Karol Kaczorowski

Jagiellonian University

TRANSMISSION OF CULTURAL PATTERNS AMONG YOUNG KURDISH MIGRANTS IN ISTANBUL

The purpose of this paper is to analyze phenomena connected with the transmission of cultural patterns between Turkey's South-Eastern ('Kurdish') region, called 'Northern Kurdistan' by the Kurds, and Istanbul. The chapter also includes remarks on transmission between the communities of young Kurdish migrants and the host society of the multicultural metropolis, of which more than 80% are migrants born outside Istanbul (see: Akaraca and Tansel 2014). I will present partial results of an ongoing research project concerning the social construction of ethnic identity among young Kurds internally migrating to the country's capital city from other parts of Turkey. In the first part of the chapter some general information is provided concerning Kurdish culture and the region perceived by them as their homeland. I will also describe the specific nature of the city of Istanbul seen from internal migration in Turkey and then provide a brief history of relations between the Turkish state and the Kurds. In the following parts, the Relative Acculturation Extended Model and Antonina Kłoskowska's theory of culturalization are cited as theoretical frameworks for the subsequent analysis. The last paragraphs are devoted to examples of ways of cultural transmission among young Kurdish migrants in Istanbul.

KURDS, KURDISTAN AND ISTANBUL

Kurds are often considered one of the largest ethnic groups in the Middle East and one of the biggest in the world without a sovereign state (see e.g.: Roy 2011). Kurdistan, as a geographical and cultural region, is in the Kurds' view their homeland and the location for their intended autonomy or independent self-rule. It's name and borders remain highly controversial, especially among officials of the four countries within which borders the region lies – Turkey to the North, Iraq to the South, Syria to the East and Iran to the West. Nonetheless, the political empowerment and eventual unification of these four parts belongs to the greatest

Kurdish dreams and is perceived as a necessary step in the preservation of their culture and their very existence, as throughout the years they have been subject to political and cultural oppression (see: McDowall 2005). Traditional Kurdish social organization revolves around a semi-nomadic way of life with taking care of the flock and land cultivation as the main occupations and strong kinship ties and the prevalence of oral tradition. Collective celebrations are important. Kurds from all of the parts of Kurdistan feel cultural and historical affinity, even if the group is heterogeneous in terms of language and religion. The northern ('Turkish') part of the Kurdistan is the largest. Estimations of the Kurdish populations in the first decade of 21st century vary between 14 and 20 million (CIA 2008; Sirkeci 2006).[1]

This article concentrates on Kurds living in Turkey, and in particular the most visible group, the leftists[2]. It is important to note there is no single Kurdish identity. The political environment of the cultivation of Kurdish culture was and continues to be different in each of the four countries. Given this difference, the analysis was limited to those Kurds migrating from other parts of Turkey to Istanbul. The ideology of the Turkish state is based on specifically nationalistic premises (often called Kemalism, after the Republic's founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk; see: Yavuz 2003: 31) and this has for many years sought to erase Kurdish identity (e.g. by calling them the mountain Turks) and thus can be treated as a 'predatory identity' in Arjun Appadurai's (2006: 51–59) sense. In contemporary social sciences it is often stressed that identity is not a fixed set of traits invariably transmitted through socialization, but rather a product of social construction through contextual self-reference created within one's social circumstances. In the case of Kurdish Studies, such an approach was proposed by Murat Somer (2002).

[1] Turkish and global Kurdish populations are hard to estimate. Resettlement policies, assimilation processes and previously existing bans on researching ethnic differences have contributed to the impossibility of more accurate demographic calculations. In Turkey, the most available indicator of ethnicity can be information on language collected in censuses held until 2000. Some scholars note, however, that this is a misleading indicator, as a growing number of Kurds from younger generations (among others due to their education undertaken in Turkish) do not speak Kurdish (see: Zeyneloğlu, Sirkeci and Civelek 2015). Some estimations from the first decade of the 21st century imply that there are 30–38 million Kurds worldwide and 12–20 million live in Turkey (see: Yıldız 2005: 6). Calculations of the Kurdish population in Istanbul estimate their number to be between 2 and 4 million (see: Ağırdır 2008). Judging by these estimations and the geographical proportion of Turkish Kurdistan relative to its other parts, it can be inferred that Turkish Kurds represent half of the world's Kurdish population. Estimations from the same time period point to: from 8 to 10 million Kurds living in Iran, from 4.5 to 5 million in Iraq and from one to one and a half million in Syria (see: Lalik 2008: 27).

[2] For years open identification as a Kurd was connected with political affiliation to Kurdish nationalism and a leftist point of view. There are, however, numerous Kurds who are conservative Muslims. This was visible for a long time in strong support for the Muslim democratic *Justice and Development Party*. Many of them would not underline their ethnic identity as the religious one is perceived as more important, others treat Kurdishness as a purely cultural and not political identity and would be less inclined to underline it and participate in research on topics such as the one presented in the chapter. However there are movements which underline both the role of Islam and Kurdish heritage, such as academic circles around the journal and publishing house – *Nûbihar*. It is also important to note that despite political, linguistic and economic differences among Kurds in Istanbul, their perception of discrimination and persecution of Kurdish language and culture is to a large extent similar (see: O'Connor 2016: 160; Ahmetbeyzade 2007). Even the very conservative Free Cause Party (Turkish acronym: *Hüda-Par*), which is often associated with the so-called Turkish or Kurdish Hizbullah, has a program of bringing Kurdish language to the public sphere and promoting its teaching.

Kurds speak different languages (which are often considered as 'dialects' of Kurdish), dominant being: Kurmanci, Sorani, Zazaki (or Dimlki) and Hewrami (or Gorani) (see: Kreyenbroek 2000). Furthermore, the Kurds are believers of various religions: Sunni and Alevi Islam, Yezidim and Ahl al Haqq (see: Kreyenbroek 2000). The majority of Kurds in Turkey speak Kurmanci and are adherents of Sunni Islam, but in the country there are also Kurds who speak Zazaki and are Alevis.

Since the 2000s, Istanbul has been called the 'biggest Kurdish city' as it has been a place of intensive migration connected with economic deprivation and the prevalence of an environment of insecurity in mainly Kurdish inhabited South-Eastern Turkey (see: TimeTurk 2010). Moreover, it is an important city for Kurdish culture, as the first Kurdish political and cultural organizations were formed here at the beginning of 20th century (see: Alakom 1998). The total population of Istanbul exceeds 14 million. It is a commercial centre as it hosts headquarters and central offices of national and international corporations, but it is also characterized by visible economic inequalities (see: Karpat 2004; Ciplak 2012). Migration waves in the Republic of Turkey can be divided into three. The first was stimulated by the country's industrialization of the 1960s and 1970s. The second took place in the 1980s and 1990s. In contrast to the first wave, this was mainly driven by expulsion due to military conflict between the Marxist-Leninist Kurdistan Workers' Party (Kurdish abbreviation – PKK) and the government of the Republic (see: Çelik 2005). During the 1990s, several villages in South-Eastern Turkey (Northern Kurdistan) were razed by the Turkish army and the PKK (see: Jongerden 2007: 79–81).Therefore, many Kurds were forced to leave their regions and move within the country. Since the government of Turkey suspended the policy of expulsion in the South-East at the beginning of the 21st century, one can define the third wave of migration as relatively more voluntary – yet, migration rates are still increasing (see: Kaczorowski 2014). By 2011, immigration to western and south-western provinces increased: 84% of Istanbul residents were migrants, and 39% of Turkish citizens were internal migrants. This proportion was three times as high as that in 1950 (12%) (Akaraca and Tansel 2014).

BRIEF HISTORY OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TURKISH STATE AND THE KURDS

Contemporary Kurdish activists and scholars, while describing the situation of Kurds in Turkey, highlight the contrast between the nationalistic Turkish Republic and the multi-ethnic pluralistic Ottoman Empire when lands inhabited by the Kurds had benefited from quasi-autonomy under the rule of princes – *mirs*. Relations between these principalities and the state have been compared to vassal obligations in medieval Europe (see: Marescot 2007: 57, Bocheńska 2011: 96–98).

Although some Kurdish groups initially supported Atatürk's political movement and many of them even fought between 1919 and 1923 in the Turkish War of Independence (in Turkish: *Kurtuluş savaşı*), the Turkish Republic was proclaimed as a nation-state with ethnically-homogenous citizens. Gradually, it began to be evident that not only were the Kurds supposed to integrate themselves to the dominant Turkish culture but eventually their

distinctive customs and traditions would be denied when authorities assigned them the identity of the 'mountain Turks' (see: Özcan 2006: 69–71). Kurdish attempts to gain autonomy and independence resulted in various uprisings that were bloodily suppressed. Most notable were Sheikh Said's uprising (1925), the Ararat rebellion (1925) and the Dersim rebellion (1937–1938) (see: Bruinessen 1994). The relative opening of the Turkish political sphere in the 1960s led to the involvement of many Kurdish activists in the leftist Workers' Party of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*) (see: Özcan 2006: 41; Romano 2006: 46–47).

Following the coup of 1980, the Kurdish left was monopolized by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) – a Marxist-Leninist organization which started an armed struggle with the Turkish state in 1984. After his capture in 1999, the PKK's leader – Abdullah Öcalan, inspired by an American philosopher Murray Bookchin, changed his policy and advocated for autonomy of the Kurdish people and the general democratization of the whole of Turkey. Since the 1990s, the Kurdish left has been represented on the political stage (also in Parliament and local posts) (see: Marescot 2007: 83).

The first decade of the 21st century was considered by many commentators as a time of democratization in Turkey. During those years, the situation of Kurds in Turkey seemed to be changing radically, owing to sweeping reforms undertaken by the ruling Justice and Development Party (Turkish abbreviation AKP). After gaining power in 2002, the party announced accession to European Union (EU) as its primary goal (see: Balci 2013). Some reforms were also made with the intention of increasing gender and ethnic equality. Reforms allowed for broadcasts in the Kurdish language and in 2009 *TRT* 6 – the first public TV channel in the Kurdish language was formed. In late 2012 (then prime minister) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced the Resolution Process aimed at ending the military struggle with the outlawed PKK through peaceful dialogue and reforms. In 2015, both Turkish and Kurdish opinions had high hopes on the results of June elections (in which for the first time – a pro-Kurdish party HDP passed the 10% threshold). These hopes, however, turned to dust in late July when the government announced Turkey's war on terror, officially aimed against both ISIS and the PKK, but with a significant focus on bombing and arresting people associated with the Kurdish left.

CULTURAL PRACTICES AS A WAY OF MAINTAINING IDENTITY – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Construction of the cultural identity of migrants and receiving groups is interconnected with transmission of cultural patterns. It usually involves partial maintenance of heritage culture and adapting to some norms and values of the host society. Since Frederik Barth's (1969) famous text, the social sciences have focused on the analysis of boundaries between ethnic and – more generally – social groups. Contemporary approaches to studying ethnic and cultural identity often treat it as affected by the interests of groups and the possibilities to address these interests. It is pointed out that this process is not fixed, as it depends on social context and on which strategies are perceived by the group as effective in a given situation. Scholars such as Stuart Hall (1996) and Rogers Brubaker (2004) analyze ethnicity as a discursive categorization that can be invoked based on the aims and structural limitations.

Antonina Kłoskowska (2001, [1996]) stressed the significance of studying individual ways of the usage of elements of the cultural syntagma (understood as national cultural structure). The dominant factor shaping this usage is, for her, the process of culturalization.[3] The fundamental role during this process is attributed to peer groups and influential people who act as gate-keepers of contact with culture. They stimulate the individual's contact with the cultural content (such as beliefs, ideologies, art) and, as a result, these encounters shape one's cultural identity (see: Kłoskowska 1996: 109). Applying these suggestions to the topic of cultural transmission, I would argue that it is dependent on practices which may have individual character, but which are influenced by certain collective social actors (e.g. political and cultural elites). Culturalization of Kurds in Turkey, and specifically those migrating internally, can be treated as having particular structural limitations due to the long-lasting ban on the Kurdish language and the nationalistic ideology of the state. Transmission of cultural norms in regards to migration can also be analyzed as a vital part of acculturation processes. In the 1970s, a psychological approach began to dominate studies on acculturation, owing to the development of the Acculturation Model by John W. Berry and his associates (see: Berry, Kim, Power, Young and Bujaki 1989). The model proposed to study the acculturation attitudes connected with preservation of identity and relations with the host society, modifications of practices and living conditions, along with emotional and psychological difficulties associated with these phenomena. Subsequent studies on acculturation elaborated on Berry's model and expanded it in order to include additional factors and dimensions. The Relative Acculturation Extended Model (RAEM) developed by Marisol Navas and her associates is one such recent example of new approaches to acculturation. These scholars (2005) included the following factors in their analysis: the acculturation attitudes of both host and migrant groups, psychosocial variables influencing them and additional behaviour indicators (such as participation in organizations, linguistic practices, use of media). Inspired by Javier Leunda (1997), RAEM initiators proposed the consideration of seven domains: *politics and government* (understood broadly as power relations), *work* (understood as more material aspects of labour such as tools, conditions and schedules), *economic* (concerning exchange transactions, consumer habits and ways of financial management), *family relations* (connected with marital customs, kinship relations and parenthood), *social relations* (involving contacts with people outside of the family, most notably friends), *ways of thinking* (including principles and values) and *religious beliefs and customs* (see: Navas et al. 2005: 26–29).

The RAEM addresses the discrepancies in expectations and real possibilities of maintaining identity and acculturation, while taking into consideration different strategies and elements of cultural identity that can be fulfilled in different social domains. Thus, acculturation as cultural identity is treated as socially constructed, selective and relative. Analyzing various social contexts (see e.g.: Navas et al. 2007; Leunda 1996), the RAEM scholars noted that discontent between migrant and host groups will be easier to resolve if they concern concrete rather than symbolic domains. The RAEM was designed for quantitative research using psychological scales (see: Navas et al. 2005: 29–30), but it can also be treated as a general

[3] Culturalization is understood by Kłoskowska as a process resembling socialization, but with an emphasis on the development of the cultural identity in the course of the individual's life.

theoretical framework when analyzing the phenomena of acculturation.[4] Such a framework allows cultural transmission to be addressed in different social domains and the inclusion of the reception of migrants by the host culture.

The results presented here mainly concern cultural transmission from Turkey's Southeast (Northern Kurdistan) to Istanbul. Preservation and reconstruction of cultural identity through culturalization – studied among young Kurdish migrants in Istanbul – is also an important part of horizontal (intergenerational within a family), vertical (between peers – in this case Kurds in Istanbul of different geographical origin) and oblique cultural transmission (from older generations outside the family) (see: Berry et al. 2002: 20). While cultural transmission is in some conceptualizations distinguished from acculturation as a perpetuation of customs, values and traditions within a primary culture (Berry et al. 2002: 20–21), it can be argued that the process is always connected with reference (and contact) to other cultures. Ways of preserving Kurdish identity, therefore, form an important part of both acculturation to Istanbulian society (consisting in the main part of migrants) and cultural transmission of Kurdishness. Moreover, these ways (including their institutional and private aspects) are strongly affected by their social and political surroundings, including the dominant Turkish culture. In this understanding, transmission of cultural patterns is connected with both acculturation and cultural transmission, and culturalization serves as an important dimension. As cultural patterns, following Ruth Benedict (1934), can be conceptualized as configurations of norms and customs, their transmission concerns: societies of origin, migrants and their ways of construction of cultural identity and a heterogeneous host society. Our findings mostly depict that aspect connected with transmission between societies of origin, young migrants and Kurds from different parts of Turkey's Southeast living in Istanbul who are affected by the specific socio-political environment of the city. They are, however, supplemented by remarks on transmission between Kurdish and Turkish communities in Istanbul.

WAYS OF CULTURAL PRESERVATION AND TRANSMISSION EMERGING FROM FIELD RESEARCH

The following analysis of the transmission of cultural norms among young Kurdish migrants in Istanbul is based on partial results of 50 in-depth interviews and participatory observations. The research was conducted during two two-month field trips to Istanbul during the summers of 2014 and 2015. The sampling was based on a snow ball approach and the availability of the respondents. The interviewees were migrants living in different districts of the city, differing in their level of political activism. Some were college graduates, others – students and factory workers. Most can be described as middle class. Among the graduates, there were young lawyers, high school teachers, physiotherapists, pharmacists

[4] In the Polish academic context the RAEM was used, for instance, by Halina Grzymała-Moszczyńska (2015) in her study of Syrian refugees in Istanbul.

and entrepreneurs. A smaller group (that accounts approximately for 20% of the sample) belonged to the working class (e.g., bakers, waiters or workers at a textile factory)[5]. Almost all were Sunni Muslim (except for two Alevi women) and Kurmanci dialect speakers (except for three speakers of Zazaki). Their ages ranged between 19 and 38. Most of the respondents were male: only 7 were women. Respondents' political views were mostly leftist as they often explicitly declared themselves as pro-Kurdish *Peoples Democracy Party* voters (*HDP* in Turkish). One respondent described himself as a former AKP voter. The interviews focused on three broad topics: history of migration, social construction of Kurdish identity and attitudes toward Istanbul. The research was conducted in Turkish. Additional interviews were held with representatives of Kurdish cultural organizations and a group interview was held with conservative young Kurdish women living in Istanbul.

Kurdish culture can be preserved by migrants through participation in events and activities organized by Kurdish educational, political and artistic organizations. Istanbul, being the economic and cultural capital of Turkey, offers such possibilities. Almost all of the Kurdish publishing houses in Turkey have their headquarters or distribution centres in the city (e.g., the biggest publishing houses *Avesta* and *Vate Initiative*, which was the first to publish literature in the Zazaki language). Moreover, many cultural institutions, such as the Mesopotamia Cultural Centre (in Turkish *Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi*, Kurdish: *Navenda Çanda Mezopotamya,* Turkish abbreviation MKM) were first established in the city and only later opened branches in the South-East. MKM was the first, paving the way for others, as it was officially formed in 1991, after the law forbidding publication in Kurdish was rescinded. Aiming at cultivating Kurdish traditional culture and spreading leftist political ideas, the institution offers courses on: Kurdish music, dance, theatre, film making and language. Additionally, the MKM organizes concerts and promotes musical and artistic oeuvres. Some events are also organized in order to collect financial aid for Kurdish groups in need. In the summer of 2015, MKM organized first public week-long festival of Kurdish culture with two to three events daily.

Kurds living in Istanbul, including the young migrants from the South-East, can attend classes and events prepared by MKM. Its significance also lies in its prestige, as it was the cultural organization most often cited by my respondents, also those who did not participate in any of its initiatives. By offering relatively low cost (as for non-governmental institution) cultural education, MKM also promotes Kurdish cultural heritage among less economically privileged groups. This can be important, especially in the new districts of Istanbul inhabited mainly by working-class migrants where independent but similar institutions have been formed (such as *Arzela Cultural Centre* in Şirinevler).

The most frequently mentioned event attended by respondents was *Newroz* – a spring festival celebrated as the beginning of the new year by Kurds on every 21st of March. It commemorates the demise of the mythical tyrant Zuhak who was overthrown by a Kurdish blacksmith – Kawa (a version of a myth similar to the one also present in the Persian epic *Shahnameh*). The Kurdish celebration involves burning bonfires and performing traditional dances and songs.

[5] The occupations of the cited respondents are given after the quotes from them.

> I participate in Newroz, every year I participate, this year I went, it was very great, apart from that they celebrate Newroz in the university, apart from school for example in certain places in Istanbul, in certain districts, during the week we celebrate newroz in different places. (Male, around 22 years old, from Şırnak Province, college student)

Another institution popular among my respondents was the Kurdish Institute of Istanbul (in Kurdish: Enstîtuya Kurdî Ya Stenbolê, in Turkish: İstanbul Kürt Enstitüsü) which was also established in the 1990s and aims mainly at teaching the Kurdish languages and promoting Kurdish literature. It is a non-governmental foundation, as legal obstacles prevented it from being an academic association. The core of activities organized by the Institute are language courses in three dialects: Kurmanci, Zazaki and Sorani. Apart from this, the organization works on translations and publications. It publishes textbooks for teaching Kurdish, *Zend* – a journal devoted to the Kurdish language and its heritage, and re-releases novels and poems of traditional Kurdish authors such as Feqiyê Teyran. The institution was often referred to by the respondents as providing an opportunity to learn grammar and standards of writing in Kurdish. They often pointed out that, although they knew the spoken language from their places of origin and could speak in Kurdish with their families, they had not learned the literary language until after migration to Istanbul:

> I wanted to write in Kurdish et cetera... so to a certain degree it was up to me, I managed, but there is a thing... so in the city where I was born there was no such thing as an organization in which you could learn Kurdish... of course the family speaks Kurdish, knows it, but has a problem with things like writing in it, so I came... and for example there is the Institute in Istanbul or other organizations, by going there you learn Kurdish. (Male, 24 years old, from Muş Province, college student and journalist)

This phenomenon can be considered within the framework of Kłoskowska's theory as a secondary culturalization, as it occurs outside of peer groups and in the place of migration.

The Ismail Beşikçi Foundation (in Turkish: *İsmail Beşikçi Vakfı*) is also an important Kurdish cultural organization formed in Istanbul. It was established by friends (intellectuals and activists associated with the Kurdish left, operating before 1984) of Ismail Beşikçi – a sociologist who, as early as the 1960s, was the first Turkish scholar to publicly raise the problem of Kurds. The foundation aims at the preservation and promotion of works by Beşikçi, along with fostering new initiatives in Kurdish Studies. It runs a library open to the public in its headquarters in the centre of the city, and hosts a radio channel aimed to young people called *Yaşam* (which in Turkish stands for 'Life'). It organizes seminars on Kurdish culture and publishes works on the topic.

Respondents also pointed to organizations not concentrating on culture as providing possibilities to maintain the Kurdish identity, such as the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) and The Human Rights Association (in Turkish: *İnsan Hakları Derneği*, abbreviation: İHD). The former gives political representation to the Kurdish left and supports other Kurdish organizations, while the latter, formed in the late 1980s in Ankara, was the first legal institution demanding respect for human rights and freedoms for political prisoners. Throughout the years, this organization gave legal help to Kurds arrested on political-related charges or due

to the use of the then outlawed Kurdish language. Many Kurdish and pro-Kurdish lawyers have worked there, such as Osman Baydemir, who later became mayor of Diyarbakir and a prominent HDP politician. The party was the organization most cited Kurdish by respondents and its co-leader Selahattin Demirtaş was, along with Abdullah Öcalan, mentioned most frequently by respondents as a Kurdish person who they support. Positive attitudes toward the HDP leader can be illustrated with a quote from a respondent who migrated from Silopi:

> I have respect for our politicians, I love all of them, but I love Selahattin Demirtaş the most, he is a very genuine man, who knows how to speak in a proper way... always telling the truth... doing whatever is needed for his nation... this is how he is. So among politicians I love him most – Selahattin Demirtaş. (Male, 22 years old, from Silopi district, waiter)

Young Kurdish migrants studying in Istanbul can also participate in Kurdish leftist student organizations focusing on political activism, such as the Federation of Democratic Student Organizations (in Turkish: *Demokratik Öğrenci Dernekleri Federasyonu*, abbreviation: DÖDEF). Another non-cultural organization, but popular among respondents, was The Migrants' Association for Social Cooperation and Culture (in Turkish: *Göç Derneği – Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Kültür Derneği,* abbreviation: *Göç-Der*). It was formed in Istanbul in 1997 in order to help Kurds expelled from the South-East. Currently, it aims at providing support for internally displaced people, Kurdish refugees and spreading knowledge about Kurdish forced migration in Turkey through conducting research and publication of reports on the topic.

Apart from cultural, educational and political organizations, young Kurdish migrants preserve their cultural identity through everyday practices in both private and public spheres. They are recipients of and contributors to media and journals, including those focused on Kurdish culture and society. Among leftist Kurds in Istanbul and including participants of my study, popular are leftist newspapers such as (pro-PKK oriented) *Özgür Gündem*, *Evrensel*, *Bir Gün*, and (more central-leftist) *Radikal*. While the first as a Kurdish newspaper is widely available in Istanbul, the other three represent Turkish leftist media which regularly publish topics connected with the Kurdish question. Some respondents cited the leftist television channel *IMC*[6].

Cafés and teahouses play an important social role in Turkey. Some demonstrate their ties to the Kurdish culture in their Kurdish names and decorations. The decorations, apart from including yellow, red and green – the colours of the Kurdish flag, often use Zoroastrian and Yezidi themes. Stressing ties with the Zoroastrianism was a strategy of Kurdish elites at the beginning of 20th century in order to point to the Indo-European origin of the Kurds and highlight their difference from the Turks who dominated the country (see: Bruinessen 1995, 1997). Portraits of Kurdish artists, writers and politicians hang on walls. Some of these cafés organize concerts of Kurdish music and sell Kurdish publications. For a long time, the most distinctive trait of such cafés was the serving of *kaçak çay* – 'smuggled tea' – as it was previously smuggled from Arab countries. This tea usually originates from Sri Lanka, as

[6] Enlisted media outlets are widely popular among leftists in Turkey, including followers of the Kurdish Movement which for years referred to leftist discourse (see: Güneş 2012). For information on the construction of the Kurds in Turkish press, see: Sezgin and Wall 2005.

opposed to Turkish tea which is cultivated in the Black Sea region. This tea has been treated as a symbol of Kurdish distinctiveness, but recently many cafés, also in touristic districts of Istanbul, with no connections with the Kurdish culture, have started to serve it. This phenomenon is an example of cultural transmission from migrant group to host society. One of my respondents said that some tea houses have Kurdish symbols in their interior decoration (e.g., a portrait of the musician Ahmet Kaya) only for marketing reasons and that they are not 'real' Kurdish places. Some of the tea and coffee houses in Istanbul which show some forms of connection with the Kurds (e.g., play Kurdish music) are popular not only among Kurds, but are widely regarded as some of the best places for meeting friends in the city centre. This way Kurdish culture also affects Turks and other ethnic groups living in Istanbul. Kurdish dances in public places have a similar effect as passersby of different ethnicities and political backgrounds often join the collective *halay* dances. Open-air concerts and festivals are visible signs of Kurdish culture and at the same time invitations to get to know it. Turkish leftists often engage in activities of Kurdish student and political organizations, this was visible in the summer of 2014 during protests in support of the defence of Kobane. A notable example of transmission of Kurdish culture was exhibited at that time by the youth of the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP) who on their banner used the slogan – 'long live the resistance of Kobane' in Kurmanci. This was the first time that anyone connected with the party underlining its roots in Atatürk's policy had used the Kurdish language.

Apart from drinking *kaçak çay*, another example of maintaining ethnic customs through cuisine, cited by another respondent from Şırnak, was eating cheese with herbs made according to a special recipe typical for his province of origin:

> I preserve Kurdish customs and traditions, yes, I can mention which customs, for example in our culture in the morning, herby cheese is made for the breakfast, I have personally brought the cheese from Şırnak, I prepare my breakfasts in the morning with the herby cheese. Here there is Turkish tea but I brought myself smuggled tea, smuggled tea gets to Şırnak from Iraq and I drink smuggled tea from Kurdistan, this is also Kurdish culture. I have şal û şepik. şal û şepik is a traditional Kurdish outfit, şalvar, şalvar they call it, I also have şalvar sometimes. I wear it when I have free time. (Male, 19 years old, from Şırnak Province, college student)

He also mentioned the traditional Kurdish loose brown outfit called in Kurdish *şal û şepik* and the loose trousers – *şalvar* that are part of it.

Many respondents also admitted to listening to Kurdish music and artists such as Şivan Perwer, Ciwan Haco and Ahmet Kaya. These singers address the harshness of life in Turkey and are connected with the Kurds (as Şivan Perwer and Ciwan Haco sing in Kurdish) and they were for many years outlawed in the country. Cassettes were illegally distributed and treated as symbols of Kurdish resistance toward Turkification.[7] A more traditional form of

[7] In this sense, Turkification is understood as symbolic and physical violence aimed at assimilation. However, this word (in Turkish *turkleşme*) is also currently used in a different sense with reference to Abdullah Öcallan's call for the democratization of the whole of Turkey. In that context, it depicts the efforts of Kurdish leftist organizations aimed at presenting Kurdish culture to other citizens of Turkey (e.g., through the opening of cultural institutions in the cities of Western Turkey which have relatively much smaller communities of Kurds than Istanbul or Turkey's Southeast.

Kurdish music is connected with the Kurdish bards – *dengbej* – spreading oral tradition by reciting and singing legends and poems. Although this occupation is currently very rare and its practitioners are mostly the elderly living in the South-East, owing to the spread of mass media records of their performance have been shared. Cultural institutions such as *Ismail Beşikçi Vakfı* and MKM offer lectures and courses devoted to the *dengbej* traditions and from time to time organize *dengbej* concerts. Kurdish traditional music is also practiced by young migrants in Istanbul in the form of performing folk dances, which is arguably the most widely visible manifestation of Kurdish culture as they are performed in public spaces (e.g., close to the ferry station serving commuters across the Bosphorus) and passersby are invited to join the often large circles of dancers accompanied by Kurdish music. Although Kurdish traditional dances are similar to others in Anatolia and the Middle East in general, they can be easily distinguished by the singers singing in Kurdish.

Intensive migration to western Turkey in the 1990s and an increase in voluntary migration since the beginning of 21st century has allowed the rise of social and cultural remittances between Istanbul and Turkey's South-East. Some of my respondents have stressed that they came to the city only to get education and they plan to return 'back home' and use their new knowledge in their region of origin. Migrants who had lived relatively longer in Istanbul also stated that their cities and towns of origin have changed since their migration, mostly for the better. One of the symptoms of such change could be the development of high quality higher education (provided e.g., by Artuklu University in Mardin and Dicle University in Diyarbakır). One of my respondents underlined the role of economic remittances: all the time he had been working in Istanbul he had been sending in Istanbul he sent money home. Owing to contacts with working class people from abroad (e.g., Afghans, Arabs) he was able to learn new languages. Economic remittances can be connected with social ones, as patterns and culture of entrepreneurship can be transmitted from the South-East to Istanbul and back again. An example of this process is a vendor selling clams in Hakkari for the first time. This type of street-food is very popular in Istanbul and other western Turkish cities, while it used to be relatively unknown in eastern Anatolia. A video prepared by one of the local televisions about the vendor is quite popular on the YouTube platform. As many Kurdish organizations were first formed in Istanbul, the experience gained while running these organizations in the city could be exploited by new branches opened in the South-East.

Looking at the transmission of Kurdish culture by young migrants from the perspective of the theoretical framework of the RAEM, it can be argued that the domain generating most discontent is politics. The lack of legal recognition of the Kurdish minority and nationalist politics are the most often cited obstacles to maintaining cultural identity. A woman from Bitlis said:

> Every race has good sides and bad sides. But especially as the state policy in relation to Kurdish identity... aims at removing my Kurdish identity, and moreover I am excluded from society, I cling to Kurdish culture. And because I cannot live according to my Kurdishness... being a Kurd is very important and very special. (Female, around 27 years old, from Bitlis Province, law intern and college student)

The state is seen by Kurds as an oppressor forbidding cultivation of culture, which stimulates resistance. The policy of the closure of Kurdish-medium primary schools in the South-East was most often cited as this type of practice by the state. Although these sentiments are mostly directed toward the Turkish state, my respondents also mentioned cases of negative attitudes of Turks toward the Kurdish language and prejudices linked to associating Kurds with terrorism. Interestingly, it is possible to be discriminated against or stigmatized as a terrorist based simply on one's Kurdish region of origin. Among others, such a case was also raised by one of the respondents of the focus group with conservative women, distancing themselves from the Kurdish left. From the perspective of Turkish society, the Kurds are often perceived as rebellious and not respecting state authority.

In hypotheses put forward by authors of the RAEM, the political domain is considered relatively less conflictive, which may result from the stress on transnational migration by RAEM scholars, as opposed to internal migration, as in the case of the Kurds, who often perceive the Turkish state governing their homelands as an oppressor. In an ideal situation, my respondents would see the Turkish state recognizing the specificity of Kurdish culture with all its practices, spreading egalitarianism among ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. The ideal order of the political domain, for most of my respondents, would also involve some kind of political autonomy for the South-East, perceived as Northern Kurdistan. This matter appears to be the most controversial within Turkish society, where the fear of a dismembering of the country has been ever-present since the treaty of Sèvres (1920).

The respondents were satisfied with educational and economic opportunities provided by Istanbul. They also liked the multiculturalism of the city: owing to their migration they were able to better get to know the members of other cultures and their perspectives. Respondents noted, however, that many Kurds are economically exploited in Istanbul, working long shifts in poor conditions and for low wages. This topic was mentioned among others by a respondent from Mardin: *In other Kurdish districts, if you live with Kurds there* [...] *they are poor... they are oppressed...* (Male, from Mardin Province, around 32 years old, business manager). Such a situation is also connected with Kurdish forced migration, as people expelled from the South-East until 2004 lacked social services and public assistance, were often treated by the state as criminals and had to cling to any jobs they could find (see: Çelik 2012; Saraçoğlu 2011: 79–105). In the domain of social interactions, social life in Istanbul is valued by the respondents, as they pointed to cultural opportunities provided by the city and its more socially liberal atmosphere. This can be illustrated by the remark of a respondent from Van:

> In our place, in the evening, everybody altogether stops for the call for prayers – ezan – and life ends. Here it's not like this, in Taksim, in Kadıköy, at night at any hour you can sit with your friends. (Male, around 26 years old, from Van Province, college student)

In reference to cultural norms and values connected to the domain of family, respondents positively valued the Kurdish tradition of having many children. Some of them have, however, highlighted some Kurdish traditions which they perceive as negative and anachronous, such as arranged marriages:

> Now it is like... traditional culturalism and things like that have their positive dispositions but there are also negative, perhaps the anachronous, the ones which when you practice you feel that they are anachronous et cetera [...] For example bride-price, a grandfather and grandmother for example want a girl and a boy to marry... you come, father tells you how much money you have to give as the bride-price and things like that, but in recent years with freedom movement's appreciation for freedom of women and the value put on women's organizations, this has been undermined and for the last two years completely forbidden. (Male, around 28 years old, from Malazgirt District, college student)

Several times, the respondents have admitted similarities between Turkish and Kurdish culture, customs and religiosity, but have also seen a problem in the imposition of Turkish identity and culture on all citizens in the country. Such a stance can be illustrated by a quote from a representative of the Mesopotamia Cultural Centre (MKM):

> Our Kurdish culture is not worse or better than any other culture. As I have said, none of the cultures... for example of some tribe on the border of Africa is worse or better than any other. Because from the perspective of a person, no one is worse or better than another. And this is important for our culture. If you would for example go to some Turkish organization, you would hear how they try to say that you cannot live outside of the Turkish culture, you cannot live like that, you have to adapt [...]. (Male, around 35 years old, from Tatvan District, musician)

CONCLUSION

Transmission of cultural patterns between Turkey's South-East (often called Northern Kurdistan by Kurds) and Istanbul can be described as specific, due to its history of difficult relations between the Turkish state and the Kurds. Structural limitations have been imposed on Kurdish identity as the result of the nationalistic ideology of the state. The resistance toward treating Kurdish culture as a peripheral version of the Turkish one arguably had a major impact on young Kurdish migrants' attitudes toward maintaining their cultural identity. Nevertheless, they make use of various ways and social domains in order to construct their Kurdish identity and participate in cultural exchange with the host society. Istanbul, as a centre of migration, has a special significance for Kurds, as it hosts the largest community in the world and was the place of origin of the first modern Kurdish organizations. My respondents have pointed to the city's advantages in providing economic, cultural and educational possibilities as well as granting a more open atmosphere for social life. Owing to the provision of education in the standardized Kurdish literary language, migrants can experience secondary culturalization in Istanbul. Interviewed migrants, however, noted that the city is also a place of economic exploitation of many Kurds, especially those who were forced to migrate during the military conflict between the state and the PKK in the 1980s and 1990s. Taking the Relative Acculturation Extended Model as a theoretical framework, it is possible to assess the political domain as the one causing most intensive discontent between the Kurds and the Turks. While the former perceive cultivating their culture as forbidden, the latter fear that greater freedoms for Kurds will result in division of the country. Regarding the domain of

family, respondents pointed to the Kurdish tradition of having many children, but some also mentioned some traditions which they perceive as anachronous and do not want to continue, such as arranged marriages.

Patterns of culture established in Turkey's Southeast (often called Northern Kurdistan by Kurds) are being transferred in both directions between this region and western Turkey (in this case its biggest metropolis Istanbul), owing to the organizational and educational opportunities provided by the city. Based on respondent's narratives, it can be argued that this transmission has helped in the preservation of Kurdish culture in the country (especially in times when any form of association in reference to Kurdish culture was forbidden in the Southeast). Study participants have also stressed the opportunities in learning about other cultures after migration which has resulted in their being more open to other groups. Contact with other cultural and ethnic groups has also affected Kurdish organizations which have started to highlight multiculturalism as a value, point to the heterogeneity of Kurdish culture and prepare events and initiatives aimed at presenting Kurdish culture to other groups (e.g. Turks in the West) by organizing cultural festivals or opening branches in cities with Turkish majorities. Experiences in leading associations and cultural exchange are also transferred back to Turkey's Southeast, as exemplified by the opening of many Kurdish organizations first in Istanbul and then in mainly Kurdish inhabited regions. Many Kurdish publishing houses, journals and media outlets print their oeuvres (including textbooks and dictionaries) in Istanbul and distribute them in the country from the city. It can, therefore, be argued that Kurdish culture is also transmitted from Istanbul to the other parts of Turkey (including the Southeast).

Owing to cultural transmission, manifestations of Kurdish culture can be seen in public life of Istanbul. This refers not only to events and political activities organized by Kurds, but also to every-day life, as in the example of Turkish cafes offering *kaçak çay* and Turkish passersby participating in performances of Kurdish folk dances. Members of host societies or people of other cultures can engage in a wide range of activities provided by Kurdish organizations and cafés. In part as a result of such cultural transmission, Kurdish culture has become publicly visible and cannot easily be decried by nationalists as non-existent and derived only from Turkish heritage.

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