like ‘support the Kurds’ or ‘defend Kobane’ take on political value only to the extent that they are taken up and deployed in meaningful and consequential ways by one social

Language Activism: This dissertation, in contrast, examines the public making practices of Kurdish language activists in Turkey and Kurdistan and considers how these practices influence larger processes of Kurdish public formation. As such, this dissertation is necessarily interested in the relationship between mass publicity, language, and the national public. But it seeks to do so without repositioning nationalism as the default frame through which to understand all Kurdish public making projects. Once again, this project also considers the relationship between

actor in relation to others. But this is always a function of position, perspective and the relation of different interests across steep hierarchies of power. Indeed, contemporary processes of transnational Kurdish public making are defined by complex acts of ‘relay’ and ‘translation’ (Gal 2018) in which Kurdish political discourse taken up by a host of differently institutionally positioned social actors –anarchists and ecologists, right-wing identarians, EU bureaucrats and US politicians. On the one hand, these discourses are inevitably repurposed according to these parties’ own political interests and objectives. On the other hand, its uptake brings visibility and legitimacy to the ‘Kurdish cause’ – political values which are subsequently realized by various Kurdish political organizations and movements in the construction of relationships with foreign governments and international organizations that have real, material consequences for these movements and organizations’ capacities to act in the world (e.g. access to capital and credit, ‘official recognition’, weapons and other US military ‘support’). But they also bring these organizations into new relations of obligation and dependence – relations in which the specificity and situatedness of their political claims are largely made to conform to what Li (2020) describes as the two “two conjoined and mutually justifying aspects of world order”: the discourses of ‘post-Cold War humanitarian interventionism’ and the ‘post 9/11 Global War on Terror’ (p. 5). Whereas humanitarian interventionism reduces Kurdish political claims on a global stage to the assertion of Kurdish victimhood, GWOT discourse has increasingly functioned over the past decade to erase the PKK’s decades-old participation in the public making projects of leftist anti-capitalist (and anti-US) internationalism in favor of a western-facing (i.e. English-and other European-language) discourse that positions Kurdish militants as the newest frontline soldiers in the fight against the ‘global enemy’ of transnational jihad. At the same time, Kurdish political discourses once primarily addressed to fellow revolutionary movements across the global south or leftist and feminist activists in Europe and North America are now complicated by the circulation of new discourses designed, it would seem, to better appeal to large-swath of the Republican party or right-wing Twitter accounts in the United States, who routinely cite the PKK’s discursive and practical commitments to multiconfessional, ‘secular’ politics and armed feminism as evidence that ‘the Kurds’ are also anti-Islamic, freedom and gun-loving libertarians (and thus suitable US military partners).

Kurdish language activism in Turkey and the politics of the Kurdish movement as represented by institutional Kurdish actors such as the PKK. But it does not assume that ‘official’ Kurdish discourse represents the only standard of value to which Kurdish language activists must either conform or diverge, or that work on language is always understood as ‘political’ as such. Rather, it considers how these activists use their work on language to enter into relations of value with a multiplicity of institutions and other social persons in ways that are both socially meaningful and allow them to act in the world –both as individuals and participants in forms of larger-scale, coordinated projects of public making.

By language activists, importantly I do not only intend those most visible public figures in the Kurdish language movement, often with formal positions in Kurdish language organizations or with institutional links to Kurdish politics – i.e. those most likely to publicly identify as a language ‘activist’ (**K**: aktîvîst/**T**: aktivist). Rather by the category of ‘activist’, I intend a larger collection of Kurdish-language students, teachers, and media workers who spend their time and labor to position the Kurdish language as a medium of value in public life and who by their individual and collective public making projects work to mobilize or conscript others in these relations of value. While many of my interlocutors might not identify themselves as ‘activists’ per se, most of them would be recognized by others as such and would likely see much of their work on language in the context of a larger Kurdish-language activist project.

As will become clear throughout the work, Kurdish language activism is especially well-positioned as an object and site through which to study processes of Kurdish public formation because it brings into focus three interrelated social fields whose interactions, I argue, are critical to understanding these processes: the political field (e.g. official Kurdish organizations, party media, state institutions, teachers’ unions, schools), the economic field (e.g. the publishing

industry, music, popular media, and entertainment), and the moral field, or the field of total relationships, here understood as relationships between mutually known persons (e.g. family and relatives, friends or neighbors, co-workers and professional colleagues, members of literary circles and book clubs, café owners and regular customers, et al.). These fields are not intended to reproduce the dichotomy between the macro perspectives of mass media and the political economy and the micro perspective of kinship and the face-to-face community. Rather these are analytical distinctions between different fields of value. In practice, as this project makes clear, these fields are deeply imbricated in the making of all social relationships and therefore jointly influence how people relate to one another and coordinate social action. The value fields of the political and the economic shape the construction of moral relationships between known persons. A café owner turns his relatives into customers, a writer converts her friends into readers, a local politician makes his neighbors into voters. Feelings of mutual obligation and affection are rarely if ever entirely separable from the exchange of tea, money, text objects, or political favors, despite their disarticulation in liberal theories of the public. Nor are one's political identifications ever simply a question of self-abstraction in the realm of mass-mediated stranger sociality – one also identifies with the Kurdish movement, for instance, with respect to ones' family, friends, and classmates. On the other hand, basic categories and value metrics belonging to the moral field are routinely projected onto market transactions (as when a tradesman offers a potential customer a glass of tea and transforms an otherwise anonymous, commercial relationship into one that is now simultaneously a relationship between a 'host' and 'guest'); or onto mass-mediated interactions between political parties and voters (as when relations between a political leader and his supporters become assessed through the same metric as interpersonal relationships – e.g. through a metric of 'samimiyet' as I discuss in chapter two). Importantly, this dissertation

does not claim to offer an entirely new theory of politics or social life. Rather it seeks to suggest some ways that we might productively extend our analytical concept of ‘publics’ in order to better account for how mass media and large-scale political and economic institutions intervene in and are shaped by relations between known people, bringing this concept more closely aligned with discussions of value as present in both linguistic and economic anthropology.

Publics of Value: Early linguistic anthropological scholarship on ‘publics’ differentiates itself from earlier liberal theories of the public (as exemplified by the work of Habermas and his followers) by avoiding treating publics as collective actors with agency and rationality. Rather, they characterize publics as imaginary entities that only emerge in the context of mass-mediated communication (Errington 1992; Gal and Woolard 1995). But unlike Anderson’s (1983) famous treatment of the national public as an ‘imagined community’ self-constructed through the market forces of modern print capitalism, these scholars point to the centrality of language ideologies that mark certain linguistic forms as ‘authoritative’, and therefore better, under an ideology of ‘anonymity’, ‘neutrality’ or ‘objectivity’ (Bauman and Briggs 2003; Woolard 2005, Gal 2006). From this perspective, Anderson’s ‘national public’ is the ideological achievement of powerful social institutions that exists to the extent that it is invoked by individual speakers in everyday interactions. Here, too, the national public is related to the ideology of standard national language, which in reality only constitutes “one in a spectrum of forms of socio-linguistically-created authority” (Gal and Woolard 1995 p. 133; see also Mitchell 2009; Silverstein 1996). In this approach, the liberal paradigm of the public as an agent of collective action through reasoned deliberation is repositioned as a socially and historically located ideology unto itself, and the problem of communicative action is recast as a relationship between language ideologies and

their uptake in interaction. As Agha (2002) puts it, “institutions do not simply ‘speak down’ to individuals. They live through them” (p. 56).

Subsequent work on publics in linguistic anthropology has taken up and expanded these insights. But they also repurpose the category as an analytic whose interpretive purchase is geared toward the questions of collective action and co-constituted subjectivity raised by liberal theories, albeit not on liberalism’s terms. Cody’s (2009, 2011, 2015) recent work is exemplary in this regard. For instance, Cody (2011), defines publics primarily as “political subjects that know themselves and act by means of mass-mediated communication” (p. 37). But, Cody (2009) points out publics are not the anonymous, abstract subjects of liberalism who only live in discourse. Instead, publics are the products of ‘regimes of circulation’ (Cody 2009) that link social persons through chains of semiosis and material exchange that are evaluated through “cultivated habits of animating artifactually mediated texts (p. 287)” – that is to say are assessed in relation to wider social value regimes that shape communicative processes of uptake and redeployment. In contrast to liberal theories of publics, which he describes as both ‘utopic’ and ‘disembodied’, Cody (2015) calls on us to “rethink the public sphere from an illiberal perspective” (p. 61), by looking at the ways that mass mediated political relations also take part in the every-day, ‘intimate’ spheres of known persons and face-to-face interaction: The ‘key point’, Cody (2015) argues, is that mass mediation takes part in processes of ‘people making’ and that ‘illiberal’ public making is about “passionate participation before an interested and oftentimes intimate audience, either face-to-face or mass-mediated, and one can easily lead to the other, stretching the normative limits of citizenship and throwing them into question” (p. 62).

For Cody the category of the public is primarily useful in relation to studying politics and mass mobilization. Moreover, while he rejects the utopian premises of liberal theory and its

disembodied, self-abstracted public of anonymous strangers, he takes seriously the importance that liberalism gives to publics as the foundation of modern democracy and contemporary ideas of popular sovereignty. Like Cody, I share also share these normative commitments. But along with many Marxist scholars (for whom democracy and popular sovereignty likewise remain important principals), I suggest the solution is not so much to rethink the public in relation to the political institutions and sociological premises of liberal democracy (i.e. elections and political parties) but to call into question our understanding of the political as an entirely disarticulated field of social value. I thus argue that we consider more closely how public making projects (and thus acts of popular mobilization) intersect with multiple value fields and cross multiple domains of social life. The Kurdish voting public that is momentarily constituted every several years during Turkey's local and national elections or the Kurdish crowds that assemble annually to celebrate Newroz are not coextensive in scale or temporality, for instance, with the consumer public that purchases Kurdish-language texts objects or the activist public that teaches and publishes. This is not to claim that many of the biographical persons who participate as members of Kurdish reading publics or in projects of Kurdish language activism do not also vote for pro-Kurdish parties or attend yearly Newroz rallies (based on my experience most certainly do). Rather it is to suggest that we cannot assume the semiotic and material linkages shaping Kurdish reading public and the value regimes around which they are oriented are the same as those shaping electoral politics or mass public festivals. The former takes into consideration, for instance, the quality of the language, the identity of the writer, and the literary content of the text object or promotes certain language ideologies around 'proper writing' and 'good speech'. The voting public, as Lippman (1992) pointed out almost a century ago, is constituted by a simple choice between two or more candidates or political parties – it is not a fully articulated

expression of the public or its opinions. But Cody's approach offers much of value, pushing us to rethink the public through multiple forms of mediation and in relation to intimately known others, as well as in his greater emphasis on both the semiotic and material bases of public formation. Here, therefore, I suggest that we expand Cody's concept of a 'regime of circulation' to consider not only how chains of mass communicative discourse are taken up and evaluated by differently positioned social persons, but to explore how social value moves between social persons and undergoes transformations in form through social relationships more generally. Consider, for instance, the case of the oldest and best-known Kurdish-language newspaper in Turkey, *Azadiya Welat*, and its role in the creation of a Kurdish urban public even when it is 'unread', as Jamison (2016) explains:

Everyone knew about the [new Kurdish-language] books, and those who could afford it often owned a text or three. But rarely did I encounter an actual reader, even among those who could claim that uncommon combination of literacy in print media and (more or less) fluency in spoken Kurdish. This was also the case for the Kurdish language daily newspaper, *Azadiya Welat* (Freedom of the Nation/Country, henceforth, AW), which began publication as a daily in August 2006. Even more than the books, however, which were occasionally visible in a few shops, homes, or bookstore-café's, the newspaper was everywhere in Diyarbakir. It lay next to the wide array of Turkish language news media on the wire shelves of most corner markets in the city and was delivered to my door every morning. It graced the director's coffee table at the women's center where I spent much of my time, as well as the desks of the mayor's staff at City Hall. Roving salesmen held copies aloft during political rallies and press conferences in the city park, hoping to make a sale. At 40 kuruş per copy—about USD \$0.30—it was only slightly more expensive than the cheapest dailies, and around the same price as the more prestigious national broadsheets. Yet despite its wide availability, only rarely did I encounter a dedicated reader of AW, even as many congratulated me on my own efforts to decipher its pages (Jamison 2016 pp. 44-45).

Jamison's links AW's value as an 'unread' text object to its symbolic importance as material evidence of Kurdish commensurate status with Turkish as a national print language – an argument I take up in detail in chapter seven. Here Jamison is hitting on something important: the value of the newspaper has nothing to do with its status as a medium of discourse. But I

would argue that its value is better understood not in relation to its status as a token of standard language – in reality, its language is often the object of ridicule among both Kurdish-language activists and members of wider Kurdish-speech communities alike – but as an interpersonal token of political solidarity that is realized in the process of exchange and public display that takes place between and for mutually known persons in cities across North Kurdistan. But to clarify my position I need to say a few more things about this paper’s history, content, and circulation.

AW is not only the first and largest Kurdish-language daily in Turkey – it is also widely taken as the unofficial Kurdish-language paper of institutional Kurdish politics in Turkey (i.e. the legal Kurdish parties and the PKK).¹⁰ As such, most of the paper’s articles are taken from Kurdish-moment linked press agencies (e.g. DÎHA and ANF) and are thus translated from Turkish, and many of its columns are also borrowed and translated from the movement’s unofficial Turkish daily, *Özgür Gündem*.¹¹ Very few people read it because there is very little new news in it, beyond days-old articles on Kurdish political rallies, press conference, and reports on PKK military operations with exaggerated Turkish causality figures (that are also found in *Özgür Gündem*, Kurdish press agencies websites, and on Facebook or Twitter). One is thus very unlikely to learn anything important or new from AW. But even as everyone acknowledges that AW is more or less a party rag with questionable standards of written

¹⁰ In this sense it is distinct from the newer Kurdish-language paper, Xwebûn, that has a smaller circulation but a much more dedicated readership who prefer it for its political independence and high-quality writing. For many years AW was also the only Kurdish-language print newspaper (although it has much competition online). Whether it will have the same status in years to come is up for question.

¹¹ The paper was shut down by Turkish court order in August, 2016. Almost immediately a new Turkish-language daily, *Özgürlükçü Demokrasi*, opened to replace it.

Kurdish, and even though very few read it, it is found everywhere in major Kurdish cities such as Diyarbakir, as Jamison observes.

But here, too, we also need to understand the history of the paper's circulation. For most of its history, AW was not sold openly on newsstands (as the case is again now) – the situation described by Jamison was an exception only during the height of the peace process and it seems likely that its presence on these newsstands owed more its symbolic presence than its status as a regular seller. Rather, the paper is delivered to the city's tradesmen and businessman by personally known, party-linked couriers. In the 1990s, this delivery was done in secret and at great risk to both those who carried it and the editors and journalists who put it together – a story told in the Kurdish/Turkish film *Press* (2010). As recent as 2014, during the peace process, a distributor of AW in Adana named Kadri Bağdu was gunned down and killed as he made his deliveries. The paper, therefore, has come to carry immense political and moral value that extends beyond either its function of communicating party ideology or its status as a Kurdish text object. Rather, AW derives its value as an object that mediates co-constituted, face-to-face performances of political solidarity and recognition.

One of my oldest and closest friends in Diyarbakir, Erdal – an artist and tradesman (T: esnaf) working in the old commercial district of Ofis – remains, like all of the other tradesmen and cafe owners on the side-street where had his workshop, a regular purchaser of AW. Whenever the delivery came while I was present at this shop, Erdal would go out to meet the man out front, exchange greetings and invite him to come in (an invitation that was always politely declined), and then return with the paper, before casually discarding it on the coffee table or one of his work desks – sometimes also throwing me a knowing smile. Very rarely was it taken up and read, except out of boredom, and even then, the general tendency was to make a

joke about its language or to point out one of its especially absurd articles or headlines. More often than not it became an improvised table covering on which to eat workplace meals or a mop to clean up spilled tea or wood varnish. Erdal, like all the *esnafs* in his neighborhood, purchases the paper neither out of a desire to read its content nor a particular interest in what was being communicated, but out of feelings of obligation to the Kurdish movement as expressed in regular participation in the value projects of Kurdish public making and as lived in interpersonal relationships. AW is important because it mediates face-to-face relationships between known persons – not only those who deliver it and those who purchase it, but the latter's customers and guests for whom its visible presence can be taken up as a basic sign of an establishment's political orientation toward the Kurdish movement, and just as importantly, peoples' orientations toward one another. It is an object of value because it links members of Kurdish urban publics in daily acts of exchange at the same time that it aligns them around a basic set of political and moral values – values that are themselves not reducible to the official PKK discourses that constitute the majority of the paper's content.¹² AW thus derives its meaning from the regime of circulation through which it moves and the social relationships that this circulation engenders. It is a vehicle of mass mediation – but as Jamison also observes this mediation has very little to do with the newspaper's communicative properties as normally understood. Indeed, while most studies of mass media focus on 'communicative' media, I want to suggest that public formation is made through many forms of media (not only television broadcasts and newspapers, for instance, but also money, tea, clothing) whose linked semiotic and material properties become

¹²From another perspective, however, the fact that the paper does carry PKK discourse and everyone knows this to be the case does generate a kind of a political value for the PKK, but not so much in the actual uptake of 'official' discourse as a more general recognition of its hegemonic – if 'ambiguous' (Wedeen 1999) – legitimacy as the primary representatives of Kurdish interests in Turkey.

valuable or meaningful through their deployment in the creation of social relationships (and not only as vehicles of discourse).

In invoking a concept of ‘publics of value’, therefore, this dissertation seeks to bring together related insights from linguistic anthropology on both the semiotic qualities of material objects and the interrelated semiotic and material dimensions of circulation (Bauman 2016; Gal 2017; Hull 2012; Kockelman 2006; Nakassis 2013) with work in economic anthropology on the creation and realization of value within the context of social relationships (Graeber 2001; Munn 1991; Turner 2008). By doing so, it attempts to offer a fuller account of the interaction between chains of semiosis, the movement of people and goods, and the making of social persons. This approach, I argue, allows us to better account for, among other issues, how interactions between global commodity chains and Turkey’s national market have structured the commercial relations of the tea trade in a manner that allowed for the emergence of locally salient distinctions between ‘Turkish’ and ‘Kurdish’ tea and their uptake by national politicians as well as cafe owners in Istanbul and Mardin (chapter three). It will also allow us to see how the relations of value binding Turkish state institutions to Kurdish teachers through their state salaries are transformed by these teachers as they invest these salaries in the establishment of Kurdish book cafes (chapter five) or redistribute it among family and friends, or as part of wider Kurdish-language activist projects (chapters six and seven).

In short, I suggest that rather than approach publics as either ‘ideas’ or ‘things’ (i.e. collective subjects), we understand them instead as the semiotic and material processes through which social relations become mutually aligned with respect to some larger horizon of value. At its basis public formation is a process of interdiscursive and materially mediated alignment through which social actors – individuals, families, organizations – engage in co-referential acts

of identification and differentiation across multiple scales of social life. Public making projects can align around an explicitly political horizon (as in ongoing projects to mobilize people in North Kurdistan to demand some form of Kurdish self-determination), but they can also align around other value projects (such as the repositioning of the Kurdish-language as a medium of value in public life). But they can do so only to the extent that they either leverage existing relations of value or create new ones. To understand this more fully we must account for both the mechanisms through which institutionalized ideologies of value (or ‘value regimes’) shape how people identify and position themselves and others, as well as for how certain ideological frames become active in the context of institutionalized social relations of value. Then, also, we can say something about how people work to contest these ideologies and remake social relations.

Relations and Regimes of Value: All forms of public making are fundamentally about the construction of social relationships. All social relationships are built on the realization of certainly socially mediated values. Within any social institution (the family, the school, the market), certain value regimes set the metrics through which individuals position themselves as social persons in relation to others. For instance, one is only considered a ‘good teacher’ in relation to her students, or a ‘good parent’ in relation to his children. But the social expectations that shape relations between teachers and students or parents and their children – that is to say the ideological metrics through which these relationships are evaluated – are never confined to a single classroom or household. Rather they are the products of more widely institutionalized ideologies that allow for wider recognition, uptake, and evaluation (Gal and Irvine 2019). Moreover, while a ‘good teacher’ is primarily evaluated in relation to her students, she is not only evaluated by them. Rather both the students’ parents and (in the case North Kurdistan) functionaries of the National Ministry of Education are also likely to have an opinion that

matters. Moreover, in debates over who is or is not a ‘good parent’, spouses, in-laws, neighbors, teachers, social workers and family court judges often have a voice that is often equal to if not greater than one’s children. Value is thus always also a question of perspective and relationality to others in view of a wider public of value. As Graeber (2001) puts it:

One is tempted to say that “society” is created as a side effect of such pursuits of value. But even this would not be quite right, because that would reify society. Really, society is not a thing at all: it is the total process through which all this activity is coordinated, and value, in turn, the way that actors see their own activity as meaningful as part of it. Doing so always, necessarily, involves some sort of public recognition and comparison. This is why economic models, which see those actions as aimed primarily at individual gratification, fall so obviously short: they fail to see that in any society—even within a market system—solitary pleasures are relatively few. The most important ends are ones that can only be realized in the eyes of some collective audience. In fact, one might go so far as to say that while from an analytical perspective “society” is a notoriously fluid, open-ended set of processes, from the perspective of the actors, it is much more easily defined: “society” simply consists of that potential audience, of everyone whose opinion of you matters in some way, as opposed to those (say, a Chinese merchant, to a nineteenth-century German peasant farmer, or vice versa, or most anthropologists to the janitors who clean their buildings, or vice versa) whose opinion of you, you would never think about at all (pp. 76-77).

Two takeaways are important here. The first is that value is a fundamentally public phenomenon. Money, commodities, titles or public honors, or property in goods and land is meaningless outside of the wider social relationships in which their value is realized. The second takeaway is that value is not simply a question of public opinion generally. Certain opinions matter in the context of certain relationships. But the language of ‘opinion’ can be misleading since it can suggest an individualistic form of judgment that overlooks the existence of powerful social institutions that shape the categories through which social relations are understood (i.e. who is this person to me and others?) and the value metrics through which it is evaluated (i.e. does this person meet my socially informed expectations of them in their relationships with me and others?). This becomes especially obvious when looking at how the institutions underlying

global capitalism have worked to reify value in a quantifiable, alienable form. Today, for example, rural Germans, Chinese businessmen, janitors, and anthropologists alike are all likely to recognize the value of the US dollar regardless of their ‘opinion’ of its position as the world’s reserve currency. But what is ultimately of real interest is what they do with a dollar if they have one. Kurdish language activists working in state schools, for instance, probably spend most of their salaries on housing and basic household consumption (thereby transferring the value of their Turkish liras into the real-estate or retail markets, and by extension, into the banking sector – since the entire process is built on consumer debt), but they can also spend some of their money enjoying a tea at a colleague’s cafe with several friends, or buying a Kurdish-language book to gift to a sibling or cousin on the occasion of graduation or a birthday. Many will also give a portion of it to their parents or younger siblings to help with family expenses. And some invest portions of their salaries in opening Kurdish-language journals or ‘book cafes’ – although very few of these ‘investments’ are ever geared to make a profit. In all of these cases, the monetary value of their salaries is transformed into other forms of social value as it mediates relationships between friends, colleagues, siblings, parents and a wider Kurdish-reading public and money becomes another medium of value orienting oneself and others toward other horizons of value (friendship and the peer group, the family, the Kurdish language and the Kurdish reading public). Ultimately, Graeber argues, it is the struggle not only to appropriate value but to set the metrics of what is valuable in public life that lies at the foundation of not only politics, but social life more generally. Within any ‘social order’, moreover, these metrics are invariably contested and change over time:

...a social order can be seen primarily as an arena in which certain types of value can be produced and realized; they can be defended on that basis...or, alternatively, they can be challenged by those who think these are not the sorts of value they would most like to pursue. In any real social situation, there are likely to be any number of such imaginary

totalities at play, organized around different conceptions of value. They may be fragmentary, ephemeral, or they can just exist as dreamy projects or half-realized ones defiantly proclaimed by cultists or revolutionaries. How they knit together – or don't – simply cannot be predicted in advance. The one thing one can be sure of is that they will never knit together perfectly (Graeber 2001 p. 88)

Fortunately, for our purposes, linguistic and semiotic anthropology has provided us with a set of useful analytical tools from which to begin to understand how social values are made and contested. In particular, this scholarship foregrounds the way that ideology mediates how social actors relate to wider social value regimes and the social hierarchies that they structure. Ideology, in this literature, is fundamentally about: "...the sense of difference, positioning, perspective. To speak of an 'ideology' always implies that there is an alternative one that somebody else, differently positioned, might hold. An ideology, then, is something contestable. This is the case even though the ideology itself, viewed from the inside, as it were, may be a totalizing vision, purporting to account for everything and everyone in the world" (Gal and Irvine 2019 p. 13).

When I speak of the public making projects of Kurdish language activists, therefore, I am interested in both the ways that these projects seek to shift the ideological value metrics shaping public language through an explicit mobilization of 'difference, position and perspective', as well as the way this ideological work unfolds in the context of social relationships and, in fact, actually constructs such relationships. Analytically, I suggest, publics are among our most useful categories for understanding these interrelated processes. However, in seeking to understand how ideology shapes public formation I am not only interested, for instance, in the uptake of explicitly Kurdish political discourses, but also in how ideology, as Gal and Irvine (2019) argue, structures the 'regimes of value' that shape everyday interactions, often unconsciously, and in ways that "[concern] the most intimate, experience-near apprehensions of signs as well as their widely proliferating corrections" (pp. 13-14). This will allow us to better trace, following Cody

(2015), the interplay between interested, intimate realities of the everyday and their role in shaping the wider relations of value on which political life is constructed.

Higher Education and ‘Youth’: This study is centered at the Artuklu University and the Living Languages Institute (LLI) in Mardin, but it devotes relatively little space to exploring interactions in classrooms, faculty offices or other, ‘official’ spaces of the university – here keeping in mind that university campuses and buildings are securitized spaces that are often off-limits to outsiders and require identification to enter. Rather, the university and the LLI are both approached as social institutions shaping a wider set of value relations and the social persons that participate within them. It is fundamentally in relation to this institution, importantly, that we can speak not only of ‘professors’ and students’, but also ‘youth’, since rather than an age demographic, ‘youth’ in Turkey is a category historically most identified with university students (Mardin 1978; Neyzi 2001). Moreover, it is fundamentally as an emic category, indexically linked to different social spaces, person types, and values – and not as a definable social group or demographic –that this dissertation approaches the category of ‘youth’ (**K**: ciwanî, xortî : **T**: gençlik)

Significantly, both Artuklu University and LLI are but one manifestation of the larger institutional evolution of the university in North Kurdistan and Turkey and this work must be understood in this wider social context. Over the past two decades, higher education in Turkey has undergone a period of rapid growth and far-reaching institutional transformations. Between 1999 and 2016 alone, the number of university enrollments ballooned from just under 1.5 million to over 6 million, according to the Turkish Council of Higher Education (YÖK). Meanwhile, the percentage of young adults (25-34 year-olds) holding tertiary diplomas rose from 10.49% to 27.52% between 2002 and 2017 – an almost threefold increase in just 15 years (OECD 2017).

This growth has been made possible by massive new investments in Turkey's higher education system on the part of the Turkish state and a rapidly expanding private higher education sector. Since 2000, more than one hundred new universities have opened across the country, while many established institutions have also been significantly enlarged to accommodate for the influx of new students. The university's transformation from a relatively elite domain into a mass institution has increasingly positioned it as a central, contested site in the struggle between the emergent value projects reshaping life in the 'New Turkey' (T: Yeni Türkiye) and this transformation, I argue, is closely connected to an observable shift in the social meanings and values attached to youth and higher education, as well as to how my interlocutors understand their relationships not only to the university and Kurdish language activism but interpret their possible life trajectories and construct their aspirational horizons more generally.

For nowhere in Turkey, importantly, are these transformations more evident than in North Kurdistan, where higher education has been historically the least developed, and where the number of state universities has tripled over the past fifteen years alone. The Turkish state's efforts to expand access to higher education in North Kurdistan – among the 'youngest' regions (as measured by median age) in the country (TÜİK) – is often framed by government officials as a belated attempt by the Turkish state to resolve its 'Kurdish youth problem' (Darici 2013) after years of neglect. Nationally, youth from Turkey's Kurdish East and Southeast regions remain the lowest performers on Turkey's university entrance exam and the least represented in Turkish institutions of higher education (YÖK/MEB). However, beyond simply an attempt to remedy disparities in educational outcomes, the impressive growth of the university in Kurdistan over the past two decades is also emblematic of larger social and economic developments, as well as indicative of important shifts in Kurdish politics in Turkey and the relationship between Kurdish

communities and the state. New institutions of higher education thus offer a privileged perspective from which to understand the recent evolution of Turkey's decades-old (and still unresolved) 'Kurdish conflict', as well as an important site from which to consider their place in the broader social transformation taking place in these regions - a transformation that is both integral to and distinct from developments within the rest of the country.

In the case of Mardin and the LLI specifically, the university has become an institution linking Kurdish students not only to the state (both in the present sense of their status as 'students' and in the future sense of their status as potential state employees, or 'memurs') but also to networks of other students, professors and a wider Kurdish public interested in Kurdish language activism. We see this, importantly, in how the category of 'youth' becomes applied by my interlocutors to designate spaces outside of the university – such as cafes or cultural spaces – where the relations of value linking people within the university are rearticulated in the form of new modes of relationality that lie largely outside the influence of state value regimes. Importantly, not everyone in these spaces is actually 'young.' Rather, as I suggest above, 'youth' becomes an index pointing both to the presence of university students, and importantly, to the relative novelty of these spaces in Mardin. As Neyzi (2001) argues, a concept of 'youth' in Turkey is best approached through a concept of generation, and by extension to intergenerational shifts in social value regimes. In looking at 'youth cafes' and 'youth language', for instance, I am drawing attention to spaces and linguistic practices that others in Kurdistan and Turkey point to and recognize as being in some sense 'new' or 'emergent.' Therefore, they constitute especially productive conjunctures from which to understand how social value regimes are contested and remade in social life more widely.

III. Chapter Summaries

The dissertation is composed of four parts and seven chapters. The first part provides a general overview of Mardin's development in recent decades and offers an account of the city's unique position in both Kurdish and Turkish public imaginaries. In the first chapter, "Mardin Between Kurdistan and Mesopotamia", I trace how the city's development, as well as local forms of political and social identification, have been shaped by a widely circulating, if highly contested, discourse situating Mardin as the quintessential 'Mesopotamian' city; and I show how an idea of 'Mesopotamia' – in contrast to 'Kurdistan' – has been mobilized within the value projects of the AKP government, the Kurdish movement, and local Kurdish language activists over the past two decades in their competing efforts to re-imagine and remake Mardin a model 'post-national', 'multicultural' and 'multilingual' space. In the second chapter, "Language, the City and the University in Mesopotamia" I look at how the language regimes shaping the linguistic practices of local speech communities in Mardin and ideas about multilingualism have been influenced by discourses around 'Mesopotamia', especially as they have been enacted in new municipal projects to shift the relative value of Mardin's local languages. Finally, I describe some of the transformations that have occurred in the city of Mardin since the opening of Artuklu University in 2007, and I show how the university has emerged as both an exemplary 'Mesopotamian' project and a contested institution wherein competing social actors enact their public making projects.

In the second part of this dissertation, I describe how the semiotic values of commodities come to index larger differences in person types and social relations and how these conventions have themselves shifted in response to the changing practices of consumption and shifting transnational commodity chains. In chapter three, "Tea, *Samimiyet*, and the National Public", I describe how the Turkish state's historical efforts to foster domestic tea production and its

corresponding enforcement of a national tariff regime encouraged the smuggling of foreign-produced tea into Kurdistan, and I demonstrate how in contemporary Turkey the distinction in imagined qualia between domestic Turkish and foreign-produced tea has become indexically linked to an opposition between ‘Turkish’ and ‘Kurdish’ and become central to competing efforts at ‘national’ branding. Moreover, I show how in both North Kurdistan and Turkey more widely, tea is taken up as a token of *samimiyet* – a value metric which although often glossed simply as ‘sincerity’, possesses a fuller range of social signification and stands out as a central moral value governing both political and interpersonal relationships. In chapter four, “Cafe Culture in North Kurdistan”, I look at the recent development of a new *kafe* sector in North Kurdistan, contrasting these new mix-gendered, youth spaces with both older forms of coffeehouse house culture and non-market sites of commodity consumption (i.e. the guesthouse). In chapter five, “Value Creation and Kurdish Public Formation in the *Pirtûk Kafe*”, I examine the role of new Kurdish book cafes as central sites in the public making projects of Kurdish language activists, arguing that book cafes redirect moral and economic relationships toward the celebration of the Kurdish text objects and thereby work to conscript others to participate in these value projects.

Chapter six, “Teachers, Schools, and State Value Regimes: The Politics and Political-Economy of *Memurluk* in North Kurdistan”, examines the evolving and often contradictory relationship between Turkish state institutions and Kurdish teachers working in Turkish state schools. Specifically, I discuss the value circuits connecting Turkey’s *memurluk* (‘civil service’) system and public education, and I argue that the current political ‘crisis’ over Kurdish teachers can be understood as stemming from their structural position between contradictory value regimes, as both *memurs* (‘civil servants’) ostensibly representing the Turkish state and

important actors in Kurdish language activism. Here I document several important historical changes in Turkey's *memurluk* system in Kurdistan over the past two decades, drawing our attention to the growing importance of self-identified Kurdish *memurs* in the formation of a new Kurdish middle class and their emergence as significant actors in the Kurdish politics and the creation of an emergent Kurdish culture industry.

The seventh and final chapter, "Language and Publics of Value", unfolds over two parts. The first part explores how language activism is conceived by Kurdish-language students and teachers themselves, focusing specifically on how Kurdish language activists mobilize an ideological opposition between the 'cultural' (**K**: çandî) and 'political' (**K**: siyasî) dimensions of the Kurdish struggle to distinguish their own work on language from those of more established Kurdish political actors, arguing that these emic distinctions are useful in understanding the wider set of value metrics shaping Kurdish-language activism outside of institutional Kurdish politics. The second, longer part of the chapter examines the contested role that both state (e.g. Artuklu University) and various non-state institutions are playing in efforts to standardize and valorize competing forms of written and spoken Kurdish. Here I argue that the absence of universally legitimated language authority and anxieties around 'correct speech' are reflected in continually controversies over what constitutes 'standard language' while also meaning that conformity to the provisions of a standard language, rather than anonymity, instead indexes a marked form of linguistic expertise or a specific kind of social person. At the same time, I show about both 'expertise' and 'authenticity' (Woolard 2005) operate at different poles of Kurdish linguistic authority in controversies of proper language. At the same time, I pay particular attention to how emergent forms of linguistic practice – especially around lexical borrowing and code-switching – are understood and contested with respect to wider Kurdish fears about Turkish

assimilationist projects. Ultimately, I offer three arguments that I hope will help to clarify our analysis of Kurdish language practices and the corresponding public making projects that seek to set the metrics by which these practices are evaluated: The first is that the politics of standard language, even in the context of Kurdish national movement, are not reducible to the politics of modern national sovereignty. The second is that, conversely, nationalist politics is not only enacted in standard, commensurated code. And the third is that even in situations where a national framing seems hegemonic, language is always judged according to other value metrics.

Chapter 1: Mardin Between Kurdistan and Mesopotamia

The following narrative unfolds in a contested geography and under the shadow of competing spatio-political imaginaries. As recognized internationally, the city of Mardin and what today constitutes the wider administrative boundaries of Mardin province are located in Southeastern Turkey on the border with Syria. According to Kurdish nationalists, however, Mardin lies in ‘North’ (**K**: Bakûr) or ‘Turkish occupied’ Kurdistan – a territory that is variably imagined to constitute the majority, but seemingly never the entirety, of the official statistical regions of Southeast and East Anatolia (while in some cases extending beyond them). In this spatio-political imaginary, North Kurdistan itself constitutes only one of four parts of a greater Kurdistan – along with West (**K**: Rojava) Kurdistan (i.e. Syria Kurdistan), South (**K**: Başûr) Kurdistan (i.e. Iraqi Kurdistan) and East (**K**: Rojhilat) Kurdistan (i.e. Iranian Kurdistan) – with

the region’s internationally recognized borders recast as the internal frontiers of a divided and colonized national territory.

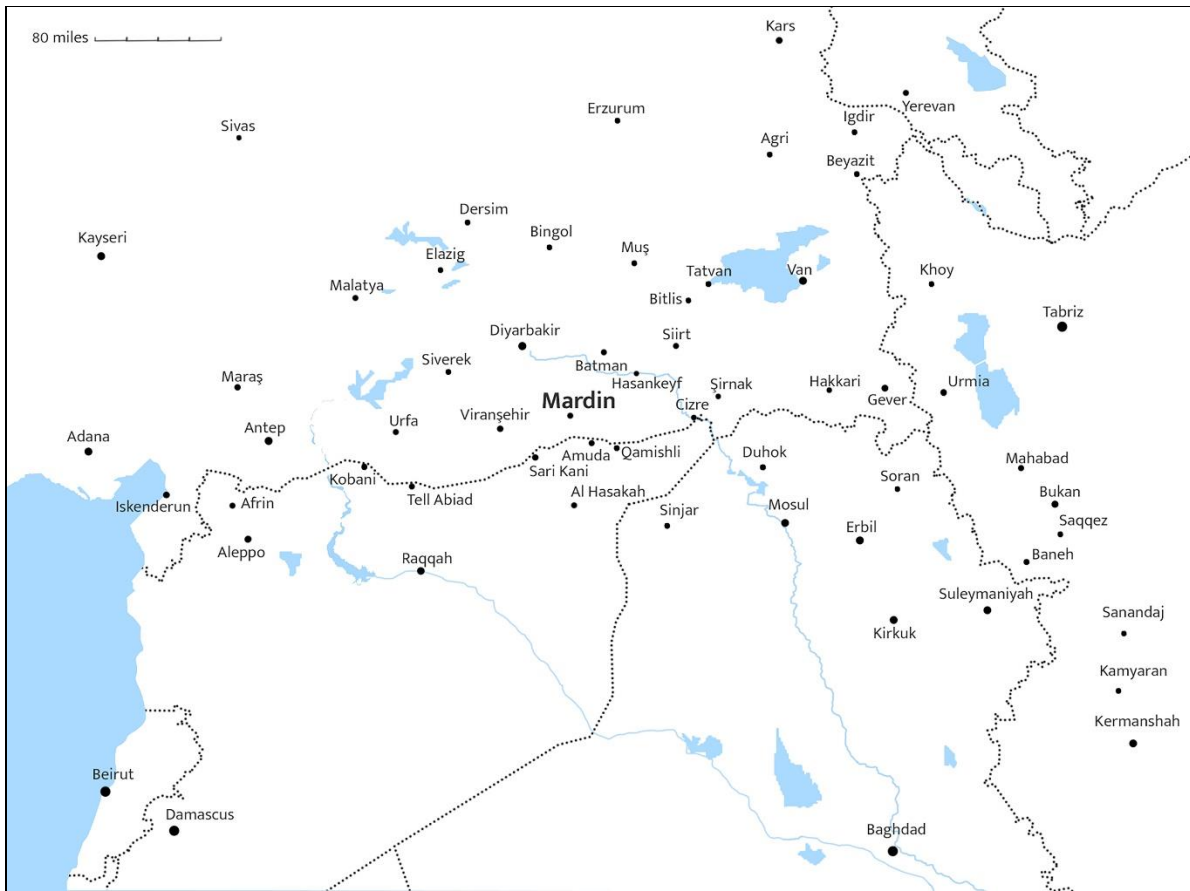


Figure 1.1: Mardin in Kurdistan and Upper Mesopotamia

These overlapping political claims are likewise reflected in contested naming practices in the province and the wider region. The standard anglicized form of ‘Mardin’ is orthographically identical to its rendering in Turkish and closely resembles Romanized transliterations of the Arabic (ماردين), Armenian (Մարդին) and Neo-Aramaic (ܡܪܕܝܢ) names for the city. The Kurdish standard form ‘Mêrdîn’, however, differentiates itself from the standard Turkish and English spellings, as well from all other variants in the pronunciation of its first vowel, allowing for a more forcible linguistic contrast and the construction of indexical linkages between the city and its imagined Kurdish qualities. In recognition of English writing conventions and of ‘Mardin’ as

being closest to the prevailing cross-linguistic consensus, I prefer this form when referring to the city and the province, except where translating direct speech by one of my interlocutors using the Kurdish form.

Other local contrasts in naming are more dramatic and thus more difficult to adjudicate in ‘neutral’ scholarly writing: Qoser, as it is now called in standard Kurdish, is the largest, predominantly Kurdish-speaking city in Mardin province and lies at the center of the province’s most populous district. However, both the town and the district to which it gives its name were officially renamed as ‘Kızıltepe’ following the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 as part of a wider state campaign to Turkify the new nation-state’s toponyms (cf. Öktem 2008) – somewhat ironically given that the standard Kurdish ‘Qoser’ is almost certainly a derivation of the Ottoman Turkish name for the town, ‘Koçhisar’ (قوج حصار). In recognition of the city’s largely Kurdish-speaking public culture, and also out of a sense of balance, I generally refer to the city as Qoser while sometimes giving its official Turkish name in parenthesis (except, again, where I am translating direct speech, in which case I use the name used by my interlocutors).

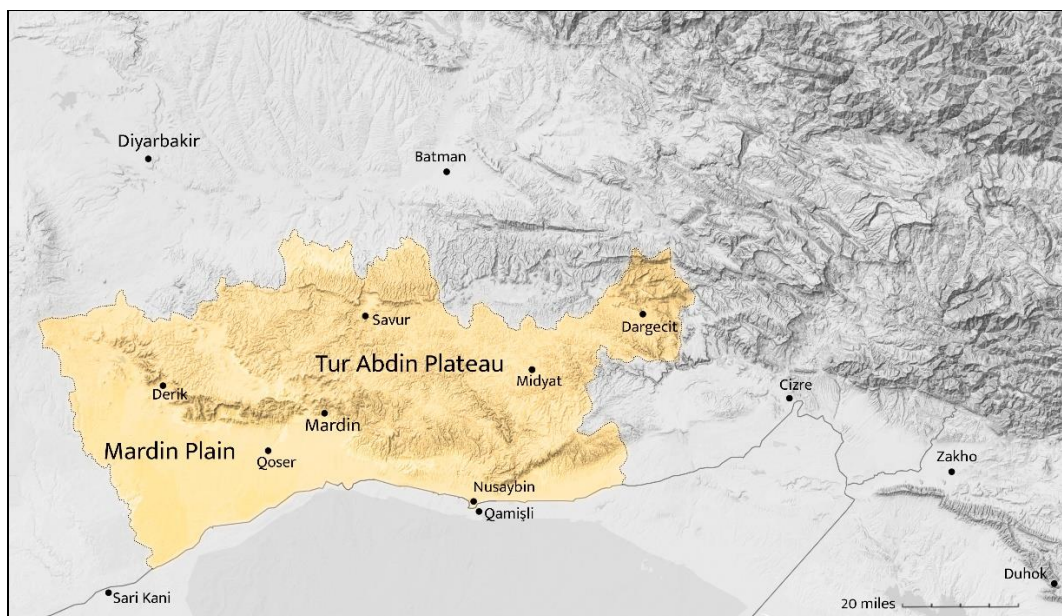


Figure 1.2: A Map of Mardin Province in the Region

But this creates its own problems: for one, this approach reproduces a Kurdish nationalist language ideology that positions an opposition between Turkish and Kurdish standard names as the primary toponymic contrast. This is evidence, for instance, in the widespread reproduction of lists of Kurdish toponymic guides that provide paired lists of names – Turkish and Kurdish – in order to popularize the latter. Consider, for example, one such list from a work on (proposed) standard Kurdish medical terminology providing name-pairings for all of the major districts in Mardin (with Kurdish listed first): Mêrdîn: Mardin; Kerboran: Dargeçit; Dêrik: Derik; Qoser: Kızıltepe; Şemrex: Mazıdağı; Midyad: Midyat; Nisêbîn: Nusaybin; Mahsertê: Ömerli Stewrê: Savur; Rişmil: Yeşilli; Dirbêsî: Şenyurt.¹ However, this approach tends to erase the existence of other toponymic varieties. In Armenian, for instance, Qoser is still known by a name derived from Arabic – i.e. ‘Til Ermen’ (Arm. Թիլ Արմեն/ Arb. تِلْ أَرْمَن) meaning ‘Hill of the Armenians’ – while in Standard Modern Arabic it is often still referred to by its older name, ‘Dunaysir’ (دُنَيْسِر), derived from the Roman name ‘Adenystrai’.² But it is not simply the case, moreover, that each separate language community has its own names for local cities and towns. For example, many in Mardin will still refer to the city as Qoser when speaking in Turkish and, conversely, will refer to it as ‘Kiziltepe’ or ‘Dinesyir’ (a Kurdish rendering of ‘Dunaysir’) when speaking in Kurdish, and many Arabic and Kurdish speakers alike are aware and will actively point to the existence of the alternative toponym linking the city to the presence of a now-absent

¹(Bülbül and Bülbül 2009, p. 55) That such a list would be included in a guide to medical terminology is evidence of their uniqueness. Multiple iterations of Kuridsh movement’s Turkish-language daily newspaper have generally preferred (in an approach that mirrors my own in regards to Qoser) to use Kurdish toponyms while providing the official Turkish names in parenthesis. One imagines that this is at least in part out of fear that their readers will not recognize certain Kurdish place names (especially if located in a regions other than where one lives), since for decades these names were given absolutely no space in print media or any kind of public signage.

²See entry on ‘Dunaysir’ by Sourdel (2012) in the Encyclopedia of Islam.

Armenian community. The contested qualities of Mardin's geography, therefore, extends beyond and encompasses more than a dichotomous opposition between Turkey and Kurdistan.

This reality is seen in the prominent place afforded by many in Mardin to more localized geographical references, such as to the Tur Abdin plateau that encompasses the majority of the eastern districts of the province, or to Mardin plain (T: Mardin Ovası) – the northernmost extent of the al-Jazira plain that encompasses most of what is known in the historiography of the region as Northern or Upper Mesopotamia. In Mardin, importantly, 'Mesopotamia' itself has been increasingly put forward as a new geographical imaginary differentiating the city and the province from both Turkey and Kurdistan. Indeed, whereas in Turkey as a whole references to 'Mesopotamia' have primarily designated either 1) historical geographies (e.g. the territories of Sumer, the Akkadians and the Hittites and the early Islamic empires), or in a more narrow and recent set of contexts, 2) a shibboleth for 'Kurdistan' (by analogy with the indexical process wherein 'Anatolia' refers to Turkey), in Mardin especially, I argue, 'Mesopotamia' has come to take on new meanings in recent years as indexing the presence of multiple overlapping ethnolinguistic communities and pointing to alternative, post-national political and social horizons.

In this chapter, I set out to trace the emergence of new geographic ideologies of Mesopotamia in relation to the urban transformation of Mardin over the past two decades, connecting larger shifts in the geopolitics and political economy of the region to more localized changes in spatial imaginaries and official language ideologies. In the first section of this chapter, I provide a brief history of Mardin over the past century, describing its transformation into a border zone within the new nation-state system over the 20th century and then focusing in particular on important developments within the dynamics of Turkey's 'Kurdish issue' since the

turn of the millennium – developments in which, I demonstrate, the new spatial imaginaries of Mesopotamia are centrally implicated. Whereas before the turn of the millennium the Kurdish movement in Turkey largely agitated along nationalist lines for an independent Kurdistan, I describe how official Kurdish discourses over the past two decades have increasingly shifted toward invocations of ‘Mesopotamia’ as a spatial imaginary for signaling an alternative, ‘multicultural’ political project beyond the framework of the nation-state (Casier 2011; Akkaya and Jongerden 2012). At the same time, I draw attention to a more localized spatio-semiotic ideology that positions Mardin as a quintessentially ‘Mesopotamian’ city as defined by the qualities of ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘multilingualism’. In contrast to Diyarbakir, the unofficial Kurdish capital in Turkey, Mardin is often imagined as a ‘mixed’ city where Syriac Christians, Kurds, and Arabs live together (Biner 2020).

Importantly, however, whereas a widespread spatial-semiotic ideology positions Diyarbakir as a Turkish-speaking city (with Kurdish-speaking rural districts), Mardin is well known in Kurdistan for its major Kurdish-speaking district centers and for its status as a center of Kurdish literature and language activism. This, I argue, has become especially significant given the larger shift toward language activism (and away from armed militancy) among many Kurdish students since the turn of the millennium and has functioned to give Mardin a new symbolic importance and cultural capital within the Kurdish movement. Looking in detail at how the official language ideologies of the Kurdish movement shape understandings of Mardin as a multilingual space, I examine the effects of these new spatial discourse on the Kurdish movement’s introduction of a series of language projects at the municipal level over the past decade that are explicitly designed to celebrate cultural diversity and accommodate linguistic differences between cities and regions.

In the chapter's second section, I consider how the Kurdish movement's articulation of its post-national vision for Mesopotamia from the early 2000s until the collapse of the peace process in 2015 worked in conjunction with the AKP government's efforts to rethink the cultural parameters of the Turkish nation-state in relation to its 'multicultural' Ottoman imperial past – one aspect of what has been described as the AKP's larger 'neo-Ottomanist' project.³ At the same time, government projects around Mesopotamia have sought to address EU priorities around minority rights and economic development and to better adjust Turkey's nationalist discourse to the new regional realities created by the US-occupation of Iraq and the emergence of the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Northern Iraq (and, after 2012, the semi-autonomous PKK-linked enclave in Northeast Syria). In this context, I describe how Mesopotamia became a contested category that is centrally mobilized by both the Kurdish movement and the Turkish government in their efforts to transform Mardin's urban environment and to create new forms of public space (under a globalized regime of neoliberal finance capital), particularly during the period of rapid economic development experienced by Mardin between 2000 and the onset of the twin political and economic crises that have beset the region since 2015.

Ultimately, I seek to show how competing discourses around Mesopotamia have influenced everything from the implementation of new language regimes in Mardin to the trajectory of the city's recent urban development. My point is that Mesopotamia, rather than

³ White (2013), for instance, notes that 'neo-Ottomanism' refers both to a more assertive foreign policy in the region and a more generalized feeling of "nostalgia for a lost cosmopolitanism (now sanitized by standardization and the wholesale removal of any sources of class and ethnic pollution)" that – until the events of late 2015 – allowed the AKP government to maneuver outside the parameters of narrow Turkish nationalism and advocate for multicultural and multilingual policies (p. 129)

simply a Kurdish spatial imaginary (cf. Casier 2011), has emerged locally in Mardin in recent years as a widely mobilized if deeply contested category that buttresses two competing political projects at the same time that it allows for local actors in Mardin to position their own value projects in relation to the official discourses of both the Kurdish movement and the Turkish state. At the same time, I demonstrate how both the government and the Kurdish movement's shift toward a discourse of 'Mesopotamia' reflects not only shifts in internal party ideology but is influenced by larger transformations in the political economy and geography of the region, as defined by Turkey's growing integration into regional markets and Mardin's spatial redefinition from a border-town on the periphery of the Turkish nation-state to a 'world city' with larger cultural and economic importance as a symbol of regional development (typified by the city's emergence as a center for transnational higher education and its novel status as an international tourist destination)

I. Mardin in the Kurdish Movement's Shifting Spatio-Political Imaginary

On April 28th, 2014, leading Kurdish parliamentarians and municipal leaders from the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) gathered in Ankara to mark their formal transition into a new political organization - a pan-Turkey, leftist and pro-minority umbrella party called the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). Officially founded two years earlier, the HDP was initially composed of a coalition of small socialist and social democratic parties and civil society organizations that had emerged out of Peoples' Democratic Congress (HDK) following the 2011 general election. Among this new alliance's most distinguishing features was its rejection of a monolithic Turkish ethnic identity as a foundation of public life in the country. Indeed, the party's very name -- Peoples' Democratic Party, or alternatively, Democratic Party of the Peoples (**T**: Halkların Demokratik Partisi, **K**: Partiya Demokratîk a Gelan), i.e. 'peoples' in the plural -- suggested its

pluralistic vision for Turkey, a vision that included open advocacy for Kurdish cultural and political rights along with the rights of Turkey's other ethnic and religious minority communities. Speaking at the meeting, then BDP co-chairperson Selahattin Demirtaş (he would become co-chairperson of the now significantly larger HDP two months later) explained the goals of the project in explicitly non-sectarian terms:

Today we continue in our work with even more seriousness, passing to the next phase in our years-long struggle for democracy and the law. Our voters did not vote for us as Turks or Kurds, or as Alevis or Sunnis. They voted for us from a position of unity. It is now time to move away from these monolithic and homogenous understandings before it comes to fascism and open racism, and to move toward an alternative understanding supported by a strong popular will. We will be the voice of the oppressed, whoever they be, and all of those who embrace the realities of Turkey's social composition.⁴

The BDP alliance's with the HDP was designed to transform both into a single party that was capable of crossing Turkey's ten percent electoral threshold, a feat that no predominantly pro-Kurdish party had yet accomplished despite similar alliances in the past (Kurdish parliamentarians had run as independents since the 1990s, largely confining their representation to the predominantly Kurdish East and Southeast of the country where they could win local majorities). The project was conceivable largely owing to the historically dominant position of the PKK and its leftist and social democratic allies in Turkey's Kurdish movement—a position that allowed Kurdish leaders such as Demirtaş to credibly mediate between Turkey's politically diverse Kurdish movement and the country's factional left; and, at the ballot box at least, the project has proven successful: the HDP has entered parliament in every subsequent general election, twice in 2015 and again in 2018, despite widespread voter intimidation and the imprisonment of much of its parliamentary leadership (including Demirtaş since 2016) and

⁴All quotations from the 2014 meeting taken from Al-Jazeera Turkish. "'HDP'li oldular." 28-April-2014. All translations by the author.

dozens of its MPs and municipal leaders. But this project has also been shaped by internal tensions within the HDP, not least around efforts by leaders in the Kurdish movement to transform their diverse and shifting political coalition, constructed primarily around identification with a Kurdish nation, into the dominant bloc in a pan-Turkey party rejecting nationalism and other exclusionary forms of identity politics.

This ambivalence is likewise captured in new discourses within Kurdish politics (and in Turkey generally) for talking about political and social identities and new ways of positioning oneself and others in social space. This was in evidence, for instance, at the same 2014 meeting, in a remark made by then-mayor of Mardin, Ahmet Türk, in response to an invitation from then co-mayor of Diyarbakir, Gültan Kışanak, for the assembled politicians to meet again soon in her city. Türk, pointing out the close association between Diyarbakir and Kurdish politics in Turkey, suggested that perhaps Mardin would be an equally if not even more appropriate venue for a future gathering of HDP leaders, saying: (T) “*Diyarbakır’a itirazımız yok. Diyarbakır, Kürdistan’ın başkentidir. Ama Mardin de Mezopotomya’nın başkenti*” (“We have no objections to Diyarbakir. Diyarbakir is the capital of Kurdistan. But Mardin is also the capital of Mesopotamia”).

Türk’s comments played well as a political quip about a neighborly rivalry between two cities - Mardin lies approximately 90 km south by south-east of Diyarbakir – as well as between two mayors.⁵ And there was certainly some humor in the gumption of Türk, the co-mayor of a significantly smaller Mardin, attempting to one-up the co-mayor of Diyarbakir, the symbolic and institutional (if not entirely ‘official’) capital of Kurdish politics in North Kurdistan/Turkey on a

⁵ In accordance with HDP/DBP party rules, all executive posts (whether mayorships or party leadership positions) are occupied jointly by male and female co-mayors, co-presidents, co-chairperson, *etc.*

question of political precedence (with a population of close to one million, Diyarbakir is also more than five times larger). But his remarks were not without a potential element of irony either: Ahmet Türk and Gültan Kışanak are both established and prominent figures in Turkey's Kurdish movement. Both, for instance, were imprisoned after the 1980 coup, Kışanak as a young student radical, and Türk as an already seasoned politician with past associations with two of Turkey's largest political parties during the 1970s (the DP and the CHP). But Türk hails from a prominent Kurdish land-owning family in Mardin, and has cultivated a public persona (within the context of Turkey's Kurdish movement) as a moderate centrist, if a stalwart defender of Kurdish political and cultural rights; he also routinely speaks Kurdish in public. Kışanak, in contrast, hails from a Turkish-speaking family in Diyarbakir and has long been active in left-wing activism and the Kurdish women's movement, but while she occasionally peppers her speeches with Kurdish revolutionary slogans, she does not speak in Kurdish publicly.^{6*7} The contrast of the two mayors' public personas thus also reenacts what is already a popular 'language ideology' (Irvine and Gal 2000; Woolard and Schieffelin 1994) framing a contrast in the relative statuses of Kurdish and Turkish as publicly spoken linguistic codes in Diyarbakir and Mardin⁸: namely, the ideas that although Diyarbakir is the 'Kurdish capital', it is a Turkish-speaking city (Jamison 2016); and conversely, that while Mardin might not be entirely Kurdish

⁶ I have heard credible reports that she was taking regular private lessons while co-mayor of Diyarbakir in an attempt to improve her speaking ability in Kurdish. The story of why she would do so – that is, how the Kurdish language has been remade as a valuable medium of public discourse (and an object of value in itself) over the past two decades – is one of the central questions of this dissertation.

⁷ Notably, Kışanak has not spoken publicly since 2016, when she was also imprisoned as part of the government's crackdown on elected Kurdish politicians that followed the 'city war'; she is currently serving a 14-year sentence for 'terrorism' related offenses.

⁸ The two mayors' public personas shape perceptions of their interactional stances and thus contribute to the situational humor of the mass-mediated encounter, and I suggest that this in part explains the attention the event later received in the Kurdish press.

city, Kurdish is still spoken widely in the province, even by many non-Kurds.⁹ But the personal contrast of the two mayors (and by extension, the two cities) also includes a third contrast, between Mesopotamia and Kurdistan, and in locating his hometown with Mesopotamia, Türk was simultaneously locating Mardin within an alternative spatial imaginary and gesturing toward different modes of social and political identification – modes of identification that, he seemed to suggest, had become even more relevant with the assembled politicians collective decision to join the HDP.¹⁰

Türk's contrast between Kurdistan and Mesopotamia mobilizes and redeploys a set of popular spatio-semiotic ideologies that link places to the presence of different ethnic and religious communities, linguistic regimes and modes of intercommunal sociality – and specifically in the context of contemporary discourse on 'Mesopotamia', to notions of 'tolerance' (T: hoşgörü) and 'multiculturalism' (T: çokkültürlülük). On one level, it conforms to official Kurdish movement talking-points around its nearly two-decade-old project to reimagine possibilities for national liberation outside of the nation-state; and in this sense, it is not intended as an invalidation of Kurdistan or its capital. This is to say that while Türk claims Mardin as the 'capital' of Mesopotamia, he does not claim that it lies outside of Kurdistan or even that it cannot also be just as 'Kurdish' as Diyarbakir. Rather, his formulation relies on a less rigid and more inclusive orientation toward political borders that, in keeping with current party ideology, seeks

⁹ For a more detailed discussion of these ideologies see next chapter

¹⁰ In fact, neither Türk or Kışanak would officially join the HDP, since municipal officials in North Kurdistan remained officially part of a separate party – the Democratic Regions Party (DBP) – that was also created in 2014 following the decision to merge the DTP's parliamentary caucus into the HDP. The DBP only contests local elections in Kurdistan, and in practice the distinction is more administrative, as two parties remain in close alliance. But the continued existence of the DBP also points to ongoing tensions around the HDP's status as a national political project representing Kurdish demands for regional autonomy.

to remake the relationship between political space and national and cultural belonging in a form that breaks from the exclusionary logic of the modern nation-state (and its emphasis on a majoritarian national identity) (Akkaya and Jongerden 2013).

The celebration of ethnic and religious diversity that regularly accompanies contemporary invocations of ‘Mesopotamia’ in official Kurdish discourse stands in stark contrast to the modern history of ethnic and religious conflict in the city and the wider region. What is today Mardin province was one of the epicenters of the Ottoman state’s genocide against the Christian communities of Anatolia in 1915-16 (Biner 2020); and Mardin witnessed renewed violence in the series of Kurdish rebellions that followed the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic, moreover, Mardin province has been shaped by its existence in a newly formed ‘borderland’ (Alvarez 1995) on the periphery of the Turkish nation-state. In the new nation-state order, Mardin lost much of its historically strategic position on the trade routes from Iran and Northern Iraq into Anatolia. This process of peripheralization began with the division of the Ottoman market by the construction of an interstate border between the new Kemalist regime in Turkey and the French and British colonial states in Syria and Iraq respectively in the first two decades following the First World War; but the border’s location was only gradually established (marked only by a single wire until 1936) and locals continued to cross largely at will, with commerce conducted through cross-border kinship networks (Özgen 2011). At the same town, the borderlands around Mardin became a refuge for those escaping violence in Turkey after the First World War; and to this day, tens of thousands of residents in Syrian border-towns such as Qamishli and Amuda across the frontier

from Mardin are descendants of Christian and Kurdish communities who fled lands that would become part of Turkey during the first decades of the 20th century.¹¹

Soon after Turkey's entry into NATO in 1952, Mardin found itself on one of the newest frontiers in a rapidly expanding Cold War. The castle atop Mardin city became a NATO military-outpost¹²; and the border 13 km to the south was also heavily militarized, with the introduction of landmines and construction of new border fortifications beginning within only a couple of years of Turkey's joining NATO (Özgen 2011; see figure 1.3). At the same time, Mardin province was increasingly remade as a center of and conduit for regional cross-border smuggling; and although a culture of small-scale trade among cross-border family networks persisted into the 1970s and 80s (Aras 2015; Özgen 2005, 2010), the expanded security regime along the border enabled networks of state actors in security forces together with an increasingly small number of powerful landlords and merchants to control illicit cross-border trade through their control of *kaçak pasajlar* – or markets selling smuggled goods in border-towns such as Nusaybin – as well as their increased capacity to police movement across the border and control traffic on roads in and out of the border region (Özgen 2005, 2011; Beşikçi 1969/2014). As Beşikçi (1969/2014) makes clear, by the late 1960s, the political economy of the border region was shaped as much by the immediate needs of the states in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria as by Cold War politics more generally, arguing that the latter especially had “with its border policy transformed smuggling into an integral element of the state” (p. 283).

¹¹ A fact that the Syrian government pointed too for decades to deny citizenship to many Kurdish residents of Northeast Syria.

¹² The military base in Mardin's ancient castle served for some two decades beginning in the 1960s as one of NATO's Air Defense Grand Environment (NADGE) early-warning radar sites (Uslu 2003).



Figure 1.3: Images from along the border in Mardin province: (left) the buffer zone along the border between Nusaybin and Qamişlo (a town in NE Syria); (right) “The border is honor”, a Turkish military outpost on the border along the E90 “İpek Yolu” (“Silk road”) Highway between Nusaybin and Qoser.

But in addition to state policy, Beşikçi (1969/2014) emphasizes that the new industry of illicit cross-border trade was deeply shaped by changing class relations among land-owners (or *ağas*) and peasant communities along the border. More specifically, he links the emergence of a new exploited class of low-level smugglers – a dangerous job in which one risks both long terms of imprisonment, serious injury or death¹³ – to wider shifts within property relations among agricultural villages along the border, typified by the expropriation of the peasantry and the increasing concentration of land in the hands of a small landowning class of *ağas* who, through privileged access to state credit, were among the primary beneficiaries of the mechanization of agriculture in North Kurdistan the 1950s and 1960s (pp. 513-522). But, he points out, it was this same propertied class of *ağas* that came to finance and direct cross-border smuggling networks

¹³One of the most recent reminders is the December 28th, 2011 ‘Roboski massacre’, in which a Turkish F-16 bombed a group of Kurdish adolescent smugglers bringing tea and petrol across the border from Northern Iraq to their village in Turkey. The airstrike killed 34 Kurdish civilians, mostly minors from the same extended family.

and, in the process, to exploit this new class of low-level smugglers just as they had traditionally exploited other popular classes in the agricultural sector.¹⁴

In Mardin, the mechanization of Mardin's rich agricultural lands on the northern edge of the al-Jazira plane beginning in the 1950s and 60s also pushed an increasing number of primarily Kurdish-speaking peasants and pastoralists from rural areas into rapidly expanding frontier towns such as Nusaybin and Qoser (T: Kızıltepe)¹⁵, where many faced chronic unemployment or underemployment, transforming North Kurdistan into one of western Turkey's primary reserves of cheap and flexible labor.¹⁶ Frustrations over entrenched patterns of uneven development between East and West Turkey and growing inequality within North Kurdistan itself first expressed its publicly in the organization of the 'Eastern Meetings' in the 1967 – a kind of proto-nationalist movement in Kurdistan that brought together landowners and the popular classes in a coalition to protest widespread poverty and the lack of economic opportunities in Eastern Turkey (Gündoğan 2015). Over the subsequent decade, these frustrations were increasingly expressed

¹⁴ Beşikçi (1969/2014) notes, for instance: "I have shown how relations of production in East Anatolia are multidimensional. Here it possible to see feudal, capitalist, and pre-feudal relations of production together in the same place and at the same time. Under such relations, for instance, those still within the system [of agricultural production] but with little or no land make a living as 'tenants' (T: kiracı) or 'sharecroppers' (T: ortakçı/maraba) for *ağas* overseeing the larger holdings. But the growth of the population has created such pressures that certain persons and families have been forced out of this system entirely. Thus the orientation toward smuggling arose automatically [from within the society itself]. However, the people who direct all of these people and these activities are the same people who own property in the agricultural sector and oversee relations of production there. All of which goes to show how smuggling lies entirely on class foundation"(p. 283).

¹⁵ Today, significantly, these two towns either rival (i.e. Nusaybin, circa 100,000 people) or greatly exceed (i.e. Qoser, circa 250,000 people) Mardin's provincial capital (i.e. Mardin city, 140,000 people) in terms of population.

¹⁶ Many others moved outside the province entirely, either temporarily or permanently, becoming part of the first great wave of migrants from central and eastern Anatolia to cities in central and Western Turkey in search of work in major industrial centers or in commercial agriculture in the Aegean or Black Sea region in the 1950s and 60s. This pattern would be greatly intensified by the forced evacuation of Kurdish villages in the 1990s.

through the organization of Kurdish revolutionary organizations such as the PKK (officially founded by a cadre of former Kurdish university students in 1978) and the growing frequency of violent clashes between Kurdish youth militants and Kurdish landowners and conservative tribal leaders, adding explicitly class and generational dimensions to what had been primarily a conflict with ethnic and regional dimensions.

Kurdish nationalism, largely ‘dormant’ in Turkey for three decades, again came to the forefront of political consciousness in Turkey in the 1970s and 80s; and as the Turkish state was once again forced to confront the existence of a Kurdish identity that it had suppressed for decades, its discourse increasingly came to reframe the country’s ‘Kurdish problem’ in terms of ‘terrorism’ and ‘separatism’ on the one hand, and as a problem of economic development on the other (Yeğen 1996).¹⁷ Moreover, wider regional tensions following the Iran-Iraq War and tensions between Iraq, Syria, and Turkey over the PKK-led Kurdish insurrection in Turkey beginning in the 1980s, together with the complete closure of the border between Turkey and Iraq in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War and the implementation of the US-led sanctions regime on Iraq further isolated Mardin and the other predominantly Kurdish and Arabic speaking border provinces in the region. During the same period, moreover, the Turkish state’s counter-insurgency against PKK guerillas increasingly devastated the predominantly Kurdish-speaking countryside, as the Turkish military forcibly evacuated thousands of Kurdish villages beginning in the early 1990s, pushing hundreds of thousands of villagers into overcrowded urban slums in North Kurdistan and Western Turkey (Çelik 2005; Jongerden 2010).

¹⁷This would become important in AKP’s own approach to the Kurdish problem – see next section.

The turn of the millennium marked a series of important, interrelated turning points in Turkey's Kurdish conflict. Following threats of a Turkish invasion, the Syrian government agreed to expel the PKK leadership from their bases in Syria in 1998 after hosting them for nearly two decades, leading to the capture of the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan by Turkish security services in Kenya the following year. Soon thereafter, the PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire, withdrawing the bulk of its guerilla forces from Turkey to the Qandil mountains of Northern Iraq (South Kurdistan). The US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 changed the political and economic geography of the region yet again; and whereas international sanctions on Iraq before the US occupation had greatly limited cross-border trade between Southeast Turkey and Northern Iraq, Turkey emerged post-2003 as the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) largest trading partner. The death of Syrian president Hafez al-Assad in 2000 and the accession of his son, Bashar, together with the election victory of the AKP in Turkey in 2002, also opened a new chapter in Turkish-Syrian relations; and tensions on the border, already diminished by the expulsion of the PKK, further decreased over the next decade, culminating in Syria's abandonment of its claims to the Hatay and the announcement of a mutual agreement on visa-free travel between the two countries in 2009 (Okay 2017).

In this new geopolitical context, the PKK leadership began to moderate their demands for an independent Kurdish nation-state; and whereas before the 2000s 'Mesopotamia' had functioned in PKK discourse as more or less a codeword for 'Kurdistan' among persons and organizations linked to the Kurdish movement¹⁸, it was increasingly put forward as the

¹⁸Since any open use of 'Kurdistan' has, for most of the Turkish Republic, constituted potential grounds for charging an individual or organization with promoting separatism, many Kurdish television channels, cultural centers, news agencies, language societies, *etc.* have historically elected to use 'Mesopotamia' instead.

foundation for an alternative political project based on the principles of local democratic autonomy and trans-state communal associations across borders and communal boundaries. This is exemplified, for instance, in the launch of a new, (Turkish-language) PKK-linked publication in 2003 called *Socialist Mesopotamia* (T: Soyalist Mezopotamya), whose editorial staff outline the main tenets of this new project, and the PKK's role in it, in their opening issue:

...*Socialist Mesopotamia* is the product of a 'socialist will' (T: 'sosyalist irade') that seeks to strengthen and develop the revolutionary response to the Kurdish people's ongoing struggle for national freedom and democracy. But it is not, nor will it become, simply the product of routine efforts or conventional forms of struggle. It is known that, for some time now, it has been necessary to develop a new language for understanding the dynamics [governeing the relationship between] the peoples of Mesopotamia, as they are now contemplated in both public and private. Today it is possible to encounter everywhere an understanding that is developing in the contours of these dynamics and out of a larger transformation in which the Kurdish people are at the forefront. *Socialist Mesopotamia* is the product and voice of this understanding.

From all the peoples of Mesopotamia; from the Kurdish people's progressive, patriotic, democratic and socialist intellectuals and party members; from the ranks of the patriotic-socialist youth who are searching for a new revolutionary political perspective; from the working classes who struggle to make a living amidst severe political and economic pressures; from the poor villagers who have paid the heaviest price for the state's declaration of a state of exception; and finally from the Kurdish women who have been the most ravaged [by state violence] and who have recently come into prominence with their suicide [attacks]; and from all segments and classes of society living in 'Kurdish geography' (T: kürt coğrafyasında) there exists, whether spoken or unspoken, a search for this new understanding...

...*Socialist Mesopotamia* is of the opinion that at the turn of the 21st century a fundamental rethinking of categories and concepts is required. The collapse of really-existing socialism; the persistence of disconnected movements; the stagnation of labor and working-class movements; the establishment of the doctrine of national independence through the waging of independence struggles of the oppressed against imperialist powers and the emergence of new problems that once against raise the question of the national freedom struggle of the Kurds and other peoples; and finally globalizing capitalism and its internal dynamics...all of this requires that we develop a completely new understanding from which to approach our world, our region and our country...

... Kurdish workers and the workers of other peoples and ethnicities must join workers of other peoples and ethnicities in Turkey as part of a common economic and social struggle in the defense of workers rights and *Socialist Mesopotamia* supports the development of a struggle around this platform and works toward this goal...Now we are faced with the task of developing, step by step, a new 'we' from this 'I'. Everyone in the geography of Northern Mesopotamia who claims to be a socialist, and Kurdish socialists

most of all, will be held responsible for this duty. *Socialist Mesopotamia* is made to serve the goal of the willful creation of a new organic identity. As in walking toward this new 'we', it is necessary to bring along the greatest number of people. Therefore our pages are open to any progressive, revolutionary, democratic, intellectual and socialist pen...¹⁹

As is clear from the text, Mesopotamia emerges as a central reference in the PKK's efforts to transform itself from a revolutionary socialist party leading a struggle for national self-determination to one element within a transnational, anti-capitalist movement that is aimed at the freedom of all peoples and nations within a new, post-nation-state framework (albeit one in which national categories are still centrally operative). In her analysis of the Kurdish movement's organization of the Mesopotamia Social Forum in Diyarbakir, for example, Casier (2011) also describes how the category of 'Mesopotamia' was centrally positioned within "...the ongoing project of the Kurdish movement to re-think the spatial order of current politics, moving from the idea of Kurdistan as a classical nation-state toward a project for autonomy, within its philosophy of a democratic society, and, at the same time, opening up a political space of its own by means of performative political acts" (p. 417). However whereas in Casier's analysis this shift is characterized as a sui generis development within the Kurdish movement, I want to suggest that it is better understood as a response to larger transformations in the politics and political economy of the region and has in fact been taken up by and for a host of different social actors – a claim I develop further in the next section.

Language, too, became central in the shift toward talk about 'Mesopotamia', and Kurdish-language activism emerged as an increasingly important element within the Kurdish movement's new political program following the turn of the millennium. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the reemergence of a mass Kurdish movement in Turkey beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s was likewise reflected in the growing oppressiveness of Turkish state's language policy vis-a-

¹⁹ Quoted and translated from "Artık yeninin zamanıdır..." *Sosyalist Mesopotamya* 1 (2003): (pp. 1-3)

visa Kurdish (Zeydanlıoğlu 2012b). The 1980 military coup-d'etat in Turkey and the adoption of a new constitution in 1982 (pushed through by the military dictatorship) resulted in the further criminalization of the Kurdish language by proclaiming Turkish as the official language and banning the use of any other language in public (Hassanpour, et al. 1996). However, perhaps less expected (given both the Turkish state's decades-long ban on the use of Kurdish and the PKK's stated goal of creating an independent Kurdish nation-state) was that initially language was not made into a primary site of struggle by the PKK during this period – a fact which marked them off from the cultural politics of Kurdish intellectuals and educators. Uçarlar (2009) suggests two primary reasons for this: on the one hand, the PKK's interpretation of Marxist-Leninist ideology tended to reject an emphasis on language and other 'cultural' work as an artifice of bourgeois nationalism; on the other hand, the social backgrounds of the PKK's leadership meant that only a few had the necessary proficiency in Kurdish to deploy it centrally in their political struggle – a fact for which the PKK would later be criticized by many prominent Kurdish intellectuals who would accuse the party of having neglected the language struggle (ibid). Despite the growing violence in Turkey and North Kurdistan, Kurdish intellectuals concentrated in the European diaspora continued their Kurdish-language advocacy; and they were later joined in this work by a small group of Kurdish intellectuals within Turkey following the return to multiparty democracy and the partial easing of restrictions on Kurdish-language publishing under President Özal (in office 1989-1993). But they did so at great personal risk to themselves, attracting both the wrath of nationalists within Turkey's security services²⁰ and public condemnation in Turkish media, as

²⁰ For instance Musa Anter, a well-known Kurdish intellectual and educator was murdered by JITEM – the main actors in the Turkish state's dirty war in Kurdistan in the 1990s - in Diyarbakir in September, 1992 – just a few months after he had helped to found the Kurdish Institute of Istanbul (**K**: Enstîtuya Kurdî ya Stenbolê, **T**: İstanbul Kürt Enstitüsü). There are hundreds of similar examples from that period.

well as the suspicions of the PKK leadership, who tended to view such work as a challenge to their own political authority.²¹

However, the importance of language within the Kurdish movement changed greatly in the post-2000 period, when cultural struggles were increasingly seen as an important element in efforts by Kurdish-run municipalities to establish new forms of local autonomy and make their political demands legible to a wider international audience, specifically in terms of the demands for the right of ‘mother-tongue’ education in the context of Turkey’s EU accession process (Uçarlar 2009). This change, in turn, brought greater attention to cities such as Mardin where Kurdish continued to play a more important role in public life than the largest cities of North Kurdistan such as Diyarbakir or Van.²² Indeed, whereas in Diyarbakir a widely mobilized language ideology posits the countryside as a Kurdish-speaking, while positing the city as Turkish-speaking, in Mardin, importantly, processes of urbanization over the past half-century have not automatically meant ‘Turkification’. In part this is owing to the historically dominant position of Kurdish and Arabic in the province. Census data cited by Beşikçi (1969/2014) from

²¹One famous example of this occurred in 1989, when Ahmet Türk and several other Kurdish MPs – then part of an unofficial Kurdish block in leftist Social Democratic Party (SDP) – were expelled from the party for traveling to the 1st World Conclave on Kurds in Paris in October 1989. In Turkey, the MPs were accused of attending a conference organized by the PKK; in reality, the PKK leadership had denounced the conference and its local supporters demonstrated outside. Indeed, upon his return to Turkey, one of the expelled Kurdish MPs İsmail Hakkı Önal explicitly differentiated Kurdish aspirations for cultural and linguistic rights from the political ambitions of the PKK, telling the *New York Times*: "Kurds don't want to establish a separate state...We just want our culture - to speak our language, to listen to our music. We're afraid that if the Government doesn't approach this problem intelligently, then illegal groups like the P.K.K. can become a source of power." (Haberan, Clyde. "For Turkey's Kurds, Fragile Gains" NYT. Nov. 3. 1989). Of course, Önal was right. Over the next decade the PKK did become a source of power, and today no MP linked to the Kurdish movement would publicly call it an ‘illegal group’, whatever their opinions about its politics.

²²This was no doubt one factor in the decision to open the first Kurdish-language program here (see next chapter).

the 1960, for instance, reports that 92% of the population of Mardin province still spoke a ‘mother-tongue other than Turkish’ – the highest of anywhere in the country (by comparison, 69% of respondents in Diyarbakir province and 55% in Van province reported speaking a language other than Turkish) (p. 510). But the local realities of these speech communities – who are only ever recorded in Turkish state documents as speaking in a ‘language other than Turkish’ – were rendered invisible and left unrecognized by the official organization and regimentation of language community under the hegemony of Republican Turkish. Since the early 2000s, the public invisibility (and to a lesser extent, inaudibility) of the Kurdish language has been challenged by the Kurdish movement with a new intensity. This period, significantly, also coincides with the beginning of the Kurdish movement’s consolidation of control over the majority of municipal governments in Kurdistan, beginning with their victory in Diyarbakir in 1999 (although they would not consolidate their control over Mardin city center until 2009).²³

At the same time, these efforts were backed by a broad spectrum of actors within and outside the institutional spaces of Kurdish movement, including many first-generation Kurdish university students for whom language activism was an attractive alternative to the dangers and deprivations of participation in armed struggle – especially in the face of the political and military setbacks encountered by the PKK at the turn of the millennium. One former Kurdish-language instructor at the LLI from Qoser, for example, once described to me how while at university in Western Turkey around the turn of the millennium, he became involved in a new Kurdish-language association run by Kurdish students. When he returned to his hometown after he graduated from the education faculty, around 2002, he began to volunteer running a small

²³This control has obviously been challenged by the Turkish state’s decision since 2016 to replace most of the democratically elected pro-Kurdish municipal governments in Kurdistan, including Mardin’s, with state-appointed Trusteeships (or ‘kayyum’ administrations).

Kurdish-language course with two other young teachers.²⁴ However, after only a couple of months of lessons all three were arrested by Turkish police, tortured, and remanded to custody for several weeks. Only after their arrest, he explained, did he learn that around that same time the PKK leadership in Kandil had itself put out a call for an increased focus on language work and Turkish police had assumed they were operating on the PKK's orders. The point is that despite its association with organizations connected to the institutional Kurdish politics, many in this new generation of university graduates also took up Kurdish language activism as a form of participation in Kurdish political and cultural struggles that was largely outside the immediate control of official Kurdish parties. If language activism represented a new site of political struggle for the Kurdish movement, it also created space for new social actors to intervene in the name of the Kurdish public often beyond the control of the movement's official actors.

In the years that followed, language activism increasingly gained public expression in the discourse of Kurdish municipalities and in the growing frequency of Kurdish politicians and other public figures openly speaking Kurdish in public (and even in parliament, to the scandal of many in Turkey's Kemalist establishment).²⁵ In 2007, moreover, the private Kurdish Language Research and Development Society (or Kurdi-Der) was founded in Diyarbakir in order to train new Kurdish-language teachers and to provide Kurdish lessons for all interested students – in addition to the hundreds of city employees and contractors who were now required by Kurdish-run municipalities to demonstrate basic competence in Kurdish (or at least one other local

²⁴In fact, as I describe in Chapter 6, a great many Kurdish language activists, writers and publishers are current or former teachers employed in Turkish state schools.

²⁵Kurdish was first spoken in the Turkish parliament, famously, by the Kurdish MP Leyla Zana in 1991, although this would become an established ritual for many Kurdish MPS by the early 2000s.

language besides for Turkish).²⁶ At the same time, Kurdish municipalities have increasingly sought the right to provide city services in Kurdish by, for instance publishing bilingual informational pamphlets and organizing public health campaigns in Kurdish. But while in Diyarbakir, for example, it became more common to hear municipal workers speak Kurdish publicly during their work, the widespread use of Kurdish written code in administrative documents or municipal publicity has been limited and largely symbolic. This reality, for example, is typified by the Kurdish movement's introduction of new multilingual municipal signs in towns and cities across North Kurdistan (see figure 1.4).

Beginning in 2014 – and encouraged by the ongoing peace process and the state's seeming willingness to negotiate around the question language rights (see next section) - Kurdish municipalities began including Kurdish, and to a lesser extent other 'local' languages, on public signs in the city, rendering Kurdish not only audible but visible – and by extension commensurate with Turkish code (Jamison 2016), as well as the other standardized codes that are differently imagined to exist in the region. In February 2014, for instance, the Sur municipality in Diyarbakir unveiled a new sign on the entrance of city hall in four languages (Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian, Syriac – Arabic was added later); while Greater Diyarbakir Municipality also introduced several bilingual Kurdish-Turkish traffic signs throughout the city.

²⁶Kurdi-Der quickly opened new branches throughout North Kurdistan, and continued to maintain a presence in most major towns and cities in North Kurdistan before it was shut down by state-order in 2016.



Figure 1.4: (Left) ‘Sur Municipality’ – Sign at the entrance of the Sur district (old city) municipal building in Diyarbakir in 5 languages (Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian, Syriac and Arabic), Summer 2014. (Right) entrance for ‘Mardin Greater Municipality Commission for Women’s Policy / Arin Women’s Center / Service and Occupational Courses’, 2017.

Mardin municipality, for its part, has consistently opted for its four-language approach (Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, Syriac), posting large quadrilingual signs at the entrance of city hall and on its other municipal buildings, as well as employing painted labels in alternating languages on municipal benches, flowerpots, and trashcans (see figure 1.4). In this example we see how an emphasis on Mesopotamia as a multicultural space is made a reality on the physical space of the municipal sign, transforming language from an abstract symbol into a material icon of inter-communal harmony and ‘brotherhood and unity among peoples’. Here we also see how Mesopotamia as a language ideology intersects with a broader ideological preference for the ‘visibility’ of print publics and the constitution of language community over the audibility of speech communities, wherein the existence of the former is understood to validate and safeguard the latter (Jamison 2016). This is an ideologized relation that is nicely captured in remarks by Februniye Akyol, herself co-mayor of Mardin and a Syriac Orthodox Christian, at the occasion of the unveiling of the municipal building’s new quadrilingual sign in September, 2014:

In Mardin you will hear a different language on every street. Kurdish, Arabic, Syriac, Turkish. The ringing of [church] bells mixes with the call to prayer. A new harmony

emerges. Cultures, faiths, languages together in one place. All of these differences are accepted as richness. The value of togetherness is well known. It was a great shortcoming that, until today, that this richness and beauty was not reflected in the municipality and its service to local voters. Now with great pride we are taking the first step in making up for this shortcoming. May it be of benefit to the people of Mardin.²⁷

As Akyol's celebrates Mardin's multilingual character, she insists that this character, already 'audible on every street', be visibly represented on municipal signs. At the same time, she draws a direct analogy between linguistic diversity and religious and ethnic diversity, where the intermingled public speech of Mardin's four languages is imagined to create a harmony akin to the mixing of the sound of church bells and the call to prayer, in which multiple 'cultures', 'faiths', and 'languages' intermingle (here she largely ignores, for instance, historical tensions around both public language use and public forms of religious expression in Mardin). In this way, Akyol's argues that is only the visible presence of written code that languages can be recognized to exist in Mardin as such and that their co-presence on text objects is akin to the harmonious existence of their distinct speech communities.

These two language ideologies – 1) an emphasis on the visual and written over the audible and spoken, and 2) the reduction of multilingualism to a question of intercommunal harmony – are central pillars of the Kurdish movement's contemporary language politics; ideologized processes that have been institutionalized in political discourse as they have been continually reenacted in public performances such as the one described above. These ideological features of official Kurdish political discourse on language, importantly, are in stark contrast to those institutionalized in the historical language policies of the Turkish state and its more than

²⁷Quoted from *Akşam* "Mardin'de 4 dilde tabela." 2-Sep-2014 (Original source *DHA*).

century-long project²⁸ to assimilate, often through force or violence, the diverse speech communities existing within its border to a monolingual Turkish-language regime.

But while many, including this author, might celebrate these ideological readjustments as progressive steps toward greater personal freedom and the public recognition of marginalized speech communities, I also want to suggest that they often have the unintended effects of obscuring important, enduring hierarchies in local speech communities while also drawing an overly stable analogy between linguistic practices and ethnic identity – that is, the idea that one is what one speaks, i.e. a form of ‘iconization’ (Irvine & Gal 2000) common to modern nation-state politics, wherein, for example, those who speak Turkish are imagined to be ‘Turks’, those speaking Kurdish ‘Kurds’, and those speaking Arabic ‘Arabs’²⁹ -- that is often in conflict with the way that many in Mardin talk about their relationship to language or enact different modalities of socio-cultural identification. This is a problem I return to discuss in greater detail in the next chapter, where I consider how these new language ideologies erase important features of local linguistic practices and misrepresent the realities of multilingualism in the province. Now, however, I turn to consider how the category of Mesopotamia has been mobilized by local actors in Mardin in a manner that allows them to differentiate themselves from the political values of the Turkish nation-state at the same that, significantly, it allows them to align themselves with state development projects and to take part in a wider regime of transnational neoliberal development. Rather than simply a binary contrast – as, for example, between ‘Turkey’ and ‘Kurdistan – new discourses around Mesopotamia have allowed for new forms of social and

²⁸ Since this project obviously had its Ottoman predecessors under the Hamidian and Young Turk regimes (Üngör 2008a, 2008b;).

²⁹ For discussion of similar ideological processes elsewhere see: Berthele 2008; Irvine 2008; Gal 2011.

political alignment at the same time that they have produced novel forms of political ambivalence.

II. Mesopotamia and transnational regimes of development

If Mesopotamia is widely invoked in official Kurdish discourse to signal its advocacy for an alternative political project to that of the Turkish nation-state, it also responds to a larger transformation in Turkey's politics and the political economy of the wider region. In Mardin, for instance, Mesopotamia has emerged as a spatial and political imaginary that is deeply contested between the Kurdish movement and the Turkish state at the same time that it has created the rhetorical space for mutually referential alignment between local actors, state officials, and Kurdish politicians—especially around projects directed toward the province's economic development. Indeed, I suggest that it is impossible to fully understand the significance of Mesopotamia discourse in Mardin without also taking into consideration the region's rapid economic growth over the past two decades (growth that has stalled since 2015) and the larger transformations in urban space and public culture that have accompanied it. Consider, for example, how Ahmet Türk rhetorically invokes Mesopotamia in his attempt to position Mardin as both a marquee city in the Kurdish movement's new political project and as an emerging center for a transnational regional economy. Speaking with a reporter from *Ajansa Nûçeyan a Firatê* – i.e. ANF, or Firat ('Euphrates') News Agency, a Kurdish news agency closely linked to the *PKK* – several months before the meeting in Ankara described above, this is how Türk explained Mardin's relation to Mesopotamia and its significance to the Kurdish movement's larger 'post-national' turn:

Of course, Mardin is a very important city. It's 'a world city' (T: bir dünya kenti), it's 'a center of culture' (T: bir kültür merkezi). It's 'multiconfessional' (T: çok inançlı), it's 'multilingual' (T: çok dilli). It carries all the colors of Mesopotamia. This is why we here have such political commitment to 'brotherhood among peoples' (T: halkların

kardeşliğini). As you know, Mr. Öcalan is in favor a politics that promotes bringing [different] peoples closer together. Mr. Öcalan, the leader of the Kurdish people, released a press statement openly requesting that all of these colors be represented in municipal government. In a place like Mardin, other cultures also need to be represented, in fact he personally called for [representation] from the Syriac community. And our party, as a party that takes as its basic principle ... 'the unity and brotherhood of peoples' (T: halkların kardeşliği ve birliğini), we paid attention to this call³⁰ ... on the subject [of cultural projects], for instance, we plan to open cultural centers in which different peoples and faiths' cultures and beliefs can be reflected. We are developing the Kurdish, Syriac and the Arabic languages, and we will open centers where people can learn about their history. Mardin is a world city and I think that in the future Mardin can become the capital of the Middle East. In order for Mardin to be a city that can represent all of the colors of the Middle East, we plan to open a new international conference center. We have further projects around tourism. We are going to really emphasize Mardin's tourism potential. We want to transform what is still a military base [in Mardin's old castle] used as a radar site for surveillance into a tourist site and connect it to the city via a cable car. There is no need for such a radar site now.³¹ The state now has all kinds of other means for surveillance. So, we want to open up that area to tourism. Mardin stands in a very strategic position. On one said is the border with Rojava [i.e. 'Western' Kurdistan, Northeast Syria], an on the other side is South Kurdistan [i.e. Northern Iraq]. At the time it contains so many cultures and languages. For this reason, we are developing suitable projects through which to realize Mardin's autonomy.³²

As pointed out above, Türk frames his presentation of Mardin as an exemplary Mesopotamian city within the Kurdish movement's larger project of 'democratic autonomy'; and he explicitly credits imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan for the promotion of a multicultural and democratic governing framework in the city and the province as captured by the call for 'brotherhood among peoples'. But notice how Türk also goes beyond the political horizons of PKK discourse in order to project an image of Mardin as also, for example, an aspirational space and a potentially lucrative new site in Turkey's important tourism industry. In so doing, significantly, he links Mardin's status as a 'Mesopotamian' city (i.e. as 'a cultural

³⁰ Türk is referring to the appointment by his party of Februniye (Benno) Akyol, a young Syrian Orthodox Christian woman from Mardin, as co-mayor.

³¹ Mardin's old castle served for several decades as a NATO radar-outpost (see next section).

³² Quoted from interview by Sedat Sur, *ANF*, (as reprinted in) *Rojava Kurdistan*. "Ahmet Türk: Mardin Ortadoğu'nun başkenti olacak." 17-February-2014.

center' and a 'multiconfessional' and 'multilingual' space) to its potential for economic growth, thereby orienting his own vision of Mesopotamia toward a more widely circulating metadiscourse that links Mesopotamia to economic development and repositions it as a future-oriented chronotope that seeks to convert the value of Mardin's heritage sites and the value of its unique (in the context of Turkey) sociolinguistic regime into a new political and economic paradigm for the city and the wider province. Importantly, I argue, new spatial ideologies positing Mesopotamia as a multicultural space are not the sole prerogative of Turkey's Kurdish movement. On the contrary, these ideologies are also reproduced by locals in Mardin from across the political and communal spectrum (albeit often in terms that significantly deviate from official Kurdish discourse), and are likewise encountered within various registers of 'neo-Ottomanist' discourse (White 2013) emanating from the AKP government as well as in recent talk of 'regionalism' both an EU-promoted development strategy and an alternative cultural horizon to the nation-state – a discourse that has become not only in the peace process between the PKK and the Turkish state, became particularly important in the context of Turkey's EU accession process as well as Turkey's closer integration within regional and international markets.

The refashioning of Mesopotamia as a central geographic ideology within the Kurdish movement since the turn of the millennium, therefore, is not an isolated phenomenon. Rather it has parallels in shifts in Turkish state discourse since the election of the AKP in 2002, and also closely correlates, significantly, to the period of rapid economic growth and social transformation that defined the AKP's first ten years in power and – a period that, as we will see in later chapters, was also central to new investments in a rapidly expanding Kurdish cultural industry and new ways of assessing Kurdish's value in the market and public life. In part, this

period was a continuation of a four-decade process of economic liberalization that is rooted in the post-coup military regime that came to power in 1980. But this process also took on a new direction when – after more than a decade of unstable coalition governments, heightened anxieties over the growing electoral successes of Islamist parties, and growing popular anger over the intensifying civil war in Kurdistan during the 1990s – a major economic crisis in 2001 brought down a coalition of Turkey’s establishment parties and led to the election of the first AKP government the following year.

At the time, the AKP was heavily attacked by the country’s Kemalist establishment for what the latter perceived as its violation of Turkey’s secular constitution; and during its first years in power, multiple efforts were launched by the AKP’s opponents to remove the government from power through the judiciary and the mobilization of popular pressure as a pretext for future military intervention. In response, the AKP sought out support not only from pious Turks, but liberal democrats upset with the military’s anti-democratic role in Turkish public life, and conservative Kurds who were unhappy with both the direction of Kurdish movement under the PKK as well as Turkey’s traditional ruling parties. The electoral strategy appeared to work, at least initially: In Mardin province, for instance, the AKP went from around 15% of the vote in Turkey’s 2002 general elections to 44% (and first place) in 2007.

In response, the AKP government doubled down on its promise of cultural reforms. Two years later, it launched what it referred to as its *Kürt açılımı* (‘Kurdish opening’) – one part of a larger campaign of democratic openings between 2009-2011 – that was designed to ease long-standing restrictions around the use of the Kurdish language in media and education. According to government officials, this ‘opening’ was implemented as a response to demands from Turkey’s Kurdish minority for state recognition of their language and culture; and as a prelude to

the *Çözüm Süreci* ('Solution Process', *i.e.* peace process), or the now-defunct efforts on the part of the Turkish government and various Kurdish actors to negotiate a permanent political settlement to Turkey's 'Kurdish issue' between 2013-2015. In 2009, for example, the Turkish state launched its first dedicated Kurdish-language television channel (TRT-Kurdî); moreover, the following year it announced the creation of the introduction of Turkey's first-ever Kurdish-language program at Artuklu University in Mardin (see next chapter) in order, it was widely rumored at the time, to train new teachers for a system of Kurdish-language primary education. Over the next five years, moreover, five more Kurdish-language departments opened at state universities across Kurdistan and the Ministry of Education began allowing the teaching of Kurdish on a limited, elective basis in some Turkish state primary schools in Kurdistan, evening commissioning Kurdish-language professors at Artuklu University to develop an official state textbook. Taken together, these moves had the effect of fundamentally transforming the state's relationship to Turkey's 'Kurdish issue,' which transitioned from a position of outright denial to an active role in speaking to and on behalf of Turkey's Kurdish community.

Importantly, AKP's Kurdish policy was but one part of its efforts to rethink Turkey's cultural horizons and its growing role in regional politics, as well as to rebrand itself as a democratic leader in the Middle East; and initially, at least, the AKP was successful in cultivating a new global image for itself as a positive force for economic and political reform in the country and the wider region – a line that was happily consumed in North American and Europe capitals. At a meeting in Ankara with President in 2004, for instance, US President Bush praised Turkey as a model for "how to be a Muslim country and at the same time a country which embraces democracy and the rule of law and freedom."³³ Five years later, President

³³ BBC News. "Bush praise for key ally Turkey." 27-June-2004.

Obama chose Turkey for his first visit to a Muslim country and traveled to Ankara, where he addressed Turkey's parliament and voiced support for its accession to the European Union. Nor was such praise limited to Western political leaders, but included support from Western media and intellectuals from across the political spectrum. Writing for *The Nation* in 2010, for instance, one John Feffer argued that Turkey under AKP-rule was aiming to establish a 'Pax Ottomanica' based in investor-friendly policies and a newly assertive regional foreign policy together with a corresponding reimagining of Turkey's national identity along with principles of multiculturalism and respect for religious expression:

Today, a dynamic neo-Ottoman spirit animates Turkey. Once rigidly secular, it has begun to fashion a moderate Islamic democracy. Once dominated by the military, it is in the process of containing the army within the rule of law. Once intolerant of ethnic diversity, it has begun to reexamine what it means to be Turkish. Once a sleepy economy, it is becoming a nation of Islamic Calvinists. Most critically of all, it is fashioning a new foreign policy... Perhaps the most dramatic reversal in Turkish policy involves the Kurdish region of Iraq... Détente with Iraqi Kurdistan has gone hand in hand with a relaxation of tensions between Ankara and its own Kurdish population with which it had been warring for decades. Until the early 1990s, the Turkish government pretended that the Kurdish language didn't exist. Now, there is a new twenty-four-hour Kurdish-language national TV station, and new faculty at Mardin Artuklu University will teach Kurdish.³⁴

Of course, this was a story sold about Turkey by the AKP government; but it was also the story increasingly retold by foreign diplomats, investors, journalists, and think-tankers, especially as Turkey's economy grew at over seven percent year for the AKPs first decade in power and continued to expand despite the 2008 recession. Indeed, beyond just talk of 'democracy' and 'multiculturalism', the AKP sent the message to foreign partners that Turkey was open for business – combining social and economic reforms under a new development paradigm that Biner (2020), following Hale (2005), terms 'neoliberal multiculturalism.' Between

³⁴ John Feffer. "Pax Ottomanica? How Turkey is chasing China to become the next big thing." *The Nation*. June 14, 2010

2002 and its peak in 2013, the size of the Turkish economy grew from 238 billion to 950 billion dollars (World Bank). This growth was fueled, in part, by a spike in foreign direct investment beginning in 2005 that peaked at over 22 billion dollars in 2007 and remained elevated despite Turkey's increasing economic difficulties.³⁵ But even more importantly, the integration of the Turkish banking system into the global financial system through relaxed rules on foreign borrowing and securities requirements drove domestic banks toward more and more risky consumer lending practices (which also took on an increasingly predatory character), financing short-term growth through massive increases in levels of household debt (Karaçimen 2014).



Figure 1.5: Mardin's *Yeni Şehir* (New City) as seen from below the Diyarbakir Gate

³⁵Investment and Promotion Agency of Turkey (ISPAT)

Mardin was no exception to these general trends. Between 2004 and 2017, the total size of Mardin's economy grew sixfold from 2.5 to 15.9 billion liras.³⁶ But despite these 'impressive numbers', private sector investment in Mardin has been primarily concentrated in only a few industries (namely agriculture, construction, and real-estate, with secondary investments in tourism, retail, education, and healthcare). Construction and real-estate, in particular, have played an important role not only in the growth of Mardin's economy but in transforming its urban fabric: the expansion of Mardin's *Yeni Şehir* ('New City') has more than doubled the size of its urban area over the past two decades, extending the city in connected blocks of brand-new concrete high-rises for 3.5 km along the New City's main thoroughfare (see figure 1.5); and then still further, in scattered developments reaching almost as far as the new Artuklu University campus, roughly 10 km north of the city on the road to Diyarbakir. Its population has also grown, but more slowly, from around 108,000 people in 2000 to roughly 175,000 in 2018, but a significant portion of this growth is more recent, and driven by arrivals from Syria and other parts of the province.³⁷ In current economic conditions, however, construction in the New City has dropped precipitously, with many projects left half-completed, despite the recent increases in demand for housing. Moreover, a decade of expanded access to credit cards and home mortgages has left many locals deeply indebted.³⁸

³⁶This figure is partly misleading, since it does not take into account the devaluation of the lira (and corresponding inflation) over the past five years in specifically. In 2004, 2.5 billion liras were around 1.8 billion dollars; in 2017, 15.9 billion liras came out to around 4.3 billion dollars, resulting in a still impressive growth rate of nearly 250% over 13 years (in dollar terms). All economic statistics in this section are taken from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) unless otherwise noted.

³⁷For comparison, the population of Mardin province as a whole grew from 705,000 to 829,000 over the same period, with the majority of growth occurring after 2011.

³⁸In Mardin, the debt crisis has hit an emerging class of first-generation university graduates and professionals – composed primarily of state functionaries, or *memurs* such as doctors and teachers – particularly hard. Importantly, this class has constituted one of the primary

A modest tourism industry has also grown up in recent years, centered primarily around the old cities of Mardin and Midyat, and supported by the opening of a newly renovated, state-subsidized commercial airport in 2012.³⁹ But most of the tourism industry is set up for domestic tourists and generally run through group tours concentrated over a few crowded weeks every autumn and spring, especially around major events such as the Mardin Biennial or the city's annual film festival; and although there are also tourists from Iraq and a constant trickle of backpackers from Europe, Japan and South Korea, Mardin does not have anything like the touristic clout of places like Antalya, Muğla, or Cappadocia. In spite of this, tourism seems to have captured an outsized place in Mardin's developmentalist imagination, and not only local municipal leaders, but the Turkish state, in partnership with the EU, have also made significant investments in restoring and preserving Mardin's cultural heritage, in particular the old city's famous Artuqid architecture. And if Mardin's tourism campaigns have not always brought the city as much revenue or visitors as elsewhere in Turkey – they have certainly brought the city a new level of prestige, with Mardin's 'Mesopotamya masalı ('Mesopotamia fairytale') playing an important role in branding it as both a tourist destination and a marquee site in a series of important social experiments with new public imaginaries (as 'a place where yesterday, today

beneficiaries of Turkey's 'economic miracle' as it was experienced in the border provinces of the country's Southeast. However, rising interest rates, high levels of inflation and precipitous drop in the value of the lira over the past half-decade have greatly diminished the social standing and purchasing power of the Kurdish professional classes. This is especially significant for my discussion, because as I discuss in chapters three (on the Kurdish book cafe), four (on Kurdish teachers working for Turkish state schools) and five (on Kurdish language publishing), this new class of primarily first-generation Kurdish teachers have played a central role in the creation of the Kurdish cultural industry and the transformation of Kurdish politics over the past two decades.

³⁹In 2017 figures compiled by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism recorded that Mardin had around 50 hotels with a total capacity of 4,300 beds. The tourism industry suffered greatly after the 2016 war, but has recovered since 2018.

and tomorrow meet’ and the site of ‘a never-ending epic story’ – see figure 1.6 below). In mobilizing Mardin’s history as an enduring value to the city, importantly, Mesopotamia also becomes a category through which the stored value of the past – imagined as latent in Mardin’s historical architecture and heritage sites - is realized as part of a future-oriented development paradigm that seeks to convert this value to a new prestige as a ‘world city’ and an international tourist destination.



Figure 1.6: (Upper left) a plaque marking the Abdullatif Mosque in Mardin’s old city, its restoration was sponsored by the Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP), a government-run development agency and supported with EU funds. (Upper right) A plaque celebrating an official visit from Prince Charles in 2004 (Below) An advertisement in Anadolujet’s inflight magazine - sponsored by the Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP), a government-run development agency - promoting tourism in Mardin and other cities in ‘Mesopotamia’, here made to correspond with the provinces of Southeast Turkey (circa 2017).

This process of fraught cooperation between locals, the Turkish state and the Kurdish movement is exemplified, as Biner (2020) adroitly describes, in the Historical Transformation Project first launched by Mardin's *valilik* (or centrally appointed state government) in 2009, with 7.5 million Euros of support from the European Union.⁴⁰ In Biner's telling the project is significant because it exemplifies the fraught cooperation between ostensibly opposed figures of the Turkish state and Kurdish movement in a situation that she refers to as a 'violent peace', and her description adroitly captures the multifaceted character of Mardin's 'multicultural developmentalist paradigm' as well as the way locals mobilized heritage discourses in coordination with (but also in distinction to) both the prerogatives of the Turkish state and the priorities of the Kurdish movement. But I also want to emphasize that this developmentalist paradigm was not limited to the tourism potential of heritage projects. Rather, it also sought to project Mardin's 'heritage' onto a broader developmentalist vision for Mardin that placed the province at the center of an emergent transnational economic system and political order in the

⁴⁰ In addition to restoration work on historical monuments, the project called for the complete or partial demolition of over 1000 concrete (i.e. 'non-historical') buildings and the relocation of their residents to newly built apartments in the New City in partnership with the Mass Housing Development Administration (TOKİ); and its official aim was to restore Mardin to its 'original' state in preparation for the city's application for UNESCO World Heritage status (a cooperative effort between NGOs, the municipality, EU programs and the Turkish government, the application was finally submitted in 2014 – the same year as the municipal government introduced its new multilingual public language policies). In Mardin especially, as Biner notes, this paradigm transcended divisions between the AKP's 'multicultural neoliberalism' and the Kurdish movement's re-articulation of Mesopotamia within a project of local autonomy: "In Mardin, the practices and discourses of heritage-centered projects did not revolve around the struggle between the government and the pro-Kurdish party activists. Although the conflict framed the discursive limits of multiculturalism, the presence of Arabs and Syriacs has shaped the definition and imagination of the "historical" and the "cultural" within the multicultural domain. The cultural has been promoted as if it existed above and beyond the political, as the political has been associated with the Kurdish political movement. The boundaries between the ethnic and the cultural, between the nationalist and the multicultural have constantly shifted under AKP rule" (Biner 2020 p. 39).

region – a political order typified by the contested category of Mesopotamia. This is perhaps best exemplified by the foundation of a new state university in the city in 2007.

The opening of Artuklu University – together with the rapid growth of the city’s student population (currently over 11,000, or around 6% of Mardin’s population) since 2007 – has fundamentally altered the character of the city. Estimates from 2016, for instance, put students’ contribution to the local economy in the form of consumer spending alone at over 40 million liras a year (İş, et al. 2017); and investments in infrastructure and building around the university have also consisted the single largest set of construction projects undertaken in the city in the past twenty years (rivalled only by the construction of a new state hospital campus from 2018-18). Beyond its economic effects, the presence of university students has likewise introduced new forms of public space and modes of sociality to Mardin; and outside of the official spaces on campus and university offices and classrooms, student life at Artuklu University is shaped through a much larger network of new semi-formal and informal institutional spaces, such as dormitories and student apartments, cafes and coffee houses, bookshops and libraries, student clubs and youth organizations (see figure 1.7 below). Moreover, as we will see in the coming chapters, such sites have formed the foundation for the emergence of new Kurdish reading publics, shaping new patterns of circulation for Kurdish text objects and altering relations between professors, students, and a wider Kurdish reading public. At the same time, the university has attracted an international student population from neighboring countries of Syria, Iraq, and Iran (including a significant number of students from other parts of divided Kurdistan), as well as students from Africa and Central Asia, sponsored under the Turkey Scholarships Program; and it has sent hundreds of local students, graduate researchers and faculty abroad as part of ERASMUS and other international exchange programs. All of which have positioned the

university as an important institutional link between students in Mardin and transnational youth publics.



Figure 1.7: (left) A university-run tea garden and hotel in Mardin's old city; (right) Artuklu University's new main campus, 10 km north of Mardin city center

Taken together, these developments have profound effects on Mardin's urban fabric and the way that locals understand the position of Mardin in relation to Turkish and Kurdish national projects. Thus, more than a discourse about the region's past or a stand-in for 'Kurdistan', 'Mesopotamia' has figured centrally in efforts to discursively reconcile rapid social change with the city's contested location between two nationalist projects – a site that has shifted dramatically in response to wider geopolitical and economic developments over the past two decades. In her study of rapid urban transformation in 19th century New York, Munn (2013) draws our attention to what she terms the 'spatiotemporalizing processes' that shape how people understand the changing qualities and identities of space and place and how these qualities shape the lived experiences of urban residents. Such processes, Munn explains, are defined by both "a particular nexus of common descriptions and related commentaries on observable change" and "...modes of action or practices and states of the city place-world which concretely engage and manifest these changes; and which are articulated in diverse [yet thematic] ways in this discourse" (pp. 359-60).

In Mardin, too, we can see how competing discourses around Mesopotamia and Mardin's multicultural character have influenced contemporary urban development and is reflected in new regimes of socio-spatial relations. Indeed, despite a seeming emphasis on the city's historical heritage –indeed many outside of Mardin associate Mesopotamia with a historical space – many in Mardin associate the Mesopotamia project with rapid urban transformation and an experience of profound novelty. Consider how Melike, another graduate of the LLI from Mardin, describes how an emphasis on Mardin's traditional architecture and heritage tourism are decidedly new phenomena in the city that have emerged alongside the university and other novel forms of urban space:

So, the whole history of the *kafe*⁴¹ [in Mardin], and I am including Kafe X, is just ten years...so a few films were shot here, and a few television programs. Mardin became a little better known, and after well tourists and people from outside of Mardin began to come...[Mardin's] shape, its atmosphere, and the color of its shops, also their rooftops, when you walk from the square along the road, all of these new places, this is something that's happened in the last five years.

In Melike's description, we see how a new regime of neoliberal capitalist accumulation in Mardin – backed by foreign finance capital and founded on relations of debt – is closely correlated with the emergence of new modes of social-cultural identification and a new sense of place.

Importantly, I am not suggesting that the AKP's neo-Ottomanist inflected discourse on Mardin and Mesopotamia and the Kurdish movement's articulation of Mesopotamia as a new, aspirational spatio-political imaginary are manifestations of the same political project. Rather, I want to suggest that, in Mardin specifically, both have been designed and implemented to intervene in the same localized social conditions and to effectively participate in the same wider

⁴¹As I explain in chapters four and five, not all coffeehouses or cafes are called *kafes* – a novel social institution in Turkey and Kurdistan. The former have existed in Mardin for centuries.

set of transformations in the region's political economy and politics. Thus, at the same time that Mesopotamia has been taken up by a host of political actors and centrally mobilized in competing political projects, it has also figured centrally in a set of more politically ambivalent development projects underscored by 'a particular interplay of discursive and concrete practices' (Munn 2013) that, I suggest, ought to be approached in all of their sociohistorical specificity (rather than as a generalizable process of neoliberal urban development).

Finally, as I discuss in detail the next chapter, many in Mardin from across the political spectrum invoke Turkey's wider multicultural turn as a confirmation of their lived realities and a partial validation of more locally salient forms of identification, while they also mobilize Mardin's connection to Mesopotamia to project this experience far into the region's past. Invocations of Mesopotamia thereby serve to reframe local forms of identification as more universally valid and more legitimated by history than the monolithic ethnic identities of nation-states such as Turkey.⁴² At the same time, however, these metadiscourses are also implicated in a host of competing value projects – from the development of a local tourism industry to the foundation of Artuklu University and the promulgation of new public language ideologies by municipal governments. As I show in the next chapter, these metadiscourses also affect how communities in Mardin understand their own sociolinguistic practices and approach the meaning of 'multiculturalism' and 'multilingualism' as realized in local social relations.

⁴² In this sense, Mesopotamia has also taken on a similar function that it played for early generations of leftist Iraqi intellectuals and political leaders, for whom the historical memory of Mesopotamia was central in distinguishing Iraqi nationalism from Pan-Arabism and in creating space for the expression other ethnic and religious identities within the Iraqi state project (Davis 2005).

Chapter 2: Language, the City and the University in Mesopotamia

Much of the optimism that colored discourse of Mesopotamia and the socio-spatial reimagining of Mardin since the turn of the century has largely dissipated over the past five years. Regional political developments stemming from the Syrian Civil War led to the complete re-closure of the border in late 2014. Moreover, with a GDP per capita of just \$12,028 annually (just over half of the national average), Mardin still ranks among the poorest provinces in Turkey (OECD).¹ Today, moreover, Mardin continues to have one of the highest unemployment rates of any province in Turkey.² Nor has Mardin escaped the return to political violence that has

¹Mardin ranks 69th out of 82 Turkish provinces in terms of per capita GDP.

² The most recent government numbers from 2013, before Turkey's economic crisis, put official unemployment in the province at over 20%, among the highest official numbers listed of any province in the country.

affected North Kurdistan more broadly. In the spring and early summer of 2016, fighting between Turkish paramilitaries and PKK militants left hundreds dead and displaced nearly 65,000 people and destroyed one-third of the city of Nisêbîn (T: Nusaybin) in the southeast of the province (filling Mardin city with tens of thousands of civilians fleeing the fighting); and later that same year the province's pro-Kurdish municipal governments were replaced by Ankara-appointed trustees and thousands of Kurdish civil servants and municipal workers were also thrown out of their jobs. This has included professors at Artuklu University, who lost their jobs in a series of purges beginning in 2014 and peaking after the 2016 failed coup attempt, as well as many state teachers who were completing second degrees in the newly opened Kurdish language department.³

However, I want to submit that one striking feature of this most recent crackdown on institutional Kurdish politics has been the resilience of the Kurdish language as a now legitimized medium of public discourse – if one still fraught with possibilities for social tension and conflict. Despite increased pressures on faculty and students, Artuklu University continues to accept new enrollments into its Kurdish-language program (albeit in fewer numbers than four or five years ago), and a small minority of its graduates continue to find public employment as Kurdish-language teachers in Turkish state schools. Around Artuklu, in greater Mardin, university students can visit bookstores selling a wide range of Kurdish-language publications, as well as attend literary readings and musical performances by Kurdish-language writers and artists hosted at cafes and cultural organizations around the city. Signs on Mardin's municipal buildings still bear inscriptions in the city's four 'official' languages - Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic

³ See my discussion of Kurdish teachers and Turkey's civil service (T: memurluk) system in chapter four.

and Syriac - even though the pro-Kurdish party which first introduced this practice was forcibly removed from office by the Turkish state in 2016 (and subsequently reelected in Turkey's March 2019 municipal elections and removed again).⁴ And although several locally operated Kurdish-language newspapers and television stations have recently been forced to close, Turkish state television and radio (TRT) still maintains dedicated Kurdish-language channels; while TV satellite broadcasts from Syria, Iraq, Europe, and the United States, together with online social media, newspapers, and magazines provide a rich selection of readily accessible Kurdish-language content to local consumers. Taken together, I argue, this points to the enduring transformations that have typified the Turkish state and Kurdish movement's Mesopotamia projects in Mardin and speak to their connection to larger shifts in public value regimes that are reshaping sociolinguistic relations in the city and the wider province.

In the last chapter, I described how 'Mesopotamia' has emerged in recent decades as a new spatio-political imaginary within the Kurdish movement and, in the context of Mardin, a contested spatial category between this movement, government officials and locals from across the communal and political spectrum; and I showed how the mobilization of this category is related to larger shifts in geopolitics and political economy in the region and became centrally implicated in local economic development. In this chapter, I consider how the Mesopotamian project has been received and mobilized by residents in Mardin. I begin by looking more closely at the parameters of local speech communities in Mardin and I consider how ethnic and linguistic differences are understood and mobilized in relation to other horizons of belonging, especially the family and the familiar, face-to-face modalities of public sociality that define life in

⁴In Sur, interestingly, the *kayyum* administration replaced the 5-language sign with a bilingual sign in Turkish and Kurdish – although they also added a Turkish flag for good measure.

neighborhoods and in wider urban publics; and I consider the situation of Mardin's diverse speech communities in relation to attempts by the Kurdish movement to commensurate and valorize written Kurdish code in relation not only to Turkish but Arabic and Neo-Aramaic in an attempt to remake public language ideologies as part of its larger 'Mesopotamian' project. Ultimately, I am interested in examining how the Kurdish movement's project to reimagine Kurdistan within a multicultural Mesopotamia, as described in the previous chapter, is reflected in how people in Mardin speak about the interrelated qualities of one's linguistic practices, cultural orientations and position in social space.

In the last section of the chapter, I look specifically at the foundation of Artuklu University in Mardin in 2007 and the creation of the Living Languages Institute (LLI) – the first institute in Turkish higher education to offer state-recognized degrees in Kurdish-language literature, linguistics and education – at Artuklu University three years later, describing how Artuklu University and the LLI specifically have emerged as marquee projects in both the AKP government and the Kurdish movement's efforts to institutionalize Mesopotamia as an ideological project within Turkey shifting public language regime. Importantly, I argue that while the collapse of the process and the ongoing crackdown on Kurdish political actors within Turkey – including prominent actors within the Kurdish language movement – has again created significant obstacles to the use of Kurdish in mass media and education, it has not curtailed its use entirely and, in the context of Mardin at least, the Mesopotamian project as in large part endured in the face of resurgent Turkish nationalism and renewed armed conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK.

I. Language, local modes of identification and the values of the face-to-face speech community

An ethnographic vignette, Autumn, 2018: I board a minibus heading southwest along the Yeni Yol Caddesi, the primary thoroughfare through Mardin's New City. When I climb in its packed and there's standing-room-only. I end up directly behind the driver and my position between the passenger door and the cockpit means that I'm continually recruited by newly boarding passengers to pass their fares to the driver and to return the change that comes from the front of the minibus. As we continue to pick up more passengers en route to the Old City, the driver announces the amount of money received and the number of fares deducted for each group, and regularly calls out stops and cajoles his passengers to pay - all in Turkish (T: 'var mi inen?', 'evet başka ücret' 'ücretini vermeyen bi zahmet').

But when he's not interreacting with other passengers, the driver is engaged in an animated conversation with two men squeezed into the front passenger seat. The conversation revolves around the increase in fuel prices, I think. I say 'I think' because they're speaking Arabic, albeit in a local dialect of Mardin (its regular code-switching and free use of Turkish lexicon making such conversations slightly more accessible to me than the Arabic spoken by Syrians living in the city). Seated to my left are several students, recognizable by their uniforms and bags, playing a game on their phones and shouting out encouragement to one another in Turkish; seated to my right is an elderly couple, with several plastic bags full of vegetables, local cheeses and several plastic jugs of cooking oil at their feet, dressed in the customary clothing of the Mardin plain. As we pass the traffic circle for Kızıltepe, the woman whispers something to the man in Kurdish, and he nods silently.

In front of Migros supermarket, the last stop before the steep climb up to Diyarbakir Gate, several more people get on. As the minibus begins its slow, low-gear ascent up to the

Old City, I and the other standing passengers adjust for the incline, two of the newest passengers – an older and a younger woman - begin to argue, in Kurdish, about how to pay the fare.

Switching to Turkish, the younger woman asks the driver about her grandmother's right to ride for free, since she is over 65. The driver retorts, also in Turkish, that her grandmother ought to get a card from the municipality, explaining that there is an official process for such things. But the young woman persists, all the while arguing with her grandmother as she loosely translates the driver's response. Finally, the driver, perhaps sensing that the young woman was losing her patience, turns quickly around to glance at both, and then, after again fixing his eyes on the steep, curving road ahead, begins addressing the elder woman in Kurdish, 'Temam, tamam, baş e. Ama ş'we ra kartekê bigre teyze, kart!' (Ok, it's fine [this time]. But get a card, aunty, a card!).

~

The above vignette is only intended as a brief sample of the complex socio-linguistic factors shaping everyday interactions across Mardin's diverse speech communities, drawing attention to how the use of any linguistic code is bound up not only with the identity of an individual speaker, but is the product of a social relation between speakers. The driver speaks Arabic with his companions and Turkish with his passengers. He speaks Turkish when explaining the official rules for receiving reduced fares to a young woman, but he speaks Kurdish to an elderly woman when announcing he would let these rules slide. And lastly, the young woman speaks Kurdish with her grandmother, but Turkish with the driver (even though, it would seem, both the driver and the young woman are also capable of speaking both codes). All of this is to say that one never simply speaks, but one invariably speaks as someone to others. This point was made clear to me, in a different context, in a conversation with a Kurdish

academic from Qoser (T: Kızıltepe) who explained how he had forbidden his son from speaking Turkish in their home, complaining that Turkish was all his son spoke with his friends from school. ‘But students his age usually speak in Turkish with their friends’, I interjected. ‘A student can speak Turkish’ he responded, ‘but my son should speak Kurdish.’

As his formulation suggests, since any biographical person can be simultaneously a student (relative to her teachers or classmates); a daughter or sister (relative to members of an immediate family); and a citizen, employee, or subject (relative to state institutions), she might be expected to employ multiple codes in everyday interaction, inflecting her speech patterns in response to the social context. But such interactions take place in relation to a larger sociolinguistic regime (Gal and Irvine 2019), in which certain codes are always more appropriate for one context or another (a function of both the participants involved and the institutional setting, e.g. school, home, office, marketplace, etc.); and in Mardin, especially, locals linguistically negotiate and construct social relationships in relation a dynamic public language regime that is differently constituted across social space.

But in its narrative simplicity, unfortunately, the above vignette largely fails to capture both the complex interplay and wide range of the social codes, registers, and voices that shape everyday interactions in public. For instance, the ideologized depiction of three distinct linguistic codes – Turkish, Arabic, and Kurdish – which I deploy above overlooks what are important, locally salient contrasts in spoken varieties of each. In Mardin, for example, one important contrast often made by locals between the Kurdish spoken in and around Qoser and the al Jazira plane into Northern Syria, with its greater preservation of Arabic phonetics (in particular the ‘ayn ‘ع’ sound), and the Kurdish spoken on the Tur Abdin plateau, marked by, among other features, a few unique verb paradigms possibly influenced, it has been suggested to me by some of its

speakers, by close contact with the Neo-Aramaic dialect of Tuyoro (for a more general discussion of language contact between Neo-Aramaic and Kurdish, Chyet 1995). Another is between the Arabic spoken in the city of Mardin proper, and the Mhallami Arabic spoken in some villages around the city and in the neighboring districts of Savur, Yeşili, Midyat, Nusaybin and Ömerli, and north into Batman and east of Diyarbakir provinces (for a linguistic account of Mardin's Arabic dialects, see Şayir 2017). A third widely mobilized contrast is between more local dialects of Turkish and 'official', 'Istanbul Turkish.' This last contrast in fact operates across the entirety of North Kurdistan, and in reality, is but one species of a larger contrast between Standard Republican Turkish – originally based on dialects spoken by Ottoman émigré communities from the Balkans - and the dozens of local varieties of Turkish spoken across Anatolia and North Kurdistan. Moreover, this narrative obscures how public speech often draws on multiple codes and registers throughout an interaction, making any attempt to fix the boundaries of what 'language' is being spoken in any encounter necessarily reductive to one among many ideologized schema for linguistic classification – schema that themselves linked to other forms of classification (class, race, ethnicity) are often implicated in larger political projects (Flores and Rosa 2015; Gal and Irvine 1995; Rosa 2016; Silverstein 1995).⁵

⁵Succinctly summarizing linguistic anthropology's critique of the concept of 'language', for instance, Gal (2018) notes that a modern idea of language as bounded code is in fact inseparable from modern projects of standardization, a view that "...assumes language to be a bounded, homogeneous, structural system, a unity made primarily for denotation (i.e. reference, labeling the world), with centrally defined norms of grammatical and orthographic correctness to which all speakers are expected to orient. Each such named language ideally expresses the particular spirit of a people (nation), determines the national identity of its speakers and is linked to a territory. Language's objectified unity is reinforced by dictionaries, grammars and literature which seem to physically embody and license the regularities. Monolingualism with respect to such a language is assumed to be a natural condition, the language fulfilling all functions and separated from other, parallel systems by self-evident limits on mutual (denotational) intelligibility and connected to them via intertranslatability. The presence of multilingualism—of

In this section, however, I am less interested in exploring the particular linguistic details of code-switching or the semiotic construction of social registers per se. Rather, I am interested in making a more general point about the way that the use of one or more language codes is understood to reflect wider processes of social identification in Mardin. I explore how popular language ideologies intersect with the mediation of face-to-face interpersonal relationships and forms of public identification. And I draw attention how the Kurdish movement's efforts to recognize Mardin's linguistic diversity through an emphasis on the visibility of multilingual print publics – principally in the novel use of Kurdish, Arabic and Syriac code in municipal publicity and in municipal support for language education and other initiatives to increase non-Turkish competency. I argue that these policies have functioned to reorder the value regimes shaping local linguistic practices and increased the visibility of Kurdish and other locally spoken languages in public life. At the same time, I explain how these policies have obscured enduring hierarchies between standardized language codes and divergent speech communities, while also pointing us to the limits of municipal power in shifting language regimes.

Consider again the case of the municipal signs that appeared around North Kurdistan after 2014 that I introduced in the last chapter. The BDP's introduction of Mardin's four 'semi-official' language policy (although 'official' in matters of public presentation more than the actual business of municipal administration) was predicated, the mayor explained, on the need for the work of the municipality to reflect the linguistic (and by analogy ethnic and religious diversity) of the city in its service to residents. But what exactly does it mean to provide municipal services in the city's native tongues? In Mardin, in my observation, municipal

speakers and communities—is usually erased or made to seem exceptional, deviant. This system of values, beliefs and practices is a regime of standardization” (p. 226)”

services were largely already available in the major spoken languages of Mardin (that is Turkish, but also Arabic and Kurdish⁶) before any change ‘official’ policy, insomuch that municipal workers, along with many local state employees (or *memurs*⁷), also often spoke these languages and routinely conversed in them with city residents in their everyday interactions. On the other hand, neither Arabic, Kurdish or Syriac ever became widely used in official written documents or correspondence; and the language of municipal bureaucratic administration (a few prominent municipal signs notwithstanding) remained in Turkish throughout the entirety of the successive Kurdish-led DTP-BDP-DBP administrations in Mardin (2009-2016, 2019). But the introduction of Kurdish (or Arabic or Syriac) as an administrative language always faced significant obstacles in the region, given both state pressure and the widespread lack of familiarity with Kurdish (and other non-Turkish) written codes and especially their legal and administrative registers, even in provinces with significant Arabic and Kurdish-speaking populations such as Mardin.⁸ This is apparent, for example, even when we consider those places in Mardin where Kurdish code prevails most completely –such as in the towns of Nusaybin and Qoser (T: Kızıtepe). For even if we can confidently predict that many, if not most spoken interactions between locals in public spaces in these towns (such as cafes or stores) will occur in spoken Kurdish code, we can

⁶But most likely not in Tuyoro, the locally spoken dialect of Neo-Aramaic. As I explain below Tuyoro is spoken almost exclusively by Syriac Christians, and is thus much less likely to be employed by municipal workers in Mardin, where the population of Tuyoro speakers is relatively small (this may not be the case in the town of Midyat, I suspect where Tuyoro speaker’s constitute a more significant portion of the population, but I do not have sufficient evidence to make this claim one way or the other).

⁷See chapter six for my discussion of education, language use and Kurdish teachers working in Turkish state schools.

⁸This is largely due, of course, to the Turkish state’s long-standing ban on minority language education. Although this ban, as I discuss in the next two sections of this chapter and explore in more detail in chapter four.

likewise reasonably expect that nearly all text objects in these same settings (whether in form of signs, advertisements, menus, etc.) will be written in Turkish.

In this way, the Kurdish movement's introduction of multilingual signs obscures the enduring dominance of Turkish as the standard public medium for all written text in North Kurdistan. But more importantly, the more or less equal visibility of these linguistic codes on municipal sign tends to abstract from what is their decidedly unequal presence across social space and thus obfuscates the complex relations of value underlying the interaction of multiple spoken registers in everyday public interaction. Thus, while Mardin is exemplary of the Kurdish movement's attempts to position multilingualism at the center of its Mesopotamian project, a closer look at the enduring hierarchies that shape public speech also draws our attention to the current limits of this project both to reflect Mardin's sociolinguistic realities and more significantly, to relate these realities to historical legacies of state and intercommunal violence and ongoing processes of dispossession and forced migration, as well as to the everyday lived experiences of Mardin's inhabitants. As Jamison (2016) demonstrates, the Kurdish movement's push for 'linguistic equality' over the past two decades has been largely focused on three interrelated forms of commensuration: the commensuration of spoken Kurdish and a Kurdish written code, the commensuration of Kurdish and Turkish as language codes, and the political commensuration of Kurds and Turks as sovereign peoples. This formula doubtlessly captures an important ideological feature of Kurdish movement's language politics over the past two decades. But in the case of Mardin, significantly, this project was necessarily inflected for a broader set of ideologized relations between languages: not only between Turkish and Kurdish, but between, for instance, Kurdish and Arabic, and spoken and written varieties of each.

Moreover, the most politically and socially salient contrasts in forms of public identification in the province, I would argue, are generally constructed not so much as a contrast between Turks and Kurds. Rather, they are constructed as contrasts between those persons and organizations allied with the Turkish state and those who cooperated with the Kurdish movement – regardless of chosen ‘ethnic’ labels. Ethnic labels, as I discuss below, function more as relational qualities than fixed elements of group identities. Indeed, both the current Turkish government and the Kurdish movement claim to have assembled multicultural political coalitions in Mardin, pointing to the limits of an opposition between ‘Turks’ and ‘Kurds’ as both a locally salient form of social contrast and as a scholarly analytic for understanding the politics and social realities of communal boundaries in the province (and in Turkey more widely).

Consider, for instance, how Hatice – a graduate of Artuklu University’s BA program in Kurdish education who herself grew up in Mardin – talks about her family’s ethnic background relative to her and her family members’ participation in Kurdish speech communities (and in the case of Hatice specifically, print publics). Hatice and I had the following exchange (in Kurdish) when I asked Hatice if she had experience with written Kurdish before she began her university studies:

Hatice: No! In fact let me put it like this, I didn’t even know about the alphabet. So how, well my only connection to Kurdish was to have grown up in a ‘Kurdish family’ (**K**: malbata kurd), and also in a ‘culturally Kurdish family’ (**K**: malabata kurdewarî)

PL: Then you all speak Kurdish? You don’t know Arabic?

Hatice: I don’t know Arabic, but my family has such a shape that, well, my mother’s father is Armenian, my mother’s mother is Arab, my father’s mother is also Arab, and my father’s father is a Kurd. So actually, we are only 25% Kurdish. We are 50% Arab. And we are 25% Armenian. We are a little ‘complicated’ (**K**: tev li hev) (*laughing*) But I feel more that I am Kurdish.

PL: Why, because you speak Kurdish?

Hatice: Yes, because we speak Kurdish. My mother also doesn't know any Arabic, she only knows Kurdish fully.

PL: Does your father know Arabic?

Hatice: Yes, my father knows Arabic [because he grew up around Mardin and worked in the city].

PL: Did you learn any Arabic at all?

Hatice: I understand a little a bit, but just a little, because the Arabic of Mardin is very mixed with lots of Turkish, so it's not 'true Arabic' (**K:** erebî haqiqî)

PL: It seems to me too. I studied a little Fusha but I don't understand well at all

Hatice: Yes, everyone says this. I have a friend from Syria. She now studies at Artuklu, and she also says that the Arabic of Mardin is really far from real Arabic.

PL: And did you know Kurdish in your childhood?

Hatice: Yes, before I began the first grade, I didn't know any Turkish. And I studied for the first five years in the village. A village connected to Mardin [city], about 10 minutes from the center. For example, in that village there were three Christian families. And some of their children were our friends and half of the time they lived in Istanbul and so they knew Turkish, and the teacher would always ask one of them, named H., and he would ask H. to translate when he had a question, because we didn't speak [Turkish]. I didn't really learn Turkish until the second grade. This is why the question of education in Kurdish has recently become so important.

There is much in Hatice's commentary that is illuminating here for our current discussion (as well as for the broader themes of this dissertation). For the moment, however, I want to bracket her discussion around the importance Kurdish-language education and literacy – a subject to which I return repeatedly throughout this work– to focus on the way that Hatice formulates her family's mixed ethnic ancestry in relation to both their current participation in Kurdish language communities and their participation as 'Kurdish speakers' in Mardin's face-to-face speech community, and to draw out more fully some of the general implications of her

account of her family's history for the relationship between language, kinship and communal belonging in Mardin.

Over the past three decades, linguistic anthropology has shifted the conversation in sociolinguistics from what focused with locally isolated speech communities with unique norms and practices to a more dynamic examination of how political economy and politics influence how people make themselves and their social worlds in and through language and how macro-level forces shape everyday interactions. At the center of this discussion is over the relationship between localized, plurilingual 'speech communities' defined by "shared interpretative norms, but not linguistic forms" (Gal 1989 p. 349,) and 'language communities' defined by an allegiance to a standard, bounded denotational code (Silverstein 1996). In this literature, speech communities are defined by a common knowledge of locally salient registers and person types, if not the capacity to speak all locally prevalent linguistic codes (Gal 1988; Silverstein 1998). In Mardin, for instance, most Kurdish-speakers and Arabic-speakers are at least bilingual in Turkish (with the exception an older generation of monolingual Arabic and Kurdish-speaking women). Some, especially men who grew up in public plurilingual domains of Mardin city center, are trilingual in Turkish and local varieties of Arabic and Kurdish. But most Arabic-speakers in the province cannot speak fluent Kurdish and most Kurdish-speakers cannot speak fluent Arabic – with the relative balance between directions of language acquisition inverting in recent decades as I describe below. But virtually everyone who lives in Mardin province understands that Mardin is a multilingual space and, consequently, the use of either Kurdish or Arabic is differently marked and taken up than in Istanbul or even Diyarbakir. For example, no one on the minibus in the ethnographic vignette above (except perhaps for the anthropologist) found the co-presence of multiple language codes or the driver's codes-switching particularly remarkable. This

is because Mardin's speech community is defined by a normalization of multilingualism – a localized sociolinguistic reality that, as I describe below, was both invoked in and reshaped by efforts by the both the Kurdish movement and the Turkish state to reshape Turkey's wider language regime and to position Mardin as a marquee multicultural space in these projects.

For linguistic anthropology, 'language community', in contrast to 'speech community', is based on common reference to a shared denotational code (e.g. 'Kurdish', 'Turkish' or 'Arabic' in the case of Mardin). Anyone who has advanced beyond the primary level of the Turkish education system – essentially all of my interlocutors – possesses significant familiarity with standard Istanbul Turkish (if they do not have the same capacity to produce it in speech). However, beyond the domain of the LLI and a limited circle of Kurdish language activism, far less have any deep familiarity with the standard forms of Arabic or Northern Kurmanji-Kurdish – although a growing number of Kurdish-speakers have at least a passive understanding, if not always a positive reception of standard written Kurdish code. Thus, many Kurdish language activists in Mardin, such as Hatice, participate as both Kurdish and Turkish speakers in a local speech community and as members of a Kurdish language community in relation to wider Kurdish print publics – here also keeping in mind that Kurdish language communities are themselves inflected for allegiance to different institutional standards (see final chapter).

Importantly, however, Kurdish activists participation in speech communities as Kurdish speakers and their participation in language communities as writers, educators, and consumers of mass media are not isolated or independent forms of social action. Rather, linguistic anthropology has demonstrated that 'speech communities, or 'local language communities', are 'dialectically constituted cultural forms' (Silverstein 1998 p. 401) that are "the result of specific historical forces which produce different social and linguistic results at different times and

places” (Gal 1988 p. 238). This approach, as Silverstein (1998) argues “takes literally the proposition that through social action, people participate in semiotic processes that produce their identities, beliefs, and their particular senses of agentive subjectivity. It considers culture to be a virtual—and always emergent—site in sociohistorical spacetime with respect to the essentialisms of which such agents experience their groupness” (p. 402). In the context of local language communities, Silverstein argues that we can document this agentive participation primarily in relation to three ideological moments or phenomena of sociolinguistic life: 1) language structure as a synchronic abstraction (e.g. debates about proper Kurdish); 2) the uptake of social discourse in everyday interaction (e.g. the way people in Mardin talk and mobilize more widely entextualized discourse in their everyday interactions); and, 3) ideological processes through which they valorize language and discourse (i.e. the primary ideological forms, socially locatable and locating, that structure language regimes and in relation to which people in Mardin position themselves in socially meaningful ways) (Silverstein 1998 pp. 415-421).

In Mardin, importantly, the values of Mesopotamia have been realized in relation to a dynamic language regime that is itself a product of a specific, if shifting sociohistorical spacetime – one in which Mesopotamia has come to represent both a validation of the values of Mardin’s speech community in relation to the nationalist projects of both the Turkey and Kurdistan and, conversely, the imposition of new linguistic projects by competing for institutional forces (i.e. the Kurdish movement, the Turkish state, and the predominantly English-language domains of ‘global’ higher education and transnational tourism). In Mardin, specifically, discourse around Mesopotamia have been taken up in contested projects that seek to capitalize on the locally salient value of linguistic pluralism while simultaneously seeking to shift local language ideologies around pluralism from, for instance, the recognition of steep

hierarchies of multivariant local speech registers to the celebration of formal equality between commensurate and formally distinct language codes (i.e. Kurdish, Turkish, Arabic and Neo-Aramaic) in the case of the Kurdish movement; or to address local cultural and political alienation from the state through the limited provision of education in ‘mother-tongue’ (i.e. the ‘living languages’ of various local communities) as second-languages as in the case of the Turkish state; or the repositioning of Kurdish as a language of higher education and scholarship on par with English by an emerging Kurdish-language academy. Once more, mass political mobilization by the Kurdish movement resulting in the electoral capture of Mardin’s city and provincial government (a victory now invalidated by fiat of the Turkish central government) has fundamentally altered the position of Kurdish as a language in local public life even as it has had somewhat less success in entirely inculcating local Kurdish-speakers into the emergent value regime of standard Latin-script Northern Kurmanji-Kurdish. Mesopotamia as a spatio-semiotic ideology has, in fact, been taken up by differently positioned actors in Mardin who use it to validate their own ideological perspectives on multilingualism and pluralism.

However, these perspectives only become valuable and thus a force in social life to the extent that they are made meaningful for people in social relationships with others. People in Mardin participate in this process of constructing sociolinguistic regime through the manifold ways they position themselves and act in relation to these wider publics of value. Kurdish language activists, importantly, can position themselves as bearers of standard language or linguistic experts, but they also can (and often do) position themselves just as successfully and convincingly as partisans of local speech varieties and on the side of the popular Kurdish of the people. As central actors in emergent Kurdish public making projects, I argue, they also offer a

privileged perspective from which to understand the dynamics remaking local language regimes and the relation between language and forms of social identification.

For one, Hatice's account of her own recent family history points to both the centrality of participation in language communities in influencing one's communal orientation on the one hand, and the limits of ethnic labels correspondence with linguistic practices on the other. Hatice begins by affirming her family's Kurdish background. But almost immediately, when I ask about her knowledge of Arabic, she moves to complicate this background, pointing out that three of her four grandparents were not ethnic Kurds at all (keeping in mind that what is meant an assertion of one's 'ethnicity' is itself a question of the context in which it is mobilized and by consequence subject to change). In this way, she elaborates what Ellis (2003), in a different but analogous post-Ottoman context (the former Yugoslavia), terms a 'shadow genealogy' to describe how interrelated Muslim kinship groups tied to a common urban Islamic (or 'şehirli') identity became divided into distinct 'ethnic' or 'national' categories (Turkish and Albanian) over the 20th century. Hatice, for her part, claims that her mother's father was 'Armenian', but what this likely means is that he was the descendant of an Armenian child adopted into a Muslim family during and immediately after the 1915 genocide (and thus her maternal grandfather, although 'Armenian', was likely neither Christian nor spoke the Armenian language). Indeed, both claims to and accusations of 'Armenian ancestry' are widespread in Mardin and North Kurdistan; and how one approaches such issues is often as indicative of one's political orientation as one's 'actual' family history.⁹

⁹Both in Mardin and in Turkish the genocide itself is still a deeply polarizing topic and a hotly contested site of public memory; and while the Kurdish movement recognizes the events of 1915 as a genocide the Turkish state does not. For a discussion of how the genocide is discussed in Mardin, see Biner (2010). For a historical account of these events in Mardin see Gaunt (2015).

This phenomenon was also evident, for example, after the June 2015 elections when Mehmet Ali Aslan became one of four MPs from the HDP elected from Mardin and also the first publicly self-identified Mhallami (Arab) ever elected to the Turkish parliament. Unsurprisingly, media sympathetic to the HDP celebrated Aslan's election as a further example of the HDP's commitment to representing Mardin's diverse cultural constituencies (the HDP's four MP delegation from Mardin after the June 2015 elections also included one self-identified Turk, one Kurd, and one Syriac Christian). But when Aslan took his oath of office he did so not, as normally stipulated, in the name of the 'Great Turkish Nation' (T: Büyük Türk Milleti) but in the name of the 'Great Nation of Turkey' (T; Büyük Türkiye Milleti) – thereby reinforcing the Kurdish movement's emphasis on the same multicultural values that buttress its political imaginary of Mesopotamia – pro-government new sites began to attack him by circulating rumors that his family was of Armenian origin.¹⁰ Aslan, for his part, responded to his critics in a public letter, pointing to Turkey's multicultural composition and arguing that the HDP, like 'Noah's Ark', was bringing together all of Turkey 'races, religions, and languages' in one place, before calling on Turkey and the entire Middle East to 'become more like Mardin' (T: "Mardinlileşsin") – a city where, he noted, "the call to prayer, [church bells] and Melek Taus¹¹, as well as Armenians, Syriac Christians, Kurds, Arabs, Turks, and Mhallami all live together in brotherhood." Finally, Aslan claimed that although his maternal grandmother was a Syriac Christian, he did not have any Armenian relatives, but that he would be proud if he did.¹²

¹⁰In Turkish nationalist and (some) Islamist discourse, such individuals are therefore rendered as crypto-Armenians and thereby excluded from membership in a Turkish national community

¹¹A central figure in Yezidi religious belief (Mardin still has one of Turkey's largest populations of Yezidis, although many have migrated to Europe in recent decades).

¹² *Milliyet*. "HDP'li Vekilden Cübbelli Ahmet Hoca'ya Gönderme." June-28th-2015.

Like Akyol and Ahmet Türk above, Aslan draws on a widely circulating discourse about Mardin as a Mesopotamia city to position it as an exemplary space (within both ‘Turkey’ and the ‘Middle East’) in which distinct communities live together peacefully and in which the values of the Kurdish movement’s political project are also best exemplified. Like Hatice, moreover, Aslan links Mardin’s multicultural character to his own family background, publicly acknowledging his own Christian ancestry. But beyond the Kurdish movement’s undeniably important discursive challenge to anti-Armenian sentiment in Turkey (a challenge which has created more space for many others in Mardin such as Hatice to speak publicly about their own mixed backgrounds), I also want to draw attention to how the language policy in which this discourse has been institutionalized obscures the persistence of entrenched social hierarchies and enduring social divisions.

This is most evident in the case of Armenians and other non-Muslim communities in Mardin. Indeed, the Kurdish movement’s efforts to commensurate ‘linguistic community’ with ‘religious community’ together with their emphasis on linguistic equality – or what, following Asad (2008), we can think of as a kind of secularization of religious difference – creates identifiable ideological effects when institutionalized in public language practices such as the municipal signs. Importantly, the Kurdish movement’s public stance toward Turkey’s non-Muslim (primarily Christian) faith traditions contrasts sharply with the Turkish state’s, in particular around the recognition of the 1915 genocide (it is therefore also probably not a coincidence that the Kurdish movement elected to introduce its new language policy the year before the commemoration of the 100th year anniversary of the Armenian genocide in 2015). And while in Istanbul, for example, one can find Armenian or Greek text on a small number of buildings (Armenian and Greek churches, schools, some private residences, etc.), there is

nothing in Turkey outside of North Kurdistan resembling an attempt to position these ‘Christian’ languages as public languages or display them prominently on government buildings.

But in their efforts to reflect the existence of Mardin’s diverse faith traditions through a policy of linguistic commensuration, I want to suggest that this policy also contributes to three distinct forms of ideological erasure. The first is in the form of an omission. Although, for instance, Armenians constituted a substantial portion of the population of Mardin city before the 1915 genocide, and despite the fact that a small number of Armenian families still live there today, Armenian code is not included on Mardin’s public municipal signs. Therefore, unlike in Diyarbakir, where the Kurdish-run municipality includes both Armenian and Syriac text, Mardin’s municipality does not include Armenian code in its official public language regime (and thus, by its own logic of representation, does not publicly acknowledge Armenians as one of the historically constitutive ethnicities of Mardin).¹³ The second form of erasure occurs through the uneven relationship between linguistic codes and communal boundaries. Mardin’s Yezidis, for example, practice a faith with a largely Kurdish textual tradition but they bridge multiple local speech communities and many are multilingual (speaking some combination of Turkish, Kurdish and Arabic). Yet their lack of a distinct language means that their unique

¹³Although, notably, many of the (mostly Catholic) Armenians in the city of Mardin before the genocide spoke a local form of Arabic (in contrast to the Armenian community in Diyarbakir who spoke a variety of Armenian), while Armenian villagers in the region often spoke Kurdish (Üngör 2012b; Murre-van den Berg 2020). In this sense, the absence of Armenian also resembles the second form of erasure I describe above. Admittedly, the number of self and publicly identified Armenians remaining in Mardin is very small (although the same could be said for Diyarbakir – a city more than five times larger) but by many local accounts, dozens of families who survived the genocide remained in the city until the 1970s and 1980s, many only leaving following Turkey’s invasion of Cyprus (and the anti-Christian violence that followed) and the beginning of the PKK’s insurgency a decade later. The house where I lived in the old city during much of my fieldwork, for example, had been owned by an Armenian family until the 1970s – and the outlines of several religious motifs were still visible under a layer of plaster – although the dedication to its construction was written in Arabic.

religious and ethnic identity is effaced by a project that foregrounds commensurate but distinct language codes as the primary marker of a distinct ethnic community.¹⁴

Finally, a third form of erasure occurs through a formulaic and ultimately superficial invocation of language equality (in the form of multiple, co-present, and commensurate language codes) that obscures not only sociolinguistic hierarchies but enduring structural inequalities within society more broadly. The inclusion of Syriac Aramaic as one of Mardin's four public languages, significantly, contrasts sharply with both Mardin's sociolinguistic realities and locals' metadiscourse on their language practices, in which only Turkish, Arabic and Kurdish (and not Syriac) figure as widely used mediums of inter-communal interaction (see also Biner 2020).

To be sure, there is a small community of Tuyoro speakers –a dialect of Neo-Aramaic – concentrated in the villages and towns of Tur Abdin, but many local Syriac Christian communities do not speak Tuyoro (but, like other communities in Mardin, a mix of Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish),¹⁵ and unlike these other three codes, Neo-Aramaic is rarely (if ever) used as a spoken medium of interconfessional communication. Thus, while the inclusion of written Syriac Aramaic code in the municipality's official language policy does publicly recognize the existence of local Syriac communities, it does so by misrepresenting the lived realities of that existence (i.e. neither equal or commensurate). And while by itself, the Kurdish movement's obfuscation of Mardin's sociolinguist realities might not be worthy of special attention (since,

¹⁴The existence of Yezidis is acknowledged, however, in a less mobilized three-way contrast between Islamic, Christian and Yezidi symbols (consider Mehmet Ali Aslan's description of Mardin above), but this contrast is much less prominent than the two-way contrast made between Christians and Muslims (the call to prayer and church bells) and largely confined to the districts around the town of Midyat, where most of Mardin's remaining Yezidis are concentrated.

¹⁵Most of the young Syriac Christians I met in Mardin did not speak Tuyoro but were multilingual in Turkish and Kurdish and/or Arabic, although some told me that they had been instructed by priests in how read Classical Syriac – the liturgical language of Syriac Christians – at the nearby Mor Hananyo Monastery (also known as Deyrüzzaferan).

after all, all attempts to reflect those realities, including my own, rely on certain language ideologies and are therefore necessarily reductive and perspectival), I want to suggest that in the context of ongoing dispossession of Syriac communities from their lands by the Turkish state (often with the tactic complicity of some Kurdish political actors), and in the face of ongoing processes of forced migration of Christians and other non-Muslim minorities from Mardin province (Güsten 2015; Biner 2020), the discursive mobilization of language equality in Mardin also tends to distract from and paper over present inequalities between Mardin's Muslim majority and its non-Muslim communities – a point that has been made to be more than once by local Syriacs in private conversation, albeit not exactly in these terms.¹⁶ Indeed, the introduction of Syriac as an 'official' public language alongside Kurdish in 2014 has occurred, importantly, in the shadow of ongoing legal battles over Syriac properties that had been taken over by Arabs and Kurds after many of the Syriac Christians fled their villages in Tur Abdin during the height of the PKK insurgency in the 1990s. So not only does Kurdish language policy discursively deprive many Christians of any ownership over their actual 'native' languages (i.e. Arabic, Kurdish and/or Turkish) but it also projects an image of tolerance and peaceful coexistence onto current conditions of inequality and contemporary processes of dispossession.

On the other hand, the Kurdish movement's project to reorder triangular relations of value between Mardin's three dominant spoken codes (Turkish, Kurdish, and Arabic) and to position the latter two alongside Turkish as a public language likewise created describable ideological effects. The first is that it has reduced Mardin province's spatially uneven and historically conditioned sociolinguistic regime into an abstract and timeless principle of language

¹⁶Rather they point to a generalized mistrust of Kurdish political leaders and express a fear that they are being used as tokens by the movement for foreign consumption.

equality represented by the co-presence of commensurate language codes. But just as with the case of Neo-Aramaic, this sidesteps the way that both the social registers of talk and the values they mediate become adjusted for one's position in social space (i.e. as a function of relations between participants, setting, and context of encounter. et al.) as well as how people themselves talk about this spatial configuration, or what we might call their 'spatio-linguistic ideologies' (i.e. the ways that people metadiscursively map linguistic practices onto social space).

In Mardin, for instance, people often speak of Midyat and Yeşili as Arabic speaking towns and Nusaybin and Qoser as Kurdish speaking towns (although Turkish, Kurdish and Arabic are spoken in all four). But at the same time these ideologies are not just 'ideas' - they are widely reproduced metadiscourses about language and space that shape social expectations and consequently influence linguistic practice and the metrics through which such practice is evaluated. At the same time, the sociolinguistic regimes that shape linguistic practices are neither timeless nor unchanging, but are themselves connected to larger developments in political economy and inflected for changing value regimes in society more broadly (Gal and Irvine 2019; Kroskrity 2000).

As Biner (2020) notes, today the city of Mardin itself is popularly imagined as a 'mixed' (T: *karişik*) city "where people would switch between three languages - Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish - depending on the socioeconomic setting" (p. xiii). However, despite attempts by both the Kurdish movement and local allies of the Turkish government to project an image of Mardin as a multilingual space far into the city's past, Mardin's contemporary sociolinguist regime is largely a product of the past three decades; and for much of the 20th century, Mardin's politics and economic life was dominated by a small number of elite Arabic-speaking families. Until the 1990s, moreover, Arabic spoken code was the preferred medium of communication among the

city's dominant classes, and Kurdish speaking villagers who traveled to the city to sell their produce or shop in the market often complained of abuse by Arab shopkeepers who they complained would cheat them or force them, sometimes by threat of violence, into making unfavorable deals.¹⁷ Thus while Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish were all technically spoken in the city, the values associated with each code differed immensely, with Kurdish especially marked as a language of rural, low-class outsiders. Many Arab shopkeepers did know some Kurdish, since it was a basic requirement of doing business in the province, but they generally used it—some of my older Kurdish interlocutors from Mardin remember – to ‘speak down’ (T: *aşağılamak*) to Kurdish-speaking outsiders, many of whom did not have mastery over local varieties of Arabic or Turkish. Thus, Arabic and Kurdish, more than denoting two distinct language codes, likewise linked persons to a position in social space – a form of relational difference that became reified in a distinction between ‘ethnic groups’ (Brubaker 2004). These ‘ethnolinguistic’ divisions were further entrenched with the outbreak of the PKK’s insurgency in the 1980s, during which time Mardin’s urban Arabic-speaking elites largely aligned themselves with the Turkish state and for many Kurds in Mardin, the label ‘Arab’ came to be synonymous with ‘pro-state.’

However, the intensification of the Turkish state’s counterinsurgency campaign during the 1990s and Turkey’s concurrent economic liberalization also had profound effects on the city’s social composition and linguistic landscape – effects that would eventually invert the hierarchies governing the relationship between these different language codes. Over this period, importantly, hundreds of thousands of Kurdish-speaking villages migrated to cities across North

¹⁷For instance Salih, one of my Kurdish teachers from Qoser, told me that when was young in the 1970s and 1980s that Kurdish villages from the plane would only travel to the city in large groups in order to guarantee their safety.

Kurdistan, and within only several decades, Kurdish became as commonly spoken as Arabic in Mardin, with some neighborhoods entirely dominated by Kurdish-speakers. But this did not simply transform Mardin into an Arabic and Kurdish speaking city (as I suggest above, both languages were already spoken in the city for over a millennium) but rather altered how locals understood the relationship between their linguistic practices and social space and the effects of both on local processes of identification.

For example, in his study of ‘interculturality’ (T: kültürlerarasılık) in shaping local politics and ethnic identity in Mardin, Sarı (2010) draws our attention to how locals describe Mardin’s shifting spatio-linguistic realities, drawing contrasts between, for example, an Arabic-speaking city center and a Kurdish-speaking periphery (p. 226), or between an Arabic-speaking old city and Kurdish-speaking new city (p. 177). Others draw finer distinctions between Kurdish neighborhoods, Arabic neighborhoods, and mixed neighborhoods (pp. 226-230). But what is especially interesting about the interviews that he cites is both the way that the qualities of language, place and social persons (as defined by both class position and ethnic identity) become linked on the one hand, and how these qualities are understood to shift overtime on the other. Consider how one interlocutor described the situation in the ‘mixed’ area around the Cumhuriyet neighborhood at the center of the old city:

I mean everyone goes to certain places in the city. For example, around the Cumhuriyet square, and around the market, the Kurds are more numerous. Kurds shopping for vegetables and yogurt will sit in the coffeehouses [around there] because there are no Arab villages in that area, and its Kurds who do this job – it’s Kurds who work with animals and grow vegetables and fruit. That’s why when you go to a coffeehouse near the Cumhuriyet Square you will see more Kurds. There are Arabs among them too. And when you get into the personal histories you will see that there are ‘Kurdified Arabs’ (T: Kürtleşmiş Araplar). And you can also see that there are ‘Arabified Kurds’ (T: Araplaşmış Kürtler). I mean they have really mixed into one another so that there isn’t much of a difference. But the coffeehouses around the *Yeni Yol* (‘New Road’) are generally full of Kurds because the surrounding neighborhoods and the coffeehouses all belong to them (p. 230).

Significantly, even as Sari's interlocutor reproduces a locally salient contrast between 'Arab' and 'Kurd' he recognizes that both categories are inflected for other qualities of social life, namely one's profession and location within the city. Moreover, he acknowledges that 'assimilation' occurs in both directions – this is to say that many 'Arabs' are former 'Kurds', while many 'Kurds' or former 'Arabs'. What he does not say explicitly, although what is implied by the ideological processes of iconization that I describe above (in which those who speak language X become part of ethnic group X) is that what is really happening when one 'assimilates' is that one changes their position in social space, and necessarily, their linguistic practices. Consider again Hatice's description of her own family and in particular the case of her mother, who despite being the daughter of an 'Armenian' father and an Arab 'mother' became a 'daughter of the Kurds':

My mother, for example, she's half Armenian, half Arab. But ask her, she'll tell you she is completely Kurdish. Sometimes I joke with my mother and I say 'Mother, you're not Kurdish.' And she tells me, 'No, I am Kurdish.' (laughing). She gets upset and says "I am Kurdish. 'I am a daughter of the Kurds.' (K: Ez keça kurdan im).¹⁸" And really, she doesn't speak any Arabic, and she doesn't speak any Turkish. She speaks completely in Kurdish. All of us are like that.

Hatice's point is that what defines her mother's identity is not her family background but her language. Importantly, however, one's language is not simply an inner quality of an individual or even a relation between kin (as in the often invoked 'mother tongue' since her mother's mother's native-tongue was most likely Arabic) but the wider medium through which one constructs relationships with others. Since speaking is fundamentally a social act, one's patterns of speaking are inflected for one's position within a wider set of social relations. But it is

¹⁸ 'Keçê Kurdan' is also a well-known patriotic song most famously performed by the Kurdish singer Aynur Doğan.

not just that peoples' linguistic practices shift when they move in social space. Rather, their linguistic practices are reflected for a spatialized sociolinguistic regime that is itself a function of institutionalized social relations and therefore subject to change. In this sense, Hatice's mother's pride in her Kurdish identity cannot be understood separately from the Kurdish movement's political project to alter the value regime shaping public language use and this project's effects on shifting patterns of socio-political identification and a corresponding realigning of communal boundaries over the past two decades – developments that correspond, importantly, with the Kurdish movement's administration of the city and its institutionalization of alternative language projects.

But this project does not simply seek to elevate Kurdish over Arabic (a kind of hierarchal inversion that mirrors the Kurdish movement's displacement or cooption of Mardin's Arab-speaking elite families in the context of the city's local politics) but to align Kurdish and Arabic as local languages against Turkish, and by extension, to align Kurdish and Arab ethnic identities in a political alliance against the Turkish state – a kind of encompassing fractal wherein an axis of differentiation at the level of social life in Mardin (Kurd vs. Arab) is reiterated in relation to a broader comparison between Mardin and wider Turkey so that categories opposed on one level (e.g. as 'rival ethnic communities') of comparison become aligned on another (e.g. as common inheritors of the city and its local value regimes): if, in the narrower context of local politics Arabs can be imagined as pro-state, in the broader context of Mardin's position in Turkey they can ideologically repositioned as allies in their mutual opposition to Turkish monolingualism.

Consider again, for instance, the public political career of Mehmet Ali Aslan. Aslan's selection as an MP for the HDP in 2015 typifies the developments in the Kurdish movement over the past two decades that I described in the last chapter. Aslan, originally a teacher, was one of

the principal founders and first president of the Mhallami Association for Dialogue between Languages, Religions, and Civilizations (T: Mihellemi Dinler, Diller ve Medeniyetler Arası Diyalog Derneği) – the first cultural association in Turkey working to document and celebrate the Mardin’s local Mhallami Arabic identity. Neither a former leftist militant nor a member of a prominent landowning family, Aslan became best known for his language activism and his efforts to promote Mhallamis as a distinct ethnolinguistic identity in Turkey. However, like many in Mardin, he also recognizes the historically contingent and flexible nature of such identities. Speaking at the First International Mhallami Conference held in the town of Midyat in 2008, for instance, Aslan remarked that:

There exists a lot of speculation about the roots of the Mhallamis. Some people claim they are descendants of Kurds or even Turks. Others debate if they are Arab or Syriacs. And without a doubt there are assimilated Kurds, Turks, Persians, Jews, Syriacs, Yezidis, and Sun-worshippers (T: Şemsiler) among the Mhallamis. At the same time, there are assimilated Mhallamis among the Kurds, Syriacs, and Jews.¹⁹

Here Aslan seeks to position Mhallami as a local identity particular to the region around Mardin²⁰ and to thereby realign ‘Arabness’ from a pro-state, anti-Kurdish quality to one aligned with Kurds as a constitutive identity of the peoples of Mesopotamia. At the same, time, however, this functions to distance Mhallami identity from a larger transnational Arab identity, a point that Aslan stressed when speaking to an amateur Arab-Turkish YouTuber who produces online videos about Arab communities in Turkey. Recounting their long history in the region, Aslan was careful to differentiate Mhallami identity from a broader, pan-Arab identity, saying “they

¹⁹Excerpted and translated from: MidyatSesi.com. "1. Uluslararası Mihellemi Konferansı." 13-Aug-2008.

²⁰Although he acknowledges the existence of a Mhallami diaspora in Lebanon and Europe as well.

count as Arabs, but Arabs of the Tur Abdin, Arabs of Mesopotamia” (A: hønné yənhesbuwn ‘ereb, bəs ‘ereb Tur 'Abdin, ‘ereb Mesobotamyā).²¹

Here as well, however, there emerges a further disconnect between the Kurdish movement’s attempts to construct a language policy that recognizes the existence of multiple local ethnic identities and their insistence that such identifies be represented by the co-presence of distinct commensurate language codes. Significantly, however, to my knowledge, there is almost no documentable evidence of the existence of a modern Arabic print tradition in Mardin during the 20th century; and while many pious Muslim families (of all ethnolinguistic backgrounds) have traditionally sent their children to courses at local mosques (or informal Kurdish madrasas) to learn how to read and recite the Quran, I am told that education in literary Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) was largely unheard of in the city among Arabic-speaking locals in Mardin before the opening the LLI and the influx of large numbers of Syrians after 2011. Rather many pro-Kurdish Mhallami intellectuals emphasize (as Aslan puts it) their own ‘unique dialect’ (A: lehjet khaşşa) – a set to closely related local varieties of the Qeltu dialect of Arabic that is spoken across around Mosul and across Northern Iraq and Northeastern Syria (Akkuş 2015; Şayır 2017) – as the basis for their local identity. Thus, the Kurdish movement’s project to introduce written Arabic code to the city has had incongruous effects. On the one hand it has increased the capacity of Kurdish political leaders to credibly speak on behalf of local Mhallamis and brought many self-identified Mhallamis within the Kurdish movement’s locally constituted ‘Mesopotamian’ coalition. On the other hand, the movement’s new language policies in Mardin, in conjunction with Turkish state actors, is laying the foundation of a new educational

²¹ Youtube. "alrashdye- الراشدية- الأناضول العربية في القرى العربية في الأناضول" 08-Oct-2013: <https://youtu.be/myj1pBcU5ag>

infrastructure that is teaching a new generation of young Arabic-speakers in Mardin to read, write and speak in MSA, and by extension, shifting the orientation of Arabic from one shaping a set of local identities to a transnational Arabic public – an ongoing process whose ultimate trajectory remains uncertain.²²

All of this said, the Kurdish movement's new language policies have also had a demonstrable effect in shifting the value metrics through which local speech is evaluated. And whereas bilingualism in Arabic and Kurdish is not a new phenomenon on the city, its public valorization under the metric of a 'colorful' multiculturalism has changed the way locals assess one another's speech, while functioning to place Kurdish and Arabic on equal levels of prestige. Again, consider how Hatice, in the same interview, describes an encounter that she had recently had with an Arab shopkeeper:

For example, the other day I was out with a friend in the Souk, in upper Mardin, and he was buying tobacco, and the seller was Arab. But my friend spoke in Kurdish and he responded in Kurdish, I mean it was obvious he was an Arab. But I really enjoyed that he was someone who as Arab but he was speaking in Kurdish. Many of the *esnafs* know Arabic and Kurdish, and many families are also like this. Like I said about my family, and a lot of families are like that. Their mother is Arab, their grandfather is Arab, their father. And there is such an exchange between families that they have some Arabs and some Kurds. And that's what Mardin is like. It's colorful. I really love it.

Hatice's celebration of Mardin's colorful multiculturalism and the multilingual character of many local families, as evidenced here, contrasts sharply with the sociolinguistic regime that prevailed in the city prior to the consolidation of Kurdish politics; and it is revealing of how a political project that self-consciously seeks to change local linguistic practices is succeeding in remaking the metrics through which everyday interactions within speech communities are performed and evaluated. However, while Hatice's happiness when encountering an Arab

²²And must remain a question for another project. Importantly, the vast majority of students at the LLI were bilingual Turkish and Kurdish speakers and did not know Arabic.

shopkeeper willing to speak Kurdish is revealing of this change, it is also indicative of lingering tensions around forms of ethnic identification and linguistic practice and the way both, under certain circumstances, also come to take on salient political dimensions. Conversely, I have personally witnessed many shopkeepers in Mardin's old Souk who, for instance, when asked the price of a product in Kurdish by largely monolingual Kurdish-speaking women, respond using Turkish numbers, despite their being perfectly capable of responding in Kurdish. Thus, Hatice's happiness stems from an element of surprise: yes, many Arab shopkeepers can speak Kurdish, and many older Kurdish shopkeepers who grew up around the city (or Arabic-speaking towns) are also capable of speaking Arabic – but generally, both 'groups' will only do so under certain circumstances and not without indexing other meanings.

Importantly, these other meanings need not be explicitly political, but in the context of the collapse of the peace process, the political dimensions of language code have again come to the forefront of everyday sociolinguistic realities in the city, with a willingness to speak in Kurdish, for instance, potentially signaling forms of alignment that exceed the context of an individual encounter (e.g. the momentary relationship between buyer and seller in the market) and thus have the potential to be taken up as a marker of one's political sympathies (even when, as is usually the case, code-switching is performed more as a form of politeness or routine social solidarity). At the level of second-order indexicality, an Arab shopkeeper who speaks Kurdish can be positioned and his speech assessed in relation to an ideology of standard Kurdish (relatively rare), or, in relation to his membership in a common speech community (much more common). At the level of third-order indexicality, however, the same shopkeeper can be positioned and his speech assessed in relation to the locally constituted social value of linguistic

pluralism and intercommunal harmony or as a signal of political sympathy and social alignment with the Kurdish movement.

This again demonstrates, as I have stressed above, that political differences as such do not stem from pre-given ethnic identities or socio-linguistic practices. Rather, such identities and practices are contingent, and ought to be approached more as an expression of one's political alignments or social orientation than as their cause. Thus, even within 'mixed' Arab and Kurdish families, we see a great deal of both sociolinguistic diversity and internal political differentiation, a point made by Ahmet Türk in the run-up to the March 2019 local elections:

...So, someone [in the ruling party] comes out and says, 'we won't surrender [Mardin] to separatists.' But we are a party that receives 60% of the vote here. So, do you consider the will of 60% of the voters as an expression of separatism or terrorism or whatever? And here the AKP provincial chairman comes out and says, 'we won't surrender Mardin to the separatists.' Well the other day I went and did a little research. In his own village, among his own relatives, we received 260 votes and he only received 140 votes. In his own village! So how can a political perspective in which one considers his own relatives as terrorists and separatists be a project that will bring the people together?²³

Notice that Türk need not even specify the linguistic or ethnic identities of the man in question (although most local prominent AKP officials in the province now publically identify as Arab or Turkish).²⁴ What is important in this case is rather one's political alignment, a reality that here overrides not only linguistic and ethnic identity but kinship ties as well. But, as I have argued in this section (and politicians like Türk as well as my interlocutors confirm) these are not enduring differences between two stable ethnic or sociolinguistic groups (Brubaker 2004). Nor

²³Quoted from a recorded interview from *Medyascope*. "Ahmet Türk: "Seçimi almak bizim için zor değil." 11-May-2019. See: <https://youtu.be/rOn8c2SXsjM>

²⁴As I explain in the next section, the AKP did also receive a substantial percentage of Kurdish votes in Mardin early during their rule, but their own multicultural politics has been deeply compromised by the collapse of the peace process and their reassertion of a chauvinist Turkish nationalism at the national level – a reality which has alienated most self-identified Kurds at the time that it has been public identification with Kurdishness a liability within the party bureaucracy (ongoing government rhetoric notwithstanding).

are they even perceived to be as such by locals in Mardin themselves. Hatice identifies as Kurdish, but she is under no illusions as to her family's diverse ethnic background. At the same time, one's identity is never just a function of individual inner feeling or personal choice, but is continually articulated as part of social relations and thereby shaped by social institutions – the family, peer groups, state institutions, print publics and political parties – through which such identities become meaningful in the first place. At every stage of these processes, however, relations are mediated by more widely able stereotypes (i.e. ideologies linking various qualia to types of social persons) that link kinds of people to specific social spaces, linguistic practices, comportment and dress and political orientation and in turn shape how one positions oneself and others in social space. 'Being Kurdish' in Mardin is therefore not a matter of family genealogy or ethnic background, but a question of participation in Kurdish language communities or one perceived status as a Kurdish speaker in Mardin (here keeping in mind that such Kurdish speakers speak neither exclusively, or even primarily in Kurdish!), or by extension, through affiliation with social institutions – families, businesses, religious orders, political parties, cafes – metasemiotically linked to the Kurdish language (regardless of actual linguistic practices of individuals). Nor must these relations always or even primarily be political. Indeed, as will become clear in later chapters in this dissertation, there are many self-identified Kurds who reject the centrality of politics, narrowly defined, to Kurdish identity as it is locally constructed and valued.

II. The post-national university in Mardin and Mesopotamia

Perhaps no institution in the city has been as deeply implicated in competing efforts by the Kurdish movement and the Turkish state to realize the ideologized values of Mesopotamia as Artuklu University. First opened in 2007 – and one of more than a dozen new state universities

to open in North Kurdistan under the AKP government – Artuklu University stands out (not only in Mardin but across Turkey) for both its symbolic and institutional importance in the series of recent, major shifts in the value regimes governing public forms of socio-cultural identification and linguistic practice. For many locals in Mardin, as well for the thousands of students from across Kurdistan that the university has drawn to the city, it has likewise emerged as a central institution in the contestation and remaking of Mardin’s sociolinguistic regime and its political and social hierarchies.

These processes are best exemplified by and studied through the creation of the Living Languages Institute (**T**: *Yaşayan Diller Enstitüsü*/**K**: *Enstituya Zimanên Zindî*). Opened in 2010, the Living Languages Institute (LLI) at Artuklu University became the first academic institution in Turkey to offer state-recognized degrees in Kurdish-language education. Over its first decade of existence, moreover, the LLI emerged as a politically fraught if influential project; and closer ethnographic attention to the competing value projects situated within the LLI offers us a microcosm from which to understand broader shifts in language ideology and their mobilization with political struggles over the control of public institutions and the ability to set language policy at a national scale. Indeed, neither entirely a space of state domination, nor a space of Kurdish resistance, Artuklu University and the LLI remain sites of contested authority and shifting forms of relationality in which a host of competing language projects confront one another in often fraught and ambivalent ways.

This became to me from the movement of my first official visit to the LLI in the early summer of 2015. Mardin Artuklu University was the most prominent state university opened by the AKP government in Southeast Turkey and its first half-decade of existence seems to have been largely defined in local imagination by a sense of excitement and possibility, as well as a

feeling among many of the students and faculty that Artuklu was a ‘different kind of university’ relative to other state universities in the region. Artuklu, for instance, initially attracted a large number of prominent instructors from all over Kurdistan and Turkey, as well as a relatively large number of foreign faculty from Europe and the Middle East, many of whom were attracted by the promise of innovative programs in the Institute for Social Sciences (including Sociocultural Anthropology), the Faculty of Fine Arts, and the Faculty of Architecture – not to mention its English-language preparatory program and the creation of the LLI in 2010, all of which functioned to position Artuklu University as a marquee project for Turkey’s expanding system of state higher education in North Kurdistan. Moreover, its presence in Mardin’s old city gave it a unique urban mystique (almost all state universities in Kurdistan are built on the peripheries or entirely outside of the cities in which they located) as well as a connection to Mardin’s historical fabric that served to obscure its recent creation.²⁵ The rapid growth in the number of foreign faculty and students in the city, in conjunction with the expanded of Mardin’s tourism industry during this period, likewise contributed to the international atmosphere in the city and further strengthened Mardin’s newfound aspiration to the status of a ‘world city’ and an emergent regional center.

But optimism around Artuklu University proved short-lived, and while the university was a contested institution from its creation, these tensions came to a head in the months immediately before and during the collapse of the peace process in 2015, around the time of my first official visit to the institute. Some months before, in late 2014 the LLI’s founding director, Kadri Yildirim, had been forced to resign, along with the university’s first rector, after state authorities

²⁵As I discuss in the previous section, a new main campus was also eventually built around 10km north of the city, as is more keeping with the Turkish state’s practices in the region.

suddenly launched a ‘corruption’ probe targeting the university and the LLI administration. Yildirim was subsequently elected as an MP from the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) in the country’s 2015 June elections. Then, just a few weeks later (and a few days before my arrival), almost half of the university’s foreign faculty (and nearly all of the institute's Kurdish faculty without Turkish citizenship) were summarily dismissed from their positions by the university’s new rector citing an obscure and hitherto unknown regulation from Turkey’s Higher Education Council (YÖK). Many working or studying at the institute were furious and the new rector was widely labeled as the ‘state’s man’ (T: devletin adamı) who had initiated an internal ‘coup’ (T: darbe).²⁶ Another faculty member told me in private soon after I arrived that the recent actions of the state had thrown the entire Artuklu project into jeopardy. Sitting in front of his desk as we drank tea, he went on to bemoan how the state had continuously interfered with the institute’s development and had openly blocked many of the internal initiatives which were designed to strengthen its appeal within the local community and among Turkey’s Kurds more broadly. Then he suddenly grew quieter and making a slow, sweeping gesture with his hand toward the city which lay outside his office window, he added: ‘The state needs to be careful. If they push us too far, we’re not alone here.’

²⁶The rector in question later become well-known in Turkey for his unhinged public comments to the press and is notorious in Mardin for his shameless self-promotion. He was finally replaced in 2019.



Figure 2.1: Calendars from pro-government *Eğitim-Bir-Sen* union (left) and pro-Kurdish *Eğitim-Sen* (right) on professors and administrators’ desks at the LLI

At the time I interpreted his remarks as an implicit if an indirect threat to the state and its local supporters – a claim that the Kurdish professors and students at the LLI had the support of the Kurdish movement (including the PKK’s armed guerillas that operated in the hills around the city).²⁷ Now, in retrospect and with greater perspective, I think of it more as a statement of fact: an assertion that it was the local Kurdish faculty and students, and not administrators appointed by the central state, that had the most legitimacy in the eyes of most Mardinites and across North Kurdistan more broadly. The LLI, although officially a state institution, thus emerged as a contested project and negotiated space, with faculty and administrators aligning along different sides of the Mardin’s major political divides. Like nearly every other state institution in North Kurdistan, the LLI emerges as a microcosm of wider political struggles between those aligned with the Kurdish movement and those aligned with the Turkish state. These alignments are signaled both by faculty and student participation in organizations and activities outside of the institute and their wider public personas, as well as in ways more institutionally linked to the

²⁷Initially the Kurdish movement’s response to the opening of the LLI was much more ambivalent but institutional actors within the movement would become among its most prominent defenders (see chapter six).

LLI. One particularly salient institutional contrast, as I describe in chapter six, is between the pro-government *Eğitim-Bir-Sen* public educators union, and others joining its major competitor in the region, the leftist, pro-Kurdish *Eğitim-Sen*.²⁸ In the everyday space of this institute, this contrast is signaled, for instance, by those faculty and administrators who prominently display the calendars of either of their respective unions on their office desks, as well as between them and those who elect to display neither (see figure 2.1 above) – a quotidian and often unremarked if ever-present form of social differentiation.

At the same time, however, such political differences were only one of the salient contrasts active in the institute, and this contrast was also inflected for other, more locally salient contrasts between, for instance, more pious students interested in Kurdish classical literature, and outwardly less-religious students interested in modern Kurdish art and cinema²⁹; or between distinct language communities and regional/ethnic identities. It is in the latter case, especially, we see both the various forms of ideological convergence and tension between the competing efforts to commensurate language codes. In keeping with both the Kurdish movement and pro-government discourse around language and Mesopotamia, the LLI at Artuklu not only hosts programs in the two primary Kurdish ‘dialects’ spoken in Turkey (i.e. Kurmanji and Zazaki), in addition to Sorani (the predominant variety of Kurdish spoken in Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan), but likewise offers degrees in Arabic and Syriac languages and literature (i.e. all three of

²⁸ For a discussion of the role of *Eğitim-Sen* in Kurdish politics and language activism specifically, see chapters 3 and 4.

²⁹ Here I want to stress that such contrasts, while certainly salient, are not nearly as fetishized or polarizing as they are in the politics of western Turkey. These students often took classes together and spent time in cafes together, and worked on common activist projects despite their differing academic interests and varying levels of Islamic piety. Certain social activities (e.g. drinking of alcohol) were not shared in common. But both ‘groups’, like the vast majority of students affiliated with the LLI, were at least tacit or passive supporters of institutional Kurdish politics.

Mardin's semi-official local languages as defined by both the Kurdish movement and state-sanctioned structure of the LLI).³⁰ This has positioned the LLI at the center of new projects to socialize students into the use of standardized minority language codes and thereby a central institutional node in efforts to reshape local public language regimes according to the value metrics of a state-sanctioned Mesopotamian discourse.

Unsurprisingly, many of the same salient forms of differentiation that are recognized by Mardin's speech communities are likewise present in the work of the LLI and likewise complicate the official language ideologies of both the Kurdish movement and the Turkish state around a principle of commensurate and equal codes. For example, while some in the LLI's Arabic department prides themselves on their work to linguistically describe and document local varieties of Arabic, its primary mission remains to educate students in the international written standard of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and to linguistically socialize their students into a transnational Arabic-language academic community – a project that, as I described in the first section of this chapter, has been meant with ambivalence by many of Mardin's local Arabic speakers. Likewise, the Syriac department is largely divided between those who emphasize education in Classical Syriac (a pan Syriac liturgical language based on a written variety of Aramaic spoken around Edessa, or modern-day Urfa, or Riha in Kurdish, between the 4th and 8th centuries AD), and those who emphasize modern literary forms of the locally spoken variety of Neo-Aramaic (or Tuyoro, with its competing standards in both the Syriac and Latin

³⁰Across Turkey's Southeast, moreover, similar Kurdish-language programs are likewise functioning to generate the first generation of university-trained teachers, writers, and journalists to work in the fields of 'minority-language' education and media with the consent (if not always the support) of Turkish state institutions. Today, for example, Kurdish language-departments now operate at a half-dozen state universities across in the region - more than half of which have opened over the past decade (Aykaç 2017).

alphabets). In both of these cases, on the one hand, disagreements over language standardization can be linked to more widely circulating language ideologies that are structured around, for instance, an opposition of ‘authenticity’ and ‘efficiency’ (Woolard 2005; Gal 2006). In the local context of Mardin, on the other hand, they can also be mapped onto individuals’ socio-political orientation and the way they understand the relationship between language and politics.



Figure 2.2: 5th grade Kurdish Language textbooks (developed at Artuklu University and printed in 2014)

Such ambiguities are also encountered in the changing relationship of both local Kurdish speech communities and the Turkish state to ongoing efforts to create a single, standardized Northern Kurmanji-Kurdish – a relationship that is typified by the creation of the LLI (and which I discuss in detail in the last chapter). Whereas once this project was entirely driven by informal and semi-formal Kurdish language associations operating largely in the diaspora (Ucarlar 2009), the growing importance of the Turkish state in authorizing forms of Kurdish linguistic practice cannot be overlooked. Moreover, beyond competing projects to standardize Kurmanji Kurdish, a further set of salient contrasts also emerged around the classification of different Kurdish

‘dialects.’ As I mentioned above, the LLI offers programs in both Zazaki and Kurmanji and was the institute primarily responsible for producing the Turkish Ministry of Education’s (MEB) official elementary school textbooks for both varieties of Kurdish (see figure 2.2). However, while these books were originally printed together (with Zazaki and Kurmanji versions included in the same edition), officials within the MEB later mandated that these editions be printed separately. For some professors at the institute, this was taken up as an attempt by the state to reassert its position that Zazaki and Kurmanji are two distinct languages (as opposed to two ‘dialects’ of Kurdish) and to thereby undermine the unity of Kurdish (and by extension, the Kurds). As one former professor at the LLI once alleged when speaking with me in private, it was the insistence by the institute’s faculty of teaching both in the same department (as opposed to two more recently opened programs in Eastern Turkey that only offered courses in Zazaki) that was among the primary factors driving central administrators in Turkey’s Council of Higher Education (YÖK) to deny the program the right to grant PhDs, even though it was the first and most prestigious Kurdish-language department in the country.

Importantly, institutional battles over the definition and standardization of distinct Kurdish language codes in the LLI take as their reference not only local conditions in Mardin or language politics in Turkey but likewise address themselves to transnational actors and institutions. The Kurdish movement’s push for minority language education, importantly, has benefited greatly from the support of EU institutions (Uçarlar 2009).³¹ Moreover, the LLI’s

³¹It is hardly coincidental, I submit that the local office of the Council of Europe’s ‘Democratic School Project’ – a project whose stated goal is the development of ‘competence for democratic culture’ through promoting respect for cultural differences and EU law – is located inside the same small building as the institute, rearticulating what is an ideologized causal contiguity in the EU between ‘minority-language education’ on the one hand and ‘democracy’ and ‘human rights’ on the other as a materialized spatial contiguity between the sites of Kurdish-language education and EU democratization protects.

relationship with EU exchange organizations such as ERASMUS has encouraged many of the institute's faculty and students to study English, and beyond the explicitly political dimensions informing the commensuration Turkish and Kurdish, many at the LLI also understand the standardization of Kurdish and the development of new academic registers relative to 'global' languages such as English as well. This understanding is evident, for example, in the launch in 2016 of the *Journal of Mesopotamian Studies*, a multilingual academic journal focusing on history, language, and culture publishing articles not only in Turkish and three languages of the institute (Kurdish, Arabic and, Syriac) but English as well – a transnational academic publication directed toward a polyglot audience in which the three languages of the LLI, Turkish and English are put in a relation of equivalence as proper academic languages. Here we how the institute's language politics transcend the parameters of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict and endeavor to position Kurdish as a more widely recognized and valuable medium of global higher education. In any case, what is stake is the refashioning of the language ideologies shaping how Kurdish linguistic practices are evaluated locally and globally (by no means distinct phenomena).

On the other hand, the LLI remains a Turkish state institution and thus a site wherein the Turkish language still mediates all formal relations and, therefore, remains structurally above Kurdish, Arabic, and Syriac in an institutional hierarchy. If an ideological project of commensuration by the Kurdish movement seeks to position the four languages on a level of equality, Turkish state discourse seeks to position the former three as local 'mother-tongues' and 'living languages' – "living despite everything" as my Kurdish interlocutors liked to joke – as subordinate to Turkish as the language of state and official bureaucracy. However, just in the case of the opposition between Arab and Kurd can be articulated as a relation of similarity in comparison to the Turkish state, Kurdish, Arabic, and Syriac (as well as local varieties of

Turkish) can be opposed to the official language of the Turkish state in another kind of ‘encompassing fractal’ (Gal and Irvine 2019). Despite its status as the official standard of public life, importantly, the values associated with the prestige dialect(s) of Republican Turkish, for instance, are not constant across social space nor stable across social interactions, but present opportunities for renegotiation and revaluation. Within the LLI, for instance, although Turkish remains standard for written administrative communications, in my experience many of the institute’s Kurdish faculty and students often avoid speaking Turkish entirely, and speak proudly with ‘eastern’ accents when they do, often exaggerating local phonetic features for rhetorical effect. Thus, while the capacity to produce standard Turkish code on official documents – such as the *dilekçe* (a genre of official petition used to submit requests to all state offices – is a basic requirement to navigate university bureaucracy, the local status of the prestige form of spoken ‘Istanbul Turkish’ does not carry the same value as it might in Western Turkey (a reality that holds across Mardin more widely and for local Arabs and Syriacs in addition to Kurds).

All of this to argue 1) that salient forms of sociolinguistic differentiation in the LLI mirror and replicate other axes of comparison active in Mardin’s local speech community as well as more political points of differentiation between the Kurdish movement and Turkish state; and to show, again, 2) how discourses around Mesopotamia became centrally implicated in larger shifts in both the political spatial imaginaries and the sociolinguistic regimes shaping public life, in Mardin especially, but also in Turkey and North Kurdistan more broadly. Taken together, moreover, developments at the LLI point to a larger sea change in the role of Turkish as the dominant language of public life; and, significant recent setbacks notwithstanding, new institutions of higher education such as the LLI are functioning to position youth as central actors in this change. The rapid expansion of Turkey’s system of higher education over the past two

decades has been accompanied by the ascendancy of novel language and new linguistic projects that are remaking the university as a linguistic space and restructuring youth's relationship to language as both a medium and an object of social value. Today, the dominance of the Turkish language in Turkey's public life is constructed against an emergent multilingual public sphere in which newly emergent language projects are working, together with new geographic and political imaginaries, to alter the values associated with different forms of public linguistic practice and the kinds of social relationships they mediate. In both Mardin and North Kurdistan more broadly, specifically, the rise in new discourses around Mesopotamia over the past two decades has been accompanied by a transformation in the sociolinguistic regimes that inform the metrics through which Kurdish is positioned as a medium of value – a transformation that has had enduring effects despite the current state of Kurdish politics in Turkey.

Chapter 3: Tea, *Samimiyet*, and the National Public

In Turkey, tea is a domestically produced and imported commodity, an everyday consumer item, and an important ‘semiotic medium of representation’ (Turner 2008) through which people produce relations of hospitality and solidarity, or ‘samimiyet.’ As such, tea exists simultaneously as a sensuous material object and a wider semiotic field that endows it with socially recognized qualia linking its substance to types of social persons and modes of relationality. Tea thus mediates social relationships and positions people as social persons. In the context of Mardin and the wider southeast border region and its relation with the Turkish nation-state, moreover, tea is also implicated in the construction of a salient axis of social

differentiation. In this way, talk about and through tea becomes centrally implicated in making national publics and contesting political power.

In this chapter, I begin by describing how the history of tea trade in Turkey has shaped important semiotic distinctions between ‘Turkish’ and ‘Kurdish’ tea – distinctions that are mapped onto competing national value hierarchies. In the second and third sections, I consider how tea mediates the enactment and realization of *samimiyet* – a central social value in Turkey and North Kurdistan – and I consider how its use as a moral metric for assessing interpersonal relationships and is also projected into the field of politics and taken up as a value in mass-mediated political discourse. Finally, I suggest some ways that *samimiyet* as a concept is important for understanding the relationship between students and professors at the LLI, in particular as it concerns their shared investment in Kurdish language activism – a subject to which I return in detail over the following three chapters.

I. Tea as a national value project

According to market researchers, Turkey has the largest per capita consumption of tea of any country in the world; at nearly 7 pounds per person per annum, consumers in Turkey are reported to drink 40-50% more tea than those in the countries ranked 2nd and 3rd in tea consumption (Ireland and the United Kingdom respectively).¹ Despite these globally unmatched levels of consumption, Turkey is neither a major exporter nor importer of tea. Almost all tea grown in Turkey (around 1.5 million tons annually) is produced for domestic consumption and has historically been unable to compete in price or quality on the global market, while what little sold abroad is primarily marketed to Turkish diaspora communities in Europe and North

¹“Annual per capita tea consumption worldwide as of 2016, by leading countries (in pounds)” *Statista* (2016). <https://www.statista.com/statistics/507950/global-per-capita-tea-consumption-by-country/>

America. Outside a small climatic zone centered on the Rize region in northeast Turkey along the Black Sea close to Turkey's border with Georgia, moreover, tea cultivation constitutes a relatively insignificant part of the Turkish economy, with the total value of the domestic crop in 2017 valued at 2.6 billion liras, or just under one tenth of one percent of Turkey's 3.1 trillion lira national economy.² Yet limiting any examination of the value of domestically produced *türk çayı* ('Turkish tea') to its monetary value as an agricultural commodity risks seriously underestimating its importance within larger consumer value chains; as well as overlooking its centrality to nearly every significant form of private and public sociality in the country.

Tea is drunk daily with breakfast, and after lunch and dinner, as well as on many occasions between meals. A ubiquitous and relatively cheap commodity, it is also routinely offered to visitors and guests, given freely to customers and clients in the course of business, and shared among colleagues at the workplace and among friends and family members in the home. An object of everyday consumption, tea also mediates different kinds of social relationships, and in examining its life as a commodity what is often important is not only that some people grow it and some people purchase it, or even that it is bought and sold many times before it is consumed, but also that people ultimately prepare it, serve it, and drink it, often together with others. Here I do not want to make an argument for the analytical primacy of consumption over exchange or

²This is the wholesale price received by cultivators prior to its purchase by local tea factories for processing, around 2,000 liras per ton in 2018, according to figures released by *TÜİK* and the *Rize Ticaret Borsası*. Its retail value in the supermarket is about 10-15 times higher. *Çaykur*, the former state monopoly that remained publicly controlled until its transfer to Turkey's new sovereign wealth-fund in 2017, remains the largest player in the Turkish tea sector, buying around half the tea sold on the domestic exchanges in Rize, Trabzon and Giresun. Its differently branded 1kg bags of loose black tea retail from between 23-29 liras in the supermarket (around \$5-6 USD). Its price by volume of tea once prepared in a cafe in Mardin is generally between 1-3 lira per cup, much greater (x10-15) than its retail value in a store, which shows the capacity of tea to add value as moves across its value chain.

production, but to make the case that what it is often glossed as consumption can itself constitute both a moment of productive social labor and its realization in enduring social relationships; and to explore how, inasmuch that the social labor process driving the production and consumption of tea differ between the cafe and the office, the home and the marketplace, so do tea's capacity to mediate the modalities through which value is created and realized and by whom.

In Turkey, tea is not only cheap and ubiquitous, it is also universal. It transcends class, even as it configures it.³ Tea is drunk by the rich and the poor. It can be found in almost any cafe or restaurant, although its price can fluctuate greatly, and thus can serve as a reliable (if one-dimensional) index of the establishment's position in social space. Tea also crosses social barriers, as well as political and ethnic divisions. In Turkey it is drunk by secularists and Islamists, by leftists and fascists, by Kemalists and Kurds, by Alevi and Sunni; and for the most part, they all prepare and drink it in the same way. Tea culture in Mardin, too, mirrors this broader 'national' culture. Tea is generally prepared in the Turkish-style *çaydanlık*, a 2-piece samovar in which tea is brewed above and water boiled below to allow each drinker to choose between more or less *demli* ('strong brewed') and *açık* ('weak) options. Tea is also brewed unsweetened, as is common practice in Turkey, allowing each drinker to choose the amount of sugar she wishes to add. In Mardin, like in most regions of Turkey, sugar has been historically sourced from Turkish state factories where it is processed from domestically grown sugar beets.⁴ However, tea culture in Mardin does deviate from the national standard in one important respect: the tea itself.

³ Hann (1990), for instance, speculates that the lack of distinct brands under the state-monopoly *Çaykur* until the early 1980s limited the potential for tea to serve as a marker of social differentiation.

⁴For an account of the state sugar industry, see Alexander 2002. In some border regions of Turkey, smuggled sugar from Iran is also popular.



Figure 3.1: A delivery van advertising a brand of *kaçak çay* in front of a super-market in Mardin's New City (left). *kaçak çay* in Mardin's *çarşı* (right)

As recent as a century ago, black tea had nothing like the social importance in Anatolia that it has today. Tea did not begin to emerge as an object of mass consumption in Anatolia and Northern Mesopotamia until the end of the 19th century. An early attempt was made to grow tea in the Black Sea region of the Ottoman Empire in the 1890s, but these efforts only drew sustained financial support beginning in the 1930s and centered on a small region around Rize in Northeastern Turkey bordering Georgia. Far from a 'traditional' Turkish beverage, therefore, tea production was a mid-20th century state project, and the commercial processing and sale of tea was under the control of a state monopoly until the 1980s. Under this monopoly, primary producers, small-scale farmers cultivating just a couple of hectares on average, were guaranteed a minimum price for their crop by the state tea corporation. However, tea in Rize was generally produced at costs significantly higher than the global average, and the lax enforcement of quotas and planting standards led to the overproduction of low-quality tea⁵, a reality that generally made

⁵This is not my assessment (I quite enjoy Turkish tea) but the institutional view of the big London tea houses: Hann (1990) explains that this judgement was the historical result of state policies and corruption (including the exchange of political favors such as higher quotas and prices for votes); as well as climatic factors such as year-long precipitation (as opposed to an alternation between dry and rainy seasons encountered in the traditional tea growing regions of

Turkish tea uncompetitively expensive relative to the global market and thus required a protectionist regime for the domestic economy that in turn encouraged smuggling and black-market sales.

Mardin province, located on the border with Syria, emerged as one of the primary entry points for smuggled tea into Turkey, and over many decades *kaçak çay* ('smuggled tea') became the locally preferred variety. In contrast to Turkish tea -- or 'Rize' or *yerli* ('domestic') tea, as it is more often referred to among locals in Mardin - *kaçak çay*, or less commonly *seylan çayı* ('Ceylon tea'), refers to (mostly) Sri Lankan varieties processed using the CTC method⁶ and thus possessing a taste and color quite distinct from their domestic counterparts. Moreover, as these teas have been historically packaged and prepared for sale in the Iraq and Syria, they are very often sold under Arabic brand-names with English and Arabic-language labeling and packaging. Notably, this has continued despite the end of the state's tea monopoly and relative easing of import restrictions (although all foreign tea is still subject to a tariff of 145%). Today, so-called *kaçak çay* is not only sold in the open-air bazaars of border-towns, but openly in supermarkets and shopping malls. Nor is much of what is today classified as *kaçak çay* even now smuggled into Turkey, but imported legally directly from Sri Lanka and packaged in Turkish cities like Gaziantep.⁷ It often continues to be sold in its 'traditional' English and Arabic-language packaging, but this packaging is no longer coincidental to the dissonance between global

East and South Asia). In Rize, moreover, there is only one growing season and one harvest per year. The current devaluation of lira has made Turkish tea much more competitive on the global market, however, and Turkish tea is now significantly cheaper than *kaçak* varieties within Turkey. ⁶*i.e.* the 'Cut, Tear, Curl method', See Hann (1990) for detailed comparison with production process in Turkey.

⁷ The crisis in the Turkish economy and the collapse of the lira has actually made legally imported *kaçak çay* nearly twice as expensive at a retail level as tea produced by the former state monopoly, Çaykur; and many people in Mardin have described to me how they reluctantly mix *kaçak çay* with Turkish varieties in order to save money.

commodity chains and national tariff regimes, but rather the objectification of this historical process in a new kind of ‘national’ brandedness - one that takes its power from conditioned taste and affective responses of Southeast Turkey’s border communities, for whom *kaçak çay* has also become both a preferred variety of tea and a mark of social differentiation. In Mardin, *kaçak çay* is standard in most local homes and cafes, and domestically grown Turkish tea is generally only available in upscale national patisserie chains, and even then, often as one of two options.



Figure 3.2: *Kaçak çay* on the menu in front of Kurdish cafes in Beyoğlu, Istanbul

If the position of *kaçak çay* in Mardin is so dominant to be unmarked, its smaller market share in Turkey can, in certain social spaces, transform into an explicit marker of a non-standard, minority identity. In Istanbul, for example, new kinds of youth cafes targeting ethnic Kurdish customers will often openly advertise that they serve *kaçak çay*, gesturing simultaneously toward the fulfillment of a consumer preference, the interpellation of an ethnic or regional identity and, in the case of many youth cafes, and the articulation and performance of ‘style’ in relation to an assemblage of citational practices through which youth, in concert with others, can reformulate the value metrics shaping forms of everyday sociality (Nakassis 2016).

Indeed, as I discuss in more detail in the next chapter, the *kafe* is among the most important spaces for the articulation and performance of new forms of Kurdish youth style, encompassing the consumption of not only food and drink, fashion and various forms of print and digital media, but also specific language and register choices as well as a broader set of outwardly expressed social attitudes that can be read as simultaneously aspirational and political and which endeavor to revalorize ‘Kurdishness’ (**K**: Kurdiyete) within the frameworks of global youth culture and more localized consumer markets alike. Within this larger milieu, *kaçak çay* can serve as a marker of an ‘edgy’ or ‘cool’ Kurdish youth style, as when it is shown on the menu shown alongside ‘Diyarbakir style toast’ (**T**: Diyarbakir usulü tost), ‘Kurdish coffee’ (**T**: kürt kahvesi), and ‘dibek’, a light variety of spiced coffee made from rough grounds and more commonly consumed in Eastern Turkey (see figure 3.2). But this style is ultimately inseparable from a larger set of political claims, a reality which makes such performances both a social risk (from police as well as Turkish nationalist mobs) and a form of struggle over public space and the values that will define life in a community. For many Kurds living in cities in Western Turkey, signs advertising *kaçak çay* or ‘Kurdish coffee’ is also a spatial-semiotic index that the *kafe*’s owners and patrons might valorize Kurdish-language practices. In addition to signaling toward consumer ‘taste’, it also points to the presence of specific social persona, namely potential ‘hemşehri’ (<**T**. people of a common city, province or region) who are more likely to be of compatible social outlook and political sensibility and with shared sentiments and affective attachments.

Consider, for example, how Melike, a graduate of the LLI, described the role that *kaçak çay* plays – alongside ‘language’ (**K**: ziman) ‘tradition’ (**K**: kevneşopî) and ‘culture’ (**K**: çand) – in drawing Kurdish students to the Kurdish-language oriented ‘pirtûk kafe’ (<**K**: book cafe) in

Ankara where we did the interview and where she also regularly volunteered giving Kurdish-language lessons.

Melike: Oh, and I have forgotten something! There is *kaçak çay* (**K**: çaya kaçak) here. You know how important that is for Kurds! (laughing)...you know I've heard, in fact ask Mrs. Z. [the owner of the café] because she will be able to tell you even more: some students only come here for *kaçak çay*. Just think. They only come here for *kaçak çay*. Kurds love *kaçak çay* that much.

PL: So, you also prefer *kaçak çay*?

Melike: I also prefer *kaçak çay*. At home, everywhere. We are just used to it (**K**: em hin bûn). That's the tea you drank in your childhood. For example, in my home we drank nothing but *kaçak çay*. We just can't drink Turkish tea, *Çaykur*, or whatever. No one in my house can drink it.

When I asked her what she thought was specifically so different about the taste of *kaçak çay* and *türk çayı*, she pointed to several 'salient' (**K**: zelal) qualities. For example, she described how *kaçak çay* was 'more thoroughly brewed' (**K**: bidedem), 'bitter' (**K**: tahl) and 'heavier' (**K**: giran) than Turkish tea, which tended to be served 'weak' (**K**: zeif) and 'without color' (**K**: bêrenk). Interestingly, I also heard analogous contrasts made in Mardin (in Turkish) by members of the Turkish civil service and security forces from other regions of Turkey, who often complain about the relative unavailability of Turkish tea in cafes and other public venues in Mardin, as well as *kaçak çay*'s 'bitter' (**T**: acı) flavor and 'dark' (**T**: koyu renkli) complexion, as if it had been 'over-brewed' (**T**: fazla demlenmiş). And when locals in Mardin poke fun at Turkish tea in Turkish, they commonly cite its 'lack of flavor' (**T**: tatsızlık) and its production of 'weak' (**T**: zayıf) tea.

What I want to note here is that such qualities are in large part socially conventionalized, even between those of opposed tastes, and allow qualities of taste to be linked to enregistered social voices and person types (Gal 2013; Harkness 2015; Silverstein 2016). Melike herself did

not rank these qualities explicitly in terms of ‘good’ or ‘bad’; rather she linked her preference for *kaçak çay* to her childhood, life in her family, and an enduring affective attachment to the drink (and the kind of spaces in and people with whom it is shared). But her association of *kaçak çay* with Kurdishness and her assertions about the undrinkability of certain kinds of tea both borrow from more widely circulating discourses about tea’s relation to taste, forms of personhood, and national identity. And in other contexts, we can see how indexical linkages are made between a problem of incompatibility of taste and the question of social compatibility more broadly—linkages that in Turkey and North Kurdistan can be drawn across multiple axes of differentiation.

Anthropological studies of food and eating have long sought to understand how the production and consumption of foodstuffs shapes and is integrated into larger social and cultural life-worlds. Historically, approaches to food and eating within anthropology sought to understand food systems as either a function of a particular social order or the expression of a cultural system; however, by the 1960s many scholars were attempting to bridge these two approaches, emphasizing the connection between cultural meaning as developed, for instance, in the ‘culinary anthropology’ of Levi-Strauss (1966) with broader concerns about social reproduction and the material base of social life as expressed in the early economic anthropology of Richards (1939) and others (Appadurai 1981). Sahlins (1977), for instance, shows how markets for meat in the contemporary United States are deeply informed by cultural meanings (those of bourgeoisie American culture) in addition to more universal logics underlying capitalist commodity production. Likewise, Appadurai (1981) shows how in South India, acts of cooking and eating are organized by a system of semiotic meanings while also becoming the object of ‘gastro-politics’ wherein “conflict or competition over specific cultural or economic resources as it emerges in social transactions around food” (p. 495).

Munn (1986), too, famously demonstrates how food-stuffs, in being ascribed with certain qualities, likewise come into relation with larger qualisigns – or larger social value metrics that categorize, order and rank clusters of qualities – and thereby become mobilized in and linked to the construction of social persons and relationships. In Munn’s description, for instance, yams and taro are positively associated with ‘heaviness’ in the garden (where it represents unrealized value *in potentia*) but are negatively linked to the same quality in the stomach (where it represents the loss of this potential value and a contraction in spacetime⁸). However, if the same yam or taro is given away in a relation of hospitality, it can be realized instead as ‘fame’ and thus an extension of the self in intersubjective spacetime. In this relationship, moreover, Munn demonstrates how such acts of generosity transform food from a qualisign of ‘heaviness’ into its opposite: ‘lightness’, ‘buoyancy’, and ‘health’. Within this cultural system, this opposition between ‘heaviness’ and ‘lightness’ is in turn evaluated against their existence as qualisigns of value, wherein “iconic logics of metaphor are linked to indexical logics of causation” (Chumley and Harkness 2013), so that an object’s socially recognized qualities, or qualia, such a ‘lightness’ or ‘heaviness’, become linked to other such qualia (e.g. ‘health’ and ‘sickness’, ‘generosity’ and ‘selfishness’) and thus central to the construction of interrelations between these conventionalized qualities, people and things. More recent work in linguistic anthropology has likewise drawn attention to how material objects or substances (such as food and drink, text artifacts, and other commodities-cum-objects), as well as people, become socially ascribed with certain qualia, and the relation of these qualia to ideologized regimes of social value (Chumley and Harkness 2013; Gal 2017; Harkness 2015; Keane 2003; Silverstein 2016). Among the most

⁸ A fact that, Munn notes, is reflected in associations between over-eating, bodily heaviness and the loss of mobility p. 75

important insights of this work is that the qualities central to the production of social life are conventionalized as qualia⁹; that these qualia are compared or contrasted with other qualia through ideologies that construct hierarchical relations of difference and similarity; and that these ideologies in turn order indexical relations (and thus socially meaningful connections) between divergent social phenomena – relations which are themselves social contestable and subject to change.

This is evident in how the values of *kaçak çay* described above can be inverted as it is mobilized in other social contexts and through other modes of relationality. For if in a limited number of spaces in Turkey outside of North Kurdistan, *kaçak çay* can circulate and be consumed as a token of ethnic solidarity, it can be also be mobilized as a marker of social danger and as an objectification of a negative value with respect to the value regime of the Turkish nation-state. This process was on full display in news piece broadcast by TRT1 (Turkey’s official state news channel) in 2012 in the province of Osmaniye, when camera crews that had gathered to record the meeting of provincial state and military leaders caught a rather different kind of scene.¹⁰ At some point during their meeting, the assembled statesmen called upon a passing beverage peddler to serve them tea. As they were being served, Osaminye’s then *vali* (provincial governor), Celalettin Cerrah, asked for confirmation from the peddler on camera that they were to be served Turkish tea (T: “Türk çayı değil mi?”). The peddler’s response - whether out of a sense of rebellion, honesty or simple habit we cannot know¹¹ – was that he served both

⁹ This can be true regardless if commonly named as such in metapragmatic discourse (Gal 2013). That is to say such linkages can be both explicitly made and subconsciously enacted and reproduced.

¹⁰ The TRT report can be seen on Youtube: <https://youtu.be/0tvmGX83hiI>.

¹¹ Although it is probably worth keeping in mind that Osmaniye is located close to the Syrian border and, as provincial governor Mr. Cerrah confirms with his own words, *kaçay çay* is popular in the province.

Turkish and *kaçak çay* (T: “Var, Türk de var kaçak da var”), according to his customer’s preference.



Figure 3.3: Screen-Shots from TRT1 News Report – “Reaction to *kaçak çay* – tea question angers *vali*”

The initial reaction from most of the assembled military and state officials, as later confirmed by TRT, was amused laughter; the *vali*, however, moving quickly to regain control of the situation, began to berate both the tea peddler and, through his performance before the assembled cameras, a larger, more amorphous public.¹² “If you’re helping the PKK (pronounced Pe-Ka-Ka) then drink *kaçak çay*,” Mr. Cerrah declared, before continuing:

If you want to help the PKK, if you want Turkish police and soldiers to be killed, if you want Turkish citizens to be killed, smoke *kaçak* cigarettes, use *kaçak* gasoline, what else can I tell you? I mean could there be such a Turkish citizen? On the one hand, you say ‘damn the PKK’, on the other hand you support them. You support them by smoking *kaçak* cigarettes and by drinking *kaçak çay*. Wherever I go there is *kaçak çay*. It just can’t go on this way. If we are to wait for the military and the state and the police to take care of everything it simply won’t do, as citizens there are also certain duties that fall to us.

¹² “If those around him were laughing, he drew attention to a different reality” (T: “çevredekiler gülünseyidi o farklı bir gerçeğe dikkat çekti”), the TRT presenter reported when later framing the event for the channel’s national television audience.

We need to recognize them. We need to know who are our enemies and who are our friends. If we don't, then won't it be enough for them to divide us up?

In his equation of the consumption of *kaçak çay* with support for the PKK, Mr. Cerrah likewise draws an indexical relationship between the former beverage and Kurdish identity, even as (as is commonplace in Turkish state discourse) any mention of such an identity is erased and replaced with vague references to criminality, separatism or terrorism.¹³ When speaking about the PKK in Turkish, importantly, his use of the pronunciation 'Pe-Ka-Ka' expresses derision or condemnation (whereas the pronunciation 'Pe-Ke-Ke' is more neutral or sympathetic). Unsurprisingly, the former is hegemonic in mainstream Turkish media, while the latter is the more common among Kurdish speakers in Mardin. But the distinction is active and widely understood across the entire country – as I first learned soon after I moved to Turkey when I was corrected by friends in the western city of Denizli after using the 'neutral' form (which is also the form that more closely resembles its pronunciation in English).

In connecting his disapproval of *kaçak çay* to his condemnation of the PKK, and by implicit extension, Kurdishness more broadly, Mr. Cerrah succeeds in inverting the value indices tied to this same indexical relationship in the *pirtûk kafe* that Melike describes above. The relationship between *kaçak çay* and Kurdishness thus operates on multiple dimensions of contiguity, with the *vali*'s formulation of the connection unfolding across a distinct vector of indexicality. Here it is not that the taste or preference for smuggled Sri Lankian tea is traced to common origins and experience of life along the border – a kind of spatial contiguity often invoked by my informants – and by further indexical extension, to membership in a common ethnic or national community (indeed, Mr. Cerrah speaks only of Turkish citizens). Rather, Mr.

¹³ For a concise account of this phenomenon historically, see Yeğen (1996).

Cerrah points to a causal contiguity built on alleged relations of value between the consumer of *kaçak çay* and the PKK as its primary trafficker;¹⁴ and what begins as an economic relationship between buyer and seller is then reframed as one of ‘support’ for the latter’s political project (the description of which here, of course, is limited to attempts to kill Turkish soldiers and divide the country).

If in Turkey the social uptake of *kaçak çay* is structured through a salient and widely recognized sign-object relationship (wherein *kaçak çay* is the sign and Kurdishness the object), it only takes on value as such when it is mobilized in the context of specific social relationships (where it mediates a relationship between persons both as a material object and an ideological frame or conjecture that becomes activated in interaction). Like its exchange value as a commodity, *kaçak çay*’s value as a token of Kurdish identity is conditioned on the wider relations of value in which it is deployed. Nor is it everywhere in Kurdistan as salient a marker of Kurdishness as in Mardin. Kurdish friends from the Serhat region on Turkey’s Eastern border with Iran studying in Mardin told me that in cities like Van *kaçak çay* has nowhere near the same levels of attachment or consumption as in the border cities of the South (although it also always seemed to me that these friends were able to make the transition to drinking *kaçak çay* much more easily and with less complaining than many non-local Turkish civil servants, who often positioned it as a kind of hardship – suggesting again how taste is also a quality of social position, not simply individual preference). But taste is only one axis of differentiation

¹⁴ Just to drive the point home, the TRT narrator concludes the segment by noting that the PKK earns 2 billion liras annually from the trafficking of smuggled tea and cigarettes.

While the PKK is credibly alleged to be involved in cross-border smuggling, the claim that the entire economy of cross-border tea smuggling is controlled by the group is absurd, as is the claim, as explained above, that the sale and purchase of *kaçak çay* necessarily unfolds on the black-market. Much of it is not legally imported and packaged in Turkish factories.

distinguishing *kaçak çay* from Turkish varieties. In a Kurdish youth cafe in Istanbul, for instance, it can take on value as a commodity, an object of consumer desire or sensuous attachment, as well as a token of solidarity and friendship. In the face of Turkish state authority, in contrast, it is institutionally revalorized as an illicit commodity (through criminalization and customs regimes) and refashioned as a marker of danger, criminality and terrorism.

II. Tea and *samimiyet*

If tea in Turkey and North Kurdistan can function as a mark of differentiation separating those inside and outside a larger national value regime it also can be taken as the bearer of a more universal and abstract public values that shape how people in both Turkey and North Kurdistan frame and evaluate both interpersonal and mass mediated political relationships. This can be seen in one of the dozens of widely circulating Turkish-language tea memes, wherein the qualities of tea are compared directly with the qualities of human relationships: “They ask what I get from tea”, reads one such meme (figure 3.4) “...I get what I look for but can’t find among people: warmth and *samimiyet*”.



Figure 3.4: “-They ask what I get from tea...I get what I look for but can’t find among people: warmth and *samimiyet*”. Unattributed internet meme.

In this other form of ‘commodity fetishism’ – wherein the qualities of a social relationship are misrecognized as an inherent value of the commodity itself – what is here

imagined to adhere in the commodity is not exchange value, but *samimiyet*, a concept that the Turkish academic and public intellectual Tanıl Bora (2018) lists among the first of his ‘timely concepts’ for understanding contemporary Turkish society and politics. It also a central concept used by my interlocutors in Mardin and North Kurdistan when speaking about and assessing their own and others relationships, as well as when assessing the state of a Kurdish public more generally. In contrast to the formal and hierarchal forms of relationality as typified between citizens and officials in state institutions (e.g. administrative offices, hospitals, courthouses) where petitioners and patients are generally not served tea, tea is almost invariably offered to guests in the home or customers in private workspaces or shared between colleagues, coworkers and friends in the coffeehouse or cafe.

A Persian-Ottoman word derived from Arabic, *samimiyet* is often glossed in English simply as ‘sincerity.’ However, *samimiyet* is a more generalized social value emphasizing a modality of horizontal, non-transactional, and non-manipulative relationality that is understood to be as central to the integrity of large-scale democratic societies as it is to close personal friendships and life in the family. “The desire for *samimiyet*” Bora argues, “goes much beyond the dictionary meaning of ‘honesty’ (T: dürüstlük) or ‘sincerity’ (T: içtenlik) to include a longing for something ‘unalienated’ (T: yabancılaşmamış), ‘simple’ (T: yalın), ‘unmediated’ (T: dolayimsız), and ‘authentic’ (T: otantik). A longing not only for candid relations (‘riyasızlık’) among people but among the world in its entirety” (p. 21). Opposed to both the self-interest of the market or the anonymous disinterest of the liberal public sphere, *samimiyet* is a value discourse that describes both a ‘mutuality of interest and being’ underlying notions of kinship as a universal category (Sahlins 2013), in addition, the qualities of an open and non-hierarchal relationality that are often ascribed to friendships and relations between colleagues, classmates or

peers. In practice, it can be used to describe everything from the layout of a room to the relations between members of a religious community or nation. One friend in Istanbul, for example, recently commented to me how a new arrangement of furniture in her living room had made the space more ‘samimi’; while another friend in Diyarbakir recounted – after the especially securitized and formal Newroz celebrations that took place in the city in 2018 (under martial law and state-appointed city managers, or ‘kayyum’) — how the unorganized and largely spontaneous Newroz celebrations that characterized life in the city before the institutionalization of Kurdish politics in the early 2000s had been more ‘samimi’ than the official party rallies that have characterized the occasion since.

With its expectation for ‘simple’ and ‘unmediated’ social relationships, Bora observes, *samimiyet* is often made to invoke familiar, ‘face-to-face relationships’ (T: yüz yüze ilişkiler), ‘that which is private’ (T: ‘özel’ olanın), ‘belongs to private domesticity’ (T: mahremiyet), and ‘authenticity’ (T: otantiklik) (p. 22). It thus is commonly associated with life as centered in the home or lived publicly in the neighborhood or village. Yet, Bora acknowledges, if *samimiyet* is popularly imagined to be centered in face-to-face communities, it has become a central value of public and political life in Turkey and an object of mass mediated performance and uptake. No one exemplifies this reality more, Bora points out, than the president of Turkey himself: “Recep Tayyip Erdoğan”, he writes “with his discourse of *samimiyet*, together with his style of addressing the nation, tries to create a family atmosphere. If only we felt like we were in a ‘family environment’ (T: aile ortamında). If only we were to ‘imagine the nation as a family’ (T: milleti bir aile olarak tahayyül etmek). If we would only solve our problems like ‘family problems’ (T: aile meseleleri). If only we would listen to the worlds of our elders, our fathers, and our ‘abiler’ (older brothers)” (p. 23) Erdoğan, as Bora documents, continually cites

samimiyet as a value metric in his political discourse, questioning his opponents' *samimiyet* and emphasizing his own, all the while invoking it when speaking of everything from Turkey's foreign relations, its interests in and responsibility for Ottoman heritage sites in the Balkans, and the quality of the country's bread flour (pp. 19-20). But Erdoğan's penchant for discursively mobilizing *samimiyet* in his political rhetoric pales in comparison to his capacity to enact its particular kinds of embodied performances – what Bora calls Erdoğan's 'style of addressing the nation' (T: *milletine hitap tarzı*) – and the subsequent capacity of these performances to be taken up and redeployed by a sympathetic mass media and thousands of internet-savvy fans.

Bora's argument seems supported by a multitude of other observers, including the president's supporters. Erdoğan's army of fans and trolls on the social media frequently share videos drawing attention to his *samimi* character and documenting his most *samimi* moments, showing the former mayor of Istanbul and prime minister and current president hugging young children and embracing old women, playing with animals, and joking and bantering with his youth supporters.¹⁵ In his open and loose familiarity with the people and his willingness to address them as if they were neighbors and family members, Erdoğan seeks to erode the social distance that has traditionally separated 'great statesmen' (T: *büyük devlet adamları*) from the people, and to position himself as an authentic and unaffected representative of the nation.

His capacity to perform *samimiyet* was on display, for example, when at the end of 2017, at a rally in the South Anatolian town Karaman, he took up an invitation to tea from a local family, who had hung a banner from the balcony over their apartment overlooking the square where the president was to speak. Part of the family had moved to the Netherlands as migrant

¹⁵ Consider the video "Erdoğan'ın Samimiyetini Gösteren 30 Hareketi" published on Youtube by *Osmanlı Torunu*, a verified, pro-Erdogan channel with over 400,000 subscribers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XaCq15D72FA>

workers and were in Turkey visiting from Europe, a fact they also openly advertised to the president. Flanked by Turkish flags, their banner read: “[from] a migrant family: Certainly our leader would say yes to our invitation to tea.” Erdoğan accepted the invitation, and press photos later showed the Turkish president climbing the stairs to the apartment, embracing his hosts at the door, and joining male members of the family in the *salon* accompanied by a few aids and local politicians. Erdoğan is reported to have asked the family if they had any complaints about his presidency and he inquired about any personal problems. His hosts explained that a few of their relatives had had difficulty finding work, family members later told members of the press, and arrangements were reportedly made through the president’s aides to for follow-up contacts.

What is remarkable about this mass mediated political event is its ordinariness as a form of everyday encounter. The ‘invitation to tea’ (T: *çay daveti*)– in particular the *samimi* social register in which this invitation was composed, e.g. the use of “our leader” (T: *reisimiz*)¹⁶ and the reportive verb suffix that gives a sense of respectful informality, i.e. ‘certainly you would say yes’ (T: *evet dermişsiniz*) – serves as a metasemiotic framing that indexes both the routinized acts of everyday hospitality in the home between family members, neighbors, and friends as well as the more formalized ‘tea talks’ (T: *çay sohbetleri*) and family visits that characterize political and civil society among Islamic urban publics in Turkey.¹⁷ What is important here that Erdoğan is publicly seen to be engaging in the labor of mutual care and concern understood to be the foundation social life in the home and the community, even if the act is only one of mimicry performed for the assembled cameras. It went unreported (and for our purpose is perhaps ultimately insignificant), whether or not anyone in the family received a job; although it is

¹⁶The term ‘reis’ has become a special epithet used to refer to Erdoğan by his supporters.

¹⁷For description of role of ‘tea talks’ (T: *çay sohbetleri*) and their role in the the rise of AKP’s connection to civil society, see (Tuğal 2009)

potentially telling, for instance, that no actual tea appears in any of the press photos, and that neither Erdoğan nor his colleagues appear to have removed their shoes before entering the family's *salon* – an oversight that would be unthinkable in almost any other social context. The important thing is that in entering the homes of common people for tea, Erdoğan is seen to erase the social distance, both physical and symbolic, separating himself from his supporters and his fellow countrymen and to embody what Alexander (2003) terms, albeit in a very different context, the 'personal state.'

Bora's emphasis on the connection between the family and *samimiyet* allows him to draw out some of the latent ambiguities in the latter's capacity to mediate between the horizontal modalities of egalitarian civility and comradeship – what Victor Turner (1969) termed 'communitas' – and the vertical modalities of social authority. Bora, for instance, acknowledges that certain ideologized family relationships do not easily correspond to value metrics of *samimiyet*, such as the relationship between a father and his children.¹⁸ Rather, Bora argues, it is closer to the value metric informing the relationship between younger and older siblings, here singling out the figure of the *abi* ('elder brother', from the Turkish "ağabey") for specific attention – keeping in mind that 'abi' also can be used as an informal, if respectful style of address to male strangers in addition to kin. But when referencing the more informal (if still hierarchal) relationship between younger and older siblings, as Bora makes clear, *samimiyet* as a value discourse can configure an ideologized form of personalized authority based in enduring and intimate social ties of kinship. Such authority is ideally non-manipulative and understood to

¹⁸The point here being not that Turkish and Kurdish fathers cannot be 'samimi', but that to describe someone as 'samimi bir baba' (a *samimi* father) in Turkish, for instance, is to denote a specific kind of father-figure (namely, one who prefers to engage with his children through informal and horizontal as opposed to hierarchical and authoritarian modalities of relationality) and not to describe a socially generalizable expectation of fatherhood.

valorize both the relationship (between siblings) and its institutional framework (the family) as ends in themselves. However, as Bora points out, when the authority conferred by the status of *abi* is employed instead in a self-interested assertion of prerogative or power – that is, when it is used to manipulate others as means to some other end – the authority derived from the enactment or performance of *samimiyet* can also take on exploitative and patriarchal dimensions and recreate gender hierarchies. On this point, the presence of multiple women in the first series of photographs taken on the balcony, and their absence in the second series of photographs taken with the president in the family *salon* (one widespread modality of domestic hospitality in Turkey suggests that the women are preparing the tea) also points to how gender hierarchies and conservative fears around an ‘excess of samimiyet’ (**T**: fazla samimiyet) between men and women in face-to-face interaction can differently shape their capacities to participate in the realization of *samimiyet* as a value in public, even as women’s labor (both manual and semiotic) is as critical (or more) to its creation as men’s. But here it is also important to distinguish between the semi-hegemonic, conservative gendered discourse of the AKP regime and the necessarily more complex articulation of public gender relations across Turkey and North Kurdistan more broadly.¹⁹

Samimiyet, significantly, has social force as a qualisign of value that extends beyond pro-government institutions or the AKP’s base; and because *samimiyet* also organizes a public value discourse that extends beyond the question of face-to-face relationships, it is also deeply implicated in debates about the vitality of the nation as a political community and relations between its members. This is true in popular assessments of politics and the social relationships

¹⁹ I return to the questions of labor and tea, as well of gender and public culture in the context of my discussion of the *kafe* in the next chapter.

through which it takes place; for instance, a few years ago, after the AKP converted many provincial centers across Turkey into ‘greater municipalities’ (T: büyük belediyeler), a retired-school teacher living in Aydın province opined to me on how politics in the formerly independent hamlet where he lived for decades had been more ‘samimi’ before its takeover by the nearby city. Where before disputes were solved locally, he explained, village politics was increasingly influenced by polarization in Turkey more generally.

Samimiyet is therefore also central to popular conceptions of democracy and for assessing the quality of life in a political community. But *samimiyet* has taken on a particular function in government discourse, where the valorization of a conservative (and hyper-masculine) public culture by pro-AKP media (in addition to, Bora observes, the regime’s security forces and judiciary) in fact point to kind of ‘moral authoritarianism’, in which the mobilization of *samimiyet* plays as much to authoritarian values as democratic ones:

Samimiyet in Erdoğan’s discourse frequently becomes a kind of threat; in fact, sometimes the threat is the goal itself: the defiance of the bully...but let’s not get ahead of ourselves. He is always subjecting his enemies to tests of their *samimiyet*. He does not allow anyone to be evaluated according to their own demands, identity, or words. Everyone is required to prove their *samimiyet*. In order to be recognized by authority (i.e. the president) one must have their *samimiyet* registered and approved by him in advance. This is a kind of ‘moral authoritarianism’ (T: ahlâkçı bir otoritarizm). Morality takes the place of politics, and those in authority determine the measure or one’s morals...(p. 25)

Citing Adorno's (1973) *Jargon of Authenticity*, Bora argues that Erdoğan’s politics of *samimiyet* have functioned to collapse the distinctions between the private and public spheres. This is possible, he writes, because “an ‘overvalued private sphere’ (T: aşırı değerlenen özel alan) tied to the force of the market and consumption have conflated public and private roles” (p. 27). This, in turn, has led to the intrusion of a moralist police state in the private lives of Turkey’s citizens; “we might call it the tyranny of *samimiyet*” Bora writes “and we can

summarize as follows: the ‘tyranny of the ideology of *samimiyet*’ (T: *samimiyet* ideolijisinin tiranlığı) blended with the myth of the family and a regime of state surveillance.”²⁰

However, in his focus on *samimiyet* as fundamentally a ‘family value’ introduced into Turkish political discourse by president Erdoğan, Bora tends to downplay its mobilization as primarily a phenomenon of conservative reaction or religious hypocrisy. As a consequence, his essay largely neglects the significance of its role in public discourse more broadly, including widespread mobilization and public performance of *samimiyet* in ‘secular’ and even leftist politics (admittedly to the horror of many Turkish leftists such as Bora). In contrast to Bora’s argument that *samimiyet* collapses the distinction between the public and the private, however, I want to suggest, following Gal (2002), that it functions to bridge the scalar dimensions of the state and family, the national public and the domain known persons and face-to-face relationality. Understanding how *samimiyet* as a value mediates relationships across multiple scales of public life in Turkey and North Kurdistan, therefore, allows us to see how processes of public making likewise move across the domains of the personal and the political.

III. *Samimiyet* across the domains of the personal and the political

This capacity of *samimiyet* as to serve as a more widely mobilized social value and to mediate between the domains of the personal and the political was on full display, for instance, during a mass-mediated back-and-forth over several days between then Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and Sırrı Süreyya Önder – a prominent Turkish leftist and (then) parliamentarian for the pro-Kurdish HPD – during the first months of the city war in late

²⁰ Ultimately, drawing on Sofsky’s (2009) work on politeness, Bora argues for a new kind of public politics that would devalue the public performance of private identities and public moralizing about private matters in the favor of a new form of public discourse based on distancing modalities of public formality.

December 2015. The exchange began on December 26th, with an off-the-cuff remark to reporters by Önder – who is also a writer and director of popular political films well-known for his colorful, folksy and sharp-witted speeches and exchanges with politicians in other parties – about the inadvisability of interparty meetings over a government proposal for constitutional amendments while Turkish soldiers were besieging cities in North Kurdistan.

For Prime Minister Davutoğlu’s party visit to discuss the constitution to be meaningful or consequential, it is only possible if the country is brought back to a constitutional framework before his visit. This is what gets me. As if I would entirely abandon the basic right to life for the people [living in] the warzone. But he if comes to visit us without recognizing their right to breathe, to be able to bury their dead, well then he will drink his *kaçak çay* and leave [without any agreement].²¹

Önder was one of a number HDP MPs, including the then party leader Selahattin Demirtaş, to publicly defy calls by the Turkish Prime Minister for interparty talks about constitutional reforms. But Önder’s remarks struck a loud chord in the media, as much for his open criticism of government policy in North Kurdistan as for his subtle but public act of defiance, typified by in his invocation of *kaçak çay* at the end of his remarks. By telling the Turkish PM that he if he were to visit under such circumstances he would only ‘drink his *kaçak çay* and leave’, Önder was not only saying that the proposal was a waste of time if the government were not willing to protect the basic rights of the people of North Kurdistan, but was drawing on well-known associations between *kaçak çay* and Kurdishness to remind the government and Turkish public of his party’s position as a representative of oppositional political identity. On the other hand, his invocation of tea speaks to exactly the kind of projection of ‘private’ or ‘face-to-face’ modalities of relationality onto the public sphere that Bora describes as central to *samimiyet* as a public value. In using a tea metaphor, importantly, Önder is in fact

²¹Quoted from T24. "HDP’li Önder’den Başbakan Davutoğlu’na: Kaçak çayını içer gider" Dec-26-2015.

modeling the proper behavior of a host toward their guests, and implicitly suggesting that even under the circumstances of widespread fighting that a visit from a government delegation, while pointless and morally suspect, would still be received with the dignity required by the basic obligations of hospitality. On another level, in his reference to the consumption of *kaçak çay* Önder is also implying that political disputes can be solved like personal disputes, namely by people talking over tea.

The news might have ended there and Önder's remarks might have remained a non-event. However, we know that word of Önder's remarks later reached Prime Minister Davutoğlu, because the PM cited them three days later at a press conference in which he attacked both Önder personally and the HDP more generally. 'Exploding with rage', as Önder would later characterize Davutoğlu, the PM launched into a five-minute tirade in which he accused of Kurdish politicians of exhibiting a complete 'lack of *samimiyet*' (T: *samimiyetsizlik*) and 'seriousness' (T: *ciddiyet*) both for their wider approach to the politics of the peace process and, significantly, for their display of personal disrespect toward the PM as a 'guest coming to visit them' (T: *kendilerine ziyaret edecek bir misafir*) in the context of the HDP's refusal of his request for interparty meetings on the constitution. He concluded his invective by attacking Önder personally and suggesting that his remark about *kaçak çay* were the words of an 'unserious filmmaker' with links to the PKK and a cavalier disregard for the deaths of Turkish security forces in the ongoing fighting:

We're not writing a screenplay here. Turkey is encircled by flames. We have lost hundreds of our soldiers and police as martyrs. Come now. We are supposed to drink tea, and *kaçak çay*? Let them go drink tea with whomever they want! If they want let them go to Kandil and drink their tea! This screenwriter! Turkey is on fire, there is fire all around us, and this gentleman is going to talk about *kaçak çay* and I am going to sit down at that table, is that so? Everyone who enters the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (Turkish parliament) must possess the [necessary] seriousness to represent this nation. If they think that they are going to, going to ridicule us with some jokes just made up at night, well

they are going to sit, to sit down and take a course in seriousness, a test [in seriousness]. Either they will be *samimi* and enthusiastic [concerning our offer of a meeting], and all of our doors will be open to them. Or they will move away from *samimiyet* and forget their seriousness, in which case we will put them in their place. Political negotiations are an issue of *samimiyet*.²²

A few hours after the PM's press conference, Önder gave his own, impromptu press conference in a meeting room in the Turkish parliament. Throughout his remarks, which lasted for nearly twenty minutes, he addressed the Prime Minister's accusations at length, offering a point-by-point rebuttal to Davutoğlu, while explicitly challenging the latter's understanding of the values of *samimiyet* and seriousness. In Önder's formulation, significantly, the metrics with which to evaluate *samimiyet* are instead based not, as it is in the PM's remarks, in the acceptance of the 'unity' and 'completeness' of the Turkish nation-state, but instead in an acknowledgment of the basic rights of all of Turkey's citizens and a commitment to peace, democracy, and co-existence as fundamental public values. These are points Önder stresses in his closing remarks:

Peace, right away! Peace, right away! A democratic framework right away! Democratic practice! While there is still time, before it's too late. And finally, I want to finish with one more thing. Please don't consider this as the impressions of a filmmaker. I'm someone who has experienced good and bad politics, and my political life has been longer than my life in the cinema. That thing which you call victory, and here I am speaking to the military leaders as well...well the day you reach it, whatever you imagine it is, will be the day that this country has already been divided. For this reason, we say that this isn't the way forward. For this reason, we asked the leader of the National Security Council what reason they had sent tanks into civilian neighborhoods. What changed so quickly? What calculations are being made [behind closed doors]? Seriousness, responsibility, political analysis, these are just 'his words' [T: lafı], so start with this: come [meet], and if it's the *kaçak çay* that has upset you badly we will offer you Rize tea, but it's a matter of life [and death] that we bring our homeland back onto democratic foundations to discuss these issues.²³

²²For video of his remarks, see *Bursa Hayat*. "Davutoğlu'ndan HDP'ye kaçak çay tepkisi." Dec-28-2015. <https://youtu.be/42gGuDrlxJo>. I have included an extensive translation of both Davutoğlu's remarks (excerpted above) and Önder's subsequent response in the appendix.

²³Remarks pieced together from a series of videos recording Önder's remarks (lasting over 20 minutes in total) published by Doğan Haber Ajansı can still be found on MYNET under nearly the same title "HDP'li Önder: Kaçak çaya hallendiyseniz Rize çayı ikram ederiz." 28-Dec-2015; and from transcript in article (with an identical title) on CNN TURK. "HDP'li Önder: "Kaçak

What is notable about this exchange for our purposes is how both men drew on ideas of *samimiyet* to legitimate their political claims and as well as to ground their moral authority, as well as how a notion of *samimiyet* is here again linked to the consumption of tea, and the role that tea itself plays in the construction of social persons and the making of social relationships. Throughout the exchange, Önder and Davutoğlu come to mobilize a set of interrelated and salient categories in an increasingly coordinated and interdependent manner and to deploy these categories in a corresponding struggle over moral ‘footing’ (Goffman 1979) vis-a-vis both one another and a set of larger, divergent publics in Turkey and North Kurdistan. In the process, both their respective identities and their authority to represent others in public are mutually contested and figuratively remade. In focusing on shifts in alignment between the two public figures and their divergent audiences (and necessary reframing of categories that follows) become poetically organized around the concepts of ‘seriousness’ (T: *ciddiyet*) and *samimiyet*, I argue that we can gain important insight into these concepts function as ideologized value metrics in public life more broadly and offer a better understanding how acts of public alignment bridge the scales of the personal and the political.

In this incipient exchange between two public figures, linguistic anthropologists will recognize an emergent pair-part structure in two-turn discursive space (Silverstein 2003), albeit once stretched out in duration and expanded in scale through a mass-media space-time. In part this is the artifice of the ethnographer: the transcript of Davutoğlu’s remarks, for instance, were excerpted from a five-minute video recording published online by *Hürriyet* and is itself only a partial record of a longer press conference given by the Prime Minister in Ataturk airport in

çaya hallendiyseniz Rize çayı ikram ederiz." 28-Dec-2015. See Appendix 1 for extended transcript.

Istanbul immediately before an official visit to Serbia; and Önder’s long response in Ankara later that day is even more dramatically excerpted from video and press transcripts of the press conference. But the exchange was also given this form by the mass media in Turkey, who were primarily responsible for constructing the event as a back-and-forth between two public figures around the subject of tea, even as the two politicians obliged by taking one another’s performances in an increasingly coordinated manner.²⁴



Figure 3.5: Screenshot from publicly available video footage of Davutoğlu and Önder’s press conferences

In taking up one another’s remarks, Önder and Davutoğlu come to engage in a mutually coordinated, if oppositional public performance. It begins with Önder’s rejection of interparty talks about a constitution absent a cease-fire in North Kurdistan (**turn 1**). It escalates sharply with Davutoğlu’s accusations of support for terrorism and the questioning of the moral integrity of Kurdish MPs and voters (**turn 2**). Finally, the PM’s sustained outburst sets up Önder’s final response by entailing a further set of contextual conditions, which Önder subsequently shapes into his own, longer rebuttal (**turn 3**). In answering the PM’s accusations, Önder comes to

²⁴ Consider the headlines of three articles from which I draw parts of the exchange above: “HDP-member Önder to Prime Minister Davutoğlu: You will drink your *kaçak çay* and go”, “ Prime Minister Davutoğlu’s response to the HDP about *kaçak çay*” and “HDP-member Önder: If you are upset about *kaçak çay*, we will offer [you] Rize (Turkish) tea.”

mobilize of the same values in reverse (‘no, it is you rather than us that lack *samimiyet* and seriousness’), accusing Prime Minister and the government of failing to respect the basic rights of Kurds and abandoning their commitment to peace. What is also notable about this exchange for our purposes is the way that this entire exchange is mediated through metaphors about tea and is shaped by contested metrics of *samimiyet*. As I suggest above, this has the effect of creating a metasemiotic framing that projects moral modalities of relationality governing enduring, face-to-face relationships and the basic obligations of hospitality and mutual consideration. At the same time it offers a productive window onto how a central social value is mobilized in relation to differently positioned social persons and created in public performance.

In emphasizing his status as a guest, significantly, Davutoğlu reframes what is, in reality, a political relationship between the then-nominal leader of the Turkish government and a small Kurdish parliamentary opposition (at a moment of incipient civil war) as a moral relationship between hosts and guests. Indeed, what seems to have irked the PM about the affair the most was not the HDP’s opposition to government policy – something he dismissed as simply as their ‘world view’ (T: *dünya görüşü*) – but how Önder and other HDP MPs had supposedly personally spoken against him despite his status as a future ‘guest.’ Putting all the ‘political stuff’ (T: *siyasi şeyler*) aside, the PM suggests [par 1.1] – (All subsequent citations refer to the expanded transcript in Appendix 1) – it is their lack of respect to the fundamental moral obligation of hospitality is most damning. In contrast to the Kurdish politicians, whom Davutoğlu attacks for their refusal to host him, Davutoğlu declares that the doors of his party remain open to them (on the condition that the Kurdish politicians are indeed ‘samimi’ and ‘serious’) and thus affirms before a wider public his and his party’s own commitments to the moral norms of hospitality and negotiation. However, this same metric, importantly, is then reversed in Önder’s response, where

he not only insists that the government had an open invitation but that declares that they would be willing to serve ‘Rize’ (i.e. ‘Turkish’) tea if their own preference for *kaçak çay* was the barrier to peace, thereby showing himself not only as hospitable, but more open to compromise for the sake of the greater social good.

It was by no means inevitable that Davutoğlu ultimately takes up Önder’s invocation of *kaçak çay* as an attack on his personal dignity. As I suggest above, Önder’s reference to *kaçak çay* originally functioned to signal his and his party’s alignment with an oppositional political identity. For many Kurdish communities in Turkey, the PM’s subsequent display of disgust at the suggestion he would drink *kaçak çay* likely only served to reinforce a widespread sentiment of distance from the value projects of the Turkish nation-state. For a wider Turkish public, however, the PM’s framing of again confirms its negative association in the Turkish popular imagination with terrorism and the PKK – hence the PM’s suggestion that HDP MPs could ‘go to Kandil’ (i.e. the military headquarters of the PKK in the Kandil mountains of Northern Iraq) to drink their tea.

In taking up Önder’s comments on *kaçak çay* and in identifying Önder directly (if by part-time profession and not by name), moreover, Davutoğlu too works to reframe a political conflict between the government and a pro-Kurdish opposition party into a personal conflict between two men. In invoking the status of a future ‘guest’, importantly, Davutoğlu dismisses the HDP MPs’ public opposition to state violence in Kurdistan as both a personal insult and a public act of disrespect that he could ignore neither ‘personally’ (T: şahsi olarak) nor from his ‘public position’ (T: bulunduğum makamdan olarak) as PM [par 1.1]. Multiple times during his remarks, in fact, Davutoğlu draws attention to a distinction between speaking as ‘Prime Minister’ and in the name of the nation, and speaking personally and with the capacity for humility [par

1.1, 1.2]; and he also vacillates between these two social voices throughout his speech, most obviously by switching between the third and first persons [e.g. beginning of par 1.2]. But Davutoğlu ultimately declares that it was with respect to the fundamentally personal relationship between host and guest (‘leaving the political things aside for a moment’) that Kurdish and HDP MPs had demonstrated their *samimiyetsizlik* (‘absence of *samimiyet*’) most openly [paragraph 1.1].

In the PM’s remarks, significantly *samimiyet* is deployed as a metric not only to evaluate Kurdish politicians but the Kurdish voters who had supported the HDP in the last two elections. While Davutoğlu acknowledges that many ‘intellectuals’ and others²⁵ might have supported Kurdish HDP/BDP candidates ‘in a *samimi* way’ (T: *samimi bir şekilde*”), this evaluation is then predicated on them recognizing this deception and turning against their elected parliamentarians and municipal governments at a moment of political crisis and in the face of state violence [par 1.2]. In this way, the primary substance of the HDP’s public discourse – hundreds of civilian deaths, thousands of civilians trapped in their homes and many thousands more forced to flee, the need for an immediate end to fighting as a precondition for political talks in the interest of all parties – is erased and any space for political negotiation is foreclosed.

Once more, in the PM’s invocation of the ‘*samimiyet* test’ (T: ‘*samimiyet testi*’) [par 1.2] – a political trope among AKP officials and a wider pro-government right-wing represented by *Yeni Şafak* and similar publications – we see evidence of precisely that modality of ‘moral authoritarianism’ identified by Bora (2018) above, in which “morality take the place of politics, and those in authority determine the measure or one’s morals.” (p. 25) By claiming the power to

²⁵In fact, in the June 2015 elections Kurdish parties won very large majorities in almost all of the major cities in the East and the Southeast of Turkey, including 77.7% in Diyarbakir, the largest city and unofficial capital of North Kurdistan.

publicly evaluate the *samimiyet* of their political counterparts as if they were known persons (as opposed to political representatives), AKP leaders like Erodoğan and former AKP leaders like Davutoğlu can summarily dismiss oppositional views as morally unqualified for comment (and, by virtue of their positions of power, outside of state interest or concern). If the AKP regime invokes *samimiyet* so centrally in its public discourse, however, they do so because it carries wider social resonances. And this also means that *samimiyet* is active and salient as a value metric even when it is not explicitly named as such. In fact, Bora, drawing on his observations of Erdoğan, argues that it is perhaps most effective when not explicitly invoked: “one thing that anyone brings to mind when they constantly talk about *samimiyet*” he notes, “(especially when they pronounce with a shadda, like *samiğmiyet*) is *samimiyetsizlik* (p. 20).” Here Bora is making fun of conservative attempts to emphasize ‘proper’ Arabic pronunciation to give the concept greater moral authority. But Bora expects his readers to also perceive the irony here: *samimiyet* is certainly derived from Arabic, but it is not an central category of Islamic thought or ethics,²⁶ even if government supporters think they may position as such by emphasizing its Arabic origins.²⁷ Rather it is a popular value with cultural resonance across Turkish and Kurdish society.

This is apparent in how Önder, in turn, inverts the metrics through which *samimiyet* ought to be evaluated. In his long response, Önder works to establish a kind of implicit ethical footing with respect both to his obligations as a host (vis-a-vis Davutoğlu) and their mutual responsibilities as political leaders. *Samimiyet*, in Önder’s formulation, becomes reframed not around one’s identity as Turkish or one’s celebration of the Turkish nation-state, but around

²⁶As is, for example, a concept of ‘ikhlās’ (إخلاص), or ‘ihlas’ in Turkish, a word also often translated as ‘sincerity.’

²⁷ Here Bora is making phone of conservative attempts to emphasize ‘proper’ Arabic pronunciation to give the word more moral authority.

more fundamental moral questions concerning one's ethical obligations toward others in a community. Namely, the obligation of those in state power to protect the rights of its citizens, or the requirement of public leaders to remain open to reconciliation, as when Önder speaks of the duty of politicians to seek solutions through mediation [par 2.6], as well as when he repeatedly emphasizes the open nature of their invitation to meet [par 2.2, 2.3, 2.6, 2.8 and 2.9].

In the two's confrontations over the meaning of *samimiyet*, moreover, we gain a critical insight on its capacity to convey meaning as an ideologized category and as a value enacted and recognized in social life: *samimiyet* can be mobilized as a metric to evaluate the motivations of the social persons involved in a relationship (and by extension the quality of the relationship itself), but it can do so only in relation some third horizon of value (e.g. the family, the Turkish nation-state, democracy and mutual co-existence, friendship, the Kurdish language and its protection, and development). When Davutoğlu wants to question the *samimiyet* of Kurdish politicians, he does so in relation to their commitment to the Turkish republic as a political project ('I thought they were going to Turkeyify?' [par 1.2]), declaring that he would talk 'politics' with anyone, but that he would not debate Turkey's 'completeness' (T: bütünlük) or 'unity' (T: birliklik) with anyone [ibid]. Here Davutoğlu is voicing an institutionalized state discourse that frames any move to question the founding principles of the Republic (including the centrality of the Turkish nation and Turkish language) as *prima facie* evidence of their *samimiyetsizlik*. Önder's formulation, in contrast, assesses the government's lack of *samimiyet* in relation to an explicitly different horizon of value ('God keep us from their understanding of *samimiyet*' [par 2.2]). This horizon of value is predicated on a mutual recognition of social differences ('We never said we would become Turkish'[par 2.4]) and a commitment to a 'democratic' co-existence (suggested through the repeated invocation of 'common life' (T: ortak

yaşam) [par 2.4] and a ‘common future’ (T: ortak gelecek) [par 2.3] that is itself expressed through the acknowledgment and projection of basic rights (‘You cannot drive over people with tanks and then talk about co-existence’ [par 2.4]).

Throughout the exchange, importantly, *samimiyet* is not the only contested value but is continually link to a concept of ‘seriousness’ (T: ciddiyet). Throughout the exchange, both politicians over its publically recognized qualities and ‘seriousness’ becomes linked to everything from questions of public decorum (i.e. ‘fits of rage’ [par 2.1]), professional status (i.e. ‘screenwriter’ [p 2.5]), personal reliability and the integrity and capacity to keep public commitments (e.g. the debate around the terms and dimensions of the peace process [par 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.7, 2.8, 2.9]). Seriousness is first invoked by Davutoğlu toward the end of his intervention, where it is ostensibly deployed to evaluate Önder’s remark about *kaçay çay*; but where it also becomes linked to Önder’s status as a ‘screenwriter’ (T: senarist), and by extension to socially available indexical associations with unserious and artificial modalities of behavior (e.g. ‘senaryo yazmak’, lit. to write screenplays; to make up stories; to invent things, etc.) [paragraph 1.3].

In his response, Önder also brings to our attention to a recurring element in AKP discourse of contempt for artists and artistic production [par 2.5]. Employing the contextual conditions already in play, he takes up the label of ‘screenwriter’ to assume, at points throughout his remarks, the voice of a ‘filmmaker’ (T: sinemacı); a voice that he subsequently employs to reframe Davutoğlu’s attack 1) in relation to the AKPs lack of creativity and imagination [par 2.5]; in relation to the question of public perception and judgment [par 2.6, 2.8]; and 3) in relation to his qualifications to speak on politics [par 2.9]. Önder thus coordinates his use of categories with Davutoğlu’s in order to invert the value metrics through which the latter

originally presented them. Önder begins by noting the AKP's contempt for and complete lack of understanding of art ('The PM thinks it's easy to make a film' [par 2.5]), linking this contempt and lack of understanding to the regime's unimaginative stewardship of the Turkish economy, their inability to create anything of lasting cultural value, and the tendency toward political oppression [ibid].

He also draws on the persona of the filmmaker to align himself with the 'people' (T: halk) against the PM and his party colleagues, drawing a connection between artistic sensibility and popular notions of common sense as interdependent and overlapping forms of public judgment. The first time he links the filmmaker with the wisdom of the people through the citation of a proverb ('Mr. PM, ask your consultants what this filmmaker meant to say before responding' [par 2.6]). He then draws an equivalence between the filmmaker and the people through cooccurrence ('the filmmaker doesn't miss such things and the people don't miss such things' [par 2.8]). Here, importantly, Önder is mobilizing the people as both witness and judge – a tactic employed by both men multiple times during their remarks [par 1.1, 1.4 and 2.2, 2.3,2.4, 2.8].- and points to how Davutoğlu's assertions of seriousness are deeply compromised by his failure to live up to publicly-made commitments and by his inability to stand up for himself when any of his important rivals (including the president and other members of his own party) attack him in public. At the center of the exchange, therefore, are contested understandings of *samimiyet* and seriousness and competing evaluations of the two men's respective capacities to embody these values before a wider, shifting public.

Önder, finally, responds to Davutoğlu's invocation of his persona as 'screenwriter' one last time when he sarcastically asks the PM (and his audience) to look past his role as a filmmaker to see his final warning about the catastrophic consequences of a failure to return to

negotiations as the advice of a man who is also experienced in politics [par 2.8]. A half-hearted appeal to gravitas, it also has an effect of humor, and therefore of destabilizing the very kind of public self-regard that Davutoğlu's explicit mobilization of 'seriousness' brings to the exchange in the first place. Like Önder's vacillation between informal and formal registers and exaggerated forms of respect (as when he sarcastically refers to Davutoğlu as 'his excellency' (T: hazretleri) [ibid]), his repeated moments of self-deprecation undermines the very metric of 'seriousness' he appears to be contesting.

Here we can clearly see how public performances are not just about discourse but encompass a host of socially salient signs mediated by everything from body language and dress to institutional personas and their shifting forms of self-presentation. Thus beyond and encompassing the encounter as denotational text – that is beyond the words that were actually said by either participant (or the partial transcripts assembled by the anthropologist) – is a further layer of social text bearing implicit sets of cultural meanings that configures the interaction for both participants and the public but which only become apparent during the interaction; “an emerging multidimensional array of repetition, comparison, and contrast, an organization of denotational information that is interactionally effective because it comes to entextualized formedness in a particular way in the course of conversation” (Silverstein 2004 p. 628). Seated in front of a large portrait of Atatürk and before the assembled press cameras (see figure 3.5), Davutoğlu declares that he is the representative of the nation and the state and that the nation cannot act humbly [par 1.1, 1.2]. And from this ritually configured seat of power, he questions whether Önder possesses the 'seriousness' to occupy his public office [par 1.3].

Önder in turn responds by explicitly questioning the PM's seriousness, but he also responds by performatively reframing the value metrics through which the interaction is to be

interpreted through his posture, mannerisms, and his easy interaction with reporters. Unlike Davutoğlu, importantly, Önder never invokes humility explicitly, but he does create its effect by mobilizing, throughout the interaction, a set of recognizable gestures, stances, and voices that point to it implicitly. Seated at ground level across a conference table from reporters in a party meeting room at the Turkish parliament (see figure 3.5), wearing not (like either Atatürk or Davutoğlu) a suit and tie but a wool sweater, and drinking a cup of tea. In contrast to the Prime Minister, whose power he acknowledges ('All public institutions are under your control.' [par 2.5]), he repeatedly downplays his own personal value and importance. At one point he notes that he is willing to return to prison if necessary [par 2.6]²⁸, and at another point he offers to remove himself from the political process entirely if he has become an obstacle, and even to kill himself in the garden of parliament if it would bring peace [par 2.7].

Such a performance creates contradictory effects. On the one hand, it allows Önder to successfully participate in the hyper-masculine modalities of public contestation that have become a central feature of public life under the AKP and for which Önder himself was well-known during his time as MP. These are modalities characterized by excessive attention to questions of personal dignity and reputation and aggressive public challenges marked by personalized insults – as when, for example, Davutoğlu dismisses Önder as an unserious 'screenwriter' and *kaçak çay* drinker [par 1.3]; or when Önder points out that Davutoğlu was a weak, unpopular Prime Minister who was disrespected even by his own political allies ('No one takes you seriously. No one says it, but it's the truth' [par 2.8]). On the other hand, his destabilization of the metrics of 'seriousness' – and its ideological framings of the expectations

²⁸ In 2018 Önder would be sentenced to 3.5 years in prison on charges of 'promulgating terrorist propaganda' for his public acts of defiance during this period. He was paroled in October 2019.

of public behavior – allows him to establish a different moral footing that realigns his relationship toward Davutoğlu (and by extension a wider public) along an axis of mutual moral obligation that reframes ‘seriousness’ as a metric of value. This axis extends from the responsibilities of hosts towards their guests (already enregistered in Davutoğlu’s press conference) to the need to respect fundamental rights (to life, to bury the dead) and the mutual responsibility of political leaders to look for negotiation and compromise as basic conditions for a ‘common existence’ (T: ortak yaşam)[par 2.4]. Önder responds to accusations of inhospitality by emphasizing that he and his party had always been open to receive the government delegation (‘We never said you weren’t welcome, just that we wouldn’t accomplish anything of substance under these conditions’ [par 2.6]) and by repeating returning to a call, most poignantly at the end (as its uptake in subsequent media accounts demonstrates), for Davutoğlu to accept their invitation and come meet [p 2.9].

“Seriousness, responsibility, political analysis, these are just his words (T: lafi)” he concludes, “so start with this: come [meet], and if it’s the *kaçak çay* that has upset you badly we will offer you Rize tea, but it’s a matter of life [and death] that we bring our homeland back onto democratic foundations in order to discuss these issues” [par 2.9]. Drawing on a popular theory of language, Önder here makes an analogy between both Davutoğlu (and by extension his own) discursive invocation of the value metrics of *seriousness* and *samimiyet* and mere ‘empty words’ (as in (T) ‘boş konuşmak’, lit. to speak emptily), thereby differentiating the problem of words denotational values on the one hand and their actual instantiation in social practice on the other (a folk theory of language, coincidentally, that has parallels to linguistic anthropology’s own critique of certain approaches within formal linguistics). The repetition of the public invitation to meet at the end of remarks, coupled with the offer to serve Turkish (‘Rize’) instead of *kaçak çay*

– an inversion of the recurring deictic opposition between ‘our tea’ and ‘your tea’ that ritually frames the entire encounter – here works to configure Önder as the more serious public figure (at least in relation to his own constituencies) who puts his public duties before personal pride. But it simultaneously functions as a display of *samimiyet*, here framed both as an ethical call to inhabit the position of the other and as a signal to both the government and a Turkish public more broadly that he (and by extension those he represented) were still committed to a political project predicated on co-existence and mutual acknowledgment (‘you should come and meet’) – a recurring feature of official Kurdish political discourse that Tambar (2016) has identified under the heading of ‘ethics of expectation.’

Some might protest that the public exchange between Önder and Davutoğlu is ultimately insignificant. It lasted only a couple of days (with the majority of the exchange taking place on December 28th, 2015). Moreover, it appears to have changed little in the course of the conflict and largely faded from public memory in the months of violence that followed. But following Silverstein (2005), I suggest that in paying attention to the poetics of political practice as inscribed in such exchanges we come to better understand how politics is imagined and political action made socially effective. Specifically, I find this exchange insightful as a record of a mass-mediated, publicly enregistered political encounter at a moment of crisis in the recent history of North Kurdistan, in which also the objects, values, and ideas in which our discussion is currently most invested – tea, *samimiyet*, interrelated modalities of mass politics and face-to-face sociality – are centered and made cogent. I do not draw attention to the formal poetic features of this exchange as a semiotic performance to aestheticize the encounter – indeed, as evinced by Davutoğlu’s remarks above, at times the most banal and tedious performances are the most insightful – but to point to how an analysis of how social actors engage in a public, semiotic

protection of self in relation to social others can offer important insights into how people understand and evaluate forms of political practice (and thus how political practice becomes meaningful and effective more generally).

As Silverstein (2005) argues, “political events, that is, events that can be analyzed in relation to a political order, reach whatever effectiveness they have only in a semiotic – a sign-mediated – order or they don't reach any effectiveness at all qua sociocultural fact” (p. 3). In other words, for any political event to have meaning or social effectiveness it needs to construct itself through culturally salient sets of sign relationships that can be taken up and redeployed across a wide social field. Public figures are ‘public’ exactly because they stand for people before other public persons and institutions in socially meaningful ways (Dewey 1927). Their capacity to make their actions socially meaningful and efficacious, that is their effectiveness as political acts, is inseparable from their ability to semiotically intervene in the “interpersonal, intersubjective spaces of mutual adjustment of people” (Silverstein 2005 p. 3).

Analyses of political exchanges such as the one between the two politicians are insightful, therefore, inasmuch that they allow us to observe how culturally salient categories become differently mobilized across social space as part of divergent sets of sign relations. What becomes evident in analyzing the exchange is how the meanings of the central social categories employed by both participants in coordination with one another remain dynamic and subject to reinterpretation as they are repeatedly re-enregistered within different relations of signification. Looking beyond the individual rhetorical capacities of both men, the contested circumstances leading to the collapse of the peace process, the responsibility of political and military leaders for the violence that followed, or even the reproduction of anti-Kurdish discourses within Turkey's institutional order we can begin to see how *samimiyet* becomes mobilized as value metric across

multiple modalities of public life and how its meanings are transformed as it is developed in contested acts of public making.

Conclusion: *Samimiyet* and the University

In this chapter, I have shown how *samimiyet* carries important political resonances in Turkey in large part because it also serves as a widely deployed moral metric to evaluate life in the family and the community. It thus works to transform formal face-to-face relationships (e.g. a professor and a student) into a mode of relationality transcending its institutional basis in the workplace, state office, university, et al. to encompass other modalities of value. Within the LLI, for example, students often described as *samimi* those modalities of relationality that began to mediate between professors and students when these complementary (if opposite) institutional identities begin to cede space in everyday interaction to other more horizontally aligned forms of recognition and address (such as much might mediate between colleagues or friends).

Turkish state universities are Turkish state institutions, and the social distance between professors and students is institutionalized in official disparities of power and status. This is true for all state universities in Turkey, but is more pronounced in newly created ‘provincial universities’ (**T**: taşra üniversitesi) where individual campus cultures are generally less developed and where professors and students alike are less likely to form enduring attachments to the institutions where they work and study. In North Kurdistan, this reality is further intensified by the securitization of higher education – a process that is furthest developed in Kurdish regions. Relationships between students and professors are often mediated through security officials from outside the university, who pressure faculty to monitor dissident students (and incentivize disgruntled students to inform on professors with non-conforming politics). As the country’s first degree-granting program in Kurdish language and education, the LLI and

Artuklu University has been especially targeted for scrutiny by the state authorities; since 2014, it has lost more than half of its original faculty have been dismissed or driven into exile, while hundreds of students have been forced to withdraw without completing their degrees.

In this environment, relations between students and their professors at the university are often fraught with accusations of and worries around complicity with Turkish state power, in addition to more generalized feelings of anxiety, neglect, and suspicion. At the same time, however, students and professors can relate to each other and one another in a manner that reflects a different set of social values. For instance, efforts to transform the Kurdish language into a modern, literary standard for future use in higher education, as well as locally valorized medium of everyday communication, is a goal that has consistently brought students and professors at the LLI together outside the ‘official’ spaces of the university – such as in cafes, union buildings, galleries, publishing houses, etc – in a way that reframes their relationships. Kurdish language activism thus constitutes a common horizon of value that brings students and professors together beyond the formal hierarchies of the institute, often sitting over glasses of tea. As one former student at the institute put it to me when reflecting on his relationship with the institute’s faculty, there are basically two basic types of professor at the institute: those who would go to a cafe with their students and drink tea in a *samimi* fashion, and those who would not. Indeed, as I discuss in the following chapter, in comparison with the *resmiyet* (‘officialdom’) of the LLI, the cafe was often pointed to by my interlocutors as a space professors and students could meet on a more equal footing as members of a common Kurdish public beyond the formal institutional hierarchies and disparities in status that, in addition to various forms of state surveillance, overshadow many interactions in the university.

In the context of Kurdish language activism, moreover, a relation of *samimiyet* also entails common reference to a larger horizon of value: Kurdish language and culture. In this special sense, one calls another ‘samimi’ – even if otherwise excessively formal, reserved or aloof – when their commitment to the protection and development of Kurdish is understood to be genuine and not predicated through some form of personal gain or aggrandizement. To be *samimi* in this sense, therefore, means to share a set of common ends and to pursue them as values unto themselves irrespective of the personal benefits that might accrue. Upon initial consideration, these two senses of *samimiyet* may appear distinct. Upon closer examination, however, they can be understood to be interdependent. As a widely recognized social value, *samimiyet* configures a metric for assessing relations among people, but such an assessment can only be made in relation to some larger horizon of value – a horizon that is itself created and realized in public life. In the next chapter how I will return to the subject of the cafe (specifically the Kurdish book cafe), and ask how tea and a concept of *samimiyet* are centrally motivated in a public making project that seeks to shift the social values ascribed to Kurdish-language text objects and to recruit members of a wider Kurdish speech community into this emergent public of value.

Chapter 4: Cafe Culture in North Kurdistan

This chapter considers the introduction of a new social institution into North Kurdistan over the past two-three decades: the '*kafe*'. The *kafe* is a new style of urban cafe, associated in Mardin with both 'student', 'youth' culture as well as with the local imitations of 'world cafe culture' as defined by new international beverage options, decore, and novel forms of sociality and is primarily patronized by students and young people on the one hand, and a growing class of middle and upper-class consumers on the other. On one level, I contrast the *kafe* with older institutions of an analogous type, namely the 'coffeehouse' and the 'guesthouse', and describe how these are differentiated in terms of their perceived modes of sociality and the prevailing relations of value between participants; and I show how the *kafe* is the product of past two

decades of neoliberal development in North Kurdistan. On the other hand, however, I discuss how sociality in the *kafe* also reflects deeper cultural logics that both precede and, at times, supersede the value metrics of commodity exchange, namely those reciprocal and redistributive logics that are also active, in different degrees, in the coffeehouse and guesthouse (as I described in the previous chapter). In this chapter, I argue that the *kafe* as a value needs to be understood in relation both to recent transformations in North Kurdistan's society and political economy, and, to how these new relations of value are articulated through more deeply established social values that shape the making of social persons through participation in common value projects and the sharing of beverages. I thus endeavor to show how larger social value projects take on meaning before a wider public they are simultaneously realized in interpersonal relationships. In this way, I show how values imagined to be central to lived face-to-face relationships as made in the *kafe* (e.g. generosity and *samimiyet*) become re-interpolated as central values in the making of the larger public of value.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I described how Mardin emerged over the past decade and a half as a new object of capital investment and accumulation. I also described, however, how within Mardin (and North Kurdistan more widely) this new regime of accumulation, driven by cheap credit and the flux of foreign investors into the Turkish economy, remained limited to a small number of sectors, with the most growth occurring in real estate and construction, alongside entertainment and leisure (and in Mardin, tourism), and education. The prolific growth in *kafes* in Mardin, notably, spans all of these economic sectors. The rapid expansion of Mardin's 'New City' (T: Yeni Şehir) has essentially doubled the size of Mardin's urban area since the turn of the century, with many new *kafes* opening in or nearby the scores of new residential and commercial developments constructed during this period; at the same time,

new *kafes* have also opened in ‘Old Mardin’ (**T**: Eski Mardin)¹, next to and above² the dozens of new hotels that now target Mardin’s seasonal waves of domestic tourists – and slower, a constant trickle of foreign backpackers and heritage tourists; and finally, the creation of the Artuklu University in 2007 and its expansion in subsequent years occurred concurrently with the rapid proliferation of *kafes* targeting the city’s growing student population, which today numbers around ten thousand (or just under ten percent of the city’s population).

The *kafe* in Mardin is thus positioned at the end nodes of diverse national and global value chains; and today, arguably, it serves as one of the best representatives and most enduring legacies of the prior decade-and-half of ‘economic development’ in North Kurdistan. The *kafe*, however, has also emerged as a central institution shaping the formation and reproduction of new urban publics, characterized by novel forms of public sociality and is therefore also closely implicated in the shifting modalities of value shaping social relations in the region. In this way, importantly, the social life of the *kafe* closely mirrors that of older institutions of analogous type –i.e. the ‘coffeehouse’ (**Q**:qahve; **T**: kahve) or ‘teahouse’ (**Q**: çayxane **T**: çayevi) – despite salient differences in perceived qualities between the two and the central role of the former in introducing new modes of sociality into Kurdish urban life in recent decades. As such, more than simply a site of commodity consumption, or neoliberal subject formation, or evidence for the emergence of a new capitalist consumer culture in North Kurdistan, the *kafe* is also playing an important role in the institutionalization of new value projects underlying important social shifts (economic, but also political and cultural) in public life.

¹ Also known as ‘Upper Mardin’ in Kurdish (Mêrdînê Jor) and Turkish (Yukarı Mardin)

² Many hotels have converted their open roofs into cafes where customers can appreciate the old city’s expansive view onto the Syrian plain.

In the first section of this chapter, I introduce the *kafe* as a contested value project and describe how it differentiated from other social spaces along four primary axes of differentiation: the first differentiates between the *kafe* (and older forms of coffeehouse culture) as a site of ‘leisure’ or ‘idleness’ in contrast to the virtuous domain of religion and the productive domains of commerce and industry; the second differentiates the *kafe* from older forms of coffeehouse culture by reference to the former’s mixed-gender and younger patrons; and, the third axes differentiates individual *kafes* from one another based on a set of interrelated factors –namely their perceived customer types, their location in social space, and their orientation to wider value regimes (e.g. the market or Kurdish language activism).

In the second section, I provide an overview of the recent history of the *kafe* in Kurdistan, contrasting it both with more traditional forms of coffeehouse culture on the one hand and the rural institution of the ‘guesthouse’ on the other. I trace how, in my conversations with my interlocutors, differences in the imagined qualia of newer *kafes* are in turn ideologically linked to specific types of personhood (e.g. ‘students’, ‘memurs’, and especially ‘youth’), forms of sociality (horizontal or ‘samimi’ relations between peers), and a multiplicity of narrower social value projects. At the same time, I draw attention to efforts to shift the interrelated qualia shaping public reception of the *kafe*, pointing to how indexical relationships between person-types, commodities, and linguistic practices shape perceptions of the *kafe* in Kurdistan more widely.

In the third section, I draw attention to the *kafe* as organizing a set of related spatial-semiotic ideologies that link to the *kafe* with sets of conventionalized social qualia, as well to larger, meta-discursively constructed and socially salient ‘qualisigns of value’ (Munn 1986) such as those organized around the categories of ‘productivity’ and ‘profitability’ or, on a different register of value, ‘spirit’ and ‘culture’; and I consider how these qualia shape the articulation of

competing models of the *kafe* and their mobilization within contested value projects. At the same time, I examine a contrast drawn by the Turkish president' between his own project to create 'national reading houses' with free tea and coffee on the one hand and ordinary *kahves* or *kafes* on the other. The president's discursive positioning of this project points, I argue, to other dimensions of value within the *kafe* that supersede, at the same time that they mediate, the *kafe*'s existence as a market enterprise and point to its status as a site of social value production more broadly. Specifically, I show how the *kafe* – along with a larger set of analogous institutions – are differently imagined as sites of productive social work on the one hand, and sites of idleness and consumption on the other. Subsequently, I argue that this discrepancy emerges as both one of the primary theoretical tensions in efforts to understand the relationship between contemporary cafe culture and commodity exchange on the one hand, and as opposing metadiscourses on cafes and coffeehouses within Kurdish and Turkish society more broadly that is routinely mobilized by my interlocutors in assessing the value of individual *kafes*.

In the chapter's final section, I put my own approach to the *kafe* in conversation with two dominant (and interrelated) liberal paradigms of the cafe, specifically those developed by Habermas and the 'third place' literature developed by Oldenburg (1989), et al., pointing to how the *kafe* often produces modes of relationally that exceed the categories of both market relations and the bonds of civility and friendship -categories that are supposed to be formally opposed to market relations. Drawing on Marxist and feminist critiques of liberal models of the cafe – as well as on work in linguistic anthropology that explores the institutionalization of semiotic ideologies and the intersection of mass mediation, commodification and face-to-face communicative practices – I propose an alternative heuristic model to understand the *kafe* that is built on sustained ethnographic attention to 1) the competing modalities of sociality and semiotic

ideologies that shape social relations in the *kafe* and peoples' perceptions of these relations; as well as to how 2) the ways that the value created in the *kafe* is realized in the construction of multiple kinds of social relationships and their orientation toward distinct horizons of value. This is a model whose theoretical dimensions I seek to describe in this chapter and a model that, in the following, I redeploy in an empirical analysis of value creation in Kurdish-language 'book cafes' (**K**: *pirtûk kafe*), showing how the *pirtûk kafe* - as one subset of newer *kafes* - has become central in popularizing forms Kurdish-language public culture.

I. The *kafe* as a value project

In Turkey and North Kurdistan, the *kafe* is a value project that is contested along three general axes of differentiation. As a more 1) abstract type of social institution, the *kafe* is often compared to an older set of analogous institutions – i.e. the 'coffeehouse' (**T**: *kahve*; **Q**: *kahve*) and 'tavern' (**K**: *meyxane*; **T**: *meyhane*) – as common sites of 'idleness' or 'frivolity' (or, in a more neutral language, sites of 'leisure' or 'consumption'). Historically, such as in early debates about the *kahve* ('coffeehouse') soon after its emergence in the Ottoman Empire in the 16th-century, this contrast functioned primarily in relation to the virtuous spaces of religious devotion (e.g. the mosque or dervish lodge) (Hattox 2014; Karababa and Ger 2010). Following the advent of modern capitalism, increasingly, both the older culture of the *kahve* and the emergent culture of the *kafe* are also negatively contrasted with the productive spaces of commerce and industry (e.g. the factory, shop or office), and thus as a space opposed to the central values of piety and productivity. This is despite, as I discuss below, efforts by some actors to remake the *kafe* into the site of positive value creation conferring a social 'spirit' or 'vitality'.

On the other hand, as 2) a novel form of social space, the *kafe* is in fact contrasted to other institutions of analogous type (e.g. the aforementioned coffeehouse, teahouse and,

guesthouse), with the *kafe*, as indexing a capitalist novelty tied to shifting patterns of consumption and the introduction of new products and styles, and just as importantly, new modes of sociality (exemplified by the *kafe*'s status as a mixed-gendered space catering primarily to students and university graduates) likewise chronotopically linked to an emerging class of middle and upper-class consumers as well as a new generation of Kurdish youth with its unique culture and sociolinguistic practices. The *kafe* (i.e. new style urban café) thus differentiates itself from the *kahve* (or traditional coffeehouse) with respect to larger chronotopic and generational ideologies and the value horizons to which they are imagined to be oriented.

Finally, as 1) concrete places, the *kafe* is differentiated internally from other *kafes* in terms of its orientation in social space (i.e. its class, professional, age and gender demographics, its style, and the relationship between its owners/managers/workers and its patrons, et al.). These different axes of differentiation, rather than just providing for a fixed system of ideological classification, allow for forms of nuanced and competing evaluations of the values made and realized in the *kafe* and its position in social space.

The way that these multiple axes of differentiation could be deployed in actual controversies around the *kafe* in Mardin was brought home to me sometime in late 2017, a year give or take after the *kayyum* (state-appointed trustees) took control of Mardin's government from the (duly elected) pro-Kurdish DBP party – and roughly two years from the start of the *şehir savaşı* ('city war')³. I was speaking with friends from the Living Languages Institute (LLI) about the state of Kurdish politics in Turkey. A “disgrace” (T: rezalet), one opined. In fact, like most of those I knew in Mardin, this friend reserved the bulk of the blame for recent events on

³A series of largely contemporaneous armed battles between state security services and young Kurdish militants in urban centers in North Kurdistan from 2015-2016, leading to levels of levels of displacement and destruction on par with the height of the war in the 1990s.

the Turkish state for the extreme violence used by state security forces in suppressing the young Kurdish militants tasked with defending the KCK's proclamations of local autonomy.⁴ But beyond again confirming to many in Kurdistan that their lives or rights had no importance next to the prerogatives of the state; and that despite a multi-year peace process and a series of 'multicultural openings', public life in Turkey still rested, at its foundations, on an extreme Turkish nationalism, this social trauma also had the secondary effect: namely, significantly weakening Kurdish public confidence in the Kurdish political establishment in North Kurdistan.

Sometimes those I spoke with singled out the legalized political leadership (i.e. the Kurdish parliamentarians and municipal leaders) who they said had become too comfortable in their positions and had been unwilling to risk supporting the young militants in their armed struggle. Others blamed PKK military leaders in Kandil for their glorification of violence and their distance from the lives of the people living in the cities of North Kurdistan most subjected to its policy of armed urban resistance. Many gave voice to both perspectives, in different degrees and contexts. My friend offered a blanket opinion of the leadership as a whole: 'let them all resign' (T: hepsi istifa etsinler). On the one hand, he criticized PKK leaders in Kandil for their quickness to risk the lives of the mostly poor Kurds who inhabited the urban districts that were most affected by the fighting; on the other, he assailed Kurdish civilian political leaders for their failure to develop any real alternative to the PKK's decades-old armed struggle, and for

⁴ In the subsequent fighting, lasting many months, Turkish security forces killed over one thousand people (including hundreds of civilians trapped in their houses by the fighting) and drove more than one hundred thousand more from their homes, committing multiple documented atrocities and leveling entire urban districts in provincial towns and cities across North Kurdistan (including one-third of my friend's hometown of Nusaybin, a border-city in Mardin province 60 km to the southeast of the city of Mardin).

their seeming incapacity to generate a meaningful political response to the events that had followed the collapse of the peace process in 2015.

To illustrate this latter point, he brought up the case of three former high-ranking municipal employees in Mardin (such jobs were often political appointments for higher-ranking party apparatchiks) who had lost their positions with the city following the installment of the centrally-appointed *kayyum* administration. The core of this complaint, however, was based not around how these men had conducted their service to the city when in power (as such complaints generally go), but what they had decided to do once they were forced from their city jobs: namely, they went and opened a *kafe* ('cafe'). (K) "Ma kafe çi ye?", I recall another friend asking at the time, "I mean a *kafe*, what's that?"

At the time, his question had struck me as both provocative and a bit disingenuous. But upon further reflection, I also think it can point us toward a deeper reality about the contested role of the *kafe* in public life. We both knew, for one, that my friend himself had helped to open and run a couple of *kafes* over the past several years (albeit *kafes* of a different type from the more lucrative, upscale operation the former municipal employees were said to be running). But more generally, despite his gesture toward incredulity, it was not especially surprising that the three former municipal employees would choose to go into the *kafe* business: the massive growth in the *kafe* sector in North Kurdistan over the past decade – compounded by the reality that there exist few opportunities for profitable enterprise outside of it – has made the choice to 'run a *kafe*' (T: kafe işletmek) into both a popular and practical ambition, even for those with limited access to economic capital.⁵ Once more, for those targeted by the state for their family backgrounds or

⁵The cafe thus constitutes one form of what is known in the economic development literature as a 'micro-enterprise', with its low barriers to entry allowing members of the working and middle classes to become minor entrepreneurs and business owners (citations)

political activism – like formal municipal employees, Kurdish teachers purged from their positions in state schools, or the LLI graduates who have been denied teaching positions in these same schools – working in or running a cafe is one of a small number of viable options to earn a living in the region. I know multiple former and current teachers, for instance, who in the aftermath of the massive wave of teacher suspensions in North Kurdistan in September 2016, decided to open *kafes* following the loss of their jobs; and I have heard of a dozen or more similar cases.⁶ But my friend’s expression of disapproval, I think, speaks more to the more to the context than to the institution: the choice to open a commercial *kafe* might have been unsurprising from the perspective of economic pragmatism or personal necessity, but it is an understandably disappointing response from one’s ostensible political leaders to a renewed campaign of state violence and oppression. But his comments reveal a still further insight: namely, although *kafes* are market enterprises, both the social relationships on which they depend and the relations of value that shape these relationships cannot themselves be grasped through market logics alone. Rather they require greater attention to the creation and circulation of other forms of social value,

II. The *kafe* in Mardin and North Kurdistan

Above I argued that the *kafe* was differentiated along three primary axes of differentiation. Here I need to introduce one further axis of contrast, albeit one that operates in between the first (i.e. as a contrast between spaces of consumption and spaces of virtue or productivity) and second (i.e. as a contrast between the older culture of the coffeehouse (*kahve*) and the emergent culture of the *kafe*). In comparison to the ‘guesthouse’ – and institution that, in

⁶I discuss events around the 2016 suspensions and the position of Kurdish teachers working in state schools in greater detail in the next chapter.

its ideal form is both universal (including all male members of the village) and deeply hierarchal (reflecting important distinctions in social status), both the newer *kafe* and the older *kahve* are more horizontal social institutions which are often orientated toward a specific subset of society. In contrast to the guesthouse, therefore both the *kafe* and the *kahve* represent processes of social differentiation that occur not, like in the guesthouse, on the scale of social persons (e.g. between a village headman and a dependant) but between different social groups and their division along ethnic, political and class lines. In Mardin today, however, both the *kahve* and the guesthouse are often aligned with traditional (male-dominated) Kurdish public culture, and are contrasted with the *kafes* – which are associated with the city’s recent economic transformation and the emergence of a new youth culture in the region.

Salih was one of my first Kurdish teachers in Mardin. He was from a village in the district of Qoser (T: Kızıltepe) but had fled Turkey to Europe during the height of the war between the PKK and the Turkish state in the early 1990s, when he was in his early 20s. He spent more than a decade abroad, where he finished university and became a citizen of a country in Northern Europe, learned several European languages, and became active in Kurdish-language literary circles, translating novels from English and others European language into Kurdish. He returned to Mardin around the time Artuklu University opened, toward the end of the first decade of the new millennium, enrolling in and then graduating from the MA program in Kurdish language and literature at Artuklu University. Today, Salih continues to work as a translator from his book-filled apartment in Qoser city center; now in his late 40s, he tells me how he is now learning Russian with the hope of translating Chekov to Kurdish.

One afternoon after one of our lessons, as we sat together in the large tea garden that sits across from the LLI, and Salih told me the story of the first *qehwe* (Kurdish for ‘coffeehouse’)

that opened in his village, a relatively large agricultural settlement just a few kilometers from Qoser city center. Before the opening of the *qehwe*, he recounted, male members of the village had generally gathered in the guesthouse – an institution that I introduce in the previous chapter and that local in Mardin generally call a (**K**) ‘odeya gund’ (lit. ‘village room’ analogous to the Turkish ‘köy odası’), a large, semi-public room often located either in the house of a village *aga* (denoting, in reality, anything from a nominal village headman to a major landlord) or in an independent structure owned and maintained in common by prominent residents of the village as a whole. Here the male residents of the village gathered to pass the time with caffeinated drinks (both tea and coffee)⁷, likewise hosting guests, listening to the performances of traditional Kurdish music (either in person or on the radio), or catching up on and discussing important news. However, as Salih emphasized, social life in his village during this period was increasingly shaped by the encroachment of the city – a result of the successive waves of rural to urban migrations that began in the 1960s and 1970s and then peaked in the early 1990s during the Turkish state’s campaign of forced evacuation of Kurdish villages (by virtue of their location on the Mardin plain, many of the villages around Qoser were spared mandatory evacuation but were likewise effected by rapid urbanization through either their gradual incorporation by or growing proximity to the urban development). At some point some younger residents of the village, whether inspired by their experiences of contemporary urban life or compelled by the violent changes in rural life during this period, decided to open a *qehwe* (Kurdish for ‘kahve’, or coffeehouse) in their village, thereby introducing a new form of social space into the community

⁷As discussed in the last chapter, before tea came to predominate over coffee in everyday rituals of hospitality around the turn of the 20th century, the most popular beverage in Mardin is said to have been what is locally called *mirra*, a bitter coffee.

while simultaneously undermining the social position of the *aga* and the status of his home at the center of public life in the community.

The crux of the story, however, was that a short time after opening a misunderstanding occurred among the *qehwe*'s patrons, in this case, the majority of the village's male residents (both the guesthouse and the rural coffeehouse are traditionally male spaces). The misunderstanding, the origin of which Salih thought was most probably personal and at any rate has been long-since forgotten, quickly took on other social dimensions, and shortly thereafter a second *qehwe* opened in the village. Now there were two cafes in the village: one catering primarily to older, more politically conservative villagers who were averse to the PKK and its revolutionary brand of Kurdish politics; and one catering primarily to younger village residents who were more sympathetic to the party. When he told me the story more than two decades later, he confirmed that his village still had two *qehwes*, while the large room next to the house of the village *aga* that had once hosted the *odeya gund* now stood empty and neglected.

In its simplicity, Salih's story above captures one of the fundamental social dynamics shaping the proliferation of the cafe in Kurdistan in recent decades. On the one hand, the cafe stands out as a space dominated by horizontal forms of relationality that contrast with the formal hierarchies of state institutions as well as traditional family, village, and tribal structures (as typified by the 'guesthouse' or *odeya gund*). While technically accessible to every male villager, the *odeya gund* nevertheless remains a space defined by social hierarchies, where precedence in seating might be based on status or position and where women were often barred.⁸ In cafes, in

⁸See discussion of 'guesthouse' in Barth (1953) and Leach (1940/2004). This is not to suggest that the *odêyê gund* constitutes an institution that is stable across history or homogenous across social space, although the model described above seems to have been common in large agricultural villages on the Al-Jazira plain in Southern Mardin and Urfa provinces. However, there are analogous institutions in villages across Kurdistan called by different names, as well as those

contrast, patrons generally sit around small tables in a fashion that functions either to diminish or disguise social hierarchy; and in many of the newer *kafes* in Kurdistan catering to younger patrons, women and men sit and socialize together. On the other hand, the proliferation of the cafe has been central to the production of novel forms of social distinction that point to the changing scalar dimensions of social differentiation and political conflict, as well as the presence of new cultural and aspirational horizons. Whereas the *odeya gund* in Kurdistan is (or was, depending on the village) a space where all (male) members of the community gathered to welcome village guests or discuss important matters of collective interest, individual cafes are often distinguished by their distinct social orientations and thus come to be closely associated with specific person types and their corresponding value projects.

Today in Mardin -- a city of 130,000 people – I estimate that there are at least several hundred cafes spread across every corner of the city. The majority of these cafes are new *kafes*, products of the urban transformation that has reshaped Mardin and the other cities of North Kurdistan over the past two decades. Of course, the coffeehouses in Kurdistan is nothing new; and historians of the Ottoman Empire have documented the importance of such spaces in shaping new forms of sociality in Istanbul and other Ottoman urban centers for close to half a millennium – a full century before their popularization in Western Europe (Ellis 2008; Hattox 1985). Kömeçoğlu (2005), for example, points to the central role of the Ottoman *kahvehane* (lit. ‘coffeehouse’) in creating new forms of public sociality outside the domain of the mosque and beyond the supervision of religious authorities, noting that by the late 16th Century there were already over 600 such *kahvehanes* in Istanbul alone. However, the long tradition of the

those existing under the same name but very different forms of collective or personal ownership, while many other villages do not have such spaces at all. I return to this question in my discussion of the ‘guesthouse’ in the final section of the chapter.

traditional *qewhe*, or coffeehouse⁹, in Kurdistan notwithstanding, for centuries its impact was confined to cities and towns or stops along intercity trade routes in a society where the vast majority of people lived in the countryside as nomadic pastoralists or peasants¹⁰, and its emergence as a universalized form of popular space regularly frequented by most of the population is an innovation that most likely dates no earlier than the second half of the 20th Century. Moreover, the origins of the *kafe* goes back only a few decades and constitute a newer social institution that is differentiated from more established forms of ‘coffeehouse culture’ in North Kurdistan and Turkey more broadly. Consider how Huseyin, a former student at the LLI and a Turkish-language teacher working in Diyarbakir, described these differences to me in a conversation about the *kafe* in North Kurdistan:

Huseyin: Youth (**K**: xort) spend a lot of time at *kafes* and *qehwes*.

PL: Youth or everyone? It seems a lot of people go. I mean what there always this culture of the *kafe* in Kurdistan?

Huseyin: The *kafe*, well there were *qehwes* before, course.

PL: Oh, right, so should I say *kafe*, or *qehwe*, or *qiraatxane*? Sometimes I get don’t know what to call it.

Huseyin: Actually, they are all different. For example, older people generally go to the *qehwe*, the *qehwexane*. They play Okey and other such things. Young people (**K**: ciwan) who do not play usually go to the *kafe*.

PL: But sometimes they have Okey in *kafes*, how do you know the difference?

Huseyin: The *kafe* makes itself out as a bit more modern.

PL: How so, more modern?

Huseyin: By its set up by its aesthetic. Look at a *qehwe* there are a bunch of tables. Everyone is playing *Okey*. So maybe there will have *Okey* to play at a *kafe* but

⁹Today in Kurdistan tea is primarily consumed in the *qewhe*.

¹⁰This is not to suggest that such populations had no contact with the city or knowledge of urban institutions; simply to emphasize that the urban coffeehouse was not be a site of everyday experience for the great majority. There is however ample evidence that coffee was also being consumed in rural areas soon after it was popularized in the cities, although along different patterns, as I discuss in the final section of this chapter.

there are places just to sit too. There are comfortable chairs. At a *kafe* there are both men and women, but at *qehwe* here are more men. It's also younger people at *kafes*.

In Turkish and Kurdish, as Huseyin explained, the term *kafe* invokes a more 'modern' style café (**K**: moderntir xwe dike) that differentiates itself by its 'set up' (**K**: bi şekîl), by its 'aesthetic' (**K**: bi astetîk).— an institution that only became widespread in Northern Kurdistan, as my interlocutors affirm, over the past twenty years. In contrast to the *çay bahçesi* (Turkish for 'tea garden'), which are generally hosted in larger, outdoor spaces and are usually less socially differentiated and more representative of the urban population as a whole (Wohl 2017), a *kafe* typically caters to a narrower demographic, with a specified style and a more specified position in social space. In contrast to the *kahve*, *kıraathane* or *çayevi* (**T**: 'teahouse'), on the other hand, the *kafe* is much more likely to be accessible to both women and men, and certain *kafes* in Mardin (particularly upmarket *kafes* located in new shopping malls and housing developments) now even employ young female waiters and cashiers. And unlike the *kahve* or tea house, where older, male patrons (often laborers, craftsmen or traders) converse in local dialects of Kurdish or Arabic, the *kafe* in Mardin tends to be a social space characterized by Turkish-speaking students, civil servants, and urban professionals of all genders. Finally, *kafes* are especially associated with the tastes, values, and practices of 'youth' (**K**: ciwan, xort).



Figure 4.1 : New style *kafes* in North Kurdistan, in Van (left) and Diyarbakir (right)

In Mardin, many of my interlocutors and colleagues have linked this new youth *kafe* culture to the construction of Artuklu University; and today in Mardin there are many new ‘student cafes’ (**K**: *kafeyên xwendekaran*; **T**: *öğrenci kafeleri*) counting university students among their most regular patrons. These new *kafes* are generally recognizable to the experienced observer through bundles of related qualia, including foreign-language names, colorful decors, and replicas of European artwork and Hollywood photographs, upholstered chairs, and booths (the ‘comfortable’ chairs mentioned by Huseyin) (see figure 4.1); foreign or Kurdish music, for instance, as well as Kurdish books at Kurdish culture or *pirtûk kafes*; or European-style coffee options (such as French-press, latte, espresso, *etc.*) at upmarket *kafes* in new upscale developments, hotels, and shopping malls. In turn, these objects-cum-qualia (anything from Italian espresso and upholstered chairs to foreign-language signs and music) become indexically linked in meta-discourse on the *kafe* with different kinds of social persons and their corresponding modalities of sociality.

Consider how Yunus, a graduate from the LLI, describes the importance of the *kafe* during a formal interview at his home in which we discussed the recent origins of the *kafe* and its

role in urban youth culture and contemporary Kurdish-language activism. not only promoting new kinds of learning and thinking but new forms of sociality more broadly:

Yunus: We go with the claim to intellectualism and education. But it's not only that. It's also a space where boys and girls can be together and see one another and socialize.

PL: Because they can't do this in their homes?

Yunus: No, they cannot see one another in their homes. *Kafes*, for young people, are a 'space that has recently opened' (**K**: mekan ku hat nû avakirin). The kafe is a 'safe space' (**K**: mekanekê ewle).

PL: Were there such *kafes* for young people 25 years ago?

Yunus: There were, but few. Very few. Actually, there weren't *kafes* before, there were 'patisseries' (**T**: 'pastahane'). You would go and eat your sweets, and there were also places to sit there.

PL: Was it more expensive?

Yunus: No, not really. You would drink [just] a tea or neskafe. But the presentation was different. A *kafe* is more relaxing and more comfortable. People can be more themselves.

Here Yunus sets up a set of nested contrasts. On the hand, he contrasts the newer *kafe* with an older form of public youth sociality in North Kurdistan (i.e. the *pastahane*), in which the former, with its 'different presentation' (**K**: teslima cuda). is 'more relaxing' (**K**: firehtir) and 'more comfortable' (**T**: rahatir) and where young people of different genders and backgrounds a space where they can spend time together and 'be more themselves' (**K**: zêdetir di holê xwe kirin). But, in the context of Kurdish language activism, he also contrasts a narrow set of 'culture *kafes*' and especially 'book *kafes*' with a larger, encompassing set of youth *kafes*. Whereas the former is indicative of a more specific 'claim to intellectualism and education' (**K**: iddiaya intellekulîzme û xwendinê), the *kafe* as a more generalized youth space.

In this latter formulation, Yunus links the social world of the *kafe* to that of the *pastahane* through common commodities (tea and *neskafe*) and forms of sociality (public interactions

between young, unmarried men and women). But he is also distinguished between the two: *pastahanes* are places where young people can sit and consume tea and ‘sweets’ (**K**: şirin) together; in comparison, *kafes* are space where youth can sit together for longer, less supervised by older customers and the moral orders governing relations between unmarried, non-related persons at home and ‘out in public’ (in the street, on public transportation, in a school or state office, or even in many restaurants or cafes frequented by social authorities, families, etc.). Thus, even in conservative communities (as I discuss in the next section), the *kafe* – or more specifically the youth *kafe* – is a place that is often described as standing outside, and in spatial opposition to, the domain of patriarchal authority of both the family and the state. Notice also how, when mobilized as a model of youth space, the *kafe* is made, through multiple processes of fractal recursion, to transcend distinctions between public/private (Gal 2002): on the one hand, it is understood as a ‘safe space’ where people can be themselves with known friends and acquaintances (the private space of the ‘peer group’); on the other, it is described a site of public sociality where young people interact with and in front of strangers, and take part in depersonalized forms of commodity exchange as ‘customers’. But if the *kafe* is widely acknowledged as a type of social space linked to youth values more broadly conceived everyone I spoke to would acknowledge, like Yunus, that not all youth *kafes* were the same or equally productive of meaningful social value. Indeed, all of my interlocutors drew stark contrasts to the majority of commercial *kafes* where youth wasted their money on expensive drinks or popular student *kafes* where young people wasted their time engaged in idle gossip or playing games such as backgammon and rummikub, and those more narrow set of *kafes* that centered learning, language and culture as primary social values. This is not only a distinction mobilized by young

Kurdish-language activists, but is a more generalizable contrast recognizable across North Kurdistan and Turkey.

III. The cafe as a spatio-semiotic ideology and a site of value creation

In early June 2018, with just a couple of weeks to go before Turkey's general election, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan presented a new government initiative to a large crowd of supporters at an open-air campaign rally in the Hatay, a border province in Southern Turkey. The president announced this newest project after running through a long list of the government's work in the region (from transportation infrastructure to stadiums to 'national-gardens'), in a direct challenge to his main election rival, Muharrem İnce.¹¹ The president described it to the crowd and larger mass-mediated audiences thus:

So, look I have another project too, and I'll say it to him. I'll say it to him. Mr. Muharrem, you won't steal this one, will you? You won't try to walk off with it ever so delicately.¹² (*Crowd jeers and boos*). So, what was it? God-willing a new step, we will open national 'kırathaneler' (lit. 'reading houses'¹³). Now of course look, Mr. İnce might misunderstand this. (*Crowd boos*). When we talk about 'national' (T: 'milli) *kırathaneler* he might think of a place where people go to play cards. Mr. Muharrem, it's not like that. It will be full of books, a library, and inside God-willing there will pastries and tea and coffee. Our youth and our elderly will come and they will both read a book and get their pastry, and their tea, and their coffee, and 'for free' (T: *ücretsiz*). For free. And what, in the end, will these [reading houses] contribute to life? Spirit. They will contribute spirit.¹⁴

Word of the president's newest project drew harsh responses from his critics, who saw in his campaign promise of a national *kırathane* not the reading house full of books that Erdoğan

¹¹ The Republican People's Party 's (CHP) presidential candidate. He ultimately finished second behind Erdoğan.

¹² lit: 'ince ince' Erdoğan is using wordplay that draws attention to the common denotational meaning of his rival's last name, 'delicate' or 'fine'.

¹³ 'Kırathane' is an Ottoman-Persian word formed from the Arabic 'kırâat' (قراآت), meaning 'reading', and the Persian 'hâne' (خانه), meaning 'house.' However, as I explain in this chapter, its primary valence in modern Turkish is in meaning of 'coffeehouse' or a traditional form of cafe.

¹⁴ The speech can be watched on Youtube at <https://youtu.be/EXY7nujucWA>.

had described but rather a traditional coffeehouse or ‘kahve’ (as *kıraathane* is more or less synonymous with *kahve* in popular usage, where perhaps lends a thin veneer of tradition and culture to an otherwise ordinary coffeehouse). The president’s project was quickly reframed as the promise of ‘free tea and pastries’ (T: *bedava kek ve çay*), and his electoral opponents openly questioned the seriousness of his proposal, highlighting common conceptions of the *kahve* as a site full of the idle and unemployed and accusing the president of attempting to distract the people from the country’s increasing economic difficulties. For his part, CHP presidential candidate Muharrem İnce asked why Erdoğan was not doing more to create employment opportunities in productive sectors of the economy:

I am traveling from city square to city square. I am talking about food. I am talking about work. And now after 16 years he comes out and says I am going to open *kıraathanes*. Just look at this project! Open a factory, open a factory that’s actually up and running (‘bacaları tüten’ lit. ‘with its chimneys smoking’).¹⁵

Meral Akşener, presidential candidate for the newly formed ‘İyi’ (Good) Party and Erdoğan’s other main rival in the election, attacked the Turkish president’s proposal along similar lines, declaring:

There are all of these ‘crazy projects’¹⁶ flying around everywhere. For three days I have been asking. I am saying, “look, 65 billion dollars will be invested [in these projects], but what will be the benefit to Turkey”? I mean how will this benefit Rize, Istanbul, Ankara, Edirne, or Şırnak? But we never got any response; and now as of yesterday, we’ve even heard about a new crazy project. I mean he’s opening *kahves* (‘coffeehouse’), *kahves* ya! Instead of opening a *kahve*, take that money and put it in the pocket of the worker. There are two types of *kahve*. One kind is for retired people, and one is for youth. In the *kavhe* for retirees, men will chat, drink tea, and keep track of the prayer times. Retirees have a hard time drinking two teas at a *kahve*, right? Instead of opening a *kahve*, take that money and put it in his pocket and let him drink his tea wherever he pleases! Create employment

¹⁵ Quoted from *Gazete Duvar*. "'Millet kıraathanesi' sosyal medyada gündem: En çılgın proje!." 07-Jun-2019.

¹⁶ Here Akşener is referencing Erdoğan’s self-declared ‘crazy projects’ (çılgın projeler), or a series of massive infrastructure projects including a major new airport in Istanbul, a third Bosphorus bridge, a metro tunnel under the Bosphorus, and a still unrealized ‘second Bosphorus’ that would create an artificial channel north of Istanbul connecting the Marmara and Black Seas.

for young people! Provide some job opportunities to those kids and save them from the *kahve*! Now instead of doing this he is opening *kahves*...the state should make major investments, let the private sector open *kahves*.¹⁷

Here both Akşener and İnce work to recast Erdoğan's proposal as a cynical plan to tackle the problem of unemployment and faltering economic growth with a program of mass, state-subsided consumption that might amount to little more than a trivial social distraction (as well as a potential new source of unearned profits¹⁸ for a small number of government supporters who would inevitably be the ones granted the privilege of setting up and running the state-supported *kıraathanes*). In contrasting the *kıraathane* with the factory, İnce, for example, draws on a widely circulating spatial ideology that classifies the coffeehouse as a site of idleness (and the unproductive consumption that accompanies it) – a space opposed to the productive sites of industry (i.e. 'bacaları tüten fabrikalar'¹⁹). In arguing that there were two kinds of *kahves* -- those that cater to retirees and those that cater to unemployed youth – Akşener likewise to cast the *kavhe* primarily as a site of idleness; an institution, moreover, that was threatening the nation's youth. Here she draws on an indexical relationship between the social space of the coffeehouse and enregistered person types (retired men and unemployed youth) to cast the *kavhe* primarily as a site of unproductivity from which Turkey's young people need to be saved;

¹⁷Quoted from *Cumhuriyet*. "Akşener'den Erdoğan'a 'kıraathane' tepkisi." 09-June-2018.

¹⁸ Or 'rant', from the French 'rente', as this form of income is still referred to in Turkish. Note that this is essentially the same meaning given to 'rent' by Adam Smith in *Wealth of Nations* as well as other early classical political economists.

¹⁹Consider also some remarks İnce made on campaign a few days later: "My promise to you is not parks, stadiums or *kıraathanes* My promise is fields overflowing with abundance and factories up and running (again, **T**: 'bacaları tüten fabrikalar'). Let those who want to have free pastries and tea vote for Erdoğan. Let those who want jobs in a factory vote for me." Quoted from *Istanbul Gerçeği*. "Muharrem İnce: Benim vaadim parklar, kıraathaneler değil, bereket fişkiran topraklar, bacaları tüten fabrikalar." 10-June-2018.

“provide some job opportunities to those kids”, Akşener declares, “and save them from the *kahve*.”

Notice how Erdogan’s ideologization of his *kıraathane* as a space primarily for ‘youth’ (T: gençler) and ‘the elderly’ (T: yaşlılar) in fact closely mirrors Akşener’s ideologization of the cafe through the categories of ‘youth’ (T: genç) and ‘retired’ (T: emekli), demonstrating how ideological differences about the cafe are themselves constructed from a common, widely circulating metasemiotic discourse about the cafe as a social space and the forms of personhood understood to occupy it. On the other hand, compared to both İnce and Akşener the president paints a very different picture of the role of the cafe in social life and its capacity to generate value, as well as the role of youth and other cafe patrons in this process of value creation. For instance, at another public function earlier that year the Turkish president also explained how a network of government-linked cafes might serve an important site of youth education and acculturation, and therefore a central institution in his party’s efforts to transform Turkish society and culture. Speaking at a meeting of the *Youth of Turkey Foundation* (*Türkiye Gençlik Vakfı*, or TÜGVA, a government-linked youth organization) earlier that year, Erdoğan offered his approval (with one notable reservation) of the foundation’s efforts to open new spaces such as *kafes*, here pointing to how they could serve as sites where youth could meet, socialize and build relationships in their communities:

I ask for success from our Lord for the work that our foundation is doing around the creation [of various projects] that concern everything from the education and instruction of our youth, their work lives, and all issues from sports to the family. Here people talk about a ‘kitap kafe’ (‘book cafe’) but I say let’s call it a *kıraathane*. The ‘kafe’ doesn’t belong to us. TÜGVA is growing everyday with all of its projects based in the *kıraathane* and its various publications, and I am sending my greetings to everyone who is working on these projects under the TÜGVA umbrella.²⁰

²⁰Quoted in *Hurriyet*. "Erdoğan'dan son dakika açıklaması: 800 tanesinin işi bitti akşama kadar sayı artacak." 01-Feb-2018.

Here is an instance where Erdoğan draws our attention to the explicitly political dimensions of his project, framing the *kıraathane* not as a site of idleness and consumption, but as a space of productive social labor and creative action directed toward the making of different kinds of publics and the value projects they animate. Notice in his remarks how the space of his *kıraathane* is made to intersect with the social domains of the ‘education’ (T: eğitim) and ‘instruction’ (T: öğretim), the ‘family’ (T: aile) and ‘worklife’ (T: iş hayatı), and also how it becomes a site where value moves and transforms across these different domains. Notice, also, how Erdoğan’s discourse links the face-to-face work done by social projects in the *kıraathane* (T: ‘kıraathanesi ile yürüttüğü projelerle’) to the foundation’s publishing work (T: ‘yayımları ile’). Yet Erdoğan differentiates his *kıraathane* project from the popular tradition of the *kahve*, where the retired and unemployed spend their days playing cards (T: ‘iskambil oynanan’). At the same time, he opposes it to the ‘modern’ *kafe*, arguing that the latter did not belong to them (T: ‘kafe bizim değil’, lit. ‘the *kafe* isn’t ours’) when critiquing the foundation’s choice of label (‘I say let’s call it a *kıraathane*’).

Here, Erdoğan’s public preference for the label ‘*kıraathane*’ over ‘book kafe’ (T: kitap kafe) generates a set of encompassing contrasts through the use of the deictic ‘our’ that can be argued to function on at least three levels – two explicitly mobilized by Erdoğan himself and the third latent in his discursive divergence from the party’s youth supporters. On a broader level, the president is signaling toward an association of the *kafe* with ‘foreign’ forms of sociality and a globalized consumer culture – an association also well-known to his audience. In this sense, he thus works to position the *kafe* as something undesirable and in opposition to Turkey’s authentic ‘Islamic’ and national values. But as everyone is well aware, and as evidence by the existence of a ‘book kafe’ in a pro-AKP organization, the *kafe* is already a popular, domestic institution. In

telling his supporters that the *kafe* ‘does not belong to us’, therefore, Erdoğan is also reminding them of salient differences between themselves and supporters of ‘secular’, ‘pro-Western’ parties who are imagined to frequent *kafes*.

But the entire event speaks to another contrast, as much generational as political, that opposes the president’s vision of an ideal Turkish public culture and the everyday practices and aspirations of his younger supporters. Erdoğan’s preference for ‘national reading houses’ where Turkey’s youth could read books, enjoy free tea and coffee, and become socialized into the value system is typical of the AKP’s larger ‘Medeniyet’ (‘Civilization’) project – the president and his party’s wider ambition to create a new generation of pious youth loyal to the value projects of the AKP²¹ – both in its top-down design and its ambivalent results. It is obvious from this event that there exist many in the president’s movement who do not see any necessary conflict between the *kafe* and their public identities as AKP supporters and/or pious Muslims, and here is seemingly another example of how the AKP seems to undermine itself in its struggle for hegemony in the cultural sphere. It is notable that TÜGVA’s local project directors, most likely younger members of the party, chose to designate their cafes as ‘kitap kafe’ only to be overruled by the president himself. Yet the difficulty of marketing a ‘kıraathane’ as both a stylish and aspirational space to youth in contemporary Istanbul is obvious enough to anyone with a passing acquaintance with contemporary youth culture in the city and the kinds of establishments to which the label is popularly applied (namely working-class, all-male teahouses). Moreover, new style *kafes* are immensely popular with young people of both genders and attract patrons from across Turkey’s political and ‘religious-secular’ divide. They are now commonly found even in more

²¹For more detailed discussion of the AKP’s Medeniyet project and its various youth initiatives, see Özipek (forthcoming)

conservative districts. But even if the *kafe* has become omnipresent as an institutional form – their content as social projects can differ significantly across social space.

At stake in all of these debates is a broader concern around the role of the cafe in the transfer of social value and the production of social persons, as well as the ideological construction of the cafe as a space defined by contested forms of sociality and governed by competing and shifting metrics of value. No longer a space of unproductivity, in Erdoğan's framing the cafe emerges as a central site in the construction of social relationships and in the creation and realization of the social values that are central in the reproduction of these relationships. In positioning his *kıraathane* as a site of social productivity, he simultaneously links it to broader clusters of ideologically schematized social 'qualia' – that is to say the ideologically constructed and semiotically produced association of qualities with social persons and things. This is most evident in the generalized opposition between 'productivity' and 'idleness' that shape the debate around the president's *kıraathane* and this dichotomy's central role as a 'qualisign of value' (Munn 1986), or a central, organizing value metric informing capitalist culture more broadly. In the speeches of presidents's rivals, the *kafe* is linked to unproductivity through an association with unproductive person types (the 'elderly' and 'unemployed youth'), unproductive activities ('card games', 'chatting', 'keeping track of prayer times'), and unproductive consumption ('free tee and pastries'). Erdoğan, for his part, brings attention to the socially productive activities that he claims are taking place in government-linked cafe (as a site where youth receive education and instruction, help with family problems, access to the labor market. etc.). Rather than an unproductive use of time and resources, the president characterizes cafe sociality as a central modality underlying public life and an important ingredient in the creation of 'spirit' or 'vitality' (T: ruh). Erdoğan thus works to frame

his cafe project outside the value metrics of capital, at the same time that he works to conform to them. But his discourse is not a panegyric to a cafe writ large. On the contrary, the president is careful to distinguish his project from what would seem to be the majority of cafes in Turkey – whether in the form of the ‘traditional’ *kahve* or the ‘modern’ *kafe* – and their imagined negative associations with idleness and youth unemployment (as well as, especially in the case of the latter, with non-‘Turkish’ or non-‘Islamic’ values, or simply the values of the current political opposition).

IV. Theorizing the cafe as a site of value creation and transformation

For my interlocutors at the LLI -- many of whom are not only regular customers but have also at some time worked in or helped to open and run the new generation of *kafes* that have proliferated across North Kurdistan over the past two decades-- many of the differences pointed out by the Turkish president were also noteworthy and important. Nor is it simply that the *kafe* ought to be contrasted with more established social institutions of analogous type (the ‘kahve’, ‘kiraathane’, ‘çayevi’, ‘çay bahçesi’ etc.). Among *kafes* themselves, my interlocutors in Kurdistan discern important differences in terms of ‘customer-base’ (including clusters of demographic qualia such as age, class, ethnic or religious identity, political orientation and corresponding expressions of aesthetic presentation and sensibility as defined in conventionalized notions of taste), as well as in terms of distinct forms of sociality and the modalities of relationality to which they responded. They also drew important distinctions between a particular *kafe*’s relationship to the market and its orientation toward other kinds of value projects less reducible to the logic of capitalist accumulation. Consider, for instance, how Melike, a former student at the LLI, described (in 2018) the emergence of the ‘pirtûk kafe’

(Kurdish for ‘book *kafe*’) during an interview in one very such *kafe*, and the way she understood its importance:

It’s only been a few years that we can say something like the ‘book kafe’ (K: ‘pirtûk kafe’) has emerged. Like you said, X *kafe* in Mardin, or Y *kafe* in Ankara, or Z *kafe* in Istanbul...So what is their importance? Well, there is no official status for Kurdish institutions, like you know, there is no official place for Kurdish institutions, where people can express themselves and speak. They don’t exist. There is no place to learn the language. Over the past few years they were all closed. And so, I think Kurds see these as an alternative way. I can speak about Ankara, since I follow the program here. There are Kurdish classes here. In Y *kafe*. We give Kurdish classes here since as you know all of the other places offering classes have been closed, but of course, the classes here are unofficial ...we are just trying to help those who want to learn Kurdish. For example, until today I have had around fifty students...And so we create a syllabus for the class. But we are not only teaching language. I also speak about Kurdish history, even if just a little. We talk about Kurdish literature and Kurdish history. About Kurdish music, culture, folklore. And so, the *kafe* presents an opportunity for people. It offers Kurdish classes. Maybe once a week an author comes here. This is where writers can follow the Kurdish book scene. When there is a new book launch, everyone comes here to the cafe. Or a new journal. And writers speak about their books. For example, once Ismail Beşikçi who is a Turkish social scientist came here -- as you know he is a very famous Kurdologist who has long defended the rights of Kurds -- and presented an article here. And last week there was a presentation here on Kurdish theater, that is on the history of Kurdish theater. And so, it’s almost like it serves as a university or a school. For Kurds, the *pirtûk kafe* has the mission of a school, because unfortunately there are no Kurdish schools. There is no other place for Kurds to express themselves, and for that reason, these *kafes* are very important.

When speaking about the *pirtûk kafe*, Melike does not frame the cafe primarily in terms of the relationship between customers or friends, but between teachers and students. She points out that in the absence of any officially recognized ‘Kurdish institutions’ (K: *dezgehên Kurdî*), the *pirtûk kafe* represented an ‘alternative way’ (K: *reyekê din*) and an ‘opportunity’ (K: *derfet*) for people to come together with others also committed to Kurdish language activism. The *pirtûk kafe*, as Melike explains, serves as a ‘university’ (K: *zaningeh*) and a ‘school’ (K: *dibistan*) and performs the ‘mission of a school’ (K: *wezifaya dibistan*), in the absence of official Kurdish-language education in the country. This metasemiotic reframing of the *kafe*, importantly,

underscores a very different set of value relations that the market relations often posited to structure commodity exchange. Rather, the *kafe* is reimagined as a classroom, as well as a meeting place for like-minded writers and intellectuals for whom it provides an ‘opportunity’ to come together to publically valorize their work in a manner that is not well captured by economic ideas of consumer demand or the relationship between cafe customer and operator.

From this perspective, the analytical purchase of ‘cafe’ as a universalized gloss for a type of social institution – keeping in mind no such gloss exists in either Kurdish or Turkish – must be reconciled with the diverse and competing value projects they function to reproduce in reality. An understanding of the role that the ‘cafe’ is playing in the emergence of a new Kurdish cultural industry and new urban public formations in Mardin, therefore, also requires that we briefly pause to clarify the utility of the cafe as a comparative ethnographic category and to reassess its position within the larger problem-space it helps to organize.

In Ottoman historiography, the coffeehouse is often positioned as the *locus classicus* in the early exchange and consumption of capitalist commodities and the emergence of a modern consumer subjectivity (Karababa and Ger 2011). An analogous connection is made by Habermas and his followers in their discussion of the 17th-century coffeehouse culture in Western Europe. Nor is this without reason: as pointed out by Mintz (1985) and others, coffee and tea (the two caffeinated beverages today most associated with the cafe²²) – together with their most popular

²²Today in North American and Western Europe, the cafe is particularly associated with coffee, its cognate (both in English as in Turkish).²² In Turkish, for instance, the word for ‘coffee’ (T: ‘kahve’) borrowed from the Arabic ‘qahwa / قهوة’) also assumes the meaning of ‘coffeehouse’ and the Turkish *kafe* (‘cafe’) is simply a cognate of the older *kahve* borrowed back from French. However in both Turkey and North Kurdistan today, as I will discuss in the next chapter, tea is probably even more central to cafe culture, both in many *kahves* and *kafes*, as well in the analogous institutions of the ‘tea-house’ (T: çayevi) and ‘tea garden’ (T: çay bahçesi), in whose designation the latter beverage is instead emphasized.

additive, sugar – are among the most important in the formation of a modern capitalist world system with its new global commodity chains linking sites of colonial production in the East and South to new sites of consumption in European towns and cities. In Kurdistan, significantly, tea and sugar were likewise the ur-commodities connecting locals to an emergent capitalist world system, with the former constituting the primary (and for many, perhaps the only) medium through which people began to consume the latter in the late 19th-century.

It is perhaps by virtue of the close association between coffee and tea as the ur-commodities of the capitalist world system and the coffeehouse and cafe as the first site of their popularization, I suggest, that cafe society is often made to stand as a microcosm of market society, and cafe culture is imagined to mirror a wider culture of commodity consumption. This tendency is seen, for example, in both Habermas (1991)²³ and the popular ‘third space’ literature developed by Oldenburg (1989; 2013) and other urban sociologists and geographers that offer the former’s historically and geographically situated account of the 17th-century European coffeehouse as a universally valid theoretical framework, *mutatis mutandis*, for understanding a new ‘global cafe culture’. In literature, and the cafe is theorized as a global ‘third place’ outside the home and the workplace where ‘citizens-cum-consumers’ can both spend their money on

²³ Habermas (1991), for example, draws our attention both to the centrality of the coffeehouse in the creation of new reading cultures and the formation of a ‘bourgeois public sphere’, as well as as an emergent site of capitalist consumer culture. Coffeehouses, he observes, were important nodes in the circulation of literary and political criticism, as well as the circulation of news pamphlets – text objects that were simultaneously instruments of commerce and commodities unto themselves. Yet even if early modern coffeehouses were both important sites of commodity exchange and consumption, and institutions whose existence depended on the monetary revenue derived from such activity, Habermas can nevertheless argue that the sociality of the coffeehouse was one wherein the “laws of the market were suspended” and “economic dependencies also in principle had no influence” (p. 36). Yet, as many of his critics have pointed out, his model of the public sphere – where anonymous social persons enter into free association and exchange of ideas governed by a universal form of reason – seems to closely mirror the very laws of the market that he claims it to have superseded.

desirable commodities and participate as political actors in civil society (Tjora and Scambler 2013). However, an empirical account of the relationship between the exchange of commodities and ideas, between the status of consumers on the one hand and friends or citizens on the other, is generally lacking. And there exists a lack of clarity in both Habermas as well as in the ‘third place’ literature around the relationship between processes of commodification and the emergence of a ‘profane’ consumer culture on the one hand, and the emergence of the modern domains of ‘politics’, ‘art’ and ‘culture’ on the other.²⁴ The cafe or coffeehouse is thus left to occupy an ambivalent position between the ‘economic’ on the one hand, and ‘political’ and ‘civil’ spheres of social life on the other; as well as between the ‘private’ and the ‘public’ – a space of multiple overlapping ‘value regimes’ (Appadurai 1988) and the different value metrics they organize. Liberal doctrine, as Marx pointed out close to two centuries ago, sidesteps this incongruity by dividing the ‘economic’ and the ‘political’ (or ‘civic’, ‘religious’, ‘personal’, etc.) into distinct and separate spheres. Contemporary liberal theory – whether in its classical Habermasian form or more recent, neoliberal iterations (cf. Lauier and Philo 2006) –confronts this incongruity (insomuch that it is compelled to do so), in the final analysis, in favor of the economic, appropriating market metaphors for its analysis of all areas and relations of social life.²⁵

This is not to suggest that these approaches contain nothing of value for our current purposes. Among the primary insights of this literature is to connect social life in the cafe to larger questions around life in a ‘mass society’ and corresponding concerns with the creation and

²⁴ Habermas, citing Williams (1958), makes this point himself (p. 37).

²⁵For two, conceptually aligned if differently theorized accounts of how discourses or ideological frames form or about the ‘market’ come to enter into all areas of social life in Western societies, see Foucault (1979) and Sahlins (1976).

protection of a democratic public culture – all factors that have positioned the category of the cafe as a global point of comparison in wider debates around democracy, mobilization and political deliberation (Cody 2009, Cody 2015; Wedeen 2008). Habermasian theories of the cafe tend to position it as a central site in the creation of civil society and argue that it is a space wherein inequalities of status are diminished and social distances collapse, allowing those within it to interact as equal citizens and members of a common public. In this way, the cafe or coffeehouse theorized as a ‘liminal’ (Turner 1969/2017) space wherein social relations can be disassembled and remade. This work borrows from Habermas’s (1991) description of the coffeehouse in early modern Europe as a space where members of opposed classes could meet as ‘common human beings’ around a common set of interests and values. In the specific social world that Habermas considers a world governed by the free exchange of commodities becomes a world of open and free political debate. However, in much of contemporary ‘third place’ literature, Habermas’s ‘public sphere’ is retheorized in market terms and expanded beyond the historical and geographic parameters in which Habermas situates it: the social world of the cafe becomes a universal domain of ‘inclusivity’ and ‘connectivity’ and the problem of democratic civil society is reframed primarily as an ahistorical and asocial problem of consumer ‘access’ and social relations are reduced to networks of individual ‘customers’ (cf. Laurier, et al. 2001; Laurier 2008; Tjora and Scambler, eds. 2013).²⁶ I want to propose an alternative approach that takes seriously the comparative potential of the cafe as an ethnographic category from which to better understand interrelated processes of commodification, face-to-face public formation, and

²⁶Note that this is not entirely in the spirit of Oldenburg’s original work, where he expresses a deep skepticism around modernist urban planning and late 20th century consumer culture’s capacity to reproduce the same quality of human relationships as older forms of urban life (cf. Holm 2013). It is much more evident, however, in the work of

mass politics; while also acknowledging both the much older history of the coffeehouse (and comparable social institutions) in Kurdistan and arguing that contemporary cafe culture responds to horizons of value beyond neoliberal regimes of consumption and capital accumulation.

As an ethnographic category, the cafe organizes a comparative problem space around the market, democracy, and civil society – a problem space that also resonates in work on cafes and coffeehouses in Turkey. Scholars working on the modern Turkish Republic have pointed to the centrality of the ‘coffeehouse’ (T: kahve) and ‘tea garden’ (T:cay bahçesi) as central to Turkey’s modern democratic culture (Fallers 1974; Hann 1990; Wohl 2017); and for or many of my interlocutors in Mardin and Istanbul, too, cafes were spaces marked off by the value metric of ‘samimiyet’ and were accordingly often described as more ‘samimi’ places than either university classrooms, faculty offices, student dormitories, and occasionally even the home itself. *Samimiyet*, as I discuss in chapter three, is a central value shaping how many people talk about and evaluate both their interpersonal relationships as well as relations in society more broadly. It is also a modality of sociality that emphasizes informality, horizontality, and ends-oriented relationality. *Samimiyet* is thus a value that organizes conceptions of public and private alike and is central to the imagining of Turkey’s democratic culture, but it is also a concept (as many critics of and from Turkey will point out) fraught with populist and authoritarian resonances. In exploring how *samimiyet* is deployed in the cafe, both as a metric and a modality of social relations, I also look to explore how the cafe is a site where outside social hierarchies are diminished and new forms of relationality can emerge. But I do so also mindful of the multiplicity of social relations that intersect in the cafe, as well as the distinct value projects that animate these relations.

In Mardin as elsewhere, the cafe is also a space where social difference is articulated and the group borders are maintained or reimagined. This is a point already made often and forcibly by Habermas's critics, who point out that the abstract 'common man' of which Habermas writes originated from a narrow set of social backgrounds. Coffeehouse socialization in Europe may have aspired to produce undifferentiated, 'democratic' persons, but did so only by excluding the majority of society, including women and most of the working masses. Early Marxist critics of Habermas such as Kluge and Negt (1993) point to how different forms of capitalist domination render the public sphere a hegemonic construction of the ruling classes. Fraser (1990), likewise, powerfully summarizes and redeploys feminist critiques of the liberal public sphere as an ideological construct designed to represent 'bourgeois white males' as universal subjects, and argues for the importance of feminist bookshops and cafes in the formation of 'counterpublics' that challenge prevailing cultural hegemonies. Linguistic anthropologists have pointed out ideological links between forms of 'disinterested' and 'rational' discourse that Habermas identifies with the early coffeehouse and creation of standardized national language, pointing to how both are only possible through an ideological equivalence between 'standard' usage and the privileged authorization of some social voices as 'neutral', 'anonymous' or 'disinterested' (Baumann and Briggs 2003; Gal 2006; Silverstein 1996); and more recent work in linguistic anthropology has brought renewed ethnographic attention to the cafe and its role as an interface between face-to-face and mass-mediated publics (Agha 2011; Cody 2011, 2015). Unlike 'third place' frameworks, however, there is no attempt to posit the cafe as a universal space under a single hegemonic value regime. Nor does there exist an assumption that the primary identity of all participants is always as 'workers' or 'customers.' Indeed, as I discuss in the following

chapter, the *kafe* is productive of multiple axes of identification in which ‘customer’ and ‘worker/manager/owner’ is often but one relation of value.

-Conclusion-

In this chapter, I have outlined an account fo contemporary *kafe* that pays attention to its novelty as a type of social space as well as its contested status as a value project oriented toward both the market and other salient horizons of value. Moreover, I proposed an alternative heuristic model to understand the *kafe* that is built on sustained ethnographic attention to 1) the competing modalities of sociality and semiotic ideologies that shape social relations in the *kafe* and peoples’ perceptions of these relations; as well as to how 2) the ways that the value created in the *kafe* is realized in the construction of multiple kinds of social relationships and their orientation toward distinct horizons of value, thereby attempting to bridge what (in ‘Habermasian’ and ‘third place’ theories of the cafe) are the formally distinct domains of ‘economics’, ‘politics’ and ‘culture’ through different forms of ‘value transfer’ and ‘value transformation’ (Graeber 2001; Munn 1986).

In the chapter that follows, I put this model to work in an empirical analysis of value creation in Kurdish-language ‘book kafes’ (K: *pîrtuk kafe*) and their role in remaking the relations of value in which Kurdish-language practices, and Kurdish text objects specifically, are assessed and valorized in the creation of social relationships. Looking specifically at the social qualia most associated with the *pîrtuk kafe*, I seek to describe its role in efforts to shift the interrelated qualia shaping public reception of the *kafe*, pointing to how its owners and operators work to rearrange many of the indexical relationships between person-types, commodities, and linguistic practices that shape perceptions of the *kafe* in Kurdistan more widely, especially concerning public making projects to reorder the language ideologies underlying the valorization

of Kurdish as a public linguistic code, (in particular markets for books and tea) intersect with the value regime of emergent Kurdish culture industry as well as the more individualized value projects and aspirational horizons of cafe owners and managers, as well as student workers and patrons,

Rather than a universal kind of social space, I underscore the cafe's centrality to a plurality of competing value projects and the divergent forms of sociality that they engender. I, therefore, push back against overly optimistic proclamations about the emergence of a 'global cafe culture' with a pre-given relationship to the value system of Western liberal democracy or an abstract concept of 'sociality' (as something necessarily positive, and in contrast to 'isolation', 'alienation', 'atomization' etc.). At the same time, I point to how older, more localized cultural logics— such as those framed by a notion of 'hospitality' and the semiotic ideologies shaping sociality in the 'guest house' – also continue to shape the modalities of relationality within the *kafe* in North Kurdistan. I further suggest that in paying closer attention to how the exchange of commodities intersects directly in the construction of manifold social relations, we can see how what is often glossed as commodity exchange is, in fact, a more complex social interaction in which multiple forms of value are at stake and multiple modalities of relationality are present. In offering a different account of the social relations in the *pirtûk kafe* than one overly focused on individual customer preferences and behavior, I seek to show how the growing market for new Kurdish language media, the political economy of *kafe*, and the sociality of food and drink are themselves closely implicated in the formation of new language ideologies and their institutionalization in broader relations of value.

Chapter 5: Value Creation and Kurdish Public Formation in the *Pîrtûk Kafe*

In Mardin and other cities in Northern Kurdistan, the rapid development of a new urban *kafe* culture of the past two to three decades has born witness to how both the relationship between clusters of qualia and processes and conventional social metrics through which they are valorized can, under certain circumstances, shift radically. One such recent shift involves language, and specifically the relative value of Kurdish linguistic practices among university students and graduates, many of whom also work as teachers in the towns and villages of the province, and who are also the most frequent owners and one of the most important customer bases for a new subset of Kurdish ‘book *kafes*’ (K: *pîrtuk kafe*) in Mardin. The example of the *pîrtuk kafe* again reveals how larger shifts in political economy and politics become reflected in localized regimes of value as they are likewise expressed in wider shifts in patterns of

consumption and the semiotic values of commodities (questions closely covered in chapters 3 and 4). But it also shows how people, in this case, Kurdish language activists, can actively intervene in this process and agentively shape and reconstruct the metrics through which, for instance, Kurdish text objects are assessed and valorized. By directing the value derived from economic activities in the *kafe* toward Kurdish publishing and by orientating the moral values of friendship and collegiality realized in the sociality in the *kafe* around the celebration of the Kurdish language as a wider horizon of value, Kurdish-language activists position the book *kafe* as a central site in their public making projects.

The *pîrtuk kafe* is a *kafe* that also sells Kurdish-language books and other text objects, and in recent years several such *kafes* have become immensely popular among a significant cross-section of Mardin's growing population of students and young urban professionals. As noted by Jamison (2016), these openly 'Kurdish' book *kafes* first appeared in large Kurdish cities like Diyarbakir in the early 2000s. *Pîrtuk kafes* later proliferated across Turkey and North Kurdistan during the period of peace negotiations that began around 2009 – the year the AKP government publicly announced its first 'Kurdish initiative' to solve the Kurdish issue through democracy and dialogue – and that was later formalized in a government-recognized 'peace process' in 2013 before the entire process collapsed into fighting two years later. In the wake of renewed civil war and seemingly interminable economic crisis, however, and despite increased political and economic pressures and the omnipresent threat of anti-Kurdish state violence, the *pîrtuk kafe* has endured¹; and in turn, it has emerged as a central node in the circulation of Kurdish text objects in Turkey, as well as a new site where Kurdish youth are reshaping the

¹ Even as many *pîrtuk kafes* have closed their doors in the wake of the twin political and economic crises engulfing Turkey since 2015, new *pîrtuk kafes* are also opening, not only in Kurdistan but in Istanbul, Ankara and other western cities.

value metrics of local speech communities and Kurdish's status as a public language and written linguistic code.

Importantly, however, these are not 'political' spaces in any special or explicit sense. As one of my interlocutors points out below, *pirtûk kafes* often take deliberate pains to distance themselves and their language activism from institutional Kurdish politics. Indeed, while the majority of its patrons likely do have some sympathies for pro-Kurdish politicians and parties, the *pirtûk kafe* is in this respect no different in this respect than thousands of other predominantly ethnically Kurdish *kahves*, 'university' *kafes*, or teahouses across North Kurdistan and western Turkey (whether or not they are Kurdish-speaking). In fact, during elections, Kurdish *kahves*, or male-dominated, traditional coffeehouses, are much more likely than book *kafes* to become sites for campaign visits and to plaster their walls and windows with election propaganda. Rather, political activities in the book *kafe* are limited to the narrow domain of Kurdish-language activism.

While book *kafes* routinely host writers, social scientists, and linguistics who might also be considered dissident Kurdish intellectuals, they generally avoid inviting Kurdish politicians or party officials, and events and activities are generally focused on cultural, literary, or historical subjects such as folklore or classical poetry. They rarely or never touch directly on explicitly political topics such as municipal or national elections or Kurdish-language education (much less on Kurdish national autonomy or independence). On the other hand, their owners and patrons position them as central institutions in a 'cultural' (**K**: çand/kûltûr; **T**: kültür) struggle to valorize the Kurdish language as a medium of public culture – a struggle that many see as distinct from the domain of politics (**K**: siyasî; **T**: siyasi), even as many also acknowledge its important place in the larger Kurdish movement.

By contrast with both the Kurdish *kahve* and the majority of student and commercial *kafes*, the *pirtûk kafe* is an institution dedicated to the celebration and sale of Kurdish text objects. At the same time, it brings together known persons into everyday moral relationships mediated by performances of *samimiyet* and hospitality, as well as placing them in economic relationships as workers, owners and customers – both relations of value also active in any normal *kafe* or *kahve*. Some *pirtûk kafes* are successful businesses that bring a profit to their owners. Many others struggle financially and are subsidized by their owners (owners who, in the case of Mardin, are almost universally local Kurdish teachers and/or current/former students of the LLI). But all conscript their owners and customers into a common public of value in which the Kurdish language and the production of Kurdish text objects are given preeminence and in which the majority of customers, who might neither regularly read Kurdish-language text objects or buy them, can still participate their celebration as valuable objects in public life. In my analysis, the *pirtuk kafe* is an institution that redirects economic and moral relations of value toward a third horizon of value that seeks to ascribe value and importance to Kurdish books, and by extension, to Kurdish language activism more generally.

In this chapter, I look at the *pirtuk kafe* as a site of value creation and transformation. Drawing on my discussion of the *kafe* in the last chapter, I begin in section one by looking at how my interlocutors position the book *kafe* in social space by contrasting it with other kinds of *kafes* while also drawing attention to the connections – ideological, institutional and interpersonal – between the LLI and Artuklu University and book *kafes* in Mardin. In section II, I consider in detail how Kurdish books take on value both as commodities as intrinsic objects of value unto themselves. Exploring the growing market for text objects, I examine the relationship between tea and books as both commodities and bearers of other semiotic value in the *pirtuk*

kafe, and I contrast their differing roles as media of monetary exchange and the fundamentally distinct albeit interrelated ways they can become mobilized in the creation of social value. Drawing closely on a series of conversations with *kafe* operators/workers and patrons – many of whom were also former or current students at the LLI - I look at how the circulation of tea and books in the *kafe* are evaluated according to two different metrics, wherein the sale of the former is used to subsidize the latter. In section III, I look at how a commonly cited contrast between *kafes* run for profit (or what my interlocutors call ‘commercial’ *kafes*) and those oriented toward the promotion of Kurdish language and culture (or what they call ‘ideological’) contrasts the domain of economics and Kurdish language activism, while aligning Kurdish-language activism with a form of struggle analogous, but distinct, from politics.

In section IV, I look at how sociality within the *kafe* connects the domain of Kurdish language activism to a more basic set of social values around generosity and *samimiyet*, and I show how the construction of interpersonal relationships that occur in the *pîrtuk kafe* are likewise essential to the creation of relations of value in which the Kurdish language and Kurdish text objects are positioned as a medium of social value. In section V, finally, I look at how Kurdish language activists position the *kafe* as a value project distinct from official Kurdish politics, opposing the ‘cultural’ value generated in the *kafe* with the explicitly political work of institutional Kurdish political parties and organizations. Ultimately, I argue that the *pîrtûk kafe* as a social value project that reorients the *kafe* from a space of commodity consumption to one focused on the protection and promotion of ‘culture’; and I consider the interrelationship between ‘culture’ and ‘exchange value’ as primary qualisigns of value, drawing attention to how, within the *pîrtûk kafe*, the interaction between people and commodities frequently diverges from market logics and map onto other social value metrics, here specifically focusing on the metrics

shaping the evaluation of Kurdish-language practices and their valorization by emergent Kurdish reading publics. Although I contend, North Kurdistan is an entirely ‘commodified’ society where the logics of money and exchange are universally operative, such logics are not the only form of ideology shaping commodity exchange in the *kafe*, and that ideologies shaping the buying and selling of tea and other commodities in the *kafe* are likewise inflected for older cultural forms tied to the making of social relationships and circuits of obligation and reciprocity tied to other horizons of value.

I. The *Pirtûk Kafe* in Social Space

Within the institute, the *pirtûk kafes* has been immensely popular with students and faculty alike. As Bidar – a public school teacher and institute graduate who helped to found and run one such *pirtûk kafe* close to the institute for several years – explained to me, these book *kafes* were often as important as the institute itself in popularizing emergent forms of Kurdish public culture to a wider urban audience. As Bidar explained:

We had a professor from the university, he was then an assistant professor he was giving a class [at our cafe] on the philosophy of Kurdish art. Every week, on Friday evenings. We had a class on the philosophy of Kurdish art for five or six months...we created a network with members to decide when class hours would be. To join that network we asked for a small donation, like 5 liras, the price of a couple of teas. Other than that there was no fee, and sometimes people would just be there and notice he was explaining something and come and listen. It was really incredibly beautiful. Even this professor was saying so. He was teaching a class at the university, and also at the cafe, but he would say that the class he gave at the cafe was better.”

Beyond their important role in promoting a rapidly expanding Kurdish cultural industry, however, these avowedly Kurdish *pirtûk kafes* also present an alternative to the formality of the institute’s classrooms and faculty offices with their mandated modalities of sociality shaped by the ‘official’ value metrics of the Turkish state. Rather, they promote more horizontal forms of relationality that tend to diminish the social distance between professors and students, as well as

between ‘educated, literate’ Kurdish-speakers and communities of Kurdish speakers. Firstly, the *pirtûk kafes* brings teachers and students together in a space that lies outside of the institutional hierarchies of the LLI and state education. At the same time, however, it presents opportunities for these students and professors to promote Kurdish-language education to a wider public of Kurdish speakers, who are themselves invited to participate as students or simply as curious bystanders. The token monetary contribution expected from each of the regular attendees, like the purchase of a few teas with which Bidar compares it, provides both material support and social validation for Kurdish language activism and likewise works to celebrate the Kurdish-language as a valuable medium of art and education.

For Bidar, importantly, the book cafe was one link in a larger transformation linking the foundation of the Kurdish language program at Artuklu University to the emergence of a new Kurdish reading public. Consider, for example, how Bidar narrates the early history of the institute after it opened in 2010:

Bidar: At the beginning there was this incredible informality, actually of course it was formal because there were classes, and institutions, and course schedules, but when we first arrived, we experienced this kind of situation in which we learned more from our friends than our teachers. What do I mean? All the people who were working on Kurdology or wanted to do something with Kurdology all around Turkey came together, and that’s where all the energy came from. And it was the energy coming from this crowd that lead to so many Kurdish books being sold, and there were new printings, and books that had only been printed once were printed again. New places opened selling Kurdish books...There was a new perception of the market. Journalists and those working in television also started coming to the department. And there was an energy created by all of these people. It was the peak point for Kurdology in Turkey. Teachers were making a list, saying that we were going to read those books. And every day we were talking about these books. This was the informal part, I mean how many hours were we in class? If I am not wrong it was 16 hours a week...but we were learning so much outside of those class hours.

PL: Where for example?

Bidar: In *kafes*, here and there. I mean let's say classes were over at 2, no one was leaving. Everyone was going off someone together and working in different groups. They were talking, debating, asking what can we do? I really think it was this informal part, in this second space, more than the first (T: 'formal') space, that we really developed our Kurdish.

Here Bidar connects growth of the *pîrtuk kafe* to the growth of Artuklu University and the creation of the LLI, as well as to ongoing shifts in the public culture of the *kafe* in Turkey, as well as to the emergence in North Kurdistan over the past one-and-a-half-decades of a Kurdish culture industry and the proliferation of Kurdish-language media (films, magazines, music, books, etc.). As a value project, the Kurdish book *kafe* deliberately seeks to subvert the widely mobilized ideological opposition between a more 'modern', and a more Turkish-speaking *kafe* and the 'traditional' Kurdish-speaking *kahve*. These are *kafes* that consciously and actively promote Kurdish-language literacy through the sale of Kurdish-language magazines and books, as well as through the organization of cultural events such as concerts, poetry readings, and film screenings.

Once more, *pîrtûk kafes* also deliberately seek to create a greater respect 'traditional' Kurdish aesthetic and artistic forms – exemplifying a common move from the celebration of Kurdish language to Kurdish 'culture' more widely – mixing the distinct qualia associated with Kurdish *kahves* (e.g. older décor and furniture such as wooden stools, or 'kursi', Kurdish traditional music, coal stoves and roasted chestnuts in the winter, the availability of relatively cheap *kaçak çay*, et al.) with those of the *kafe* (e.g. a young and mixed-gender clientele, contemporary Western art, or, occasionally, the sale of alcohol). In placing written Kurdish code on posters advertising traditional musical performances or as part of a multilingual display of

poetry adorning bare-stone staircases (see figure 5.1), Kurdish language activists in North Kurdistan and Turkey work to reorder ‘chronotopic’ (Bakhtin 1981) associations between the Kurdish-language and traditional *kahve* culture, which many of my younger interlocutors associate with ‘retrograde’ (T: *gerici*) modes of sociality. The *pirtûk kafe* is thus distinguished from both other *kafes* and more traditional *kahves* by a unique relations of qualia and by the broader value regime in which it is situated.

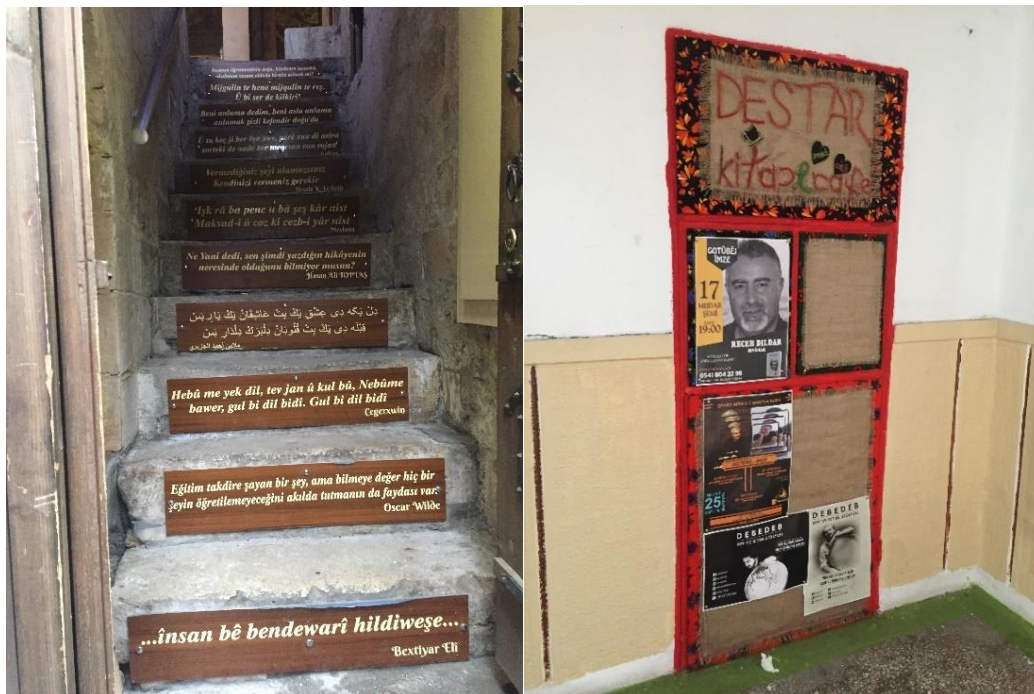


Figure 5.1: The entrance to Kurdish ‘book cafes’ in Mardin (left) and Ankara (right)

Consider how Haydar, himself a MA student at the institute who helped to run a self-described commercially-oriented cafe in Mardin for close to six months, frames these distinctions:

Haydar: [The *kahve*, the *kirranthane*, they belong to the city], but not the city of today. There have many *kiraathanes* in small district centers, and in large villages they have existed. I mean for 50 years. Or maybe 60 years, 100 years. I don’t know. But if you’re going to talk about the *kafe*. The *kafe* belongs more to the city, but the modern city/ Or large cities. But there are 2-3 kinds of *kafe* in Kurdistan. There are culture (K: *kûltûr*) *kafes*. There the music is Kurdish or Persian. The

people who come are generally more intellectual [types] and have studied. They speak, they debate things. This kind of scene exists. But there is also just the *kafe* scene. I mean, for example, Starbucks, or Kafe Deryasi, Kafe Dünyası

PL: Roberts People?

Haydar: Yes, David's People, and Roberts. What are they? They are completely within the realm of capital.

PL: And Ildo?

Haydar: Yes, Ildo. These are 100% commercial. For example, cafe X isn't like that. Of course, when you go there, they don't give you a beer for free. You give But they have built [their *kafe*] around a concept so that you can see yourself there as part of a larger cultural framework.

At the beginning of the passage, Haydar confirms Yunus and Melike's descriptions in the previous chapter of the *kafe* (in a history I also describe) as relatively new spaces located in 'modern' **K**: *bajarê modern*) and 'large' cities (**K**: *bajarên mezin*) – this in contrast to the *kahve* or 'teahouse' (**K**: *çayxane*; **T**: *çayevi*), which I explain in the previous chapter, are much older and more evenly distributed social institutions. Haydar then outlines a system of classification in which there are at least two or three kinds of *kafe*.² Here the primary contrast is between 'culture' *kafes* – defined by an explicit orientation toward Kurdish culture and aesthetics and a higher degree of learning among its patrons – on the one hand, and a class of upscale, commercial *kafes* such as global (e.g. Starbucks and Gloria Jeans) and national (e.g. Kahve Dünyası, 'World of Coffee') cafe franchises – or, in the case of Mardin, local imitations – that sell European-style coffee and promote new forms of 'conspicuous consumption' (Veblen 1899/2015) and more

² Elsewhere in our interview he draws attention to a further contrast between 'student' (**K**: *xwendekar*) *kafes* more generally and a narrower set of explicitly 'culture' *kafes*. Consider again the contrast made by Yunus in the last chapter between youth *kafes* generally and a more specific subset delimited by their special 'claim to intellectualism and education'

atomized forms of sociality. In Mardin, such *kafes* are typified by their generic English-language and Turkish names – e.g. David’s People, Robert’s Coffee, Kahve Deryası (Turkish for ‘Sea of Coffee’) – that are designed to invoke the name of these aforementioned global and national brands –hence our confusion over their correct names in the interview above. Whereas Haydar describes the latter as ‘100% commercial’ (**K**: *ji sedê sed ticarî*) and ‘entirely with the realm of capital’ (**K**: *zincîrê tam kapîtal*, lit. ‘in the chains of capital’), the former are positioned as being oriented toward a larger ‘cultural framework’ (**K**: *çarçoveya kûltûrê*) that while reproducing commercial relations (after all, as Haydar points out, one still needs to pay for one’s tea or beer) likewise redirects these relations toward a larger horizon of value. The *pirtûk kafe*, therefore, is imagined to be different from ordinary *kafes* not only in its aesthetic qualities and the background of its customer base, but with respect to the larger value regimes in which it is embedded.

II. Books, Tea and the Commodity

Also at issue in Haydar’s formulation is what exactly you pay for when you buy a tea or coffee (or beer) in a *kafe*, and how economic value, in particular, becomes realized (or not) in the creation of a broader set of social values. In Mardin, as Bidar and Haydar indicate, the *kafe* is a particularly privileged site for exploring how the values that underlie contemporary Kurdish public making projects become linked with and inflected through global commodity chains as well as more localized value projects. Such *kafes* are value projects in multiple senses. They are market-oriented enterprises that seek to sell commodities for a profit. But in the case of the *pirtûk kafe*, they are also important sites in the construction of new Kurdish-reading publics and the distinct value projects they animate; and as Bidar explains below, the value-generating quality of the book cafes that he and many others have helped to run are not so much in their

capacity to generate profits (something they only occasionally succeed at anyway) but in their capacity to re-position the Kurdish language as a potential medium of value in public life. For many of my interlocutors at the LLR, moreover, this process was often simply described as the protection and promotion of ‘culture’ (**K**: çand/kûltûr; **T**: kültür) – a form of value that was irreducible to either language’s political or economic dimensions. While the ‘realm of capital’ prevails over the of the *kafe*, it does so only in part (and in some places more than others), while the logics of commercial calculation are themselves inflected for other social value metrics, namely a notion of ‘culture’. Perhaps no single medium of value is more emblematic of the larger effort by the *pirtûk kafe* to transform the language ideologies shaping public reception of Kurdish in Turkey as that from which it takes its name, the book.

Books are simultaneously text artifacts, commodities, and sensuous material things (for example, in the descriptions of my interlocutors below they are given both a ‘weight’ and ‘smell’); and in examining the divergent ways that books are positioned as media of value in the *pirtûk kafe*, we must remain cognizant of how books’ association with particular sets of qualities is achieved through a sign-object-interpretant relationship. This is to say that the value ascribed to a book is always the expression of a relation between relations, wherein its qualities are semiotically fashioned as corresponding to some set of socially recognized qualia only in relation to something (or someone) else (Kockelman 2008). To put this another way, for example, Kurdish-language books can have a monetary value in relation to other commodities (i.e. exchange value), a literary value in relation to other books, a cultural value in relation to other kinds of Kurdish-language media, or even a political value in relation to Turkish-language media, but these values are themselves more or less salient depending on the social relations in

which they are activated and the different ways that books, as media of value, are deployed in the construction of social relationships.

Recent anthropological accounts of the intersection of language, politics, and media in Kurdistan have drawn our attention to the relation between the ‘material’ qualia of print media such as books, and the effects of these qualities on the divergent ways that they circulate and become deployed and valorized in public life. In her account of the struggle of Kurdish female singers to establish themselves as the ‘authors’ of their poetic compositions (or *kilam* in Kurdish), Schäfers (2017) points to the importance of the ‘durable’ quality of cassette tapes and print media in inscribing one’s ownership over cultural material, arguing that uneven access to the ‘means of inscription’ on the part of subaltern women deeply disadvantage them in their capacities to achieve public recognition (or financial compensation) for the creative efforts. Jamison (2016), too, describes how the qualia of text objects such as Kurdish books allow them to take on meanings even when they are unread, arguing that “the circulation of largely unread Kurdish texts allows us to investigate how the material qualities of certain text objects—shape, sheen, heft, font size, organization, display, location, to name a few—contribute toward the assertion of particular forms of linguistic commensurability and equivalence” (pp. 34-35).

Both scholars draw on a wider body of work within linguistic anthropology that deconstruct the ideological projection of the ‘national language community’ onto divergent speech communities, as well as modern semiotic ideologies that privilege ‘written’ over ‘oral’ forms of communication (Bauman and Briggs 2003; Gal 2006; Silverstein 1996). Taken together, however, they likewise show us the competing ideological metrics and forms of relationality through media objects are valorized in practice. For Schäfers (2017), the problem is largely articulated through the opposed of categories of individual authorship and collective

culture, and an analysis of how these categories are deployed in debates over different forms of social ownership and implicated in “the reproduction of enduring patterns of authority and domination” (p. 555). Jamison, on the other hand, frames the cultural evaluation of Kurdish text objects through the metrics of nationalist politics, pointing to how the proliferation of Kurdish-language media in recent years is itself deeply implicated in “bitterly contested struggles for sovereignty and power” between Turks and Kurds (p. 55). Rather than work at cross-purposes, however, these two pieces allow us a better sense of the multivalent quality of Kurdish-language text objects as media of value at a moment in Kurdish public life when increasingly, as Schäfers describes, “struggles for Kurdish political and cultural rights intersect with an emerging market dealing in representations of minority culture” (p. 558).

New *pirtûk kafes* are among the most important sites where new Kurdish-language text-artifacts-as-commodities circulate between differently positioned members of emergent Kurdish-media publics. They are thus particularly productive sites to explore contemporary processes of ‘mediatization’ (Agha 2011), or the “institutional practices that reflexively link processes of communication to processes of commoditization” (p. 163), and draws our attention to how assessments of the value of a book as a commodity are informed by broader semiotic and social processes in which such books are mobilized. The book, like tea, is a commodity; but also like tea, it is a broader medium of value whose social meanings and significance can, in many social contexts, transcend the logic of market exchange and avail themselves to evaluation along multiple metrics of value. In one sense this is an obvious point, already made more than a century ago by Marx in his discussion of the relation between ‘use’ and ‘exchange’ value. In another sense, however, its implications are anything but readily apparent and point us to the

deeper imbrication between value as a product of capitalist commodity production and exchange and the semiotic values that give commodities their meaning, and thus value, in social life.

Summarizing the main insights of Terence Turner's project to rethink the Marxist categories of 'creative action' and 'value' beyond capitalist frameworks, Graeber (2001) focuses our attention on the centrality of Turner's conceptualization of 'concrete media of value.' Nearly all forms of social value, argues Graeber following Turner, are "realized mainly in the public, communal sphere, in the forms of concrete circulating media of value" (Graeber 2001 p. 74). In practice, the potential range of such 'concrete media' is incredibly diverse,³ but Graeber lists three common characteristics that all such media can be said to possess -- characteristics also shared by Kurdish books as - namely 1) their capacity to serve as a measure of value, in terms of absence/presence (i.e. the existence of Kurdish books as evidence of a modern Kurdish print language, as Jamison (2016) argues), ranking (e.g. the hierarchal relationship between Turkish and Kurdish linguistic codes), and proportionality (e.g. the exchange value of a particular book); 2) the existence of such media as discrete material things (e.g. the status of books as the 'concrete, material means' through which the value of Kurdish culture is realized before a wider public; as well as 3) the tendency to become positioned as 'ends in themselves' (e.g. the ideological emphasis, as described by Jamison (2016), not on the textual content of Kurdish-language books but on their status as material objects of value even when left unread).

Consider, for instance, how Xelil, the co-founder of the oldest Kurdish *pirtûk kafe* in Mardin, described the differently situated capacities of books to generate social value in contrast to their failure to generate sales revenue.

³ Graeber (2001) himself mentions foodstuffs, livestock, durable objects such as shells and beads, cultural practices such chiefly chanting, esoteric forms of knowledge, or paper currency or metal coins, et al.

Xelil: So we run our place as *kafe* with books, or a *pirtûk kafe*. So we don't have the worry of paying the rent with our book [sales] because the *kafe* takes care of the rent. So maybe there is a bookseller around here who just does books. But the *kafe* [part] takes care of 'the merit of industry.' So we are the only ones like this in Mardin. Ok, so maybe there is a book-seller or two in the shopping mall. But they are just [book]-stands, that's it. They just can't afford the rent. But many people want to try anyway. They will see a nice little shop and want to rent it, fix it up and sell books. Because it's a work with prestige, it is a nice kind of work. People love it, and many people dream about selling books. Selling books is a really nice job. I'll give you an example, because I sell books I can speak with - sorry what was your name?

PL: Patrick.

Xelil: I can speak with Patrick. And it's not like other commercial *kafes*. I probably wouldn't have gotten to speak with you. There wouldn't be such an opportunity. Because you come here to do research. Once, as a surprise, Suren Asaduryan (a well-known Armenian musician from Turkey) came here. Why? Because of books. Books give a 'weight' (**K:** giranî) to a place and the people who come to that place can take it for themselves. It's really nice. I mean everyone, well not everyone but many people want to sell books, but it's hard to keep it going.

PL: So, you sell tea and books?

Xelil: We sell tea so that we can sell books. When we opened the *kafe*, during the first two years, the news channel IMG came and did an interview with us. Perhaps you remember them? They were later closed down by the government. They asked me, "how are you able to make a living here selling books?" I told him, like we say in Kurmanji, I put Xelo's hat on Welo's head'. I take from one to give to another. That's how it can work.

The problem, as Xelil describes, is the divergence in the capacity of realizing books' value as commodities on the one hand, and their value as objects of social esteem on the other: selling books is a pleasant job that brings with it social recognition – it is both a 'job with prestige' (**K:** karekê bi prestîjê) and a 'pleasant job' (**K:** karekê xweş).⁴ But in Mardin, books

⁴The word's borrowing into and use in modern Kurdish would certainly amuse Leach or Barth, but it also shows the manifold relations of mutual influence between the categories of social science and those communities on whom they are employed.

don't sell (or at least not in sufficient numbers to cover the fixed costs of running a bookshop). So Xelil and his partner decided to sell tea as well, not so that they could make a profit, but so they could afford to sell books. The preparation and sale of tea provides for monetary profit – i.e. ‘the merit of one’s labor’ (K: heqê xebatkari) – and thus allows an owner to meet basic expenses or even to be compensated for one’s own work. Books, on the other hand, give a ‘value’ (K: giranî) or ‘weight’ to a place⁵ – a form of value that is distinct from their exchange value as commodities and which all those who come to the *kafe* can participate in.

In contrast to books, tea is positioned in this ideological conjuncture as a mere commodity on whose value the *kafe* depends for its operation. Of course, as I describe in the previous chapter, tea is never simply a mere commodity – in fact, no commodity is ever a commodity independent of its social use (i.e. its ‘use-value’ or its larger set of semiotic properties). A book-seller cannot substitute ‘widgets’ or ‘telephones’ for tea and expect to meet with similar success. Rather tea only becomes just a commodity in the practical contrast made by the book *kafe* operator between the sale of books and the sale of tea – with the former, at least from the perspective of Kurdish language activism, constituting the ‘ends’ and the latter the ‘means’ of the *pirtûk kafe*’s existence as a social institution – here captured by the Kurdish proverb to put ‘Xelo’s hat on Welo’s head’ (K: kumê Xelo li ser serê Welo kirin).

In Xelil’s formulation, in contrast to tea the value of books is not assessed through the metrics of exchange value. In Mardin, the market for text commodities is relatively small and thus the cost of running a bookshop by itself prohibitively expensive given the expected low volume of sales. But, importantly, books still generate economic value not in spite but because of

⁵In adjectival form, the word ‘giran’ can mean both ‘heavy’ and ‘expensive’, and thus its nominalization ‘giranî’ conveys something like ‘substance’, ‘value’ or ‘weight’.

their classification as objects of intrinsic worth (and not as commodities). In the *pirtûk kafe*, Kurdish books are thus valuable in three senses: (1) firstly, as commodities unto themselves, although not in sufficient numbers to make this a significant source of income for those who run them. (2) Secondly, and more importantly, Kurdish books are valuable as desirable material objects of aesthetic and cultural importance that are imagined to possess the values of ‘culture’, ‘learning’ and ‘education’ *in potentia* (Munn 1986)– even when left on a shelf unread. In this ideology, Kurdish books are positioned as objects of intrinsic cultural and linguistic value that deserve valorization independent of their profit potential and represent a wider social value into which new generations of Kurdish youth ought to be socialized. An appreciation for the value of books as material objects, with the qualities of ‘weight’, ‘sheen’ and ‘beauty’ (Jamison 2016), and as tokens of Kurdish language activism and learning. This juxtaposition is exemplified, for instance in an Instagram story shared by a female colleague from the LLI, originally from Mardin, showing her young nephew enthusiastically looking through her collection of Kurdish-language titles with the caption: “Let children grow up with the smell of books. Nephew Y” (see figure 5.2)– a post which nicely captures the celebration of Kurdish-language books as both material objects and indexes for an appreciation and celebration of Kurdish-language education. On the other hand, this is a ‘value’ or ‘substance’ (K: giranî), as Xelil notes, that all who come to the book *kafe* are able to ‘take for themselves’ (K: ji xwe ra bigrin) simply by virtue of their co-presence with books and others who value them.

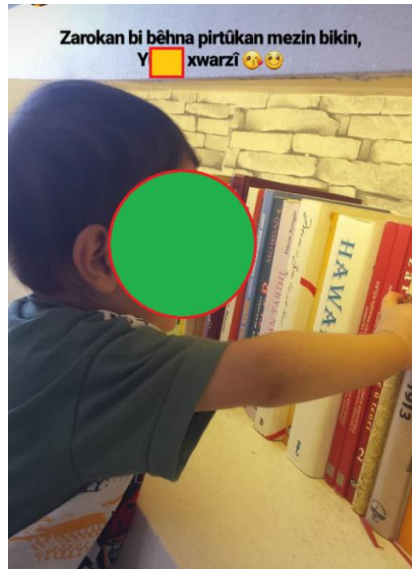


Figure 5.2: (K): “Let children grow up with the smell of books. Nephew Y.” An Instagram story shared by a graduate of the LLI showing her nephew examining her Kurdish book collection.

Finally, (3) books also have value in a third sense: inasmuch that their semiotic qualities in the *pirtûk kafe* are in effect valorized through the sale of other commodities, namely tea. Inasmuch that people come to the *kafe* to celebrate books, books also confer value to the tea by encouraging customers to consume it there (as opposed to any other ordinary *kafe* or *kahve*) and can also serve, more cynically, as an effective draw for a *kafe* targeting young Kurdish audiences. This is generally not considered a problem when the economic value created in the *pirtûk kafe* is seen to be reinvested in cultural activities or redistributed to cash-strapped Kurdish-language activists in partial compensation for the labor. However, if a *pirtûk kafe* is seen to become too profitable, it can also raise questions about the relative importance of ‘tea’ (i.e. ‘commerce’) and ‘books’ (i.e. activism) and the status of latter in relation to the former – either as end in itself or a cynical form of self-branding.

III. Commerce, Activism, and the Profit Motive

Importantly, people do not always lose money on projects promoting the Kurdish language or culture. In the context of the growing *kafe* sector in North Kurdistan, the growing

visibility and popularity of Kurdish-language code means that in some contexts, it can actually be profitable to employ it in some aspect of *kafe* design or branding. This is accomplished through many techniques, including giving *kafes* Kurdish names – and thus Kurdish-language signs (see figure 5.3) – or simply labeling the men’s and women’s restrooms in Kurdish (‘mêr’ and ‘jin’ respectively); including traditional ‘Kurdish’ dishes or drinks on the menu; or playing popular Kurdish music. Consider how Berivan, another student at the LLR from Mardin, described the recent emergence of a new class of commercial *kafes* that seek to employ Kurdish-language code as a form of branding or marketing:

Berivan: Actually, now for example, there are *kafes* that try to be read as a bit more ethnic, and these more preferred by students and other people. And so there are these ethnic *kafes*, their feel, their interiors; and ok, so maybe kafe Z isn’t like this, since I know the owners of Kafe Z, but many other *kafes*, well generally these *kafes* use it this as a way of making a profit...so that they can make themselves better known.

PL: But isn’t this a good thing for Kurdish?

Berivan: It is. It’s a good exchange.

Here she draws on a more widely ideologized contrast between *kafes* operating according to ‘commercial’ objectives (i.e. to make a profit), and those oriented toward what my interlocutors refer to as ‘ideological’ principles – here represented by the defense and promotion of Kurdish culture. As Gal (2012) describes, it shows the co-constitutive nature of economic and semiotic value. Culture adds value to the *kafe* as a commercial operation, even as the *pirtûk kafe* claims to create value for culture. Thus Berivan observes that, following the growth of popularity in the *pirtûk kafe*, a larger subset of *kafes* in Mardin began to become a bit more ‘ethnic’ (**K**: etnîk) in their aesthetics – a set of qualities she refers to as ‘their feel’ (**T**: dokunuşu) and ‘their interiors’ (**K**: hundira wan) – as a form of self-promotion, i.e. ‘with the goal of profit’ (**T**: kar amacıyla). On the one hand, she shares her unease about what the practice meant for Kurdish

language activism, especially we assume, given the past labor and sacrifices of so many Kurdish teachers and educators. On the other hand, when prompted by my own question, she acknowledges that the ability of Kurdish values to be profitable represents a positive development, lit. ‘a good exchange (**K**: takasekê baş e), because it speaks to the actual success of such projects in positioning Kurdish as a medium of value in public life.

Berivan’s formulation also mirrors a more widely circulating ideological contrast and practical tension between ‘pride’ and ‘profit’ that, as described by Duchêne and Heller (2012), has to dominate minority-language discourses in recent decades. Duchêne and Heller (2012) draw attention to discursive shift away from discourses of ‘pride’ to discourses of ‘profit’ in minority-language activism, arguing that the latter has become especially salient under conditions of neoliberal globalization. This fits nicely with my own observation around the emergence of a Kurdish culture industry in Turkey over the past two decades and the position of the *pirtûk kafe* in relation to growth in this sector. However, following Gal’s (2012) work in the same volume, I also want to draw attention to this existence of this contrast as a co-constitutive oppositional pairing in which ‘pride’ (i.e. Kurdish language as an intrinsic social value) is hierarchically privileged in relation to ‘profit (i.e. the instrumental use of Kurdish for monetary or other forms of social gain) on a salient axes of differentiation. This contrast, in turn, serves as a metric to evaluate one’s own and others’ social practices, and in turn, “harnessed to formulate, motivate, justify or explain emerging struggles in social relations” (Gal 2012, pp. 23-24). An analogous ideologized contrast is also reproduced by my interlocutors in their evaluation of the work of the book *kafe*. On the one hand, one ought to operate a book *kafe* out of a feeling of pride or enjoyment in one’s language and culture and from one’s desire to protect it and share it with others, not for commercial profit. On the other hand, everyone recognizes that capital

(either earned through commerce or invested from other sources) is a basic condition for a *kafe* to operate. This ideological contrast, therefore, is likewise reflected in the competing logics of *kafe* operations and especially the ways that the value metrics of Kurdish-language activism intersect with the economic and moral domains of value more generally.

But this opposition also draws our attention to a more generalizable opposition, also identified by Weber (1922), between ‘purposive’ or ‘instrumental’ logics of commerce, (i.e. using money to make money) and what the latter calls ‘value rationality’, or a “conscious belief in the unconditional and intrinsic value—whether this is understood as ethical, aesthetic, religious, or however construed—of a specific form of particular comportment purely for itself, unrelated to its outcome” (i.e. the idea that Kurdish-language and Kurdish books represent objects of value unto themselves) (Weber 1922/2019 p. 101). Following recent work in semiotic anthropology on value, however, I want to expand Weber’s notion of ‘value rationality’ into a broader notion of ‘semiotic value’ that considers how an object’s measurable qualities and social meanings are closely implicated and ultimately inseparable from its existence as a commodity (Gal 2012, 2017; Keane 1994; Nakassis & Searle 2013; Searle 2014). It is not simply that tea valorizes books or that books valorize tea in market terms, but that their distinct semiotic and social qualities that allow them both to be instrumentalized in the service of the one another and positioned, alongside money, as social ends in themselves.



Figure 5.3: New commercial *kafes* in Diyarbakir with Kurdish-language names and signs: left, ‘Gopal Xane’ (‘House of the Cane’); right ‘Seva Çıra: Cihê rûniştinê’ (‘Lantern Night: the sitting place’)

Pirtûk Kafes are commercial operations where commodities are exchanged for money, and most cafes are organized to generate a profit, or at least enough revenue to meet operating expenses and pay a salary to its staff (who are often also the owners). That said, many *kafes* that I witnessed open by friends and acquaintances also failed to generate sufficient revenue and eventually close, while others continued to be subsidized at a loss (as conceived in economic terms) by their owners or operators – both through the injection of capital and the provision of uncompensated labor. In this case, however, as idealized in Kurdish activist discourse, this subsidy is normally understood to constitute a kind of social investment that is redirected toward a value horizon in which Kurdish culture, language, and literacy are given intrinsic worth. Be that as it may, all of my interlocutors understand that *kafes* run on money. Out of necessity, therefore, all *kafe* operators adopt an instrumental approach to money and commodity exchange on some level. At stake in the contrast between the ‘ideological’ and the ‘commercial’, therefore, is a question of ends, not means, and the wider horizon of value to which a *kafe* is oriented.

In the case of Bidar, whose *pirtûk kafe* close to the institute became a gathering place for faculty and students, as well as writers and artists and a larger network of teachers and other Kurdish *memurs* and urban professionals attracted to the *kafe*'s cultural events (as well as to the larger social scene that formed around them), 'profit' was not supposed to be the primary motivation, as he described to me (in Turkish) in an interview at my home in Mardin:

We were never that worried about making money. We never had that worry at Kafe B. We did all kinds of events but we never took any money. In fact, we were spending money. When we invited a writer, we would pay for his/her transportation, for a place to stay. We were helping to sell a lot of their books, sometimes we were giving away books... We never made any money. It was all coming out of our pocket. And if we did make any money, we would immediately organize some other event and put the money toward that. I never had money; it was always leaving my pocket. I would go and figure out how much money I needed to spend on the cafe every month. Because I was a *memur* I wasn't too desperate for money. I was spending at least 1000 liras a month on the *kafe*, one third of my salary. My partner in the cafe was the same way. He was also a teacher, a mathematics teacher. We never had any arguments about money, because we were never interested in making money. We spoke about this at the beginning. We are going to open a 'culture *kafe*' (T: kültür kafe). It's enough if it can finance itself. We had mostly university students as customers, and those interested in Kurdish books.

The opposition between cafes run according to 'commercial' (T/K: ticari/ticariî) reasons and those run for 'ideological' (T/K: ideolojik/ideolojik) motives is, in fact, a contrast commonly drawn by friends, colleagues and other interlocutors when I brought up my interest in the *kafe*. Here I need to separate the terms of my analysis and my interlocutors' terminology. I am not suggesting that the domain of commerce is non-ideological. From the perspective offered by semiotic anthropology, all social life, including the 'economic', is infused by ideology in that the latter connects and gives meaning to all social action (Silverstein 1992; Gal and Irvine 1995). Rather I am describing a situated ideological contrast through which Kurdish language activists describe, evaluate, and identify different kinds of motivated action (i.e. the 'commercial' and 'ideological') while they situate themselves and own projects in relation to it.

In opposing the goals of the *pirtûk kafe* to the value domain of economics and commerce they are, in fact, creating an analogy between politics and Kurdish language activism as modalities of social action. This is despite the fact that most Kurdish language activists draw a distinction between the domains of ‘political’ and ‘cultural’ struggle and locate the work of the *pirtûk kafe* in the former, as I describe below. In contrasting *kafes* as either ‘commercial’ and ‘ideological’ projects, importantly, *kafe* operators are borrowing from the conceptual vocabulary of political struggle. In the institutional practices and discourse of the PKK, for example, ‘ideology’ means ‘party ideology’ – or those sets of principles, beliefs and values that inform the party’s understanding of its political goals and its strategy to achieve them. All new recruits are subject to ideological education and taught that it only with the correct ideology, in combination with the cultivation of a ‘will’ (T: irade), that one becomes an effective political ‘subject’ (T: özne) capable of effectively making a political ‘claim’ (T: iddia). In taking up the category, however, Kurdish language activists are not claiming PKK ideology, rather they are appropriating a more widely available model of social action wherein what is here understood as a hierarchically lower forms of means-oriented action – e.g. the commercial activity of buying and selling of tea in which money and labor is the means and money is the end – is subjectively re-oriented toward a larger horizon of value. In this case, the public celebration of the Kurdish language, book culture, and education.

Consider, for instance, how Haydar describes the differences between a profit-driven *kafe* that he had helped to run for close to 6 months and the more explicitly ‘ideological’ motivations of Kurdish *pirtûk kafes* where he was a regular patron:

Haydar: If you’re asking about our *kafe*, well our *kafe* was 100% commercial. But, ok, the goal is commercial, but there is also that feeling.

PL: It wasn’t like Kafe L. or B.?

Haydar: No, it was entirely commercial, but with a difference. Let me give you an example. We ran this *kafe* for 5-6 months. But every month at least 6-7 people were coming here and eating their meals [for free]. They were students, all of them were students.

PL: Kurdology students?

Haydar: All from Kurdology, like 90% of them.

PL: Oh, I see. So the goal is commercial, but at the same time...

Haydar: So, the goal is commercial, but you also have that sensibility, that spirit...

PL: Do the customers also get this or what?

Haydar: Customers, well among the customers who came to us there were two groups. One was really very cultured. They would really come to sit. They like polite music. Pleasant music.

PL: Kurdish music?

Haydar: Kurdish and international.

PL: Were these young people?

Haydar: Yes, generally. But there was another type who wanted to come to listen to their music, drink their beer, and go home.

PL: Of course, you had the view there too.

Haydar: Yeah. We had a few, in fact we had a [rooftop] terrace [in the Old city]. But if you have that thing you're talking about, a real ideological claim, it would have to be somewhere where you engaged in activities. The kind of place where you would give concerts, you would host workshops, you would organize reading groups. Of course, that is something different.

Here Haydar makes explicit the distinction between *kafes* that operate on a 'commercial' (**K**: *ticarî*) basis, and a smaller subset of *pirtûk* or *kûltûr kafes* that operate according to an 'ideological claim' (**K**: *iddaya ideolojîk*). This claim entails the organization of various cultural activities – in Haydar's example, 'concerts' (**K**: *konser*), 'workshops' (**K**: *atolye*) and 'reading groups' (**K**: *grupên kitapxwandin*). Here, too, the *pirtûk kafe*'s cultural 'activities' (**K**: *çalakî*) – a central category in Kurdish activist discourse describing both the work done for language as well

as the realization of that work in forms of social enjoyment and solidarity⁶ – is what distinguishes it from other, merely ‘commercial’ *kafes*. But notice how the same ideological contrast between the *pirtûk kafe* and the ordinary *kafe* is in fact reproduced in the latter, as where Haydar distinguishes between the commercial objectives of the *kafe* he ran with his friends on the one hand and its ‘sensibility’ (K: *hesasîyet*) and ‘spirit’ (K: *ruhîyet*) – a reality in evidence by their generosity toward Kurdish students. Notice how an analogous contrast is also made between two types of customers: wherein one is described as possessing ‘culture’ (K: *kûltûr*), enjoys good music and comes to sit and talk with others, another just wants to come and drink before going home. Here we see how this contrast is fractally reproduced across multiple scales and in the context of different kinds of comparisons (Gal and Irvine 2019). This is noteworthy, I suggest, because it draws our attention to how the value Kurdish activists ascribe to the Kurdish language and education also becomes located in the ‘spirit’ of certain places and the profile of their customers.

IV. The *Kafe* and the Moral Public

In the above conversation Haydar also draws our attention, however, to another reality: namely, how even within entirely ‘commercial’ *kafes*, owners and patrons are often bound by feelings of mutual obligation and affinity that transcend market logics. Although they ran a commercial *kafe*, he and his fellow *kafe* operators feel obliged to occasionally provide for the meals of Kurdish students who could otherwise not afford them, and by extension, allow them to participate in the public activities of the *kafe*. But the generosity of an operator toward a customer represents only one of many relational stances available in the moral public of the *kafe*.

⁶ As well as the name of a new, popular Kurdish student organization that organizes trips for Kurdish university abroad and invites foreign student groups to Turkey to take part in Kurdish-language cultural activities.

Beyond the contrast between the values shaping the ‘commercial’ activities of the *kafe* and the ‘ideological’ commitments of Kurdish language activism, my interlocutors also frequently referred to how the social world of the *kafe* was also built on face-to-face moral relationships between known persons built on relationships of reciprocal generosity and mutually acknowledged ties of solidarity and *samimiyet* – a reality that is in fact often explicitly linked to the larger value horizon of Kurdish language activism and the moral qualities of the *kafe* public.

Consider how Haydar describes his preference for Kurdish book cafes over more upscale franchise *kafes* located in newly built urban developments and shopping malls that dotted Mardin’s New City, even when tea or coffee was the same price at both kinds of locale:

Haydar: Just think. So you could go to *David’s* and get a coffee, or you could to *kafe X* and have one, What’s the difference? That’s a *kafe*. This is a *kafe*. Let’s say its five liras there, five liras here. But how does the design of the place affect people. When I go to *kafe L*. I feel like I’m at home. Why? Because its conception, because the physicality of the space, has been prepared just that way. Because there is a *samimi* relationship between myself and the people who own it and work there.

PL: So, it’s an issue of *samimiyet*?

Of course, it’s 100% *samimiyet*. Both with the owners, and the people who work there. You can see it as a symbol of culture. In *kafe X* you can see a piece of culture. And in *Ildo* everything is luxurious, grandiose. Its lighting. Its ceramic work. Its ironwork. But in *X*. you can see books. No? You can be among people of a humbler background. It’s not that crowd of rich people who got rich of their father’s money. It’s mostly just teachers and students

Haydar: So *memurs* and students?

PL: Yes, that’s it really. For example, the ‘contractors’ don’t come to *kafe X*.? Did you understand? How the spirit of the cafe shapes the people who go there?

As in an earlier part of the interview quoted above, Haydar is distinguishing between two kinds of *kafes* – those entirely ‘commercial’ imitations of contemporary global café culture (e.g. Davids’ People) and Kurdish culture or book *kafes* (e.g. Mardin’s first and most important *pirtûk kafe*). Like Berivan above, he draws our attention to the aesthetic qualities of such places – what he glosses as the ‘the physicality of the space’ (**K**: fizîka mekanê): in contrast to the ‘grandiose’ (**K**: ihtişam) and ‘luxurious’ (**K**: lux) qualities of Ildo, an upscale Turkish national patisserie franchise, with its expensive metalwork and ceramic tiles and the *pirtûk kafe* with all of its books – an aesthetic that positions it as a ‘symbol of culture’ (**K**: sîmgêyekê kûltûrê) in contrast to a site of capital accumulation. But the contrast in aesthetics is linked to larger social stereotypes that structure indexical links between occupational and class categories and the promulgation of certain social values. In contrast to the ‘contractors’ (**K**: mutehît) – here a general gloss designating all those who make money in the speculative world of real estate construction or through corrupt municipal and state contracts, i.e. ‘not that crowd of rich people who got rich of their father’s money’ – the is frequented by a more humble set of teachers and students. Here he links the interior space of the *kafe*, the social backgrounds of the other patrons, and the relationship between cafe patrons, owners, and workers (the last being labeled under the heading of *samimiyet*) and describes how these links function together to produce a social ‘spirit’ (**K**: ruhîyet) of feeling of belonging described as ‘feeling at home’ (**K**: li mala xwe xiz kirin). Here, we see how *samimiyet* constitutes a social value that is both ideologically contrasted to the value logics of commodity exchange and yet deeply implicated in shaping the patterns of that exchange. This last point is particularly notable because it destabilizes the projection of a set of Euro-American cafe practices and their corresponding commercial logics (albeit ones now encountered globally) as universally valid.



Figure 5.4: Interior of a *pirtûk kafe* in Mardin

This is apparent when examining how in the book *kafe*, the ‘economic’ value that is sometimes derived as profit from the sale of commodities is often not reinvested in a profit-generating enterprise (i.e. used as capital), and therefore does not remain ‘economic’ in the sense generally understood by the term. Rather, this value is invested in and realized as part of non-capitalist value projects. Such projects are often very limited in scope, as the common case where profit is extracted from the *kafe* and transformed into the procurement of the necessities of life for oneself and one’s kinship networks (family members, neighbors, business partners, or co-workers). This also raises the problem of how different forms of non-waged labor become necessary to the production of value in the *kafe*, and draws our attention to the problem of how the revenue derived from commercial activity in the *kafe* is subsequently invested as part of non-market value projects –i.e. in the maintenance of interpersonal relationships and the construction of social persons, or those disparate aspects of social life that have, in the Marxist tradition, been productively (and unproductively) unified under the common heading of ‘social reproduction.’

But this is further apparent when examining how, within the social life of the *kafe* in Kurdistan, a tension almost invariably emerges between the value regimes governing the purchase and sale of commodities on the one hand, and their redistribution or reciprocal offering

and sharing on the other. Laurier's (2008) 'third place'-inspired cafe ethnography, for instance, enumerates a few of the 'recurrent activities' that he claims constitute a kind of universally generalizable customer experience, arguing that "listing them in this way provides a minimal reminder of the sequence of activities that constitute a café visit"; here he lists 'entering the café', 'selecting a seat/table', 'ordering', 'paying', 'the course of drinking or eating', and 'leaving the café' (p. 168). But anyone even remotely familiar with *kafe* culture in Kurdistan will immediately notice a problem with this formulation: not all, in fact perhaps not even most 'customers' pay for their food and drink (and almost nowhere would even paying customers be asked to pay before consumption).

Of course, it makes little difference from the perspective of business accounting or formalist economics whether, within the *kafe*, a customer purchases two teas in a *kafe* and drinks them by herself, or drinks one and shares the other with an acquaintance or friend (the latter simply relegating the distinction to a question of individual 'utility'). From a substantivist perspective, however, such distinctions are critical (Polanyi 1944). In Kurdistan, *kafes* are sites of market exchange. But perhaps just as importantly, they are sites in which certain modalities of redistribution and reciprocity that shaped the social world of the 'guesthouse' or between guest-host relations in private homes are reproduced – albeit with greater flexibility in social roles and equality of footing.

On the one hand, such redistribution can be inflected for perceived differences in access to economic resources between colleagues or peers, as well as for hierarchies of age, professional status, or role (e.g. between guest and host, or student and professor). On the other hand, even in an absence of any acknowledged hierarchies or obvious differences in roles, it is almost invariably the case that only one or several members of a larger group will pay for their peers.

Indeed, although the ‘German way’ (T: *alman usulü*)⁷ of splitting a bill according to what one individually orders is becoming increasingly common among the professional classes of Turkey’s larger cities, it is still very rare in the *kafes* of Mardin and other districts of North Kurdistan; and at the conclusion of most gatherings in a *kafe*, it is often the case that two will politely argue over the right to close the bill, or that several from a larger group will congregate before the register, each vying with the others for the honor of paying. This is how Haydar described the practice to me, linking it in turn to a special quality or value of the Kurdish nation and its culture:

Haydar: This is a collectivism of spirit. The spirit of the Kurdish nation. If you have a group of people. For example, I am a student. We are three people eating together. Now we’ve eaten. If my economic situation is better than theirs then I will pay. And if yours is better...

PL: Then I would pay.

Haydar: According to this culture. Look I am not saying that you must absolutely pay. It would be better if you paid. Because among the Kurds if you are a person who is *merd* (K: ‘*miroveki merd*’, lit. a generous person), ‘*mert*’ or ‘*merd*’, this is something important. Every Kurds want to be known for their capacity for *merd*. That is something human. For food, for tea, everything. For example, if you were to come here today and say, Haydar, your T-shirt is really great, and I take it off and say here you go, [take it]. Do you understand? It also gives me happiness to give it to you. I know that it is a blessing to make someone else happy.

PL: And everyone knows this?

Haydar: Everyone knows this. This collectivism is tied to the love of a person for oneself.

PL: So, is all of this generosity an issue of hierarchy too?

Haydar: In my opinion, yes.

PL: So, the rich are considered generous?

Haydar: Yes, people think that way. Say I went to the village. My brother and I went somewhere to eat. I cannot pay, because my brother is older than me.

⁷Analogous to ‘going Dutch’ in English, possibly introduced to Ottoman consciousness by German military officers and advisors in the 19th century.

- PL:** For example, I also went to eat with Professor Y and he didn't let me pay.
- Haydar:** Of course, how could you pay? Before everything else, you could be considered a 'guest' (**K:** mevan). And so, there is no way you could.
- PL:** But say that difference isn't there, it's just three students, all more or less the same.
- Haydar:** If it's three students: for example, when I was studying at a university in Van, whoever had the most money would pay.
- PL:** But there isn't any accounting?
- Haydar:** Of course not, look, you know that I often go out to eat with professors X and Y, right? Every time one of those two will pay. But now and then I have a little money and I say to both of them, 'Look, please allow me to pay this time.' And they allow me because they also want for me to be able to say that I am *merd*. I also want to be able to say that I am a person (*laughing*). That's it really, it's natural psychology, it's not about borders or hierarchy...if not I wouldn't be able to feel good about myself.

Notice how, at the outset, Haydar explicitly links the value metric of generosity – here described as a collective social value, i.e. 'collectivism of spirit' (**K:** kolektivisma ruhiyetê) and glossed through the category of 'merd', lit. 'man' or 'generous'⁸ to a 'Kurdish national spirit' (**K:** ruhiyeta milletê kurd). At the same time, however, generosity (**K:** merdî) serves as a metric through which to assess individuals – a measure of prestige for which people are publicly recognized, i.e. 'to be known for one's generosity' (**K:** bi merdîya xwe naskirin)– and a practice through which social relations are imagined to be constructed. In part this is significant as further evidence that this association is not only a product of Ottoman and Western colonial discourse (see chapter four), but is routinely reproduced in emic representations of contemporary Kurdish culture, serving as a set of metrics that is offered to assess the behavior of oneself and others. But

⁸The Persian/Kurdish 'merd' becomes 'mert' in Turkish owing to final devoicing. 'Merd' also means 'man', hence the common association of generosity as a 'manly' virtue, but Haydar's formulation (*i.e.* 'mirokeki merd') is less rigidly gendered than Leach (1940) or Barth (1953) discussion might suggest.

secondly, and more significantly, it draws our attention to how, as I suggest above, the sociality of the contemporary *kafe* in Kurdistan is shaped by older, moral relations of value that have only been formally subsumed, in Marxist terms, within market relations. On the one hand, the *kafe* continues as a site of traditional social redistribution, wherein those with the means to be generous are especially expected to behave as such, and wherein differences in social status (such as between elder and younger brothers) or the social role (guest and host) are said to determine who can pay (i.e. to gift a drink or meal to another). On the other hand, Haydar points to how generosity can also function to level relations between social persons – at least among those who wish to enact horizontal modalities of relationality such as defined by friendship, collegiality, or membership in a common national community – a certain degree of mutual reciprocity.

In the course of an actual relationship, the balance between redistribution and reciprocity is carefully negotiated. Invariably, this always leaves a degree of ambiguity in practice and shows us how, rather than simply a reflection of social relations, the gifting and sharing of tea in the *kafe* semiotically and materially produces such relations. When Haydar goes out with the above-mentioned professors, more often than not the latter pay. This is not, importantly, simply because they are professors and he is their student. On the contrary, as I have argued over these past two chapters, their frequent co-presence in the *kafe* can be understood as working to reframe their relationship through a modality of friendship (as opposed to the hierarchical modalities of relationality that define relations between students and professors in Turkish state universities). Rather, it is because as *memurs* with state salaries, they simply possess a greater means to pay. But while this is implicitly acknowledged in the pattern of payments, they cannot always pay. If they did, as Haydar implicitly suggests, theirs would not be a relationship between equals,

between friends, but something entirely different – a hierarchical relation of dependency. But this is not only important inasmuch that it shows the persistence of older cultural frameworks in shaping contemporary *kafe* culture in Kurdistan.

For our present discussion, however, the centrality of discourses around *samimiyet* and generosity is significant inasmuch that moral forms of relationality are themselves implicated in the construction of new Kurdish reading publics and the larger relations of value on which they are predicated. This to say that the construction of such interpersonal relationships is, at the same time, the building blocks through which media circulate and larger ‘national’ reading publics emerge in the first place. This is because such moral relations frequently inscribe those who enter them into other relations of value, whether political or cultural, that can become difficult to separate from the moral bonds of friendship or collegiately. The role of the *kafe* in mediating between face-to-face relationships among known persons and the formation of mass-mediated, reading publics is likewise captured in Haydar’s remarks about the contrasting qualities of the book kafe above that a *kafe*’s aesthetics or its sale of a particular commodity (i.e. Kurdish books) allowed him to feel as if he were ‘at home’. Melike, in turn, when expanding upon why the *pirtûk kafe* that she frequented in Ankara attracts so many young Kurdish students, also stressed a feeling of ‘homeliness’ and comfort that came with seeing those things one values (a culture, tradition, language or music) also valorized before a wider public:

One reason people come to Kafe Y is that they are many Kurds here. Few Turks come. So, they see their culture here. They see their traditions. They encounter their language. For years this wasn’t possible. And here, well not everyone, but let’s say around half of the people are speaking in Kurdish. They play Kurdish songs here. You can’t hear Kurdish songs just anywhere. There are Kurdish [academic] programs here. Kurdish books are sold here. What I want to say is that they see themselves at home here. They see this place as their home. Students pack into the place. And the food here! You know sometimes Mrs. Y (the owner of the *kafe*) makes [traditional Kurdish] food for us here. And so, this is why. There just isn’t that many places like this.

Kurdish students come to the book kafe to acquire or consume desirous objects (e.g. books, Kurdish regional dishes, *kaçak çay*). But they also come, she explains, to participate in larger social value projects and the construction and reproduction of the social relationships on which they depend. Invoking the categories of Kurdish ‘language’ (K: ziman), ‘tradition’ (K: kevneşopî), and ‘culture’ (K: çand), Melike describes how the students who pack into the *pirtûk kafe* encounter a space where their preferred language practices are valorized in public, both in the form of commodities (i.e. Kurdish books, CDs, magazines, live concert tickets) and in relation to other people as part of social relationships. Students can be comfortable speaking their own language as if they were ‘at home’ (K: li mala xwe). They are places where Kurdish music is played, Kurdish lectures are given, Kurdish books are sold, and Kurdish is spoken, all in public. But they are also spaces framed by metrics of *samimiyet*, as seen both as the end of the last chapter and in Haydar’s remarks above (‘It’s 100% *samimiyet*’). Here *samimiyet* again moves us to consider the evaluation of social relationships and to reflect on how it only when the qualities of the *pirtûk kafes* described to us by Haydar and Melike above are mobilized through social relations within the *kafe* that they become valuable as such. The moral relationships between people in the *kafe* likewise become the foundation for the creation of a wider public of value in which Kurdish language and literacy is positioned as a central value horizon.

V: Book *Kafes* and the Politics of Language and Culture

In paying attention to how the values of commodities mediate various forms of sociality and are realized and transformed in the creation of social relationships, I argue that we can offer a better account of the relationship between economic and other forms of social value, and the role that these different values play in mediating between the horizontal anonymity of national publics, the exclusionary hierarchies of nationalist politics, and the intimate relations of kith and

kin as constructed in the home, workplace, and between networks of colleagues, friends, and other known persons. This, significantly, allows us to explore how language takes on value beyond the framework of nationalism and its emphasis on the commensuration of linguistic codes as a pre-requisite for political equality in a world of sovereign nations, drawing our attention to the way that language can (and invariably does) mediate and enact multiple kinds of social identification. Indeed, at the same time that my interlocutors invoked an ideologized opposition between the values of commerce on the one hand, and culture on the other, they often opposed the latter to the category of ‘politics’ (**K/T**: *siyasî/siyasi*) as well.

For instance, this is how Melike described the role of the *pirtûk kafe* and her own experiences at one such *kafe* in Ankara during an interview (in Kurdish) that was itself conducted in the *kafe* in question:

Melike: Kafe Y just opened two years ago (i.e. 2016).

PL: In difficult times then?

Melike: Yes, it was opened in difficult times. Yes, it was difficult times, but despite that this work gets done. Until now, it’s all been ok. There has been no intervention. God willing, things will continue like this. Because this isn’t a site of politics, but [a place] of art and culture. So thankfully no obstacles have come up yet.

PL: and what was there before...in Ankara?

Melike: ...well in Ankara there was an organization before, called H., when there was a problem. Xanim X was responsible there too and when there was a problem and closed down, she opened the book *kafe*. Actually, they think like an organization. But it’s entirely non-political, there is ‘culture’ (**K**: *çand*), ‘culture’ (**K**: *kûltûr*) and music. *Dengbejs* for example, they host a lot of their performances here. And you know the importance of *Dengbejs*, every *kilam* of theirs is like a historical document, a cultural framework...So Kurdish music, Kurdish literature, Kurdish history. You can see everything here.

PL: Other than politics?

Melike: No, you won’t see politics here. Xanim X is also really picky about this. And really, it’s not as if a *kitap kafe* is the best play for politics. I mean there are

such spaces for politics. As Celadet Bedirxan says in his *Hawar* manifesto - I don't know if you've read it? He says that culture and art is our task not politics...

According to Melike, the book *kafe* is a not 'site of politics' (**K**: *cihekê siyasî*) but a space for 'culture' (**K**: *çand/kûltûr*). Yet, when pressed, few of my interlocutors will deny that the kind of Kurdish cultural work undertaken in book *kafe* has political dimensions: in Turkey, inviting dissident academics such as Ismail Beşikçi to give presentations or hosting Kurdish *dengbêj* singers performing *kilams* (poetic compositions performed to music) recounting violent episodes from Kurdish history can, and often are, interpreted as political acts. Moreover, the book *kafe* is run more like an 'organization' (**K**: *komala*) than a commercial operation (recall the opposition between the 'ideological' and the 'commercial' described above). Yet Melike's opposition of culture to politics is likewise quite common, and points to a more narrow definition of the 'political' as relating to official party politics and the contestation of political authority. I will return to the question of language activism in relation to ideologized understandings of 'culture' and 'politics' in the final chapter of the dissertation when I look more closely at the writing practices and cultural projects of students at the LLI. But for now, I want to draw attention to the framing deployed by Melike in her recounting of the Bedirxan's well-known opposition of the 'pen' (**K**: *qelem*) and the 'dagger' (**K**: *xencer*) – which here glosses as a distinction between culture and politics⁹ – specifically around the question of obligation. Indeed, her description of cultural work as 'our task' (**K**: *karê me*) – in contrast to assertions around the individual motivations of cultural workers and language activists, however, understood – introduces a new 'moral' dimension to otherwise 'economic' and 'cultural' activity (Carrier 2018).

⁹ See chapter 5 for an extended discussion of this essay and its contemporary interpreters among current Kurdish-language activists.

-Conclusion-

All of these points were brought home to me during my conversation Xelil, who recounted above how he derived both ‘pleasure’ and ‘prestige’ from the selling of books, when he told me the story about the founding of his *kafe* – of the oldest book *kafe* in Mardin. The origins of Xelil’s book *kafe* go back to his efforts more than a decade ago, at the very beginning of the AKP’s cultural reforms, to organize a Kurdish-language ‘reading group’ (K şêwira xwendinê) while working as a teacher in his hometown of Qoser. As Xelil describes it, he began by recruiting friends and acquaintances, as well as fellow teachers through the local pro-Kurdish teachers union, *Eğitim-Sen*.¹⁰ However, this was not easy work and often required that Xelil trudge around Mardin and Qoser delivering books and haranguing colleagues and friends to support his efforts. Finally, it became too much, and he decided along with another teacher to open a Kurdish-language book kafe that would allow people to enjoy one another’s company while also serving as a place where people could access Kurdish text objects:

And again, I was doing the same thing, going around, meeting different people. But it wasn’t that nice, it was difficult and I couldn’t get used to it. You go around with a book and try to organize people to meet and read a book. Because in Mêrdîn there weren’t even any book-sellers. There just weren’t any. For that reason, I was distributing them. Going around asking who wanted them. Really there weren’t any booksellers. Only some *kirtasiyes* selling school books. Later we said: ‘Why don’t we open a place where we can sell books?’ And the really difficult part was that there were no books in Mêrdîn. And in Mêrdîn there was no place where you could just sit, I mean nice *kafe*, a place where one could chat. There wasn’t anything like this. So, we thought we could open a place. And so, I once saw my [future business] partner, M., and told him I was interested in opening a place, and he also said he wanted to open a place. And so, we said alright, together then. And we looked around for the place, and we found saw [what became] the first floor of Kafe X.

...Our objective then was straightforward. We wanted to be a bookseller, because there weren’t any in Mêrdîn. So, the *kafe*, well right there were a couple of book *kafes* in Diyarbakir. Where friends could go. But there were no bookstores in Mardin, and a lack

¹⁰ A leftist teachers’ union whose local branches in Kurdistan are closely tied to the Kurdish movement – the largest public teachers’ union in North Kurdistan before the 2016 purge (see discussion in next chapter).

of books. And so, we wanted, we saw this work as a responsibility, and we decided to do this together, and we said until there is a good bookseller in Mêrdîn we will do this, but once there is we will be free and then we could give up this work. But until then we wouldn't be free, we would be obligated. And so, we started.

I want to focus on what his story about the history of their book *kafe* can tell us about the recent emergence of a Kurdish cultural industry in Turkey and North Kurdistan, and specifically what it reveals about the relationship between processes of market formation, feelings of social obligation, and the construction of moral relations between known persons.

In modern liberal theories of the market, commodity exchange, in contrast to 'traditional' forms of social redistribution or reciprocity, is conceptualized as a depersonalized affair entailing no enduring forms of obligation. Rather, such exchange is understood to be driven by the self-interest of both buyer and seller and thus does not entail any lingering responsibility on the part of either party following the conclusion of an exchange. However, our *kafe* owner's account opens our eyes to a different reality: the contemporary market for Kurdish books and other text commodities has been constructed, in large part, through networks of mutually known persons, and has often relied on feelings of obligation and therefore on countless acts of uncompensated labor to flourish, again keeping in mind the association between cultural 'activity' (**K**: çalakî) and the labor necessary for their existence (e.g. the hawking of books or serving of tea). Our *kafe* owner describes physically traversing the city, carrying and distributing books. When he goes to acquire books from the major Kurdish publishers in Diyarbakir, he goes not simply as a customer, but as a colleague and fellow proselytizer to whom they offer whatever help he needs (most likely in the form of free advances of books) and respond with what in Kurdistan is the universally recognized offer of hospitality – 'ser serê, ser çawa' (upon our heads and our eyes). When he is not sure how he will see these books, he goes to find friends and acquaintances in *qehwes* or their places of work, and he calls on his colleagues in the teachers' union, converting

all of them into his ‘customers’, even as he recruits them as fellow members of an emergent Kurdish reading public.

Moreover, he does all of this, he declares, because he and his partner saw such work as a ‘responsibility’ (K: *berpirsiyarî*), and felt themselves to be ‘obligated’ (K: *meçbur*). Although he does not explicitly share to whom he exactly felt obligated or responsible, the content of that obligation is clear: he felt obligated to provide Kurdish books for his city and his community. It may be the case, as he describes for us further above, that such work brings with it a certain amount of social esteem as well as personal pleasure. But it is also apparent in his remarks that such work requires a significant amount of both time and labor, often with little in the way of a tangible material reward (and often at the cost of great personal risk to one’s career).

Moving beyond what I would argue is an overly dismissive category of the ‘identity entrepreneur’ with all its implicit associations of ‘identity politics’ as a form of cynical self-promotion (cf. Brubaker 2004), I argue that we should also understand Kurdish language activism from within the perspective of a moral economy of mutual obligation, in addition to an economy of mere commodity exchange, in which Kurdish-language activists and educators stand in a manifold relation of value to the Kurdish language vis-à-vis their friends and colleagues, as well as a wider Kurdish-reading public. But I also want to suggest that rather than simply a pre-given or latent social reality, this moral economy is itself constructed by participants in the course of their activism. Furthermore, I want to suggest that the expansive category of ‘culture’, rather than simply a shibboleth for nationalist political projects, encompasses a variety of value projects and is mobilized to accomplish different kinds of social work that differently organizes the political, economic and moral domains of social life.

Chapter 6: Teachers, Schools, and *Memurluk* in North Kurdistan

On a Friday afternoon in early September, 2016 – less than two months after the failed July-15th coup attempt and the ensuing declaration by the Turkish president of a nation-wide state of emergency – myself and a group of friends, nearly all of whom worked as teachers in local Turkish state schools, gathered in a cafe on a shady pedestrian thoroughfare in Diyarbakir’s *Ofis* neighborhood. Across the country, public school teachers were just returning from summer vacation and preparing for the start of classes, and the beginning of *Kurban Bayramı* (the Feast of the Sacrifice, or *Eid al-Adha*) was just two days away. Yet neither the looming school year nor the upcoming holiday featured prominently in our conversation.

Over the previous days and weeks, a rumor had begun to spread through Diyarbakir and neighboring provinces – fed by leaks from school administrators and the public statements of persons close to the government – that officials within the Ministry of Education were compiling a long list of names in preparation for a major purge of Kurdish teachers working in the region.

Such rumors seemed particularly credible given the existing political environment: already, thousands of state workers had been arrested under suspicion of involvement in the coup attempt, and tens of thousands more had been summarily dismissed from their jobs following the events of July 15th. Government officials, for their part, were pledging that the crackdown on oppositional elements within state institutions would continue.

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim had seemed to confirm rumors of a forthcoming teacher purge during a visit to the city earlier that week. Speaking to a private gathering of pro-government business and civil society leaders at a local hotel, Yildirim offered some ‘clarification’ about the government's plans to combat the influence of the PKK in local state schools, telling the audience that the ‘terror’ which threatened Turkey was not only to be found in the mountains but ‘within the state’ and assuring those present that the government also had plans to deal with all state workers who rubbed shoulders with terrorists. “It is estimated that in this region there are fourteen thousand teachers who are in one way or another in the pockets of terrorists”, Yildirim is reported to have said, adding that the struggle against terrorism could not, therefore, be won by weapons alone. Pledging to send new teachers to replace those who sympathized with the ‘separatist terrorist’ organizations such as the PKK – in the same way the government had replaced state workers linked to the FETÖ-backed coup-plotters¹ – Yildirim laid out the broader logic behind the government's strategy:

“If we fail to confront their logistical support and the brains behind their movement we will be unable to achieve our objectives. We are aware of this. This, therefore, is not a one-dimensional [struggle], but [encompasses] security, development, and social

¹ ‘FETÖ’ is an acronym for *Fethullahçı Terör Örgüt* (‘Fethullahist Terror Organization’), the government’s designation for an alleged conspiracy by a group of state workers linked to Fethullah Gülen to take control of the state, and in use since at least 2014.

rehabilitation. And going forward we will wage a total struggle with all determination to completely cleanse our public institutions.²

A few days later, on the evening before we met in the cafe, the Ministry of Education released a statement through its official Twitter account in which it announced that over eleven thousand teachers in the predominantly Kurdish Southeast and East regions of the country were to be suspended pending investigation for ‘connections to a separatist terrorist organization.’ As we gathered together the following afternoon, the mood was one of uncertainty mixed with foreboding. Although the actual list of the teachers to be suspended (T: ‘açığa alınmış’), dismissed (T: ‘ihraç edilmiş’), or forcibly transferred (T: ‘sürgün edilmiş’) had yet to be officially released by state officials, all the teachers seated with us expected their names to be included. According to widely credited, albeit still unconfirmed reports, the principal criterion for categorizing a teacher as a supporter of the PKK was a record of his/her participation in a one-day teachers’ strike the previous December. The strike had been organized by a prominent pro-Kurdish teacher’s union to protest major Turkish military operations against Kurdish youth militants. The ensuing fighting had engulfed Diyarbakir and other Kurdish cities and towns in the region for months, leaving more than a thousand people dead and over one hundred thousand displaced. All of the teachers present at the café that day had participated in the strike.

Yet still no one knew for certain. In a tactic seemingly more appropriate to an HR handbook than a government ‘anti-terrorism’ investigation, the Ministry of Education elected to delay informing teachers of their status until the end of the workweek that Friday. As the afternoon dragged on, our conversation largely centered around these teachers’ anxiety for the future and the enormous uncertainty which the loss of their jobs would create for themselves and

² For a full transcript of Yildirim’s remarks, see: CNNTURK “Hükümet 14 bin öğretmen için harekete geçiyor” 4-SEP-2016 (all translations by the author unless otherwise noted).

their families. Employment as a teacher in a Turkish state school once almost invariably qualified someone as a *devlet memuru*, or an employee of the Turkish state, and such employment came with - it had once been assumed - certain guaranteed legal rights, among which were life-long job security. Moreover, relative to most private-sector opportunities in Turkey's economically underdeveloped East and Southeast, *memurluk* (or the quality or status of being a *memur*)³ provided one of the primary paths of social mobility for youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.⁴ Even a starting teacher's salary of more than three thousand liras a month, while perhaps nothing to write home about in Istanbul or Ankara, is a middle-class income in Diyarbakir and other cities in the region – and a sum which would be difficult to find in other forms of employment, particularly if one were blacklisted by the government and its supporters.

The looming threat of their suspension or outright dismissal had suddenly forced these teachers to reassess their life circumstances. How would they pay their mortgages or rent, or put food on the table and meet other basic needs? Could they remain in Diyarbakir, or would they be forced to look for employment elsewhere? One of the teachers talked about moving back to his parents' village with his wife and two young children. Another discussed the feasibility of opening a small shop or cafe. Still others began to speak about trying to flee abroad, asking me my views on the asylum process in Europe (on which, I conceded, I couldn't speak with any authority). Amid this nervous brainstorming, Ruken – a guidance counselor in her early 30s who had worked within the state school system in Diyarbakir for nearly a decade – interjected that

³ 'Memurluk' is derived from the 'memur' using an abstract Turkish suffix '-lık'; 'memuriyet' is an older form of the same term, derived using an Ottoman-Persian abstract suffix '-iyet'. The valence of both *memur* and *memurluk* is discussed in detail in the next section of this chapter.

⁴For a discussion on *memurluk* and class mobility in Turkey historically see: Babul 2012.

perhaps there was at least one positive side to these developments. (T) “*Şimdi en azından*” she remarked, “*devletten tamamen kopmuş olacağız.*” (“At least now we will have broken entirely from the state.”)

A little before 4pm, news finally began to filter through to teachers included on the list. Suddenly, everyone was speaking on the telephone, anxiously trying to reach their school principals for information on their status, consoling worried family members and colleagues, or talking with union representatives. Within the hour, the fears of those at the table had been confirmed: all of them had been suspended. Nor were they alone. In Diyarbakir alone, over forty-three hundred teachers had been suspended, a figure representing close to 20% of all teachers in the province.⁵ In Mardin province to the south, the numbers were just as striking: of just under ten thousand total teachers, nearly eighteen hundred were suspended; and in Qoser (T: Kızıltepe), a district of Mardin, twenty different schools were left without a single teacher.⁶

For most, these suspensions ultimately proved temporary.⁷ Of those initially affected, the great majority (approximately 85%) were eventually allowed to return to their jobs after many

⁵According to the Ministry of Education there are currently 21,498 teachers now working in Diyarbakır, although a significant (and still increasing) percentage of these are now likely ‘contracted’ (T: *sözleşmeli*) teachers, who do not possess full *memur* status, and thus can be more easily dismissed. This means that most likely the percentage of full *memur* teachers suspended in the investigation was even higher. I will have more to say on the increase of ‘contracted’ teachers in a later section.

⁶ For another firsthand, contemporaneous account of the teacher purge in the Southeast, see Pervin Kaplan’s interview with Eğitim Sen national president İsmail Koncuk and former president Alaaddin Dinçer: “48 bin eksik öğretmen, 100 bin açık ile başlıyor.” 19-Sep-2016.

⁷ The same cannot be said for many other government workers caught up in the successive waves of purges since the events of July 15th, in which over 130,000 have lost their jobs, including over 28,000 teachers. For a recent account of the purge from a legal perspective, see: Ruys and Turkut (2018).

months of uncertainty – although several hundred were directly fired, and hundreds more were subsequently dismissed or faced mandatory transfer following the outcome of the government’s ‘investigation’. Moreover, the great majority of those allowed to return to their jobs, chose to do so, despite both the trauma and resentment that their ordeal had engendered. This included Ruken, who had suggested to us that day at the cafe that their dismissal might have a positive side, namely their ‘complete break’ from the state. In her recognition of the ties that bound herself and other Kurdish *memurs* to state institutions, and the potential of these ties to position them in a relationship of complicity or subservience with respect to their institutional projects, Ruken’s words reveal how many Kurdish *memurs* are keenly aware of, and at times will openly acknowledge, their ambivalent position between the opposing value regimes of the Kurdish movement and the Turkish state. Her decision to return to work after her suspension, despite her deep reservations about her own participation in the Turkish state’s pedagogic projects in Kurdistan, can help us better understand how the logics of competing value regimes resolve themselves under conditions of economic hardship and the threat of dispossession and violence.

Ruken’s situation is hardly unique among Kurdish teachers working in Turkish state schools, nor, I argue, should her choice to return to work be understood as exceptional, or even necessarily ‘contradictory’ in itself – although, as I discuss later in this chapter, there is certainly much that can be said to be contradictory in the social position of many Kurdish teachers working in Turkish state schools. Rather, Ruken’s actions are entirely normal, even socially expected reactions to a difficult situation, in which an individual’s feelings and beliefs about state institutions and the value projects they organize are necessarily less consequential for one’s relationship to said institutions than economic and social survival, not only for oneself, but one’s friends, colleagues, and family. During my research, I have known and spoken with many

Kurdish teachers, as well as other classes of Kurdish *memurs*, who continue to work in state institutions despite their unease about the roles that they are often compelled to play in the Turkish state's institutional projects. Their various reasons for their doing so, and the consequences of this for how many Kurdish *memurs* in Turkey conceive of, approach and understand their relationship to their work in the state in both their political rhetoric and everyday practices will be central to the discussion that follows. So, too, will the role of Kurdish *memurs* in shaping state educational institutions in a manner that fundamentally alters the social meanings and the circuits of value that Turkey's *memurluk* system organizes.

In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of how the *memur* functions as a social category in everyday social discourse in Kurdistan, giving rise to contested and widely mobilized ideologies of personhood and state; and I describe how *memurluk* structures a social relationship between persons and state institutions defined by the contractual transfer of economic value (in the form of salaries and other state resources) to *memurs* in exchange for professional or administrative services. I then explore how these 'economic values' become mobilized as part of other 'social value projects' (Nakassis and Searle 2013) as they circulate from state institutions to Kurdish teachers, through whom they are transformed by their subsumption into alternative, and at times competing value regimes. Focusing specifically on the centrality of ethnic Kurdish teachers in Kurdish-language activism and education, I argue that role of Kurdish teachers as the primary agents of the Turkish state's pedagogic projects in Kurdistan is complicated by the fact that both 1) many only half-heartedly attempt and partially succeed in socializing their students into the value systems of the Turkish nation-state, with its preferred forms of socio-political identification and linguistic practice; and 2) that the economic value they derive from their work in state schools is in fact mobilized as part of competing social value projects that are themselves

inflected through the contradictory value regimes of Turkey's Kurdish movement and the Turkish state.

Here I examine how social value is mobilized and transformed as it moves along larger social value chains and becomes articulated across multiple social relationships, describing how Kurdish teachers convert the value derived from their positions as *memurs* into a source of livelihood for themselves and their families, a vehicle for upward social mobility, as well as the primary source of 'investment' (or 'subsidy') for an emergent Kurdish cultural industry. In the second part of the chapter, I argue that the ambivalent value relation between Kurdish teachers and Turkish state institutions, as well as the larger value chains through which *memurluk* binds state institutions to Kurdish communities, are increasingly threatened by the twin economic and political crisis afflicting Turkey at present; and I look at how, in the face of this larger social value crisis, Kurdish-language education and activism becomes articulated through alternative value metrics that diverge from, even as they do not entirely escape, the logics of the economic value and market relations in which they are fundamentally embedded. Finally, I place my discussion of *memurluk* in Kurdistan in dialogue with more contemporary conversations around the 'state' as a social reality and its use as an analytical category in the anthropology of Turkey.

I. *Memurluk* in Kurdistan and at Artuklu University

A *memur* is a functionary of the Turkish state and designates a legal-professional category of personhood. Today in Turkey there are several million *memurs* serving in various occupational roles from judges and policemen to doctors, religious officials, and (most numerous) teachers. For many of Turkey's working and lower middle-classes, a position as a *memur* remains an aspirational horizon promising a steady income and life-long job security. In Turkey's popular imagination – the category likewise denotes a range of person types and personality traits encompassing everything from the high, aloof officials to low-level state

functionaries best known for being risk-averse and sticklers for regulations. However, beyond their role as state employees, memurs also constitute an important part of civil society and a significant consumer base – especially in Turkey’s less-developed provinces where they often constitute the largest part of the middle classes.

Any analysis of Turkey’s ‘*memurluk* system’ (T: ‘*memurluk sistemi*’) necessarily takes on a further dimension when one transitions from a discussion of *memurluk* in Turkey generally to ‘Turkish’ Kurdistan specifically, and when one turns from an investigation of the status of the *memur* in its entirety to the specific status of the ‘Kurdish *memur*’ as an increasingly central, if fraught social category for understanding contemporary developments in Kurdish politics and society. Here, where public identification with the state is the weakest in Turkey, we encounter most directly the ambiguities and contradictions of the country’s *memurluk* system) as a larger value regime structuring hierarchies of status, authority and power, and also as an institutional infrastructure shaping the relationships through which such hierarchies become socially meaningful; and here also do we come up most firmly against the limits of the *memur* as a category capable of designating everywhere a consistent or stable set of social ‘voices’, ‘identities’ or ‘subjectivities’.

My goal is to demonstrate how *memurluk* organizes a wider ideological field in which the category of *memur* emerges as an object of public attention and contestation, where it becomes contrasted with and evaluated against a host of other social categories and markers. I want to more closely examine the value metrics shaping how *memur* is taken up in North Kurdistan and mobilized in both everyday interactions as well as in widely circulating discourses on *memurluk*; and to describe how these value metrics can shift in response to larger transformations within institutionalized relations of value between state actors and Turkey’s Kurdish populations. I

intend to show how *memurluk* - both as an ideological field and as a social relationship – is thus deeply implicated in the larger social value projects underlying contemporary struggles around language and identity in Turkish Kurdistan, where it both structures the exchange and shapes the forms of social value through which such projects are reproduced and contested. Turkey's *memurluk* system has thus emerged as the site of an ongoing and bitterly contested political struggle over the status of the Turkish state's pedagogic institutions in Kurdistan and the relations of value binding Kurdish communities to state institutions.

The Institute of Living Languages at Artuklu University in Mardin presented a particularly privileged site from which to explore the relationship between Kurdish public formation and the problem of the *memur* as a social category, *memurluk* as an ideological field, and Turkey's *memurluk* system as an institutionalized set of value relations between Kurdish *memurs*, their communities, and Turkish state institutions. As the location of the first state-recognized Kurdish-language program in Turkish Higher Education, the institute played a central role in the rapid expansion of Kurdish-language media, publishing, and cultural activities in the half-decade between its creation in 2010 and the collapse of the peace process in 2015. As a degree-granting program training Turkey's first cohort of Kurdish-language teachers working in Turkish state schools, it also emerged as an experimental (and controversial site) wherein the rapid growth of Kurdish-language education and activism underway in Turkey since the early 2000s intersected most directly with Turkish state institutions; and where, moreover, these emergent forms of Kurdish cultural politics most directly confronted the AKP's 'Neo-Ottomanist' ambitions.⁸

⁸The AKP's 'Neo-Ottomanist' (T: Yeni Osmanlılık) project sought, among other things, to rebrand Turkey as simultaneously both an avowedly multicultural and outwardly Islamic society

From the moment it was opened in 2010, the Living Languages Institute emerged as an object of suspicion both within government and many segments of Turkey's Kurdish movement. Kadri Yildirim, the institute's first director (and currently an MP for the pro-Kurdish DBP), publicly said as much in an interview with the Turkish journalist Fehim Taştekin in 2014, explaining that, "[In the beginning] the state accused us of sympathizing with the BDP⁹ and Kurdi-Der¹⁰, and Kurds accused of working in service of the government and the Gülen movement."¹¹ One former lecturer at Artuklu, Melkan, had been a founding and prominent member of Kurdi-Der for close to half a decade before he joined the institute in 2011, overseeing the training and certification (although not recognized by any state body) of hundreds of Kurdish-language teachers. In an interview in 2018, two years after he was dismissed from the institute during the first wave of the still ongoing purge of Kurdish academics and teachers, he explained to me that some of his colleagues and acquaintances within the Kurdish language movement had, at first, greeted his decision to work in the institute with hostility and threats, calling it a form of 'collaboration' (T: işbirlikçilik) with the Turkish state.

However, despite widespread opposition to the institute from within the Kurdish movement initially, Melkan explained, Kurdish political discourse on the institute began to

that could recognize and permit ethnic and linguistic differences on the basis of a common religious identity.

⁹The BDP, or Peace and Democracy Party, was an earlier iteration of the current pro-Kurdish DBP/HDP alliance that existed from 2008-2014.

¹⁰Kurdi-Der, or Society for Research and Development of the Kurdish Language (K: Komeleya Lêkolîn û Pêşvexistina Zimanê Kurdî; T: Kürt Dili Araştırma ve Geliştirme Derneği) was a civil society organization, close to the Kurdish movement, that offered free Kurdish lessons and Kurdish-teacher training and certification. It was founded in Diyarbakir in 2006 and was active in most of the Kurdish-run municipalities until its closure by order of the National Security Council (MGK) as a terrorist organization in 2016.

¹¹ See Taştekin, Fehim. "Kürdistan'ın dört parçasını birleştiren okul: Artuklu Kürdoloji" 11-13-2014. Al-Monitor.

soften, notably after it proved immensely popular with Kurdish students. When the MA-program (lisansüstü) was first opened in 2012, for instance, the institute received over two thousand applications, and accepted 500 students into its inaugural class. Many of these students were already working as teachers in Turkish state schools in other disciplines and wanted to qualify to teach Kurdish; others had graduated with undergraduate degrees (lisans) from educational faculties but had been unable to find appointments in their own fields and now hoped to find employment in future positions opened for Kurdish-language teachers. At the time, it was widely rumored that the government planned to hire thousands of new teachers to meet the future demand for Kurdish-language education in East and Southeast Turkey. Melkan confirmed this to me, narrating how soon after the institute opened a delegation of government representatives arrived from Ankara promising as much, albeit behind closed doors. Then in 2012, Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arinc – then the government’s point-man for its evolving Kurdish policy – publicly labeled Kurdish a ‘language of civilization’ (‘medeniyet dili’) for the first time at a conference in Istanbul on the “Democratization Process and the New Constitution”, signaling (by the logic that a language of civilization could also be a language of formal instruction) that the government would be willing to consent to some form of formal Kurdish-language education in Turkish state schools. Later that same year, the government announced that Kurdish-language classes would be offered as an ‘elective’ (T: seçmeli) course in select schools in predominantly Kurdish-populated areas.

However, despite these initial, largely symbolic steps, the government continued to drag its feet. A police investigation opened into the institutes’ inaugural MA class declared 480 of the 500 students to be PKK sympathizers.¹² Then, despite its unofficial pledges, the Ministry of

¹² See Taştekin (2014) cited above.

Education declined to appoint any of its graduates as Kurdish-language teachers, leading to a group of students and faculty to take part in an 18-day hunger strike in 2013. Eventually, the Ministry appointed some two dozen Kurdish-language teachers from among the institute's new graduates, but these proved to be largely cosmetic measures: from among the thousands of students who graduated from the institute (and the six other Kurdish-language departments opened by the government since)¹³ over the past half-decade, less than 100 have been appointed to official positions as Kurdish-language teachers across Turkey. Among the over 40 students who graduated from Artuklu University's Kurdish-language BA program (MA students are no longer eligible to apply for these positions) in 2018, moreover, only two received appointments as Kurdish teachers in Turkish state schools.

As government officials seemed to be renegeing on their pledges around Kurdish-language education -- or 'mother-tongue' (T: *anadil*; K: *'zimanê dayikî'*) education as it was referred to in the official government discourse¹⁴ -- established Kurdish political actors increasingly came to the institute's defense. This became apparent, for instance, in the support and publicity given to hunger-striking students by prominent Kurdish politicians, media outlets and leaders in civil society. Whereas just a few years earlier, actors within the Kurdish movement were openly attacking the institute as a 'state project' (T: *'devlet projesi'*), most were now defending students' right to be appointed as Kurdish teachers in state schools, and therefore to employment as Turkish state *memurs*. Indeed, despite Kurdish political rhetoric around the 'state', and well-

¹³ Kurdish-language programs (in either Zazakî, Kurmancî, or both) have since been opened at Bingöl University, Dicle University, Muşalparslan University, Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Hakkari University, and Munzur University (all state universities in East and Southeast Turkey). The latter two only offer BA programs, while Van Yüzüncü Yıl and Dicle Universities only offer graduate education.

¹⁴I will have more to say about the discourse of 'mother-tongue' in the next chapter.

worn and often mobilized associations and between employment as a state *memur* and ‘collaboration’ with state projects, *memurluk* continued to shape the everyday lived realities and aspirational horizons of many of the institute’s students and faculty, as well as a much larger class of Kurdish *memurs* working in state institutions throughout North Kurdistan.

Until very recently, however, the very ‘Kurdishness’ of these Kurdish *memurs* was often something external to and at odds with their position within Turkey’s civil service. This is to say, until many of the ‘reforms’ of the past two decades (reforms whose status and ultimate trajectory appear increasingly uncertain), any overt expression of Kurdish identity was largely inimical to one’s identity as a Turkish state *memur*. For decades in Turkey, even ordinary citizens were forbidden from speaking Kurdish in state institutions or making public claims to Kurdish identity, and Kurdish *memurs* were expected to conform, in exemplary fashion, to state-sanctioned linguistic practices and forms of public presentation. However, as the situation at Artuklu University and the Living Languages’ Institute reveals, today the ‘Turkishness’ of many Turkish state *memurs* is often partial and conditional on forms of shifting relationality. Moreover, this more general change is not only felt among those *memurs* who work in the still highly circumscribed fields of Kurdish language and culture -- such as Kurdish-language teachers or *memurs* working in the Turkish state’s now decade-old Kurdish-language radio and television broadcasting -- but has become palpable across the spectrum of Turkey’s civilian *memurluk* system in Kurdistan (with the possible exception of the police and judiciary).

Kurdish public perceptions of the institute began to change again when both the president of the institute and the university’s rector were replaced following a ‘corruption’ investigation in 2014. That following Spring, Melkan described these events to me as an Ankara-backed *darbe*, or ‘coup’ within the university. After Melkan and many of the institute’s remaining original

faculty were themselves dismissed following the 2016 coup attempt, some students began referring to the institute's current leadership (composed in part by allegedly 'pro-government' faculty transferred from other departments) as the 'kayyum' - a reference to state-appointed trusteeship governments that forcibly replaced elected Kurdish municipal governments across much of Turkey's East and Southeast during this same period. Whereas Kurdish public debate outside the institute tended to unfold in more generalized terms and centered on its alleged capture by or complicity in a host of government projects, commentary on and explanations of developments in the institute from its students, faculty, and staff tended to paint a more complex picture, wherein the line that separating 'state' actors from those 'resisting' them could shift from one moment to the next.

The situation which I encountered at Artuklu can be helpful for thinking through some of the complex assemblage of institutions, discourses and actors that constitute Kurdish politics in Turkey. Although nominally a state institution, Artuklu could hardly be spoken of as 'state-space' in any absolute sense, and the lines which distinguished state actors from actors belonging to the Kurdish movement seemed to shift greatly from one moment and context to the next. Neither wholly a space of 'state-power' or Kurdish 'resistance', Artuklu emerges as space of contention in which different ideologies and projects confront one another in often fraught and ambivalent ways. Moreover, the views and attitudes expressed by the faculty and student body at the institute were not significantly different from those which I had come across in more independent Kurdish language and cultural organizations. Indeed anti-state discourses were almost as commonplace among faculty and students at Artuklu as any other Kurdish organization in Turkey - despite the fact that the institute was frequently derided as a 'statist' (**T**: devletçi) project within the wider Kurdish movement - and that many of those who gave voice to these

anti-state discourses were themselves employees and functionaries of the Turkish state, either through their positions at the institute itself or as teachers within the Turkish state-school system; and many also had deep and longstanding ties with many of the very same Kurdish organizations and groups which expressed grave doubts about the Artuklu project.

The situation at the institute thus functions to bring into focus the problem of the Kurdish *memur* as an increasingly important, if ambivalent actor in Kurdish politics and society; and the study of *memurluk* among Kurdish populations in Turkey, I contend, offers a unique purchase on which to understand how the Turkish state emerges and endures as a social reality in North Kurdistan, as well as how the contested meanings of ‘memur’, ‘kurd’ and ‘state’ as everyday emic categories are mobilized for understanding, navigating and acting across diverse institutional and social settings. The LLI likewise provides an instructive perspective from which to investigate how social categories become enregistered and reified in contested ideological constructions of political authority and national belonging, as well as institutionalized as larger class distinctions and political divisions within Kurdish society.

As is generally the case with ethnography in small institutional settings, it was often difficult to distinguish between actual political differences and mere personal enmity. Some of the students made claims about certain members of the faculty being supporters of the state, while other students openly defended the same faculty. Several members of the institute’s leadership were also open with me about their initial reluctance to accept their positions and their desire to make the best of a bad situation. On the one hand, Melkan, the purged member of the faculty mentioned above, continues to maintain close personal and professional relationships with some of the institute’s remaining faculty, including those in leadership positions, and to speak respectfully of them as friends and colleagues, showing that it is not only through the

frames of *memurluk* or even as fellow university faculty that many of the academics at the LLI assess their interpersonal relationships and the value horizons on which they are based.¹⁵

The *memur* and bureaucracy

At issue for us here, therefore, is how the *memur* as a social category is related through semiotic ideologies to person types and value metrics; as well as its legal-administrative institutionalization defining the relationship between an individual and the state. The term *memur* is derived from the Arabic past-participle "مأمور" from the root م ر ء ('-m-r) meaning to 'order' or 'command', thus having a literal meaning in Arabic of being 'under command' or 'ordered'.¹⁶ After the Ottoman administrative reforms of the late 19th century, the term *memur* became used more specifically in Turkish to designate a legally recognized class of state-employed administrators and professionals (Findley 1989). Today, it is most commonly translated into English as 'bureaucrat' or 'civil servant.' However, while both 'bürokrat' and 'kamu görevlisi' (meaning in Turkish 'bureaucrat' and 'public official' respectively) are often acceptable synonyms for *memur* in Turkish in certain contexts, neither of the former categories possesses the range of semantic values covered by the latter.

The Turkish *bürokrat* is, like its English cognate, derived from the French, and its range of meanings (from neutral to pejorative) parallels its use in other languages. On the one hand, it

¹⁵ Out of a sense of both respect and gratitude for the welcome I received, as well as out of concern for the reputations and well-being of those who continue to work in the institute, I have attempted to avoid revealing any unnecessary 'gossip' or to go into detail about the specific factions or cliques. Rather my concern is to show how the categories that circulated and were mobilized by students and faculty in Artuklu for talking about politics and power are in fact salient categories across most social spaces and institutional settings in Kurdistan. Thus, while I continue to draw on conversations with students and faculty at Artuklu, I generally avoid overly detailed anecdotes pertaining to the institute itself.

¹⁶ The word does not, I am told, carry the same meaning in Turkish as modern Arabic, where today it is a somewhat archaic way to speak of a military or security officer.

can be employed pejoratively, evoking in Turkish many of the same critical meanings that references to ‘bureaucrats’ and ‘bureaucracy’ convey in other European languages. Consider, for example, how Turkish president Erdoğan railed against ‘bureaucrats’ while advocating for a change to the law regulating the state’s relationship to *memurs* following the 2016 coup attempt:

It can no longer be that [people go about thinking]: ‘Let me find safe position in the state and then I can be free of all my money worries forever.’ What do we have to say about this? This is the reason we argue that there must be a change in the *memuriyet* law. Why? Those who work hard and are deserving should continue to work, but this state and this nation shouldn’t be forced to carry those who don’t work on its back. Isn’t this what we experienced on July 15th? Weren’t these the people [we faced] in July? We were deceived by these people, we allowed them in, and they rained bombs down upon us. Thusly does the Prophet Muhammed, peace be upon him, emphasize that 90% of one’s livelihood derives from commerce...Constitutional changes are necessary, but we haven’t given up. Thanks to the work we have done on this problem we’ve made a lot of progress within the executive branch and the ministries. I have recommended that our government take advantage of every opportunity to create a ‘public employee regime’ (‘bir kamu personel rejimi’) that will destroy the bureaucratic oligarchy and that will act according to the principle ‘let people live so that the state can live.’ And I believe that the historical transformation that we have experienced in Turkey over the past 14 years will take one step more forward. I want you all to know that I will continue to work to resolve your problems until we have, through proper regulation and policy, a bureaucratic infrastructure that does not create problems for traders and manufacturers but opens a path for them. As a politician who comes from a trader background, I see this as my personal problem.¹⁷

Here Erdoğan opposes ‘bureaucrats’ to traders and manufacturers as obstacles to economic development, and his remarks recall an established ideological opposition within Turkey (and far beyond) that contrasts the inefficiency of the bureaucrat with the innovativeness and ingenuity of the entrepreneur.¹⁸ Indeed, Erdoğan’s instance that ‘the state not be obliged to carry anyone on its back’ (T: ‘bu devlet onları sırtında taşımaya mecbur kalmasin’) is an

¹⁷ Quoted in: NTV. “Erdoğan: Sirtını bir yerlere dayayanlar, bedelini ödemeye devam edecekler.” 08-11-2016.

¹⁸ The opposition between the bureaucrat, and by extension the *memur*, and the ‘entrepreneur’ (T: girişimci) was at least in part entextualized by Western social scientists working on Turkish education in the 1950s and 1960s, for whom ‘risk taking’ and ‘ingenuity’ were both impartible and measurable qualities. (cf. Kazamias 1967)

invocation of a well-known Turkish saying about *memurluk* and the benefits of a guaranteed (and frequently undeserved) income.¹⁹ In his reference to a *bürokratik oligarşi* ('bureaucratic oligarchy'), on the other hand, Erdoğan also draws an analogy between the *bürokrat* and the agents of the *derin devlet* ('deep state') - a perennial obsession in Turkish political discourse – and of the *paralel devlet* ('parallel state'), a newer discursive innovation popularized by the current government.²⁰ In addition to invoking social conformity and economic efficiency, talk of bureaucracy can therefore also index an element of political danger as a site of potential plots and subterfuge and the subversion of legitimate government authority.

Bürokrat can also, in a more limited set of contexts, impart a more 'neutral', or 'academic' meaning as a category of analysis in the social sciences. This is the case, for example, in Us (1973), where he employs *bürokrat* more or less interchangeably with *memur* (the former in fact appears more frequently) in a broader discussion of the Turkish state's public sector from a comparative perspective. It is also the case in Babül's (2017) recent English-language study of bureaucratic authority in Turkey, where the category of 'bureaucrat' is made to function as more or less coextensive with Turkish category of *memur*. In both cases, the elision between the two social categories allows for a broader and often productive engagement with the canonical Western academic literature on bureaucracy and the state. In both cases, however, this is accomplished at the expense of much of the term's rich emic content.²¹

¹⁹See, for instance, the entry in *Ekşi Sözlük* on "En güzeli memurluk sırtını devlete dayayacaksın" or the entry in *Uludağ Sözlük* on "memur olup sırtını devlete dayamak."

²⁰The former designates an older phenomenon, in existence since Turkey's post-war democratization, and refers to the presence old-guard Kemalist officials who maintained a hold on state institutions; the latter refers specifically to agents of the Gülen movement and has been employed by the government since at least 2014.

²¹It is notable, for instance, that despite the fact that Us occasionally frames the research problem within the article as a question of the 'prestige of bureaucracy' (T: bürokrasinin prestiji'), all of the opinion polls that he cites as his evidence ask specifically about the categories of 'devlet

Anthropological literature on bureaucracy, for its own part, has been largely concerned with the channeling and concentration of power and the establishment of formalized social hierarchies through the institutionalization of organizational rules, norms, ideologies, and practices (Graeber 2012, 2015; Hoag 2011; Heyman 2004). The figure of the bureaucrat – regardless if employed in a state office, NGO, or private corporation - is generally identified with established institutional interests and characterized by corporate ‘intimacy’ (Balbul 2017), social ‘indifference’ to outsiders (Herzfield 1991), organized ‘corruption’ (Gupta 2012), deliberate ‘irresponsibility’ (Hull 2012b) and formalized ‘stupidity’ (Graeber 2012, 2015). And whereas anthropologists have been increasingly willing to draw comparisons between anthropological and bureaucratic practices (Hoag 2011), they seem less interested in the fact that, as Bernstein and Mertz (2011) point out, “actual bureaucrats in actual bureaucracies, just like people in all sorts of other settings, constantly make decisions, interact with others, exceed their own control. As a lived social world, the administrative setting is not as drab and lifeless as it appears from the outside.”

memuru’ or ‘memuriyet’²¹ ; and it was certainly no accident that it was “Memurluk Prestiji” (‘The Prestige of *Memurluk*’) that was ultimately chosen for the article’s title. This is because the invocation of *bürokrasinin prestiji* outside of the specific academic context in which Us is working (or even as a heading for it) would just as likely have been confronted with bemusement or an ironic amusement than as a serious inquiry into the hierarchies of social status in Turkey. In Babül’s case too -- despite the obvious value of her study to my own project for its important insights into the category work and contested forms of relationality that inform a *memur*’s social existence – I find her preference for ‘bureacrat’ slightly awkward for two reasons. In the first instance, owing to pejorative connotations of *bürokrat* noted above, it is a label many of her own informants would likely reject. In contrast, whether or not a particular state employee is particularly proud of or willing to draw attention to his/her status as a *memur*, they would almost certainly not deny it if pressed, inasmuch that it stands out as a more-or-less legally and socially-constituted ‘fact’ whose reality in all but the most extreme cases would be obvious to all concerned and thus accepted beyond dispute. Secondly, it seems to me that the only sense in which the seemingly diverse group of state-employed administrators and professionals (provincial governors, police officers, judges, religious officials, teachers, healthcare workers, etc.) with whom Babül conducted her research might be easily justified to constitute a common class of ‘bureaucrats’ is through the particularities of Turkey’s *memurluk* system, by which they all fall under a common social and legal category of *memur*.

(p. 7) Still fewer have been interested in exploring the lifeworld of the ‘bureaucrat’ beyond the ‘administrative setting’ or specific workplace environment.

But while the status of the *memur* assumes a role as a state official, a position in the state administrative apparatus, or the potential to be taken as a representative or agent of state power, it is not reducible to these qualities. *Memurs* not only work in state administrative offices (although certain categories of *memur* do); in fact, the vast majority of *memurs* work in other professional and occupational capacities, serving as doctors and nurses, judges and prosecutors, professors, and teachers, Islamic clerics and social workers. Moreover, unlike the prototypical anthropological bureaucratic, the *memur* can be deeply embedded in civil society and active in community organizing, social activism, trade unionism, or party politics in addition too (but not always beyond) their official capacity as a public official. Many are therefore also visible, sometimes prominent members of local communities, and can be encountered as often in a cafe, mosque, or market as in a state office.²² And *memurs* are likewise members of families – as the widely circulating and deeply contested category of the ‘*memur çocuğu*’²³ can attest – and their access to state incomes and other resources are often important in sustaining the value projects of wider kinship networks. Thus the *memur*, while closely associated with the state, is not identical to it, nor is she always obliged to identify with it; and, as events of the past few years have demonstrated, under certain circumstances the *memur* is just as likely to be a target or victim of ‘state violence’ as to be its agent or representative.

²² Fallers' (1971) account of civil life in a small Turkish Aegean town is instructive in this respect. For an excellent cinematic take on this phenomenon, see Nuri Bilgi Ceylan's *Ahlat Ağacı* (2018)

²³ Lit. ‘child of a memur’ – like the term *memur* itself it has multiple, contested valences.

For many of my interlocutors, moreover, *memurluk* offers a value metric by which to understand the complicated relationship between persons and state institutions and the multiple forms of value transfer and transformation that emerge from this relationship. On the one hand, *memurluk* provides opportunities and resources that are often otherwise unavailable to many university graduates. State employment is often the only vehicle enabling access to forms of social mobility otherwise unavailable to the majority of Kurdish university graduates from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and is thus closely linked to the new aspirational dispositions, discourses, and practices reshaping ideas of the ‘good life’ in Kurdistan.²⁴ More narrowly, *memurluk* has emerged as one of the primary drivers of growth in Kurdish media and publishing, providing the necessary capital for many of the recent investments in the Kurdish cultural industry; and Kurdish *memurs* – and Kurdish teachers in particular – have a special place of prominence as owners of cafes, partners in bookshops and publishing houses, and as writers, editors and translators.

On the other hand, my interlocutors readily acknowledged how their status as *memurs* placed them in a relationship of reciprocal obligation with state institutions in a manner that can severely limit their capacity to speak and act in accordance with their beliefs. And yet, it was often explained to me, to place one’s status as a *memur* before all else – that is, to place one’s job before one’s political principles and cultural and national identity – is to evacuate one’s position as a Kurdish educator and intellectual and become just a mere *memur*. This is obvious, for instance, in the way that Baran – a graduate from the institute and now a middle-school Turkish-language teacher in Istanbul who remains very active in the Kurdish film and theater scene – narrated the institute’s downward trajectory from an important center of Kurdish studies to just

²⁴I will return to this problem in greater detail in the next chapter.

another branch of the Ministry of Education, here highlighting specifically the role of the institute's faculty as it evolved from `teachers` and `friends` to ordinary *memurs*:

At the beginning there was this incredible informality, actually of course it was formal because there were classes, and structures, and course schedules, but when we first arrived, we experienced a situation in which we were learning more from our friends than our teachers. What do I mean? All the people who were working on Kurdology (T: Kürdoloji) or wanted to do something with Kurdology all around Turkey came together here, and that's where all the energy came from. And it was the energy coming from this crowd that led to so many Kurdish books being sold, and there were new printings, and books that had only been printed once were printed again. New places opened selling Kurdish books...There was a new perception of the market. Journalists and those working in television also started coming to the institute. And there was an energy created by all these people. It was the peak point for Kurdology in Turkey.

However, as became increasingly evident after 2014 (and then possible to ignore following the events of 2016) this initial enthusiasm gave way to an atmosphere of intimidation and compliance, as the institute's remaining faculty struggled to protect their positions and avoid government attention:

[Now] there isn't that much going on. There aren't as many students now, and most of those good teachers, who were learning together with their students, who were developing themselves, and making contributions, and writing new books, well most of them have been dismissed. Most of the teachers now, and I witnessed this myself during those five years, the brave ones who were explaining things in class, who were talking about the need for a [Kurdish] state to oversee education, well after a while you couldn't talk about those things. They became just like those employees of the Ministry of Education who come, teach their class, and leave. That whole *memur* thing. Now they are more like *memurs*. But before they weren't like *memurs*.

By virtue of their status as state employees in a public institution²⁵, the faculty at Artuklu had always been *memurs* - as Baran himself is also technically a *memur* owing to his status as a public school teacher in Istanbul. But for Baran the faculty at Artuklu only really became like *memurs* when they stepped back from their language activism and other forms of public political

²⁵In fact, not all public employees are *memurs*, but most are. I address this in the following section.

activity in order to protect their jobs. It is this particular quality of *memurluk* – namely, a preference for one’s own interests (whether individual or familiar) over broader political principles in addition to a consciousness of and a willingness to accept the limits of one’s agency in the face of more powerful institutional forces – that perhaps best describes the pejorative concept of ‘memur zihniyeti’ (‘memur mentality’) or ‘memur kafası’ (‘memur mind’) in Turkish. Those qualities of bureaucratic personhood that are perhaps more immediately recognizable to readers of the canonical literature on the subject (*e.g.* a deference to hierarchy, a strict adherence to rules and regulations, a general unwillingness to accept personal responsibility) likewise color ideologies of *memurluk*, but they do so more as secondary effects rather than as the primary drivers of what Safa above designates the ‘will of the memur’ (T: ‘memur iradesi’) with its ‘soul of obedience and conformity’ (T: ‘intibak ve itaat ruhu’). It seems to me that these later qualities, as much as constituting the necessary preconditions for the form of bureaucratic rationality described by Weber and others, likewise represent basic, more individualized strategies for protecting one’s position, income, and personal well-being while working within politically perilous state institutions. This is to say that if the category of bureaucracy frequently denotes a form of *zweckrationalität* whose only defined end is the efficiency and efficacy of state power itself, *memur zihniyeti* is better understood as describing the kind of instrumental rationality that an individual adopts in relation to a state institution in order to fulfill a host of possible ends -- whether ‘personal’ or ‘collective’, ‘aspirational’ or ‘political’ -- that require a basic income and access to public resources that employment as a *memur* provides.

Memurluk, the public sector, and institutionalized relations of value

For Baran, for example, the category of the *memur* is not only useful for thinking through the question of political commitment, but the related problem of economic dependency as well --

a fact that became inescapable in the aftermath of the teachers' purge (in which Baran was also caught up) and the hardships that it created for Baran and his co-workers:

After our suspensions, so many of my colleagues spent weeks crying, asking 'what are going to do?' We shouldn't live with so much worry. We are always worried. We are worried about everything. Of course, I know I won't be happy when I'm a *memur*, but [there is a way of thinking] that says, if I am not a *memur* it's as if everything will be better when I am a *memur*. No, only the dimension of the problem changes...for example, if you are not a *memur*, you have all these economic worries, you have these problems. But then once you become a *memur* you have other problems. Let me give you as an example the unhappiness and contradictions in my life as a Turkish teacher. Kurdish has no official status or existence. Therefore, I am always asking myself what I can do, and how I can work against assimilation, but at the same time I am a Turkish-language teacher. I am part of the gears of the very machine that I have rejected. And I am always experiencing this contradiction in my life. Against assimilation but on the side of those assimilating. An impossible situation. A great paradox.

Here Baran highlights how, for many young university students living in Kurdistan, *memurluk* provides one of few guarantees of economic security, and a precious avenue for upward social mobility. Indeed, in the absence of a developed or diversified private sector, options for professional employment outside of public institutions remain limited, in particular in relation to the major industrial and commercial centers in central and western Turkey. A *memur*'s income is often, therefore, indispensable in efforts by young people to both meet their basic necessities, as well as in their efforts to pursue more distant aspirational horizons - a state of value dependency that Safa labels the 'warehouse of confused ideas and needs' (T: karmakarışık bilgilerin ve ihtiyaçların antrepo) that shape the ambitions of many young university graduates. In Kurdistan - as was once the case for most of Turkey's historically statist economic system - the public sector remains one of the major pillars of the regional economy, and public employment one of the most important institutionalized social relations between local communities and state institutions. Yet whereas contemporary academic discussions about Turkey's economic liberalization generally emphasize the decline of its public sector (T: 'kamu

sektörü’) and minimize the continued importance of the *kamu görevlisi* (‘public official’), their numbers in Turkey’s East and Southeast in both absolute and relative terms have actually increased under AKP rule (TÜİK).

In contrast to the category of *memur*, the category of *kamu görevlisi* (*pl. kamu görevlileri*) is a legal designation for anyone in public employment.²⁶ As such, it is less commonly invoked in everyday language, and is usually proffered as an equivalent to *memur* largely in this specific, technical sense. Whereas all *memurs* are technically *kamu görevlileri*, some publicly employed officials or functionaries are not technically *memurs* -- specifically members of the military and many of those employed by local municipalities²⁷ or engaged as temporary ‘contract’ (T: ‘sözleşme’) employees – and the status of *memur* remains a distinct form of legal personhood, conveying specific rights, privileges, and obligations under the Turkish legal code.²⁸ That said, insomuch that this distinction is determined by legal fiction, it is therefore also continuously contested in litigation and legislation (as well as in the streets) and thus remains open to reinterpretation and reformulation. This becomes immediately obvious, for

²⁶A related category, ‘*kamu personeli*’ (‘public employee’ or ‘public staff’), invoked by Erdoğan in his remarks quoted above, seems to be a more recent alternative and the now preferred designation in government discourse -- a fact that is perhaps indicative of a wider ideological orientation toward transforming Turkey’s public institutions along private-sector models.

²⁷In fact, within Turkey more broadly and (as I address in the last section of the chapter) within Kurdish regions specifically, there is a socially important distinction between working for the ‘state’ (T: ‘devlet’: K: ‘dewlet’) and the ‘municipality’ (T: *belediye*; K *şaredarî*) – a difference that carried even more social salience in those municipalities formerly run by pro-Kurdish parties. For a discussion of municipal employment in relation to the status of *memurluk* following Turkey’s first period of liberalization in the 1980s, see:

²⁸ Whereas both Turkish public law (T: ‘*kamu hukuku*’) and criminal law (T: ‘*ceza hukuku*’) recognize a common class of *kamu görevlisi*, Turkish public law draws an explicit distinction between this broader class of public officials and a more specific class of ‘*memurlar*’ or ‘*devlet memurları*’²⁸, often referring to the former by the designation “*memurlar ve diğer kamu görevlileri*.” (‘*memurs* and other public officials’) Yet despite the specificity of their status, *memurs* still make up an overwhelming majority of all *kamu görevlileri* and have thus come to constitute the ideal-type of public official in the Turkish popular imagination.

example, after even a cursory glance at the *Law of Devlet Memurs no. 657* cited by both Erdogan and Us above. First promulgated in 1965, amended dozens of times over the years, and currently running to nearly 200 pages, it outlines everything from professional grades and salary tables, to the arbitration of workplace disputes and the enforcement of labor protections, and the rights of state *memurs* to form unions and join political parties. So encompassing is this law – often known simply as the *memuriyet* law, *devlet memur* law or law 657 – that it reads like an annotated political history of *memurluk* in Turkey over the past half-century, documenting the transformation of *memurluk* as an institution and social relationship between persons, state institutions, and civil society organizations.

Memurluk in Turkey, therefore, structures a standardized and regulated relationship of value, based in contractual obligations between persons and state institutions, and backed (at least in theory) by the weight of the law. Importantly, the nature of these obligations (which, from the perspective of *memur* entail certain professional and extra-professional responsibilities²⁹, as well as an established set of rights and privileges) have changed as a result of broader socio-political and economic developments. As an institution, therefore, *memurluk* allows for generalized patterns of class formation across different regions of Turkey, as well as the emergence of a set of more-or-less universally recognizable (if not always recognized or ‘legitimized’) ideas about the state and the forms of value derived from relations with state institutions. Both the categories of *kamu görevlisi* and *memur* are thus closely linked to political struggles over the future of Turkey’s large public sector – of which public education remains the largest component.

²⁹*Memurs* may occasionally be asked to represent the state in other capacities, such as poll workers during elections.

The Ministry of Education (MEB) is the largest single employer in Turkey with over 920,000 teachers working in state schools across the country (MEB). In 2018, its budget was 92.5 billion liras, accounting for just over 12% of total government spending and roughly 2.7% of Turkey's GDP. Given that 70% of the MEB's budget is earmarked for personnel expenditures, we can estimate that the salaries of those employed in primary and secondary public education alone account for approximately 1.9% of Turkish GDP (around 65 billion liras), with the majority of this sum going directly to pay teachers' salaries.³⁰ This quantity is even more significant in less economically developed regions of the country, where the private sector is much smaller both in absolute terms and as a percentage of total economic activity. In Mardin province – which ranked 69th of Turkey's 81 provinces in terms of per capita GDP, coming in at below half the national average (TÜİK) – I calculate that teachers' salaries alone account for upwards of 2.5% of provincial GDP, and possibly even higher.³¹ As already noted in the

³⁰I have relied in part for my interpretation of these numbers on *Eğitim-Sen*'s published report, "2018 MEB Bütçesi Analizi" analyzing that year's Ministry of Education budget.

³¹ In Mardin here are currently 9,819 public school teachers working in Turkish state schools (MEB). Assuming a base salary of just 3000 TL per month, the annual economic value of teacher-salaries in Mardin province alone exceeds 350 million liras (and potentially significantly more). In fact, the minimum salary for full-time teachers is 3,320 TL and can run as high as 3,929 TL (not counting the income earned from extra classes), although given the ambiguities in the MEB's statistics it is possible a small number of the total reported teachers are in fact *geçici* ('temporary') or *söyleşmeli* ('contract') teachers who would earn significantly less. Provincial GDP figures are last available from 2014, when Mardin's GDP was reported by the Statistical Institute of Turkey (TÜİK) at 10.4 billion liras. Since 2014 Turkey's GDP has contracted in dollar terms. However, by applying the average national 'growth' rate to the province (in liras) – although this rate of growth is highly doubtful for Mardin given the events of the past three years – we can arrive at a figure for current provincial GDP of around 12.2 billion liras (as of 2018). In the case that it is less, however, the proportion of Mardin's GDP made up of by teacher salaries would be even higher. When considered alongside the multiplier effects generated through teachers' relatively easy access to credit in the forms of specially-issued credit cards, mortgages and automobile loans, the economic impact of teachers in Mardin is most certainly even larger. And although most of this value likely circulates back outside region for the purchase of goods produced elsewhere in Turkey and abroad, a still-significant portion is realized in the local economy.

previous two chapters, *memurs* have been crucial to the rapid urban growth that has remade Mardin over the past two decades, as well as one of the most important sources of new investment in Kurdish-language publishing, as well as a significant source of consumer spending on the Kurdish cultural industry more broadly, where Kurdish *memurs* are often among the most prominent and dependable customers.³²

Memurluk, civil society and Turkey’s Kurdish movement

In April 2014, a group of high school students in Nusaybin – a predominantly Kurdish-speaking town in Mardin province on the Syrian border – distributed a petition at their graduation ceremony calling for the release of their former assistant-principal, Seyfettin Yavuz, who had been arrested two and a half years earlier and remanded to custody pending trial for membership in a banned Kurdish political organization, the *Koma Civakên Kurdistan* (KCK), or ‘Kurdish Communities Union’.³³ Supported by local representatives of *Eğitim-Sen* – a national teachers’ union supportive of Kurdish cultural and political rights – the students first organized a protest calling for his release on World Teachers Day the previous October. Now they were attempting to rally their parents and community to their cause. In a statement read by one of the students, they called for Yavuz to be let go and emphasize the impact that his incarceration had had on their studies:

The arrest of our teacher has negatively affected our psychology. Some of us didn’t even take the university entrance exam because of it. We are calling on the Ministries of Education and Justice. As students, we want our teachers by our side, not in prison. We are therefore collectively launching a petition calling for his freedom.³⁴

³² Baran, for example, affirmed that his *memur* salary provided him with the discretionary income to spend, in his estimation, 200-300 TL on Kurdish books and other cultural objects and activities every month.

³³ Since its creation in 2005, the KCK has functioned as an umbrella organization coordinating between Kurdish civil society groups, local municipal governments, and Kurdish militants.

³⁴ Quoted from *Nusaybinim*. “Öğrenciler Tutuklu Öğretmenlerini unutmadı” 29-April-2014.

These events at Gazi Anadolu High School are revealing of a larger situation shaping contemporary conditions of state education in Kurdish regions of Turkey, and it serves to complicate the monolithic image of the teacher in Kurdistan as an outsider representing the Turkish state. It is the direct result, moreover, of a larger social transformation within both Kurdish society and Turkish politics over the past two decades. Beginning in the early 1990s, the intensification of the war between the Turkish military and the PKK in the countryside, coupled with the forced evacuation of thousands of Kurdish villages by the Turkish military, resulted in a period of rapid rural to urban migration, in which hundreds of thousands of Kurds moved from villages to urban centers in East and Southeast Turkey (Jongerden 2007). This, in turn, led to significant demographic and social shifts within Kurdish society, and the emergence of new urban publics and forms of urban sociality I highlight in chapter one, characterized by, among other things, increased access to education (including higher education) and emergent forms of Kurdish mass media such as Kurdish-language newspapers, journals and satellite television (Bruinessen 2000). After 2000, the effects of these transformations were also increasingly felt in the political realm, as pro-Kurdish parties began to win municipal elections. By the 2014 local elections – just a month before the graduation ceremony at Gazi Anadolu High School – a pro-Kurdish political party in alliance with independent candidates was able to win control of 11 provinces in Turkey’s East and Southeast. In Nusaybin, this alliance won 79% of the vote.

Out of this larger social transformation, an emergent class of Kurdish *memurs* began to form in a manner that has fundamentally reshaped relations between Kurdish communities and state institutions. As Melkan – who worked as a high school philosophy teacher in Mardin before joining the institute – explained to me, the effect of this period of rapid urbanization together with the increased educational opportunities that emerged enabled a generation of young Kurds,

many of whose parents did not finish high school, to become the first members of their family to study at university and find employment in state institutions. His own biography exemplifies many of these transformations, as well as the important role that Kurdish teachers appointed during this period played in the rapid expansion of Kurdish-language activism and education. He began to work on Kurdish-language activism and education while at the educational faculty in Adana. In 2002, while preparing for the civil service exam, he and a few friends opened an unauthorized Kurdish course in Qoser, for which he was arrested, tortured, and held in police custody for several months. In 2006, now a high-school philosophy teacher, Melkan helped to found *Kurdi-Der* with several other self-taught Kurdish linguists. When I asked him if most of his colleagues in the language movement were also teachers like him, he responded: Yes, almost all of them.

Although near impossible to document statistically ('Kurdish' is not a recognized category in any official state records), overwhelming ethnographic evidence confirms these changes. Today, for example, all my informants report that the vast majority of state teachers working in Kurdish urban centers are local Kurds – a fact which makes sense given how teacher appointments are made by the Ministry of Education.³⁵ These changes can also be gleaned from union membership; whereas *Eğitim-Sen* is the third-largest teachers' union in Turkey in terms of national membership, it was (until 2016 at least) the largest in many Kurdish regions of the

³⁵Teacher appointments in Turkey are based on a point system, wherein teachers accumulate points based on years worked and the hardship ratings of their posts. Since Kurdish provinces are generally less preferred by teachers from other parts of Turkey, it is often easier for local teachers to receive appointments there. It is still the case that many young teachers from Western Turkey are appointed to less desired positions in isolated Kurdish villages and towns. However, they tend to leave after their required 'eastern service', while many local teachers, on the other hand, remain for the entirety of their careers and are particularly dominant in major Kurdish urban centers. I will discuss changes in this system, and the implications of these changes, in greater detail in the last section of this chapter.

country, and despite the wave of dismissals and resignations that followed the teacher purge, it continues to be at least the second-largest teachers' union in most Kurdish provinces (after the pro-AKP *Eğitim-Bir-Sen*). Nor have these changes been limited to the education system, but can be observed across state institutions, in state hospitals and banks, post offices and prisons.³⁶ In predominantly Kurdish-speaking districts, for instance, it is now common to hear state *memurs* speaking Kurdish with locals in the course of conducting 'official' business. Consider how Berfu – a graduate from the Kurdish-language program at Artuklu – described the linguistic situation in her hometown of Qoser (T: 'Kızıltepe) in Mardin for me:

In normal life, in the city center, in the minibus, on the road, in official spaces, in offices (in the market?), also in the market, everywhere. Really also in official spaces (K: 'cihên fermî', i.e. state offices). We are obliged to speak Kurdish in official spaces. Because most *memurs* are Kurds. 97% of *memurs* who work here are Kurds.

Significantly, Berfu went on to explain that the centrality of Kurdish in Qoser's public language regime also extended to the school:

We also speak Kurdish in official spaces. We speak Kurdish in hospitals, the doctors speak Kurdish. There is a reflex to speak in Kurdish, eh, for example, you go to a bank it's Kurmanji. You go to a restaurant, a café, it's Kurmanji. In the city center it's Kurdish. At the university, we were educated in Turkish for two years but I spoke in Kurdish. I never once said to a friend, 'bana bir kalem verir misin?' (T: would you hand me a pen?), but 'kalemekê bide min lo' (K: Hand me a pen, man). Only when a teacher asked a question in Turkish would we respond in Turkish.

As part of this larger transformation with the local *memurluk* system, ethnically Kurdish teachers have assumed an increasingly prominent position within the Kurdish movement, specifically through their work on Kurdish-language education and activism. Since its formation in 1994 after the re-legalization of public employee unions, moreover, *Eğitim-Sen* emerged as an

³⁶In Diyarbakir I have personally observed prison guard *memurs* with Ceza Infaz Kurumu speaking Kurdish with relatives of prisoners during visiting hours and commiserating with them over the harshness of the state's prison regulations.

important institutional counterbalance to the policies and projects of the centrally-controlled Ministry of Education in Turkey's Kurdish regions, serving as among the leading advocates for Kurdish cultural and political rights in the country, including the right of Kurdish language education. I return to examine the role of Kurdish teachers in language activism in greater detail in the next chapter, but for the moment I want to consider what all this means for the social importance of this new class of Kurdish *memurs*, specifically as it concerns their position within the increasingly contradictory value regimes structuring social life in North Kurdistan.

Any discussion of the relations of value between Kurdish teachers and Turkish state institutions must necessarily consider two distinct moments of social labor and value creation. The first moment occurs in the school and concerns the forms of professional and pedagogic work for which teachers are employed by state institutions. The second moment, more temporally and spatially diffuse than the first, concerns how teachers realize the value they derive from their work in state schools in other social value projects outside of state institutions, whether those projects take place in the domain of family, new Kurdish urban youth publics, or intervene within some other project of individual or collective self-making.

Teachers, state authority, and the transmission of institutional values

A substantial body of scholarship on Turkish education is concerned with how students acquire and derive social value from Turkish state schools. On the one hand, value in this literature can refer specifically to economic value, namely the aggregate forms of 'human capital' (Becker 1964) acquired as qualifications, knowledge, and skills. For a generation of Kurdish teachers now in their 20s and 30s, many of whom are among the first members of their extended families to graduate from university, such forms of social value –both in the forms of 'cultural capital' described by Bourdieu (1986), such as the ability to speak 'proper' Turkish, as

well as the more institutionalized forms of social value typified by state-recognized university degrees – have figured centrally in their individual and family value projects and the strategies of value accumulation through which they are constructed. On the other hand, value is often employed in its more political sense, as described by Althusser (2014) in his discussion of the ‘ideological state apparatus’ and the specific function of state school system in producing ‘submission to the dominant ideology.’ From the perspective of this value metric, however, the ‘success’ of state pedagogic projects is less clear, and there is much evidence to suggest that the system of Turkish state education has largely failed to inculcate many Kurdish youth – not to mention Kurdish teachers - into the system of ‘civic’ values underlying its models of the ‘ideal citizen’ (Kaplan 2006) or to create ‘nationalist citizens’ (Altınay 2002). Moreover, developments over the past two decades point to a broader incapacity on the part of state institutions to readily convert economic value into political capital. Despite making significant new investments in Kurdish provinces, for example, the AKP government has been largely unable to ‘buy’ Kurdish votes in substantial numbers -- one of the basic mechanisms through which political actors are understood to transform ‘economic’ into ‘political’ value. Nor, as I demonstrate shortly, is it clear that Turkish state schools are succeeding in entirely assimilating Kurdish children to the national value regime of the Turkish Republic, even when they are successful in teaching them Turkish.

From the perspective of many of my interlocutors, the question of how their work in Turkish state schools creates value is connected to their tripartite identity as Kurds, teachers, and state *memurs*, and the different ways that these social identities are mobilized in the performance of social authority. At issue is the tension between their role as Kurdish teachers and their role as state employees. For many Kurdish teachers, as noted above, their position as a state *memur*

places them in an ambivalent relationship between their families and communities, and the state institutions which they are supposed to represent, but whose legitimacy they themselves often question. The PKK, for example, have historically charged state teachers with ‘collaboration’ (**K**: *altaxî*; **T**: ‘işbirlikçilik’) with Turkish security forces; during the 1990s, PKK guerillas targeted teachers working in rural areas for extortion, and in extreme cases, for kidnapping or murder (although this tactic has seemed to fall out of favor in recent years given the public backlash it tended to provoke among Kurds and Turks alike). For this reason, most of my interlocutors -- who view their position as potential representatives of state authority not as a privilege to be guarded, but a status to be downplayed, if not rejected – often choose to emphasize their professional status as ‘teachers’ (**K**: *mamoste*; **T**: *öğretmen*), but downplay their status as *memurs*, drawing attention to the latter only to criticize themselves or their colleagues, or to downplay their own agency. At issue here is the different forms of authority and metrics of value organized by the categories teacher and *memur*, and the relationship of both to the state.

Former Turkish PM Yildirim’s allegation that state schools had been infiltrated by teachers who ‘rub shoulders with terrorism’ (**T**: *terörle haşır neşir olmuş*), likewise, can be taken as exemplary of a wider concern within the current Turkish government around the capacity of state institutional actors to exercise control over public education, amid fears that schools (and those who staffed them) were emerging not as proponents of, but as centers of opposition to AKP-rule.³⁷ Moreover, it is indicative of a growing disappointment and frustration with which

³⁷ It would be misleading to suggest that such paranoia is limited to schools in Kurdish regions, or those suspected of providing institutional support for the Kurdish movement. Rather, recent initiatives launched by the government such as their *proje okullar* (‘project schools’) program; the government’s well-known preference for and expansion of religiously oriented *iman hatip* schools, and their closure of hundreds of schools and *dershanes* linked to the Gülen movement all point to the central role which control over educational institutions is playing in wider political struggles to remake Turkish society under AKP rule.

many in both the government and wider Turkish society now openly regard the state's pedagogic mission in the country's Kurdish regions, amid the perceived failure of Turkey's education system to successfully inculcate Kurdish youth into the value systems of the Turkish Republic. In part, the PM's remarks speak to deeper-seated social concerns around Turkey's long-standing 'Kurdish Youth Problem', which dates back in the public imagination to the first major Kurdish urban *serhildans* (Kurdish for 'uprising') of the 1990s, after which images of stone-throwing Kurdish youth came to define the Turkish-Kurdish conflict as much as those of PKK guerillas (Darici 2013). What is indeed novel about these events, however, concerns how public proscription turned from youth themselves to their teachers; and how a new paranoia about 'terrorist teachers' began to mold public opinion and government policy alike.

At the time of the purge, for instance, sensationalist coverage published in right-wing Turkish press outlets included a long list of allegations against the accused Kurdish teachers, including 'sharing pro-PKK material on social media'; 'taking part in individual or collective strike actions'; 'promoting PKK propaganda in the classroom'; 'sending their students to [fight] at the 'barricades' (**K/T**: 'hendika')³⁸ erected in districts like Cizre, Yüksekova, and Nusaybin'; 'shouting revolutionary slogans such as *serhildan* in the classroom'; and, 'working to recruit students to go to the mountains [to fight as guerrillas]'.³⁹ While undoubtedly exaggerated, such charges are striking in two ways: in the first place, for their stark contrast with sacralized representations of the teacher as the vanguard of the national revolution in traditional Turkish

³⁸ The reference to 'hendika' or 'ditch' refers specifically to the barricades erected during the *Şehir Savaşı* ('city war'), which engulfed more than half-a-dozen Kurdish cities and towns between November 2015 and July 2016.

³⁹ For original list of charges from which I am quoting, see *Yeni Şafak* "11 bin 285 öğretmen açığa alındı." 9-Sep-2018.

state ideology, as typified in invocations of Atatürk with the honorific *başöğretmen* ('headteacher'); and secondly, for their effect in complicating the Kurdish movement's public discourse on the Turkish education system, which positions teachers as among the primary agents and schools as the primary sites of the state's 'assimilationist' project.

Recent, influential anthropological studies on education in Turkey, generally describes the school as the primary institution for the socialization of youth from the periphery into the value projects of the Turkish nation-state (Altınay 2002; Kaplan 2006). In this respect, the Turkish education system is understood to typify a broader modern phenomenon, wherein the institutionalization of mass education is directed toward the creation of a new, 'national publics' defined by a common set of values and affective attachments (Anderson 1991; Balibar 1990; Hobsbawm 1990). Notably, many contemporaneous western studies on Turkish education during the first five decades of the Republic sought to place these developments in a positive light, pointing to the necessary role of new schools in inculcating the 'modern' and 'civil' values driving national development.⁴⁰ Contemporary scholars, on the other hand, have generally been more critical in their assessments of Turkish state educational policy, emphasizing how its pedagogic projects have often succeeded in their objectives of cultural assimilation only through various forms of state violence (Zeydanlıoğlu 2012; Üngör 2012b). However, both scholarly perspectives largely agree in their assessment of Turkish state teachers, whose role, if addressed at all, is generally limited to representing the values of the central state and serving as the agents of its pedagogic projects. However, as the position of many teachers and students at Artuklu University reveals, the circuits of values that bind teachers and students to state institutions under such conditions are anything but uniform or stable.

⁴⁰e.g.: Dewey 1924; Verschoyle 1950; Kazamias 1967.

At issue is the figure of the teacher and the forms of authority that the teacher is historically understood to embody. In Kurdish regions of the country, for example, the majority of teacher appointments were historically held by monolingual, Turkish-speaking outsiders (and frequently also young, recent graduates from western Turkey completing their mandatory *doğu görevi*, or ‘Eastern service’).⁴¹ Largely ignorant of local social norms and conditions, and unable to speak Kurdish, Turkish teachers in Kurdistan emerged over time as idealized tokens of central state authority and the value projects this authority represented (Coşkun et al. 2011). Yet, as I detail in the next section, the growing preponderance of ethnically Kurdish teachers working in Turkish state schools in Kurdistan – many of whom are also deeply involved in Kurdish political and cultural activities – have complicated this picture. And yet the identification of teachers with the state is still not entirely rejected by Kurdish teachers themselves, as Baran explained when I asked him if thought his students saw him as a ‘representative of the state’ (T: devlet temsilcisi):

I think that they do. I don’t see it that way. I try not to impose this on them. But this system, well it’s not really up to you. Let me give you a little example. When I walk into the classroom, all the children stand up, during my first class. And I tell them, there is no need for you to stand. I am already here, and I already understand your respect from all of our [previous] interactions. I don’t want you to stand. So, we come to an agreement, and I finish my class and leave the classroom. And then the next teacher who comes to the class starts to yell at them, saying ‘a teacher has just entered the room, why are you not standing?’ ...Or children are raising their hands to speak, and I am saying you don’t need to stand while speaking. I can hear you. But the other teachers want something different. Or for example, I am teaching the children the things that I want, but there are also exams for them to continue to the next grade, so how are you going to deal with this? I mean you are nothing in this system. You are just a tiny part.

⁴¹‘Şark hizmeti’ is an older term for the same phenomenon, and likewise refers to the mandatory service in less developed, peripheral regions of Turkey that most state *memurs* complete at the beginning of their careers. Although the regulations and requirements regulating has ‘eastern service’ has changed significantly over the decades (including multiple times under the AKP government) it has existed in some form from late Ottoman period and the formation of Turkey’s *memurluk* system.

Adil – a current MA student at the institute from Batman who currently works as Turkish-language teacher in a village close to Diyarbakir – echoed Baran’s sentiments while drawing more explicit attention to the state’s project of linguistic assimilation and the problem of anti-Kurdish discrimination:

It is something really strange, since we are teaching the children the language of the state. We claim that the state is assimilating Kurdish children, but we have become an instrument of assimilation. I am Kurdish. The children are Kurdish. But we are forced to teach them a different language. This is very upsetting for me. Many other people think the same way, but you are obligated. Because you know that if you don’t do it, someone else will come in and take your place. And those children will be forced to learn Turkish. Of course, many Turkish teachers are very good people. But there are many that also really hated Kurds, including the children. For example, in Colemerg [Hakkari in Turkish – a Kurdish city bordering Iran and Iraq where Adil had worked before Diyarbakir] we had two Turkish teachers, and one would say things like, “God willing, all the children will die.” Really, we had teachers like that. Once there was a small earthquake in Colemerg, and after one of the teachers said ‘God willing, all of Colemerg will die.’ She really hated them, but she was a teacher here. We have teachers like that.

Indeed, among many of my informants there emerged a sentiment that whatever qualms one might have about the Turkish education system and the role that teachers were made to play within it, it was better for teachers to be local Kurds than Turkish outsiders. This is how Salih – an MA student at the institute who grew up in Van and Istanbul – put it to me:

So imagine a village in Van. In place of a Turk teacher, who constantly demeans them [şürekli aşağılayan] and looks at them as something strange, I would prefer that it is a Kurd educates [those children]. And if they have a Kurdish teacher at the very beginning [of their education], then even better.

Despite his concerns about linguistic assimilation, Adil confirms that in addition to offering Kurdish-lessons, both he and his students regularly use Kurdish during his Turkish-language lessons as a way of improving communication.

I always speak Kurdish with the students. They also speak Kurdish. Sometimes they ask for lessons in Kurdish too. The students cannot express themselves well in Turkish, they are village children. Sometimes in class I will be explaining something abstract in Turkish and they don’t understand. When I explain to them in Kurdish they understand

better. Or sometimes I ask them something and they cannot answer in Turkish, so they respond to it in Kurdish.

For Salih, Adil, and many of my other interlocutors, the advantage of Kurdish teachers is two-fold. In the first place, these teachers can speak Kurdish with the students, a reality that, as Adil and others confirmed, was in fact quite common in smaller Kurdish-speaking towns and villages. But secondly, and perhaps just as important, they can impart in the students a sense of the value that is often denied by Turkish teachers who ‘constantly demean’ the Kurdish language and Kurdish identity. Yet it is difficult to imagine that such a distinction could even be drawn without the dramatic shift in the social composition of teachers working in Turkish Kurdistan over the past 15-20 years, as well as the political and cultural changes that have accompanied this shift. As Adil makes clear, his ability to speak Kurdish with his students is the result of recent political and social developments:

Many Turkish teachers have a real hard time in the village. When children first come to the school, they don’t know Turkish, it is difficult for [the teacher]. It also difficult for the children. But in Middle school, it is most difficult for the children themselves. They don’t understand many things. They study in Turkish at school, but they speak Kurdish at home. I was the same. I learned Turkish at school. Until the 4th grade I didn’t know Turkish well at home. It was very difficult. The teacher would speak, and I wouldn’t understand. It was forbidden to speak Kurdish so I couldn’t speak Kurdish. They would beat us. Then most of our teachers were Turkish. And if they were Kurdish, they wouldn’t speak Kurdish, and they wouldn’t say that they were Kurdish. Back then Kurdish wasn’t spoken. This changed around 2000 [Why then?]. I am not exactly sure. More Kurds began to study, state policies began to change. That denial also changed. You know if the 90s they denied there were even any Kurds. They said Kurds didn’t exist. Their language didn’t exist. Some of the prohibitions were removed. It became a bit easier for people.

Much more than simply a ‘demographic shift’, therefore these changes are reflective of a larger political mobilization within Turkish educational institutions in Kurdistan. Yet they also speak to the ways that this mobilization has fundamentally altered the relationships between Kurdish

memurs and the Turkish state, and the circuits of value binding state institutions to Kurdish communities, as well as to an increase in the value placed on the Kurdish-language.

As demonstrated above, the school is one important site of value creation defining the relationship between Kurdish teachers and state institutions. However, the forms that value takes once created are multiple and abstract, in contrast to the more concrete forms of value derived from state institutions by *memurs* themselves. Nor, as I point out, is it always clear when and by whom the value created in schools is ultimately realized. For instance, the creation of ‘civic values’ in Turkish state schools in Kurdistan and the ability of the Turkish state to realize this value in the production of national subjects is a contradictory process with ambivalent outcomes and one that does not always seem to yield much practical success in the form of positive public sentiments about Turkish state institutions or Kurdish support for government policy. Once more, the subsequent realization of these values in the national economy as ‘human capital’ is often difficult to evaluate, as is the question of to whom this value accrues exactly, when and how.⁴² On the other hand, a closer examination of the relations of value connecting Kurdish teachers to Turkish state institutions reveals how this value becomes realized in the creation of other social relationships and appropriated as part of multiple, contested value projects beyond the control of state institutions. At the same time, moreover, it allows us to more fully grasp the subtle ways that the circuits of economic value binding Kurdish teachers to state institutions create contradictory political effects – effects that have become increasingly pronounced and palpable following the outbreak of the interrelated political and economic crises reshaping social life in North Kurdistan at present.

⁴²Indeed, the question of when human capital accrues to an individual or family as opposed to the national economy as a whole remains a lingering question in Becker’s (1964) own treatise on the subject.

Kurdish teachers, value transformation, and social labor

The social values created within Turkish state pedagogic institutions – whether it be in the form of the political values associated with a ‘dominant ideology’, the often more subtle value metrics shaping youths’ linguistic practices (together with the problem ‘cultural assimilation’), or the various forms of ‘human capital’ imagined to congeal in various skills and qualifications – are not created *ex nihilo*, but are rather the product of complex processes of social labor, involving the construction of social relationships between students and teacher that are characterized less by the forms of labor governing the creation of commodities than by what Graeber (2001) describes as the labor of care and socialization governing the creation of human beings. This does not imply, however, that such labor cannot be both evaluated in economic terms (i.e. valorized as a certain quantity of money). For teachers, opportunities for this form of valorization present themselves most fundamentally in the form of salaries and other benefits paid to them by the state, as well as in access to increased social mobility and quantities of free-time during which they can participate in other social value projects outside of the school. *Memurluk* is therefore an institutional relationship with both important economic and political dimensions, albeit one wherein these two dimensions are neither particularly well-integrated nor even always commensurate.

Significantly, the analogy between monetary value and other forms of social value is not just an artifice of anthropological theory, but a common ideological construct shaping how Kurdish teachers evaluate their own practices of value creation. Consider, for instance, how Baran compares his intellectual and cultural work outside of school with his contribution to the state’s ‘assimilationist’ project through his work in Turkish state schools:

Ok, so I am working as a Turkish-language teacher, but I am also working as a Kurdish-language teacher [outside of the school] ...I have 15 hours of class a week, sometimes

20. How many hours are there in a week? Something like 160 hours. So, what I am doing for those 140 hours? I am part of the assimilation for 20 hours, but I can use those other 140 hours for some other benefit, for Kurdish perhaps, looking at it from this accounting perspective. So, what I am doing? I cannot complete myself in my position as a Turkish teacher. I am only spending a 7th of my time there.

Here Baran draws on a familiar theory of value, asserting a direct equivalence between the value of his time spent teaching in Turkish schools and the value of his time spent working on alternative social value projects. On the one hand, he understands his labor in school to produce value for the state in the form of ‘assimilation’, where it is also compensated in the form of a state salary. On the other hand, Baran suggests by analogy that his uncompensated labor working in Kurdish produces a roughly equivalent amount of social value (as measured in labor hours) – a kind of social compensation for his work as a Turkish teacher – even if money never enters the labor process as a mediating factor. However, this is not to argue that all, or even most, Kurdish teachers give the same degree of importance to such ‘cultural’ work and the value projects they organize. Nor is to suggest that there is some necessary quantitative equivalence between the social created, for instance, by an hour working in a state school and an hour spent on Kurdish-language activism; indeed, the smile that appeared on Baran’s face as he made this analogy suggested to me that he himself only took it half-seriously. Rather it is to point out that many Kurdish teachers are both keenly aware and open about their position between competing, at times contradictory value regimes, and the different forms of social value that underlie them; and it is also to demonstrate how of the logics imagined to govern value creation adhering in one domain can be activated in other seemingly autonomous, albeit interdependent domains.

If for Baran both forms of labor generated an equivalent quantity of social value, however, it was not the case that each form of value could be as easily realized in the

marketplace or converted into a source of livelihood.⁴³ Indeed, in comparison with the seemingly more intangible forms of social value that teachers like Baran both create and derive from their work in Kurdish-language activism, their work in Turkish state schools provided a ready source of income and public benefits in a manner that is impossible to match in Kurdish-language education or publishing. Indeed, teachers also emphasize how their work in state schools is a basic condition of their and their families' survival – it is, after all, their 'bread' (T: 'ekmek'; K: 'nan') as many teachers colloquially refer to their state salaries. As Adil put it to me when talking about the depoliticization of Kurdish teachers in the aftermath of the purge: (T) "Tabii ki susacaklar, ekmeğini dokunuyorlar" ('Of course they are going to keep quiet. They (*i.e.* government authorities) are messing with their *bread*'). Sevda – a graduate from both the BA and MA programs at Artuklu who had passed the civil service exam to become a teacher but who was eliminated in the newly reinstated 'interview phase' for future teacher candidates – captured a similar sentiment when she explained why she and so many of her classmates attempted to become teachers: (K) "tu kes ji îdeolojîyê tijî nabe" ('Ideology doesn't fill anyone's stomach'). Like many Artuklu graduates now blacklisted by the government's new hiring policy, Sevda was ultimately forced to find for job working in the private sector outside of Kurdistan.

Many of the values driving Kurdish public formation over the past decade were opposed to the pedagogic projects of the Turkish state, and yet for much of this period, the political-

⁴³It would be incorrect to assert that there no possibility for Kurdish educators and intellectuals to earn money for their labor on Kurdish, either directly as teachers (although rarely the case), or through writing, translating or publishing; or indirectly in other forms of cultural work (running a Kurdish-themed café, organizing cultural events, etc.). Many do, and some even earn enough to consider it their primary occupation, but turning Kurdish into a profit-making enterprise was difficult at the best of times, and the entire Kurdish cultural industry has undergone a deep devaluation, in monetary terms, since the collapse of the peace process. I will return to this discussion in the next chapter.

economic conjuncture in Turkey allowed for steady, if uneasy flow of value between Turkish classrooms and Kurdish cafes and bookstores, political parties and cultural organizations, often with the Kurdish *memur* as the primary mediator. The important points to grasp here are that 1) different kinds of social labor and the work that goes into value transformation; 2) these temporally and spatially distinct forms of value creation are both integral to and productive of larger social value chains. Recent developments in Turkey, however, have thrown these circuits of value into jeopardy and now threaten among the most significant and enduring institutional ties binding Kurdish communities to Turkish state institutions.

A crisis in national values

In the summer before the purge, Mesut, a high-school social sciences teacher from the Kurdish city of Van, summed-up the problem faced by himself and many of his colleagues with the following formula: **(K)** “Em hem memur in, hem jî PKK’li ne. Em bêçare ne” (‘We are both *memurs* and supporters of the PKK. We are in a desperate situation’). At issue in this pronouncement was the deep ambivalence he felt around his work a Turkish state institution, coupled with his seeming inability to find any alternatives. His younger brother had been killed a year earlier fighting for a PKK-allied Kurdish group in Syria, and state authorities had created numerous obstacles for his family in their attempts to repatriate his brother’s body to Turkey for burial. During the purge, he was himself first suspended, then forcibly transferred to another province, before finally being able to return to Van after nearly a year of petitions and appeals. Yet, despite all these experiences, he emphasized the necessity of his continued employment as a teacher in a Turkish state school, largely out of the need to support his family.

Despite the severity of Mesut’s case, his experiences are reflective of growing contradictions within the social value regimes structuring everyday life in North Kurdistan. As

emphasized before, many young Kurds are driven to pursue as a career as a *memur* by economic necessity, even if the values created by their work in state schools are often in conflict with the larger set of social values shaping their relationships with friends, family members, and Turkey's Kurdish movement. Indeed, when I asked students in the Living Languages Institute about their reasons for studying in the Kurdish language and culture program, they often took great care to emphasize that it was not economically motivated, even as they frequently added that some of their peers might have chosen to study in the institute more for the employment opportunities it offered than in working to develop Kurdish. As is the case with cafes discussed in the last chapter – where my interlocutors drew on a commonly acknowledged distinction between the *ticari* ('commercial') and *ideolojik* ('ideological') values shaping the social economy of the cafe – they are also able to clearly distinguish between the specifically 'economic' and broader 'social' values shaping their work both in Turkish schools and on Kurdish language and culture, as well as the kinds of value transformation that structure the relationship between these different forms of value more generally.

And yet, as Mesut's story illustrates, there is sometimes a limit to one's capacity to convert between these different forms of value, while at the same time keeping these domains of value separate – a reality that has become more evident since the collapse of the peace process. No doubt most of my interlocutors would have sympathized with Mesut's plight, and very rarely did I hear an ordinary Kurdish teacher condemned for backing away from political activism when their freedom or family's economic survival was at stake. On the other hand, however, the reduction of Kurdish-language education to a purely economic motivation by Kurdish-language teachers themselves could be a reason for censure, and the 'sacrifice' of Kurdish solely for economic gain was spoken of as a form of betrayal or a form of *samimiyetsizlik* (<T: lack of or

incapacity for *samimiyet*). This became clear in the late fall of 2018, when the Ministry of Education announced that it would allow the small number of MA-graduates from Artuklu working as Kurdish-language teachers the opportunity to transfer back from Kurdish-language education to their original fields in exchange for an opportunity to earn higher salaries. In response, Yunus – a graduate from Artuklu, now working as a Kurdish-language teacher in a rural district of Diyarbakir –shared the following message on Instagram in the form of a two-part story, all in black text against a gray background, to his more than one thousand followers.

Addressing those teachers who had decided to take the Ministry up on its offer, Yunus wrote:

(1) To all of those who work as Kurdish teachers and now want to change their field: let them no longer count me as a friend and let them cut off all relations with me (**K**: bila min hevaltiya xwe de derxînin û têtikiliyên xwe qut bikin). (2) Do not sacrifice the Kurdish language to your ‘own interests’ (**K**: berjewendiyên xwe)!!

A few weeks later, I spoke with Meltem, who was herself a graduate from Artuklu University’s BA-program Kurdish-language and finishing her MA at the institute. During our conversation, I asked her about the controversy and her own thoughts on the Yunus’ reaction. Meltem told me that she largely agreed with his sentiments, adding her own thoughts about the values that structured Kurdish-language activism and education among her peers:

Meltem: I also was very hurt when I heard this. In fact I saw it has a great act of ‘disrespect’ [**K**: bê rumeti]...There was no ‘political reason’ [**K**: sedema siyasî] for it. They only saw it from its ‘economic aspect’ [**K**: aliya aborî]. The money they were getting was better. Their salary was better.

PL: But there is an economic crisis, maybe they have families?

Meltem: Ok, so they have families. But Kurdology is not like Turkish literature. It is not like religious studies or other disciplines. I mean, it has a mission. Every student from the department of Kurdology has a great mission. We must look at it like this. For example, I studied Kurdish for four years. I had economic difficulties, my friends [in other departments] were all appointed as teaches. They are being paid salaries. I am not thinking about any of that. I really want to learn [Kurdish]. So, for those who come to study Kurdology, well this should be their thinking. It shouldn’t be for economic reasons or so that one can get a job. They should not have come at all.

And later you look and it's like they have changed sides. It makes one sad. For us Kurds it's really a dirty situation.

Yes, Meltem acknowledged, unemployment is a difficult thing. But if these teachers were worried about the potential repercussions they should have remained in their original positions. Why become Kurdish teachers at all if one's only concern was economic? Kurdology, as Meltem stressed, could not be reduced to economic considerations – a basic function of mere *memurluk* as I outlined above – but needed to be evaluated against a fundamentally different metric of value than other forms of state employment. Meltem did not condemn her friends in other departments for choosing to become teachers in other fields, but she took great offense at those who had taken the opportunity to become Kurdish teachers – an opportunity, given the system of state quotas [T: kontenjan], that they had in effect taken from others – only to back out when offered the opportunity to earn a higher salary elsewhere. And yet for most Kurdish teachers working in Turkish state schools – the great majority of whose positions did not carry the explicitly linguistic-political dimensions of Kurdish-language education – the calculation was necessarily different, and yet also undeniably altered by the twin political and economic crises reshaping their relations to state institutions and one another.

If Kurdish-language activism and education (and the larger value regime of Kurdish politics in which it has become embedded) are inflected through a relation of value between teachers and state institutions, they are also (as Yunus' remarks remind us) a function of the friendships between educators and activists, as well as between Kurdish intellectuals and their wider communities. Kurdish-language activists working in Turkish state teachers thus confront a double-bind. On the hand, the economic resources that are the basis not only for the livelihoods of themselves and their families are tied to their state employment. On the other hand, the condition in that employment is their participation in a pedagogic project whose goals they

themselves oppose – a situation that most recognize and bemoan. At the same time, however, many labor unpaid in Kurdish-language projects outside of their jobs or convert their labor into investments in cultural or language activities, either by running such activities themselves or by participating as consumers. Thus the same ties that bind them to the state serve as important conduits of value into the Kurdish culture industry and language projects.

Chapter 7: Language and Publics of Value

In the run-up to Turkey's March 2019 local elections both domestic and international media hyped the contest as a potential turning point in Turkish politics. Following the crises of 2015-2016, marked by the many months-long 'city war' in North Kurdistan and the spectacular 'failure' of the July 2016 putsch and the major state crackdown that followed, the ruling AKP-MHP alliance had increasingly come to resemble what many in the field of comparative politics now call a 'hybrid regime.'¹ The AKP maintained a broad base of electoral support, although perhaps no longer an outright majority. But it was doing almost everything in its power to crush or marginalize its political opponents through the full force of the state: tens of thousands were arrested in the span of just a few years for association with any number of 'terrorist

¹Its old typologies from the 'democratic transition' paradigm, it seems, are no longer adequate in our post-end-of-history moment.

organizations' and hundreds of thousands lost their jobs or livelihoods on similar grounds. Most public protests were banned, television stations and newspapers were shuttered, and hundreds of journalists were jailed or forced into exile. Nearly the entire network of democratically elected, Kurdish-run municipal governments in North Kurdistan were summarily dissolved, most of their officials were jailed or lost their jobs, and municipal authority was put into the hands of state trustee administrations. And in 2017, the ruling party and its allies achieved their long-held ambition of narrowly winning a second constitutional referendum, under a national state of emergency, awarding sweeping new powers to an executive presidency.

But there were also signs that Turkey's ruling party and its 'leader' (leader (**T**: reis) and most important symbol, President Erdoğan, were becoming increasingly unpopular – especially in Turkey's largest urban areas where the effects of a half-decade of double-digit inflation and rising unemployment was the most pronounced. And despite the lack of political freedoms, around the country actors from across political society mobilized for opposition parties – most notably the pro-Kurdish HDP/DBP alliance and the two main opposition parties (CHP and İYİ). Like all of Turkey's recent elections, it was a bitterly if popularly contested, drawing participation from nearly 85% of eligible voters², as well as tens of thousands of volunteer election observers – some of whom remained beside ballot boxes for days after counting ended to guarantee the integrity of the process. The results were mixed, and there were allegations of fraud, but opposition parties won the symbolic victory.

Across the entire country, the AKP and MHP combined won just over 50% of the total votes cast in the official count. But pro-Kurdish parties won back most of the largest cities in North Kurdistan (only to have them taken over by the government again a few months later).

² As a rate nearly double that of an 'advanced democracy' like the United States.

And the ‘National Alliance’ of the two main opposition parties won the mayorships of both Istanbul and Ankara together with several other major western cities. When the government did not accept the outcome of the election in Istanbul, which had been decided by just thirteen thousand votes (or about two-tenths of a percent), the president called for a re-run of the election that June. In the re-run of the election, the AKP’s mayoral candidate in Istanbul was defeated again – this time by over eight hundred thousand votes. There was even talk, albeit often hyperbolic, about ‘the beginning of the end for Erdoğan.’

One major key to the opposition’s success, it was widely observed at the time, was the widespread support from Kurdish voters for the opposition alliance in western cities like Istanbul, Ankara, Antalya and Adana. Under other circumstances, these voters might have supported the HDP, which in the past had run its own mayoral candidates in these cities. But Kurdish political leaders decided not to contest these mayoral races and gave their supporters tacit approval to vote for the main opposition candidates. Tacit support, however, increasingly turned into public enthusiasm in the run-up to the re-run of the Istanbul election in June, where a younger, highly personable, and all-around ‘samimi’, if a relatively unknown candidate from the CHP party Ekrem İmamoğlu (currently the mayor of Istanbul) was in a rematch against Erdoğan’s stodgy and widely disliked former Prime Minister, Binali Yıldırım.³

Sensing an opportunity to reach across Turkey’s traditional political divides, a popular leftist activist in Istanbul, Kemal Işıktaş⁴, asked on Twitter how to translate the popular slogan of

³ Former and, it seems for the time being at least, ‘last’ PM, since the office was abolished following 2017 constitutional referendum.

⁴ Işıktaş is a self-described ‘independent communist’ and a defender of human freedom and nature. He is also a popular Twitter user with 45.5. K followers. He also writes editorials for several left publications.

İmamoğlu's media-savvy campaign – the light, happy and nostalgic⁵ "Her Şey Çok Güzel Olacak" ('Everything Will Be Great') – into Kurdish. He then posted a few of the initial responses for further comment:



Figure 7.1⁶

Everything Will Be Great

I asked friends to write it in Kurdish and here are the replies that came

Hertışt pır delal be

Her Tışt Wê GELEK SPÎHETİR BÊ...

Her tışt pır dalol buew

Her tışt wê rındtır be

which one is right/close to right[?]

friends who know Kurdish

#HerŞeyÇokGüzelOlacak

Işıktaş's goal was to produce a Kurdish-language a T-shirt with the campaign slogan emblazoned on the front. The post drew over one hundred comments from his followers and the wider Kurdish Twitterverse, with many sharing their thoughts on the best translation or giving

⁵ The slogan is also, perhaps not entirely uncoincidentally, the name of a very popular Turkish comedy from 1998 that helped to launch a young Cem Yılmaz into national stardom.

⁶ For link to entire thread see entry in works cited.

their own suggestions.⁷ Among these suggested translations are ones that closely imitate hegemonic Kurmanji-Kurdish written standards, as well as those that significantly deviate in both morphosyntax and lexicon from these standards. Some acknowledge this divergence explicitly, offering some geographic (e.g. ‘mardin’) or dialectal (e.g. ‘zazaca’, ‘kirmankî’) gloss. But most are just given as uncategorized local speech varieties, offered without further comment, or labeled with vague deictic phrases like ‘where I’m from’ or ‘our way.’ The spelling and orthography also show diverse qualities. While some suggested translations largely adhere to more standard Kurdish orthography, others contain non-standard spellings for common words (e.g. ‘gellek’ for ‘gelek’ and ‘xüş’ for ‘xweş’), borrow characters from the Turkish alphabet (‘ı’ or ‘i’ or ‘ü’ for ‘û’), or employ characters found in neither Turkish or Kurmanji’s Latin standards (e.g. ‘é’ for ‘ê’ or ‘sh’ or ‘ş’) – Işıқтаş’s model for his T-shirt, for instance, repeatedly uses two non-standard letters (‘ı’ and ‘é’) (see figure 7.2)

In fact so great was the diversity of responses that this itself became a primary topic of the thread. A few Turkish nationalist trolls, in tweets now deleted or removed, mock the participants by claiming that Kuridsh was obviously not a ‘real language’ (T: gerçek bir dil) if there was so much disagreement over how to say one simple phrase. At least one Kurdish user

⁷I document at least 30 unique suggestions: ‘Hertişt pır delal be’, ‘Her Tişt Wê GELEK SPÎHETÎR BÊ...’, ‘Her tişt pır dalol buew’, ‘Her tişt wê rındtır be’, ‘Her çie zaf rindek beno’, ‘Wé her tişt pır xweş be’, ‘Wé hemû tişt pır xweş be’, ‘Wé her tişt gelek xweş be’, ‘Wé hemû tişt gelek xweş be’, ‘Wé her tişt zor xweş be’, ‘Wé hemû tişt zor xweş be’, ‘giyan pır xweş bibe’, ‘Ewê her tişt Pır Rind be’, ‘Ewê bashbe’, ‘hertişt pır xaşbe’, ‘hemmi tişt we heri çetirbin’, ‘e we her tişt gellek baş/delal be’, ‘Hemu tişt de pır law/delal/xişkuk be’, ‘Hertişt évê xeeş bive’, ‘Her tişt yê pır baş be’, ‘Hemmi tişt ı pır xüşbe’, ‘we hertişt pır xweş bive’, ‘her tişt pır rındık bua’, ‘Wê rojeki hemu tişt xweşbin’, ‘Hamu tişt zof xoşık çebe(mardin)’, ‘vur vira zaf rindek biyayış (zazaca)’, ‘Hemû tişt ewê pırî xweş be’, ‘wê hertişt baş bibe’, ‘Ewe hertişt pır delal be’, ‘wê her tişt xweş bibe’, ‘Her tişt dê pır xweşik be.’ ‘Her tişt dê gelek xweş bibe’, ‘her tişt wê bêtir xweş bi be’, ‘Her têşték pér réndéwé’, ‘Her tişt pır juwan bibe’, ‘Wê hemû pır xuşikbe’, ‘Her tiştê pır xweşik bibê’, ‘Her tişt we gellek baştır bibe’, ‘Hemû Tişt wê Baştırbi’

appears also to have been put off by the free invention of Kurdish code, on different grounds, declaring that: “[The standard form is] ‘Her tişt dê gelek xweş bibe.’ Those who do know the grammar should not write how they speak. For those friends who don’t know if how they speak is correct or incorrect, please don’t create confusion. We have lost thousands [of lives] for this language. Be a little respectful and go and immediately get a Kurdish grammar. This is not difficult!!!”⁸ Another user, writing in defense of diversity, argues that Kurdish couldn’t be held to one single standard: “Kurdish is a rich language (T: zengin bir dil). Things can be expressed differently according to the ‘phrase’ (T: deyim), ‘local vernacular’ (T: şive), or ‘accent’ (T: lehçe). The examples above are mostly [right] or close to right. Our accent is not academic. We aren’t Kurdologists. It’s not correct that there is only one way of expressing [it].” Finally a third, more cynical user commented that while any of the suggestions offered might work, it was not especially important because the T-shirt would not change the mainstream opposition’s view of Kurds. As evidence s/he offers a photograph of an official CHP campaign T-shirt that includes the election slogan below a Turkish flag and above translations in 10 other languages, including Arabic, English, Spanish, French, Azeri, Dutch, German, Japanese, Russian and Greek – but notably not Kurdish (see figure 7.2). “It doesn’t matter.” s/he writes, “They all mean the same thing, pick whatever. But this T-shirt proves that the CHP’s attitude toward the Kurds hasn’t changed.”

⁸The same user later moderated his stance in a second Tweet, arguing that while ‘xweş’ was the most generic, unmarked form, and thus the best translation for ‘güzel’, other adjectives were indeed possible: “Xweş, ciwan, rind, baş, cindî... these words can all be used in the place of ‘xweş.’ But for the desired effect I think that ‘xweş’ is the most appropriate. This is a preference, not a rule”

The story of Işıktaş's tweet and its uptake offers a useful starting point for the discussion that follows. In the first place, it offers us a better sense of the more expansive dimensions of the politicization of the Kurdish language in contemporary Turkey and the diverse publics toward which Kurdish language media is directed. While outwardly sympathetic to the Kurdish movement (his current profile banner contains a photograph of himself together with imprisoned Kurdish leader Selahattin Demirtaş), as a self-declared 'independent communist' and 'nature lover', Işıktaş is not easily labeled as a Kurdish nationalist, nor can his attempt to elicit Kurdish support for İmamoğlu's mayoral campaign in Turkey's largest city be put down to just another manifestation of 'Kurdish nationalism'. Secondly, the varied reactions to the tweet help to introduce us to several of the most recognizable positions adopted by Kurds (and Turks and others) on the dissemination of Kurdish-language code in Turkey, while alerting us to the problems of power and authority that inevitably inform attempts to determine 'correct language.' Moreover, the situation reveals how more abstract concerns around standardization and linguistic pluralism relate to more practical questions, like for instance: how a political movement that celebrates the diversity of Kurdish and the authority of 'authentic' speakers in its official discourse should decide on a single version of an election slogan for a Kurdish-language t-shirt?

Kürtçe tamam
Lazca gelsin
#HerŞeyÇokGüzelOlacak
Translate Tweet



4:14 PM · May 15, 2019 · Twitter for Android

Replying to @pancuniyoldas
Farketmiyor. Hepsi aynı anlama taşıyor. Hangisini yazsan olur. Ama bu t-shirt olayı chp nin Kürde karşı zihniyetinin hala değişmediğini gösteriyor.
Translate Tweet



Figure 7.2: (left) Işıқтаş’s model for his T-shirt; (right) CHP’s Istanbul election T-shirt with Turkish flag, election slogan, and translations (see Twitter threat cited above).

In the first part of this chapter, I examine how Kurdish-language activists in Mardin frame a distinction between advocacy that is ‘political’ and ‘cultural’. Importantly, I treat these as emic categories and I work to draw out the parameters of this distinction on my interlocutors’ own terms. Rather than seeing such ‘cultural’ work as strictly non-political, therefore, I adopt a similar perspective to the one taken by Woolard (2016) in her work in Catalonia, arguing that we need to extend our analysis of language politics in Kurdistan beyond the dimensions of the nationalist paradigm in which it is so often unproductively pigeonholed. That is to say, we need to consider how Kurdish language publics evaluate linguistic practice beyond a narrower set of conventional questions around Kurdish national sovereignty. This is not to argue that the relationship between language and Kurdish national politics is an unimportant question, simply that it is not the only question and also that a better understanding of language’s other social dimensions can in fact strengthen our analysis of how ‘nationals’ politics works in practice. So while acknowledging both that language continues to play a central role in Kurdish national

movement in Turkey (i.e. the political organizations controlled by the PKK and/or ‘legal’, mainstream pro-Kurdish political parties) and that public feelings about language are shaped by nationalist sentiment, I also argue that a myopic focus on the relationship between Kurdish linguistic practice and institutionalized national politics also obscures other important dimensions of contemporary language regimes in Kurdistan and Turkey, and I advocate for a more expansive exploration of how these language regimes shape public life in Mardin and Kurdistan.

In the second, longer part of this chapter, I attempt to demonstrate what such an analysis might look like in practice. Specifically, I examine how a narrower set of language activists as well as members of wider Kurdish speech communities navigate two primary value regimes shaping contemporary Kurdish language practices, namely: the public valorization of Kurdish as differentiated social registers and its public valorization as standardized written code – considering how both forms of valorization are mediated through a concept of ‘language anxiety’. While Jamison (2016) primarily treats language anxiety in Kurdistan as a relationship between Kurdish speakers and ‘standard’ written language – experienced as both a personally felt ‘unease’ about one’s capacity to produce standard and a corresponding ‘pride’ in Kurdish’s status as a language of print media and thus a ‘commensurate’. ‘national’ language – I suggest that its meaning can be productively expanded to designate the more generalized situation of uncertainty resulting from both a widespread fear about linguistic ‘assimilation’ and competing efforts to create a national standard in the absence of a hegemonic linguistic authority capable of fixing Kurdish code. I begin by drawing attention to the fact that ‘language anxiety’ (**K**: *endîşeya ziman*) functions as a practical category of public life in Kurdistan, and is routinely employed by

Kurds themselves in metapragmatic discourse about their language practices and consequently mobilized in social projects to reshape how language is used and valued.

Pointing out that not all Kurdish-speakers feel the same way about ‘standard language’ and that, moreover, not all of those who advocate for the creation of a standard agree on its parameters, I explore how this ideological opposition between the public valorization of diverse vernaculars on the one hand and a unitary standard on the other reproduce common oppositions between speech and writing and map onto corresponding ideologies of linguistic ‘expertise’ and interpersonal ‘authenticity’, or in another register, *samimiyet*. I examine how ideologies of expertise and authenticity become implicated in the performance and contestation of linguistic authority, especially as it relates to the different capacities of social persons to achieve and maintain this authority. I document how these basic ideologies shape linguistic practices as they are differently manifested in everyday face-to-face interactions within Kurdish speech communities, institutionalized in Kurdish politics, and are taken up in the field of Kurdish-language activism. Turning my attention to the creators and creation of manifold Kurdish texts objects (with a focus on new Kurdish media) – that is, to emergent ‘writing publics’ in Kurdistan – I describe how Kurdish-language activists make multiple, contested claims to define ‘standard’ or ‘best’ practices. Thus, I argue that rather than simply conforming to a pre-given standard, these new ‘writing publics’ are participating in the interdiscursive process through which the value metrics of linguistic practice are negotiated and an ideology of ‘correct language’ and ‘proper speech’ is remade.

I. Reframing the Politics of Language and ‘Culture’

In late 2017 I was chatting on the terrace of a *kafe* in Mardin’s old city with Mikail, a friend from Qoser (T: Kızıltepe) who was briefly back in the province visiting family. When I

was first introduced to Mikail by friends a half-decade earlier in Istanbul, he was completing an MA thesis on Armenian and Kurdish literature and subsidizing his modest university stipend with work as an English/Turkish-Kurdish translator. His specialty was translating subtitles (or dubbing scripts) for foreign television programs then appearing on some of the new Kurdish-language channels, based both locally and abroad, that had begun broadcasting in Turkey in the several years leading up to and during the peace process. However, when I brought up the subject of his translation work that day – now more than a year after the end of the City War – as we took in the open air and the sweeping view of al-Jazira plane below, Mikail’s first reaction was to shake his head, telling me that even when he did get some work he considered himself lucky if he was paid. When I asked him if some of the institutional Kurdish political parties and organizations still had some money, he doubled down on his earlier assessment:

They are the worst. And they always try to appeal to your patriotic feelings, telling you, ‘look, you’re doing it for Kurdish.’ But what have they ever done for our language? For thirty-five years ‘they’ve done ‘nothing but politics’” (T: siyasetten başka bir şey yapmadılar).

This was not the first time that I had heard this criticism. Indeed, as I describe in earlier chapters, many of my interlocutors positively opposed their own ‘cultural’ work with language to the ‘political’ activities of certain Kurdish parties and organizations. And as I discuss in the first chapter of this dissertation, for the first two decades of its existence the PKK itself largely marginalized the question of Kurdish language activism and education in favor of an emphasis on the politics of class struggle and national liberation, leading many Kurdish intellectuals to later accuse the PKK of having neglected the language struggle (Uçarlar 2009). But in Mikail’s words, I also detected a distinct form of criticism that I had encountered often in conversation with my interlocutors in Mardin and around the LLI – a criticism that was less about the PKK’s initial neglect of the Kurdish language as it was about the ways, in recent years, both the PKK

and its allies in the major ‘legal’ Kurdish parties and institutions (exemplified by the HDP/BDP-run municipal governments across North Kurdistan) have worked to explicitly politicize Kurdish language activism in a manner that has tended (in the opinion of many language activists and educators in Mardin with I spoke) to evacuate it of its true meaning and value. Consider, for instance, how Bilal, a graduate of the LLI and a middle-school Turkish language teacher in Mardin, described what happened when he helped to organize and direct the first Kurdish-language school play ever produced in the city, and how he contrasts his language activism with that the major pro-Kurdish teacher’s union (of which he is still a member) and the local Kurdish-run municipality, both of which he accused of having transformed language into a mere political ‘slogan’:

Bilal: My principal wanted me to put together a project, a project involving bringing the kids abroad for a trip or greeting students visiting from abroad. [He wanted] an idea or whatever. And at that time, I was also giving Kurdish lessons.

PL: In middle school, right?

Bilal: Yes, in middle school. I’m talking about something that happened only two years ago, two or three years ago.

PL: Before everything that happened of course?

Bilal: Yes, before all these events [around the city war and the collapse of the peace process]. In my Kurdish class I was giving the kids theater lessons and they were really unbelievably creative. But when I would teach drama in Turkish, they were not creative at all. And I said they are probably better because it's their ‘mother-tongue’ (T: anadil) and probably they can express themselves better in their mother-tongue. It’s natural that they would be a little more confident. They hadn’t just ‘memorized’ it (T: ezberlememişler). There was something of themselves in it. So, I had an idea. Let’s take some of the students who were not that successful academically speaking and let’s put together a theater group, teach them a bit about theater, and then produce a play with them. And with this mother-tongue theater we could get rid of some of the phobia in the school against [mother-tongue education.] It made a lot of sense to our principal. So, we said let's do it. Ok, let's do it this way. We will find some folkloric work, a fairytale or whatever, and turn it into a theater script.

And I brought it to the National Education [Ministry]. But before I did, I asked someone who worked in curriculum development there. I asked if there was any history in Mardin of some projects like this being done in Kurdish. She looked at her records, and she told me that there had not been a single such project. Not one. But *Eğitim-Sen* has been throwing out slogans about mother-tongue education since 2003. And we're always talking about it. But until that moment they had not put together a single project. And that day I couldn't even really explain my project. I was so demoralized. I was so upset, asking how is it possible that a union whose membership in Mardin is 1,500 [teachers], composed mostly of Kurdish teachers, had not put together a single project around Kurdish?

Bilal begins by describing the goals of his Kurdish-language theater initiative, namely to build self-confidence and promote creativity among his academically underperforming students, for whom the official Turkish curriculum is positioned as foreign and alienating; and to reposition Kurdish as a potential medium of value within local education practices more generally. He then contrasts this project to the work done (or not done) by the pro-Kurdish teachers' union and the municipality, for whom Kurdish language activism is reduced to an act of political symbolism – a series of empty slogans. This reality becomes apparent, as Bilal makes clear, in the way that the pro-Kurdish municipal government reacted to his project, first through indifference and neglect, and then by reducing the educators and students' creative work to an opportunity for party propaganda:

Bilal: So now you will hear the rest of the story. I said to my principal something like, “this hasn't been done before but if you support me, I will do it and go ask the National Ministry of Education for support.”

PL: Was he also a member of *Eğitim-Sen*?

Bilal: He was, but he later resigned, because as you know it is now difficult to be a principal and a member of *Eğitim-Sen*. So, I said first I will go to the municipality, and then I will go to the National Education [Ministry] to ask them for support. The director of culture [of the HDP municipal government] knew me, he knew I am a teacher, in fact he was an old teacher of mine. But he didn't give me a meeting. He told me he was busy. That they had many meetings. Anyway, I went to the National Education Ministry and I explained the project. And one administrator at the ministry really liked the idea. I asked for 2,400 liras. He said that we can't give that much but

perhaps around 1,600 liras. National Education Ministry! They filled out the official paperwork and transferred that money to the school's account.

PL: The local branch of the ministry?

Bilal: Yes, the local branch, here in Mardin.

PL: Are they all Kurds?

Bilal: No, well look, this has nothing to do with Kurds. Ok, this man happened to be a Kurd. But I didn't even say 'Kurdish'. I said 'mother-tongue.' And then later, with the help of some contacts and some insiders, I was finally able to meet with that old teacher, one of Ahmet Türk's advisors at the municipality. Only with some insider-help was I able to get a meeting to explain to them what I wanted to do. I was finally able to get 1000 liras of support but I really had to push for it, to squeeze them for it. It wasn't easy.

So, we finished everything. We got the play ready. People came from the both the municipality and the education ministry. The play was great. Everyone liked it. The administrator from the Education Ministry said to us, "you requested 2,400 but we only gave you 1,600 but we want to give you the extra 800 because it really came out well. And we know it cost you more." And so, they put that money in the school's account as well. Then the municipality took this up and really made a thing about it. You know, 'Kurdish theater in the school', 'Kurdish theater in the school', 'Kurdish theater in the school', Then the governor's office opened an investigation.

PL: What, saying it was all propaganda?

Bilal: Yes! (laughing). They accused the municipality of conducting Kurdish propaganda in the schools. They asked for an investigation and the Education Ministry sent an inspector. But when the inspector came, he looked and said, "This was actually a project supported by the ministry. It has nothing to do with the municipality."

Anyway, they wanted to interview me, to see what happened and how it all went down...[the inspector] came to the school and drank tea, we explained the situation. We told him it was something that we ourselves had organized, not the municipality. And after they all left my principal and I had a conversation among ourselves in which we said, "if only the municipality was able to put together something like this. It would be much more widespread, more impactful"...we all have to do what we can, to work for Kurdish, and all of that stuff about 'official language' (T: resmi dil) or this or that, or to wait for approval or to wait for a hero, that is ridiculous. So, the union is also ridiculous. And all the rest of them.

To be clear, last I checked Bilal was *still* a member of *Egitim-Sen*, despite the increased pressure on Kurdish teachers (and especially administrators, like his former principal, who would later resign his membership); and he was among the more than 1,000 teachers suspended in Mardin in late 2016 for their participation in the one-day strike the previous year to protest aggression by state security forces in the incipient City War⁹ (all events which took place after the story he recounts above). In the more than half-decade that I have known him, moreover, he was always prominently involved in the local Kurdish language movement (as a writer, filmmaker and former owner of a *pirtûk kafe*) and as a regular contributor to the union's campaign for 'mother-tongue' education (the first time I visited *Egitim-Sen*'s local offices in Mardin was as Bilal's guest). His criticism is not, therefore, that of an outsider, but that of an insider in Kurdish language activism and local union politics. And I share his story here not because it is exceptional, but rather because it is broadly representative of many of my interlocutors' experience with Kurdish-run municipalities, as well as indicative of a common contrast made by many language activists between their own work and the activities of official Kurdish institutions.¹⁰ Moreover, it provides a vivid example of what my interlocutors mean when, like Mikail above, they oppose their cultural and language activities to the domain of 'politics' (**K/T**: *siyaset*).

As discussed in the first chapter, public life in Turkey under the first decade of AKP rule was marked by an increasing emphasis on the country's 'multicultural' Ottoman past. But beyond its ostensibly 'cultural' framework, the AKP's Neo-Ottoman project also had significant economic and political dimensions – both of which, as we observed in the first chapter,

⁹See previous chapter.

¹⁰Consider, for example, Schäfer's (2019) discussion around how woman musicians opposed the work of their organization KADAH to the municipal-run Mesopotamia Cultural Center.

intermingled in Mardin's urban development over this period. However, many scholars of contemporary Turkey have argued, often with much evidence, that most of the AKP's reforms have had limited, decorative value. Writing even before the collapse of the peace process, for instance, Zeydanlıoğlu (2012) asserts that the AKP's move to loosen restrictions on Kurdish cultural and linguist expression amount to little more than a window-dressing put on for the EU during Turkey's now stalled accession process. Akkaya and Genç (2013), in a similar fashion, argue that in reality what has been branded as 'AKP multiculturalism' is in reality just a new form of authoritarianism, albeit an authoritarianism with an 'Islamic' and 'neo-liberal' character as opposed to the statism and secular nationalism of the earlier Kemalist regime. And Güç (2016), herself drawing on research in Mardin, argues that the state's outward turn toward multiculturalism was a form of cynical rebranding and political pandering aimed at commodifying the city's heritage in various development projects while papering over lingering social inequalities and political divisions within the city. Taken together, they offer a compelling case that much of government reforms around 'linguistic and cultural rights' was driven more by an interest for money and political advantage than by, for example, an intrinsic preference for multilingualism, a real willingness to seriously consider 'mother-tongue' education beyond token elective classes, or a sincere desire to recreate Anatolia's rich linguistic heritage in contemporary Turkey. But I also want to caution here that my readers do not automatically project the same cynicism onto my interlocutors, for whom the state reforms over the past two decades, if admittedly limited and flawed, have allowed for new and at times previously unthinkable space for them to expand the use of Kurdish in public life (if not always space for dissent or free expression); and for whom, for better or worse, the Kurdish language does possess an intrinsic value beyond its instrumentalization by institutional political actors.

Perhaps the most eloquent and robust account of the interaction between the dimensions of politics and culture in contemporary Turkey – especially helpful for our discussion given her focus on Mardin – is Biner’s (2020) new study on the political economy of cultural heritage and the historical legacies of state and intercommunal violence as entrenched in Mardin’s localized regimes of dispossession. What is of particular importance for our discussion here is Biner’s analysis of how, in contemporary Mardin, the domain of the ‘political’ often becomes disarticulated from the that of the ‘cultural’ in local efforts to promote Mardin’s economic value as a ‘multicultural’ city and a new center for tourism and education. As quoted in the first chapter, for example, Biner argues that in the context of Mardin’s recent development, “the cultural has been promoted as if it existed above and beyond the political, as the political has been associated with the Kurdish political movement” (p. 39). In other words, a widespread ideological contrast between the domains of ‘cultural’ and ‘political’ activities structuring the AKP’s ‘Mesopotamia’ project in Mardin has allowed many Kurds in the province to differentiate their own activities from those of institutionalized Kurdish politics. In the case of language activists, in particular, it has allowed them to sell Kurdish-language books, organize Kurdish-language reading circles, and hold Kurdish-language concerts without automatically being targeted as ‘separatists’ or ‘terrorists.’

But this distinction also places discursive limits on how they can talk about the relationship between language and politics. We see these limits, as well as the ambivalent ‘(in)distinction’ between ‘culture’ and ‘politics’ described by Biner, when Bilal emphasizes the category of ‘mother-tongue’ theater as opposed to ‘Kurdish’ theater when speaking with officials at the education ministry. He does this, importantly, not out some illusion of some actual difference, but to better conform to state discourse, as well as to distance his project from the

explicitly ‘political’ work of the Kurdish-run municipal government. And he does so by drawing on a wider ideological opposition mobilized by Kurdish language activists and educators from across the political spectrum. In the context of talk about education or language activism in North Kurdistan, whereas ‘Kurdish’ is made to invoke the domain of national politics, ‘mother-tongue’ in contrast is used to refer something more individualized and particular, a quality of the self as opposed to ‘slogan’ of an institutionalized political movement. However, I am less convinced that this distinction always represents a ‘fantasy’ – in Žižek’s (1989) sense of a deep libidinal investment in a system of beliefs that prevails even when no one believes them to be ‘true’ – as much as a self-conscious rhetorical strategy, mobilized in relation to a more generalized ideological opposition, that allows Bilal and others to frame their work as non-threatening to an institutional Turkish state audience for whom an explicit invocation of ‘Kurdish’ (given the context of ongoing national agitation) was and continues to be taken up as a potential challenge to state authority and Turkey’s established political order. Bilal fully understands himself to be, in the common parlance of many of my interlocutors, ‘working for Kurdish.’ But he also remains well aware of the limits imposed on this work by the political context in which it takes place. Like all Kurdish language activists I know in Mardin and in Turkey generally, Bilal understands that he had to pick his battles.

Moreover, the idea of ‘culture’ (**K**: kûltûr/çand; **T**: kültür)¹¹ – in the sense, importantly, that Bilal and many of my other interlocutors talk about and employ it – is not positioned as

¹¹Both the Kurdish ‘kûltûr’ and the Turkish ‘kültür’ are (as think is obvious) derived from western European languages, with one primary meaning of the term referring to a distinct set of beliefs, customs and behaviors defining a specific people as introduced by Herder and later formalized by 19th century anthropologists such as Tylor and Frazer. The Kurdish ‘çand’ is a neologism created by analogy with the former through the same agricultural metaphor – the Kurdish verb ‘çandin’ meaning to ‘cultivate’ or ‘plant’.

existing ‘beyond’ or ‘above’ politics, but instead represents something prior to it, serving as the foundation on which the latter is constructed. In contrast, among many academic critiques of the AKP’s version of ‘multiculturalism’ – critiques whose basic assertions are entirely valid– the category ‘culture’ almost invariably emerges as something superficial, a veneer that gives the impression of political reform in the absence of more fundamental social transformation. Importantly, however, this is *not* how many of my interlocutors have mobilized and deployed the category of culture. Conversely, the reduction of cultural struggles – such as the struggle around language (indeed language is often put forward as the primary ground on which culture is contested¹²) – to a status that is epiphenomenal to a primary domain politics is exactly what many of them would reject as the politicization of language, or its reduction to mere ‘politics’. Thus when my interlocutors talk of ‘culture’, which they often do in this dissertation, it is this distinction that I ask my reader to keep in mind.

Notably, this distinction has its roots in the experiences of earlier generations of Kurdish intellectuals who – in the aftermath of a series of political and military defeats suffered by the Kurdish national movement in the decade after the First World War – began to see ‘cultural’ work with language as the preferable, if not the only viable medium of national struggle. For instance, Celadet Ali Bedirxan, the prominent early Kurdish-language publisher (and early standardizer of Kurmanji-Kurdish) writing from exile in French-mandate Syria in the 1930s, famously contrasted the futility of the ‘dagger’ (**K**: xencer) –here used as a metaphor for violent nationalist agitation – to the utility of the ‘pen’ (**K**: qelem) as a tool for the preservation and promotion of Kurdish national culture in an essay that continues to be widely cited by Kurdish

¹²In fact, Kurdish language activists and educators routinely draw the connection between the Kurdish word for ‘dictionary’ (**K**: ferheng) and its cognate in Persian (فرهنگ/farheng) which today also conveys the meaning of ‘culture’ in the modern sense described above.

language educators and activists today¹³ (here recall Melike’s remarks about Bedirxan and the *pirtûk kafe* as a ‘cultural’ as opposed to ‘political’ space in the last section of Chapter 3).

Likewise prominent Kurdish nationalist and polymath Cegerxwin, today best remembered for his voluminous Kurdish-language poetry, also positioned the Kurdish language as the primary pillar of the national struggle, exhorting his readers to not ‘forget their language’ in a poem whose well-known opening lines have become standard fare for public speeches and language coursebooks: “Vejîne zimanê xwe ey xwendevan / Nebûye millet hîç kesek bê ziman” (‘Resurrect your language, oh readers /No people has ever become a nation without language).

Today these and similar verses are cited to exhaustion by Kurdish nationalist ideologues and Kurdish language educators and activists alike. Multiple monographs could be devoted to the subject without exhausting the available material. No doubt linguistic anthropologists as well as scholars of modern nationalism will recognize in such rhetoric all the hallmarks of the romanticized and highly emotive connection between language and national identity as developed in 19th and 20th-century national projects (Bauman and Briggs 2003; Gal 2006; Mitchell 2009).¹⁴ Nor would scholars of Kurdish nationalism be incorrect in asserting that an affective affinity for language has been centrally mobilized throughout the modern history of the Kurdish national movement. However here I also want to suggest that a myopic focus on the relationship between language activism and national politics in academic studies of Kurdistan largely overlooks what are the divergent value metrics that shape how Kurdish-language publics

¹³The essay is entitled “A reproach to my dagger” and appeared in the influential early Kurdish-language publication Hawar: “Gazinda Xencera Min”, *Hawar*, (v. 12), 179-180.

¹⁴Here also keeping in mind that linguistic anthropologists have also offered important critiques of overly simplistic accounts concerning the relationship between modern language communities and national identity as exemplified by Anderson (1983) and others (e.g. Gal 2011; Silverstein 1996)

understand and give meaning to their own and others' linguistic practices, reducing a diverse and complex set of sociolinguistic phenomena into a singular political impulse.

In reality, my interlocutors in Mardin have expressed diverse opinions around, for instance, the desirability of an independent Kurdish nation-state, alternative forms of Kurdish regional autonomy, or even (as I discuss in this chapter) the need for an official status for Kurdish within the Turkish state education system or local municipal government. This is to say that while Kurdish language activism remains an important pillar of Kurdish national movement, it should not be taken as given that any advocacy on behalf of or individual preference for Kurdish is somehow a cover for an expression of political nationalism – here understood as a project aimed at Kurdish national sovereignty, whether in the guise of an independent ‘nation-state’ or a politically autonomous region.¹⁵ Here, importantly, I am preferring an anthropological approach to nationalism outlined by Kelly and Kaplan (2001), wherein nationalism is understood *not* through some vaguely defined act of imagination around common ‘mass’ identities linked to modern ‘print capitalism’ (i.e. Anderson (1983) and his followers) – a more historically and culturally diffuse phenomenon – but is positioned as a historically situated political project aimed at communal ‘representation’ as national sovereignty in the context of decolonization and the emergence of the modern nation-state system that largely emerges over the late 19th and 20th Centuries.

In his story above Bilal frames the value of Kurdish not as a vehicle of national sovereignty but as a medium that engenders the creative abilities of his students in a manner that allows them to reassert their self-worth relative to a school system that systematically marks

¹⁵ Of course, this is exactly the position most often adopted by Turkish state institutions, for which any form of Kurdish language advocacy is automatically equated with Kurdish nationalism and, by extension, Kurdish separatism.

them as linguistically ‘deficient’ or academically ‘weak’. It becomes valuable as a medium that enables students to think and act autonomously – not through a pedagogic regime of ‘rote memorization’ (T: ezberleme) offered by the state curriculum. Conversely, it is only when mobilized by the municipal government and local politicians and party functionaries that it becomes a medium for Kurdish nationalist agitation (or, as might just often be the case, base political propaganda and self-aggrandizement).

It is generally this distinction, moreover, that I believe my interlocutors have in mind when they have insisted on the difference between language work that is ‘political’ and ‘cultural’. Yet significantly, this distinction is reproduced by both those language activists who are generally critical of Kurdish nationalist politics (whether in general or as currently constituted in Turkey) and those who, despite their sympathies for such politics, desire to distance their language advocacy – and by extension shield themselves – from the consequences of public association with it. Those falling on both sides of the ‘nationalist’ divide (here acknowledging that such a dividing line hardly remains stable in practice) can argue for the cultural value of the Kurdish language that precedes any relation to the Kurdish national movement. And in both everyday interactions in public – or more academic debates over correct usage – other ideologies also intervene to set the value of linguistic practice and render it socially meaningful.

But these metrics and the language ideologies that inform them, are not given prior to their instantiation within a particular social interaction and the relations through which participants are themselves fixed (by themselves and others) as social persons throughout an interaction. One might choose to speak Kurdish to signal one’s patriotic feelings (as during a public address at a political rally) or to show off one’s erudition or learning (as during a

university lecture or academic symposium). On the other hand, one might speak in Kurdish simply out of custom or habit, or to convey an added degree of intimacy or informality (or simply because the person with whom one is speaking does not understand Turkish or Arabic, or because speaking anything else would be so socially awkward or out-of-place. Conversely, in other kinds of social settings, one might choose not to speak in Kurdish as much out fear of being taken for an uneducated ‘villager’ (**K**: gundî) as out of concern for being marked as a Kurdish nationalist. But these are not simply products of individual choice or preference. Speaking in certain ways becomes metasemotically linked to stereotypical person types and social roles and thus when people speak in a certain way they are responding to and intervening in an uneven sociolinguistic value regime that mediates all linguistic practice. Thus the value metrics that position Kurdish (or a particular register of Kurdish) as preferable in certain social circumstances and settings, can in another setting serve to mark it as disadvantageous or deficient. And the ideologies that inform these metrics are not independent of the wider field of political economy or the networks of social institutions and persons from which they emerge. Consequently, what I refer to loosely as ‘language activism’ can take many different forms. And like any social project drawing widespread participation, moreover, contemporary Kurdish language activism in Turkey is not without its internal tensions and competing goals.

II. Assessing Correct Language, Policing Proper Speech: Ideologies of Standardized Code and Informal Register

Language Anxiety and Linguistic Authority: Every year on May 15th, Kurdish language activists and educators across Kurdistan and in the diaspora mark the ‘Day of the Kurdish Language’ (**K**: Roja Zimanê Kurdî) to celebrate Kurdish’s value in public life and to draw attention to the efforts of activists, educators and ordinary speakers to protect it and expand its use. During my first year of formal fieldwork in Mardin in 2018, the largest event in the city

marking the holiday that May was held at the local offices of KESK (a major confederation of public employee unions that includes the pro-Kurdish, leftist teacher's union *Eğitim-Sen*) and featured remarks by two locally well-known Kurdish public intellectuals. The event merits special mention here for two reasons. Firstly, it yet again exemplifies the interconnection between Kurdish teachers and the broader field of Kurdish language activism, and the tension between the formers' role as functionaries of the Turkish state (i.e. *memurs*) and as central actors challenging its institutional language regimes. Both the presenter and the moderator were themselves former academics who had been expelled from the positions at Artuklu University during the purge of its faculty between 2014-2016, and their individual biographies are exemplary of how networks of professors and students affiliated (or formerly affiliated) with the LLI extend through Kurdish civil society, linking the institute and the university to wider developments in Kurdish cultural industry and intellectual life in the province. Significantly, although the event's organizers had no formal connection to the university, it was better attended by students of the LLI than any public function I attended at the institute itself during my two years in Mardin. In fact, there were likely over one hundred people crowded together on the second floor of the union hall to hear Remezan Alan, a former professor of Kurdish literature at Artuklu, give a lecture on the question of 'language anxiety' (**K**: *endîşeya ziman*) and to witness his exchange on the subject with Selim Temo, a former professor of Turkish at Artuklu and well-known Kurdish novelist (he writes in both Turkish and Kurdish), and other language activists who made up his audience. The second reason the event merits mention is down to the content of Alan's address itself, which bears special relevance to our current discussion. Firstly for how Alan works to performatively reframe the value metrics of 'standard code' over the course of his address; and secondly and even more importantly, for what Alan's analysis of contemporary

Kurdish language practices in relation to the concept of ‘language anxiety’ can contribute to own attempts to theorize how ‘anxiety’ as a concept organizes a matrix of language ideologies around ‘correct language’ and ‘proper speech’ that are as centrally deployed in subverting hegemonic language regimes as in conforming to them.



Figure 7.3: (left) Remezan Alan giving his address on ‘language anxiety’ in May 2018; (right) A Kurdish-language poster advertising the event

Alan began his remarks describing an opposition between the ‘language of the village’ (**K**: zimanê gund) and the ‘language of the city’ (**K**: zimanê bajar)¹⁶, explaining the role that a nearly century-long processes of forced-resettlement by the state and rapid urbanization had played in the marginalization of the Kurdish language. According to Alan, Kurdish-speaking former villagers have only come to ‘recognize their own identity’ (**K**: nasnameya xwe nas dikin) as Kurds in cities, where they have come into increased contact with speakers of other languages. However for the past one hundred and fifty years, importantly, successive regimes of Ottoman, European, and Turkish colonialism have fundamentally reordered how people viewed language

¹⁶Where I offer quotes, I am using his original categories. The address itself was reconstructed from a partial phone recording of poor quality and my own written notes. It thus does not reflect a perfect record of what was said that day.

in Kurdistana, just as they reordered every other aspect of social life in the region. Drawing on Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Alan then framed the experiences of formerly rural Kurds who had traveled from their villages to the 'metropol' under these conditions as an analogous form of colonial rule described by Fanon. Specifically, Alan focused on the 'language anxiety' that these migrants have inevitably suffered— drawing a comparison with the psychological state of 'shame' (K: eyb) – as they were detached from their traditional speech communities and made to linguistically conform to colonial value regimes that have systematically devalued Kurdish. Ultimately, this led many Kurds to negatively reevaluate their former linguistic practices, subsequently thinking of them as less 'cultured' (K: çandî) and 'erudite' (K efendî) with respect to the 'dominant language' (K: zimana serdest).¹⁷

However, Alan pointed out, this anxiety was not entirely new, nor was it sufficient to lead all Kurds to abandon their language or to cease believing in its value. To make his point, Alan brought up the example of Ehmedê Xanî¹⁸ – a 17th-century Kurdish polymath who was one of the first known Kurdish intellectuals to write in vernacular Kurmanji-Kurdish. In invoking Xanî, moreover, Alan sought to create a direct comparison between Xanî's age and our own, by pointing to the fact that nearly all of the Kurdish-speaking ulema and political rulers of Xanî's

¹⁷ The word 'serdest' can also convey the meaning of 'ruling' or 'sovereign.'

¹⁸ Today Xanî is best remembered for first compiling in written form what is perhaps the best-known story of the Kurdish classical oral literature, *Mem û Zin*, as well as for publishing the first Kurdish-Arabic dictionary.* While widely respected in Kurdish language activist and literary circles, Ehmedê Xanî has special importance for more Islamic current of writers and educators who have collected around the prominent *Nûbihar* journal and publishing house based in Van – not far from the city of Bazîd (T: Doğubayazıt) where Xanî completed most of his published works. In these circles, Xanî is positioned as one of the historical articulators of a 'Kurdish Islam' and an exemplar of the marriage between Islamic piety and Kurdish national feeling. **Nûbehara Biçûkan*, or 'Spring of the Children' – the text in modern terms was more akin to a composite dictionary, grammar and abridged encyclopedia, and it was widely used as a primary coursebook in Kurdish medreses until well into the 20th century (Öztürk 2016).

day also preferred to write in other dominant languages - Arabic, Ottoman or Persian - and arguing that Xanî himself was compelled to begin his work with a ‘poor language’ (**K**: zimanê feqîr) with which he was nevertheless able to produce things of great cultural value. The point of the comparison was clear to all in the room: we make Kurdish valuable when we use it and develop it in concert with others.

Alan’s celebration of Xanî and his efforts to improve the status of the Kurdish language would be considered standard fare for a public address at Kurdish Language Day. However, what proved much more interesting for the anthropologist, and seemingly more engaging and entertaining to his wider audience (who reacted multiple times with outbursts of amused laughter at his provocations) was how Alan then pivoted this analysis into a more nuanced and critical look at the value regimes shaping contemporary Kurdish language practices as reflected not only in relation to the Turkish state, but in relation to Kurdish language activism and how language is publicly valued in Kurdistan more broadly.

Drawing on his earlier opposition between the linguistic practices of the ‘village’ and the ‘city’, Alan asserted that it is only in migrating from rural areas to urban spaces that Kurds shift from speaking the particular languages of their village or region to a ‘common’ (**K**: hevpar) Kurdish urban idiom. Importantly, Alan contended, this new language of the city is not the same as the modern written form of Northern Kurmanji as it exists in Turkey – or what he variously termed ‘standard language’ (**K**: zimanê standart), ‘correct language’ (**K**: zimanê rast), academic language’ (**K**: zimanê akademîk) and ‘the language of reading’ (**K**: zimanê xwendinê). Rather, he was referring to what he called ‘real, direct language’ (**K**: zimanê raste-rast) or ‘public language’ (**K**: zimanê giştî) – the language of the ‘home’ (**K**: mal) as well as ‘shopping’ (**K**: danûstan), and ‘economic’ (**K**: aborî) as well as ‘cultural’ (**K**: çandî) activity (e.g. popular music

and literature) more broadly (like Saussure's concept of 'parole, he noted). Importantly, this 'public language', although 'common', does not conform to a unitary 'standard' code in the manner of an 'academic' text. Rather it allows for differences between speakers in terms of grammar and lexicon: "We say either 'were', 'wisa' or 'wilo'", Alan noted, 'but we [all] understand."¹⁹

But what was especially remarkable about his remarks was how then Alan put his status as an accredited academic and former professor at the university aside in order to elevate the 'public language' to a level of importance greater than the question of standardization – which he bracketed off as a simple 'problem of schools' (**K**: meseleya xwendigehê). This was a formulation later reenforced by the moderator Selim Temo, who in his response to Alan remarks rearticulated this distinction between one of the 'language of education' (**K**: zimanê perwerdeyê) and the 'language of the city' (**K**: zimanê bajar). Citing a recent work by one of his former colleagues at Arutklu on the relation between religion, class, and nation in the construction of contemporary Kurdish political identities (Çiçek 2015), moreover, Alan openly attacked contemporary efforts to create a 'standard language' on the basis that they were projects of social control enacted in the interests of an emerging professional Kurdish middle class. Alan then went so far as to claim that he "did not even know academic Kurdish" (**K**: Ez kurdîya akademîk nizanim), that "academic Kurdish could be damned" (**K**: Kurdîya akademîk lanet be), and that he was on the side of 'kurdîya serreş' – the simple Kurdish of the common people, or in an alternative translation, 'low Kurdish'.²⁰

¹⁹The forms 'were', 'wisa' or 'wilo' are all regional varieties of a common adverb meaning 'so', 'thusly' or 'in this/that way.'

²⁰Since 'serreş' often means 'unfortunate', 'downtrodden', or even 'disgraced' (as in a concept of 'bextreş', or an 'evil fate'). Literally 'serreş' means 'black headed' (as in a horse, 'hespê serreş'), or a person with black hair (similar to 'esmer') – the only definition given in almost all

Here it is necessary to situate Alan’s remarks with the wider context of contemporary Kurdish language activism in Turkey, where talk about language anxiety unfolds through two primary ideologized processes that are related to a concept of ‘assimilation’ – processes we might term ‘disappearance’ and ‘degeneration’. ‘Disappearance’ refers to discursive mobilized fears about the decline in Kurdish speakers through their ‘assimilation’ to a Turkish language community; and ‘degeneration’ to the corruption of linguistic ‘purity’, either through neglect (e.g. the lack of widespread formal education and the ‘forgetting’ of classical or ‘standard’ forms) or through a more narrow form of specifically ‘language assimilation’ (e.g. the influence of language contact, primarily with Turkish, on Kurdish’s lexicon and grammatical structure). Moreover, while the first is largely spoken of in abstract sociological terms (e.g. in the idiom of statistical analysis of language shift or macro-level generalizations about intergenerational change in terms of related questions of social mobility and rural to urban migration²¹); the latter is often framed as both a personally-felt emotional disposition toward one’s own (in)ability to

dictionaries – but I’ve encountered it used just as much in this first, abstract sense. It is also appears paired with ‘evd’, especially in the Kurmanji spoken by Ezidi communities in Armenia. For example, De La Bretèque (2012) documents ‘e’vdê serreş’ in a *kilamê ser* (a form of melodic, melancholic speech performance) by a woman from an Ezidi village Armenia’s Aragatsotn Province (p. 136). She translates it as ‘people’ along the analogy of ‘evdê xwedê’ (‘human being’, lit. ‘servant of God’) or ‘evd û însan’ (‘people’). However by itself ‘evd’, derived from the Arabic “عبد/‘abd”, also can mean ‘servant’ or ‘slave’, here also giving the sense of someone ‘downtrodden’ or ‘unfortunate’ (lit. a black-headed slave or servant). The same expression also appears in a collection of Fêrikê Ûsiv’s poetry (Lêgal Plyûs, Yerevan 2010) where the meaning of someone ‘unfortunate’ or ‘downtrodden’ is confirmed in repeated opposition to ‘xweşî’, meaning pleasant or happy, as in “şabe, şabe, kelbê kêfxweş / û nenihêr me-evdê serreş / Em jî carna xweşiyêdanin / Em jî carna reşiyêdanin” (p. 92) and “û te çi kirye, ku evdê serreş / Dilê te nekire bi xeberek xweş?” (p. 286). I once heard another friend at the LLI use the term ‘Kurmancê reş’ (‘black Kurmanc’, or ‘black Kurd’), with some admiration, to refer to a type of uneducated and unassimilated Kurd who lives in the mountains or the countryside. Obviously, there are potential racialized dimensions to this phrase – consider, for instance, Powell’s (2003) discussion of the use of analogous language in another post-Ottoman context. ²¹ Hill (2002) describes this emphasis on statistics as an ideological process of ‘enumeration.’

speak, as described by Jamison (2016), as well as by an obsessive attention to (and policing of) what constitutes ‘standard language’ and ‘correct speech.’ But, as I also will show, the effects of this language ideology extend beyond the fear or reluctance to speak Kurdish and the corresponding discursive silencing of certain voices (both admittedly real and important problems in the field of contemporary Kurdish language activism). But my point is that ‘language anxiety’ is a broader phenomenon that frequently shapes events of public contestation and negotiation of ‘correct’ language practices as well as to the public celebration of ‘mixed’ and ‘non-standard’ forms. In the latter case, moreover, the validation of ‘non-standard’ language is performed both by Kurdish speakers largely untrained (and almost universally ‘uncertified’) in the specifics of standard code, as well as members of a much smaller social set (including students and professors at the LLI) who have been socialized to conform to these linguistic prescriptions. In this sense, rather than representing solely a negative phenomenon, the language ideology of ‘anxiety’ actually shapes many of the creative processes through which contemporary communities of Kurdish speakers are reproduced and their linguistic value metrics reformed – constituting an anxiety that is simultaneously productive and inhibiting, and that is as much about transforming the value metrics used to assess linguistic practices as it is about conforming to them.

For Alan specifically, the problem of language anxiety is to be confronted directly, both through a positive validation of non-standard forms and in particular the ‘low Kurdish of the people’ (i.e. **K**: ‘kurdîya serreş’), and through a repositioning of Kurdish as a medium of value in contrast to the colonial language regimes imposed on Kurdistan from the outside. Whereas Alan remains concerned about the problem of ‘disappearance’, he is more nuanced about the question of ‘degeneration’, arguing that concerns around the language’s classical purity or formal

correctness need not be elevated over a celebration of language of the popular classes. As both a scholar of the Kurdish novel and novelist himself, moreover, Alan is certainly aware of Bakhtin's conception of 'heteroglossia' and his corresponding celebration of linguistic difference.²² Yet for Bakhtin, the problem of 'heteroglossia' transcends a simple celebration of linguistic difference in order to explore how this difference is evaluated against broader social hierarchies in a manner that informs language's 'stratification' in relation to society at large (Bakhtin 1981).

However, while Alan is explicit in his opposition to the imposing a unitary standard for Kurdish, his thoughts on popular forms of code-switching and the growing effect of contact with Turkish on spoken Kurdish (linguistic phenomena largely absent from his literary production and public speech that are also often the targets of language purists) remain unclear. In Mardin province, importantly, Alan's invocation of "kurdiya serreş" ('low' or 'common' Kurdish) might denote a social register of Kurdish akin to one that is imagined to be spoken by, for instance, a rural villager working for low-wages on an 1000-hectare farm on the Jazira plain, or with her family in the hills growing vegetables and fruit or raising sheep to produce cheese to sell in local markets; a day-laborer in one of the small, primarily Kurdish-speaking district centers like Nusaybin, Derik or Qoser; or even a Kurdish-speaking Syrian refugee from Syria – all registers less likely to be colored by the anxiety of 'Turkish linguistic assimilation.' Here keeping in mind that, within Kurdish-language activist circles and among Kurdish publish more broadly, an image of an illiterate (and thus largely older), Kurdish women living in rural villages have long been put forward as the bearer of the purest, least unadulterated Kurdish. The closest 'masculine'

²² In fact one of his former students at the LLI has published an article in the institute's journal where he centrally employs Bakhtin's use of the concept in his analysis of one of Alan's own novels (Altinkılıç 2017).

equivalent of this socio-linguistic type –as one of former Kurdish teachers at the LLI once pointed out to me when suggesting with whom I could socialize in order to be exposed to the purest, most original Kurdish – is that of an illiterate Kurdish shepherd. But a celebration of ‘kurdîya serreş’ in relation to the popular Kurdish classes in the major ‘metropollar’ in North Kurdistan (e.g. Diyarbakir and Van) or in western Turkey (e.g. Istanbul)– where linguistic realities reflect widespread code-switching and language contact between Kurdish and Turkish (or ‘assimilation’ in the ideology of language anxiety) – might refer to something entirely different: a distinct set of linguistic registers situated within a divergent language regime.

Here Gal and Irvine’s (2019) recent re-articulation of the concept of ‘language ideology’ as something fundamentally ‘contested’ – a product of positioning and perspective that is always simultaneously implicated in matters of “power, politics, interest and social action” (p. 13) – becomes fundamental to my own analysis. As such, I want to emphasize that linguistic registers are ideological relationships between linguistic practice and types of social persons – not necessarily the ‘real’, ‘objective’, or universally recognized facts of linguistic practice. They do not ‘mean’ the same thing to everyone. Some differences are inevitably made to matter more than others in different contexts; and in some contexts, moreover, otherwise enregistered differences might not matter at all (or even be recognized as such).²³ Rather registers become meaningful to the extent that they are used and taken up within a community and as such are social, interdiscursive achievements that serve as ‘cultural models’ [linking] “contrasting and typified features of communicative display to contrasting types of speakers, characteristics,

²³ Agha’s (2003), for instance, points out that registers are social in two senses: 1) in the first sense because they position speakers in social space, that is they index a ‘social range’ of potential person types: and 2) in the second sense because their valence and uptake are themselves unevenly spatialized within society, or distributed within a specific ‘social domain’ – i.e. the subset of speakers socialized in their use.

activities, practices, and values” (Gal 2018 p. 3). But these indexical relationships can themselves change, or be made to change, as they are mobilized by new social actors.

Contesting Standards: However, it is possible to draw attention to certain features of linguistic practice that, within the ‘social domain’ (Agha 2003) of Kurdish-language activism in Turkey, are recognized as salient markers of sociolinguistic differentiation and thus figure centrally in processes of social enregisterment. For example, one of the primary markers widely understood to differentiate ‘academic Kurdish’ and various registers of ‘popular’ Kurdish spoken in North Kurdistan is the use of Kurdish neologisms that have been proffered and subsequently disseminated from Kurdish language organizations in recent decades. Jamison (2016), for instance, describes the feelings of anxiety expressed by her interlocutors when confronted, for example, with unfamiliar words in a dictionary – such as ‘endazyar’ (‘engineer’) in the place of the more familiar, Arabic-derived words such as ‘mûhendîs’ – admitting that they did not know ‘book Kurdish’ (pp. 48-49) However, Jamison argues, the sense of language anxiety is offset by the ‘pride’ that stems from the “increasingly commonplace sense that there exists a singular standardized code, against which current speakers can be measured, and through which ‘Kurdish’ might now take its rightful place alongside the other constellations of people-language-place” (ibid p. 50). In this formulation, feelings of personal linguistic inadequacy are displaced by the assurance that Kurdish has become a ‘national’, ‘commensurate’ language, with its value linked not its role as a medium of social life, but as an instrument of nationalist politics and a symbol of nation sovereignty.

But this perspective, importantly, is not shared by all in North Kurdistan. Or perhaps more precisely, it is not the only perspective available to them. In Mardin, for example where

Kurdish remains a much more widely used medium of public life than in Diyarbakir²⁴, other metrics of linguistic competence are often put forward in opposition to those of ‘book Kurdish’— or in a more derogative terms, ‘party Kurdish’ (**K**: kurdîya partîyê **T**: parti kürtçesi), a widespread ideological gloss that links less commonly used neologisms with the alienated and artificial-sounding Kurdish of PKK-allied media.

Once, for instance, I was having coffee with a friend, Abdurrahman, close to the state hospital where he worked as a registered nurse in the ER. We had met a few months earlier when he had overheard me speaking Kurdish at a local gym that we both frequented and he came over and introduced himself. Like me, he was also interested in Kurdish books, which he enjoyed to read despite, he liked to add, never having received any formal instruction in the language. ‘I taught myself’, he told me. He even preferred to write in Kurdish when we would message on Instagram. He had grown up in a village close to Mardin where Kurdish was everyone’s first language, so it wasn’t that hard, he said.

That day at the cafe he was telling me about his school days, about how difficult it was for Kurdish students in village schools in Turkey, and about how few of his middle school classmates went on to high school. Only he and one other classmate went on to any kind of higher education. He got a 2-year nursing degree. He was fortunate. He got an appointment at the local state hospital and was the only person in his family working as a *memur*. But this came with its own pressures. Suddenly the waiter was by the table with our drinks. I responded with a smile and a casual ‘spas’, or ‘thanks’, the ‘standard’ form of ‘to thank’ (spas kirin) taught in every Kurdish textbook.

²⁴See chapter one for a detailed discussion of the frequently opposed language regimes of these two provinces.

When the waiter was out of earshot, Abdurrahman asked me why I would use such a word, adding that it could attract unwanted attention from the police. I was surprised, not such much by Abdurrahman's fear of surveillance but by his fear that a Turkish policeman would have the linguistic sensibility to detect this kind of subtle distinction, assuming he could understand Kurdish at all. He assured me that I would be surprised, because as he said, "Everyone knows this. A Kurd from here would never say 'spas.'"

'Normal Kurds', he went on to explain, would say 'mala te ava' ('may your house prosper'), or if the person were a bit younger, then maybe 'xwedê ji te razî be' ('may God be content with you). There's also 'gelek memnûn' ('much obliged') – but he wouldn't say 'spas'. Nor would he say 'rojbaş' for 'good morning', but 'siba te bi xêr'. Nor would he say 'endezyar' for 'engineer', but 'mûhendis.'²⁵ Nor would he say 'zanîngeh' for 'university', but 'ûnîversîtê.' These other words, he explained, are ridiculous and had no currency with the people. Look at him, he could read and write in Kurdish, but he didn't use such words. Notably, Abdurrahman was not complaining about the conventions of Kurdish writing – origins which have much deeper roots than either 'rojbaş' or 'endezyar' – but about 'standard code' as a more recent ideology of a 'commensurate' language that has a secularized and easily translatable, 'international' vocabulary for words like 'thanks' and 'good morning' but little connection to the linguistic practices or value of its speakers. Nor is he alone, even among many Kurdish language writers and readers. Not even all language 'experts' (here taking 'experts' loosely to include the thousands of students and professors who have been affiliated with the LLI over the past decade)

²⁵The fact that Abdurrahman made the same opposition between 'endezyar' but 'mûhendis' as Jamison (2016) observed when speaking with her informants leads me to think that 'endezyar', rather than just an 'unfamiliar' word from the standard language, is actually more widely known and cited example of an especially badly received or awkward neologism.

necessarily draw a straightforward equation between the necessity for such a standardized, commensurate code and the struggle for national sovereignty. And as Alan's remarks reveal, for instance, there is less consensus on the need for a 'standard language' among Kurdish-language writers, educators, and intellectuals than might appear from a myopic focus the discourses of a relatively small cadre of linguistics and intellectuals attached to the few prominent Kurdish language institutes for whom the promulgation of a single, 'standard code' remains the most pressing goal – albeit still one goal among others.

Moreover, among language organizations and experts themselves, there is even less consensus on what form that standard should take, beyond a loose allegiance to the Latin-based alphabet and (to a lesser extent) spelling introduced by Celadet Bedirxan, together with an insistence on the preservation of certain classical grammatical forms (*e.g.* split ergativity, *ezafe*-pairs fully inflected for gender) that had been largely established as the basis for the formal written standard even before the switch from an Arabic-based alphabet in the 1930s. If, as Jamison argues, the rapid expansion of Kurdish publishing and widespread dissemination of novel Kurdish text objects over the past two decades have given many 'non-readers' the impression of a newly consolidated, unitary standard that exceeds their linguistic capacities, for those who do read Kurdish text, and even more for those who produce it, the ideological effects of this anxiety is much different: a value regime of contested and constantly shifting standards where the 'allegiance' to a particular form or set of conventions is always partial and situated, and use of even a 'standard' form can index a meaning that is often beyond the intention of the writer and invariably exposes one's language to the critique of others.

Recent linguistic anthropological scholarship on the question of 'language endangerment' provides a useful starting point for this discussion. It has the added benefit of an engagement

with questions of ‘minority’ language activism and the status of non-standard speech communities while at the same time being less encumbered by debates around the politics of nationalism, allowing us to explore the manifold relations of power and value that shape projects of language activism (and the politics of language standardization) in our contemporary world, as well as the different audiences that such activism addresses. One primary concern in this literature is the very role of ‘experts’ in shaping language policy (and by extension, linguistic practice) and the corresponding question of who sets the value metrics by which language practices are evaluated and policy is implemented. Numerous scholars, for instance, have pointed out that discourses of linguistic endangerment centering on the need to protect minority-language communities have tended to reproduce regimes of ‘linguistic expertise’ (Hill 2002 ; Heller and Duchêne, ed. 2007). However, in the case of Kurdish, as spoken in Mardin and written at Artuklu University, the value of expertise is hardly stable across social contexts and thus frequently contested – even by those who are themselves ‘accredited’ language experts involved in Kurdish language education, such as those working at the LLI.

While completing my coursework at the LLI, for instance, I was routinely required to submit written work in Kurdish. This was always a problem for me, not only because of my lack of familiarity with and fluency in the written language relative to other students at the institute, but also owing to the lack of an agreed-upon reference on which I could model my writing. Sometimes I would dig up an obscure academic term from one of the more prominent Kurdish dictionaries, only to be confronted by confused or amused looks of my professors and classmates. Sometimes a colleague would change the spelling of a particular word in my paper, only for another to ‘correct’ it again by changing it back to my original spelling. Overall, the vast majority of my professors at the LLI were patient and flexible with my writing to the point of

indulgence, generously choosing to focus instead on the arguments I was attempting to make (which, owing to my unique academic background at the institute, were at least judged as ‘interesting’ if not always entirely convincing). But one professor, in particular, was seemingly unimpressed by whatever I wrote, no matter how much time I devoted to obsessing over the grammar and spelling in a presentation or essay. When he failed me on my final paper without even as much as a comment on the actual content of the work by claiming that it was ‘unreadable’, a fellow student at the LLI tried to cheer me up, telling me not think too much of it, since almost everyone at the institute agreed that his written Kurdish was terrible (‘Just take a look at his book on folklore, reading it is a kind of torture’).

This is not to suggest that there are not ongoing attempts to set standards, or that widespread consensus on many questions of standard form does not already exist. But the lack of a single legitimated language authority (along the model of an Académie Française or – ‘closer to home’ - a Türk Dil Kurumu) with the power to enforce such standards either through a regime of standardized testing or the implementation of a common educational curriculum – basic institutional tools in the maintenance of any language community (Silverstein 1996) – means that almost any linguistic prescription remains open to challenge and renegotiation. In 2019, for instance, the *Weqfê Mezopotamyayê* (Mesopotamia Foundation) – an organization headquartered in Diyarbakir that counts among its primary goals the creation of the linguistic infrastructure for a future system of Kurdish-language higher education (and where I worked for a few months as an intern in the summer of 2019) – published a *Guide to Correct Writing* (K: *Rêbera Rastnivîsînê*) that seeks to establish a fixed standard for spelling. The project was the culmination of multiple years of well-attended and relatively well-funded academic congresses held at four-star hotels in Diyarbakir and Istanbul – a process that was designed to lend prestige

to and build consensus around the foundation's proposed reforms. But as I sat with the director of the foundation at its headquarters in the summer after the *Rêber*'s publication, as his young son played atop a large pile of as yet undistributed copies stacked almost to the ceiling in one corner of his office, he confessed that there had already been some sustained objections to a number of the foundation's guidelines and that a second edition would almost certainly need to be produced in the future to address them. Nor was it the case, the director admitted, that all Kurdish writers and publishers had even been on board with the project to begin with.

Importantly, as I stated above, such anecdotes are not intended to suggest that there is not already a significant amount of agreement around the basic parameters of written code (parameters which were largely already established in their current nearly a century ago). Rather, I want to argue that it is the accomplishment of widespread conformity within written Kurmanji-Kurdish around the basic conventions of writing together with the absence of a universally recognized linguistic authority that allows for the proliferation of various modes of differentiation that generate – along the lines of what Freud described under the heading of ‘*der Narzissmus der kleinen Differenzen*’ – a situation of mutually intelligible distinction that is often minor in form but loaded with ideological content. Let us begin by way of an initial example, briefly considering the ‘correct’ spelling of several Kurdish words that have already appeared in this chapter: the word ‘spring’, for example, can be commonly encountered in written Kurdish in at least two forms: ‘*behar*’ and ‘*bihar*’ (with the first generally preferred by the LLI’s flagship *Journal of Mesopotamian Studies* and second appearing in the name of the prominent *Nûbihar* journal – two very differently socially positioned, if equally prominent Kurdish institutions²⁶). Moreover, Arabic loanwords in Kurdish that begin (in Arabic) with the voiced pharyngeal

²⁶ See footnote 10 above.

approximant /fricative ‘ayn (ع) are generally written without any indication of their ‘original’ pronunciation, but occasionally a diacritic mark (‘) is placed before the word, especially by publications wishing to index a greater level of Islamic piety, or by writers wanting to display a more folksy or locally dominant form of pronunciation, or sometimes even just by those who want to show linguistic expertise by demonstrating knowledge of correct etymology – *e.g.* ‘shame’ (eyb/’eyb), ‘slave/servant’ (evd/’evd), or ‘holiday’ (eyd/’eyd).²⁷ But also notice that even consensus creates opportunities for differentiation. The spelling of ‘language’ (ziman) is largely hegemonic in contemporary written Kurmanji-Kurdish, although this form does differ slightly from the spelling originally given by Bedirxan in his Latin-alphabet grammar (zman).²⁸ But it is by virtue of this widespread consensus that meaningful differentiation becomes possible: thus, for instance, can a colleague from the institute – through an act of intentional misspelling – add comedic effect to a story that he shared on Instagram celebrating Kurdish Language Day (see figure 7.4):

²⁷The latter is also saliently contrasted with the more ‘modern’, ‘bookish’ or ‘secular’ *cejn* (‘holiday’, ‘festival’), especially in greetings during religious holidays (in a way partly analogous to the opposition between ‘Merry Christmas’ and ‘Happy Holidays’) as in the choice between “*cejna te pîroz be!*” and “*eyda te pîroz be!*”, with the substitution of ‘mubarek’ for ‘pîroz’ allowing for even greater display of tradition or piety.

²⁸The for ‘zman’ was most likely an awkward hold-over from the Arabic-language writing system for Kurdish, which does not indicate some short vowels (*i.e.* on the model of ‘زمان’)



Figure 7.4: “May (your) Kurdish Language Holiday be celebratory.”

The image is of a man (another colleague from the institute) seated cross-legged (the posture typically assumed while seated on a *divan*) and wearing a *puşî* as traditionally wrapped around the head while posing under a hand-drawn map of Kurdistan. The caption above him reads “May (your) Kurdish Language Holiday be celebratory.” This is, in fact, a standard greeting for the occasion, except that the message contains a highly non-standard form of ‘Kurdish language’ (‘ezmanê Kurdî²⁹) as well as a conjugated form of the verb ‘to be’ (‘bît’ as opposed to ‘be’) that is non-standard except when writing in the Badînî dialect of Southeastern

²⁹This is an imitation of some form of vernacular pronunciation, with a metathesis of ‘z’ and the first short vowel (recall that Bedirxan did not even write this vowel in his original rendition of the word, ‘zman’) and with an initial ‘ayn sound thrown in at the beginning for added color. Notably, there is a common tendency for Kurdish speakers around Mardin to add an initial ‘ayn sound to words of entirely Kurdish origin in a form of hypercorrection geared toward imitating the sound as it is locally preserved in Arabic-loan words. For an example of this see Ahmet Türk’s speech at an anti-referendum rally in 2017 in Batman where he continually pronounces the proto Indo-Iranian origin-word for ‘freedom’ (azad) and even the prepositions ‘we’ (em) and ‘that’ (ew) with an initial ‘ayn sound: Halkların Demokratik Partisi – HDP. "Ahmet Türk: Yalvarıyorum, çocuklarımızın geleceğini karartmayın." *YouTube*. 11-Apr-2017.

Kurmanji, spoken around Duhok in Northern Iraq as well as in the province of Hakkari (where our pictured friend is originally from). However, its effect is largely derived from its obvious intention to deviate from standard code and thereby purposefully invoke a folksy, non-standard register that is further enhanced by our friend's choice of dress and posture (while many rural men still go out in public in traditional *puşî* head-dress in North Kurdistan, neither he nor others at the institute would normally wear them except perhaps as part of a 'national costume' during Newroz celebrations, and people do not generally sit cross-legged in chairs). The post thus derives its humor from a well-known urban intellectual playing dress up and adopting the clothing, posture, and speech patterns of a rural Kurd. However, it is not meant to be insulting. On the contrary, in the context of a celebration of the Kurdish language, it is also a reminder that it is Kurdish villages, as much as urban intellectuals, who can claim to the privilege of safeguarding Kurdish.

On the other hand, importantly, both the friend who shared the post and the one who is pictured in it are graduates from the LLI and are known as accomplished Kurdish-language writers and thus widely recognized as capable of producing 'standard code' – even as both also were born and spent their early years in Kurdish-speaking villages (a life trajectory that was very common among students at the LLI). Their semiotic achievement is therefore predicated on both a form of differentiation that is only intelligible because of a relatively strong consensus among a Kurdish reading public about the 'standard' forms from which they are deviating, and just as significantly, a confidence that their deviation would be taken up by their audience as intentional – and not simply a 'mistake'. Here, too, we see how speech registers are voiced by social actors in a manner that does not simply reflect some pre-given sociolinguistic reality but actively seeks to create new meaning (Eckert 2012; Gal 2018).

Here three qualifications are necessary. The first is that, with the possible exception of the last example (which is more an imitation of non-standard speech, a parodic double voicing, than a real claim to present an alternative written standard), such minor variations in spelling are not nearly as salient as, for example, the opposition between the Kurdish neologisms and vernacular lexicon I describe above in the story about Abdurrahman. Nor are they likely to even be noticed and taken up as significant except where their use becomes routinized in some organizational or institutional setting (journals, publishing houses, language textbooks, etc.). The second qualification is that the social domain in which such orthographic contrasts are likely to be meaningful is much smaller than the domain for lexical distinctions since these latter distinctions are also generally active in speech, and because only a regular and attentive reader of Kurdish or someone actively involved in the production of Kurdish text would probably even be consciously aware of the existence of multiple contested spellings – a reality that can persist even when readers are capable of otherwise ‘understanding’ what is written.

A final qualification, both more generalizable and foundational to the discussion that follows, is that any contestation of standard language itself requires recourse to some form of linguistic authority. If challenged, one must be able to justify one’s grammar, word choice, or spelling, otherwise, it is just a ‘mistake’ (K: *şaşî*). Importantly, such authority can come in the form of claim to linguistic expertise, as in knowledge of ‘standard Kurdish’, but it can also come in the form of a claim to linguistic ‘authenticity’³⁰ (Woolard 2008, 2016). In the context of

³⁰Woolard (2008, 2016) makes a similar point about ‘authenticity’ as opposed to ‘anonymity’ in the context of Catalonia – but in the context of Kurdistan where full proficiency in ‘standard Kurdish’ remains so rare, what Woolard glosses as ‘anonymity’ through conformity to standard code in Catalonia is instead experienced in Kurdistan as a much rarer, more marked embodiment of expertise. As my interaction with Abdurrahman makes clear, recourse to ‘standard’ is hardly a performance of anonymity but marks one as a very particular kind of social actor.

Kurdish language publics in Turkey, moreover, an ideology of linguistic authenticity is mobilized in a semiotic process of ‘fractal recursion’ (Gal 2005) across two primary scales of public life and as part of two distinct oppositions. The first, as I discuss further below, is relative to Turkish and thus unfolds on an ‘international’ scale (where ‘Kurdish’ is positioned as the ‘authentic’ language of the Kurdish people in opposition to Turkish). But an ideology of authenticity is also used on an ‘intranational’ or ‘local’ scale in contrasting the linguistic practices of various Kurdish speech communities with the implementation of a Kurdish written standard. In this second case, moreover, assertions of expertise are frequently challenged by writers and activists who point to local, authentic linguistic practices in their town or village as authority for their claims to determine ‘correct’ (K: rast) writing or speech. In her groundbreaking study of Kurdish language planning among the Kurdish diaspora in Europe, for instance, Uçarlar (2009) documents a similar tension between what she identifies as three primary approaches to Kurdish language policy:

There is great disagreement among Kurdish intellectuals in the European diaspora on the status planning for the Kurdish language...The nationalist approach is clearly pro-standardization of the Kurdish language on the base of the strongest dialect, Kurmanji, while the cultural approach appreciates the diversity of Kurdish and stands for the protection of each variety of Kurdish language. The trans-national approach stands with the cultural approach in that it advocates for Kurdish languages, but at the same time rejects the official status of any language (p. 264)

Uçarlar offers an insightful look at the major faultlines shaping Kurdish language planning as a discursive field. But rather than looking at these as stable ‘blocs’ or ‘factions’ – where each individual or organization becomes associated with one of these three ‘approaches’ – I want to suggest that these are better understood as a field of interdependent language ideologies in which the same actors can mobilize elements of each in different contexts and for different purposes. I have known ardent Kurdish nationalists, for example, who will speak out for the

Kurdish linguistic diversity even as they insist on the need for an independent Kurdish nation-state. I have also known Kurdish language educators who, although they reject ‘out-dated’ nationalist politics, justify the need for a unitary standard along the lines of ‘efficiency’ of communication (Gal 2012). Again, the *Weqfê Mezopotamyayê* – the same institution that recently published its ‘Guide to Correct Writing’ – has been working for several years on the production of a dictionary of regional variation in pronunciation and lexicon (still unpublished). Moreover, nearly all Kurdish language organizations also now agree on the need for a separate standard for Zazaki, although some are much more generous than others in devoting resources to the project.³¹ Significantly, this does not mean that the discourses of all Kurdish institutions are equally flexible or more or less identical in their discourses and practices. As Uçarlar herself observes, Kurdish language activism has been closely influenced by EU discourses on linguistic diversity and language rights as they have been ‘relayed’ (Gal 2019) across distinct institutional links between European funding agencies, NGOs and academic institutions (as well as Kurdish diasporic communities) to language organizations in Kurdistan. But this does not mean that such discourses have been taken up in the same way. A call for ‘linguistic diversity’, for instance, can be taken up as a call for a multilingual Turkey (e.g. ‘Kurdish’ alongside ‘Turkish’ in a ‘multicultural Mesopotamia’), the provision of multiple ‘standards’ (e.g. Kurmanji and Zazaki), or the defense of local speech varieties against the implementation of any common standards (e.g. Alan’s invocation of ‘kurdîya serreş’).

In looking at how Kurdish ‘standard’ code is contested and negotiated, moreover, it is likewise helpful to see how both ‘expertise’ and ‘authenticity’ take on value through a

³¹Although for the majority of Kurmanji-speaking language activists what exactly this form takes appears to be of little or no concern in comparison to the controversy over whether Zazaki is classified as a dialect of Kurdish or a separate language unto itself.

multiplicity of social relations – sometimes in conjunction and sometimes in opposition –and become ‘clasped’ (Gal 2019) to distinct registers of linguistic authority.³² Consider, for example, a set of interactions that took place on Instagram and Twitter in response to a mini-lesson posted by a Kurdish-language learning account (‘Kurdish Lessons’). While the purpose of the lesson was to teach comparative constructions, the bulk of replies and comments focused on the post’s attribution of masculine gender to the word for ‘hair’ (K: por) – see figure 7.5 below.



Figure 7.5 – (top) A post shared jointly by @kurdishlessons on Twitter (pictured) and @Kurdish_Lessons on Instagram

³²Gal describes ‘clasping’ as “the first ‘moment’ of enregisterment links the action arena in which a discourse is assembled to the arena of the objects or person-types that a discourse names and characterizes” (p. 453) For, example, it describes the process by which discourses on linguistic authority become attached to different kinds of social persons, such as a link between the voice of linguistic expertise and the ‘middle-class’, ‘professional’, ‘man’ or between the authentic speaker and ‘rural’, ‘illiterate’ ‘woman’ – a process I describe in detail below.



A Twitter Reply

UserX: So is the gender of ‘por’ masculine or feminine? There is a ‘big error’ (**K:** şaşîyek mezin) around this word. Some say ‘pora min’ and some say ‘porê min.’



An Instagram Commentary

UserY: Teacher, can’t we use the word ‘por’ in the plural? Thanks

Kurdish Lessons: @UserY, the word ‘por’ is indeed complicated. Some say ‘pora min’, some say ‘porê min’, and some say ‘porên min.’ But in the standard [they] say ‘porê min.’

Figure 7.6 – Responses on both platforms

Firstly, consider the way that the two user interventions are differently framed in the comments by UserX and UserY. UserX begins by asking a straightforward linguistic question: is the gender of ‘por’ masculine or feminine? He then declares there to be a ‘great error’ in the use of the word, adding that ‘some’ (**K:** hin) people use the word in the masculine and ‘some’ in the feminine. He does not, significantly, declare himself for one form or the other. But both his assertion of widespread ‘error’ and his corresponding awareness of how others speak function to create the effect of a ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’ form of expertise that is capable of evaluating correct speech and exhibits wider knowledge about linguistic practices. UserY, on the other hand, poses his question entirely differently. Calling the creator of the post by the honorific ‘teacher’ (**K:** mamoste), a nod to the latter’s greater expertise, he asks permission to use a form that presumably is common in his own speech variety (‘Can’t we use it in the plural?’). But this

question is also framed by an implicit claim to linguistic authority, albeit one constructed through a self-referential claim to authenticity: ‘We (exclusive) use the word in the plural. So why can’t we (inclusive) use the word in the plural?’, or perhaps, ‘So why can’t I use it when speaking to you?’ In her response to UserY, the teacher begins by adopting a similar expert footing to the one used by UserX, acknowledging that the word is declined according to a different gender and number depending on the speaker and again relying on the same vague expression ‘some.’ But then she doubles down on her selection of ‘por’ in the masculine, singular as the proper form in the ‘standard’ language. She does so, moreover, without citing any specific sources: the absence of even a pronoun (Kurdish is a pro-drop language) in the last phrase and the use of a plural verb that can agree with a first, second or third person subject (‘in the standard [we, you, they] say’) allows her to declare ‘porê min’ (‘my hair’) the ‘standard’ by summoning a literal ‘voice from nowhere’ (Bauman and Briggs 2003).

Of course, expertise always remains open to challenge. As a Kurdish friend working in language education in the United States whom I later asked about the controversy and its resolution told me: “that’s simply not true, no one can tell you the ‘correct’ gender of the word ‘por.’” After all, most Kurdish-Kurdish dictionaries do not even provide the gender of words³³, and the few that do (mostly Kurdish-English/French dictionaries) give, at best, mixed results.³⁴

³³This is a tradition that dates back at least to the Bedirxan’s (1932/2009) first Latin-alphabet dictionary and has been followed by most Kurdish institutions and writers since; and many recent dictionaries produced by Kurdish linguistics follow this example: *e.g.* Anter’s (1967) Kurdish-Turkish dictionary; Îzoli’s (1992) Kurdish-Turkish dictionary; Gazi’s (2006) Kurdish-Turkish dictionary (Kurdish Institute of Amed). Bozaslan’s (1978) Turkish translation of Yusuf Ziyaeddin Paşa’s 1894 Arabic-Kurdish dictionary (el-Hediyye el-Hamidiyye Fi’l-Lugat el-Kurdiyye) also does not give the gender of words, suggesting this was common practice even before the adoption of the Bedirxan’s alphabet.

³⁴Rizgar’s (1993) Kurdish-English dictionary does indicate that ‘por’ is a masculine noun. However Chyet (2003) notes that both genders are used, while Blau’s (1965) French-Kurdish dictionary, on the other hand, gives ‘por’ as a feminine plural in usage!

But rather than cast doubt on the teacher's claim, I am more interested in looking at the interactional construction of linguistic authority and the social dimensions that inform it. Many claims to determine correct usage, importantly, are built on equally if not more unstable grounds, but are then allowed to stand. What is thus more significant here, I contend, is the problem of why some claims go unchallenged while others are openly contested. Importantly, not just anyone can make a successful claim to the authority of linguistic expertise, and even among those who have some kind of formal instruction or certification, access to expertise is not distributed equally. But beyond this narrower problem of formal education or 'official certification' – which can vary greatly in both content and prestige depending on the institution (and which often remains unknown) – there is also a more basic social dynamic that is also potentially at play in the controversy over 'por; and which I suggest also shapes the highly uneven ways in which people both conceive of and enact linguistic authority, namely gender.

Gendered Writing and Standard Language: In her experience working with Kurdish language writers and publishers in Diyarbakir, Jamison (2016) notes that this set is “typically young, formally educated, and almost always male” (p. 44). The last observation in particular merits further elaboration. From my own experience, I can also confirm that the majority of Kurdish publishing houses and literary circles in Diyarbakir are predominantly, although not universally, male spaces.³⁵ This gender balance both stems from and reinforces wider social expectations about who is likely to be a 'language expert' and therefore determines whose claims to set standards is likely to be taken seriously. But here I also want to draw attention to a new cohort of

³⁵ Looking just at the *Weqfê Mezopotamyayê* in Diyarbakir, for instance, which represents a large cross-section of Kurdish language activism in the city and North Kurdistan more broadly, we see that three of its seven-member board of directors (including its vice president) and eight of its twenty-five-member board of trustees are women.

mostly young, Kurdish female writers, activists and educators who have come into prominence on Kurdish social media and in the fields of Kurdish education, music, and journalism over the past decade – among whom are some of the hundreds of females graduates from Artuklu University’s Kurdish-language programs.

Significantly, this new generation of female Kurdish activists, while still relatively small, has a much greater public visibility relative to their male peers when compared to earlier generations of Kurdish-language experts – increasingly positioning themselves as producers of Kurdish text as well as influencers in the spheres of Kurdish music, fashion, popular culture and other aspects of youth ‘style’ (Nakassis 2015). In so doing, they have also begun to push up against a gendered ideology of linguistic authority that contrasts ‘male’ expertise with ‘female’ authenticity – a contrast best captured in the popular celebration of the figures of the male, multilingual public intellectual and language ‘expert’ on the one hand, and of the illiterate, monolingual Kurdish-speaking village woman as the bearer of ‘authentic’ Kurdish on the other.³⁶ But I also want to suggest that the persistence of this ideology produces important differences in how these women language activists relate to the anxiety of standard relative to their male counterparts.

Looking just at the faculty at the LLI, the situation is analogous to the situation described by Jamison in the publishing houses and book *kafes* of Diyarbakir (and much more extreme than the one encountered at the *Weqfê Mezopotamyayê*): the tenured faculty are entirely male, although not particularly young – their average age is probably in the mid-50s.³⁷ However, the situation among students is more mixed. Male students still outnumber their female counterparts

³⁶ See footnote 24.

³⁷ Importantly this is much more a reflection of the policies of Turkish state higher education than it is of the practices of organizations involved in Kurdish language activism.

in both the Kurdish-language MA and BA programs at Artuklu. But at the start of the 2019-20 academic year women still made up 35.5% - or around 1 in 3 – of registered MA students (YÖK). This is not an insignificant number, especially because, as both male and female interlocutors at the LLI have pointed out to me, enrollment in the MA program is often valued as a means to further defer one's military services – an irrelevant factor for women since they are not subject to conscription – but probably not an insignificant factor for many male students (especially given the degree's sharply diminished value as a vehicle for employment in recent years). Undoubtedly this also affects the gender balance in the BA program, since males – for whom university enrollment defers and a university degree reduces mandatory military service – are much more likely than females to attend a four-year program that is otherwise economically worthless. Moreover, as Jamison (2015) argues, many Kurdish families are even more reluctant to allow their daughters to participate in potentially 'political' activities than their sons – so the choice to enroll in the Kurdish-language BA-program at Artuklu has become even less plausible for many women over the past several years. Thus, while it has been often reported to me that female students made up a significantly larger proportion of BA students during the first years of the program at the height of the peace process – while in Mardin I knew many female students among the advanced BA students and recent graduates– more recent numbers from Turkey's Council of Higher (YÖK) education show that female enrollments had dropped to 27% of newly entering students by 2017 and fell to just 15% in 2019. Here, however, the situation at Artuklu University does not tell the whole story: in 2019, for instance, close to half (45.5%) of new students entering the BA program in Kurdish Language and Literature at Bingöl university were women (YÖK). Nor, in the case of Artuklu University, can numbers alone tell us everything. Firstly, the contrasting advantages that the program offers to men and women mean that female

students who do enroll in the Kurdish-language program are much more likely to be ‘serious’ students. They are thus also more likely, on average, to attend classes and to take part in the institute’s public functions. Consequently, female students at the institute have a presence and visibility that outweighs their statistical documentation in terms of enrollments. According to several unofficial reports, female students also have a much higher graduation rate and thus a relatively greater presence in the MA program – since the best and most motivated students often continue onto the MA. During my first year at the institute, for instance, the graduating undergraduate class valedictorian was a woman.

But in my personal experiences at the institute and in my observations of public writing practices (especially as they appear on Kurdish-language social media), I have often noted that female students at the institute (and female Kurdish language activists more generally) are often more likely to have their status as experts on ‘standard’ language challenged in public. At the same time, I have sometimes observed – although I am not in a position to confirm this statistically – that this uneven burden of linguistic anxiety is reflected in a greater attention paid by many women to how they use language in public relative to their male peers. This is true for speaking, but it is even truer for public writing, not because female students are less capable than their male counterparts in producing ‘standard’ written language – but because women face greater social scrutiny when establishing their authority as language experts and as a consequence are generally more careful in protecting their expertise from public contestation. This, I suggest, is reflected in the relatively greater burden of ‘standard’ on female language activists and a greater pressure to exhibit linguistic conformity in order to be taken as a language expert.

Such an observation is clearly difficult to establish in some aggregate sense but rather pressed itself upon me throughout my research in a succession of mundane events and observations about public writing. I thus offer this observation tentatively and with full acknowledgment that the problems of how linguistic authority becomes gendered in Kurdish language activist circles as well as within wider Kurdish publics on the one hand, and how male and female language activists can institutionally mobilize and effectively perform authority on the other are complex and deserve greater attention than I can devote to them here. But what I want to suggest, simply, is that female language activists are under greater pressure to conform to standard code in their public writing and thus less easily able to move between a linguistic authority based on authenticity and expertise, and that this in part points to a greater propensity by female language activists to metasemiotically align their writing with the conventions of standard Kurdish.

Consider the example of Hatice: born and brought up in Mardin, Hatice was an MA student at the institute and a former top graduate from Artuku's undergraduate Kurdish program. Shy and unassuming in most public interactions, she is also widely acknowledged to be a brilliant student of Kurdish. But despite her reserved profile in person, she is very active on Kurdish-language Instagram, where she has a large number of followers from the institute and around the city. Hatice is a frequent sharer, sometimes posting multiple stories a day. And these stories are usually accompanied by some Kurdish or bilingual text offering funny or insightful narrations of her inner thoughts about scenes she comes across, her opinion on local problems in the province, or her everyday encounters with family and friends. Thus, in contrast to her otherwise 'modest' disposition when out in public (Hatice also wears a headscarf), her writing has given her a public platform as well as a means to show off her linguistic abilities and her

talents for social commentary.³⁸ But despite the public recognition that her writing brings her, a gendered hierarchy informing the ideology of language anxiety also shapes the form this writing takes. In contrast to the Kurdish-language text posts of many male students and graduates from the LLI (see again figure 7.4), Hatice seemingly never violates the basic parameters of ‘standard’ Kurdish code nor does she attempt to imitate local speech as she sometimes does when writing in Turkish. She only writes her Kurdish text in posts in ‘standard’. This heightened attention to formal correctness becomes explicit in the example below (figure 7.7), where Hatice offers a public correction, in the form of a follow-up post, for what she identifies as a syntactical error in the Kurdish text of her original story.



Figure 7.7: Original Instagram Post and Public Correction

In old Mardin the children’s bookstore. The children’s bookstore in old Mardin. (in my first post I messed up the syntax with Turkish logic.) 😞

The Kurdish written code in both posts conforms closely to standard Kurdish lexicon, spelling and inflection. Hatice is even careful to include punctuation, even though the headline is

³⁸ In this sense, her public use of Kurdish code on social media has allowed her to project a kind of ‘style’ through her linguistic akin a process observed by Nakassis in his own analysis of the interaction between gender and linguistic performativity (2015).

not even a fully formed ‘sentence’³⁹— a level of formality that would be strange in most Turkish-language posts. Although the grammatical error in the original post – to the extent it can be categorized as an ‘error’ at all⁴⁰ — is minor, Hatice also felt the need to publically address it. I do not know whether someone pointed the ‘mistake’ out to her (itself potentially telling) or if she realized it herself later, but her reaction is noteworthy regardless. She could have just ignored it, or she could have simply detailed the incorrect post and replaced it with one with the ‘correct’ code. But she felt the need to acknowledge a mistake and to offer a public correction. We could also just put Hatice’s reaction down to a display of linguistic humility. But even in this case, the fact that Hatice could have felt such a display necessary in the first place points to how a greater ideology of anxiety shapes public use of standard code and creates a corresponding pressure – a pressure that I argue is more keenly felt by women writers and activists – to defend one’s own claim to expertise.

The need to perform ‘expertise’ also places discursive limits on how Kurdish language activists can relate to and employ ‘authentic’ language. While ‘expertise’ and ‘authenticity’ must not always be opposed, moreover, in practice these two primary forms of linguistic authority are often difficult to mobilize in concert, especially when the production of written text is at play. It is only the truly exceptional Kurdish-language writer or public intellectual – who can show mastery of modern standard as well as classical registers and a large repertoire of vernacular speech varieties – that can always successfully navigate the authoritative polls of expertise and

³⁹ That is, it only consists of a prepositional and nominal phrase and lacks a predicate.

⁴⁰ Under prescriptions of standar Kurdish, an adjectival phrase would need to come after the noun: thus ‘the children’s bookstore of old Mardin’ would be ‘pirtûkxaneya zarokan a Mêrdîna kevin,’ But Hatice writes both as a distinct nominal and prepositional phrases and without a predicate, thereby allowing for greater flexibility in word order. She is probably right that the second choice for word order is slightly preferred in written code, but the first post hardly jumps out for correction.

authenticity. In Kurdistan today, as Jamison (2016) also observes, the most prominent of such figures continue to be men. Kurdish women language activists, more than their male counterparts, have to confront greater social obstacles when moving between these two ideologies of linguistic authority. While this effects styles of speaking, it becomes even more much pronounced in writing. Moreover, the burden of expertise sits most heavily on this new generation of young women activists who must work harder and exhibit greater knowledge of and conformity to standard prescriptions (almost exclusively dictated by men) in order to be received as language ‘experts’ – or else they must downplay any claim to expertise as such (consider the example of Ruken in the last section below). Thus, even as young women are increasingly more active in Kurdish-language activist circles and increasingly influential in emerging Kurdish media (this new media having a much larger readership than traditional print) the form of their public participation remains conscribed by interdiscursive limits of standard code and a gendered ideology of linguistic authority that continues to position men as the primary determiners of this code’s acceptable parameters.⁴¹

As Schäfers’ (2018) also argues in her discussion of the struggle of Kurdish women *dengbêj* performers for a public voice, the achievement of voice is never independent of the larger value regime that discipline public speech. Drawing on Gal’s (1989) discussion of the contrast between ‘speech’ and ‘silence’, she notes that “modern ideologies of voice inevitably inscribe subjects into tense and often fraught relationships with the various publics where voices resound or attempt to be heard. As voices become audible in public, they become subject to ideological and sonic disciplining” (p. 21). In the context of Kurdish-language activism, I have likewise observed that as Kurdish women become more prominent in the production and

⁴¹Gendered ideologies of expertise are obviously themselves either new or confined to Kurdistan.

circulation of Kurdish-language text objects, their achievement of a new kind of ‘scriptive agency’ subjects them to new forms of public scrutiny and control, even as it affords them a greater claim to set the standards of best practices. Thus an analogous process to one that disciplines women’s voices in the context of public musical performance also continues to constrain women’s ‘authorial’ voices as public writers, educators, and language experts. But as recent history has shown, gender roles in Kurdistan are not stable features of ‘Kurdish culture’ but now highly politicized and contested categories, and thus subject to negotiation and change. There is little doubt that the gendered ideology of linguistic authority in Kurdistan is undergoing an important transformation – but this is a change whose ultimate trajectory remains tied to wider social and political developments in Kurdistan and the region and requires further attention by social scientists.

Assimilation and Authenticity: Hatice’s claim that her mistake was precipitated by the ‘logic of Turkish’ (**K**: bi mantika turkî) is indicative of the way that ‘language anxiety’, as Jamison also notes (2016), is also mapped onto a fear about Turkish cultural and linguistic ‘assimilation’ (**K**: bişaffîn/asîmîlasyon **T**: asimilasyon) and its role in the decline of the Kurdish language. As I describe above, ‘assimilation’ as understood as both a process of ‘disappearance’ of Kurdish-language speakers and the ‘degeneration’ of the Kurdish language itself. In this formulation, the Kurdish language, through a process of ideological ‘grafting’ (Gal 2019), become analogous to the Kurdish people, and its ‘corruption’ in the form of language contact or code-switching emerges as a kind of stand-in for the state’s assimilation of the Kurdish nation. We see how both forms of assimilation function together –I will call them type 1 (assimilation through the disappearance of speakers) and type 2 (assimilation through the corruption of language) – in

passages from Bahoz Baran’s *Dictionary of Assimilation* (**K**: *Ferhenga Bişaftinê* (2017)) that were shared by his publisher’s Instagram account (see figure 7.8).

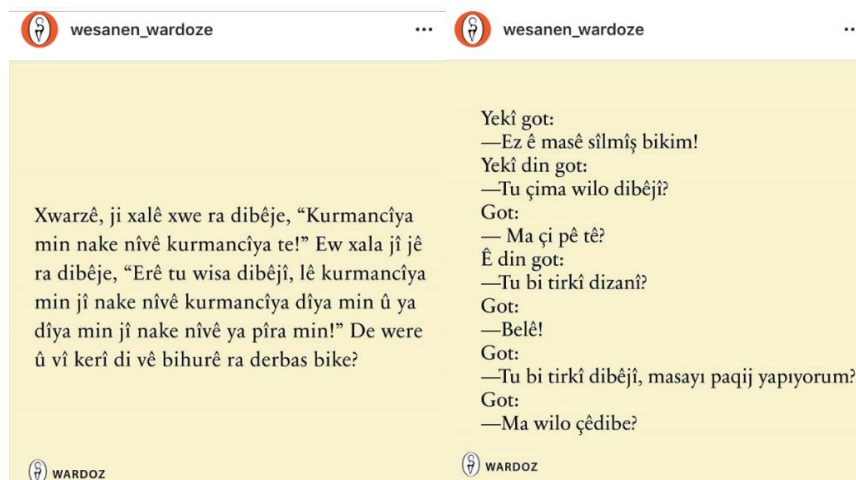


Figure 7.8: From Wardoze Publishing House’s Instagram (@wesanen_wardoze) account sharing excerpts from Baran’s *Ferhenga Bişaftinê* (2017)

Assimilation Type 1

A nephew says to his uncle “My Kurmanji is not at your level!” That uncle says to him, “Yes so you think like that, but my Kurmanji isn’t at the level of my mother’s, and hers was not at the level of my grandmother’s!”

(author’s commentary): Would [someone] come and deal with this stubborn man? (lit. Would [someone] come and get this donkey across the ford?)

Assimilation Type 2 (**Turkish**/Kurdish)

Someone said:
-I’ll **wipe down** the table.
Someone else said:
-Why do you say it like that?
[S/he] said:
-What of it?
And someone else [said]:
-Do you know it in Turkish?
[S/he] Said
-Yes!
[S/he] said:
-In Turkish do you say, **I am cleaning the table?**
[S/he] said:
-Well, would that work?

In the first excerpt, Baran draws on a familiar story of intergenerational loss in linguistic abilities and knowledge to draw attention to the decline of Kurdish speakers and the seeming lack of will on the part of Kurds themselves to defend their language against disappearance. The interaction between the nephew and the uncle reproduces a popular model of language loss,

wherein each successive generation is understood to use Kurdish less or to speak a Kurdish that is judged to be of a poorer quality than the previous generation (in the sense described by type 2 assimilation). However, Baran also works to denaturalize this loss. Whereas the nephew expresses a commonly voiced sentiment that his Kurdish is not to the level of his elders, Baran expresses exasperation with the reaction of the uncle, who responds as if the loss of Kurdish was both longstanding and inevitable ('It is the same with me, my mother and grandmother'). In an address directly to the reader, he is implicitly asking us to consider the uncle's and by extension our own responsibility in this process. Importantly, he does not shame the nephew, who his readers assume probably does not, it is true, possess the same level of Kurdish as his uncle (in particular if he grew up in the city or a house with a television). That is to say, he does not reject the model of disappearance as false. Rather, he rejects that it is a natural process independent of the uncle's or anyone else's control. If his nephew's Kurdish is weak, he implies, the uncle should work to help him improve it and not act as if the loss of Kurdish is a foregone conclusion.

In the second excerpt Baran is seeking to draw attention to Kurdish lexical borrowing from Turkish, which here stands in for the assimilation of the Kurdish language in a manner comparable to the assimilation of the Kurdish people (type 1). Baran describes an interaction between three speakers shaped around a metapragmatic discussion of language contact as two speakers comment on a third's speech. The joke is that the former are both aware of the effects of Turkish lexical borrowing on the latter's speech, as well as the unidirectional quality of this phenomenon more generally (and thus are positioned as something akin to metapragmatic 'straight men'), while the third speaker remains unconscious of these processes and thus s/he neither recognizes her/his own linguistic assimilation nor the ridiculousness of the formers' final question: Of course s/he would not replace the Turkish 'temizlik' ('cleanliness') with the

Kurdish ('paqij') when speaking in Turkish. While Kurdish routinely borrows lexical items from Turkish,⁴² lexical borrowings from Kurdish into Turkish are much rarer (Bulut 2003; Çabuk 2019); and what borrowing does occur consists largely of 'slang' that often functions to demean those to whom it refers.⁴³ Those who understand Kurdish, they imply, will almost certainly understand the 'Kurdish' "sîlmîş bikim" (although not all will value it the same), but there is no obvious or readily receptive audience for the 'Turkish' "paqij yapıyorum.' The two friends offering the metasemiotic commentary on the first speaker's language understand this, but the latter, the butt of the joke, does not.

In the domain of Kurdish language activism, this recursive ideology of assimilation is reflected in the prescriptive discouragement of Turkish-origin borrowings and a preference for 'Kurdish origin' words (with a relatively greater tolerance for Arabic, Persian or European loanwords or lexicon appropriated from Sorani-Kurdish spoken to the South) as well as a more generalized anxiety about the influence of Turkish language contact. This occurs even though borrowing from Turkish is a widespread linguistic phenomenon among Kurdish speech communities in Turkey. Many of my interlocutors at the institute, despite their constant exposure to and good command of 'academic' Kurdish, routinely employ Turkish lexical borrowings or phrase in their Kurdish speech, albeit perhaps not to the extent of 'average' Kurds (and probably even less when in public at official institute functions). More to the point, as middle-class professionals or students associated with state institutions living in Turkey, they all also routinely

⁴²In one of the most common forms of lexical borrowing, both widespread and fully productive, the past-participle -mîş form of a Turkish verb is used in conjunction with the Kurdish modals 'bûn' ('be') and 'kirin' ('to do') to form verbs (Çabuk 2019). Thus 'sîlmîş' from the Turkish 'silmek' ('to wipe down') + 'kirin' means to 'clean' or 'wipe down', as in 'Ezê masê sîlmîş bikim' cited by Baran above.

⁴³For instance, the Kurdish vocative 'kuro' ('hey boy', 'hey young man') has now passed into Turkish as a noun to refer to an uneducated, lower-class youth.

speak, listen to, write, and read in Turkish. But they also almost universally avoid Turkish-origin words in their Kurdish writing, except where they have become so naturalized in Kurdish speech that no other replacement is conceivable (e.g. the Turkish-origin word ‘kaçak’ – see chapter three). Importantly, this is a deliberate strategy on the part of Kurdish language activists, openly acknowledge and justified by the need to ‘protect’ or ‘defend’ Kurdish from further erosion by Turkish influence.

Jamison (2016) adroitly makes the connection between the project to commensurate Kurdish and Turkish – that is to position Kurdish as ‘equal’ to as well as entirely ‘independent’ of Turkish – and the project to create an ‘independent’ and ‘sovereign’ Kurdish nation. “Behind these projects of linguistic commensuration” Jamison notes, “are the projected communities of ‘Kurds’ and ‘Turks’: the deployers of the codes in question, the members of those language communities, the citizens and participants in bitterly contested struggles for sovereignty and power. (p. 54) In this ideological grafting, moreover, Turkish influence on the Kurdish language often becomes analogous to the Turkish state’s colonial occupation of Kurdistan, and the presence of Turkish words in writing and speech akin to the presence of Turkish soldiers in Kurdish towns and cities. Conversely, the use of a Kurdish code imagined as ‘uncorrupted’ by Turkish becomes a stand-in for a liberated Kurdistan – understood as a form of linguistic decolonization. This ideology of assimilation shapes powerful Kurdish public sentiments affecting how both language activists and ordinary Kurdish speakers alike evaluate Kurdish code. However, this ideology often comes into noticeable tension with the ideology of the authentic speaker. As I argue above, efforts to ‘commensurate’ Kurdish speech and Kurdish language –the first of three projects of commensuration described by Jamison – are not only bidirectional, but multidimensional and approached through a variety of available ideological

frameworks. This is to say that they implicate multiple value metrics simultaneously – not all of which I suggest are most productively understood through a paradigm of linguistic-as-national commensuration.⁴⁴ Jamison is certainly correct that the metric of commensuration often becomes a dominant ideological frame – perhaps the dominant frame in many institutional settings – through which to evaluate Kurdish code. But it is certainly not the only one. Nor is it the case that even those who publicly express Kurdish nationalist sentiments do not also, simultaneously and not without contradictions, see value in registers of mixed popular speech. This ambiguity becomes especially apparent, for instance, in the multiplicity of ways that Kurdish-speakers navigate the contradictions that arise between an ideology of an authentic self that encourages one to ‘write as you speak’ and a nationalist ideology that says ‘never use Turkish words.’ Consider, for example, a Facebook below that was shared by a Kurdish friend living in Istanbul from several years ago:

Arkadaşlar aşağıdaki Kürtçe cümleyi bana Türkçeye çevirecek olan var mı ? "İnşallah en kısa zamanda emê görüşmişbin. Cafe-de oturan bir Ağrılı arkadaş biriyle görüntülü konuşurken şahit oldum..

“[Hey] Friends, is there anyone who can translate this Kurdish sentence to Turkish for me? “İnşallah en kısa zamanda emê görüşmişbin” I witnessed a guy from Ağrı sitting in a cafe [say it] while speaking loudly with someone else...

⁴⁴ Importantly, this bidirectionality is acknowledged by Jamison, who notes that: “The emergence of heterogeneous Kurdish text–artifacts asserts that these written forms can and will and should be commensurate to the heterogeneity of speaking practices: along the double axis of similarity/ difference, that thing over there—Kurdish in speech—is meant to be like this thing over here—Kurdish in print” (p. 54) But I do not think that efforts to render certain registers of speech in code and efforts to create a common universal standard are productively thought of as part of a single project of commensuration that can then be mapped onto a nationalist project. Indeed, as I argue below, certain Kurdish linguistic practices are valued precisely for their incommensurability with Turkish and the value regime of standard code.

The joke is that the sentence needs no translation. The ‘Kurdish’ sentence’s lexical content is almost entirely constructed from Turkish words: “İnşallah, (T/K) en kısa zamanda **emê görüşmişbin**’ (‘God willing we will see each other soon’). It consists of the Arabic-origin ‘İnşallah’ (itself equally Turkish and Kurdish, although here written according to the rules of Turkish standard code), a Turkish adverbial phrase ‘en kısa zamanda’ (‘shortly’, ‘in the shortest possible time’), and a borrowed Turkish verb ‘görüşmek’ (‘to see each other’) along the same pattern as documented by Baran above (see footnote 42). Thus only the most basic sentence-level structure (i.e. the pronoun ‘we’ (K: em) and the verbal morphology ‘-ê -bin’ : fut. 1st. plural) are ‘Kurdish’ – the rest of the sentence is in ‘Turkish’. But I am less interested in discussing the morphosyntactic and lexical details of Turkish-Kurdish language contact than I am with the public presentation of ‘Kurdish’ code, by a Kurdish public intellectual writing in Turkish and living in Istanbul, and the uptake by his Facebook friends and followers. Especially as my friend’s public profile encapsulates some of the ambiguities I describe above: an ardent public supporter of institutional Kurdish politics in Turkey and a Kurdish-language musician who runs a Kurdish-language themed *kafe* in Taksim, he has also authored a well-received novel in Turkish and writes the commentary for all of his many Facebook and Instagram posts to his thousands of followers almost exclusively in Turkish.

Importantly, therefore, while his post exhibits some similarity to a wider genre of language shaming as encountered in Baran’s (2017) *Dictionary of Assimilation* described above – its language and tone are starkly different (for one, it is written in Turkish). It is also dramatically different from public hair-pulling displayed by many Kurdish language organizations at first sight (or sound) of lexical borrowing or code-switching. Rather, it is primarily an attempt at humor, in part self-deprecating, as becomes obvious in the comments that

appeared below it. Some responding did offer suggestions on how to translate the sentence into ‘pure’ or unadulterated Kurdish of both more standard and vernacular varieties.⁴⁵ But most responded with analogous examples of Turkified Kurdish⁴⁶ (T: türkçeleşmiş kürtçe) or acknowledgments that this phenomenon is much more widespread than the Eastern province of Ağrı, the hometown of the anonymous speaker reporter in the post (e.g. ‘we from Bitlis also do this’, ‘there is a lot of that in Ergani’). Writing in Turkish, some also deliberately inserted Kurdish graphemes into their posts (e.g (T/K). ‘onlardan çok var’) or employed Kurdish morphological constructions such as the vocative (‘Yaseroo’) when addressing my friend by name to give the impression of Kurdish-accented Turkish – a distinct project of commensurating writing and speech.

Here, in an inversion of the normal parameters of language anxiety, we see both a recognition of code-switching and a celebration of linguistic practices that while marginalized within both Kurdish and Turkish national institutions retain their capacity to index authenticity for many of the millions of Kurds living in Western Turkey and the largest cities of North Kurdistan (like Van and Diyarbakir) for whom similar linguistic phenomena are daily-lived realities. We likewise see how enregistered features of vernacular Turkish become clasped to ‘Kurdishness’ and consequently index ‘Kurdish speakers’ even when speaking in Turkish – a phenomenon that is captured in writing by the insertion of Kurdish graphemes (q, x,y) into Turkish written code, creating indexically minimal pairs (e.g. çok vs. çox) that are made to signify ‘Turk’ or ‘Kurd’ respectively. In the context of Istanbul, moreover, these registers are

⁴⁵e.g. ‘Înşallah emê dem kî kin de hev bibînin’, ‘Înşallah emê demekî nêz de hevûdû bibînî’, ‘Înşallah eme deme nezik edu bibinin’

⁴⁶e.g. ‘Ti wi arqadaşi aramiş bike. Bila ew ji tera söylemiş bike :)’, ‘Toprağım tu xortımı tutmuşke ez avê berdım.’

increasingly taken up in new manifestations of hybrid youth cultures, exemplified by the rise to prominence over the past decade of Turkish-language Kurdish rap artists from peripheral working-class districts such as Bağcılar who combine code-switching and heavily accented Turkish with a ‘Kurdish identity’ that is constructed more in reference to life on the social margins of Turkey’s largest city than to Kurdistan.⁴⁷

On the other hand, many members of these same speech communities also retain long-standing connections with family in Kurdistan and institutional and affective ties to Kurdish politics in Western Turkey. Therefore, just as the politics and value metrics shaping Kurdish language activism are not reducible to Kurdish nationalist politics, not all expressions of Kurdish nationalism are confined to the Kurdish language: taken as a whole, Turkish probably remains the dominant medium of ‘Kurdish’ politics in Turkey. As seen in post-colonial contexts elsewhere, large-scale linguistic assimilation has not automatically diminished nationalist or anti-colonial sentiments: millions of ‘Turkish-speaking Kurds’ (**T**: türkçe konuşan kürtler) continue to vote for pro-Kurdish political parties or associate with organizations connected to the Kurdish movement. Conversely, Kurdish language resilience among speech communities in Kurdistan has not always shown to correlate with support for Kurdish nationalist politics – a reality seen in the existence of numerous conservative Kurdish-speaking tribes who have fought with the Turkish state against the PKK’s insurgency in Kurdistan for decades.

In his discussion of the Young Turk and Kemalist regimes’ decades-long project of ‘ethnocide’ against Kurdish communities, Üngör (2012b) begins by drawing attention to “an

⁴⁷Significantly, these registers have taken on value beyond Kurdish speech communities. As an example, consider the popularity of the Kurdish Turkish-language rapper Heijan and his 2017 New Year’s hit ‘Abin Dızo Bremin’ (a Kurdish-Turkish title meaning roughly ‘Hey brother, thief’). It currently has nearly 78 million views on YouTube.

apparent contradiction or unresolved paradox in the study of linguistic change and language politics” between a discourse of language shift centered around global integration and upward social mobility – which he identifies with De Swaan's (2001) 'global language system' paradigm – and a discourse focused on language death and the preservation of language diversity as typified by Skutnabb-Kangas’s work on language diversity and ‘linguistic’ genocide (2000). While one side is unapologetic in its defense of minority and indigenous languages, often pushing for protective regimes that grant these languages special ‘status’⁴⁸ – often accompanied by guarantees for the provision of education and sometimes the implementation of linguistic requirements for public employment. The other side is openly suspicious of this approach as a form of top-down social engineering, instead relying on metaphors based on the ‘market’ and the ‘global economy’ and arguing that language use ought to be understood as an individual ‘choice’ akin to other consumer choices and directed by a universal, rational impulse toward upward social mobility.’

In distinction to both approaches, Üngör suggests such issues are best resolved in historically grounded and context-specific analysis. Thus while he documents a longstanding history around the criminalization of the Kurdish language to argue for the accusation of Turkish-state sponsored ‘cultural genocide’ against Kurds, he also acknowledges a contradictory finding: language shift from Kurdish to Turkish grew in intensity from the 1950s onward – a period marked by economic and social liberalization that came after the worst decades of anti-Kurdish discrimination. But he also notes that despite the role of Turkish in Kurdish social mobility, the decline in the language is not inseparable from its near-complete exclusion from

⁴⁸In Kurdish activist circles, this is reflected in the near-universal assertion of the need for kind of ‘status’ (**K**: statû **T**: statü) for the Kurdish language(s) in Turkey, with the actual content of that status remaining up for debate.

public and private institutions, as well as the expropriation of rural Kurdish-speaking communities during mechanization and enclosure of agriculture beginning under the Democratic Party rule in the 1950s and the Turkish military's campaign of village 'evacuations' in the 1990s. Ultimately he calls for further research to better understand the multiple underlying factors of language shift historically and in contemporary Turkey.

Linguistic anthropological interventions into the question of 'language endangerment' – the primary scholarly analytic for what in Kurdish discourse is glossed as linguistic 'assimilation' – have brought some important nuance to this debate that is worth drawing out here. On the one hand, they have long-since documented on how so-called individual, rational processes of 'language choice' are dictated by social patterns of language shift articulated in relation to political-economic structures and powerful social institutions – and thus in no sense every a question of mere personal preference (Gal 1989; Irvine 1989). On the other hand, scholars have likewise argued that the objectification or exaggerated valorization of language, or what Hull (2002) terms 'hypervalorization', tends to displace a concern with the well-being and social conditions of the speakers of a language onto a more abstract planes of linguistic diversity and language death (Errington 2003). Once more, they have expressed important concerns over how entrenched regimes of minority-language authority (the flip-side of most language revitalization efforts) can reproduce social hierarchies around class and gender (Adkins and Davis 2012); empower unaccountable experts that position language as an economic resource or vehicle for profit for those with access to specific linguistic resources (Heller and Duchêne 2012) such as self-interested 'identity entrepreneurs' (Brubaker 2004); and thus take away the ownership of language from its actual speakers (Whiteley 2003).

These insights are helpful in analyzing contemporary debates about assimilation and corresponding efforts by language activists to project Kurdish. For one, they draw our attention to the larger value regimes that position Turkish as a language of ‘social mobility’ for Kurdish youth in Turkey and make us question if this status is any sense ‘natural’ or ‘inevitable’ (as Baran himself is asking us to do). As discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, state policy has positioned fluency in Turkish as a requirement for entry into university and all forms of professional employment. Thus many Kurdish families do actively encourage their children to learn Turkish, even as they cultivate pride in their children's’ Kurdish identities. But as many of my interlocutors have pointed out to me, if it was simply a matter of personal preference or economic incentives then they might instead send their children to English-language schools – since the best public and private universities in Turkey offer education in English anyway and many wealthy Turks already send their children to English-language primary and secondary schools. In this way, they might better navigate around a language regime that inevitably positions them as linguistically deficient even when they do learn Turkish, and largely constricts their life opportunities to work in irregular manual labor or low-level positions in the state bureaucracy. On the other hand, this literature alerts us to the complex interplay of ideologies and perspectives that shape Kurdish-language activism, allowing us to see how the promotion of standard language is but one in a multiplicity of positions that one can take in the defense of Kurdish. Here more recent work tying the problem of language endangerment to larger questions of ‘social justice’ (Avineri et al. 2019; Roche 2020) is also very helpful, allowing us to link efforts around the protection of Kurdish language to larger issues of racism and linguistic discrimination (which are not only problems for Kurds or Kurds speaking Kurdish), as well to the severe inequalities in access to social resources such as quality education and employment

opportunities – problems exemplified in Kurdistan by massive overcrowding of schools and chronic underinvestment in social infrastructure more generally. But, as I seek to demonstrate above, this requires that we extend our problematization of assimilation and Kurdish language activism beyond the more narrowly national paradigm in which it has been largely confined.

Speaking, Writing, and Authentic Voice: In the final part of this chapter, I want to look beyond the ideological framing of commensurate, equal, and sovereign national languages to draw attention to contexts in which Kurdish becomes valued by its speakers exactly for its incommensurability with Turkish. In her efforts to “to trace the emergence of monolingual worlds and subjectivities out of a complexly multilingual social field” in south India (p. 13), Mitchell (2009) demonstrates how an ideology of language as “parallel entities” and “separate but nevertheless equivalent” codes was the result of competing, 20th-century ideological projects (p. 160). These projects, Mitchell argues, eventually displaced earlier understandings of languages as tools with which to navigate different social contexts – not a fundamental index of a speaker’s ethnic or national identity. What I want to suggest, pointing both to my analysis in this chapter and my discussion of multilingualism and ethnically mixed neighborhoods and families in Mardin in the first chapter, is that even after the ideology of separate, commensurate national codes becomes positioned as a dominant frame shaping the public reception of language, other ideologies continue to intervene in shaping linguistic subjectivities. Specifically, I want to look at how Kurdish becomes valued not as a vehicle indexing a speaker’s ethnic or national identity but for its capacity to mediate more *samimi* modes of sociality and leverage social solidarity. And I want to suggest finally that it is often this value – more than an ideology of ‘standard national language’ – that is key to understanding much of the sentimental relationship between

the Kurdish language and ‘national’ politics as experienced in the everyday public interactions among Kurdish speech communities in Mardin.

At the LLI in Mardin it became clear to me that even for many of the same students, writers and public intellectuals who are deeply invested in the creation of a standard, neutral Kurdish as a commensurate national print language, Kurdish also (and not without some contradictions) retains value as informal and sometimes assertively ‘unofficial’ code that allows for a greater expression and enjoyment of *samimiyet*, as understood as horizontality, authenticity, and reciprocity between speakers. Take the story of Salih and the malfunctioning ATM. Salih, one of my first Kurdish teachers at Artuklu, always liked to insist to me that certain social situations in Mardin were best navigated in Kurdish. Once my debit card was eaten by a malfunctioning ATM just the day before I needed to travel to another city. As Salih and I sat together in a tea garden a half-an-hour later, he watched me grow increasingly frustrated as the Turkish operator on the bank’s customer service line informed me that they could not return my card because it had been issued by a different provider and therefore, as per bank policy, I would need to contact my own (US!) bank for a replacement. After watching me exhaust myself for close to fifteen minutes on the telephone, Salih cut my conversation short, informing me that, **(K)** ‘ev meseleyekê ji bo kurdîyê ye.’ (‘this is a problem for Kurdish). He then drove me to the Mardin branch of the bank in question. When we arrived, he explained my predicament to the teller (in Kurdish) and secured an audience with the bank manager, who it turned out was also from Qoser like Salih. After an informal chat (again in Kurdish) and a round of tea, over which time we explained our predicament, and during which Salih introduced me as a foreign guest in Mardin there to study Kurdish, the manager amiably agreed to return my card, calling a technician to retrieve it from the ATM and deliver it to the bank for me to pick up later that day.

As we were leaving, Salih launched into a friendly ‘I told you so’, again emphasizing that in Mardin, Kurdish was always the best language for navigating such situations, since it allowed one to bypass the formal procedures and official rules of corporate and state bureaucracies and to approach those whom one encounters in depersonalized institutions on a more ‘samimi’ register. And in this case his reasoning seemed to bear itself out, albeit through a kind of language ‘fetishism’ wherein the manifold properties of human interaction are ascribed solely to the linguistic medium of communication. But this is not the same kind of language fetishism that makes spoken code an extension of the inner-self. Rather it is about relationality. In Salih’s understanding, the use of spoken Kurdish figured centrally in his scheme to ingratiate himself with the bank employees and to position us as locals (or guests of locals) justly in need of help, and not anonymous customers asking the functionaries of a major national retail bank to violate its security protocols for our benefit. But it also true that if I, as a foreigner, had entered the bank alone and asked to see the manager in Kurdish that I would have been as likely to produce surprise or alarm as to have charmed the tellers. Once more, it is entirely plausible that a similar social feat could be accomplished in Turkish, especially in a region where some locally spoken form of Turkish was the dominant language of public life. Or that within Mardin itself, in another context and set of institutional relations, Arabic would have been more effective. But for Salih, living between Qoser and Mardin, Kurdish was the primary code he used when he wanted to bend official social hierarchies and summon horizontal modes of solidarity.

I encountered a similar metapragmatic gloss, albeit implicit, when speaking with students at the LLI about their experiences in Turkish state schools. Interestingly, two different students from the institute – Ruken from a village in Qoser near Mardin and Bahar from a small village

near Van (both moved to city centers for middle school) – employed almost an identical example in describing contrastive linguistic practices in everyday interactions in Turkish and Kurdish:

Example 1: At university we were educated in Turkish for two years but I spoke in Kurdish. I never once said to a friend, [in Turkish] ‘bana bir kalem verir misin?’ (‘would you hand me a pen?’), but [in Kurdish] ‘kalemekê bide min lo’ (‘Hand me a pen, man’). Only when a teacher asked a question in Turkish would we respond in Turkish.

Example 2: When we first go to school, we don’t know Turkish. We learn it at school. And you slowly acquiesce and you begin to understand the teacher, and you start to manage your relationships in Turkish. When you go to the stationary store you no longer say [in Kurdish] “ka kalemek?” (‘how about a pen?’), you say [in Turkish] “abi bir kalem alabilir miyim” (‘[Elder] brother, may I have a pen?’)

What I propose is remarkable about these two examples is not only the use of the same image (the request for a pencil/pen) – suggesting this is a more widely cited contrast when offering a metapragmatic description of sociolinguistic code-switching among Kurds in Turkish state schools – but how both examples contrast the use of Turkish and Kurdish as a question of both language code and register and relate this contrast to a more fundamental difference in modalities of relationality. Significantly, the model of the request in Turkish in both examples is constructed in a formal register (given added emphasis by the use of a parodic tone of insincere politeness by Ruken in the first example), while the model request in Kurdish is deliberately informal in both examples. This suggests that behind the contrast of Turkish and Kurdish is the same ideological contrast between ‘official’ or ‘formal’ language of the state and corporate institutions and the ‘unofficial’ language that mediates interactions between mutually known persons that is likewise invoked by Salih in the previous example. There are multiple ways of forming this request informally in Turkish (e.g. ‘bir kalem ver sana’) or formally in Kurdish (e.g. ‘ji kerema xwe, tu dikarî kalemekê bidî ji min ra’) More to the point, I can attest that a certain

level of formality is also expected in many Kurdish-mediated public interactions in Mardin.⁴⁹ Rather what is significant here is the consistent pairing of Kurdish language with informal register when contrasted to the formal (and consequently Turkish-mediated) relations between student and teacher, or the enregistered linkages between a shift to Turkish and an imagined increase in social distance between speakers.

Importantly, Salih is also a writer, teacher, and translator of Kurdish, a graduate of the MA program the LLI, and thus also has at least some minimal commitments to standard code and the proliferation of Kurdish as a written medium in public life. Likewise, both Ruken and Bahar, as students at the LLI, have also staked their linguistic authority in some part on their formal educations and their expert knowledge of standard code. But it remains to be answered what the effects any future use of written Kurdish in ‘official’ public life – as in municipal offices and on legal contracts or in official educational curricula– would mean, if enacted, for the value all three ascribe to Kurdish as the informal and *samimi* qualities of the Kurdish language. Indeed, so much of Kurdish political discourse around language in Turkey is oriented not toward a common experience of shared standard language, but a common experience of linguistic alterity vis-à-vis the language regime of the Turkish state. This helps to explain, I suggest, the relative lack of any significant political tensions between speakers of the majority dialect Kurmanji and the minority Zazaki⁵⁰ (in fact, widely classified by linguists as mutually

⁴⁹ I would find it surprising if primary students are always so informal with older shopkeepers even when speaking in Kurdish, unless they were a close relative or family friend.

⁵⁰ This is not to suggest that many Zazaki speakers don’t complain about Kurmanji’s dominance in Kurdish public life and the ongoing ‘assimilation’ of Zazaki speakers by the Kurmanji-speaking majority (Zazaki speakers are much more likely to learn Kurmanji than the reverse). Rather, it is to point out that despite attempts by Turkish intelligence to foster an anti-Kurdish, Zazaki political movement, this has never emerged as anything more than a tiny movement of Zazaki nationalists based in the diaspora, and a larger movement for Zazaki language and cultural rights as well as a greater awareness and public sensitivity on the part of Kurmanji-

unintelligible north-western Iranian languages). It also explains how even largely Turkish-speaking Kurds, who outside of Kurdistan often confront linguistic stigmas for their ‘eastern’ accents, continue to make salient connections between their linguistic practices and a Kurdish ethnic identity.

One finds further support for this reasoning in Vali ‘s (2011/2014) historical account of the emergence of a political Kurdish identity in Iran – and identity that he describes, in Derridean terms, as emerging from a condition of alterity in relation to the modern Iranian state: “The ethnic and linguistic unity of the Kurdish community in Iran” he writes, “is constituted by its otherness, and hence its differences with sovereign identity. In this sense, therefore, the sovereign identity is constitutive of the Kurdish community, and the processes and practices which reproduce Kurdish otherness also at the same time define its unity and cohesion (pp. xiii-xiv).” In this perspective, ‘Kurdish linguistic unity’ is a relational quality, not a function of substance or content. As Vali himself acknowledges, any analysis based on ‘empirical’ ‘objective’ or ‘positivist’ foundations will reveal very little linguistic ‘unity’ among Iranian Kurds: Kurdish communities in Iran speak Kurmanji, Sorani, Gorani (a relative of Zazaki spoken in Turkey) as well as a diverse smattering of other ‘Kurdish dialects’ (especially once, as

language activists around the issue of Zazaki (if not always a commitment of resources or attention). But these linguistic divisions have never emerged as serious political divisions, remaining much less significant than the divide between Kurdish Alevi and Sunnis – onto which this linguistic division is sometimes mapped owing to a widespread association between the Zazaki language and the predominantly Alevi region of Dersim. But there are Zazaki-speaking Sunnis (Diyarbakir/Urfa/Elazığ) and Kurmanji-speaking Alevi (Bingöl), so this generalization does not always hold. The imprisoned, former HDP leader Selahattin Demirtaş – now probably the most popular and prominent Kurdish leader in North Kurdistan after Abdullah Öcalan (and in some circles more popular) – is from a Zazaki-speaking family in Elazığ, although he can also speak Kurmanji.

sometimes occurs in Kurdish nationalist discourses, the ethnic label ‘Kurd’ is extended to include speakers of other more distantly-related, western Iranian languages such as Laki).

By highlighting the political dimensions of Kurdish linguistic alterity, we can also give greater context to the rapid uptake of ideologies of linguistic diversity in Kurdish activist circles in recent decades, not only as a counterweight to Turkish-state monolingualism but also within the Kurdish movement and Kurdish language activism as a prism through which to understand the linguistic realities of a Kurdish national public. But this also places a corresponding project of standard language in a different light, and compels us to ask how this ‘common experience’ of linguistic alterity – an experience that has been abstracted from the concrete personal experiences of individual speech communities into a shared, aggregated form of ‘national sentiment’ in processes akin to those described by Tambiah (1997) under the heading of ‘transvaluation’ – would be translated into an allegiance to a common standard code with similar levels of affective resonance? Indeed, if the entrenched and fundamental political and linguistic divisions between Kurdish political factions in North and South Kurdistan (where a standard based on the Sorani-dialect and written in Arabic letters is hegemonic and political parties hostile to the PKK are in control) are any indication, the project of creating a single institutionally validated standard seems much less viable as the grounding for a ‘Kurdish national public’. More importantly, the lack of a single Kurdish standard has not inhibited the emergence of patterns of later transnational Kurdish political identification. Rather it has resulted in a shifting terrain of Kurdish public formation in which differently positioned institutional discourses confront one another and actors situate themselves in social space in relation to others based on axes of similarity and difference.

Returning to Mardin, I conclude this chapter with one final example of how graduates from the LLI are introducing ideologies of linguistic diversity and self-referential authority into their pedagogic practices, even as they promote a knowledge of and respect for the minimum conventions of writing (namely the alphabet). In the following example, Ruken describes her experiences of helping to open and briefly operate an unlicensed Kurdish-language kindergarten – and act for which she and several of her classmates at the LLI were later fined by the state.⁵¹ Here, however, what I find especially interesting in her story is not the fact of Turkish state oppression (an omnipresent reality in Kurdish language activism), but the way that she frames the educational goals of their former project.

Ruken: So, it was like this. A few friends and I, and like three or four of us, wanted to open a kindergarten. Actually, there had been one but it was closed down, and in Amed (*i.e.* Diyarbakir) there was one but it was also closed down.

PL: Like Kurdî-Der?.

Ruken: Yes so the Kurdi-der institutions were all closed down and also the kindergarten. As you know, in every sphere such things were closed. We said let's just do it on the weekend. Let's find a small space. Just a room would be enough. We will buy some chairs. Put up some whiteboards. We wouldn't teach 'grammar' (**K:** rêziman), we would teach the alphabet. Let them learn how to pronounce the letters. Teach them about reading, writing and 'correct speech' (**K:** axaftina rast). But not graduates from the MA program. Because their language is not necessary. I mean we also wanted to give them language education. But really, we just wanted 'people' (**K:** gel), any 'person' (**K:** mirov) [to help teach them], and we wanted them to learn how to read and write and speak properly. And so, we wanted to teach them the alphabet. It's something good.

PL: So, you wanted correct language?

Ruken: Yes, correct Kurdish.

PL: So, you are also supporters of correct Kurdish

Ruken: No! Well for example not [the language] of the academy. We want them to be able to pronounce the alphabet. Let them use their own words. Let them know the

⁵¹ Although Kurdish-language kindergartens are not technically illegal, she noted, the state does not give such licenses easily (if ever). Nearly every such project has been closed since 2016.

alphabet. That's where the problem is. Or 'heval' becomes 'hewal'. Or 'şev baş' becomes 'şew baş'. So, there is a bit of that problem. Let them be able to write and to know the alphabet. But our Kurdish. You know, after everything, I didn't learn Kurdish at the university. I learned in high school. Or even middle school. Ok so my education was in Turkish. But I came home once and I said I wanted to learn Kurdish. And there was a dictionary there. And I wrote and I wrote and learned the alphabet. Ok, so 'I didn't have grammar' (**K**: rêzimana min tunebû), but I knew how to read and write Kurdish in high school.

Like essentially every Kurdish-language initiative in Turkey, Ruken and her co-founders wanted to teach students how to 'read', 'write' and 'speak' Kurdish properly. But what is striking is how these pedagogies are not defined by rote memorization of Kurdish grammar or spelling but simply by an understanding of how to use the alphabet and the self-confidence to write in one's 'own language'. Interestingly, they explicitly reject working with other graduates from the institute (even though they are themselves also graduates from Artuklu's Kurdish language program) because 'their language' (the standard taught at the LLI) was not needed. When I pressed her on what she meant by 'correct speech', she was quick to qualify that she was not talking 'academic language.' Rather, 'correct speech' is a metric relative to the metrics of a community of speakers (the Kurdish spoken in Qoser by ordinarily 'people') and education is not so much about learning to conform to the metrics of standard institutional prescriptions as it is about empowering them with the capacity to transcribe their speech in written form and to build a familiarity with Kurdish print that would protect their speech from the hegemonic influences of standard Turkish (*e.g.* her contrast between hewal/heval and şev baş/şew baş⁵²) – a protection that is imagined to be afforded not by a prescribed knowledge of Kurdish grammar but by a basic capacity for shared literacy. Thus the only standard convention upon which they insisted is

⁵²Kurdish, unlike Turkish, distinguishes between 'v/w' as a common minimal pair, whereas Turkish only has 'v'. Ruken is thus describing a process of hypercorrection where Kurdish-speakers turn original 'v' into 'w' in order to sound more Kurdish (but actually sounding ridiculous).

Bedirxan's 32-letter *Hawar* alphabet – a standard whose only difference with written Turkish is in the writing of certain vowels and the addition of three extra consonants (Q, W, X) – and which is now so hegemonic in Northern Kurdistan as to be simply called 'the alphabet'. In her own story of learning Kurdish, moreover, Ruken does not say what dictionary she first used to learn how to write, but she affirms that she was already able to read and write before she learned standard 'grammar'. Language education is not only imagined by Kurdish language activists as the socialization into the use of a unified and fixed set of norms and standards – the ideal of the modern national language community – but exposure to an ongoing process of public formation in which 'standard' or 'academic' language is one value metric among many. It is a process mediated by a consensus around the basic phonetic conventions of writing – conventions now basically adopted by all major Kurdish language organizations and definitively dictated by none.

Conclusion: Standard Language and the National Public

There is a widely cited observation Kurdish-language activist circles that "whereas Kurdish once had many speakers and no books, it now has many books and few readers." The observation bears some truth: as discussed in chapter three, the value of the market for Turkish text objects, even in North Kurdistan, remains many, many times larger than that of those Kurdish text objects – and there is a widespread sense that most Kurds do not read Kurdish-language books. Unsurprisingly, this perceived dearth in readership often functions in activist discourse to reproduce a state of language anxiety around Kurdish's continued subordination to Turkish. Less commonly is the reverse implication taken from this statement: never in history have there been more Kurdish texts written and published in North Kurdistan than over the past decade.⁵³ As my analysis of writing practices above suggests, moreover, there is today a much larger body of

⁵³ And the same thing can be reasonably said for other regions of Kurdistan as well.

Kurdish text objects than would be suggested solely by reference to traditional print markets.

Thus, while most Kurds might not read Kurdish books (or perhaps any books at all), hundreds of thousands if not potentially millions of Kurds and others in Turkey are now routinely exposed to Kurdish written code in some form – whether on the internet, on municipal signs or in graffiti, or on the tickers at the bottom of their television screens. Many thousands in Turkey and North Kurdistan, moreover, now routinely write and publish in Kurdish, some regularly reaching audiences of tens of thousands or more. Although these practices remain peripheral, they are far from non-existent and they often take on value, as Jamison (2016) also suggests, that far exceeds their denotational content.

Importantly, this recent proliferation of written Kurdish code has largely occurred in the absence of authoritative or sustained oversight by any powerful social institutions. Today there are many, competing Kurdish language organizations claiming to set the norms for standard Kurdish.⁵⁴ A fuller analysis of these developments, I have suggested, requires that we move beyond the straightjacket of ‘nationalism’ that positions language activism primarily as a symbol or instrument of national struggle. Rather, I have argued, we need to examine the multiplicity of ways that Kurdish language activism becomes political and pay attention to the multiple axes on which sociolinguistic differentiation unfolds (i.e. not simply a contrast between ‘Turk’ and ‘Kurd’). In so doing, I also suggested, we can also begin to question some of the assumptions of the nationalist paradigm while also coming to a more nuanced understanding of how ‘national’ politics works in practice.

⁵⁴ As I have noted, the largely hegemonic Kurdish political institutions in North Kurdistan (*i.e.* those affiliated with the PKK and its allies in legal Kurdish parties) are, despite widespread political legitimacy, probably among the least trusted authorities on the question of best language practices.

In conclusion, here is a summary of three general takeaways, or points of clarity, that I argue can help us better approach our analyses of Kurdish language activism in Turkey and North Kurdistan: The first is that the politics of standard language, even in the context of Kurdish national movement, are not reducible to the politics of modern national sovereignty. As linguist anthropologists know, standard written languages existed long before the emergence of modern nationalism. This is also true in Kurdistan. Put simply, Silverstein notes, standardization is simply “a phenomenon in a linguistic community in which institutional maintenance of certain valued linguistic practices - in theory, fixed - acquires an explicitly-recognized hegemony over the definition of the community's norm.” (p. 285) Importantly, standards are constructed along axes of differentiation that bring contrasting linguistic forms into a hierarchal relationship (Gal and Irvine 2019). A standard, therefore, becomes meaningful only in relation to ‘non-standard’ forms – not as a body of prescriptive rules like a programming language (the ideology of Standard Language), but as a contested and evolving set of sociolinguistic relationships. Beyond standard Kurdish’s commensuration with Turkish, therefore, are the problems of how certain linguistic forms take on authority in relation to institutions (‘the party’, ‘institute X’, ‘channel Z’) or become enregistered as part of indexical contrasts that link speakers to ideologized person-types (based on distinctions of gender, age, class, level of piety, place of origin, political affiliation et al.). The problem of standard language, therefore, goes far beyond the problem of ‘deficiency’ or ‘conformity’ to a single national code.

My second point of clarity is that, conversely, nationalist politics is not only enacted in standard, commensurated code. As I have shown, it is most often regional vernacular Kurdish varieties or, to a lesser extent, mixed Turkish-Kurdish urban patois that is generally positioned as the authentic or ‘real voice’ of the Kurdish people in nationalist discourse – often over the

protests of official language organizations. Moreover, I have argued that the sentimental attachments to language and its value as an instrument of locally institutionalized national politics in cities such as Mardin often seems to stem less from a loyalty to Kurdish as a national standard and more from its perceived incommensurability with Turkish owing its status as the medium of horizontal, authentic relationships and its uptake as a sign of social solidarity. Kurdish code, in some, non-standard contexts, thus comes to index *samimiyet* – a value that, as I discuss in chapter two, has become as central to the enactment of national politics as interactions in the face-to-face public. It is a common experience of linguistic alterity in relation to the Turkish state, more than an allegiance to a shared national code, that shapes the Kurdish movement's discursive politicization of language.

My final point, entailed by the first two, is that even in situations where a national framing seems hegemonic, language is always judged according to other value metrics. As we are all aware, ideologies of commensurate, standard codes, and nation-state monolingualism are powerful frames shaping how people in Kurdistan and around the globe assess their own and one another's linguistic practices. But they are never the only available frames, and very often they are not even the most important ones. This is true, importantly, not despite but because of the dominance of the nation-state as the primary vehicle for political representation in our contemporary world (Kelly and Kaplan 2001). It should therefore not surprise us when Kurdish language activists deploy these frames their discourses. Rather we should endeavor to ask what other kinds of politics are being suggested and what other forms of social differentiation are being made when Kurdish activists talk in and about language. Importantly, such an approach will not distract from our understanding of Kurdish national politics but help clarify its multiple dimensions and potential trajectories.

Appendix

1. Extended Transcript from Chapter 3, section III.

Davutoğlu's Response (turn 2):

[1.1] Ok, so why aren't we meeting with the HDP. It's obvious. It's all there for the public to see. Before the election, I said that I would meet with everyone without discriminating and without prejudice. I promised this. And staying faithful to this [pledge], I requested a visit from [all parties] without discrimination. This is something I declared openly before the public. And so after this request was made – look, we can put down all the stuff before to political polemics or to habit, because unfortunately, we have seen this kind of behavior in the past. Let's just say it's their world view. But for them to have kept up this attitude even after my request for a meeting. And going beyond that, for them to start in with insults, and to disrespect a guest who is set to visit them only a few days later. So just putting the other political stuff aside for the moment (T: diğer siyasi şeyler bir kenara dair koysak), after such disrespect it wouldn't be right for me to meet with them, neither personally nor with respect to the public position that I occupy. In any negotiation, I give importance to only two things. We can disagree on everything else and we can have different views on every subject, since if we had the same views on every subject, we would be members of the same party. Two things are important, well, when you look at it: *samimiyet* in one's intentions, and 'seriousness' (T: ciddiyet) in one's method and approach.

[1.2] It was this country's prime minister who had requested this meeting, and with 49.5 percent of the vote¹, well a prime minister who has entered into that dialogue supported by that vote. And in my life, you have all seen, you've never seen me do anyone a dirty turn (T: pislik). But if you think I'm one to just ignore any kind of insults directed against myself, well that I won't allow. And while I can personally act humbly, I cannot act humbly [when acting] in the name of the nation from which I receive my support. I requested a meeting, and they openly displayed their 'samimiyetsizlik' (T: 'absence or lack of *samimiyet*') with regard to their intentions. And so, I am going to speak about the constitution, but then, as if this isn't the agenda, they imply they are going to ask me about what is happening in Sur (Diyarbakir), in Cizre. Let those who would ask me go and ask those who have turned Sur and Cizre into prisons with trenches and barricades. And if they cannot hold them accountable, let them be quiet. On the one hand they will support terrorism, and on the other hand when the prime minister comes to speak about a constitution that will help to create a democratic and free Turkey, they are

¹Davutoğlu was most likely referring to the 2015 November elections (where official election results show his party winning only 48.9 percent of the vote). The elections had been held the previous month, already months after the start of the city war; they were mandated after Erdogan refused to form a government following an election in which his party lost their majority in June of that year. His party's loss (together with major gains for the pro-Kurdish HDP following victories by the PKK in Syria the previous year) in the June 2015 elections precipitated the breakdown in the peace process and the start of the conflict over the following summer. In many regions of North Kurdistan, the November 2015 elections were held under martial law.

going attach conditions? Today, or yesterday, after they rejected my request for a meeting. And you saw this in the statements of that thing they call the DTK (T: bu DTK diye)², a structure that rests on uncertain foundations, on uncertain legal grounding. So, what's the deal? I thought they were talking about 'Turkeyifying'³? And here I'm testing for *samimiyet*. This is a test of *samimiyet*. I thought they were going to Turkeyify, I thought they were going to be a part of Turkish society? And now I am calling to my fellow citizens, who also see this complete absence of *samimiyet*, (T: samimiyetsizlik), but who had supported the HDP before and during the June 7th elections believing they would not be compromised by the PKK: Hold them to account! Demand to know if they used the votes that you gave them to support a project to divide Turkey. Because I know that many intellectuals voted for the HDP in a *samimi* way believing that they would not allow themselves to be compromised by the PKK. They need to hold them to account, now that their intentions are out in the open. I will debate the constitution with everyone, but I won't debate Turkey's completeness or unity with anyone.

[1.3]And secondly, it's a problem of seriousness. Look, you might enter negotiations without being sure of the other's intentions – although I don't think it's right – but someone will without a doubt look for some seriousness of one's counterpart. We're not writing a screenplay here. Turkey is encircled by flames. We have lost hundreds of our soldiers and police as martyrs. Come now. We are supposed to drink tea, and *kaçak çay*? Let them go drink tea with whomever they want! If they want let them go to Kandil and drink their tea! This screenwriter! Turkey is on fire, there is fire all around us, and this gentleman is going to talk about *kaçak çay* and I am going to sit down at that table, is that so? Everyone who enters the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (Turkish parliament) must possess the [necessary] seriousness to represent this nation. If they think that they are going to, going to ridicule us with some jokes just made up at night, well they are going to sit, to sit down and take a course in seriousness, a test [in seriousness]. Either they will be *samimi* and enthusiastic [concerning our offer of a meeting], and all of our doors will be open to them. Or they will move away from *samimiyet* and forget their seriousness, in which case we will put them in their place. Political negotiations are an issue of *samimiyet*.⁴

²Demokratik Toplum Kongresi (DTK), or Democratic Society Congress, an umbrella organization bring together leftist, Kurdish (and other minority) political parties and civil society groups and put forward as a quasi-legitimate governing body representing Kurdish society in the peace process.

³The process of 'Turkeyification' (T: Türkiyeleşme) was distinguished from 'Turkification' (T: Türkleşme) during the peace process in that it only required the PKK and other dissident Kurdish groups to accept the unity of Turkey as a basis for political settlement, but did not require Kurds to identify as or become Turkified and which, in the program put out by the HDP and its successor parties, sought to transform Turkey into a multicultural society (consider Önder's response below). Recall also my discussion of Mesopotamia and Mehmet Ali Aslan's parliamentary oath in the first chapter.

⁴For video of his remarks, see *Bursa Hayat*. "Davutoğlu'ndan HDP'ye kaçak çay tepkisi." Dec-28-2015. <https://youtu.be/42gGuDrlxJo>

Önder's Response (turn 3):

[2.1] Before his journey abroad, the Prime Minister suffered a fit of rage and we are very afraid [of what will happen from here]. Concerning his cancellation of the meeting, it seems that he evaluated Mr. Selahattin's⁵ remarks that if there were to be a meeting that we would ask him about what is happening in Cizre and Diyarbakir, and with photographs and other evidence. It seems that he saw this through the category of intention (T: niyet), and found this to lacking in *samimiyet*. And he also weighed my remarks on the scale of seriousness [and found them lacking].

[2.2] My goodness, will you look at who is speaking about manners (T: üslup) and seriousness. Mr. Davutoğlu is the last person we will take a class from on this subject. Let's start with how he once said if you don't vote for us, then you will have white [Ford] Tauruses⁶ driving around your neighborhoods. And if you want to talk about manners, we can start with this thing about the white Tauruses. But you all didn't even stop there, you came with cannons and tanks. For that reason, we do not need a lesson on manners from Mr. Davutoğlu. May God keep us from such manners and such an understanding of *samimiyet*. So, what did I say? It seems that I said (T: ben demişim ki): 'Mr. Davutoğlu, what are you coming here for?' What is the Prime Minister coming for, to speak about a new constitution, right? So, what did I say? It seems that I said that without providing for the current constitutional framework in the first place, and I explained what this was: peoples' basic right to life, that we have forsaken; their right even to breath, and that without even allowing people to bury the dead, well if you came to speak about the constitution [under such conditions] you would drink our tea, *kaçak çay* and leave [without anything of value accomplished]. So, I presented him with a foundation [on which to proceed]. whether he knows its value [I do not know]. Can this be called *samimiyet*? And here I am asking our people [to judge], too. So, you've come to speak about the constitution while the people that voted for our party by 70-80% in most cases are keeping the bodies of their children in their household freezers? There are no places left in the morgue. And the bodies [lying] in the streets are all the bodies of civilians, with their blood already dry. And these bodies will continue to lie on the ground and, for whatever good it will do, you will come to speak about the new constitution with us, is that it? If this isn't the world's greatest enactment of *samimiyetsizlik* (T: samimiyetsiz pratiği) then I don't know what is...[more about the need to respect the basic rights of Kurds, and its guarantee in the current constitution before speaking about a new constitution; more descriptions of violence]...So while all basic rights are being denied, what kind of seriousness do you have in mind when you want to speak about a new constitution? Please tell us perhaps we can sleep well at least one night.

[2.3] So, the honorable Prime Minister is the last person to give us a lesson in [seriousness or *samimiyet*]. He tells us to go to Kandil to drink our tea. In fact, we went to Kandil under policy [that lead to the peace process] that was approved by the authority of the MGK (T: Milli Güvenlik Kurumu, *i.e.* National Security Council) under the

⁵ Selahattin Demirtaş, then co-president of the HDP, imprisoned since late 2016.

⁶ Referring to the unmarked cars once used by Turkish security forces to kidnap and disappear Kurdish activists during the dirty war in the 1990s.

supervision of Mr. Davutoğlu. We went to drink tea in Kandil with the authority of the law covering the peace process. We brought along your suggestions and advice. We took your advice there. We discussed it. We brought suggestions back. We discussed them. Was it such a terrible thing? For three years none of us worried about the lives of our children. But you didn't understand the value of this period. You didn't listen to the warnings we gave you. You placed your own needs before all else. You through the common future of this country into the fire. Are you happy? Are you pleased with the situation you have created? In what name can you defend this? What need do we have of you when Kenan Evren⁷ would have done as much. As a politician who claims to believe in democracy and an elected Prime Minister, do you have no other political solution or political reasoning other than cannons and tanks to present before our people? So, what need do we have of you? If that's your plan, then make this de-facto martial law official and we won't even talk with you. Let us instead speak with the military commanders you've given authority to under martial law. They do not need you. If you are sending in tanks and cannons and shelling these people morning and night, then there is no need for politicians in this country. There is no need for a Prime Minister. It's the Prime Minister and not the Commander of the MGK, that needs to visit the region if we are not at war. If this country is still a democracy, it is you who need to come. Your MPs from that region, if you have any, need to come. You have shamefully not sent a single minister from your cabinet and now you are going to give us a lesson in seriousness? We do not need a lesson on this subject. It is you who are in terrible need of a lesson.

[2.4] So, you want to start with the DTK. It seems that the Prime Minister doesn't know on what foundations it rests. It's been around for 10 years, Mr. Prime Minister. If after ten years you are entirely unaware of the foundations on which it rests, then go figure out what the problem is with yourself. He's complaining to the voters. He's saying, look, they said they were going to Turkeyify and look at what they are doing. Mr. Prime Minister, we never said that we were Turkify, we said we would Turkeyify (T: 'Türkleşeceğiz' demedik 'Türkiyeleşeceğiz' dedik). You've misunderstood. What you and too many of you understand from Turkeyify is that everyone will become Turkish. That's not going to happen. You all were the ones saying 'your languages are a part of God's creation'⁸ as this [peace] process was getting underway. How can you expect that everyone will become Turkish? With what right? So yes, we said we Turkeyify. That for us means to transform into [a place of] multiple cultures, multiple languages, multiple faiths, the greatest land in the world, a paradise on earth...you are dividing this country with your politics of war. You cannot drive over a people with tanks and then say to their faces let's build a common existence together (T: ortak yaşam)...

[2.5] And then there is this other issue, the Prime Minister is shaking as he brings it up, namely his contempt (T: küçükleme) for art. But actually, this contempt for art is active among everyone speaking for the AKP. Whenever I get put onto a television panel with one of those huffing-and-puffing AKP MPs hurling threats and screaming about how the palace and city square all belongs to them, and I ask them to consider my

⁷Former military general and (then) unelected president of Turkey from 1980-89 following the 1980 military coup)

⁸ Referring to the citation the Quranic verse, specifically Surah Ar-Rum [30:22] in Islamist discourse in Turkey in support of minority language rights.

thoughts on the matter, they turn around and say ‘get lost, you screenwriter.’ The Prime Minister is saying ‘we aren’t making a film here.’ I guess he thinks that making a film is an easy thing. I recognize this contempt for art very well. In their 15 years in power they haven’t produced one single artist who might create some lasting celebration of them...[more remarks on incapacity for art, the superficiality of AKP’s economic program and public culture]...but those show a contempt for art will also treat others unjustly. ‘We aren’t making a film’, my goodness, we’ve seen their seriousness. If we are going to talk about seriousness let’s start here:...[he again reminds Davutoğlu of the very public role the PM himself played in initiating the peace process of their face-to-face conversations in Dolmabahçe palace, and he asks how can act if such things did not happen]...So none of this coming from someone with any right to speak about political seriousness. You are the ones who are control of public institutions, you should start first with the seriousness...[again describing the impossibility of having negotiations about a new constitution while the fighting continues; the thousands of soldiers that have been moved to Kurdistan; the inaction of the CHP (the main, ‘secular’ opposition party)]...

[2.6] ...Just look at these manners. Look at the approach from the one giving us lessons in manners. You are calling us traitors because of [these tea remarks]. But we never told you that you had no business here. All we said that is if you’re going to come, establish a democratic environment first, [rather] that you would only end up drinking tea [and not coming to an agreement]. And they got angry about this...[long discussion attacking positions on the economy, relations with Russia, labor, Rojava (Northern Syria)]. So where can we look for seriousness? So, all of this, and again I will use a metaphor, but Mr. Prime Minister, first go and ask your consultants what this filmmaker (T: sinemacı) intended to say here before responding: one’s heart isn’t cooled by [simply] cutting a watermelon.⁹ Now, while a return is still possible, let’s find a way to solve this problem on a democratic foundation. We are paying the price every day with our lives. The work we know best is to serve time and resist from prison. No good will come to you from any of this. You will be the ones held politically responsible, Mr. Prime Minister. If only you would come and we would drink that tea. After all it’s the duty of politicians to look for a solution.

[2.7]...It is you who are in the position of authority and responsibility for all the political ramifications of what happens. The bodies of enough children have been consumed for one country. If it is me that is holding up this process then I would gladly remove myself. If my absence would bring peace, I would kill myself in the garden of the parliament.

[2.8]...And anything that I have said, Mr. Bahçeli¹⁰ has surpassed a thousand times in severity, before you ran over [and formed a power-sharing agreement with the MHP]. Enough shameful and over-the-top (T: ağır) articles have come out in the press close to you about us that it is enough to bring you all into debasement. And none of it

⁹Said for those go about the right objective negligently or haphazardly, or for those who attempt to take our their anger in attacking others.

¹⁰ Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the semi-Fascist National Action Party (MHP). His party had been in opposition for most of the period of AKP-rule until Bahçeli agreed to enter into a power sharing agreement with Erdoğan following the November 2015 elections. This agreement has remained in effect until this day, and marked a severe nationalist turn in government policy.

made any of you bat an eyelid, even as we even complained... You never made this a big point of pride Mr. Prime Minister. None of this made you lose your cool. I only said if you're going to come to speak about a democratic constitution, create a situation suitable to democracy first, or you will just drink your tea and go. And his excellency (T: hazretleri) has made this a big point of pride, and of manners, and of seriousness, and responsibility. And in this country, as we lose, we are dying with our lives and our blood and our children. This cost cannot be measured. So, while there is still a chance, let us be our last call you. Because you know no one else takes you seriously now. Those around you might not tell you this, but this is the painful truth. Just look at this: Only when it comes to Kurds can you fly into such fits of rage. When they offend you, when they refuse you, your reaction wasn't one one-thousandth of what you showed toward us. A filmmaker doesn't miss such things. And the people don't miss such things.

[2.9] Peace, right away! Peace, right away! A democratic framework right away! Democratic practice! While there is still time, before it's too late. And finally, I want to finish with one more thing. Please don't consider this as the impressions of a filmmaker (T: bir sinemacının tespiti). I'm someone who has experienced good and bad politics, and my political life has been longer than my life in the cinema. That thing which you call victory, and here I am speaking to the military leaders as well...well the day you reach it, whatever you imagine it is, will be the day that this country has already been divided. For this reason, we say that this isn't the way forward. For this reason, we asked the leader of the National Security Council what reason they had sent tanks into civilian neighborhoods. What changed so quickly? What calculations are being made [behind closed doors]? Seriousness, responsibility, political analysis, these are just 'his words' [T: lafı], so start with this: come [meet], and if it's the *kaçak çay* that has upset you badly we will offer you Rize tea, but it's a matter of life [and death] that we bring our homeland back onto democratic foundations to discuss these issues [finishes remarks and transitions to taking questions from reporters].¹¹

¹¹Remarks pieced together from a series of videos recording Önder's remarks (lasting over 20 minutes in total) published by Doğan Haber Ajansı can still be found on MYNET under nearly the same title "HDP'li Önder: Kaçak çaya hallendiyseniz Rize çayı ikram ederiz." 28-Dec-2015; and from transcript in article (with an identical title) on CNN TURK. "HDP'li Önder: "Kaçak çaya hallendiyseniz Rize çayı ikram ederiz." 28-Dec-2015.

Works Cited

Statistics and Archives

Arşîva Kurd. <http://www.arsivakurd.org/>

Statista. "Annual per capita tea consumption worldwide as of 2016, by leading countries." <https://www.statista.com/statistics/507950/global-per-capita-tea-consumption-by-country/>

Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu (TÜİK). <http://www.tuik.gov.tr/>

Yükseköğretim Kurulu (YÖK) Yükseköğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi. <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>

Books, Articles and Chapters

Abrams, Philip. "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1 no. 1 (1979/1988): 58-89.

Adkins, Madeleine, and Jenny L. Davis. "The naïf, the sophisticate, and the party girl: Regional and gender stereotypes in Breton language web videos." *Gender & Language* 6, no. 2 (2012): 291-308.

Adorno, Theodor. *The Jargon of Authenticity*. Routledge, 1973/2013.

Agha, Asif. "Meet Mediatization". *Language and Communication* 3, no. 31 (2011): 163-170.

---. "Voice, Footing, Enregisterment." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (2005): 38-59.

Akkaya, Deniz Can, and Ekin Can Genç. "The European Union as an Actor in the Turkish-Kurdish Peace Process & the Free Speech Challenge in Multicultural Europe: Liberty, not Political Correctness." *Bilgi University European Institute Working Papers* no: 6, 2013.

Akkaya, Ahmet Hamdi, and Joost Jongerden. "Reassembling the Political: The PKK and the Project of Radical Democracy." *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey* 14 (2012): 1-19.

Akkuş, Faruk. "The Arabic dialect of Mutki–Sason areas." In *Arabic varieties: Far and wide. Proceedings of the 11th International Conference of Aida*, Bucharest, pp. 29-41. 2015.

Alexander, Catherine. *Personal States: Making Connections between People and Bureaucracy in Turkey*. Oxford University Press on Demand, 2002.

- Altınay, Aysegül. *The Myth of the Military-Nation: Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey*. Springer, 2004.
- Altınkılıç, Ümran. "Heteroglossia di Romana Saturn a Remezan Alan de." *The Journal of Mesopotamian Studies* 2, no. 2 (2017): 31-47.
- Alvarez Jr, Robert R. "The Mexican-US border: the Making of an Anthropology of Borderlands." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24, no. 1 (1995): 447-470.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983/2006.
- Anderson, Betty S. *The American University of Beirut: Arab Nationalism and Liberal Education*. University of Texas Press, 2011.
- Anter, Musa. *Ferhengê Khurdî-Tirkî*. Istanbul, Yeni Matbaa, 1967.
- Appadurai, Arjun. "Gastro-politics in Hindu South Asia." *American Ethnologist* 8, no. 3 (1981): 494-511.
- . "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value." In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, edited by Arjun Appadurai, 3-63. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- "Artık yeninin zamanıdır..." *Sosyalist Mesopotamya* 1 (2003): 1-3.
- Avineri, Netta, Laura R. Graham, Eric J. Johnson, Robin Conley Riner, and Jonathan Rosa, eds. *Language and Social Justice in Practice*. Routledge, 2018.
- Ayykaç, Yakup. "Bibliyografyaya Tezên Beşên Kurdolojiyê Yê Li Tirkîyeyê (2011-2016)." *The Journal of Mesopotamian Studies* 2, no. 1 (2017): 119-135.
- Babül, Elif M. *Bureaucratic Intimacies: Translating Human Rights in Turkey*. Stanford University Press, 2017.
- . "Training bureaucrats, practicing for Europe: negotiating bureaucratic authority and governmental legitimacy in Turkey." *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 35, no. 1 (2012): 30-52.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Balibar, Etienne. "The nation form: history and ideology." *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* (1990): 329-361.
- Baram, Uzi. "Clay tobacco pipes and coffee cup sherds in the archaeology of the middle east: artifacts of social tensions from the Ottoman past." *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 3, no. 3 (1999): 137-151.

- Baran, Bahoz. *Ferhenga Bişaftinê*. Diyarbakir: Wardoz Yayınevi, 2017
- Barth, Fredrick. *Principles of Social Organization in Southern Kurdistan*. Oslo: Universitetets Etnografiske Museum, 1953.
- Bauman, R. (2016). Projecting Presence: Aura and Oratory in William Jennings Bryan's presidential races. *Scale: Dimensions and Discourse in Social Life*, 25-51.
- Bauman, Richard, and Charles L. Briggs. "Poetics and Performances as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19, no. 1 (1990): 59-88.
- . *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Becker, Gary S. *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education*. University of Chicago Press, 1964.
- Bedirxan, Celadet Ali. *Ferheng*. Istanbul: Avesta, 1932/2009.
- . "Gazinda Xencera Min" (1932). In *Hawar* 12, 179-180. Stenbol: Belkî, 2012.
- Beşikçi, İsmail. *Doğu Anadolu'nun Düzeni Sosyo-Ekonomik ve Etnik Temeller*. Istanbul: IBV, 1969/2014.
- Berthele, Raphael. "A Nation is a Territory with one Culture and one Language. The Role of Metaphorical Folk Models in Language Policy Debates." In *Cognitive Sociolinguistics: Language Variation, Cultural Models, Social Systems*, edited by Gitte Kristiansen and Rene Dirven, 301-332. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008.
- Biner, Zerrin Özlem. *States of Dispossession: Violence and Precarious Coexistence in Southeast Turkey*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020.
- Blau, Joyce. *Dictionnaire Kurde*. Brussels: Centre pour l'Etude des Problèmes du Monde Musulman Contemporain, 1965.
- Blommaert, Jan. "Language Policy and National Identity." In *An Introduction to Language Policy: Theory and Method*, edited by Thomas Ricento, 238-254. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.
- Bora, Tanıl. *Zamanın Kelimeleri: Yeni Türkiye'nin Siyasî Dili*. İletişim Yayınları, 2018.
- Bourdieu, Pierre "The Forms of Capital (1986)." In *Cultural Theory: An Anthology*, edited by Imre Szeman and Timothy Kaposy, 81-93. Wiley, 2010.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, and Jean-Claude Passeron. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. Vol. 4. Sage, 1990.
- Brubaker, Rogers. *Ethnicity without Groups*. Harvard University Press, 2004.

- Bülbül, İsrâfil and Mikail Bülbül. *Kürtçe Anamnez Anamneza bi Kurmancî*. Diyarbakir: Diyarbakir Tabip Odası Yayınları, 2009
- Bulut, Christiane. "Turkish elements in spoken Kurdish". In *Turkic Languages in Contact*, edited by H. Boeschoten, & L. Johanson, 95–121. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006.
- Çabuk, Sakine. "A Note on the Contact between Kurmanji Kurdish and Turkish at Lexical and Morphological Level." *International Journal of Bilingualism* 23, no. 4 (2019): 861-864.
- Canaan, Joyce E., and Wesley Shumar, eds. *Structure and Agency in the Neoliberal University*. Routledge, 2008.
- Casier, Marlies. "Beyond Kurdistan? The Mesopotamia Social Forum and the appropriation and re-imagination of Mesopotamia by the Kurdish movement." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 13, no. 4 (2011): 417-432.
- Çelik, Ayşe Betül. "'I Miss my Village': Forced Kurdish Migrants in Istanbul and their Representation in Associations." *New Perspectives on Turkey* 32 (2005): 137-163.
- Çiçek, Cuma. *Ulus, Din, Sınıf: Türkiye'de Kürt Mutabakatının İnşası*. İstanbul: İletişim, 2015.
- Cody, Francis. "Daily Wires and Daily Blossoms: Cultivating Regimes of Circulation in Tamil India's newspaper revolution." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 19, no. 2 (2009): 286-309.
- . "Populist Publics." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 35, no. 1 (2015).
- . "Publics and Politics." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (2011): 37-52.
- Comaroff, Jean, and John Comaroff. "Reflections on Youth, from the Past to the Postcolony." In *Frontiers of Capital: Ethnographic Reflections on the New Economy*, edited by Melissa S. Fisher and Greg Downey, 267-81. Duke University Press, 2006.
- Chumley, Lily Hope, and Nicholas Harkness. "Introduction: Qualia." *Anthropological Theory* 13, no. 1-2 (2013): 3-11.
- Chyet, Michael L. *Kurdish-English Dictionary*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.
- . "Neo-Aramaic and Kurdish: An interdisciplinary consideration of their influence on each other." *Israel Oriental Studies* 15, no. 1995 (1995): 219-249.
- Davis, Eric. *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- Derince, Mehmet Şerif. "A Break or Continuity? Turkey's Politics of Kurdish Language in the New Millennium." *Dialectical Anthropology* 37, no. 1 (2013): 145-152.

- De La Bretèque, Estelle Amy. "Voices of Sorrow: Melodized Speech, Laments, and Heroic Narratives among the Yezidis of Armenia." *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 44 (2012): 129-148.
- De Swaan, Abram. *Words of the World: The Global Language System*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001.
- Dewey, John. *The Public and Its Problems*. New York: Holt, 1927.
- . "Turkey" (1924). In *Impressions of Soviet Russia and the Revolutionary World: Mexico--China--Turkey*. New York: New Republic, Inc., 1929.
- Eckert, Penelope. "Three Waves of Variation Study: The Emergence of Meaning in the Study of Sociolinguistic Variation." *Annual review of Anthropology* 41 (2012): 87-100.
- Ellis, Markman. "An introduction to the coffeehouse: A discursive model." *Language & Communication* 28, no. 2 (2008): 156-164.
- Errington, Joseph. "Getting Language Rights: The Rhetorics of Language Endangerment and Loss." *American Anthropologist* 105, no. 4 (2003): 723-732.
- . "On the Ideology of Indonesian Language Development: the State of a Language of State." *Pragmatics* 2, no. 3 (1992): 417-426.
- Fallers, Lloyd A. *The Social Anthropology of the Nation State*. Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1974.
- Felton, Emma. "Eat, drink and be civil: Sociability and the Cafe." *Media/Culture* 15, no. 2 (2012): 1-2.
- Findley, Carter Vaughn. *Ottoman Civil Officialdom: A Social History*. Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Flores, Nelson, and Jonathan Rosa. "Undoing Appropriateness: Raciolinguistic Ideologies and Language Diversity in Education." *Harvard Educational Review* 85, no. 2 (2015): 149-171.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*. Springer, 1979/2008.
- Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56-80.
- Gal, Susan. "A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction." *Differences: a Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (2002): 77-95.
- . "Contradictions of Standard Language in Europe: Implications for the Study of Practices and Publics." *Social Anthropology* 14, no. 2 (2006): 163-181.

- . "Language and political economy." *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 18, no.1 (1989): 345-367.
- . "Language Ideologies Compared". *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (2005): 23-37.
- . "Polyglot nationalism. Alternative Perspectives on Language in 19th Century Hungary." *Langage et société* 2 (2011): 31-54.
- . "Qualia as Value and Knowledge: Histories of European Porcelain." *Signs and Society* 5, no. 1 (2017): 128-153.
- . "Tastes of talk: Qualia and the Moral Flavor of Signs." *Anthropological Theory* 13, no. 1-2 (2013): 31-48.
- . "The Political Economy of Code Choice." *Anthropological and Sociolinguistic Perspectives* 48 (1988): 245-64.
- . "Sociolinguistic Regimes and the Management of 'Diversity'" In *Language in Late Capitalism*, edited by Moninca Heller and Alexandre Duchêne, 22-37. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- . "Visions and Revisions of Minority Languages: Standardization and its Dilemmas" In *Standardizing Minority Languages: Competing Ideologies of Authority and Authenticity in the Global Periphery*, edited by Pia Lane, James Costa, and Haley De Korne, 222-242. New York: Routledge, 2018.
- Gal, Susan, and Judith T. Irvine. *Signs of Difference: Language and Ideology in Social Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- . "The Boundaries of Languages and Disciplines: How Ideologies Construct Difference." *Social Research* 62, no. 4 (1995): 967-1001.
- Gal, Susan, and Kathryn A. Woolard. "Constructing Languages and Publics: Authority and Representation." *Pragmatics* 5, no. 2 (1995): 129-138.
- Gaunt, David. "Two Documents on the 1895 Massacres of Syriacs in the Province of Diyarbekir: A Discussion." *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines* 10 (2018): 187-201.
- Gazî, Mustafa. *Ferheng Kurdî-Tirkî*. Diyarbakır: Enstûtuya Kurdî ya Amedê, 2006.
- Goffman, Erving. "Footing." *Semiotica* 25, no. 1-2 (1979): 1-30.
- Gomberg-Muñoz, Ruth. "The Complicit Anthropologist." *Journal for the Anthropology of North America* 21, 1: 36-37, 2018.

- Graeber, David. "Dead Zones of the Imagination: On Violence, Bureaucracy, and Interpretive Labor: The Malinowski Memorial Lecture, 2006." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2, no. 2 (2012): 105-128.
- . *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy*. Melville House, 2015.
- . *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of our own Dreams*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
- Greenberg, Jessica. *After the Revolution: Youth, Democracy, and the Politics of Disappointment in Serbia*. Stanford University Press, 2014
- Güç, Ayşe. "Commodifying culture through representation: an analysis of the intertwined discourses on Mardin's urban space." *Turkish Studies* 17, no. 4 (2016): 643-665.
- Gupta, Akhil. *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India*. Duke University Press, 2012.
- Habermas, Jurgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991.
- Hann, Christopher M. *Tea and the Domestication of the Turkish State*. Huntingdon: Eothen Press, 1990.
- Harkness, Nicholas. "The Pragmatics of Qualia in Practice." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 44 (2015): 573-589.
- Hassanpour, Amir, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, and Michael Chyet. "The Non-Education of Kurds: A Kurdish Perspective." *International Review of Education* 42, No. 4 (1996), pp. 367-379.
- Hattox, Ralph S. *Coffee and Coffeeshouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East*. University of Washington Press, 2014.
- Heller, Monica. "The Politics of Codeswitching and Language Choice." *Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development* 13, no. 1-2 (1992): 123-142.
- Heller, Monica, and Alexandre Duchêne. "Discourses of endangerment: Sociolinguistics, globalization and social Disorder." In *Discourses of Endangerment: Ideology and Interest in the Defence of Languages*, edited by Monica Heller and Alexandre Duchêne, 1-13.. London: Continuum, 2007.
- . "Pride and Profit: Changing Discourses of Language, Capital and Nation-State." In *Language in Late Capitalism*, edited by Moninca Heller and Alexandre Duchêne, 11-31. New York: Routledge, 2012.

- . "Treating language as an economic resource: Discourse, Data and Debate." *Sociolinguistics: Theoretical debates* (2016): 139-156.
- Herzfeld, Michael. *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy*. New York: Berg, 1991
- Heyman, Josiah McC. "The anthropology of power-wielding bureaucracies." *Human Organization* 63, no. 4 (2004): 487-500.
- Hill, Jane H. "" Expert Rhetorics" in Advocacy for Endangered Languages: Who is Listening, and What do they Hear?." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 12, no. 2 (2002): 119-133.
- Hoag, Colin. "Assembling partial perspectives: thoughts on the anthropology of bureaucracy." *PoLAR* 34 (2011): 81.
- Hobsbawm, Eric J. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990
- Hull, Matthew S. "Documents and bureaucracy." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41 (2012a): 251-267.
- Hull, Matthew S. *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan*. Univ of California Press, 2012b.
- Irvine, Judith T. "Subjected words: African Linguistics and the Colonial Encounter." *Language & Communication* 28, no. 4 (2008): 323-343.
- . "When talk isn't cheap: Language and political economy." *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 2 (1989): 248-267.
- Irvine, Judith T. and Susan Gal. "Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation." In *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*, edited by Paul V. Kroskrity, 35-84. Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2000.
- İzoli, D.. *Ferheng: Kurdi-Turki*. Istanbul: Deng, 1992.
- Jamison, Kelda. "Hefty Dictionaries in Incomprehensible Tongues: Commensurating Code and Language Community in Turkey." *Anthropological Quarterly* 89, no.1 (2016): 31-62.
- . "Making Kurdish public (s): Language politics and practice in turkey." PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2015.
- Jongerden, Joost. "Village Evacuation and Reconstruction in Kurdistan (1993-2002)." *Études Rurales* 186 (2010): 77-100.
- Kaplan, Sam. *The Pedagogical State: Education and the Politics of National Culture in post-1980 Turkey*. Stanford University Press, 2006.

- Karababa, Eminegül, and Güliz Ger. "Early modern Ottoman coffeehouse culture and the formation of the consumer subject." *Journal of Consumer Research* 37, no. 5 (2011): 737-760.
- Karaçimen, Elif. "Financialization in Turkey: The case of consumer debt." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 16, no. 2 (2014): 161-180.
- Kazamias, Andreas M. "Potential Elites in Turkey: Exploring the Values and Attitudes of Lise Youth." *Comparative Education Review* 11, no. 1 (1967): 22-37.
- Kelly, John D., and Martha Kaplan. *Represented Communities: Fiji and World Decolonization*. University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- Kockelman, Paul. "A Semiotic Ontology of the Commodity." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 16, no. 1 (2006): 76-102.
- Kömeçoğlu, Uğur. "The Publicness and Sociabilities of the Ottoman Coffeehouse." *Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture* 12 no. 2 (2005): 5-22.
- Korkman, Zeynep. "Fortunes for Sale: Cultural Politics and Commodification of Culture in Millennial Turkey." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 18, no. 3 (2015): 319-338.
- Keane, Webb. "Semiotics and the social analysis of material things." *Language & Communication* 23, no. 3-4 (2003): 409-425.
- . "The Value of Words and the Meaning of Things in Eastern Indonesian Exchange." *Man* 29, no. 3 (1994): 605-629.
- Kluge, Alexander, and Oskar Negt. *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Kroskrity, Paul V.. "Regimenting Languages: Language Ideological Perspective." In *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*, edited by Paul V. Kroskrity, 1-34. Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2000.
- Laurier, Eric. "Drinking Up Endings: Conversational Resources of the Café." *Language & Communication* 28, no. 2 (2008): 165-181.
- Laurier, Eric, Angus Whyte, and Kathy Buckner. "An Ethnography of a Neighbourhood Café: Informality, Table arrangements and Background Noise." *Journal of Mundane Behaviour* 2, no. 2 (2001): 195-232.
- Laurier, Eric, and Chris Philo. "Cold shoulders and napkins handed: gestures of responsibility." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 31, no. 2 (2006): 193-207.
- Leach, Edmund Ronald. *Social and Economic Organisation of the Rowanduz Kurds*. Oxford: New York: Berg, 1940/2004.

- Levi-Strauss, Claude. "Culinary triangle." *New Society* 8, no. 221 (1966): 937-940.
- Li, Darryl. *The Universal Enemy: Jihad, Empire, and the Challenge of Solidarity*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2019.
- Lippmann, Walter. *Public Opinion*. New York: Harcourt, 1922.
- Mardin, Şerif. "Youth and Violence in Turkey." *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 19, no. 2 (1978): 229-254.
- Matthee, Rudi. "From Coffee to Tea: Shifting Patterns of Consumption in Qajar Iran." *Journal of World History* (1996): 199-230.
- Mintz, Sidney Wilfred. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Penguin, 1985.
- Mitchell, Lisa. *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India: The Making of a Mother Tongue*. Indiana University Press, 2009.
- Munn, Nancy D. "The "becoming-past" of places: Spacetime and memory in nineteenth-century, pre-Civil War New York: The Edward Westermarck Lecture, 2003." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3, no. 2 (2013): 359-380.
- . *The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Massim (Papua New Guinea) Society*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1986/1992.
- Mullaney, Thomas S. "Semiotic sovereignty: The 1871 Chinese telegraph code in historical perspective" in *Science and Technology in Modern China, 1880s-1940s*, edited by Benjamin A. Elman, Jing Tsu, 153-183. Boston: Brill, 2014.
- Murre-van den Berg, Heleen. "Arabic and its Alternatives: Language and Religion in the Ottoman Empire and its Successor States." In *Arabic and its Alternatives Religious Minorities and Their Languages in the Emerging Nation States of the Middle East (1920–1950)*, Edited by Heleen Murre-van den Berg Karène Sanchez Summerer Tijmen C. Baarda, 1-49. Leiden: Brill, 2020.
- Nakassis, Constantine V. "Brands and their Surfeits." *Cultural Anthropology* 28, no. 1 (2013): 111-126.
- . "Citation and citationality." *Signs and Society* 1, no. 1 (2013): 51-77.
- . *Doing style: Youth and Mass Mediation in South India*. University of Chicago Press, 2016.
- Nakassis, Constantine V., and Llerena Guiu Searle. "Introduction: Social Value Projects in Post-Liberalisation India." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 47, no. 2 (2013): 169-183.
- Navaro-Yashin, Yael. *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey*. Princeton University Press, 2002.

- Neyzi, Leyla. "Object or Subject? The Paradox of 'Youth' in Turkey." *Autrepart* 2 (2001): 101-117.
- Öktem, Kerem. "The Nation's Imprint: Demographic Engineering and the Change of Toponyms in Republican Turkey." *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 7 (2008).
- Okyay, Aslı S. "Turkey's post-2011 Approach to its Syrian Border and its Implications for Domestic Politics." *International Affairs* 93, no. 4 (2017): 829-846.
- Oldenburg, Ray. *The Great Good Place: Cafes: Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You Through the Day*. St. Paul: Paragon House, 1989.
- Olson, Robert. "Five Stages of Kurdish Nationalism: 1880-1980." *Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs. Journal* 12, no. 2 (1991): 391-409.
- Özgen, H. Neşe. "Nisebîn û Sinorê Wê." In *Kaniyek ji Mezopotamyayê*, edited by Eslîxan Yıldıırım Tanhan, 301-303. Istanbul: Weşanên Enstîtuya Kurdî ya Stenbolê, 2005
- . "Mayınlı Arazileri Temizlenmesi Üzerine." *Sav Almanak*, 2010
- . "Sınırdaki Kaçakçı Olmanın Antopolojik Tarihi". *NTV Tarih* December, 2011.
- Özipek, Aydın. "The Promise of Authenticity: Civilizing Youth and Branding the Nation in Contemporary Islamist Turkey." PhD diss., Northwester University, (forthcoming).
- Öztürk, Mustafa. "Manzum Sözlüklerden Sübha-i Sıbyân ile Kürtedeki İlk Manzum Sözlük Nubehara Biçûkan arasında bir Karşılaştırma." *The Journal of Mesopotamian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2016): 1-32.
- Powell, Eve Troutt. *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Ramazan, Aras. "Türkiye'de Sınır ve Sınır Bölgeleri Çalışmaları: Eleştirel Bir Değerlendirme/Border and Borderland Studies in Turkey: A Critical Evaluation." *Mukaddime* 5, no. 2 (2015): 15-37.
- Richards, Audrey Isabel. *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia: an Economic Study of the Bemba Tribe*. LIT Verlag Münster, 1939/1995.
- Rizgar, Baran. *Kurdish-English Dictionary*. London: Lithosphere, 1993.
- Roche, Gerald. "Abandoning Endangered Languages: Ethical Loneliness, Language Oppression, and Social Justice." *American Anthropologist* 122, no. 1 (2020): 164-169.
- Rosa, Jonathan. "Racializing language, regimenting Latinas/os: Chronotope, social tense, and American raciolinguistic futures." *Language & Communication* 46 (2016): 106-117.
- Rosa, Jonathan, and Nelson Flores. "Unsettling race and language: Toward a raciolinguistic perspective." *Language in society* 46, no. 5 (2017): 621-647.

- Ruys, Tom, and Emre Turkut. "Turkey's post-coup 'purification process': collective dismissals of public servants under the European Convention on Human Rights." *Human Rights Law Review* 18, no. 3 (2018): 539-565.
- Safa, Peyami. *Eğitim, gençlik, üniversite*. Vol. 7. Ötüken Neşriyat, 1978
- Sahlins, Marshall. *Culture and Practical Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.
- . *What Kinship is-and is Not*. University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- Sarı, Engin. *Kültür, Kimlik ve Politika: Mardin'de Kültürlerarasılık*. İletişim Yayınları, 2010.
- Şayı, Mehmet. *Mardin Arapça Diyalekti*. Istanbul: Akdem, 2017.
- Schäfers, Marlene. "It Used to Be Forbidden" Kurdish Women and the Limits of Gaining Voice." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 14, no. 1 (2018): 3-24.
- . "Walking a Fine Line: Loyalty, Betrayal, and the Moral and Gendered Bargains of Resistance." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 40, no. 1 (2020): 119-132.
- . "Writing against loss: Kurdish women, subaltern authorship, and the politics of voice in contemporary Turkey." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 23, no. 3 (2017): 543-561.
- Searle, Llerena Guiu. "Conflict and Commensuration: Contested Market Making in India's Private Real Estate Development Sector." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 1 (2014): 60-78.
- Silverstein, Michael. "Contemporary Transformations of Local Linguistic Communities." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27, no. 1 (1998): 401-426.
- . "Metapragmatic discourse and Metapragmatic Function" in *Reflexive Language: Reported Speech and Metapragmatics*, edited by John Lucy, 33-58. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- . "Monoglot 'Standard' in America: Standardization and Metaphors of Linguistic Hegemony" in *The Matrix of Language: Contemporary Linguistic Anthropology* (1996): 284-306.
- . "Semiotic Vinification and the Scaling of Taste." In *Scale: Discourse and Dimensions of Social Life*, edited by E. Summerson Carr and Michael Lempert, 185-212. University of California Press, 2016.
- . "The poetics of politics: "Theirs" and "ours"." *Journal of Anthropological Research* 61, no. 1 (2005): 1-24.
- . "The Uses and Utility of Ideology: Some Reflections." *Pragmatics* 2, no. 3 (1992): 311-323.

- Skutnabb–Kangas, Tove. "Linguistic Diversity and Biodiversity: The Threat from Killer Languages Tove Skutnabb–Kangas." In *The Politics of English as a World Language: New Horizons in Postcolonial Cultural Studies*, edited by Christian Mair, 31-52. Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V, 2003.
- Smith, Woodruff D. "Complications of the Commonplace: Tea, Sugar, and Imperialism." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23, no. 2 (1992), pp. 259- 278
- Sofsky, Wolfgang. *Verteidigung des Privaten: eine Streitschrift*. Munich: CH Beck, 2009.
- Sourdel, D., "Dunaysir", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, 2012.
- Talbot, John M. "Tropical Commodity Chains, Forward Integration Strategies and International Inequality: Coffee, Cocoa and Tea." *Review of International Political Economy* 9 no. 1 (2002): 701-734.
- Tambiah, Stanley J. *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia*. Univ. of California Press, 1997
- Tezcür, Güneş Murat. "Violence and Nationalist Mobilization: the Onset of the Kurdish Insurgency in Turkey." *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 2 (2015): 248-266.
- Tjora, Aksel, and Graham Scambler, eds. *Café Society*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Tuğal, Cihan. *Passive Revolution: Absorbing the Islamic Challenge to Capitalism*. Stanford University Press, 2009.
- Turner, Terrance. "Marxian Value Theory: an Anthropological Perspective". *Anthropological Theory* 8, no.1 (2008): 43-56.
- Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*. New York: Routledge, 1969/2017.
- Uçarlar, Nesrin. *Between Majority Power and Minority Resistance: Kurdish Linguistic Rights in Turkey*. Lund University, 2009.
- Üngör, Ugur Ümit. *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1950*. Oxford University Press on Demand, 2012a.
- . "Untying the Tongue-tied: Ethnocide and language Politics." *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* no. 217 (2012b):127-150.
- Us, Öznur. "Memurluk Prestiji." *Amme İdaresi Dergisi* 6, no. 3 (1973): 48-73.
- Uslu, Nasuh. *The Turkish-American Relationship between 1947 and 2003: The History of a Distinctive Alliance*. New York: Nova Publishers, 2003.

- Ûsiv, Fêrikê. *Bijare*. Yerevan: Lêgal Plyûs, 2010.
- Valli, Abbas. *Kurds and the state in Iran: The making of Kurdish identity*. Vol. 36. IB Tauris, 2011/2014.
- Veblen, Thorstein. *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*. Dehli: Aakar Books, 1899/2005.
- Verschoye, T. "Education in Turkey." *Royal Institute of International Affairs* 26, no. 1 (1950): 59-70.
- Warner, Michael. "Publics and Counterpublics." *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 49-90.
- Weber, Max. *Economy and Society: A New Translation*. Harvard University Press, 1922/2019.
- Wedeen, Lisa. *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- . *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- White, Paul. *The PKK: Coming Down from the Mountains*. Zed Books, 2005.
- Whiteley, Peter. "Do Language Rights Serve Indigenous Interests? Some Hopi and other Queries." *American Anthropologist* 105, no. 4 (2003): 712-722.
- Wohl, Sharon. "The Turkish Tea Garden: Exploring a "Third Space" With Cultural Resonances." *Space and Culture* 20, no. 1 (2017): 56-67.
- Woolard, Kathryn. "Language and identity choice in Catalonia: The Interplay of Contrasting Ideologies of Linguistic Authority" in *Lengua, Nación e Identidad: la Regulación del Plurilinguismo en España y América Latina*, edited by Süsselbeck, et al., 303-323. Madrid: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2008.
- . *Singular and Plural: Ideologies of Linguistic Authority in 21st Century Catalonia*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Woolard, Kathryn A., and Bambi B. Schieffelin. "Language Ideology." *Annual Review Anthropology* 23, no. 1 (1994): 55-82.
- Yarkin, Gullistan. "The Ideological Transformation of the PKK regarding the Political Economy of the Kurdish Region in Turkey." *Kurdish Studies* 3, no. 1 (2015): 26-46.
- Yavuz, M. Hakan. "Five stages of the construction of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 7, no. 3 (2001): 1-24.
- Yeğen, Mesut. "The Turkish State Discourse and the Exclusion of Kurdish Identity." *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 2 (1996): 216-229.

Zeydanlıođlu, Welat. "Turkey's Kurdish Language Policy." *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* no. 217 (2012): 99-125

Ziyaeddin Pařa, Yusuf. Kürtçe-Türkçe Sözlük. Trans. Mehmet Ali Bozarslan. İstanbul: Çıra, 1984/1979.

News and Social Media

"11 bin 285 öğretmen açığa alındı." *Yeni Şafak* 9-Sep-2018. Accessed in January 2019.
<https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/11-bin-285-ogretmen-aciga-alindi-2528754>

"1. Uluslararası Mihellemi Konferansı." *MidyatSesi.com*. 13-Aug-2008. Accessed on WaybackMazine January 2020.
<http://www.midyatsesi.com/haber.php?hayns=2&yazilim=haberler&osmanli=hdetay&sec e=1&aid=277&titlem=277>

Arab Turkey. "alrashdye- الراشدية في الأناضول العربية" *Youtube*. 08-Oct-2013. Accessed January 2020. <https://youtu.be/myj1pBcU5ag>

"Bush praise for key ally Turkey." BBC News. 27-June-2004. Accessed January 2020.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3843795.stm>

Bursa Hayat. "Davutođlu'ndan HDP'ye kaçak çay tepkisi." *YouTube*. Dec-28-2015. Accessed October 2020. <https://youtu.be/42gGuDrlxJo>.

Feffer, John. "Pax Ottomanica? How Turkey is chasing China to become the next big thing." *The Nation*. June 14, 2010

Haberman, Clyde. "For Turkey's Kurds, Fragile Gains." *New York Times*. Nov. 3. 1989

Halkların Demokratik Partisi – HDP. "Ahmet Türk: Yalvarıyorum, çocuklarımızın geleceđini karartmayın." *YouTube*. 11-Apr-2017. Accessed in March 2020.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gu-gBcmGqz4&feature=youtu.be>

"HDP'li oldular." Al-Jazeera Turkish. 28-April-2014. Accessed January 2020.
<http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/hdpli-oldular>

"HDP'li Önder'den Başbakan Davutođlu'na: Kaçak çayını içer gider" T24. Dec-26-2015. Accessed in October 2019. <https://t24.com.tr/haber/hdpli-ondere-rizeden-tepki-kacak-cay-sagliga-zararli-icmesi-bizim-icin-daha-iyi-olur,322339>

HDP'li Önder: "Kaçak çaya hallendiyseniz Rize çayı ikram ederiz". CNNTurk. 28-Dec-2015. Accessed in October 2019. <https://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/hdpli-onder-kacak-caya-hallendiyseniz-rize-cayi-ikram-ederiz>

“HDP’li Vekilden Cübbelli Ahmet Hoca’ya Gönderme." *Milliyet*. June-28th-2015. Accessed in January 2020. <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yerel-haberler/mardin/hdp-li-vekilden-cubbeli-ahmet-hoca-ya-gonderme-10859168>

Işıқтаş, Kemal. Twitter Post. 13-May-2019, 1:57 AM.
<https://twitter.com/pancuniyoldas/status/1127830175536881664>

“Hükümet 14 bin öğretmen için harekete geçiyor” CNNTURK. 4-SEP-2016. Accessed in January 2019. <https://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/hukumet-14-bin-ogretmen-icin-harekete-geciyor>

KurdishLessons. Twitter Post. 06-Apr-2020, 1:13 PM.
<https://twitter.com/kurdishlessons/status/1247225921007808513>

“Mardin'de 4 dilde tabela.” *Akşam*. 2-Sep-2014. Accessed January 2020.
<https://www.aksam.com.tr/guncel/mardinde-4-dilde-tabela/haber-335811>

Medyascope. "Ahmet Türk: "Seçimi almak bizim için zor değil." *YouTube*. 11-May-2019. See: Accessed January 2020. <https://youtu.be/rOn8c2SXsjM>

“Öğrenciler Tutuklu Öğretmenlerini unutmadı” *Nusaybinim*. “Öğrenciler Tutuklu Öğretmenlerini unutmadı” 29-April-2014. Accessed in January 2019.
https://www.nusaybinim.com/ogrenciler_tutuklu_ogretmenlerini_unutmadi_5578.html

Osmanlı Torunu. “Erdoğan'ın Samimiyetini Gösteren 30 Hareketi.” *YouTube*. Accessed in October 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XaCq15D72FA>

PicRiza1. "Kaçak çay içer misiniz" sorusuna Osmaniye Valisi Celalettin Cerrah çok sinirlendi." *Youtube*. 20-Aug-2012. Accessed October 2019. <https://youtu.be/0tvmGX83hiI>

Sedat Sur. "Ahmet Türk: Mardin Ortadoğu'nun başkenti olacak." *ANF* (reprinted in *Rojava Kurdistan*). 17-February-2014. Accessed January 2020.
<http://www.rojevakurdistan.org/roeportaj/12909-ahmet-tuerk-mardin-ortadounun-bakenti-olacak>

Taştekin, Fehim. “Kürdistan’ın dört parçasını birleştiren okul: Artuklu Kürdoloji” 11-13-2014. *Al-Monitor*. Accessed in January 2019. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/tr/originals/2014/11/turkey-kurdish-universities-unites-four-pieces-kurdistan.html>