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Ethnicity as a Social Movement. A Comparative Study on the Nusayrian and the Kurdish Ethnic Groups in Turkey

Abstract

In this study, ethnic movements are investigated using a deep interview technique. The focus of the study is the Nusayrians and the Kurds living in Turkey, two significant ethnic groups, which are subject to the similar influences of the nation state although their interaction with official Turkish nationalism has resulted in a different political reaction. Throughout the process of Turkish nation building, while the Kurds have constructed their social movement on ethnic grounds, the Nusayrians have done so on the basis of left-wing policies abandoning any predominant ethnic identity. In both situations, they have readjusted their identities as members of ethnic groups with different ways of political expression.

Key words: ethnicity, social movement, Nusayrians, Kurds, nation-state

Introduction

Movements based on ethnicity have recently been observed in several regions of the world; thus, they have drawn the attention of both political and social scientists. It is thought that the 'globalization' phenomenon, which is in fact an economic concept with a communicative dimension, is the cause of these movements since both information and communication systems force national boundaries and even create need for redefining of the concept itself.

Therefore, the relation between globalization and ethnic movements invokes the following question: how is it possible that our society becomes globalized while localized at the same time? Some researchers, like Jonathan Friedman, relate globalization to postmodernism (Topcuoglu 1996, p. 26). On the other hand, researchers like Turner, establish a relation between postmodern criticism and the localization process (Turner 1996, p. 43). Following this line of thinking, we may propose a relation between the globalization and localization of ethnic social movements.

If we base our analyses only on globalization, we bind ourselves to retrospective processes, which need to be defined by outer effects. Ethnic social movements, however, have inner processes, as well as outer ones. Thus, a group indulged in movement has to be assessed both by retrospective processes like globalization and by introspective processes, which consider its inner processes. At this point,

we define ethnicity as a social movement and discuss it regarding some main conceptual and theoretical perspectives since social movements determine some subject areas like 'social integrity' and help sociologists to change their perspectives on some definite behaviors (Giddens 1997, p. 545).

Currently, the world faces national movements, self defined liberalism and neo-liberalism in particular, along with legalized globalization working against the understanding of a social and national state. Each nation state experiences this process in line with its own historical and ethnical background. Additionally, even within each state different ethnicities experience such processes in a manner particular to themselves. Two ethnic groups might be living under the same conditions; however, only one of them creates a social movement, whereas the other does not.

For this reason, investigating introspective reasons causing this type of movement by contrasting two ethnic groups may be fruitful and interesting.

The Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In this study two such ethnic groups, namely the Nusayrians and the Kurds, will be discussed briefly regarding the concepts of social movement.

About Ethnicity

Here, I would first like to elaborate the ethnic dimensions regarding the Kurds and the Nusayrians. Although the phenomenon of ethnicity is very old, the concept of 'ethnicity' itself is a new one (Eriksen 1993). Ethnicity, as one of the elements of contemporary identities, implies a process of identification and unidentification with self and others; a person who accepts himself or herself to be Nusayrian or Arabic Alawi will be labeled in Turkey simply as 'Fellah' or 'Arabic'. Similarly, one can accept himself or herself as Circassian, Kurdish, Alawi, or Laz; but for a Western European, he or she is looked upon as a Turkish citizen or simply a Muslim. This principle is applicable both to groups as well as to individuals.

For either case, the people themselves decide on their identity according to the particular situation they are in. If you ask for the identity of a Turkish immigrant of Kurdish origin, they will introduce themselves as only Kurdish, or Alawi, or as a Kurd from Turkey. As Weber states: "To be ordinary is not important, the important thing is serving any cultural characteristic" (Weber 1978, p. 388). Meanwhile, ethnic identity does not construct an ethnic group. Ethnic identity provides either difficulty or ease; or it can serve as a basis for the formation of politically-oriented groups.

The group, which has an ethnic identity, can develop a form of solidarity in which the common origin of belief is very important, a situation that applies to the Nusayrians. When a group formed on the grounds of ethnical membership preserves for a long time, it may show development towards notion category which shares many characteristics with ethnicity category in which belief in "common

roots" is of utmost importance. Actions in this respect are known as nationalism. In fact, Frences suggests (Frences 1947, pp. 382–400) that ethnicity is an 'unrealized nation'. In such groups the answers to the following questions: 'Where are we from?' 'How are we, as a group, different from the rest of the society?' and 'What could/ should we do'? categorize the person according to time and place, but the answers differ depending on different levels of categorization.

In fact, ethnical groups do not act together apart from special interests such as bewaring the danger. If these interests consist of forming a state or obtaining part of it then they transform to "nation". If they become successful they become "nationality". When they are unsuccessful they remain as "nation" (nationality without state) (Worsley 1984, p. 247).

At this stage, symbols play a crucial role in the formation of collective identity and nation-states. As Breton (1978) states, people expect to see themselves in these symbols, hence, the symbolic regulations of public institutions and cultural properties should match each other. If people can not see themselves in public institutions, they dissociate themselves from the societies, which they do not feel they belong to and sometimes they search for compensation.

There may be different ethnic groups living in the same geographical region. However, this does not necessarily lead to progressing together except for joint benefits. When the abovementioned competition happens in such multiethnic societies, it is related to status and the groups are sequenced from low to high. Thus, the group, which considers itself discriminated against, searches for appropriate means to compensate for it. To an extent society becomes segregated hierarchically and divided ethnically. The disadvantaged group may evolve itself to challenge this situation, thus, it forms a social movement.

About Social Movements

A social movement is a collective entity organized around the objective of protecting a common interest or attaining a common goal by collective action outside the established institutions (Biesanz 1973, p. 555). As for Gusfield (1970, p. 2), a social movement is the socially shared beliefs and actions that are channelled to cause a change in some aspects of social regulations. 'These movements can include members from several dozens to millions. They can act within legal limits or be organized illegally' (Giddens 1997, p. 642).

While initially a social movement has an identity that has no meaning and which is poorly organized it increasingly gains a social quality and the customs and traditions shape its structure and give raise to the formation of its leadership (Durugonul 1996, pp. 2–3).

There are two different approaches to ethnic movements (Tilley 1997). The first one is the *instrumentalist* approach, which claims that culture does not directly contribute to the formation of ethnic identity. On the contrary, ethnic platforms use some symbols to influence the public by confirming ethnic claims. This approach

proposes that the main elements of culture do not have an inherently political dimension. In other words, it ignores that cultural diversity organically causes political refraction. Contrary to this approach, *primordialists* accept that political refraction is an outcome of cultural diversity. The relations of ethnic movements with other ethnic movements lie along the spectrum of the socio-economic situation in larger societies. On the one hand of the spectrum, there are deliberately 'fulfilled' movements formed to collect the group and to recreate and protect it by the help of the combination of political rhetoric and folk activities (dances, festivals) that emphasize the identity significantly and attractively. On the other hand, the ethnic movement arises to 'reconstruct' the already different social, economic, and political situation of the group. Both of these approaches are developed to analyze two different kinds of social movements. In fact, the answer to 'What is the main reason for the spread of social movements and its basis?' changes according to the kind of social movement we consider (Garner 1996). Briefly speaking, social movements arise as a reaction to the discord between civil society and social regulation.

The main dynamic in understanding the social movements appears to be 'unsatisfied social interests'. Social interests do not necessarily stem from class benefits but they may originate from cultural, religious, and ethnic dissatisfaction.

Unsatisfied social interests ⟶ Social power ⟶ Social movement (Mamay 2000)[1]

According to Weber (1978, p. 212), authority should be considered as the probability of the obedience of individuals to given groups. The legality of traditional authority formed on traditional cultural values reflects the conflict between ethnic groups. In order to solve this conflict, the differences between latent and hidden benefits and the difference between semi groups and interest groups should be taken into account (Dahrendorf 1975, p. 190). These interests cover what Malinowski (1992, p. 30) calls qualities such as character, norms, materials, activities, and function. When the hidden benefits are added to latent benefits, semi groups become interest groups, which lead to group conflicts. If a conflict is about the legality of dominating values, then it becomes the conflict of the ethnic group. The leaders play important roles in most stages of such ethnic conflicts.

The Aim of the Study and Functions

The aim of this study is not to search for the possibility of national integrity within the Turkish context, nor is it to suggest its impossibility. The purpose is to consider social movements from a new empirical point of view.

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[1] S. Mamay (2000), *Theories of Social Movements and Their Current Development in Soviet Society*, http://lucy.ukc.uk/csacpub/russia/mamy.html, accessed 15.05.2000.

The Ethnic Groups Investigated in the Study

The two ethnic groups investigated in this study are the Kurds and the Nusayrians.

The Kurds:

Although the Turkish authorities have rejected the existence of ethnic groups who discriminate themselves from others by possessing a different language, history, and traditions, these groups continued to express themselves in different ways. The Kurds are one of these groups. Andrews (1989) divides the Kurds into *Sunni*, *Alawi*, and *Yezidi* on the basis of religion; and subdivides *Zazas*, a group he treats separately from the Kurds, into two groups of *Sunni* and *Alawi*. However, three of the five cases of this study have introduced themselves of *Sunni* and the other two as *Alawi* and expressed themselves as the Kurds by including *Zaza* into the same race. Our interviewees base their division on language rather than religion. They claim that the difference among the Kurds arises from dialects, which are *Kurmanji*, *Sorani*, *Gurani*, and *Zaza*. Bruinessen also makes a classification based on language (Bruinessen 1999, p. 24). He claims that *Kurmanji* and *Zaza* are spoken by Turkish Kurds, and *Sorani* and *Gurani* by Iraqi and Persian Kurds and that people speaking these dialects have difficulty in understanding each other. He further proposes that neither language nor religion can be the basis for Kurdish ethnic integrity.

Bruinessen emphasizes the significance of social stratification in Kurdish society. He states that the elite of the local tribes dominates the domestic villagers and that the conflict among the tribes caused by imperialist relations between the dominant and dominated social strata have divided Kurdish society for a long time. He points out that even among Kurds living in a specific region, these conflicting interests have inhibited collective actions. Bruinessen also points out the minorities living among the Kurds and says that economic and social webs form their dependence on Kurds.

The Nusayrians (Arabic Alawis):

Although there are *Nusayrian* communities who live in the neighboring provinces, *Adana* and *Icel*, most of the 200,000 *Nusayrians* live in *Hatay*, a province in southern Turkey. The population in *Hatay* resides mostly in the coastal regions of Iskenderun, in the north of this town and in *Samandag*. They have traditionally settled mostly in villages. The rest of the community is settled in *Adana*, in an area stretching from *Yumurtalik* to *Mersin*. These people living in the southeast region have biological and cultural ties with people living in north Syria. What is more, the political elite living in Syria, including the Esad family, are also *Nusayrian*. While these groups' native language is Arabic, they tend to adopt Turkish as a first language. Today, they speak a dialect of Arabic heavily influenced by Turkish (Andrews 1989, pp. 214–125). Their religion is '*Batini*' (Ulucay 1999, p. 24). They place special importance on Caliph *Ali* and they have specific religious rituals differing from other Anatolian Alawis.

These exclusive 'religious background and different language' are the basis of group identity. Tribal and communal organizations and endogamy strengthen this

formation. While some Nusayrians accept that strangers use the word, '*Nusayri*' for humiliation, others claim that it comes from *Mohammet Ibn Nusayri*, the promoter of this denomination. This group claims that they have more knowledge about religious theories than other Kurdish and Turkish Alawis and that they are more intellectual (Andrews 1989, p. 214). One significant difference between Anatolian *Alawis* and the *Nusayrians* is that the latter do not let women participate in religious ceremonies and share its mystery (Andrews 1989, pp. 114–119). Another difference is that while the Nusayrians inherit their race and cannot gain it after birth, there is no such practice among Anatolian *Alawis*. Indeed, if we look at religious ceremonies, we can see that Arabic *Alawi* is a mixture of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. It is similar to Judaism in having a special quality for community in belief. It corresponds to Christianity in having Easter ceremonies and egg festivals. And Caliph *Ali*'s blessing makes it close to Islam.

Methodology

This study is an example of comparative fieldwork. The study is based on focus group research technique. Conference participant focus group data have been obtained by applying the technique of in-depth interviews. The description of the subjects (the focus groups), field procedure and data collection type are given in detail below.

Subjects (The Focus Groups)

The focus groups were chosen from a population of Turkish citizens. The focus groups live in Turkey, however consider themselves to be distinct from Turkish culture and with an identity similar to Andrews' (1989, pp. 152–155; 214–219) definition. Since the subject of the study are 'ethnic groups and ethnically defined social movements', two different ethnic groups, one of which has been considered to have completed its social movement (Kurdish) and the other which has not (the *Nusayrians*), are taken comparatively.

The groups are formed of five people and consist of two women in order to represent gender. In order to control geographical and class effects, each group had at least one subject from an urban region and one from a rural region, and also, from the upper, lower, and middle layers of their respective societies. All of the members of the focus groups were university students and had participated in political actions at least a few times; thus they regard themselves as politically active people. The backgrounds and cultural identities of the focus group's members are as follows:

Kurdish Focus Group:
Mikail: Sunni, from *Mardin* (southeastern Turkey), learned Turkish later. There are people who don't speak Turkish in his family.
Cihan: Alawi, from *Tunceli* (eastern Turkey), learned Turkish when he was 4 or 5, now his Turkish is good but he cannot speak Kurdish although he understands

it. All of his family speaks Turkish. Recently, he says that there has been a tendency among his family to learn and speak Kurdish.

Adile: Alawi, from *Shanliurfa* (southeastern Turkey), her native language is Turkish and she understands Kurdish. All of her family speaks Turkish.

Behice: *Sunni*, she says that she is first a Kurd and then a university student. She is from *Diyarbakir* (eastern Turkey) and her native language is Turkish. Kurdish is her second language. All of her family speaks Turkish.

Riza: *Sunni*, from *Mardin* (southeastern Turkey), his native language is Kurdish. While all of his family speaks Turkish, they prefer speaking Kurdish among themselves.

<u>Nusayrian Focus Group</u>:

Mehmet: from *Samandag* (southern Turkey). He hadn't learned Turkish until primary school. The family still cannot speak Turkish.

Zidan: from *Samandag*. His native language is Arabic and he learned Turkish in primary school. His family still doesn't speak Turkish.

Yelda: from *Antakya* (southern Turkey), Arabic is her second language. All the family can speak Turkish.

Derya: from *Samandag*. Her native language is Arabic. Her family has an elementary knowledge of Turkish.

Ali: from *Samandag*. He learned Turkish in primary school. His family cannot speak Turkish. All the members of the family introduce themselves as Alawi.

Data Collection Technique and Process

The data was collected from two different ethnic groups, five respondents in each group, by means of a deep interview technique. Deep interview differs from interviews and reports and can be defined as picking up individual data to make social generalizations. In reports and interviews, individuals' subjective approaches are considered. However, in deep interviews, although there are still questions and answers, the questions are asked both individually and in groups. The aim of asking these questions is not providing individual approaches, but *to determine experimentally how sociality is formed inside the individual*. Thus, the data collected from deep interviews are considered to be social, but not individual.

Inspired by Touraine's social interference principles and developing her research accordingly, Gole defines this technique as follows: "Deep interview makes it possible to create an experimental atmosphere, in which the effect of the researcher and of the experiences gained in actions are minimized to build the concept of an actor and recreate actor's consciousness. And this becomes possible by creating the actor's social relations. The hidden aspects can come into view by the researcher's interference" (Gole 1999).

While this technique is used when questionnaires and statistical reports can not provide sufficient information, there is another reason for using it in this study: An 'imaginary community' like ethnicity can provide solid information about

a community's characteristics which play important roles in daily decisions and in the decisions of whole countries.

As it is known, culture, because it is characterized with ethnic cultural identity, has constituted the basis for some social movement researchers like Cohen and Tarrow. For example, problems, formalization of disputes, definition of common identity, improvement of solidarity, or action mobilization are the areas in which some new cultural sources like social movements, identities, and ideologies are formalized. Therefore, understanding how culture can shape social movements is important in leading us to think about how culture works. Culture, thus, should be turned inside out (Swidler 1995, pp. 30–31). If we accept the existence and the importance of the first cultural elements in human societies, we face an enormous task of finding solutions to ethnic conflicts in modern political arenas, when considering the applied problems. In order to define deeper cultural elements that cause discrepancy between social institutions and values and/or that lead to misunderstanding among ethnicities we need to investigate ethnic rhetoric. Thus, 'deep interview' will be a good data collection technique for this kind of study.

To collect the data of this study, the groups were twice interviewed separately in June and July 2000. The questions in the hypothesis statement were opened to discussion during the first meeting, and further questions were derived from the feedback. These questions were asked in the second session. All of the interviews were recorded. The data from two interviews were accepted as raw data and interpreted by the researcher within a theoretical framework. The utterances of the members of the focus groups are reported in their original forms.

Evaluation of the Data

Rejection of Ethnic Identity as the Main Component of Social Movements

The members of both groups in this study regard themselves as being separate from the dominant ethnic group, i.e. the Turks. Although some group members have Turkish as their mother tongue, they regard Turkish as a foreign language. They claim that they are rejected and socially excluded for their language-identity. They even cite their linguistic rejection as a reason for the existence of their social movement and demand the recognition of their linguistic identity.

All the interviewees are eager to report that they, as members of a non-Turkish minority group, suffer from injustice, absence of identity recognition and denial by the current Turkish political establishment. However, the more oppressive the tone of denial of their identity is, the stronger their identification with their ethnic identity, culture and language is. The Kurdish focus group gives the following example about a football match played in *Nigde*, in central Anatolia, *Diyarbakirspor*, a football team from a pre-dominantly Kurdish city against *Nigdespor*, a team from a relatively homogeneous Turkish city, *Nigde*. The *Nigdespor* supporters' slogan was 'Damn the PKK, go home terrorists!' and many *Diyarbakirspor* supporters felt

insulted and socially rejected there (PKK is the acronym for the Kurdistan Worker's Party, a separatist terrorist organization that has changed its name recently to KADEK). This example illustrates that discrimination works not only on the Kurdish side but also on the other side. This discrimination reinforces the feeling of rejection, even for people who are well integrated into the wider Turkish political system and accentuate their separateness from the Turks and deny them of any form of connection even with a civic form of Turkish identity.

One interviewee from the Kurdish focus group, *Cihan*, comes forth to contest the widely held popular belief that only the revolutionary left use violence as a means to achieve its aims. To him, this is a misconception, as a Kurd can as well be a supporter of right wing Turkish politics, but at the same time he still is likely to face rejection on the grounds that he is Kurdish.

Another Kurdish focus group member, *Riza*, also wants to talk about his experience at the university: "We once carried out academic research in a Kurdish village. In the process of writing the project report we ran into trouble with our lecturer because of the Kurdish spelling of the name of the village that included the Kurdish letter «w» in it. We insisted on using the original name of the village. However, because the letter «w» does not exist in the Turkish script and Kurdish is not an official language in Turkey, our lecturer didn't accept this «w» version of the name and said that Turkish was the official language and that the letter should be spelt as «v». We wanted to urge him to leave the legality aside and attempted to convince him that the problem here was not legality but the rejection of the native language and culture of the inhabitants of this village. I told him that if we, the Kurds, had not existed, then he would have been right. If he accepted us for what we were, he would have to accept us with our language." He says he explained to the lecturer the origins of the Kurdish language and gave detailed information about it. In the end, he added, the instructor still insisted on using the Turkified version of the name of this Kurdish village and said that it was going to be their choice to decide whether to use the Turkish version or not. Fearing that their project would fail, they employed the Turkified version throughout the report.

Social Movement and Social Stratification

Whether the ethnic groups studied in this text can be placed in the social class system of the wider Turkish society is problematic. Even if such a positioning is possible, its relationship with social movements has to be understood. The researcher became aware of this process during this group's study. The members of both groups believe that so far as they identify with their ethnic group and decline to be assimilated into Turkish society they will always be condemned by the Turks to the bottom of the social stratum. In fact, even if they ceased to identify with their respective ethnic groups, the result would not be very different as it is already established that they are not Turkish. To comprehend more about the subject, the researcher provokes the group members into revealing more on this deeply

held belief by claiming that there is no social discrimination among the Kurds, the Nusayrians, and the Turks because of their native language.

Cihan, of the Kurdish group, asserts that in the Turkish National Assembly only the Turks are represented and that no one with an outward Kurdish identity can enter: "Anyone who says he is a Kurd cannot enter the Assembly," he stresses. He believes that the Kurds are forced to feel as the Turks and that they are always referred to as Turkish citizens without any reference to their Kurdishness.

On the other hand, *Behice*, a female member of the Kurdish focus group, claims that "there may not be overt discrimination, but whenever I speak Kurdish I get humiliated and called names, such as «*kiro*», which as a word, independently of its original Kurdish meaning of «children», has recently become a derogatory remark in Turkish to mean «uncivilized» or «uneducated»." Then *Adile* interrupts by saying that they get called 'tailed Kurds' and that of course offends them deeply. Here, *Mikail* points out another aspect of the linguistic isolation. He says that the situation differs from region to region as, for instance, in the metropolises they could only speak Turkish in public and Kurdish is only spoken in small groups in family and friend circles. On the subject of the social pressure to speak Turkish, *Cihan* says that even in street markets, which are traditionally the domain of the Kurds, traders must speak Turkish to be allowed to rent a stall.

The Nusayrian group wishes to share with the researcher similar experiences of being called names and offensive remarks. *Zidan*, for instance, has this to say: "I think that the exclusion by the Turkish society leads to our further isolation from it. They call us «the dirty Arabs». One day, in the house of an acquaintance a small black dog entered the room we were sitting in. Our host said «Arab, what are you doing here?» (also, the term «Arab» means black in Turkish). At that moment I felt terrible and I challenged him to say what he meant by calling the dog «Arab». He then apologized and said he did not mean any offense but the damage had already been done. I felt totally humiliated. What is hard is that this is not an isolated incident. On another day during a lecture, a professor was teaching and drawing lines on the board and then he started to chuckle while saying «it went like Arabic hair». I felt so uneasy and everybody looked at me…" *Ali* adds another popular Turkish expression "I shall be an Arab if I understand!". *Zidan* comments "well, such things are so annoying. What does, do you reckon, «I'll be an Arab if I understand!» mean? Is this a flattering compliment?".

To get a clearer picture, the researcher questions *Zidan's* opinion and asks if it is to do with the tendency to call black people 'Arabs'. That is to say that being Arab is something related to skin color. And there is an Arabic woman character in a number of Turkish movies played by colored women. And in these sayings the word "Arab" is to denote color, not ethnicity.

Mehmet: "I think this way of reasoning is a form of racism. They call us «*Fellah*», the *Fellah* Arabs. The intention is to humiliate us." The researcher asks, "Does being called *Fellah* annoy *Nusayrians*?"

Zidan: "Well, of course! By calling you this or that name, they make you feel unwelcome and isolated in society. Thus, you feel excluded and hurt!"

Mehmet: "This, I believe, is a way of informing you that in this society there exists a slavery system. The slaves of the establishment are compared to the African slaves. It is in this context that these people draw a parallel between your being darker-skinned *Nusayrian* and the blackness of the African slaves. Because we are a peasant people mostly engaged in farming, they think they are the masters and we – the Arabs or the *Fellahs* – should be their servants and slaves."

The problem that has caused the deepest grievances is the fact that most Kurds and Nusayrians speak Turkish with a very strong accent. Because they only learn Turkish in the primary school, many of them are subjected to mockery about their accents. This accent problem results, in many cases, in discrimination in social life, school, and the workplace.

In socially stratified societies there tends to be an upward mobility from lower ranks to higher ranks across the social stratum. The *Nusayrians* challenge the establishment through the leftist political movements, whereas the Kurds may be more inclined to offer dissidence in the form of ethno-nationalist and/or separatist social movements. However, it has also been observed lately that the *Nusayrians* are also moving in the direction of establishing their own ethnic organizations. This process is also helped partly by the *Nusayrian* intellectual's past organizational experiences in the left wing or socialist movements.

In both societies, the participation in the social movements is considered legitimate. To shed more light on this process of legitimization, the researcher asks another question: "Could we say that people who join these kind of activities become closer to their ethnic and linguistic identity?"

Riza immediately gives his opinion: "When the ordinary Kurds are rejected and isolated, they feel an urge to react. Even someone with no strong national feelings may easily turn into a nationalist." Referring back to the earlier mentioned role of football in ethnic identification, he says when *Diyarbakirspor* went to *Yozgat* (a predominantly Turkish city in central Anatolia) some time ago for a second--division football game, the MHP (Turkish Nationalist Action Party) supporters chanted 'Down with the PKK' for the duration of the whole game. A *Diyarbakirspor* supporter, who until then may not have developed a strong sense of attachment to his Kurdish identity, was then reminded of his ethnic identity in a very unpleasant way. This sort of reaction that they receive even at such an unrelated event, enforces the Kurdish identity and its separateness from the Turkish identity. If he did not get reminded of his Kurdishness here and there all the time, maybe his notion of Kurdishness would grow weak and vague and the Kurdish demands from the Turkish establishment for national rights would gradually subside. So long as this oppression, exclusion and denial continues, however, more and more Kurds will hold on to their Kurdish identity and push for more national rights as a reaction to the repression of their Kurdishness."

Nevertheless, *Behice* begs to differ agreeing that the oppression of one's ethnic identity is a factor, but the main reason for the increased interest in the Kurdish language is internal rather than external. To her, this process is based on the growing awareness of the fact that they are Kurds and that they have a distinct language and culture that separate the Kurds from the Turks and other nations.

The researcher then moves on to determine if there is a perception amongst the members of both the *Nusayrian* and Kurdish groups of a hierarchy based on ethnicity in Turkey and asks the following question: "Is it an indication of one's loss of identity that the *Nusayrians* and/or the Kurds speak Turkish, even when they are not obliged to, instead of their native languages?" *Zidan* acknowledges that there is a tendency amongst the *Nusayrians* to speak Turkish even within the all-Nusayrian groups as the Turkish language is considered to symbolize a higher culture. Speaking even a distorted or broken Turkish is deemed as a sign of cultural superiority whereas the *Nusayrian* Arabic is identified with social and political conservatism. Therefore, they insist on speaking Turkish. *Zidan* also thinks that being able to speak Turkish is a matter of pride in the Nusayrian community. He then goes on to say that he and the other culturally and politically conscious Nusayrians insist purposefully on speaking Arabic wherever possible in order to give Arabic a higher status and consequently make the ordinary *Nusayrians* feel also proud of their own language.

The response from the Kurdish group with regards to the same question is not wholly different. *Mikail* recognizes the dominance of the Turkish language and culture and observes that for the Kurds, too, speaking Turkish is a source of satisfaction. Another member of the Kurdish group, *Riza*, agrees with *Mikail* on this issue. However, *Behice* believes that this satisfaction amounts to one's alienation from one's culture and language and everything that makes one Kurdish.

The prevalence amongst the members of the non-dominant ethnic groups in Turkey of these attitudes towards one's native language provokes us to contemplate if the members of minority ethnic groups consider themselves, both ethnically and linguistically, inferior in relation to the dominant Turkish language and culture. However, at this stage this may only hold true with regards to these two communities. To obtain a Turkey-wide picture on this subject requires more studies to be conducted on the other ethnic groups in Turkey, this, nevertheless, lies outside the scope of this study.

The next topic the researcher desires to discuss with both group members is their assessment of the political inclinations amongst the fellow *Nusayrians* or Kurds on different levels of social and economic stratum of their respective societies. The Kurdish group stresses the diversity of the political views held by Kurds of different social and economic background, which even included supporting the Turkish nationalist MHP (Nationalist Action Party) that does not recognize Kurdish identity. However, it is possible to say that the ranks of the Kurdish political and social movements established and run by the educated class are mainly filled by the members of the middle and lower classes and that the members of the Kurdish

bourgeoisie or the feudal classes rarely join these movements. Even when they support these movements, their support is often in the form of financial assistance.

Although some mass participation on a tribal level is observed as in the case of the tribes called "Milli" and "Turk", the higher classes and the feudal leaders choose to collaborate with the Turkish establishment and are politically Turkified even though they may still speak Kurdish and retain some Kurdish cultural traits.

The same tendency, although with some significant differences, is found amongst the Nusayrian group, as well. They say that although some of the conservative political parties like the MHP, REFAH-FAZILET (a hard-liner fundamentalist party) have attempted to become organized among the *Nusayrians*, they have found no support among them, most notably in Samandag – a predominantly *Nusayrian* town in southern Turkey. Yet, there is always some support for the moderate left and right wing parties. Also, they claim that there is a great devotion and sympathy to Ataturk, the founder of the Turkish Republic and to the political party he founded, CHP (the Republican People's Party). This affection is also the result of the religious motifs within the Nusayrian community. This sympathy and devotion even found a resonance in the religious rituals and prayers of the Nusayrian community. Unlike the general *Sunni* Muslim practice of praying in mosques in the direction of Mecca, the *Nusayrians* pray either at home or in their communal places without turning towards Mecca. Another striking feature is a special ritual and prayer called "Cumhur Namaz – the Republic prayer", which is conducted in Samandag, with the financial assistance of some local families, every year on the 29th of October – that is the day the Turkish republic was founded. There is a widely held belief among the Nusayrians that Ataturk himself participated in one of these rituals. For that reason, it is a very common prayer in Samandag and in the neighboring regions.

The researcher then asks further questions as to why the *Nusayrians* generally do not vote for the conservative parties such as the MHP, FAZILET-REFAH. The reactions are very interesting. They say that their religion, language, and ethnic identity are incompatible with the political ideas represented by these parties. To them, this is actually, the driving force behind the recent political mobilization of the *Nusayrians*. If we recall the statement of *Recai Kutan*, the chairman of the fundamentalist FAZİLET party, in which he referred to the *Nusayrians* and their ethno-religious practices as 'heretics and heresy', the *Nusayrian* perception of these political parties is not mystifying.

At this point the researcher wants to deepen the discussion, somewhat provocatively, by focusing on the reasons for the Nusayrians not having any ethno-political movements like the Kurds, despite the existence of similar socio-political conditions.

Mehmet, of the *Nusayrian* focus group, explains this point as follows: "Our *Nusayrian* group migrated several times between Yemen and Anatolia. During these migrations, we had close contacts with different cultures. For example, we had relations with Judaism. You could actually see the influence of Judaism on the *Nusayrians* that the *Nusayrians* or the Arabic Alawis, too, consider themselves as

a superior nation in the eyes of God. They believe they are descended from the prophet Mohammed's family. They are the chosen people." "We are the perfect humans," *Zidan* joins in. *Mehmet* continues, "Yes. And this means that whatever our personal circumstances, our economic and political situations are, we are the beloved people of God. It does not really matter if we are poor or oppressed. That does not change this belief."

Such beliefs could lead people towards fatalism as the center of their belief system and provide the reason for not forming ethno-social movements. One *Nusayrian* group member, *Yelda*, strongly objects to *Mehmet*'s argument. However, a week later at another session, when reminded of her objection, she says that after some contemplation on the subject she comes to the same conclusion as *Mehmet* on that dimension of the state of the *Nusayrian* community.

Experiences of Social Movements and an Instrumentalist Reconstruction of the Past

The researcher's intention is to uncover the differences or similarities, if there are any, between the past and recent Kurdish ethnic movements as observed by the focus groups. The experimental group has reached this conclusion:

The power of the leaders of the previous ethnic organizations stemmed from the feudal structure and the leadership consisted of aristocratic, affluent individuals who were integrated into the system. Today things have changed dramatically. Now the leadership composition is somewhat different; it is now comprised of intellectuals, university students, and disillusioned workers and peasants with no tribal connections. Although initially there was only a limited participation by members of various tribes, a correlation with loosening of the tribal structure of Kurdish society and the mass participation followed by a sharp rise in the intensity of the movement is noticeable.

The researcher initiates a discussion amongst the Kurdish focus group about the relationship between Kurdishness and Kurdish nationalism, and between Kurdishness and being a PKK supporter. While *Riza* and *Cihan* regard these three concepts as interrelated, *Behice* and *Adile* object to this view. According to the latter, many Kurds are against the PKK and also, although they may subscribe to Kurdish nationalist ideas, they may perfectly remain outside the PKK. Thus it would be right to say that to regard Kurdishness and Kurdish nationalism as the social basis of the PKK is misleading.

All members of the Kurdish experimental group attempt to attach an internationalist mission to the PKK. For them, the roots of all the troubles of the world are in the territory they call 'Kurdistan', and the solution to this worldwide problem will only come through the internationalization of the PKK.

Throughout the discussion, the Kurdish group claims that Kurds are being forcibly Turkified. As a response, the researcher emphasizes that adaptation to the Turkish language has increased among the Kurds and the Kurds in general appear to be comfortable with it.

Cihan argues that speaking Turkish is a must to achieve better living standards, but that politicized people tend to be more closely attached to their language. On the other hand, *Behice* adds that since Turkish is the dominant language, the tendency towards Turkish is also common among the politically-oriented. Moreover, most Kurds reason that learning Turkish can increase their living standards and help them progress to the social level of the Turks. *Riza* laments: "the Kurdish language doesn't have any commercial value, and thus doesn't make any premium."

When the researcher warns them about the shift in the importance of economic anxiety over political anxiety, *Mikail* points out that this statement may hold validity for non-political individuals. Meanwhile, *Behice* begs to add: "In every aspect of life they attempt to Turkify us to make us think like a Turk, laugh at whatever a Turk laughs at, and cry like Turks and all these feelings are imposed upon us." But she emphasizes that her claims are again applicable to non-political individuals whom she calls 'the lumpen youth' and that the politically conscious, including herself, are different from this group. Furthermore, in her opinion, the attitude of this group is the result of the present Turkish education system.

In his desire to advance deeper into the subject, the researcher asks: "Have the Kurds adopted this degenerated life style from the Turks?" *Behice* claims that the 'degeneration' is due to the education system and even though the Coca Cola and hamburger culture is taking its toll on the Kurds as well as Turks, the Kurds are exposed to this culture through the Turkish culture. She says: "If a person lives like this, he or she, simultaneously, becomes a Turk", and adds, "I mean, then he or she accepts to be a Turk."

Cihan joins the discussion by saying that although he disapprove of this Coca Cola and hamburger culture, he, nevertheless, does not want to deny the existence of the craving for it. To him, this is the result of the longing generated by the contemporary consumerism in the society that in turn leads to degeneration. "We want to live our own culture and rid ourselves of this cultural decadence but this can only be achieved if the system and the wider society also changes" he concludes.

The same questions are discussed with the Nusayrian group and similar reactions are observed.

Social Movements and Position of the Leadership

With the intention of finding out both the level of charisma the leadership possesses and the institutionalization stage of leadership, the researcher brings the topic of the arrest of *Abdullah Ocalan* – the founder and long time leader of the PKK – into the discussion. A sentimental atmosphere takes over in the group and within that atmosphere everybody begins to tell anecdotes about what they have witnessed.

Cihan says that his uncle's wife, even when she had no relation with the whole situation, prayed and fasted to God for saving him. *Mikail* informs that de-spite being planned long before, not a single wedding party was held in *Kiziltepe*,

a predominantly Kurdish settlement, for one year and a large number of small businesses in *Diyarbakir* were closed in the first week because of the mourning. *Behice* tells of her observation that in addition to many ordinary people with no interest in politics, even the pro-Turkish Government Village guards loathed for their collaboration with the security forces, conceded this situation as humiliation. Many youngsters, the researcher is informed, waited at the time for instructions from the organization as to the type of actions, including suicide operations to be taken.

When the researcher reminds the group of the rumors which circulated at the time in the mass media that *Ocalan* was not a Kurd but of Armenian or of another ethnic background, they react by claiming that even if that is true it is of no great concern, at least to them. All these examples show that the leadership is not institutionalized by ethnicity. This is devotion to the leader. Also in this case, the leadership could well be regarded as binding with regards to the collective action the individual members of the community are expected to take.

Among the *Nusayrians*, on the other hand, we can conclude that the leadership institution is restricted to local religious community leaders. However, the authority these leaders exercise is limited to matters of a religious nature.

Conclusions

Ethno-nationalist movements can be explained by both primordialist and instrumentalist approaches. In some cases, one of these disciplines may well be the *raison d'être* of a movement, whereas the other would hinder it. In some other cases, these two approaches can be complementary in explaining the movement. If the ethnic group is in the process of attaining nationhood, both approaches could hasten the process. In this study the interpretation of the data leads us to think that while the Kurdish ethnic movement exhibits instrumental characteristics, the Nusayrian ethnic movement seems to have the features of primordialism. And yet, from an integrative point of view, the Nusayrians also display instrumentalist characteristics.

As for leadership, the Kurdish community has institutionalized the leadership of its social movement, whereas the leadership in the Nusayrian society has been confined to the community's religious leaders. In comparison with the Kurds amongst whom the political inclination is more towards separatist organizations – thus the rejection of the mainstream Turkish political system – the Nusayrians have developed a tendency towards left wing politics in opposition to the conservative right but are still content to remain part of the mainstream Turkish political system.

The view that the initiator of an ethno-social movement is a local element, whose primary aim is to obtain recognition for its existence and identity by the dominant state ideology, and that the direction to be taken by the movement is mostly determined by inner values of the ethnic group concerned, is supported by this study.

It seems that although Coca Cola and McDonald's hamburgers are viewed to be the post-modern symbols of globalization, ones which do not recognize national

boundaries, they are also seen, on the local level, as the symbols of the hegemony of the majority ethnic group. This explains the hostility shown to them. Moreover, these findings also exhibit that because of the perception that their ethnic identification is more related to the present, the members of both groups are feeling that they have been robbed of their history. Although they may be advocating the modernization of the society, a visible rise in the quality of life, and the establishment of a socialist system, their prime aim in fact is to rebuild their identity in the past. For that matter, they regard themselves as rivals of the dominant ethnic group, which they identify with the establishment.

Various ethnic pressure groups, which are also the components of a wider civil society, tend to seek partners among the other disenchanted ethnic groups to form an ethnic 'coalition' against the political establishment. The parallel features of both the *Nusayrian* and the Kurdish focus groups with regards to their ethnic identity and language establish this.

When we move from semi-groups to interest groups, the ethno-social movement is then able to rid itself of the tag of irrationality as one cannot consider pressure groups representing individual or group benefits as irrational. Thus, the actions that may initially seem to be irrational may turn out to be rational. Insofar as ethnicity as a concept is concerned, the ultimate aspiration of every ethno-social movement is the transformation of the said ethnic group into a nation. Therefore, even though national governments may regulate their economic activities in line with global realities, the organizational pattern of society is rational; however, this rationality may also motivate other ethnic interest groups.

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