

Kurds in Cyberspace

The Kurdish Diaspora, the Internet and its Impact on the Kurdish Question

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After the Turkish Intelligence Service (MIT) captured the Kurdish separatist leader Abdullah Ocalan in Nairobi in 1999, thousands of Kurds in the diasporas rushed to city centres across Europe to protest the Turkish government. The BBC news in Germany showed thousands of Kurds united in the streets, shouting "*Biji Serok Apo- Biji Serok Apo!*"¹ and this caught my attention. It was evident that Kurdish groups in Western Europe were amazingly well organized in so far that in a matter of hours they were able to mobilize their community to rally for their cause. This reveals a remarkable capability for mass communication. Naturally, this led me to question how that was possible in such a diffuse and broad-based population.

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Historically, what came to be known in Turkey as the “Kurdish Question” has been an ongoing problem, stemming from the creation of the Republic in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The problem lies in the fact that Atatürk based the newly created republic on Turkish ethno-nationalism.² This legacy backfired during the early part of the 1980s as the Kurdish separatism movement developed in response to this exclusive ethno-nationalism and then adopted armed conflict by initiating a bloody civil war against the Turkish government in Ankara.³ This conflict between the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)⁴ and the Turkish government lasted more than two decades and continues today. Although the actual warfare took place in Southeastern Turkey, intellectual and organizational support came from Kurds in the diasporas of Western Europe and elsewhere around the world.

Traditionally, the Kurdish conflict had only two major actors, the Turkish government and Kurds living in Turkey. Today, the issue involves numerous actors including but not limited to: the European Union; the Turkish government; Kurdish diasporas; and the Kurdish population of Turkey. As a result of active lobbying in Brussels and constant pressure on Western European governments, the “Kurdish question” became a cause célèbre in Europe. Due to activities outside Turkey, the Kurdish cause evolved from a domestic Turkish matter to an international cause, thus bringing global attention on the day-to-day lives of Kurds living in Turkey.

The increase of actors involved in the conflict stems from the mobilization and political involvement of Kurds in the diasporas. This involvement served to increase global interest in the conflict, thereby bringing the global into the local. Consequently, it can be argued that without mobilization of diaspora Kurds through modern media and the Internet, Kurdish nationalism would not have received the international support it is enjoying today.

The question then becomes how this mobilization was possible. To begin with, the Internet played a significant role in the mobilization of diasporic Kurds, as the mission to promote the Kurdish cause would not have been as successful without the adaptation of new modes of communication. Aside from the new communication methods used by the population, the geographical location of the diaspora further helped their cause: as Turkey looks towards Europe for a brighter future, diaspora Kurds’ geo-strategic location in relation to Europe has been helpful in the effort to mobilize at the level of both the European Union and the nation and/or state level throughout Europe itself. This brings us back to

the present--in order to understand the state of the conflict today, we must look back into the history of the conflict.

Ideas, Legacies, Realities: History of the Kurdish Question

There have been two stages of Kurdish resistance and separatism in the history of the Turkish Republic. First was the period of resistance to Ankara in the form of rebellions following the establishment of the Republic in 1923. These rebellions were dispersed and were not necessarily in the name of Kurdish nationalism. The second is the most recent stage in the Kurdish struggle; it is associated with the PKK, which initiated its struggle during the 1980s and continues its work today. This second stage comes as a result of many factors which include but are not limited to the pressures of cultural assimilation, the development of economic difficulties, and regional under-development.

The first stage of the conflict formed as a reaction to Atatürk and his idea of "Modern Turkey" which is/was inherently secular. Atatürk founded the modern republic upon a vision of a "modern" and secular Turkey.⁵ This model was based on the European nation-state model. However, his conception of the cultural framework of this new state evolved. Initially, Atatürk remained under the influence of Ottomanism--an encompassing identity based on traditional geographical roots, and not on the modern notion of ethnicity. It is important to point out that Atatürk was an Ottoman soldier. He was not born in Anatolia so his legitimacy came from the fact that he was an Ottoman first. During the war for independence from Greece, Atatürk and his followers were in favour of an autonomous Kurdish region in the Southeast. This was partly due to the support he received from Kurds of Anatolia and partly due to his personal opinion on what constituted "us" and "them."⁶ However, following the victory over the Greeks, due to pressing issues of realpolitik, Atatürk decided to form the modern Republic of Turkey based on an ethno-nationalistic set of ideas.

Ironically, the main reason for the initial Kurdish rebellions was not Kurdish nationalism's refusal of this new ethno-nationalist identity; it was the secular nature of the new republic. During the national struggle against the Greek invasion of Western Anatolia, Atatürk forged his union in an inclusive Muslim identity known as *umma*. After Atatürk and his followers won the Turkish Independence War in 1923, he created the secular Turkish Republic--only then did the Kurdish support for his cause decline. Yet none of the initial uprisings were in the name of a "unified" Kurdish identity.⁷ They were limited to regions and religious

subgroups, which is not surprising as the Kurds in Turkey are very diverse, with multiple levels and spaces of belonging. Furthermore, there are several different sub-dialects of Kurdish and several different factions of Islam and loyalties in tribal establishments. Thus the rebellions were very dispersed and did not gain the support of a majority.⁸

After the war, Atatürk saw nation building as a necessity. In doing so, he looked at two alternatives to build what he saw as the “Turkish nation.” On the one side, he could form a nation around Islam and on the other a nation based on ethno-nationalism. It’s evident that he chose the latter. In making his decision, Atatürk followed the well-established concept of state building, by building nationalism through education and cultural construction. These ideas were brought to Turkey by Ziya Gökalp, an influential thinker of the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish republic.⁹ Atatürk utilized Gökalp’s theory of nation building and turned it into a concept known as “*Turkçuluk*.” This concept, relying heavily on the secular notion of “Turkishness,” bases itself in ethnic roots instead of the religious traditions of Islam. The concept of citizenry based on assimilation through education into the secular Turkish population also created discomfort among landowners (*Aghas*) and religious clergy (*Sheiks* and *Imams*). As a result, both groups initiated rebellions throughout the region over the span of two decades. It is important to note that the rallying cause behind these uprisings was not support of Kurdish nationalism. Instead, these rebellions were usually initiated in the name of “saving Islam” or with encouragement of *Aghas* hoping to reverse the loss of their regional power to the central government in Ankara. Yet these rebellions shared the same fate as any rebellion in the Republic at the time—a crushing defeat by the Turkish military followed by numerous executions in the name of restoring order. It later becomes evident that this violent response by the Turkish government to any form of rebellion had a direct impact on the Kurds and the struggle for Kurdish nationalism.¹⁰

In the end, the notion of “Kurdish nationalism” became a mainstream idea only after the political abandonment of the Kurds in the name of nation building, as the movement was initiated as a reaction to Turkish nation building under the ethno-nationalistic concept of “Turkishness.” Consequently, Kurdish nationalism was initiated at a time when Ankara ignored the reality of Kurds living in Turkey and abandoned any possible policy option that involved Kurds as an established identity.

From the 1950s to the 1980s Turkey went through a variety of in-

ternal problems that resulted in various military coups fought under the guise of restoring order and preserving peace and well being. The fallout from this process generally led to an asymmetrical distribution of rights and wealth across Anatolia, with Western Turkey seeming to benefit while Eastern Turkey fared less fortunately. During this same period Kurds were constantly imprisoned and executed or exiled by the military junta, due to their communist tendencies and cultural demands that were deemed "separatist." Officially, however, the Kurdish problem was "under control" until 1983.

This changed in 1983 when a group of students from Turkey's preeminent political science school at Ankara University formed the PKK. Unlike previous Kurdish resistance movements, this movement was not initiated by *aghas* or *sheiks* rebelling against Ankara based on personal beliefs. Rather, it was a group of economically disadvantaged Kurds who were responding to decades of political pressure and economic disadvantage. In the end, they were the real consequence of the shifts in ideas and legacies: they were the outcome of a history of Kurdish subrogation.¹¹

At its inception, Abdullah Ocalan, the founder of the PKK, found grassroots support from the growing Kurdish proletariat. Initially, the PKK used guerilla tactics in small skirmishes against the Turkish military, and was successful in killing Turkish soldiers. However, the PKK ended up sharing the same destiny of other "freedom fighters" of this period, including the Palestine Liberation Organization. They felt the need to get extreme in their tactics to prove their "legitimacy." The shift towards guerilla tactics not only affected the Turkish army and government, but also hurt the Kurdish population of the region, which disillusioned them from supporting the PKK.

This shift to more extreme methods of aggression also led to a new phenomenon: the forced migration of regional Kurds as a never-ending state of emergency in Southeast Turkey meant active military presence and atrocities in the region.¹² At one point during the 1990s the situation in Turkey became so tenuous that civilians and tourists required special permits and military protection in order to visit the region. These limitations led to a pattern of forced migration that saw an increase in the number of Kurds who gave up their traditional work as peasants in the South due to the inevitable lack of economic opportunities. This started a flow of Kurds from East to West as the displaced sought work and a better life in and around urban centres.¹³ In Western Turkey, the displaced Kurds started interacting with "White-Turks," a

concept developed specifically for the Turkish population living in urban centers such as Izmir, Ankara and Istanbul. The “modern” group of White-Turks adopted an artificial Western culture imposed on them by the secularist modern Turkish state. Ironically, the White-Turks were very orthodox in their interaction with those from Eastern Turkey. Since their modernism depends on the construct of a “backward East” as their reference point, the construction of Eastern Turkey as such leads to the creation of an “Other Turkey” within the borders of modern day Turkey.

This monistic world vision of the urban centers and their concept of what constitutes modern also contributes to the development of the modern Kurdish question. In this instance, the problems of the Other Turkey have no bearing on modern Turkey until they migrate into the urban centers. As displacement and migration forced Eastern Kurds into the modern centers, they experienced pressure to assimilate into the artificial society of white Turks and become a “good Turk.” This naturally leads to tensions between the two groups.

What is interesting is that this tension actually led to renewed support for the PKK. The PKK saw clearly that the idea of a Turkey of two nations, a unified Turkey, was not to be. They realized that Turkey was for Turks and Kurds had no part in it so long as they remained Kurds. This led to further migration: the Kurds that moved from Eastern Turkey to Western Turkey and established themselves as part of the urban proletariat began to migrate from Turkey into the rest of Europe. Unwittingly, this migration creates further challenges for the Turkish government as the development of globalization serves to impact and empower a new force outside of Turkey that supports the Kurdish cause: the Kurdish diasporas.

Static Problems, Changing Geographies: Kurdish Diaspora vs. Turkish Government

To understand how the Kurdish diasporas developed, one needs to understand how globalization impacts the migration of Kurds from Turkey into Europe in general, and into Germany in particular. In general, globalization challenges the traditional ways in which migration and ethnic relations have been conceptualized. It functions as a “social process in which the constraints of geography on the social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding.”¹⁴ What this comes down to then is that the international migration and new technological developments that go along with glo-

balization develop various global, transnational or even completely de-territorialized social relations. These developments do not lead to a new uniform world culture;¹⁵ rather, the contemporary global world with its drastic expansion of mobility is a place where "difference is encountered in the adjoining neighborhood [and] the familiar turns up at the ends of the earth."¹⁶ Consequently, the local and the global become increasingly intertwined in a process of "glocalization."¹⁷

As the local and global increasingly intertwine, migration becomes a normal event initiated for different reasons for different people. Östen Wahlbeck's work examines how this process of globalization and migration causes the Kurds from Turkey to migrate to Europe in two distinct groups: the proletariat and intelligentsia. For the proletariat, moving to Western Europe was an economic opportunity, a leap forward in their pursuit of better living. For the Kurdish intellectuals, Western Europe was a free zone; it was a safe haven in the sense that they were able to publish on contemporary Kurdish affairs without the fear of prison sentences and torture.¹⁸ This ability to live in a different society than the society of origin gave the Kurdish intelligentsia the opportunity to analyze both worlds through a Saidian lens.¹⁹ They possessed an oriental mindset, yet they absorbed the occidentalist Western ideologies. This "Anatolian blend"²⁰ of the European and the Oriental is a common heritage amongst Kurdish intelligentsia, and this bipolarity is visible in the practices of the Kurdish diaspora.

Wahlbeck argues that the bipolar tension created as an individual or group of individuals assumes the role of both orientalist and occidentalist is the essence of the notion of a diaspora. "The concept of diaspora, understood as a transnational social organization relating both to the country of origin and the country of exile, can give a deeper understanding of the social reality in which refugees live."²¹ The Kurdish diaspora embodies distinctly Kurdish characteristics of family values, community and sense of solidarity that surface during campaigns of state oppression. Along with these traditional values, the diaspora feels forced to form its sense of identity with the Western ideas of "nation," "class struggle," and "ethno-nationalism" by which they find themselves constantly bombarded. In the end this leads to a unique combination that serves to empower this group in many ways that were previously not possible.

An example of this can be seen in Germany where many of the Kurdish migrants relocated. During the 1980s and 1990s Germany became "the" destination for subalternized or banned Turkish political

movements. During that period, Berlin was for the Kurds what Miami was for the Cubans. It was a “political capital” for the exiled. However, this sense of “exile” was not exclusive to ethno-centric Kurds. In the Turkish context the term “oppressed political movement” applies to a broad spectrum of migrants that range from Islamic extremists to Communists to Kurdish separatists.²² Thus, Germany became a platform for these groups to mobilize against the Turkish government, and an arena where these groups began their struggle to create diasporic awareness and gain legitimacy within the immigrant community. This struggle for legitimacy by the Kurdish organizations in Germany associated with the PKK could not have succeeded without the military action taken by the PKK. The PKK’s actions provided legitimacy for them and their Marxist ideology.²³

Two groups, the Kurdish separatists and the Islamic extremists, became successful in their attempt to gain legitimacy. Between them they had one common enemy: the Turkish government. Ironically, a common enemy was not enough to keep the groups from harbouring animosity towards each other. On the one hand, Kurdish nationalists refused to join a pan-Anatolian Islamic Republic, and on the other, Islamists did not want to be associated with “godless” Marxists. Their dislike of each other had a valid basis as the Kurdish nationalists were seeking a separate state based on ethno-national Kurdish identity while the “Political Islamists” were aiming for an Anatolian Islamic Republic with an identity based solely in Islam rather than in national identity.

In the end, their differences did not matter much since only one of the groups really survived into the present. The changing political climate and current discourse in politics has moved the political Islamists to the margins. In general, attempts to promote Political Islam failed following the events of 9/11. This was partly due to association between the Islamic diaspora and Al-Qeada, but it was mostly because of the growing Islamophobia in the West.²⁴ On the other hand, secular Marxist Kurds and their cause gained momentum during the 1990s and onwards. This was partly because of the ability of the political elites of the Kurdish diaspora, who were in exile in Western Europe, to retain close relations with the ongoing struggle in Turkey. Their charisma, experience in mobilizing the masses and political organization blossomed in the liberal political system of Western Europe and this allowed them to work toward developing a coherent diaspora with a unified voice.

The Kurdish diasporas in Europe eventually separated into several powerful organizations that undertook the task of lobbying to im-

prove the standards of Kurds in Turkey. These organizations are based at different levels of the various governments of Europe and are located in key geographical locations such as Brussels, London and Düsseldorf. The differing objectives of the organizations range from support for Kurdish separatism in Turkey to the construction of a pan-Kurdish identity to political think tanks that lead projects on Kurdish human rights. I will now discuss three of these groups at the different levels and examine their purpose and/or function.

First I will examine Kon-Kurd (*Konfederasyona Komelen Kurd li Ewropa*), a pan-European Confederation of Kurdish Associations in Europe. This organization is conveniently located in Brussels, a few minutes away from the headquarters of the European Union where it lobbies for the Kurds at the level of the European Union. Kon-Kurd's constitution states that the organization was established "to preserve and improve the cultural, economic and political rights of Kurds living in Europe according to the established international human rights norms and treaties."²⁵ However, when one examines the Kon-Kurd portfolio, they may come to a different conclusion as its contents leave the impression that their political motivation and orientation is not limited to Europe. In fact, their existing structure is entirely directed towards supporting the struggle of the Kurds in Turkey at the EU level.

Next I examine diasporic organizations at the nation-state level. Examples of these are Yek-Kom²⁶ (Association of Kurdish Organizations in Germany) and Kom-Kar²⁷ (*Yetkiya Komelen Kurdli Elmanya*). Currently, Yek-Kom has under its umbrella fifty Kurdish organizations across Germany and Kom-Kar has around forty members. Yek-Kom represents the Kurdish proletariat in Germany, thus it is associated with the PKK, whereas Kom-Kar is not ideologically bound to a certain class nor associated with any armed group. In this case, national struggles associated with armed groups give political organizations more legitimacy; thus, this lack of association with the PKK undermines the legitimacy of Kom-Kar.

At first instance, Yek-Kom is distinctive as its rhetoric includes elements of class struggle and Marxist theory. Yek-Kom's involvement in German politics allows it to pressure the German government to get involved in the Turkish government's practices against the Kurds and to give the Kurdish diaspora a political space from which to operate. The organization is renowned for lobbying against the German government's designation of the PKK as a terrorist organization. The fact that the Yek-Kom has a relationship with a "terrorist" organization undermines the

perception of Yek-Kom in Germany.

Unlike Kom-Kar, Yek-Kom also has goals and practices that focus on and involve Kurds living in Germany. Its constitution lists its duties as educating the Kurdish youth and facilitating their integration into the German economy, and working to benefit the Kurdish people from new openings in Turkey as a direct result of the EU membership bid. Thus, Yek-Kom is a perfect example of a diasporic organization with a variety of objectives both in the country of origin and in the receiving country.

An interesting thing to note about Yek-Kom is that aside from the Kurdish "community organizations" and diasporic organizations it has developed Kurdish think tanks with intellectual objectives. The Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP) is one of these think tanks. Located in London, it focuses on raising international awareness for "protecting and promoting the human rights of all persons living throughout the Kurdish regions of Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey and the former Soviet Union."²⁸ With this in mind, KHRP publishes annual reports on human rights abuses and the state of the Kurds in regions they live in and their interaction with the governments they live under. These reports are not limited to the conflict in Turkey as they cover issues related to Kurds around the world and especially in the Middle East and ex-Soviet Union. KHRP is not a unique institution in this regard. Many other think tanks exist that serve to provide an intellectual basis for the Kurdish cause, including several Kurdology institutes in Europe. Despite the fact that these institutes study a wide selection of topics ranging from Kurdish language and literature to Kurdish politics, they all find their common ground in the grief of being a nation without a land. The desire for self-autonomy is evident in the products of these institutes.

The conclusion that one comes to in examining these diasporic structures relates to the fact that the Kurds in the diasporas have become Europeanized. Not only have they adopted the pan-European rhetoric of the EU but they have also mobilized in all levels of governance.²⁹ As a result, the Kurdish Diaspora as a structure finds itself deeply imbedded into the European Political landscape. Furthermore, as this structure settles into the landscape, it becomes evident that the Kurdish diasporas work hand in hand to develop and adopt new strategies to further the process of advancing self autonomy and the construction of identity. In this process, modern media outlets and especially the Internet have become an important means for these diasporic institutions to reach their objective.

The Role of Modern Technology in the Mobilization at the Transnational Social Space

The diasporas benefit from the freedom of expression afforded them in their receiving countries, and have used this to push the boundaries of liberal democratic institutions both inside and outside those countries in order to test their limits. It also leads to the development of transnational social spaces. In the case of the Kurdish diaspora, their main obstacle is in Ankara where the Turkish government resists these boundary-challenging pressures by attempting to limit or eliminate the places where the Kurds are able to find a voice. This process of limitation and/or elimination includes pressures placed on other governments in Europe to silence the Kurdish diasporas within their borders.

The first step in creating a common voice roots itself in the need for a voice. In the case of the Kurdish diaspora, it feels that it is their duty to help "their people" to reach a better living standard. This duty stems from the fact that diasporas often have a feeling of "necessity" embedded in their identity; a necessity which Patricia Ehrkamp refers to as "transnational belonging."³⁰ This belonging stems from a desire by refugees and political exiles to help those back home; in doing so, the contacts and networks developed to achieve this goal result in the creation of transnational social spaces.

To develop this idea it becomes important first to develop the idea of "transnationalism" and how that is seen to function. In this instance, the term transnationalism broadly refers to "multiple ties and interactions linking people and institutions across the borders of nation states,"³¹ and to the technologies that serve to connect such networks of interactions. These technologies/networks existed before the invention of modern media (although not as powerful as they are today) in the form of newspapers and other print media that were published outside the country and smuggled through underground networks.³² Newspapers were then followed by radio transmissions and that was followed by TV broadcasts. Today, however, the Internet has become the dominant medium in the creation of transnational spaces. The difference in this new medium/domain of exchange revolves around an immediacy that was never available before, thereby eliminating the lag between the availability of information and the dissemination thereof. Naturally this immediacy affects the development of social spaces in an unprecedented fashion as the speed of the Internet increases and access becomes more

readily available.

The Internet is more than a worldwide, publicly accessible network of interconnected computer networks. It is a body politique. The Internet is *terra incognita* when it comes to its exteriority to existing societal norms and social imaginaries. The main pillars of our identity, gender, race, and ethnicity are non-existent on the Internet. Thus, it creates a fundamentally new space to express opinions, share ideas and broadcast news.³³

Today, the Kurdish Diaspora is presented with an opportunity to use the Internet and other emerging network technologies to support their quest for rights, freedoms and social justice. The Internet provides to them a world where almost anyone located in an urban centre can share their message globally with a free blog and a few dollars spent at an Internet café. Access is generally not a major communications stumbling block for diasporic organizations. Consequently, it becomes important for the diasporas to learn how to appropriate the technologies available in order to bend and mould them so that they can be used more strategically and politically.³⁴

Thus the Internet has become the weapon of choice for diasporic communities. In the instance of the Turkish Kurds, they were successful in adopting the Internet as the medium of communication and as a tool to fill the gap of communication between the country of origin and the receiving country. Ronaldo Munck argues that global civil society is a site of struggle for and over meaning: that global civil society is in the process of constructing itself and generating self-awareness. Networked technologies have an important role to play here, because they facilitate the diversity and representativeness necessary to get beyond the "already converted."³⁵ The Internet as a product of the communications revolution provides many new opportunities for the "formation and preservation of identities independent of territoriality," allowing dispossessed and stateless groups to redefine themselves and challenge dominant states.³⁶

The first group (in the Kurdish case) to adopt this new tool to attract beyond the already converted was the subalternized organization of the PKK. Their subalternization was a consequence of their reduced political and military power. The PKK was facing military defeat and Abdullah Ocalan was on the run--during this period he was actively chased by Turkish security and intelligence services. The PKK was cut off from the outside world due to the Turkish Military's success. By a twist of fate, the Internet took off during the same era and became a

widely available source of information. The PKK mobilized in this new space and started to issue press releases and activity reports over the Internet, which became an essential apparatus in the Kurdish conflict as it created a direct link between the Kurdish diaspora and the Kurds in Turkey, and also created a direct link between the diaspora and the global community. What links the diaspora Kurds and the Kurds in Turkey together is "a common interest in their location of origin and a foundational identity that is rooted in that place which defines an in-group, in spite of the fact that people may or may not have ever personally interacted with one another in real time and space."³⁷

Even after the capture of Abdullah Ocalan, the PKK used the Internet to mobilize the masses and generate great turnouts in protests of his arrest and trial. Today the PKK still uses the Internet. PKK supporters have also created online initiatives such as "Freedom for Ocalan" and "Peace in Kurdistan." Today there are thousands of websites on the Kurdish issue and many more on the associations and institutions. The Internet is a "bottomless well" when it comes to topical and fragmented topics such as the Kurdish question.

There are a few websites and news portals that stand out within this "bottomless well." These are usually the websites designed by diaspora Kurds and are intended to create a two-way news flow. This two-way news flow is intended to inform the Kurds living in Turkey and at the same time to receive news from the Kurds living in Turkey. Both the diaspora Kurds and the Kurds in Turkey are mutually contributing to and benefiting from these websites. These websites usually come in the form of news portals and are usually multilingual, in Turkish, Kurdish and English. The most significant ones in the English language are Firat News Agency, Dicle News Agency,³⁸ and the recently-established Bianet. There are also numerous online news portals in Kurdish, such as Azadiya Welat, a pan-Kurdish online portal that covers Syria, Iraq, Iran and Turkey. Finally there are those websites in Turkish that are intended for Kurds living in urban settings in Turkey and do not speak or read Kurdish; Yeni Ozgur Politika (New Free Politics) is one of these media outlets. However, like the previous means of communication, the day of the news portals is coming to an end. Diasporic Kurds and Kurds in Turkey are looking for more reliable and legitimate news that are not ideologically or political attached to any organization. First-hand news and blogs are hijacking the Internet news from established mainstream institutions and diasporas. There are numerous Kurdish bloggers writing on the Internet on a daily basis. The preeminent blogs are: Dozame.org, Kurdistan

Bloggers Union and Chronique de Beyoglu. These are just a few examples that I enjoy reading to get information on contemporary Kurdish affairs in Turkey.

One thing these cyber-Kurds share is the language they use: Kurdish bloggers are *not* intending to write for fellow Kurds--they write to create global awareness, thus their preferred language is not Kurdish or its sub-dialects, but English. This trend is also visible in the language preferences of Kurdish news portals too. The English language sites seem to have higher standards and more professional staff. Thus it can be argued that the Kurdish Diaspora and their media outlets on the Internet are intending to bring the experiences of their "stateless" transnational community into the attention of the global public.

Conclusions

Historically speaking, the Kurdish conflict in Turkey had many stages. The most recent stage came in the form of an armed struggle between the Turkish Military and the PKK during the 1980s and 1990s, and the bloodshed that came with it are a sad part of Anatolian history.³⁹ Today we are at a new stage in conflict. It is impossible to argue that this new stage is historically independent from the previous stages. As I have tried to explain above, the Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey is primarily functioning from a platform formed around Marxist rhetoric. Thus, understandably, the movement gains support from peasants and proletariat living in rural slums and urban ghettos. In the mean time, the prospects for a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question have found a new hope in Turkey's prospect of becoming a member of the EU. These openings are referred to as the "democratic solution to the Kurdish Question." Considering, on the one hand, the particular situation of South East Anatolia, the level of violence, the depth of grievances and the economic differentiation and, on the other hand, the Kemalist-Turkish political culture, a federalist solution to the Kurdish question has no room in the Turkish social imaginary. Nevertheless, a solution to this question may be imposed through a bottom down approach during the ongoing enlargement process with the EU. This possible and likely pressure could force the Turkish government to place the regionalization process into the political agenda.

This alternative to the existing situation was made possible by the Turkish bid to the EU but it would not have been possible without the efforts of the Kurdish diaspora. Kurds have become Europeanized in

the sense that they have adopted the means to mobilize political interest for the cause at the European Union level. They have mobilized in all levels of governance. Urban, national, and supranational levels of government are frequently lobbied by Kurdish organizations. The Kurdish diaspora as a structure has been deeply imbedded into the European political landscape. This new period of political mobilization at the European level was made possible by modern media outlets and especially the Internet. The Internet became an important means for these diasporic institutions to reach their objective. In this paper I have argued that without mobilization of diaspora Kurds through modern media, and especially the Internet, Kurdish separatism would not have received the international support it is enjoying today. The Kurdish diaspora was essential in the creation of a transnational social space through which a dialogue and an export of hope was made possible for those Kurds living in Turkey. However, what allowed this transnational space to blossom was the relatively unregulated and free nature of the Internet. Through the Internet, diaspora Kurds were able to get information on contemporary events, and quickly react to these events. The Kurdish diaspora in Germany and elsewhere in Europe mobilized in cyberspace in order to inform their community about the happenings and also raise international awareness over the Kurdish question. Yet, my conclusion is, Kurds preferred to use the Internet in order to raise international awareness, not to inform their fellow Kurds. Thus, their preferred language is not Kurdish or its dialects. It is English. I believe it can be argued that the Kurdish diaspora and their media outlets on the Internet are intending to bring the experiences of their "stateless" transnational community to the attention of the global public. The result is Kurds are now in cyberspace, and they are quite adept at maximizing its efficiency.

Epilogue

A year after I wrote this paper in the fall of 2006, the situation in Southeastern Turkey significantly deteriorated. The PKK ended its unilateral cease-fire that was in effect for the past five years and re-initiated its attacks on the Turkish military in Southeastern Turkey. With attacks originating from Northern Iraq, the PKK has been killing and kidnapping Turkish soldiers. With increased tension between Turkey and Iraq and Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan, the sentiments and political discourse of the Turkish population living in the Western part of the country shifted from democratic talks on reforming the 1980 constitution to fascist/chauvinist

levels that can only be compared to the political environment of the military coup of 1980 that established that same constitution.

This transformation of the reality on the ground in return has a direct effect on the conclusions of my paper. After this new wave of increased “terrorist” activity on the Turkish-Iraq border, the hopes of a federal Turkish state with a Kurdish region seems almost impossible in my life time. Thus, the PKK is doing more harm than good for the Kurdish population in Turkey. Yet, on the other hand, looking at the headlines of various international news outlets such as BBC, Reuters and The Guardian, one thing becomes clear: the Kurdish diaspora has created enough public awareness over the issue that their cause can make it to headlines for the five o’clock news around the world. Another place to find the fruits of this pressure lies in the way Western media outlets prefer to designate the PKK as “rebels” and “freedom fighters” rather than “terrorists.” In that sense the conclusions of my paper still remain valid and essential in understanding the transformation of the Kurdish question from a local one to a global one, and the role of the Internet and the Kurdish diaspora in that transformation.

Notes

¹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/281821.stm>; *Biji Serok Apo* translates into “long live our leader Apo.”

² Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 237.

³ Nicole Pope and Hugh Pope, *Turkey Unveiled: A History of Modern Turkey* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook, 1998), 253.

⁴ PKK stands for *Partiya Karkari Kurdistan*.

⁵ Andrew Mango, *The Turks Today* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook, 2004), 25-39.

⁶ Tareq Y. Ismael, *Middle East Politics Today: Government and Civil Society* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2001), 163.

⁷ David McDowall, *A Modern History of The Kurds* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 397-420.

⁸ Wadie Jwadieh, *Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 133-147.

⁹ Ismael, *Middle East Politics Today*, 167.

¹⁰ As Kurdish nationalism adopted Marxist rhetoric it gained support from the peasants. Combined with the peasants the Kurds formed a new front against existing feudal system of landlords and *sheiks*. Kurdish nationalism also positioned itself as a movement that defended the rights and freedoms of Kurds living in Turkey and put itself forward as the sole defender of the “Kurdish Identi-

ty." This concept of a unified Kurdish identity is a recent phenomenon. According to Martin van Bruinessen, "while the Kurdish people have ancient historical roots, Kurdish ethnic identity as a clear cut category uniting all Kurds and separating them from other possible ethnic identities is a rather recent phenomenon" (Martin van Bruinessen, "Kurdish Society, Ethnicity, Nationalism and Refugee Problems," in *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, eds. Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl (London: Routledge, 1992), 33-67. However, these rebellions also follow the myth of the Turkish military as the sole defender of the Republic against internal threats, especially Political Islam or Kurdish nationalism.

¹¹ Ismael, *Middle East Politics Today*, 420.

¹² *Ibid.*, 440.

¹³ Östen Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diaspora: A Comparative Study of Kurdish Refugee Communities* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Malcolm Waters, *Globalization* (London: Routledge, 1995), 3.

¹⁵ Mike Featherstone, ed., *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity* (London: Sage, 1990).

¹⁶ James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1994): 302-338.

¹⁷ Roland Robertson, "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity," in Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland. Robertson, eds., *Global Modernities* (London: Sage, 1995), 25-44.

¹⁸ Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diaspora*, 103.

¹⁹ Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile: And Other Essays* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 173-187.

²⁰ By "Anatolian blend" I am referring to the multicultural history of the Anatolian peninsula with settlements from various civilizations ranging from the Hittites to Persians, to Greek city-states, to Roman Empire and finally to the Ottomans and modern-day Turkey.

²¹ Östen Wahlbeck, "The Concept of Diaspora as an Analytical Tool in the Study of Refugee Communities," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28, no. 2 (2002): 222.

²² Mango, *The Turks Today*, 86.

²³ McDowall, *A Modern History of The Kurds*, 457.

²⁴ Gökçe Yurdakul, "Islam, Conflicts and Immigrant Incorporation in Germany: The Cases of DITIB and Milli Görüş" (presentation, Biennial Conference of the European Studies Community Association--Canada, Victoria, BC, May 19-20, 2006).

²⁵ Kon-KurD, <http://www.kon-kurd.org> (accessed November 15, 2006).

²⁶ Yek-Kom, <http://www.yek-kom.com> (accessed November 15, 2006).

²⁷ Kom-Kar, <http://www.komkar-info.org> (accessed November 15, 2006).

²⁸ Kurdish Human Rights Project, <http://www.khrp.org/about/about.htm> (accessed November 15, 2006).

²⁹ Tove H. Malloy, "National Minority 'Regions' in the Enlarged European Un-

ion: Mobilizing for Third Level Politics?" European Centre for Minority Issues Working Paper #24, July 2005, <http://www.ecmi.de/rubrik/58/working+papers> (accessed November 4, 2007).

³⁰ Patricia Ehrkamp, "Placing Identities: Transnational Practices and Local Attachments of Turkish Immigrants in Germany," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31, no. 2 (2005): 345; 364.

³¹ S. Vertovec, "Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 2 (1999): 445-62.

³² In the case of the Turkish Diasporas, satellite television constitutes an important vector for ethnicity and favours the process of identity continuation without taking part in the armed conflict. Roj TV (initially called Med-TV then CTV and most recently Roj TV) is the only representative of the Turkish Kurds while two other Kurdish televisions have been created in Iraqi Kurdistan (Kurdistan TV emits from Erbil since December 1998, Kurdsat TV emits from Suleimanieh since January 2000). Roj TV (Sun TV) developed legendary status due to its ability to maintain continuous broadcasting over the years. Broadcasting via satellite to four parts of Kurdistan and seventy-eight countries around the world, Roj TV is based in Denmark through the broadcast permit granted to it in the year 2003 by the Media Secretariat of Denmark. It broadcasts in the Kurmanci, Sorani, Hewremani and Zazaki dialects of the Kurdish language as well as in the Assyrian, Turkish, Arabic and Persian languages. Thus, it not only has the ability to address the diasporas at large, but it also has the ability to address the Kurds living in Turkey. The Turkish government does not appreciate the fact that a station outside of its jurisdiction can in fact negotiate a role within its borders. As a result, it placed pressure on the Danish government to eliminate it on the grounds that the channel is a media outlet for the PKK and is used for terrorist recruitment and terrorist propaganda. We should steer away from the debate surrounding the validity of these arguments and remain exo-politic and look into the intentions behind such media outlets.

³³ A group of American scholars counter this with the statement that "the Internet is widely heralded as opening spaces for a wide variety of politics and political voices. But as it is praised for its inclusiveness, it is also pilloried for enabling the fragmentation of political opinion without providing a forum in which common political ground can be identified or consensus achieved" (Lynne A. Staehell et al., "Immigration, the Internet, and Spaces of Politics," *Political Geography* 21, no.8 [2002]: 990.). In this instance, I believe diasporas do not use the Internet as an internal decision-making apparatus. They mobilize cyber space to raise awareness over their issues or create transnational networks.

³⁴ Traditionally, diasporas used newspapers and television outlets to promote their causes and the Kurdish Diasporas does not differ in this utility. However, these tools have been modernized and globalized in that their breadth and scope allows them to reach much larger audiences than in the past. For instance, televi-

sion used to depend on local senders, but now has moved into a global network due to the ability to utilize satellites.

³⁵ Ronaldo Munck, "Global Civil Society: Myths and Prospects," *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 13, no. 4 (2002): 349-61.

³⁶ David Romano, "Modern Communications Technology in Ethnic Nationalist Hands: The Case of the Kurds." *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique* 35, no.1 (2002): 127-49.

³⁷ Harry H. Hiller and Tara M. Franz, "New Ties, Old Ties and Lost Ties: The Use of the Internet in Diaspora," *New Media & Society* 6, no. 6 (2004): 733.

³⁸ Both of these news agencies get their names from Mesopotamian rivers of Euphrates (Firat) and Tigris (Dicle).

³⁹ Since I wrote this paper on November 2006, the military conflict in the Southeastern Turkey restarted following the end of the unilateral ceasefire by PKK.