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Title: ‘BATTLESPACE DIASPORA: BELONGING TIES OF KURDS IN LONDON’

Abstract:

Since the late-1980s there has been a significant migration of Kurds from Turkey to the various countries in Western Europe. Even though Kurds from Turkey make up a significant proportion of London’s ethnic minority population, they constitute an ‘invisible’ diasporic community, both in terms of the current debates surrounding ethnicity and the Muslim minority in the UK and in diaspora studies. This article examines how the Kurdish diaspora interacts with, and relates to, their country of origin by highlighting their resistance to, and struggle with, Turkey (as defined by their displacement and suppression of cultural and linguistic rights) as well as the close and, at times, intimate ties Kurds continue to maintain with Turks and Turkey. Whilst the first is conceptualised as ‘battling with Turkey’, the latter is conceptualised within the framework of ‘*memleket’* (homeland) ties. The article explores how the Kurdish diaspora encodes its orientation towards, as well as its resistance to, Turkey and in so doing, brings visibility to this largely ignored and understudied, yet politically very active, diasporic formation in London.

Battling with *Memleket* in London: the Kurdish Diaspora's Engagement with Turkey

The concept of 'home' has always been a central aspect of the battles diasporas engage in as they think through both how to relate to the home they have left behind and the new home in which they are settling. This is certainly the case for Kurds from Turkey. They have been defining, constructing and shaping a relationship with their new home in the diasporic neighbourhoods of London as well as making sense of their relationship with their country of origin. My concern in this article is the latter, namely the different ways in which Kurds[1] relate to their country of origin. The central crux of my argument is that the Kurdish diaspora's relationship with Turkey is best described in terms of 'dual home-construction'. My use of the term dual home-construction aims to account for and represent the two distinct -yet experienced and felt as one consciousness- ways in which Kurds make sense of Turkey. I call one of these 'battling' and the other '*memleket*' (homeland), the former representing the political struggles and disputes of Kurds with Turkey, the latter representing the close and intimate ties Kurds continue to maintain with Turkey. Whilst at first sight these two attitudes may seem contradictory, I believe that they are not, and the way in which Kurds make sense of the two simultaneously should be seen as one of the most distinctive, but thus far ignored, aspects of the Kurdish diasporic experience. It might be said that most people have some level of battle with their country whilst continuing to see it as a homeland, whether they are living in a diaspora or not. As will become clear later on, the Kurdish diaspora's relationship is different to most forms of battling in that it is intense, resilient, and at times radical. The intensity and fervent nature of this battling makes the continuation of *memleket* ties with Turkey all the more interesting.

Kurds make up about a fifth of the population of Turkey. However, their ethnic identity, and cultural and linguistic rights have been suppressed in addition to their being socio-economically disadvantaged and facing multiple forms of deprivation and exclusion in Turkey (Bruinessen 1998: 48; Icduygu et al. 1999; Saraçoğlu 2010). In 1984 the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) started a guerrilla campaign, demanding a separate homeland for Kurds.[2] As a result of the conflict between the Turkish army and the PKK, many thousands (mainly civilians) lost their lives and many thousands more were displaced. The PKK pressured the villages who did not support their cause to leave; the Turkish military forcefully evacuated scores of villages in their fight against the PKK. The Kurdish-populated cities such as Şırnak and Diyarbakir remained under 'emergency rule' for 15 years until 2002. Human rights violations also peaked during this period.[3]

Faced with political oppression, economic disadvantages, poor opportunities as well as displacement, it is no coincidence that many Kurds from Turkey emigrated, mostly to European countries, from the late 1980s onwards. The majority of Kurdish immigrants sought asylum. In the UK, for example, Wahlbeck noted that there was a major influx of Turkish nationals who applied for asylum in 1989 (4650), a significant majority of whom were of Kurdish origin (1998: 217). Asylum applications of Turkish nationals continued to be in the thousands throughout the 1990s (Home Office 1998) and up until 2005 (Home Office 2008). Most Kurds in London, however, do not originate from the Kurdish region of Turkey in the southeast which experienced village evacuations and the most intensive fighting between the army and the Kurdish guerrillas. They instead originate from the central regions of Turkey and the boundary areas between central and eastern Anatolia, from around towns such as Maraş, Malatya and Sivas. They are mostly Alevis, a minority religious sect. However, as Sirkeci has shown with regard to Kurdish migration to Germany, the 'environment of insecurity', underpinned by ethnic conflict, fuelled Kurdish migration to Europe, even for Kurds with 'no or only loose connections with the conflict itself' (Sirkeci 2003: 203; Sirkeci 2006). The ethnically-fuelled 'environment of insecurity' in Turkey, in addition to the persecution of Alevis (e.g. the events in Sivas in 1993 and Istanbul Gazi in 1995), seems to have energised Alevi Kurds to leave.

Currently, therefore, a significant majority of the 'Turks' in London are in fact Alevi Kurds. They outnumber Turks and Turkish Cypriots. The total number of Kurds in the UK, however, is not known as the Home Office figures for asylum seekers do not reveal the ethnic background of applicants, but only their country of origin (Greater London Authority 2009: 9). We are thus left with various estimates, none of which is completely robust. According to one estimate, about 100,000 Kurds live in the UK (Dissanayake 2008); and according to another about 180,000 (Newroz Committee 2009: 21). However, it should be remembered that not only numerically, but also in terms of political leverage, ‘the Kurds of Turkey have maintained a hegemonic presence in diaspora politics’ (Hassanpour and Mojab 2004: 222).

When Kurds first came to London, they joined the pre-existing (albeit numerically small) community of Turks and Turkish Cypriots. Together with the rest of the Turkish-speaking community, they worked in the textile businesses of East London. Following the demise of textile manufacturing in East London, they moved to catering and now run and/or work in many of the shops, off-licenses, and catering businesses in North London. They also established many community organisations in order to facilitate their adaptation to life in Britain, geared towards solving social and economic problems, easing the difficulties of transition and also aiming to alleviate the feeling of longing for their place of origin by providing a social and cultural life and network. Enneli et al. highlight the vibrancy of the Turkish, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriot community in London, describing it as:

> […] one of the most self-sufficient communities in London with half a dozen local community-based newspapers, together with Turkish television channels and countless digital radio channels. Community members can provide any service within the community ranging from mortgages to a quit-smoking helpline and from driving instruction to massage parlours. It could be christened ‘Little Turkey’ (2005: 2).

Despite this dynamism and presence, reaching numbers well over 100.000, there is little academic work on Kurds in London. Kurds (and Turks) are also mostly invisible in policy-related research and documents in the UK (King et al. 2008: 7, 9). The few published works that exist focus mainly on one particular aspect of the Kurdish diaspora in London: their politicisation and mobilisation (Griffiths 2000, 2002 and Wahlbeck 1998, 1999, 2002). These arise out of the collective injustices Kurds have faced, akin to the ‘victim diasporas’ discussed in Cohen (1997). Moreover, the data used in these works were collected about a decade ago, when Kurds were new immigrants and were still settling in London. My aim, therefore, is to provide a fresh and recent account, focusing on Kurds’ connection and relationship with their country of origin. Whilst doing this, I will outline not only how the Kurdish political struggle is fought in London, but also how Kurds simultaneously continue to foster warm and affectionate ties with Turkey. The discussion is based on an ethnographic case study. I conducted in-depth interviews with 16 leading members of community organisations and 32 lay members of the Kurdish community in London. I attempted to reach a balanced sample in terms of gender, age and place of origin in Turkey. In addition to formal interviews, I talked to many ordinary members of the community, undertook observations during various demonstrations, meetings, and festivals in London. As much time as possible was spent participating in the activities of the community to get a full sense of the kind of relationships Kurds construct and maintain with Turkey. The bulk of the data was collected during 2009.

1. Battling with Turkey

One of the dual home-construction processes that can be identified amongst Kurds is what I call 'battling with Turkey'. I use this to refer to the struggles for the Kurdish 'cause', and the criticism, defiance and opposition shown by Kurds towards the Turkish state. As Griffiths (2000) has identified, up until the late 1980s, Turks and Kurds in London pursued leftist politics and established associations together. After all, many had fought on the same side against the right-wing groups, and had fled Turkey following military coups. Following the upsurge of ethno-politically mobilised Kurds in the late 1980s in London, however, some of those organisations in the 1990s became exclusively Kurdish-oriented, and new ones were set up which came to have the Kurdish struggle in Turkey as their raison d'être. The discourse and strategies of Kurds became connected to making claims for Kurdish rights in Turkey, expressing their desire for the recognition of their ethnic identity. Some of these organisations still exist and have close links with the Kurdish struggle in Turkey; for example the Kurdish Advice Centre (KAC) in Tottenham, the Kurdish Community Centre (KCC) in Haringey, and the Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre (Halkevi). These associations also reflect the political divisions that exist amongst Kurds in London. For example, Halkevi and the KCC are mainly two branches of one organisation, and some of its members feel allegiance to the cause of the PKK, while the Kurdish Advice Centre is associated with the Kurdistan Socialist Party (PSK). Others have joined forces over time, such as the Kurdish Workers' Association (KWA) which merged with the KCC.

What is important to note is that the influx of Kurds into London changed the nature and functioning of existing organisations. Halkevi, the largest of them, was previously dominated by leftist Turks and Kurds. With the arrival of mobilised Kurds, Kurdish ethnicity and politics gained increased significance and visibility in many associations, galvanising what Bruinessen (1998: 48), using Benedict Anderson's phrase, refers to as 'long-distance [Kurdish] nationalism'. The significance of Kurdish politics also increased among the organisations which were populated by Kurds who had arrived before the late 1980s, despite the fact that their previous leftist ideology had opposed ethnicity-based politics. In this period in London, as also happened in Berlin, many self-identified 'Turks' became self-identified 'Kurds', not self-identified 'British' or 'self-identified German' (Leggewie 1996). Such changes in the ethnic composition, awareness and political orientation parallel what Mercer et al. have identified with regard to African home associations in diaspora: 'ethnicity and home associations both change over time, and the means by which they change are closely related' (2008: 16).

Since the late 1980s then, Kurdish politics came to feature heavily in the lives and discourses of the Kurdish diaspora in London -an issue strongly underlined by the existing literature (Wahlbeck 1998; 1999; 2002; Griffiths 2000; 2002)- and the diaspora at large has been heavily involved in battling with their country of origin over the 'Kurdish question', often led by 'ethnic entrepreneurs'.[4] However, this battle needs to be viewed as encompassing a wide spectrum of views. Whilst for some this battle is fought for increased democratisation and Kurdish linguistic and cultural rights in Turkey, for others it is fought for Kurdish autonomy (federalism); still others aspire to the establishment of a separate home for all Kurds comprising Iraqi, Syrian, Turkish and Iranian Kurds. For some it is non-ethnicity based, and is instead fought along revolutionary Marxist lines. It is no surprise that, akin to the existence of multiple views of what is being fought for and what the 'cause' is, the battling itself is also carried out in multiple forms, through multiple media. These practices can be in the form of simple expressions of Kurdish ethnic and cultural identity, e.g. the giving of Kurdish (rather than Turkish or Muslim) names to children, going to language classes to learn Kurdish, or attending Newroz (Kurdish spring/new year) celebrations. They are an important part of the struggle, as speaking Kurdish, celebrating Newroz and the giving of Kurdish names to children have all been subject to political repression in Turkey. Alternatively, battling can be in the form of making alliances with anti-racist, left-wing and revolutionary organisations in the UK and seeing the Kurdish plight in the light of a general struggle against repressive forms of governance and militarism. For others it involves activities such as organising or attending demonstrations, public meetings and discussion groups geared towards confronting Turkish policies and re-defining the Kurdish issue. In so doing, they create a 'diasporic battlespace', actively challenging and providing an alternative to the official construction of the Kurdish struggle in Turkey.

Even the involvement of Kurds in local politics in London can have the purpose of raising awareness of the Kurdish question and identity locally, for instance, advocating the recognition and use of Kurdish ethnicity as a separate category by London authorities, or, demanding Kurdish language instruction (in addition to Turkish) in British schools. But it is also aimed at gaining support for the Kurdish struggle in Turkey. Having become British citizens and voters, Kurds have started to engage in the political lobbying of British political leaders on the issue of Kurdish rights in Turkey. Such forms of lobbying and generating support for the Kurds intensifies pressures on Turkey, especially in its attempts to join the European Union.[5] What also energises the Kurdish diaspora is the existence of various cultural activities: politically-oriented plays, movies, documentaries, concerts and festivals. Musicians, for example, tell stories in their songs and describe their struggle whether it be against Ottoman rule or Turkish state. Documentaries that tell the story of Kurdish forced migration and village evacuations, and public talks about human rights abuses contribute to the mobilisation of Kurds by providing alternative narrations of the conflict. The annual Kurdish Film Festival brings films and documentaries not only from Turkey, but also by Kurdish directors from Iran, Iraq and Syria, galvanising Kurdish solidarity. Iconography of the conflict on the walls of some of the community organisations reminds Kurds of the battle being fought in their name. Thus, battling varies in both form and strength. It ranges from raising subtle and mild criticisms of Turkish policies towards Kurds to brash and antagonistic expressions, to hunger strikes, and even to taking part in militant activities (e.g. forcefully collecting money from Kurdish businesses in London in aid of the Kurdish armed struggle in Turkey). But whatever its form, the 'diasporic battlespace' contributes to the construction and articulation of Kurdish identity and the mobilisation of Kurds in general.

Last but not least, this battling is highly responsive to political events in Turkey. The Kurdish struggle and suffering in Turkey are instantly communicated via Turkish and Kurdish satellite TV channels, newspapers and websites (Hassanpour 1998; Romano 2002). This is most evident when the Turkish state takes steps which run against Kurdish sensitivities, often leading to ad hoc, yet well-organised, demonstrations in London. In some of those demonstrations, Kurds carry flags and posters with pictures of Öcalan (the imprisoned leader of the PKK) demanding more rights for him. Some participants take part in demonstrations dressed as Kurdish guerrilla fighters. However, no matter how radical the battling gets at times, the battling is not static, reified nor single and coherent. It is disparate and contingent upon political events and developments in Turkey.[6]

2. *Memleket* ties with Turkey

The second connection Kurds have with Turkey is founded on what I refer to as *memleket*, which can be translated (albeit with difficulty) into English as *homeland*. This second aspect of Kurdish diasporic experience has not been studied before. It is perhaps one of the most fascinating aspects of the Kurdish diasporic experience as it is a reflection of the close and intimate relationship Kurds continue to have with their country of origin in spite of the battling discussed above. *Memleket* can refer to the soil that a nation-state occupies, or to a particular region, or even to a small town or village. It is relational and positional; when uttered outside of Turkey, it can mean Turkey, when in Istanbul it can refer to the Kurdish region in Turkey, or to a particular city (e.g. Bingöl), while when expressed in Bingöl (in the form of 'I miss *memleket'* or 'I am off to *memleket* next week') it can refer to a small town or village that one's family originates from near Bingöl (e.g. Kığı). *Memleket* also evokes emotion. Whilst it is clearly expressed to refer to a piece of land, it denotes a warm attachment and bond, a close and intimate relationship, not purely a geographic location. One might compare it to the difference in meaning between 'home' and 'house' in English. *Memleket* is closer to 'home' in meaning than it is to 'house'. It is tender, warm and welcoming in spite of the troubles and challenges it may bring. In the remainder of this article, I will uncover some of the ways in which the Kurdish diaspora actualises and sustains *memleket* ties with its country of origin.

2.1 Ordinary, Everyday *Memleket* Ties

Countless and varied ties continue to bind the Kurdish diaspora in London to Turkey. On the whole, Kurds continue to perceive the whole of Turkey, not just the Kurdish regions as *memleket*. This emerged in my interviews with ordinary lay members of the community and with those who run the Kurdish associations. A leader of one of them said: ‘why should we give up beautiful Istanbul, Antalya, Izmir and be pushed to poorer parts of Turkey; they [western parts of Turkey] are our lands too’. Another stated: ‘they [Kurds from London] will go to Istanbul, and will never say that it is not their *memleket’*. Most Kurds I came into contact with did not see a contradiction between battling with Turkey on the issue of Kurdish linguistic, cultural, political rights and continuing to own and claim Turkey as their *memleket*. On the contrary, most took for granted, and were quite at ease with, Kurds’ emotional attachment with Turkey. Their territorial identification was with Turkey in general, and the town they came from in particular. Identification with ‘greater Kurdistan’, the territory that includes parts of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria was never explicitly verbalised. Even when prompted, it was never verbalised as a place of belonging. Belonging and ties were more readily expressed for their town or city of origin in Turkey (be it Elbistan, Sivas or Istanbul). When asked the meaning of the maps of ‘greater Kurdistan’ which hang in the KAC in Tottenham, and the KCC in Haringey, it was pointed out that pictures of greater Kurdistan were ‘symbolic’. Their reference points remained within Turkey: they made decisions, maintained connections, carried out transactions, and expressed concerns that engaged Turkey. In other words, unlike Kurds from Turkey who live in Germany (Adamson and Demetriou 2007), my research did not reveal a significant redefinition of national belonging and homeland; on the whole, the Kurds I met and interviewed in London, continued to see Turkey as their *memleket*.

In the interviews, I was pointed to how Kurds’ ties with Turkey are grounded and reinforced in their everyday lives. The majority of Kurds speak Turkish amongst themselves;[7] they follow Turkish television (satellite TV) and online and print editions of newspapers. Turkish television is omnipresent in Kurdish homes, in the kebab houses, shops, cafés and restaurants as well as community and political associations in north London. I met many Kurdish people who supported football teams from Istanbul, and some even supported (and voted for) Turkey during international events, e.g. the Eurovision song contest. Many Kurds invest substantial amounts of money in Turkey or send money to help relatives back home, generating significant financial flows from the UK to Turkey. Some spend their summers in Turkey's coastal regions. Even a stroll up and down the area inhabited by Kurds in London clearly shows the emotional attachment of Kurds to their homeland. There are many restaurants, cafés and supermarkets run by Kurds which have Turkish names and cultural symbols in addition to ones which reflect Kurds' emotional attachment to the Kurdish town or city from which they originate. For the majority of Kurds, their uprooting from Turkey was not seen as final. As I was reminded, 'we have one foot in Turkey, the other here in the UK'. Rootedness in the culture, politics, and language of Turkey, as well as the rootedness and belonging they feel towards the Kurdish regions of Turkey, together with the close ties Kurds continue to maintain with family and relatives in Turkey[8] mean that the country of origin, despite its suppression of Kurdish identity and language is still seen as a place to which Kurds belong and feel part of.

2.2 Overlapping Circles and 'Us vs. Them' Divisions in London

The Kurds' ties with Turkey are also reinforced via the close and overlapping circles and networks they have with Turks in London instead of, for example, with Kurds from Iraq, Syria or Iran. Kurds and Turks in London, as they do in many cities in Europe, occupy the same geographical spaces, living 'in close geographic proximity to each other in the subaltern migrant neighbourhoods of European cities' (Soguk 2008: 179). It would be a mistake to conceptualise the political, social, cultural and business networks of Kurds and Turks in London as separate, divided, and static entities with defined boundaries intersecting only on certain limited aspects and occasions. On the contrary, as I was reminded (even corrected) by some of the Kurdish leaders and lay members of the community that there are various networks to which both Kurds and Turks belong, usually depending on their social, cultural, political and religious affiliations and related collective action frameworks. Avoidance of certain organisations, as well as clashes and cleavages between them are more based on these affiliations and allegiances, rather than Turkish or Kurdish ethnicity per se. Such overlapping networks, solidarities and collection frameworks reveal the existence of non-essentialist forms of belonging and identity, and also that 'boundary-maintenance' (Brubaker 2005: 6) between Turks and Kurds in London is contingent upon political and social affiliations, stances and claims, rather than being chiefly ethnocentric. The 'us vs them' distinction, if and when drawn, was mainly between two groups: English people (used interchangeably with white) on the one hand, and Turks and Kurds on the other; and conservative, right-wing nationalist Turks on the one hand, and left-wing Turks and Kurds that held a direct or indirect battle with Turkey, on the other. The latter distinction closely follows political boundaries and divisions in Turkey, demonstrating that certain allegiances and divisions 'brought from a prior place' are maintained whilst in the diaspora (Clifford 1992: 115). In contrast, besides coming together on certain occasions (mainly during Newroz and folkloric dance competitions), Kurds from Turkey rarely interact with Kurds from Iraq, Syria or Iran. Wahlbeck (1998) also noted the rarity of contact between these groups. Neither did I detect a wish for pan-Kurdish activity or mobilisation on the part of Kurds from Turkey. On the contrary, I came across Orientalised views amongst some Kurds from Turkey towards Kurds from other countries. When I asked about interactions between Kurds from other countries, I was told by a Kurdish café owner from Turkey: 'Their culture is very different from ours. They are backward'. Another Kurd from Turkey, who is a prominent member of a leftist organisation stated: 'Their culture is very different. They are feudal.'

Numerous activities and associations continue to connect the Turkish and Kurdish diasporas and, in so doing, maintain the link between the Kurdish diaspora and Turkey. Political activism (mainly left-wing), festivals, music, folklore groups, language and supplementary afterschool classes which include both Turks and Kurds (for example at GİK-DER, the Refugee Workers' Cultural Association) enable the continuation of bonds with one another and with Turkey. The print and electronic media published in London are geared towards both Turks and Kurds. Even the pro-Kurdish newspaper *Telgraf* is published in both Turkish and Kurdish (as well as incorporating some pages in English). In addition, there exists a Turkish and Kurdish Football Federation (TKFF).Turks and Kurds, akin to what Østergaard-Nielsen notes with regard to Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots in London ‘draw on each other’s resources for trade, commerce, friendship and even marriage’ (2003: 687).

Most community organisations and centres are explicitly geared towards addressing common problems. Many such as Day-Mer Community Centre, GIK-DER, North London Community House, Yüz Çiçek Açsın Kültür Merkezi (Hundred Flowers Cultural Centre), Cemevi (London Alevi Cultural Centre), Derman (For the Well-being of Kurdish and Turkish Communities), Britanya Bariş Meclisi (Britain’s Peace Council), İmece (Turkish Speaking Women’s Group), and Halkevi (Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre) are open to both Turks and Kurds. Although different discursive and institutional strategies are followed by these groups, many are able to unite and articulate social and economic demands to the UK authorities. There are also collective political mobilisations. Starting in 2006, the ‘Kurdish, Turkish and Turkish Cypriot Election Platform’ registered thousands from the Turkish, Turkish Cypriot and Kurdish communities on the electoral register and succeeded in electing councillors in 2006 and then again in 2010 (for Hackney, Haringey and Enfield).

It also needs to be remembered that this is not a homogenous community. Gender and class interests and identities intersect with ethnicity and at times the first two become more dominant than ethnicity (Pattison and Tavsanoglu 2002; Uguris 2004). For example, Turkish, Kurdish, and Turkish-Cypriot women come together in their common cause to challenge patriarchy, and run solidarity organisations such as İmece. Female support, crossing the ethnic divide, for women contesting political posts is also observed. Neither can one overlook the similar problems of Turkish and Kurdish workers who face unemployment, poor wages, poor working conditions (long hours and insecure work), as well as the common worries of parents who are concerned about the increasing involvement of the Turkish and Kurdish youth in gang membership, use and trade of drugs (Arslan 2004). In summary, whilst many of the organisations set up by the community are normally seen as a way to ease the process of adaptation to Britain, they also serve to bring Kurds and Turks in London together, establishing solidarity between them.

2.3. Aleviness

A third important tie which continues to define and shape Kurds' close relationship with Turkey is Aleviness. Alevis are the largest group of Muslims (after Sunnis) in Turkey and the animosity between the two sects is well-known. The percentage of Alevis in Turkey (Alevi Kurds and Alevi Turks) is thought to be between 15 and 30 percent. Like most Turks, a great majority of Kurds in Turkey are Sunnis and only about 30 percent are thought to be Alevi.[9] For the population in London, however, the tables are turned. Most Kurds in London are Alevis[10] and they originate from Maraş, Malatya and Sivas (Griffiths 2002; Wahlbeck 1998).

As Çelik (2003 and 2005) has pointed out, for the Alevi Kurds in general their religious (namely Alevi) identity has been more central than their ethnic identity. Bruinessen (1996: 10) also highlights this point: 'Many if not most of the Kurdish Alevis define themselves as Alevis first and only in the second place, or not at all, as Kurds'. In addition, Turkish and Kurdish Alevis are often closer to one another than say, Kurdish Alevis and Kurdish Sunnis (Çelik 2003). This means that for some Kurds in the diaspora (as in Turkey) their Alevi identity is stronger than their Kurdish identity. Moreover: 'By 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' (Bruinessen 1996: 8).

London Alevis are no exception: for example, Kurdish Alevis in London use Turkish as the language of ritual; they follow Alevi television channels promoting Alevi values, hosting Alevi singers, showing Alevi rituals, celebrating Alevi festivals.[11] Cemevi in London regularly hosts several Alevi faith leaders (dede) and researchers on Alevi history, culture and faith from Turkey, especially during the Alevi Aşure celebrations. It has a picture of Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey, on its walls. In my interviews at Cemevi, I was told that they recognised the importance of ethnic identity for some, but that their aim was to bring all Alevis together, irrespective of their ethnicity. One interviewee even highlighted that the essence of Aleviness was against ethnicity-based politics. Another, this time a senior (Kurdish) Alevi figure, referring to this humanist tradition stated: 'We don't care Kurdish or Turkish, we care if human.'

My observations at Cemevi, and my interviews with Alevis in London suggest that Çelik's example of Alevi associations in Istanbul could easily apply to London Alevis:

> although the associations of Kurdish origin began co-operating in issues especially of concern to Kurds, many home-town associations of Alevi Kurdish regions [in Istanbul] feel closer in culture and political orientation to Alevi Turkish associations than Sunni Kurdish associations. For example Sev-Der, a home-town association representing the Alevi Kurds of Sevdilli, a village in Kahramanmaraş, is in co-operation with the home-town association of Divriği, a town in Central Anatolia, dominated mostly by Turkish Alevis, rather than any home-town association representing the neighboring Sunni Kurdish villages (Çelik 2003:154)

It is, however, necessary to acknowledge that in the 1990s, the Kurdish problem and the associated Kurdish mobilisation in Turkey has encouraged Kurds from all sects and backgrounds (whether in the diaspora or not) to assert their Kurdish ethnic identity. Many Alevi Kurds also maintain that Aleviness was at times courted by the Turkish state against Kurdishness. However, the Alevi identity that Alevi Kurds share with Alevi Turks, their common concerns, interests, and practices, the common sectarian injustices they have together faced in Turkey, and their questioning of the official state construction of Aleviness in Turkey allow the continuation of the close ties (Alevi) Kurds have with (Alevi) Turks in London, as well as encourage the maintaining of strong links with Alevis in Turkey.

3. Battling and Belonging

So far I have examined both '*memleket'* and 'battling' though providing detailed ethnographic data. I argued that Kurds in London relate to one space (Turkey) in two distinct ways, one as the country of origin in which the state oppresses Kurds, and against which they are engaged in a battle; and the other as their place of origin to which they are tied emotionally, as their *memleke*t. I explained some aspects of how this is actualised, facilitated and sustained. In this final section, I will further examine this dual-home construction, focusing on how 'battling' and '*memleket*' are experienced and played out simultaneously, and on their contingent nature. I will also consider how the identity ties of second generation Kurds may develop in the future.

First, to a naïve outsider/analyst, the two aspects of dual-home construction may seem to be internally inconsistent as one would question how one could continue to see Turkey both as one's *memleket* as well as one's oppressor. I argue that, for the Kurdish diaspora in London, these two views do not contribute to two psyches at odds with one another. Instead it is common sense and taken for granted. It is experienced and felt as one consciousness. Notwithstanding the continuation of such ties with Turks and Turkey, Kurds carry on their identity battle (with varying degrees of intensity) with the Turkish state. Perhaps this feeling is best illustrated by summarising an example I was given. One of the interviewees told a story of how, on television in a North London café, he watched his team Galatasaray (an Istanbul-based football team) win a match against an Italian team. Later, as he and his Kurdish friends left the café and went out on the streets to celebrate, they started throwing stones at passing cars which were celebrating Galatasaray's victory by waving Turkish flags. In other words, they reacted to Turkish symbols and expressions of Turkish nationalism whilst also supporting an Istanbul-based Turkish team in an international competition, demonstrating the complex and emotive reality and the contingent nature of the processes of identification and belonging of Kurds in London. Such feelings are made possible as Kurds make a distinction between Turkey the state, and Turkey the country: while they have a dispute with the former and its construction of the Kurdish problem, they continue to feel attached to the country as such. Thus for Kurds (and for many non-nationalist Turks) Turkey is not identified as '*vatan'* (motherland) which is associated with Turkish statehood, the regime and the official construction of history and identity in Turkey. It is rather identified as *memleket*, a distinctly non-nationalist mode of expressing homeland and belonging.[12]

Secondly, as is clear from my discussion of the various forms and strengths of the battling with Turkey, it is impossible to say that this dual home-construction is fixed at some common and universal level for all Kurds in London. For some Kurds, the battling aspect is both sharp and strong and the *memleket* bond is more clearly geared towards the Kurdish regions of Turkey. For others, the *memleket* feeling towards Turkey is solid and resilient and the ‘battling’ is minimal. Though for many, battling flares up when political developments upset Kurdish sensitivities and interests (e.g. when Turkey’s largest Kurdish party (DTP) was outlawed by the Turkish Constitutional Court in December 2009). As was discussed in Section 1, responsiveness to such cases reveals that belonging and battling for Kurds is highly contingent on political developments in Turkey.

For most Kurds, however, whether they are in leadership positions within organisations or ordinary members of the community, being both emotionally attached to Turkey whilst battling with it is a taken for granted aspect of their relationship with Turkey. The exception to this comes from some of the ‘well-educated, mobilised and nationalist elites’ of Kurds. These elites are usually not in leadership positions in community organisations. They feel uncomfortable with Kurds’ perception of Turkey (rather than for example ‘greater Kurdistan’) as *memleket.* For example, one of the interviewees pointed out that he was annoyed with Kurds who transferred their civil registry records from Kurdish towns and regions to Istanbul or Izmir, in so doing reinforcing their links with ‘western’, ‘non-Kurdish’ regions of Turkey at the expense of Kurdish ones. The other said that he wished Kurds in London would stop regularly visiting or buying summer houses in Turkish coastal towns, and would instead start spending their summer holidays in another Mediterranean country. Neither of these interviewees was an active member of a community organisation, but they were highly educated, politically mobilised and informed. They were frustrated with ordinary Kurds who did not feel or behave like them, signalling that there might be a divergence between the practices, cares and concerns of ordinary Kurds and those who run their community organisations in London on the one hand, and nationalist Kurdish elites on the other.

Thirdly, it is expected that the future generation Kurds’ attitudes towards Turkey will change over time. In the interviews, the leaders of the community centres highlighted emerging tensions between the first generation (including those who arrived in the UK in their teens) and the second generation. The extent to which this second Kurdish generation, most of whom are currently adolescents, will continue to hold a dual-home construction is yet to be seen. It might be that future generations will claim a stronger Kurdish ethnic identity and pursue the Kurdish struggle as a just cause, intensifying the 'battle with Turkey'. On the other hand, second generation Kurdish youth may move further away not only from Turkey but also from Kurdishness, and may become part of the wider alienated youth of 'immigrant' communities living in the deprived 'ghettos' of European cities.[13] Alternatively, the Kurdish youth may develop a more hybrid identity, for example in the form of Anglo-Kurds (Pattison and Tavsanoglu 2002). Such hybrid identities have already formed elsewhere in Europe; for example newer generations of Kurds in Sweden, the country which hosts the largest percentage of Kurdish intellectuals (Bruinessen 1998; Eccarius-Kelly 2002), increasingly identify themselves as Swedish-Kurds (Hassanpour and Mojab 2004: 222). There is also talk of 'EuroKurdishness' emerging as a result of European Kurds increasingly identifying with the continent and becoming 'Euroversal' (Soguk 2008: 176) and of the possibility of cosmopolitan perspectives and practices (rather than singular ethnic ones) surfacing in London, akin to what Çağlar (2001) noted in Berlin among second generation immigrants from Turkey.

What is worth pointing out is that the extent to which this second generation (and future ones) will continue to see Turkey as *memleket* will not only depend on their experiences in the UK or their parents' attitudes towards the Kurdish 'cause', but possibly much more so on the willingness of the Turkish establishment (particularly the bureaucratic and military elites) and mainstream media (Demir and Zeydanlıoğlu 2010) to break with past tradition and abandon their uncompromising attitude towards increased Kurdish cultural and linguistic rights. The current Turkish government has recently been taking steps towards greater democratisation and an increased recognition of Kurdish rights. However, there is a growing backlash against these developments in Turkey, including an increased popular anti-Kurdish feeling (Saraçoğlu 2010). The steeply rising tide of Turkish nationalism and anti-Kurdish feeling which may be followed by repression or deferral of Kurdish linguistic and cultural rights, may signal to the future generation of Kurds in the diaspora that Turkey is no longer their *memleket*.

Conclusion

This paper focused on and brought visibility to Kurds, a largely unstudied, yet increasingly significant and political diasporic formation in London. It presented detailed ethnographic data and analysis of how Kurds from Turkey interact with, and relate to, their country of origin by uncovering their dual home attachment: namely their political battle with Turkey, and their affectionate perception of Turkey as *memleket*. It identified that the kinds of battles which Kurds are engaged in are multiple and varied, encompassing a wide spectrum of activities, depending on how they construct what is being fought for and what the 'cause' is. It detected that the Kurdish battle is dynamic and highly responsive to politics in Turkey, exposing the 'contingencies of belonging and battling' in the diaspora. In addition, it pointed out that this alternative political sphere, in the form of 'diasporic battlespace', challenges the official construction of the Kurdish problem in Turkey. The study also identified that no matter how radical the battling gets at times, most Kurds in London have warm, intimate, and close *memleket* ties with Turkey. It did this by uncovering the everyday, ordinary ties Kurds in London continue to have with Turkey, and the overlapping circles they maintain with Turks in London. It argued that Aleviness, another central identity that many Kurds in London draw on, encourages the resilience and preservation of networks and links with Turkey.

The paper builds on the work of those who examined the Kurdish diaspora when Kurds were newly arrived and adjusting to London (Griffiths 2002; Wahlbeck 1999, 2002) by providing both new ethnographic data, and a fresh perspective. Unlike most existing studies of Kurds in London or in other European capitals, the paper does not solely focus on Kurds' anti-Turkey mobilisation. Without denying its importance, it unsettles the prioritisation of Kurds' antagonistic relationship with Turkey in the field of Kurdish studies and diaspora (Adamson and Demetriou 2007; Bruinessen, M. Van 1998; Eccarius-Kelly 2002; Leggewie 1996; Lyon and Uçarer 2001; Østergaard-Nielsen 2000 & 2001). By providing a detailed and thorough analysis of their continuing affectionate and close ties in the form of *memleket*, it shows that Kurds' relationship with Turkey cannot be reduced to the battling they engage in, but that Kurds' diasporic 'battling' needs to be understood and examined in the context of the *memleket* feelings they continue to harbour. In so doing, it also contributes to wider studies of migration and ethnicity as it reveals the non-reified and contingent nature of both ethnic belonging and of ethno-political battles in diaspora.

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Notes:

[1] This article specifically focuses on Kurds from Turkey. In the remainder of the article, when I refer to ‘Kurds’, I mean Kurds from Turkey who are living in London.

[2] The PKK is listed as a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the European Union and the US.

[3] For various reports of this conflict see Human Rights Watch (2010).

[4] Not all those who ‘left’ Turkey have been politically active, mobilised and oriented towards what they see as injustices in Turkey. For a comparison, see Toktaş 2007 on Jews who migrated from Turkey to Israel.

[5] See Eccarius-Kelly 2002 for a discussion of legislative pressures and political lobbying applied by Kurds (usually ones based in Germany) to the European Parliament and the Council of Europe.

[6] For a discussion of the role of Kurdish diasporic activism in the shaping of the Kurdish movement in Turkey see Bruinessen (1998); Lyon and Uçarer (2001); Østergaard-Nielsen (2001).

[7] 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: 412).

[8] Due to village evacuations, as well as urbanisation, Istanbul has become the city with the biggest Kurdish population in the world with the 'western' parts of Turkey also possessing a sizable Kurdish population (Bruinessen 1998; Saraçoğlu 2010).

[9] The official census in Turkey does not include data on Kurdish ethnicity or on Alevis.

[10] According to the estimates of the Alevi Religious Centre (Cemevi) in London, 80% of those from Turkey are Alevi; and of those 70% are Kurds.

[11] For a discussion of the Alevi movement and identity in diaspora, see Massicard 2003 who focuses on Alevis in Germany. Published academic work on Alevis in London is non-existent.

[12] As was pointed out by some of the Kurds in London, in their denial of, and/or non-engagement with, politicised Kurds in UK, the Turkish authorities problematise 'battling'; and do not sufficiently recognise Kurdish diaspora's '*memleket'* ties.

[13] For a discussion on the low levels of educational attainment amongst the Kurdish and Turkish community in London see Enneli et al. 2005, Greater London Authority 2009, Issa 2004. Enneli et al. (2005: 53) argue that 'young Turkish-speaking origin people are also among the most disadvantaged groups in multicultural London. … There is little life beyond the kebab shops'.

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