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Title: SHEDDING AN ETHNIC IDENTITY IN DIASPORA: DE-TURKIFICATION AND

THE TRANSNATIONAL DISCURSIVE STRUGGLES OF THE KURDISH DIASPORA

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Abstract: This article analyses how Kurdish diaspora (from Turkey) engage in de-Turkification, that is correcting, interrupting and shedding the intense Turkification and assimilation which Kurds have been recipients of in Turkey. As 'everyday critical discourse analysts' Kurdish mobilized actors identify, challenge and ideologically unpack the Turkishness manifest in their (Kurdish) interlocutors' discourses via three means: inclusion, exclusion and repositioning. The article also identifies that self-definition amongst Kurds in London is shifting as previously self-identified 'Turkish economic migrants' over time become 'Kurdish diaspora'. Rather than examining the often-discussed belonging ties of diasporas, it traces the critical interruptions and corrections Kurdish actors undertake in order to de-Turkify. The focus is on how an identity is being shed, rather than gained. In so doing, the article contributes to an understanding of the process of removal of asymmetric discourses

rather than attempting to demonstrate their production or reproduction which have tended to dominate the critical discourse analysis literature.

Keywords: Diaspora, Ethno-political, Kurds, Turkey, Turkification

Word count: 8.174 (including title, abstract, keywords, references, acknowledgements and footnotes)

This article examines the discursive battles of Kurdish[1] diasporic actors in London. In particular, it traces how Kurdish diasporic leaders engage with other Kurdish actors and propagate what I call 'de-Turkification', that is undoing the intense Turkification to which Kurds have been subjected in Turkey. As Tölölyan argues, contemporary diasporas are 'exemplary communities of the transnational moment' (1991, p. 5). Much work on diasporic groups with an ethno-political claim focuses on diasporic groups' transnational activities, examining their battles with the home and their engagement with the host country. Their ethno-political cause, shaped and strengthened through transnational activities, has been at the forefront of transnationalism research. For example, work on Kurdish diaspora has examined and contributed to a better understanding of Kurdish diaspora's mobilization (e.g. Ayata, 2011; Başer, 2015; Demir, 2012; Eccarius-Kelly, 2002; Eliassi, 2013; Erel, 2013; Griffiths, 2002; Lyon and Ucarer, 2001; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2001; Wahlbeck, 1999). Works on other diasporas with an ethno-political claim have followed a similar trend. For example, Tamil diaspora's long-distance nationalism and struggles have been studied and documented (Fuglerud, 1999). Skrbiš (1999) has highlighted the way in which homeland developments have strengthened identity and mobilization of Croatians in Australia. Others such as

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[1] In this article when I refer to 'Kurds', I mean Kurds from Turkey.

Mavroudi (2008) have examined the empowerment, inclusion and informal diasporic political spaces which Palestinians create.

Works on diasporic groups have also examined the discursive elements of their battling, including how they *gain* an identity, the 'ethnic entrepreneurial labouring' in which they engage (Demir, 2015) as well as their '*becoming',* for example, the way in which Dersimi musicians Metin and Kemal Kahraman assume marginal identities 'through performing and narrating multiple selves' and thus challenging singular identities (Neyzi, 2002, p. 91). However, transnationalism literature has, on the whole, omitted an examination of the way in which diasporic groups engage in discursive battles in order to *shed* ethno-political identities brought from home. This article aims to fill this lacuna in the literature by examining what I call the de-Turkification struggles of diasporic Kurds in London. I aim to reveal how, in order to salvage and reconstruct Kurdishness in diaspora, Kurdish diasporic brokers have engaged in 'correcting' the intense Turkification and assimilation which Kurds have been recipients of in Turkey. I aim to go beyond a mere analysis of how Kurdish transnational actors make claims for Kurdish rights and express their desire for the recognition of their ethnic identity, and instead keep attention and focus on how they propagate de-Turkification at the discursive level. As such the main battle I summarized below is more about unlearning Turkification rather than learning Kurdishness per se. In so doing, the article aims to contribute to the burgeoning field of Kurdish studies as well as the literature on discursive ethno-political battling which diasporas undertake.

Turkification has been a central aspect of the nation-building process in Turkey. As such it has involved various strategies of inclusion and exclusion. As has been discussed elsewhere (e.g. Aktar, 2010; Bozarslan, 2007; Cagaptay, 2006; Demir, 2014; Deringil, 2003; Houston, 2009; White, 1999; Yeğen, 2007; Zeydanlıoğlu, 2008), central to Turkification was the creation and incitement of a dominant, dignified and noble Turkish identity and state out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. The latter's fall was associated with its heterogeneous

ethnic and religious character. The Turkish nation-building project thus aspired not only for westernization, but also for centralization, secularism and homogenization, all serving its desire to become a cohesive, pure, strong, 'civilized' modern European state. In this process, many non-Turks were seen as 'Turks to become' and thus were subjected to immense assimilation, that is, Turkification efforts. Kurdish identity and others (Oran, 2004) suffered as a result of these efforts. Those who challenged this homogeneity were silenced or brutally erased.

In this process, the discourse of backwardness of certain groups, for example those from the east (i.e. the Kurds), and the westerness and greatness of Turks became dominant and was reproduced by state propaganda, elites, school books, media and so forth. As a result of this hierarchical ordering of the two dominant ethnicities in Turkey, Turkishness emerged as the dignified, noble and desirable *efendi* (master) identity and Kurdishness was either erased or was replaced by, and delegated to, easternness and backwardness. This legacy of nation building in Turkey, its strategies of inclusion and exclusion, and especially Turkification was aimed at the Kurds of Turkey and systematic attempts were made to 'Turkify' them. Othering and stigmatization occurred through the assumed demand for Kurds to adjust and buy into Turkishness. The Turkification of Kurds as part and parcel of state policy was not unique to the earlier history of the republic. It has persisted and was reinforced via the military coups in Turkey. It included an orientalist and belittling depiction of Kurds, the trivialization of recent and historical Kurdish suffering, and the erasure of massacres that Kurds have suffered from historical accounts. In 2009 limited gestures in the form of 'democratic reforms'[2] aimed to ease some of the restrictions on freedom of expression and on the cultural and linguistic rights of non-Turks in Turkey. However such reforms have not sought to challenge or alter the hierarchic ordering of ethnicities, namely the *efendi* positioning of Turkishness vis-à-vis its others (e.g. Kurdishness). Kurdish ethnic identity

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[2] See for example, Bayir, 2013; Çiçek, 2011 and Zeydanlıoğlu, 2012 for a discussion of the inadequacies of the reforms.

continues to be persecuted and denied.[3] There is also an intensification of anti-Kurdish sentiment expressed in the media and amongst the wider public (e.g. Saraçoğlu, 2010). The de-Turkification strategies of the Kurdish transnational actors I discuss below should therefore be understood in the context of this historical erasure Kurds have suffered, and continue to suffer, in Turkey.

Kurdish Diaspora in London

As has been identified before (Griffiths, 2000), many Kurds (and Turks) from Turkey who came to Britain were left-leaning and had left Turkey leading up to or soon after the coup of 1980. Even though their numbers were small, together with Turks and Cypriot Turks, they set up leftist organizations and community associations in North London. Other Kurds, as I discuss below, had come for what is referred to as 'economic opportunities', albeit having suffered at the intersections of economic, ethnic and sectarian exclusions. It was the arrival of ethno-politically mobilized Kurds during the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s which induced many Kurds in London to sympathize with the Kurdish struggle in Turkey and also with the Kurdish guerrilla movement. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was set up in 1984 and started a guerrilla campaign, fighting for a separate homeland for Kurds. In the 1980s and 1990s, there was an intense conflict between the Turkish army and the PKK, mostly fought in Kurdish provinces. An estimated 40,000 lost their lives. Many were also displaced. About two million Kurds suspected of harbouring PKK guerrillas were driven out of their villages. Most ended up in overcrowded urban shantytowns, in desperate conditions with poor social or economic prospects.[4] A smaller proportion, together with other persecuted and politically active Kurds, fled to Europe. Kurds of Turkey are one of the best organized

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[3] The ban on uttering the word 'Kurd' and 'Kurdish' has been removed and the prohibition on speaking Kurdish in daily life was abolished in 1991. However, many other restrictions, including the right to receive education in the mother tongue (Kurdish) in mainstream schooling, still remain. See Kurban, 2013 for an overview.

[4] Moreover, between 1987 and 2002 Kurdish populated areas were governed under the Regional State of Emergency Government (OHAL in Turkish). Serious human rights abuses, disappearances and extrajudicial killings took place during this period. For various reports of this conflict and its consequences see Human Rights Watch Reports at https://www.hrw.org/europe/central-asia/turkey.

diasporas in Europe, and hold a 'hegemonic presence' in amongst the Kurdish diaspora in Europe (Hassanpour & Mojab, 2004, p. 222).

Such developments, and the violence and the fetishism of the military solution to Kurdish demands in the 1980s and 1990s in Turkey had two interrelated consequences for Kurds in London. Newly arrived, mobilized and ethno-politically assertive Kurds in London started raising the awareness and ethnic consciousness of other Kurds. Secondly, closer links between diasporic Kurds and the Kurdish mobilization in Turkey[5] were established. The Kurdish Community Centre (KCC) in Haringey, and the Kurdish and Turkish Community Centre (Halkevi) for example came to have the Kurdish struggle as their central focus. Transnational links and political alliances between London-based Kurds and Kurds in Turkey were strengthened.

Consequently ethnic self-definition amongst many Kurds in London has been shifting since the 1990s. As I touched upon earlier on, not all Kurds who migrated to the UK have had the Kurdish struggle as central to their journey of migration. Many Kurds came for economic opportunities while others migrated before the Kurdish struggle in Turkey became prominent. Others had moved to the UK as part of 'chain' migration, often from the same village. Many came from 'kırsal alan', that is from rural areas (of Maraş, Elbistan, Malatya and Sivas). In fact, in London, there are many community associations which are based around rural and village-based identities. In addition, for some of the Kurds, their religious belief, namely their Aleviness, 'trumped' their Kurdish identity (e.g. Çelik, 2003 and 2005; van Bruinessen, 1996). In other words, even though many would have suffered exclusions in Turkey as a result of the ways in which ethnic, sectarian and economic divisions reinforce each other, a direct involvement with the Kurdish struggle in Turkey has not always been at the centre of the priorities of Kurdish Londoners. The arrival of mobilized Kurds in London transnationalized the struggle and instigated many Kurds in London to follow the anti-assimilationist struggles

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[5] See Gunes 2012 for a discussion and analysis of the discourse of Kurdish mobilization in Turkey.

of the Kurdish movement in Turkey, and especially the values and the ideals of the pro-Kurdish movement and parties in Turkey (e.g. the People's Democratic Party).[6] What is relevant for my argument is that Kurdish brokers have been continuing their struggle, raising the awareness and ethnic consciousness of Kurds in Britain, and thus furthering transnational links between the home struggles and the Kurds in London. Their diasporic struggles were not only with the home and the host nation, but also, and perhaps more importantly, with other fellow 'less political' Kurds in London. Self-definition amongst many Kurds in London has been shifting since the 1990s as previously self-identified 'Turkish economic migrants' over time become self-identified 'Kurdish diaspora'.[7] However, as my interviewees stated, there is no question that the ensuing violence and the uncompromising attitude towards Kurdish rights in Turkey were the primary drivers for this battle and shift. Homeland developments strengthened Kurdishness in diaspora, similar to the way in which Skrbiš (1999) describes with regard to Croatians in Australia. Kurdish diasporic brokers have been engaging the Kurdish community to join their diasporic battle with Turkey. One of the most important aspects of this battling which Kurdish brokers engage in is in fact de-Turkification, that is undoing the intense Turkification to which Kurds have been subjected in Turkey.

Methods

Critical discourse analysts focus on 'how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies, and the constructive effects discourse has upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge' (Fairclough, 1992, p. 12). Investigating critically how discourses 'encode prejudice', and how inequality is 'expressed, constituted, legitimized and so on by language use' (Wodak, 2001, p. 2) have been concerns at the forefront of critical discourse

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[6] Support for the People's Democratic Party (HDP) in London is impressive, as exemplified in elections. Whilst this pro-Kurdish party struggled hard not to fall below the 10% overall threshold in Turkey, securing 13% (in June 2015) and 11% (in November 2015), HDP won 60% (in June 2015) and 55% (in November 2015) of the votes of citizens of Turkey in London. The support for HDP in London is significant.
[7] Leggewie (1996) argued that in Germany many self-identified 'Turks' became self-identified 'Kurds', not self-identified 'Germans'.

analysts. For example, Teun van Dijk (2008) and Ruth Wodak (2014) have carried out influential research on the ideology and discourse of racism, nationalism, prejudice and discrimination. Fairclough (1992) has shown the social importance of language and how changes in language are related to wider social and cultural changes. Discourses of institutions and the media have therefore heavily featured in the work of critical discourse analysts. Increasing awareness of 'specific cases of injustice, prejudice, and misuse of power' then has been one of the main objectives of much of critical discourse analysis (Bloor & Bloor, 2007, p. 12).

As a consequence, however, debate in the field of critical discourse analysis has tended to focus on sexist, racist, nationalist and non-democratic forms of language and language use. Attention has been given to the study of discourses which reveal or indicate asymmetries, for example asymmetries between women and men. As Fairclough (1992, p. 201) says, '[e]ven though democratization has been a real force', 'much of the debate continues around cases where inequality and bigotry are still flagrant'. This article takes a step further, by shifting the discussion to the work of brokers and activists who make use of critical interventions to achieve empowerment. It contributes to an understanding of the process of removal of asymmetric discourses and inequalities, rather than attempting to show their existence, production or reproduction. It is geared towards revealing the self-conscious interventions by Kurdish brokers to democratize language, erase inequalities, and to restructure orders of discourse, in this case in order to question the salience of built-in Turkish biases manifest in their interlocutors' discourses.

In order to carry out my research, I conducted interviews with 90 Kurdish brokers. For the purposes of this research, Kurdish diasporic brokers are members of the Kurdish community who are engaged in the salvaging and translating of Kurdishness to others. They revive and maintain a battle with the home, and translate Kurdish suffering and uprising to the British audiences as well as to other Kurds, including their second generation. They are thus

the authoritative Kurdish actors in London: those in formal leadership positions of community organizations; and the leading and elite members of the Kurdish community who are mobilized and influential but who do not run or lead diasporic organizations in a formal capacity.

By undertaking semi-structured interviews I was able to explore the community members' attitudes, views and experiences regarding the discursive struggles, especially the 'corrections' and the 'interruptions' they employed, including the resistance they faced when doing so. My aim was to uncover how Kurdish brokers convey Kurdishness, Kurdish struggle and rebellion to other 'less political' Kurds, focusing on their discursive battles in the form of de-Turkification. In my analysis of the interviews, I also used critical discourse analysis methods and attempted to uncover what types of corrections they used, how and why they interrupted, when they chose to interrupt and when to stay silent as well as how they gave meaning to the resistance they faced when they were attempting to de-Turkify the less assertive and politically aware members of their community. Recruitment was facilitated through collaborations with existing gatekeepers and various Kurdish community networks. A semi-structured interview guide was prepared though a review of existing literature, and with the research aims in mind. Interviews usually lasted about an hour. In this study, saturation was reached after 90 interviews when no new themes were identified. Emergent themes and trends which addressed 'de-Turkification' at the discursive level were identified.

Findings

As quite a few of my interviewees highlighted, most diasporic Kurds in London are (as Kurds in Turkey) perfectly aware of the fact that they are Kurds. However, they would not have necessarily asserted a politicized collective identity around Kurdishness, even in diaspora. For example, many would not necessarily call themselves Kurds, or would self-identify as Alevi (their religion) or would emphasize their town (e.g. Elbistan) over being Kurdish. By focusing

on Kurdish brokers' engagement with the less ethno-politically aware members of the Kurdish community in London, I trace below the critical discursive interruptions Kurdish brokers undertake, including the difficulties they encounter when faced with the task of attempting to shed an identity and ideology Kurds brought from home, namely Turkishness.

Inclusion of Language: 'I am Kurdish but I speak Turkish'

One way in which brokers engaged in de-Turkification was through the assertion of 'being Kurdish, but speaking Turkish'. As with other nation-building projects, one of the central tenets of the modern Turkish republic, and its Turkification strategy, was a unified language. Strongly influenced by the discourse of modernity, the Enlightenment as well as the romantic nationalist movements of Europe, the Kemalist cadres of the new republic embarked upon the Turkish nation-building project and introduced a top-down, elite-led transformation and a regime of reforms. One of these was the Language Revolution (*Dil Devrimi*) of 1928. This not only replaced Arabic letters with the Latin alphabet, but, along with other reforms and institutions of the republic, had at its heart the aim of ensuring that all citizens, through a common language, would consider themselves as Turkish. Speaking languages other than Turkish was heavily criticized and banned (Bayir, 2013) and minority names (of people and places) were Turkified (Uçarlar, Derince, & Coşkun, 2011). '[T]o change the mother tongue of the Kurds and make Turkish their mother tongue' became a central tenet of the official state policy (Skutnabb-Kangas & Bucak, 1994, p. 362). This deliberate erasure of a language has been referred to as 'linguicide' (e.g. Skutnabb-Kangas & Bucak, 1994; Zeydanlıoğlu, 2012).

Suppression of the Kurdish language, as well as assimilation strategies in Turkey mean that Turkish is not only used extensively by ordinary Kurds in London, but 'somewhat ironically, Turkish is often the common language of Kurdish political mobilization' (Houston, 2004, p. 412). However, as Kurdish brokers stressed in interviews, attempting to exterminate

the Kurdish language has not meant that Kurdish political awareness eroded. Kurdish brokers in London have been the primary actors who, in diaspora, have attempted to 'reverse' Turkification, including linguicide. Kurdish community centres, for example, run Kurdish language classes for both adults and children. What is more relevant for this article however is that Kurdish brokers have undertaken 'correction attempts' and 'interruption strategies' at the discursive level in order to de-Turkify fellow Kurds. This is because Turkification was aimed not only at language but also aspired to shape heritage, identity and culture in favour of Turkishness, at the expense of other existing identities. The widespread presence of Turkishness in London and elsewhere, for example in the form of Kurdish-owned restaurants serving what they label as 'Turkish food' and the pervasive referrals to the Kurdish self as Turkish are challenged and corrected by mobilized Kurdish actors.

My findings indicated that when correcting the Turkish bias in language and self-referrals, Kurdish brokers drew a distinction between speaking a language and belonging to an ethnicity, being fully aware of the linguicide Kurds had encountered. Here the aim was to interrupt the normal flow of conversation and confront the 'wrong-doer' of Kurdish origin and remind them that even though they spoke Turkish, they were not Turkish. These kinds of interruptions 'included' Turkish as a language but aimed to exclude being ascribed Turkish as an ethnicity. They took place with ordinary members of the Kurdish community as well as with family or friends.

> Three of us girls [sic] were queuing up for the cash point, speaking in Turkish. A woman was behind us. She needed help with the buses and asked me in Turkish 'Are you Turkish?' I said 'I am not Turkish, I am Kurdish. But I speak Turkish'. She said 'It doesn't matter [if you are Kurdish or Turkish]; I am Kurdish too'. (Female, 32)

Many of the other interviewees also re-called similar interruptions they undertook:

I corrected a [Kurdish] speaker at … [a community centre]. After his talk I said: 'You are talking to the Kurdish community here. But you kept on saying 'we Turks'. We speak Turkish but we are not Turkish.' I then went on to ask my question. I made sure I did not approach him at the end to say these things but did so during the question session so that it was a good example to the other Kurds in the room. (Male, 38)

Another respondent (Male, 42) said:

I speak English but that doesn't make me English. [This is] just like Turkish. I speak Turkish but that doesn't make me Turkish. It makes me a Turkish-speaking Kurd.

Interviewer: Are you happy with the phrase 'Turkish-speaking community' then [a phrase sometimes used when referring to the Cypriot Turks, Kurds and Turks in London]?

I'm not happy with that either. We don't refer to the Irish in London as 'English-speaking community'. We refer to them as Irish. I don't see why the language we speak is being used to define us rather than our ethnicity. That's not how the census in Britain works. The council (*belediyedekiler*) should stop using that too.

One interviewee told the story of how, on his way to a pro-Kurdish demonstration with his friends, someone approached him and asked: 'Are you Turkish?' as a shorthand for seeing if she could join them and follow them to the nearby demonstration in Haringey. Frustrations and interruptions followed the not too dissimilar stories other brokers told. Critical yet engaging, and what some of the respondents called 'winning', discursive responses had to be thought through as there was, at times, resistance shown to these corrections and interruptions.

Exclusion of Regional Demeaning Ascriptions: 'We are not doğulu (easterner), we are Kurdish'

In the battle for Turkish modernization, distancing from, and othering of, two non-modern domains emerged as central. One of these required what I call a 'temporal distancing'. As discussed above, the Kemalist cadres aimed to eradicate the remains of the Ottoman old order. Radical reforms in education, law, attire and architecture and in many other areas of political and social life sought to break with the past and introduce 'a European level of civility'. The other is what I refer to as 'spatial distancing', that is distancing from those who were spatially distant but temporally present 'uncivilized', 'oriental', and 'backward' traditions and cultures, but most importantly peoples who lived in the east. Doğulu is a Turkish word meaning easterner which came to serve this purpose. It denotes spatial distancing. However, doğulu is not just a geographical realm; it carries a demeaning and orientalizing connotation in Turkey, and it has been used as a shorthand for Kurds who are construed as the carriers of these so-called primitive and backward attributes. Today, a 'dazzling array of narratives and images of the "East" for public consumption' are also plentiful on Turkish television and melodramas (Öncü, 2011). Most Kurdish brokers I interviewed said that they engaged in corrections when they came across the use of this word by others. The three quotes below are succinct examples:

> We were having breakfast. My nieces were using it [doğulu] to describe a guy they didn't like at work. They found him crude and unpleasant. They were speaking in English but I could spot the Turkish 'doğulu' dropped in time to time. I said to them 'This is a word which is used to denigrate Kurds. Do you know you become the oppressor if you use the oppressor's language?' Never heard them use it again. (Male 47)

> In Haringey I also heard Kurds calling other Kurds doğulu. If it is someone I know, I won't just say they should not use it, I will tell them why they should not. The second generation understand it well as at school they are drilled not to use racist language. But there is then the job of teaching them that some of the Turkish words they are using are also racist, for example doğulu. (Male, 38)

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> They say we speak [Turkish] with a doğulu accent (*doğulu şivesi*). This is said in a disparaging way, so I immediately interrupt when I hear this. For example Kurds of Diyarbakir make fun of the Kurdish those from Maraş use. This is an in-house joke (*biz bize şakalaşma*). It is different from making fun of Kurds for speaking Turkish with a Kurdish accent. … They want us not only to speak their language [Turkish], but to speak it with their accent. Otherwise we are put down as doğulu. We will eradicate the use of this word in London by pointing out its assimilationist content. (Male, 32)

Doğulu not only avoids uttering the word Kurd, but also assigns and locks Kurds to an eternal 'primitive' and 'backward' state of affairs. It has become a shorthand for the perennial portrayal of Kurdish people in Turkey as belonging to pre-modernity, with 'uncivilized' habits and characteristics. As has been discussed in the literature (e.g. Deringil, 2003; Soğuk, 1993; Zeydanlıoğlu, 2008) Turkish nationalism and Turkification strategies ironically had a clear orientalist and Eurocentric discourse whereby Turks, as the bearers and carriers of civilization and progress, would spread it to primitive and backward peoples. As such, the ethnic background of these 'uncivilized' peoples did not need to be spelt out. Even though Kurds ceased to exist as a distinct ethnic group in official Turkish discourse, demeaning attributions still continued in the form of doğulu. Doğulu conveniently allows the characterization of a group of people in a belittling way without explicitly referring to their Kurdish ethnicity. It is seen as part and parcel of Turkification and is associated with the structural exclusions and inclusions of Turkish modernity and has come to be challenged by the Kurdish mobilization in Turkey.[8] It is therefore not unsurprising to see that when faced with its usage by Kurds in London, Kurdish brokers interrupt and engage in discursive corrections. In so doing they attempt to 'exclude' such regional ascriptions and thus reverse

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[8] It is important to note that in the 1960s and 1970s 'doğulu' was used by the Kurdish mobilization itself, for example, The Revolutionary Eastern Culture Hearths (Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocaklari) and the concept later came to be rejected. I would like to thank the anonymous referee for pointing this out.

Turkification's hegemonic depiction of themselves as primordial and backward on the one hand, and its erasure of Kurdish identity on the other, as exemplified by this quote:

> Who is meant by easterner? Of course Kurds. They kill two birds with one stone. They continue to deny our identity. They also demean us at the same time. I remind Kurds that when they use this word, they are in the same business [as those who demean us]. (Male, 51)

Repositioning of Religion: 'We are Alevi Kurds, not Alevis'

Defining the Kurdish self as Alevi rather than using an ethnic identifier was another sign of Turkification which Kurdish brokers said they challenged in London. Alevis are a minority belief community in Turkey and have both Kurdish and Turkish followers. Their exact numbers are not known as the national census in Turkey does not record them as Alevi. They are thought to comprise about a quarter of the population in Turkey. Like Kurds, Alevis have faced persecution in Turkey, for example the massacres of Maraş (1978), Sivas (1993) and Istanbul Gazi (1995). Alevi Kurds are a minority within a minority in Turkey, a country which is majority Sunni, and majority Turkish. In London, however, the tables are turned: Alevi Kurds constitute the majority of those originating from Turkey. Out of the estimated 200,000 total, the majority of Alevis are concentrated in London and they are of Kurdish origin. It is therefore not uncommon to meet a self-identified 'Turkish' person in London and after a few inquisitive questions to find out that they are in fact an Alevi Kurd.

My interviews demonstrated that Kurdish brokers interrupted Kurds whom they saw as denying their Kurdishness by solely referring to their Alevi religion. For example:

> I am Alevi too. But when someone says where are you from, I say 'I am a Kurd from Turkey'. When Alevi Kurds are only stating their religion, they are doing assimilation. … I tell them they should say Alevi Kurd rather than just Alevi. If not, they are taking part in the denial politics of the Turkish state. (Female, 36)

The interruptions Kurdish brokers engaged in do not arise from their antagonism to Aleviness. In fact, Aleviness is seen as a progressive sect, and its egalitarian, gender-sensitive and humanist tradition and practices are very much respected by the Kurdish movement. However, Aleviness was courted by the Turkish state against the mounting Kurdish mobilization in the 1990s. It has, at times, been pursued as an integral part of Turkification strategies. It has also been previously acknowledged that '[b]y and large, Kurdish as well as Turkish Alevis have been supportive of the secular and populist ideals of Kemalism; many Kurdish Alevis voluntarily assimilated to Turkish culture and came to identify themselves as Turks rather than as Kurds' (van Bruinessen, 1996, p. 8). As such, critical discursive interruptions are, at times, seen as necessary in order to de-Turkify Alevi Kurds. However, Kurdish brokers often had to tread a careful line when correcting Alevi Kurds as de-Turkification needed to be carried out without denigrating Aleviness. Reminding Alevis of their persecution in Turkey, and drawing similarities between Sunni Turkism's non-recognition of Kurds and of Alevis were two central ways through which brokers attempted to 'reposition' the relationship between the Kurds, Alevis and what they regarded as Turkification. When attempting to reverse Turkification in London, they state, for example:

> So many say 'we are doğulu' instead of 'we are Kurdish'. And in London they say 'Alevi' instead of Kurd. Why do they still cling on to this Turkish propaganda and denial? Do they not remember Maraş and Madımak? (Male, 57)

> Kurdish Alevis have been on the receiving end of the wrath of the Turkish state. One for being Kurdish and the other for being Alevi. When Kurdish Alevis see a connection between these exclusions, they realize they should not abdicate their Kurdishness. But it is not easy to change years of an ingrained mind-set. (Female, 41)

Discussion: Kurdish Brokers as 'Everyday Critical Discourse Analysts'

As the interviews identified, the sensitivity to language and culture Kurdish brokers showed

arose perhaps less from their ethno-political drive for Kurdishness, and more because of their objection to the deployment of Turkified discourses. The battles they had to have with Turkification, an ideology Kurds brought from Turkey, were seen as burdensome and fraught. Attempts to de-Turkify others' language arose from Kurdish brokers' awareness of the fact that patterns of domination and hegemony are sustained and reproduced via discursive practices, and unless challenged they become entrenched as truths. Brokers not only interrupted others, they also invited their Kurdish interlocutors to self-disrupt and self-query what they had learnt to say about themselves. Making other Kurds unlearn was no easy task. Whilst they were well aware of the 'ignorance pact' some Turks held onto, and therefore could understand and make sense of (though perhaps not forgive) their lack of sensitivity and curiosity, Kurdish brokers divulged that getting Kurds to unlearn and de-Turkify was a challenging task, needing critical discursive interventions. Borrowing Spivak's terms (1999), I argue that they were '*un*sanctioning ignorance', exposing the often subconscious and easily acquiesced patterns of Turkified discourses which diasporic Kurds had brought from home. In so doing, they were giving agency to the 'wrongdoers', outlawing omission and dismissing indifference to language.

Kurdish brokers were thus carrying out critical discursive analyses and 'heckling' as they were identifying, challenging and ideologically unpacking the Turkishness they came across in the discourses of other Kurds in everyday life. They were concerned, and thus challenged and corrected other Kurds, whether they be family members or other fellow Kurds. As 'everyday critical discourse analysts', they identified and contested what they saw as the erasures and injustices sustained in and through language and expressions. They subverted conversations, heckled speakers and talks in order to point to the built-in Turkish biases manifest in their interlocutors' discourses. They drew on examples from other ethnic groups and nations. They mentioned the Irish in London when getting Kurds to see how other groups comfortably asserted their identity and referred to Afro-Caribbeans in London when pointing

out why discriminatory language needed to be confronted. Such undoings of Kurdish brokers closely overlap with, and continue, the aims of the Kurdish mobilization in Turkey, especially the aims of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) in Turkey. These demonstrate how Kurdish brokers have transnationalized the struggle and connect the Kurds in diaspora to the Kurdish movement in Turkey as formerly self-identified 'Turkish economic migrants' are over time becoming self-identified 'Kurdish diaspora'.

Kurdish brokers also put into practice discursive strategies, for example they developed responses to the replies their interlocutors gave when they were corrected. A bashful 'it doesn't matter' reply was at times deployed by other Kurds, soon to be followed by Kurdish brokers: 'You say it doesn't matter but you know it does. You are denying us like the Turkish state' (Female, 37). As 'everyday critical discourse analysts', Kurdish brokers pointed out that erasures of identity such as 'it doesn't matter [if you are Kurdish or Turkish]' only serves to further reproduce the dominance of the ethnic group who holds the upper hand. Over time, they also developed pre-emptive interventions, having seen the recurring replies they were given.

What emerged from my interviews is also that stopping saying you are Turkish or doğulu when you are speaking in Turkish is extremely difficult. This is a process which requires many interruptions and corrections, and demands considerable work and labouring. Kurdish brokers frequently attributed the utterance of a Turkified mode of thinking and speaking to a lack of political awareness and called it *'ağız alışkanlığı'* which can be translated into English as 'habit of expression'.[9] Brokers understood 'habits of expression' sociologically, including the hegemonic structures and discourses which gave rise to habitual ways of talking. As Kurds gained more political awareness, such habits would wear off and fewer corrections would need to be made. Most Kurds, when explained the consequences of

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[9] Such 'habits of expression' are different to slips of the tongue (*ağızdan kaçırmak*) which are accidental and are at times auto-corrected.

their language, usually accepted that they should have been using non-Turkified language. They were reported as being unaware of the political consequences of their discourses; but they were seen as receptive to 'unlearning'. Yet, as analysis of the brokers' discourses revealed, unless compatriot Kurds were corrected, such habits would continue.

When brokers were questioned whether it was really a 'habit' or, if it was in fact a sign of resistance to de-Turkification, it became clear that brokers attributed resistance to another group they called 'deniers'. The 'habits of expression' of those who were typically corrected are different to 'deniers'. 'Deniers' is a disparaging name, employed when referring to Kurds who actively negate their Kurdish identity or who are hostile to the Kurdish movement. As 'probationary white Turks', they actively and purposefully cherish and promote Turkishness. Political and social boundaries between Kurdish brokers and the 'deniers' in London are quite rigid. Meaningful political interaction between them is scarce, and ethno-political exchanges, on the rare occasions when they occur, are far more distraught, exposing the 'contextual limits and possibilities for activism', in this case of de-Turkification (Healey and Mulholland 1998, p. 23).

> I had a driving instructor once. He was a denier. I knew he was a Kurd but when I asked him if
> he was a Kurd, he said 'doğulu'. I kept on asking 'yes, but are you a Kurd or a Turk?'. He
> refused to say Kurdish, he kept on saying doğulu. I exploded in his face. For heaven's sake!
> (Female, 26)

Brokers know full well that 'deniers' are not interested in de-Turkifying, never mind appropriating Kurdishness. If and when 'deniers' are confronted by Kurdish brokers, antagonistic interactions such as the one above could follow. It is worth remembering, however, that confronting the 'denier' does not necessarily have the aim of correcting the 'wrongdoer'. The disparaging word 'denier' is more valuable when the confrontation story is told to other Kurds. It has the role of proscribing what is not appropriate. It silences

'unsuitable' groups and phrases whilst encouraging and inciting certain ways of being (e.g. a de-Turkified Kurd).

My research indicated that many Kurdish brokers had a sophisticated view of language and discourse. They saw that language is not a pure medium which merely reflects the world, but that it in fact constructs the social world. When considering the persistence of Turkishness, including the referrals to the Kurdish self as 'Turkish', some of the brokers deployed a further critical eye, highlighting that the language one speaks *in* also comes to define how one speaks *about* oneself. De-Turkification, especially when speaking in Turkish was extremely difficult. For example:

> If I was speaking to my fellow Kurds in Kurdish, do you think we would have this problem? Of course not! We would not be saying 'we Turks' in Kurdish. But now, when I am not careful, even I have a slip of the tongue and say 'we Turks' when I mean 'we Kurds' and then immediately correct myself. (Male 51)

Abandoning Turkification but not Turkey

Another point of intervention the article makes is that whilst brokers are engaged in shedding Turkish ethnic identifiers, they do not necessarily aim to break or even loosen connections with Turkey. In other words, whilst there was reduced willingness to be identified as Turkish, doğulu or only as Alevi, yet there was continued willingness to be identified with Turkey. Distancing was with Turkishness, not with Turkey. This also fits well with previous research which identified the homeland '*memleket*' ties Kurds of London continue to have towards Turkey (Demir, 2012). De-Turkification struggles I discuss above should not be understood as erasing Turkish elements and language. On the contrary most of my participants were quite at home speaking in Turkish, visiting Turkey in summer, having Turkish friends, watching Turkish television. Quite often, their lives were also synchronized with the quotidian politics and social life of Turkey; the lure of Turkey still persists amongst diasporic Kurds. De-

Turkification is in fact not anti-Turkey, but about undoing the assimilationist strategies of the Turkish state and rectifying erasures at a transnational level.

Conclusion

This article aimed to go beyond an analysis of how Kurdish actors in London make claims for Kurdish rights and express their desire for the recognition of their ethnic identity and instead explored the way in which mobilized Kurdish actors carry out de-Turkification at the discursive level. As I discussed above, the arrival of mobilized Kurds from Turkey enabled the links between the Kurds in Turkey and in London to be strengthened, allowing anti-assimilationist struggles of the pro-Kurdish movement in Turkey to take hold in London. Through such networks and links, Kurdish brokers are transnationalizing the Kurdish struggle, as self-identified 'Turkish economic migrants' over time become self-identified 'Kurdish diaspora'.

By focusing on Kurdish brokers' engagement with the less ethno-politically assertive members of the Kurdish community in London, the article traced the critical discursive interruptions Kurdish brokers undertake when they encounter Turkified discourses amongst the Kurds in London. I detected three types of de-Turkification strategies which Kurdish brokers employ: *inclusion* of language 'I am Kurdish but I speak Turkish'; *exclusion* of regional demeaning ascriptions 'We are not doğulu, we are Kurdish'; *repositioning* of religion 'We are not Alevis, but Alevi Kurds'. The article argued that Kurdish transnational actors are acting as 'everyday critical discourse analysts' as they identify and challenge as well as ideologically detect and unpack the Turkishness manifest in their interlocutors' discourses. They interrupt and subvert conversations as well as correct the erasures and injustices they see being sustained in the discourses of politically less aware Kurds. A la Spivak, they *un*sanction ignorance, exposing and correcting acquiesced patterns of Turkified discourses, interrupting not only 'ignorant ignorance' but also 'learned ignorance' (de Sousa Santos, 2009).

The article also discussed some of the responses and difficulties Kurdish brokers face when they engage in corrections. The offhand reply 'it doesn't matter [if you are Kurdish or Turkish]' which was at times deployed by corrected Kurds was soon responded to with an explanation of how indifference to language can further reproduce the dominance of the language and worldview of the powerful. Their diasporic struggles were not only with the home (Turkey) and the host nation (Britain) but also, and perhaps more importantly, with other fellow diasporic Kurds' Turkified discourses. This is because they were well aware not only of the ways in which existing hegemonic discursive practices can reproduce social reality and entrench hierarchic relations, but also of the important emancipatory role that discursive struggles can play in challenging relations and changing social reality. By focusing on such discursive struggles, the article draws attention to the ways in which actors work to *remove* asymmetric discourses. It thus contributes to the critical discourse analysis literature by shifting the discussion from the often-examined existence, production and reproduction of asymmetric and unequal discourses on to the work of brokers and activists who make use of critical interventions to achieve empowerment.

The article also indicates that Kurdish brokers are challenging the political and intellectual architecture of Turkish modernity at a distance. They are re-drawing the epistemological and ontological contours of not only Kurdishness, but also Turkishness, flattening differences and questioning the Turkish gaze. I anticipate that this aspect of their struggle will increase in the future and, and together with the Kurdish struggle in Rojava, its canton Kobane and elsewhere, will further transnationalize the Kurdish movement.

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