THE KURDS IN ERDOĞAN'S TURKEY

BALANCING IDENTITY, RESISTANCE AND CITIZENSHIP

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Turkey, and areas of majority Kurdish population. Created by Wayne Murphy using data from naturalearthdata.com, and GeoEPR dataset from Julian Wucherpfennig et al. (2011), 'Politically relevant ethnic groups across space and time: Introducing the GeoEPR dataset', *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 28(5), pp. 423–37.

INTRODUCTION:
ERUPTION IN DIYARBAKIR

In the early evening of 7 June 2015 Diyarbakır erupted. The largest Kurdish-populated city in Turkey's south-east, Diyarbakır sits astride the River Tigris, approximately 1,000 kilometres as the crow flies from Istanbul, a short distance from the borders of Syria and Iraq. For most, if not all, Kurds in Turkey, Diyarbakır looms large as a city of historical significance, a centre for political, cultural and intellectual activity. Some look upon it as a *baş kent*, a capital city, to a putative state that exists only in name: Kurdistan.

Diyarbakır is no stranger to eruptions. Since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the city has often been the scene of political violence and confrontation between Kurds and the instruments of the Turkish state. A Kurdish rebellion led by Sufi Sheikh Said broke out in Diyarbakır province in February 1925, the hapless sheikh being captured within two months and hung from the gallows near one of the grand gates in the old city walls. The uprising that Sheikh Said led was, in large measure, a reaction to the impositions of the newly formed Republic, which, premised on 'unity of language, culture and ideal',[1] sought to deny the very existence of Kurds within its borders. Over fifty years later, amid ongoing disavowal of the Kurds' existence and smothering of their political voices, Diyarbakır again became a flashpoint. Abdullah Öcalan and a cohort of Kurdish nationalists, seeking to carve an independent 'Kurdistan' out of Turkish territory, established the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, PKK) in Diyarbakır.[2]

The PKK embarked on a military campaign that ravaged Turkey's Kurdish-populated south-east and saw the PKK swiftly branded a terrorist organisation by the state. Diyarbakır became a site of Kurdish civilian protest, routinely met by the heavy hand of Turkey's security apparatus, and its hinterland saw clashes between PKK operatives and the Turkish armed forces continuing intermittently for over thirty years.

On that summer evening in 2015, sitting in a hotel room in Sur, the old walled city of Diyarbakır, I heard, from outside my window, a ripple of bangs and roars. I was familiar with the city's history of political tensions and violence. Such precedents did not reassure me that loud outbursts were of a peaceful nature – but the circumstances now appeared to be different. On that day, Turkey had gone to the polls to vote in a general election for the Grand National Assembly. The pro-Kurdish Halkların Demokratik Partisi (Peoples' Democratic Party; HDP) was making an all-or-nothing tilt at the parliament, seeking to overcome an electoral threshold that stipulated that any party failing to win 10 per cent of the national vote could not claim any seats in the assembly. Diyarbakır, as with much of the surrounding south-eastern region, was HDP heartland. The HDP was taking an enormous risk in competing outright in the election. No pro-Kurdish party had ever succeeded in passing the threshold. Should the HDP also fail to do so, any seats it won were, due to electoral bylaws, most likely to be granted to the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi; AKP), thereby increasing its majority and tightening its hold on the political sphere.

Leading up to the election, the mood in Diyarbakır, however, was cautiously optimistic. Over the preceding week, on street corners and in open spaces, I had witnessed spontaneous performances of the *govend*, a Kurdish dance, as people had excitedly come together in anticipation of the vote. Accompanied by bass drum and shrieking *zurna*, they linked hands and moved back and forth in a line dance marked by rhythmic chants, cheers and ululations. Meanwhile, reams of bright purple and green HDP bunting swung from lampposts, in alleyways across Diyarbakır's old town and between apartment buildings and office blocks in the newer neighbourhoods outside the city walls. The faces of HDP co-leaders Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ beamed from campaign posters splashed on walls and billboards featuring slogans in Turkish and Kurdish.

I had earlier asked a Kurdish man what he expected of the poll. '*Ya savaş ya barış,*' he shrugged – 'Either war or peace.' It soon became clear, however, that what I was hearing from my hotel room was an eruption of excitement rather than the opening salvoes of any 'war'. The bangs that I could hear in the twilight were fireworks; they were soon augmented by a raucous chorus of bass drums, whistles and car horns. In the weeks before the election, I had been told by cautious Istanbullus to avoid Diyarbakır entirely or, at the very least, to stay in my hotel room when election results were announced. As final voting figures came in it became clear that the HDP had passed the electoral threshold. It would claim 80 seats in the assembly, meaning that the ruling AKP had lost its majority for the first time since 2002. This was a political upheaval.

Despite the warnings, I decided against staying hunkered in my hotel room. I ventured to the lobby, meeting the hotel manager and assorted hangers-on. They were all chatting excitedly. They greeted me with grins, cheers, and slaps on the back. Proceeding outside, I encountered exuberant crowds that grew larger and louder as evening descended. Families and groups of men gathered on street corners or congregated in teahouses. Amid a welter of dust and fumes, in semi-darkness, youths in cars roared along the streets circling the city walls whistling and honking their horns. Others waved flags in the Kurdish *tricoleur* of green, red, yellow (*kesk*, *sor*, *zer* in Kurdish). Someone was pounding a bass drum. The Kurds of Diyarbakır were ecstatic. After years lacking representation, years of oppression, years of dismissal as 'terrorists' or 'separatists', Kurds now saw a political avenue opening before them. The HDP had won a place in Turkey's general assembly. Kurdish politics had come of age. Perhaps Turkish politics had come of age, too. The seemingly inexorable rise of the AKP and its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, had indeed been stopped. It was the dawn of a bright new era.

Or so it seemed.

Why should an election prompt warnings against visiting Kurdish cities such as Diyarbakır? Why might an election result in either 'war or peace'? Why did the HDP's entry into the Grand National Assembly evoke such euphoria among Kurds? What implications did it have for the ruling AKP and Erdoğan, recently directly elected to the presidency? The answers to these

questions lie in the political circumstances of the Kurds, their relationship to the Republic of Turkey, the ways in which they define and uphold their identity and their place in – and impact on – Turkey's political milieu. This book seeks to examine each of these as interconnected phenomena. It seeks to analyse the extent to which Kurds are able to reconcile their distinct ethnic identity with their status as citizens in a polity increasingly subject to AKP hegemony. Are these things – ethnic identity and citizenship –entirely incongruent or can there be some overlap between them?

There is no unanimously accepted definition of what constitutes Kurdishness, as Martin Van Bruinessen points out.[3] Broadly outlined, the Kurds constitute peoples who speak several languages of the Iranic family and who since antiquity have inhabited the lands of Mesopotamia across which the modern borders of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey cut. Some Kurds claim descent from the ancient Median civilisation (c. 700 BCE) but the first explicit mentions of the Kurds appear in Arab accounts after the Islamic conquests of the seventh century.[4] Turkic groups first arrived in Anatolia from points further east in the late eleventh century. Both peoples were largely nomadic at the time but this did not preclude overlap and movement both ways across ethnic boundaries. As Turkic empires arose in Anatolia, first the Seljuks centred in Konya, then the Ottomans with a capital eventually at Istanbul, the Kurds retained a degree of semi-autonomy on the marches between Turkish and Persian spheres. While under Ottoman rule (1516–1922),[5] the Kurds were regarded as part of the core Sunni Muslim population of Anatolia, which was not demarcated by ethnic categories, and Kurds fought alongside Turkish nationalist forces headed by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in the Turkish War of Liberation (Kurtuluş Savaşı), after which the Republic of Turkey was established in 1923.

Thereafter the new nation-state was conceived of as Turkish, the constitution delineating Turkishness as the marker of citizenship.[6] As stated, the premise was on 'unity of language, culture and ideal' – of a Turkish persuasion. Kurds soon reacted to the impositions and restrictions inherent in such circumstances but found the new regime offered little accommodation of their political demands.[7] Since then, the social and political circumstances of the Kurds have been cause for controversy, debate and, at times, violence, as will be further discussed throughout this book.

The Kurds are not the only ethnic minority in Turkey. The most comprehensive study of ethnicity in Turkey, published in 1989, lists a total of forty-seven different groups.[8] It is well understood that the Kurds form the largest ethnic minority, but there are no correct, up-to-date records of the number of Kurds living in Turkey. The last Turkish census that included statistics on mother tongue (and through which ethnic populations figures may be deduced) was undertaken in 1965. That census, the data of which is regarded as questionable, recorded approximately 2.4 million Kurdish speakers, constituting roughly 7.5 per cent of the total population.[9] Since then no official record of ethnicity has been compiled. Estimates of the number of Kurds vary considerably[10] and often arouse controversy.[11] The very fact that there are no official data and that discussions of Kurdish population figures are subject to dispute point to the contested nature of Kurdish identity and the contentious position that Kurds occupy within Turkey's socio-political framework.

If there is dispute over Kurdish population figures, this is also true of the defining elements of Kurdish identity. Delineating the parameters of any ethnic or national identity is a slippery endeavour, the more so in the case of the Kurds, a people split between four Middle Eastern states and, in Turkey, whose very existence was denied for much of the twentieth century. External interference and machinations aside, there has been disagreement among Kurds themselves on what the definitive markers of their ethnicity are, or who qualifies as Kurdish or otherwise.[12] The process of identification was long complicated for the Kurds by the considerable diversity in what Martin Van Bruinessen called in the 1980s the 'secondary symbols' of ethnic distinctiveness – such as 'traditional dress', music and folklore – among Kurdish communities living in different regions across Turkey, as well as often notable similarities with other ethnic groups living in the same regions.[13] Thus, the cuisine, dress and folklore of a Mardinli Kurd may be distinct from that of a Dersimli Kurd but resemble that of an Arab or Assyrian in Mardin, while a Kurd living in one of the cities of western Turkey may have more in common with his Turkish neighbours than with Kurds living in the remote villages of Hakkari. Indeed, Kurds may feel close affiliation with ethnic Turks, or, alternatively, despite assimilation into apparent Turkishness, may still retain a sense of Kurdishness.[14] Yet, as this book seeks to examine, through the pressures of political contestation and conflict, the parameters of Kurdishness in Turkey have begun to crystallise.

It is thus worth noting Engin Isin and Patricia Wood's contention that ethnic categorisation is rarely definitive and is prone to inaccuracy. They cite the example of the 'ethnically Chinese', who live in different countries, speak different languages, adhere to different faiths and pursue manifold practices and customs.[15] Like 'ethnic Chinese', Kurds live across international borders in the Middle East and in diasporic communities worldwide, thereby leading to diversity of lifestyle(s) and conceptualisations of identity. This book in its examination of Kurdish identity and political life in Turkey uses the elements that Anthony Smith sets out as requisite for the categorisation of a group as an *ethnie*, his term for an ethnic community. Smith's elements, each of which may be present to greater or lesser extents in different circumstances and between different *ethnies*, are: 'a collective proper name; a myth of common ancestry; shared historical memories; differentiating elements of common culture; association with a specific homeland; a sense of solidarity held by significant sectors of the population'.[16]

The lack of clearly defined and unanimously agreed-upon aspects of Kurdish identity do not undermine Smith's requisite elements here. Smith notes that such factors as language, religion and skin pigmentation are often regarded as 'objective cultural markers'. They are seen as existing beyond an individual's or group's conscious decision-making about their identity, thereby contributing to the contention that ethnicity is a 'primordial' quality, one that is a 'given'.[17] Despite such commonly held views, Smith argues that the six attributes he uses to define and identify distinct ethnic groups are 'strongly subjective'.[18]

If ethnic identities may be subjective, they must also be subject to change. Stuart Hall argues that identities are 'never stable, fixed or unified', but are 'points of temporary attachment'.[19] Indeed, Martin van Bruinessen recounts Kurdish speakers joining Turkish tribal formations, and vice versa, during centuries of cohabitation between Kurdish and Turkish nomads in Anatolia, and examples of Armenians assuming Kurdish identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[20] More recent examples from Turkey further illustrate the malleable nature of ethnic identity. In 2004, Turkish lawyer Fethiye Çetin published a memoir revealing her discovery that her grandmother was an Armenian who had been rescued by a Turkish official after the genocide of 1915 and raised as a Turk.[21] While Çetin may have previously thought of herself as 'Turkish', it was clear, however, that at least part of her ethnic identity was Armenian.

All of this serves to illustrate that, as Rogers Brubaker argues, ethnic identity is not 'discrete, concrete, tangible, bounded'. Applying this reasoning to the Kurds, this means that the individual and collective attributes that combine to create the category of 'Kurdishness' are sometimes indistinct and open to question or various interpretations; they are not unchangeable in time and circumstance, and are not entirely and irrevocably distinct from the attributes of some Turks, Armenians, Arabs or others. For Brubaker, 'situated actions, cultural idioms, discursive frames . . . political projects and contingent events' act as shapers of identities, be they ethnic, national or otherwise.[22] In other words, individual and collective identities are malleable, assuming different contours and points of attachment depending on the political circumstances and lived experiences of those individuals and collectivities. In this way, the elements that Smith highlights – elements of common culture, sense of solidarity, ideas of homeland – are variously formed and conceived, and contribute to the overall shape of ethnic identity.

Fethiye Çetin's book was published during the early years of the AKP's incumbency. The AKP at this time pursued a programme of political reform, seeking to overturn many of the long-standing Kemalist strictures that had hobbled Turkey's democratic processes and had created an illiberal polity where nationalist rhetoric held sway. Under the AKP's liberalising measures, greater attention was paid to Turkey's multi-ethnic fabric, efforts were made to negotiate a peace with the PKK, and Kurdish political actors were able to operate with increasing freedom. However, with time, as AKP leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan weathered political challenges and sought to institute a new presidential system, the AKP itself adopted many of the illiberal trappings of its predecessors and grew to a position of hegemony in Turkey's political and public spheres. In these circumstances, the situation of the Kurds was again curtailed. This book, therefore, sets out to analyse the elements of ethnic identity for Kurds and the ways in which the 'contingent events' of Turkey's socio-political arena, particularly during the era of AKP rule, have shaped them.

The seeds of this book have been germinating for some time; indeed, since my first encounter with Kurds in Turkey in 1992. While backpacking, I had boarded a *dolmuş* (minibus) in Malatya bound for the historic site of Nemrut Dağı (Mount Nimrod) in south-east Anatolia. After stopping at a meadow below the summit of the mountain, the *dolmuş* driver casually pointed at a

group of women in brightly coloured clothes and sickle-wielding men who were loading forage onto the backs of donkeys. He said, simply, 'Kurdish.' This was a light-bulb moment for me. Vaguely aware of a people known as the Kurds after the fallout of the Iraq War of 1990–1 had brought them to media attention, I had no idea that there were Kurds in Turkey nor, indeed, anyone other than Turks. After proceeding from Nemrut to Diyarbakır, the most important city for Kurds in Turkey, I was initiated into the circumstances of the Kurds. Arriving at a hotel late in the evening, I and several fellow back-packers were directed by the hotel manager to go to the local police station to register our passports. I initially dismissed this as excessive officiousness on the part of the manager and only later learned that this was a necessary precaution for all travellers to the city due to the prevailing security situation. During those first few days in Diyarbakır I observed a heavy military presence and met numerous Kurds who were eager to talk, informing me of the political situation for Kurds in Turkey and their 'struggle'. I was also led by local Kurdish youths around the city to important historical sites such as the Ulu Cami (Great Mosque), several caravanserais and to the churches of Surp Giragos, Meryem Ana and Mar Petyun (Armenian, Syriac and Chaldean respectively, and all in various states of disrepair and neglect). This, alongside later meeting Arabic speakers in Harran and Laz in Trabzon, alerted me to the complex socio-political and multi-ethnic fabric of modern Turkey.

Returning to Turkey in 1994–5, I lived and worked as a teacher in a language school in the west-coast city of İzmir at a time when the state's military campaign against the PKK was peaking. One day I fell into conversation with Cüneyt, a twenty-something student at the school, who was complaining about Kurdish youths speaking Kurdish on local buses. 'We are in Turkey; they should speak Turkish,' he retorted. 'If I come to your country, Australia, I must speak English.' I replied that in Australia people were free to speak and broadcast in any language and that even government publications were offered in several languages. 'Yes, but you don't have separatism,' he replied. His comment was illustrative of a view commonly held in Turkey at that time that equated ethnic diversity, or the fostering of ethnic distinctiveness, with political tumult and fragmentation. Such a view was exacerbated by the PKK and its then agenda – subsequently abandoned[23] – of seeking an independent Kurdish state within Turkish territory. In this way of thinking, widely shared

in İzmir, allowing Kurds the right to speak their language, to uphold their ethnic distinctiveness, would eventually lead to the collapse of the nation-state of Turkey. According to this logic, if Kurds wanted to be Kurds, they must, by extension, reject Turkey and desire their own nation-state. The reasoning ran that to avoid ethnic tension and political fragmentation it was necessary to deny ethnic diversity.

It struck me, however, that this thinking was fundamentally flawed; indeed, that Cüneyt's appraisal of the situation with regard to language rules was back-to-front. My experience as an Australian gave me an entirely different perspective. Rather than Australia being able to permit the use of multiple languages due to the absence of any separatist impulses within any ethnic community, my conviction was that ethnic communities in Australia did not harbour separatist aspirations precisely because they were able to use their own language if they desired. Similarly, Australia's recognition of ethnic diversity had not given rise to specific or recurring instances of inter-ethnic tensions. Clearly there are substantially different historical and socio-political parameters determining ethnic relations in Australia as compared to Turkey, but I reasoned that if ethnic communities were able to exist as ethnic communities, upholding aspects of their culture, language and identity – factors that make them distinctive and that they take pride in – within a broader political community, a nation-state, then there should be no need or desire to secede or separate to form their own political community.

In the summer of 1995, as I was preparing to leave İzmir, Turkish academic Doğu Ergil published the findings of an extensive survey conducted among Kurds resident in the Diyarbakır, Batman and Mardin provinces of south-eastern Anatolia. As if to validate my thinking that ethnic identification was not immediately or automatically a signal of separatist intent, Ergil found that although support for the PKK was high among his survey participants, only 11 per cent of them supported the idea of an independent Kurdish state.[24] Ergil likened the PKK's mission to that of a train journey, with party leaders envisioning an independent state as the final destination. The PKK then enjoyed a considerable degree of support among Kurds, as it does today. Ergil's findings revealed, however, that even though individual Kurds were willing to board the PKK train, they did not necessarily harbour separatist inclinations; they did not want to travel the whole distance to

an independent Kurdish state. Many were content to alight once they had reached their political goals, whether that be achieving decent livelihoods, incomes, employment, education, health, respect for their identity or more freedom within daily life.[25] As such, they supported the PKK not because, at that time, it pursued a separatist agenda, but because they saw it defending or advancing their political and material interests. Ergil found that a significant majority of Kurds wanted to remain within Turkey, but be respected and treated equally *as Kurds*. As a consequence, he argued that for the vast majority of Kurds there was no inherent contradiction, or clash, between Kurdishness and citizenship within Turkey.[26]

Ergil's survey was groundbreaking in that it highlighted the broader dimensions of the Kurdish question, namely the issues affecting Kurds beyond just those of terrorism and separatism. Even though it was presented as an objective record of Kurdish attitudes, the report received enormous knee-jerk criticism within Turkey. Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu noted that Turkey's nationalist press embarked on a relentless campaign to vilify Ergil in the wake of the report.[27] Ergil himself later recalled being accused of complicity with an international conspiracy to partition Turkey.[28] Such overwrought attitudes to Kurds and Kurdishness date back to the very conception of the Republic of Turkey, wherein all citizens were by definition categorised as Turks. The 1980s, during which the PKK embarked on its military campaign, were marked by the militarisation of the Kurdish-populated provinces of southeastern Anatolia and the brutalisation of many of Turkey's Kurdish citizens at the hands of both the PKK and state security forces, as well as state-directed efforts to deny Kurdish identity in its entirety.[29] Inevitably, the trauma of violence, displacement and conflict had major impacts on Kurdish identity and how Kurds viewed politics in the Republic of Turkey.[30]

Meanwhile, until the 1990s, official rhetoric and public discourse held that political unity was paramount and discussion of ethnic distinctiveness was 'divisive'.[31] Cüneyt was echoing this reasoning when he drew a link between Kurds speaking their own language in public and an implicit separatist intent. Official state policy was then to deny the existence of the largest minority in Turkey, thereby denying Kurds space within the public and political spheres to uphold their identity and culture. Sakallıoğlu posited that such a state posture marginalised and disenfranchised that very minority rather than forged a unified

national identity.[32] It was these parameters – the denial of an identity, the denial of political and cultural rights, the PKK's guerrilla campaign (deemed to be terrorism by many Turks) and the state's equally brutal counter-terror campaign – that defined, and in many ways continue to define, the 'Kurdish issue'. At work here are political grievances and security factors. For a long time, as the state, and much of the public, viewed the issue through a security rather than a political prism, the solution was seen to only be possible through decisive and resolute military action to stamp out the terror threat. Little thought was paid to the socio-political foundations of Kurdish grievances. These were the 'contingent events' that shaped Kurds' political attitudes and the ways they defined – and defended – their ethnic identity.

Circumstances changed in 1999, when Turkish agents captured Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the PKK, who was subsequently imprisoned near Istanbul. A series of ceasefires ensued, none of which endured entirely. After the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi; Justice and Development Party) won government in 2002, the political landscape in Turkey shifted considerably. Although often viewed as an 'Islamist' party, the AKP touted itself as 'conservative democratic', and embarked on a range of political, judicial and human rights reforms with a view to winning membership of the EU.[33] The AKP government in its early years also approached the Kurdish issue in a different manner, shifting from a security lens to one of economic and political development. This resulted in 2009 in the so-called Kurdish Opening, an initiative aiming to address Kurdish grievances through democratic means. This was followed by negotiations with the imprisoned Abdullah Öcalan that led to a PKK ceasefire declaration in March 2013.[34] Thereafter the *çözüm süreci* (solution process) began, whereby the government and Öcalan negotiated for peace, a process that continued without any substantive outcomes until July 2015. At that point, amid the political repercussions of the HDP's electoral 'victory' and the AKP's comeuppance, the peace process collapsed comprehensively and the political arena again contracted.

The fieldwork that provides much of the data for this book took place during several periods between June 2013 and June 2015, when negotiations were ongoing, hostilities were at a minimum and a degree of normality had returned to south-eastern Anatolia. The book seeks to take up a question that arose from Doğu Ergil's research twenty years earlier, but that has remained

largely unaddressed in the interim – that of everyday Kurds' relationship with the Republic of Turkey. Sakallıoğlu noted at that time that the state's Kurdish policy was likely to have damaged its image in the eyes of its Kurdish citizens. Ergil's survey findings indicated that even if this had been the case, Kurds had not abandoned the state entirely; they still attached some significance to their membership of Turkey, while still wanting recognition of their distinct ethnic identity. It is from here that my research question arises. This book intends to examine how Kurds conceive of, and experience, their Kurdish identity and their status as citizens of Turkey. It seeks to gauge the extent to which they are able to, or willing to, reconcile the two within the context of Turkey's political realm, which for almost two decades has been dominated by the personality of Erdoğan and the AKP. Both initially appeared inclined towards engaging with Kurds' political demands but both have recently tilted towards authoritarianism and a reinvigorated Turkish nationalism.

Diyarbakır – its inhabitants, history and physical presence – is the principal focus of the book. I chose Diyarbakır as the primary site to gather data because it occupies a pivotal place in the Kurdish imagination: for many Kurds in Turkey it is the would-be capital of a 'Kurdistan', and, as noted, it has long been a site of Kurdish mobilisation and of political tensions. The city remained under emergency rule from 1987 until 2002 during the conflict between Turkey's armed forces and the PKK. Its population swelled during this time as Kurdish villages were razed and evacuated by the army.[35] Following the collapse of the government's *cözüm süreçi* (resolution process) and the resumption of hostilities with the PKK in July 2015, it became a site of clashes between the PKK, its affiliates and the Turkish military. In this sense, Diyarbakır has experienced fluctuating fortunes during Erdoğan's time in power, benefiting from the lifting of emergency rule in 2002, a move instigated by the AKP, then experiencing something of a cultural flowering, only to be subjected to intense street-by-street fighting and destruction from late 2015.

Choosing Diyarbakır as a primary site of research also serves another purpose, that of broadening the depth of research undertaken within Turkey. Kimberly Hart contends that Istanbul dominates Turkish life in many regards, a preoccupation that extends to academic research. She notes the aphorism '*Istanbul demek, Türkiye demek*' ('To speak of Istanbul is to

Figure I.1   Kurdish boys outside the walls of Diyarbakır, June 2015. © William Gourlay.

speak of Turkey'). She argues there is an 'Istanbul-centric' assumption that decrees that Istanbul is the automatic first choice and quintessential location for social and political research conducted in Turkey.[36] Hart concedes, and I concur, that Istanbul is of pivotal importance, but restricting research to the city means a less detailed and less comprehensive picture of modern Turkey. This is particularly so regarding Kurdish life and politics, much of which is conducted in the south-east of the country. To this end, my choice of Diyarbakır is intended to raise the analytical gaze from Istanbul, to extend it to the south-east and afford another piece of research that contributes to a broader view of the country as a whole.

That said, while principally focusing on Diyarbakır, this book also takes account of Kurds in Istanbul. As the cultural, financial and spiritual capital – although not the administrative capital, and no longer seat of government – Istanbul is of central importance to virtually all aspects of life in Turkey. It is the largest city in Turkey, and it is often said that it is the largest Kurdish city in the world.[37] Large numbers of Kurds have emigrated here during the life of the Republic of Turkey, most particularly in recent decades, either seeking economic opportunity or escaping the turmoil of the war in the south-east.

Indeed, due to its multi-cultural nature, Istanbul represents a microcosm of Turkey's ethnic diversity, and as the location of significant political developments, it provides a perspective on the 'contingent events' that define Turkey's political terrain.

In examining ideas of Kurdish identity and citizenship in Turkey, this book adopts a bottom-up view, investigating Kurdish ethnicity as it is manifest in everyday situations. As Yael Navaro-Yashin did with her dissection of the secular-Islamist dialectic within modern Turkey,[38] the intention here is to move beyond the boundaries and limitations of analysis of political parties, institutions and movements and their formalised discourses, rather to enter 'public life', engaging and observing the Kurdish residents of Diyarbakır and Istanbul in teahouses, parks, corner shops, mosque courtyards, backstreets, bazaars and street corners, in order to capture the political in its 'fleeting and intangible, transmogrified forms'.[39] Beyond engaging Kurds face-to-face to enquire of their lived experiences in order to construct an image of Kurdish identity, the focus is on urban landscapes and the minutiae of everyday life – graffiti, bill posters, handbills and other such things that may contain political messages or be indicative of political currents, things seemingly as innocuous as street signs and which books, newspapers, CDs, cassettes and souvenir postcards are available for sale – as documentary sources writ small, all of which define Turkey's socio-political terrain and the formation of identities within it. In this sense the book aims to bring to the fore the voices of ordinary Kurds and the apparently mundane elements of their daily lives.

The book proceeds through nine chapters following this introduction. Chapter 1 sets out Turkey's nation-building project, the 'invention' of Turkishness as an ethnic category and nationalism as a forge for unity, and the concurrent development of Kurdish ethnic awareness. It details the AKP's initial attempts to redefine politics to create a more inclusive environment and its recent tilt towards authoritarianism. Providing context for the more thorough analysis of the components of Kurdish identity to come, the chapter examines how the Kurds were affected by these processes and political dynamics. Chapter 2 explains processes of ethnographic data-gathering that contribute to the book's argument, namely how Diyarbakır and Istanbul were chosen as sites of investigation and how Kurds related to the research and researcher. Chapter 3 begins examination of the 'differentiating elements of common

culture' that are the building blocks of Kurdish identity. It observes narratives of 'village life' and recourse to 'the mountains' and, in particular, Newroz, the Kurdish new year, and the Kurdish language as totems of Kurdish political and cultural life. It examines the ways in which the AKP have sought to co-opt Newroz and language, and the attempts Kurds have made to assert their distinct ownership of them. Chapter 4 then investigates the role that Islam plays in Turkish and Kurdish life, and how Kurds have for some time been reassessing their relationship to religion(s) as a way to create a distinction between 'their' Islam and that of others, notably the AKP and ISIS. Chapter 5 examines the contested nature of territory and notations of the map in Turkey. In this it observes Kurdish and governmental attitudes to Diyarbakır and the way that alternative designations – Mesopotamia, Anatolia and Kurdistan – feed into broader narratives about Turkey's national identity, and into the AKP's attempts to corral the Kurdish issue for its own benefit. The fact that a putative 'Kurdistan' extends beyond the borders of Turkey, informs the discussion of trans-border Kurdish identity – Kurdayetî – that is the focus of Chapter 6. What impact do Kurds' cross-border connections have? How does the AKP react to them, and how do they affect events in Turkey? Chapter 7 investigates how narratives of oppression and resistance postures that Kurds adopt play into notions of identity. It observes cultural traditions such as Newroz, the use of the Kurdish language, attempts to demarcate a distinct Islam and to re-annotate the maps as instances of 'resistance' that fortify a distinct Kurdish political position and ethnic identity, something that becomes more important as AKP hegemony grows. From the viewpoint of Kurds' enthusiastic participation in Turkey's general and municipal elections, Chapter 8 explores conceptualisations of citizenship in Turkey. It argues that Kurds' political activities constitute engagement in Renan's 'daily plebiscite', that is, they act as affirmation of their place as members of Turkey's body politic, but they are also a mechanism for staking out their own political space in defiance of AKP hegemony. The Conclusion draws together the threads highlighted throughout the book to argue that Kurdish identity in Turkey can be seen at its core as a political identity. Yet such a reality, I argue, is not a threat to Turkey; indeed, when and where Kurds are able to assert such an identity freely and without consequences their sense of engagement and belonging to the body politic of Turkey is enhanced. This much was apparent

on that summer evening in 2015, as the Kurds of Diyarbakır took to the streets to celebrate the HDP's victory in winning seats in Turkey's general assembly. However the AKP's hegemonic project and Erdoğan's increasing grip on power make such aspirations harder to achieve. With Erdoğan at the helm, Turkey's political, social and geo-strategic arenas are increasingly tense; this book sets out to examine how Kurds relate and react to these overarching political parameters and how, in turn, they play a role in shaping Turkey's political and social trajectories.

Notes

1. İnce, *Citizenship and Identity in Turkey*, p. 39.
2. Waldman and Calışkan, *The New Turkey and its Discontents*, p. 166.
3. Van Bruinessen, 'The ethnic identity of Kurds in Turkey', pp. 613–21.
4. Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, p. 13.
5. The Ottomans ruled over western Anatolia from the early fourteenth century, but only claimed eastern Anatolia under Selim I after 1512.
6. Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, pp. 6–9.
7. Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism and Modernity*, pp. 250–1.
8. Andrews (ed.), *Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey*. It is worth noting that several of the larger ethnic groups are divided by religious affiliation or location of origin to reach that total, an example being Turks, who are divided into Sunni, Alevi and Sunni Yörük sub-categories.
9. Mutlu, 'Ethnic Kurds in Turkey', pp. 517–41.
10. Mutlu in 'Ethnic Kurds in Turkey' calculated, on the basis of mother-tongue data gathered in 1990, a Kurdish population of 7 million. Alternatively, Kendal Nezan estimated in 1996 that Kurds made up one-quarter of Turkey's population, which was then 59 million. See Nezan, 'The Kurds', pp. 7–19. Hamit Bozarslan stated in 2008 that the Kurdish population was somewhere between 12 and 15 million. See Bozarslan (2008), 'Kurds and the Turkish state', pp. 333–56.
11. Erdem, 'Türkiye'de Kürtler ne kadardır? (2)', *Radikal*, 25 April 2013.
12. Van Bruinessen, 'The ethnic identity of Kurds in Turkey'.
13. Ibid.
14. Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene*, p. 43.
15. Isin and Wood, *Citizenship and Identity*, p. 49.
16. Smith, *National Identity*, p. 21.
17. Ibid., pp. 20, 23.

18. Ibid., p. 23.
19. Hall, 'Who needs "Identity"?', pp. 4–6.
20. Van Bruinessen, 'The ethnic identity of Kurds in Turkey'.
21. See Çetin, *My Grandmother: A memoir*.
22. Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, p. 11. He makes the same claim for 'race' and 'nation' – that they are not tangible and discrete but created and continually shaped by similar processes and dynamic to those that create ethnicity.
23. Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*, pp. 176–7.
24. Ergil, *Doğu Sorunu: Teşhisler ve Tesbitler 1995*, p. 68. Ergil's survey was originally conducted and published in July 1995 under the auspices of TOBB (Türkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birliği; The Turkish Union of Chambers of Commerce). For this study I have used a 2008 reprint.
25. Ibid., pp. 66–7. Ergil's train analogy for the PKK should be seen in light of a 1992 survey that found only 29 per cent of surveyed Kurdish speakers regarded the PKK as best representatives of the Kurds. See Elekdağ, 'Güneydoğu sorununda yeni eğilimler anketi', 6 September 1992, p. 17.
26. Ergil, 'Reframing the problem', p. 149.
27. Sakallıoğlu, 'Historicizing the present and problematizing the future', pp. 1–22.
28. Ergil, 'Reframing the problem', p. 149.
29. See, for instance, McDowall, *The Kurds*, pp. 44–50; Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, p. 45.
30. Gurses, *Anatomy of a Civil War*, p. 40.
31. Andrews (ed.), *Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey*, p. 41.
32. Sakallıoğlu, 'Historicizing the present and problematizing the future', p. 9.
33. Taşpınar, 'Turkey: The new model?', pp. 127–36.
34. Yackley, 'Kurd rebel leader orders fighters to halt hostilities', *Reuters*, 21 March.
35. Gurses, *Anatomy of a Civil War*, pp. 18–20.
36. Hart, *And Then We Work for God*, p. 24.
37. A 2008 report estimated the Kurdish population of Istanbul at 1.9 million. See Agirdir, 'Kürtler ve Kürt Sorunu', pp. 4–5.
38. Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State*.
39. Ibid., p. 3.