

The Kurdish Diaspora in Canada: A Study of Political Activism and The Uses of The Kurdish Language

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the Kurdish people of Turkey, who have struggled and advocated for a separate nation-state of their own. The Turkish state's denial of Kurdish identity, and its heavy assimilation and oppression of the Kurdish people have turned some Kurds into political activists, both in Turkey and in the diaspora. In addition, the historical ban and current stigmatization of the Kurdish language have crystallized the importance and centrality of the language, particularly for both Kurdish identity and the Kurdish movement. This thesis explores the forms of political activism in Canada of the Kurds originating in Turkey, and the role of the Kurdish language in their activism. Using a qualitative research design, interviews with activists and participant observations were conducted in the cities of Toronto and Montréal. The findings draw attention to the significance of community centres as umbrella institutions for political activism, and as sites for the enactment of different forms of collective resistance. The study also illustrates that the role of the Kurdish language in activism is more salient at a representational level. That is, the Kurdish language is represented as the main identity marker fuelling activism, implying that speaking Kurdish is an act of resistance and thus political. In daily life, however, the usage of the Kurdish is far more attenuated and nuanced.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Kurdish people are the largest group without a nation-state (Gunter, 2019). They are mainly divided between Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq. In Turkey, the assimilation of the Kurds began after Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. The heavy state oppression of Kurdish ethnic identity in Turkey led to the politicization of some, and the assimilation of many other Kurds.

In reaction to Turkish state oppressive policies on the Kurdish language, the Kurdish political movement tried to revitalize and encourage speaking Kurdish. Thus, Kurdish identity came to be crystallized around the Kurdish language. This thesis focused on the political Kurds originating from Turkey, now based in Toronto and Montréal, their activism and the role of Kurdish language in their activism¹.

1.2 Objectives

The Kurdish movement received much world-wide interest as immigration outside of Turkey intensified after the 1980s military coup attack in Turkey. Following the capture of Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), in 1999, Kurds increasingly became politically active. Their demonstrations varied from hunger strikes, to destroying buildings especially Greek embassies², to self-immolations.

Alongside the flow of political demonstrations, and activities the Kurdish movement also gained attention of many academics especially in Europe. While there are many ethnic groups in Canada, who are politically active, and receive considerable attention, this thesis looks at a

¹ The empirical data collection for this thesis started in early 2018, when the Kurdish issue in Turkey came to be a very heated political discussion due to the Syrian civil war, and many Syrian Kurds being displaced or organized to fight the Islamic State (ISIS). However, this thesis does not delve into Syrian conflict, as it is beyond its scope.

² It is speculated that Greece was supposed to help Öcalan hide in Kenya, however instead they played a major role in the capture of Öcalan.

relatively new ethnic group's political activism. My research questions are the following: 1) what form does the political activism of Kurds originating in Turkey take in Canada? And, 2) what role does the Kurdish language play in the political activism of these Kurds in Canada? To address these questions, I conducted eleven semi-structured interviews with self-identified politically active Kurds, as well as four participant observations. The interview participants as well as participant observations took place in Toronto and Montréal. These two cities were chosen because both have histories of migrants who either settled in or pass through these cities. Kurds also generally choose to settle in Toronto or Montréal once they migrate to Canada.

In terms of conceptual frameworks, to address my first question, I used Adamson's (2008) conceptualization of diaspora as a social construct, while using Zenker's (2013) analytical dimensions of representational and represented practices of language for the second research question.

1.3 Locating the Researcher

I was born in Istanbul, Turkey, and spent most of my childhood there. In the late 1980s, my family moved to Istanbul from Ağrı – a predominantly Kurdish city, for economic reasons. They would not be considered politically active, at least back in Turkey. My first learned language is Turkish, though at home my parents used to mostly speak Kurdish with each other and relatives that visited, it was not spoken to me as far as I remember. Growing up in Istanbul I never really questioned my identity, though I remember, the first day of the school, every year, all the teachers' first question would always be; "where are you from?" My answer – Ağrı³ – would always get an "oh Eastern!" reaction. While I do not remember at what age I was told about the difference between Kurdish and Turkish identity, I never questioned or wondered about what being Kurdish

³ In Turkey, you can't really say you are from Istanbul, unless your grandparents or great-grandparents were born there. If you say you are, the following question would be on your origins. Mainly this has to do with Istanbul's history with empires, and Istanbul is known as a hub for internal migration.

meant. However, I always knew that I was Kurdish – not Turkish – even though culturally speaking I grew up in the Turkish culture more than a Kurdish one. So, my identity construction is fuzzy, just like many other Kurds from Turkey.

I migrated to Toronto, with my family, at the age of twelve. Our environment suddenly became English and Kurdish⁴. Today at home, Kurdish is used mostly between my parents, and sometimes with other Kurdish people that visit, but generally we speak Turkish. This is because our language had always been Turkish and learning a new language like English was given more priority than learning Kurdish. My parents indeed would have wanted me and my siblings to learn Kurdish, but I guess language and identity were not strongly associated within my family. While I started getting more exposure to the Kurdish issue in Turkey through family discussions, only in my university years, I became more aware of and knowledgeable about the Kurdish issue in Turkey. The more I researched, the more I started being curious and finally as a Kurdish person from Turkey, I decided to explore the Kurdish issue for my thesis topic. At first, I was not sure of which specific area to focus on, the possibilities were vast because of the unfortunate complex political situation of the Kurds. However, because I am someone that does not speak the language that my parents speak, as I got older, I started noticing language practices among other Kurds in Toronto. I also noticed the activism that was taking place in Toronto, even my father was actively taking a role and attending demonstrations. I myself attended Newroz celebrations, which are highly political, and had been to very few demonstrations before. Seeing the demonstrations and the motivations of these people mobilizing for Kurdish rights in the homeland made me curious about how Kurds in Canada are politically active, and their attitudes towards the Kurdish language.

⁴ We had some relatives already living in Toronto, who spoke Kurdish and attended the Kurdish community centre.

Due to my Kurdish identity, gaining access to the Kurdish community was not hard at all. After all, most of the Toronto Kurdish community know who my family is. As mentioned in the methodology section, I had to do the interviews either in Turkish or English because of my language capabilities. I was only able to do one interview in English, with Bejno, which the reader will read about in the findings chapter. All the rest happened in Turkish, and in some interviews that took place in Toronto, I was questioned about why I did not speak Kurdish. Two of the interviewees directly mentioned their discomfort with doing the interview in Turkish with me. In total, four interviewees talked about how my parents are the ones to blame for my lack of Kurdish language knowledge.

While I knew about the complexity in Kurdish identity construction, due to my own personal experiences, especially for the language issue, the more interviews I completed the more I realized that there is not a single answer to these questions, and that generalization about identities of Kurds from Turkey is one tough task.

1.4 Organization of The Thesis

This thesis is composed of seven chapters: introduction, historical context, literature review, theoretical frameworks and methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion. Chapter 1 is the current introductory chapter. Chapter 2 provides a historical context. This chapter is relatively brief providing a general contextualisation of the Kurdish question in Turkey as an in-depth historical context of the Kurdish issue would surely exceed the length of a thesis. I only discuss the general ideas and important points of the issues that are pertinent to the topic of this thesis.

Chapter 3 is the literature review, divided into two main sections: language and diaspora. Within these sections, there are subsections. I deal with many concepts that are highly developed and discussed widely in the social sciences. They are mainly: language, nationalism, ethnicity,

culture, identity, collective identity, diaspora, political activism, and social movements. However, and it is very crucial to make a clarification here, while my thesis seems to touch on all these big concepts, it does not explore the debates within these topics at great length. Hence, I draw on these discussions in order to clarify my use of the concepts that I later deploy in my analysis. My literature review mainly includes literature related to Kurdish identity. The literature review chapter ends with a section on the rationale for the study, where I discuss the importance of studying this topic in Canada.

Chapter 4 has two main sections: conceptual approaches and methodology. In the conceptual approaches, I detail the approaches that I take for each of my research questions, and also the reasons for these approaches. Firstly, as said above, I use Adamson's (2008) framework for my first question, and secondly, I use Zenker's (2013) approach for my second question. The second main section, methodology, outlines my research method: case study, the data collection, and my epistemological positioning.

Chapter 5 presents the findings, and it is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on the biographical trajectories of the eleven participants that were interviewed. For the approach that I am taking, it is important to consider the trajectories of each of the participants. As Kurdish identity is fuzzy, and depends on personal experiences, in order to better develop my analysis, I summarize the biographies of each participant. The second section deals with findings on participant observations from demonstrations and Newroz celebrations. Lastly, the third section deals with findings from interviews. The last section is divided into subsections according to the themes.

Chapter 6 is the discussion; here, I develop an analysis of the findings reported in the previous chapter. This chapter is divided in three main sections: the first section deals with the first research question, the following section with the second research question, and in the last section

I bring the two questions together; in other words, I incorporate political activism and language together, and discuss how there are similar factors in both political activism and represented practices of language.

The last chapter, 7, is the conclusion. Here I summarize the discussion points, limitations, and possible future research area.

CHAPTER 2

BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF KURDS (FROM TURKEY)

Kurds mainly live under the jurisdictions of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. They are, in essence, a nation without a nation state. In this chapter, I will briefly discuss the origin of Kurds, the population, the Kurdish language, Kurds in Turkey, and the Kurdish diaspora.

2.1 Origins

The origin of the Kurds is not well documented nor is it commonly agreed upon; however, they are believed to be the descendants of Indo-European tribes (Gunter 1990; McDowall 2004). In contrast, Kurds often believe that they are the descendants of the Medes – ancient Iranian people (Galip 2015), though some scholars (ex. Izady 1992; Bender 2000) claim that this sentiment of a Medes origin is mythologized in order to foster a strong sense of collective identity amongst Kurds. Furthermore, the Kurdish identity has developed differently depending on the social and political contexts of the multiple states in which the Kurds have resided. While the majority of the Kurds are Muslim, religion is not seen as a unifying commonality for the people (Alinia 2004 p. 42). Historically, Kurdish communities adhered to an organized system of tribes. This tribal system within Kurdish society relied heavily on sentiments of lineage. It is said, “each tribe is divided into families, lineages, and clans. An individual is first member of his family, second his lineage, third his clan, and fourth his tribe” (Tahiri 2007 p. 17).

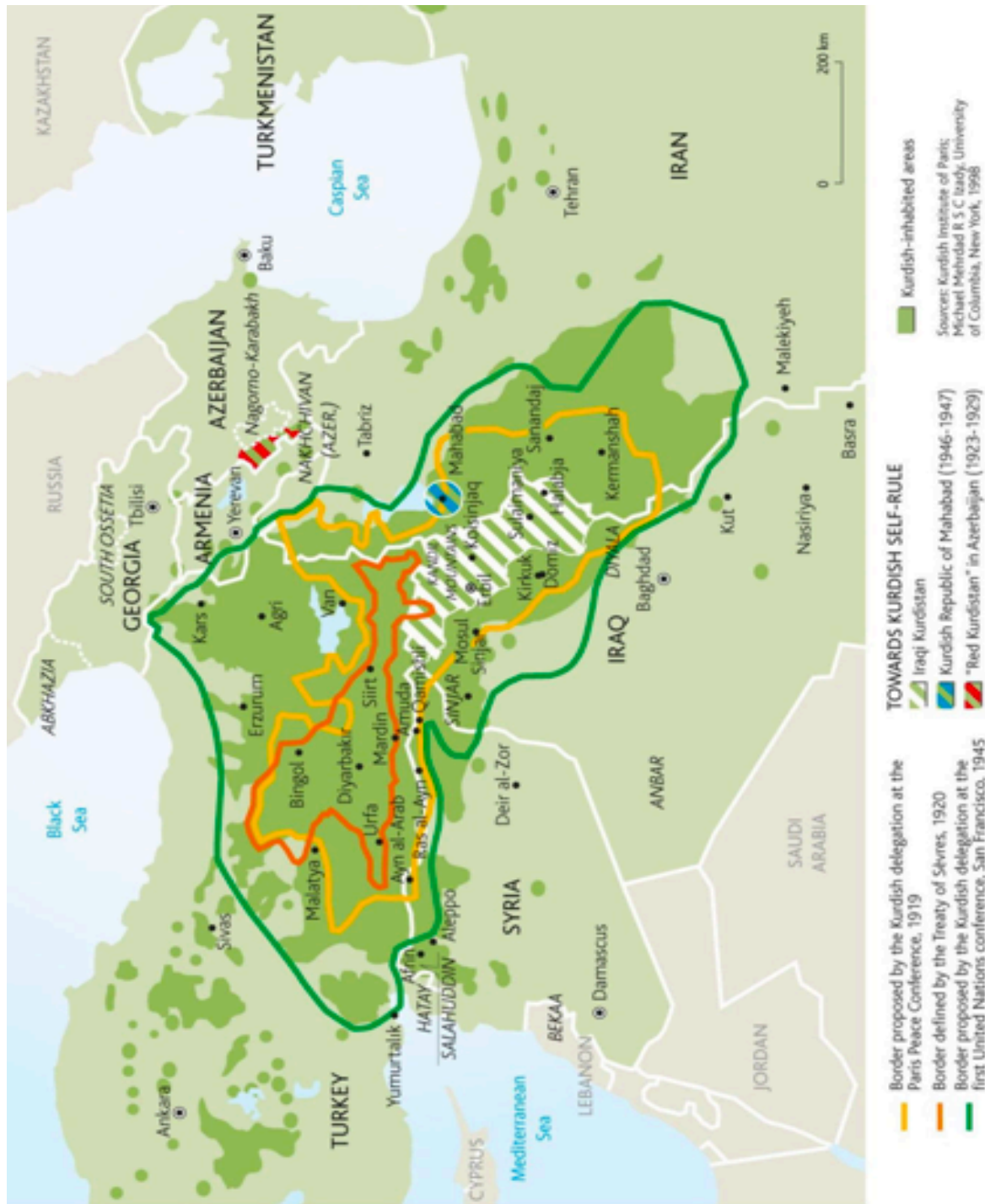


Figure 1: Kurdish inhabited areas in Middle East

Source: Philippe Rekacewicz 2013 Le Monde Diplomatique.
<http://mondediplo.com/maps/kurdistanborders>

2.2 Population

The precise size of the Kurdish population differs across a spectrum of sources; this is largely due to its dispersion and state politics. While it is speculated that the majority of the Kurds reside in Turkey (Hassanpour and Mojab 2005, p. 214), the numbers that seek to capture the entirety of the Kurdish population remain unreliable. The reason for this unreliability is, in a sense, political. For example, historically, the Kurds from Turkey were not seen as a different ethnic group and were thus counted as Turkish in the official census. Another reason for the unreliability of the population count can be attributed to the use of census questions, specifically those which define Kurdishness in terms of knowledge of the mother tongue. The problem with these questions is, quite simply, their inability to engender validity. To expand, some Kurds might choose to say that their mother tongue is the language of their home state for various reasons; in fact, some Kurds may not actually speak Kurdish at all, due to assimilation. This inability to speak the language does not negate their ethnicity. Therefore, these questions do not effectively capture what they set out to measure: the population of Kurdish individuals. Rather, the questions simply measure the number of Kurdish individuals who speak their mother tongue.

However, regardless of the validity issues examined above, population estimates for Kurdish people still exist. The most commonly accepted population numbers are:

Table 1: Population of the Kurds (Estimated)

Country	Numbered of Kurds	Percentage of the population
Turkey	13,700,000	24.1
Iran	6,600,000	12.4
Iraq	4,400,000	23.5
Syria	1,300,000	9.2
Europe	700,000	
Former USSR ^a	400,000	
Total	27,100,000	

^a McDowall (2000, pp. 3-4)

^b Le Monde, 18 February 1999.

Source: Hassanpour and Mojab (2005 p. 214)

It should be noted that table 1 was generated in 2005 thus, it does not reflect the reality of today; it is only estimation.

2.3 Language

The Kurdish language, similar to the Persian language, is considered to be Indo-European (Thackston 2006). Kurmanji and Sorani are the two most commonly recognized dialects of the Kurdish language. Furthermore, as Yavuz (1998) notes, Gorani, Leki, and Kirmanshahi are subdialects of Sorani. It is also important to note, Zazaki is spoken by many of the Kurds in southern Turkey. Thackston (2006) argues that Kurmanji is “far from being standardized or unified...whereas the Sorani dialect is more advanced in terms of standardization” (quoted by Yilmaz 2015 p. 24). When the Kurdish language is discussed in the literature, authors generally engender nuance by mentioning the variety of dialects. However, this thesis does not concentrate on the varieties of the dialects. Matras and Haig (2002) state that the earliest Kurdish language grammar books date back to the 18th century; it was published in 1787 and written by Maurizio Garzoni (pp. 8-9). Similar to religion, many Kurdish people do not consider dialect to be a unifying commonality for the people; however, it can be used to identify where the person is from. For example, northern Kurdish people often use Kurmanji, while southern Kurdish people use Sorani.

2.4 The Ottoman Kurds

For centuries, Kurds lived in the territory of Kurdistan (or Mesopotamia). There is a consensus on the fact that, historically, Kurds enjoyed some semblance of autonomy over the Kurdish territories in the east, while they were ruled by the Ottoman Empire (Galip 2015; Yadirgi 2017; Bozarslan 2008). Scholars often argue that this autonomy was attributed to the religion of the Kurds. As Galip (2015) writes, “in Ottoman society, nationality was determined on the basis of a person’s affiliation with a religious community” (p. 24). Thus, being the largest minority in the Empire, Kurds were able to participate in state affairs and retain autonomy of the Kurdistan region so long as they were loyal to the Sultan(s) (Galip 2015 p. 24). During the regime of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909), the empire became increasingly centralized and modernized (Yadirgi

2017 p. 93). This change in state affairs was championed in order to reduce local power and centralize the state. It is during this time that Kurds first began to participate in uprisings and revolts (Galip 2015 p. 28.). As a result of certain uprisings in the Eastern provinces in 1915, the Ottoman state ordered the deportation of Ottoman Armenians (see: Armenian Genocide), and then in 1916 the deportation of Ottoman Kurds (Yadirgi 2017; Galip 2015) to the central and western provinces in the Empire.

2.5 Kurds after World War I

The First World War ended with the defeat of the Central Powers. What was left of the Empire's territory was to be divided between the Allies in the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres. The Treaty was signed by the government of Istanbul, occupied by the Ottomans, but it was not recognized by the Ankara government, "which had ruled the Empire between 1913 and 1918" (Yeğen 2011 pp. 67-68) and was occupied by the Young Turks. The Young Turks, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1884-1938), formed an armed resistance in the Anatolia against the Treaty and its accompanying objective of territorial division. The Kurds supported and fought together with the Young Turks, regardless of the fact that they were granted territory under the Treaty of 1920. However, the same promise was also issued by Mustafa Kemal on several occasions (Borazslan 2008; Galip 2015). For example, in a public interview Mustafa Kemal stated:

In accordance without constitution, a kind of local autonomy is to be granted. Hence, provinces inhabited by Kurds will rule themselves autonomously [...] The Grand National Assembly of Turkey is composed of the deputies of both Kurds and Turks and these two people have unified their interests and fates" (cited in Yeğen 2011 p. 68).

Therefore, the vast majority of Kurds decided to side with Mustafa Kemal in what came to be known as the War of Independence (1919-1923). Finally, in 1923, the Young Turk Revolution succeeded and formed the Republic of Turkey with the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne. Although the Kurdish people fought valiantly alongside the Turks, promises were forgotten shortly

after the war; this marked the beginning of the denial and subjugation of the Kurdish identity. The Treaty of Lausanne denied the existence of Kurdistan and specified that non-Muslim minorities could only practice their own language in the confinement of their homes and in their personal lives. However, those who were not minorities were to speak Turkish alone. In sum, this “resulted in the exclusion of the largest minority in the country, the Kurds, as it recognized only non-Muslim groups as minorities, and made it impossible for Kurds to use their language without restrictions” (Atlas 2014 p. 160).

Predictably, Turkish nationalism soon became the state’s official hegemonic ideology. In this ideology, there was no room for ethnic or linguistic differences (Bozarslan 2008; Van Bruinessen 1984). The new Republic vehemently and completely denied the existence of Kurds. As Yeğen (2011) has outlined, throughout the years, the Kurdish question has been framed in different socio-economic lenses, even though state officials knew that the question was an ethnic one. In the early years of the Republic, the Kurdish question was framed as an issue of “the resistance of the past against the present” (Yeğen 2011 p. 69). Under this framework, Kurds were seen as a group that resisted the modernism that the state wanted to engender. Also, in these years, Kurdish nationalistic revolts and uprisings began to flourish. The most well-known of the revolts are Seyh (also known as Sheik) Said 1925, Ararat (also known as Ağrı) 1930, and Dersim 1937 (Çalışar 2013 p. 31), which were all brutally repressed (Çalışar 2013; Galip 2015; Yagdiri 2017; Bozarslan 2008). Soon after these revolts, the Kurdish question became increasingly framed as “an issue of banditry and tribal unrest” (Yeğen 2011 p. 70). In an effort to resolve this issue, the Turkish state ordered the deportation and resettlement of the Kurdish people from east to west (Yeğen 2011). This was one amongst many other measures taken by the state. For example, Turkish police forces were also sent to every Kurdish village with the task of decimating anything that was related to the Kurdish identity, including names (van Bruinessen 1984 p. 3). In order to further this effort,

the state constructed schools in the east with the sole aim of Turkifying the Kurdish population. In these schools, it was forbidden to speak Kurdish; those who did were severely abused and humiliated by their teachers, effectively stifling the use of their mother tongue (Fernandes 2012). Prior to the late 1960s, the years were often regarded as “quiet years” (Özcan, 2006; Bozarslan 2008) in terms of uprisings and revolts.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the question became framed in the context of regional underdevelopment (Yeğen 2011 p. 71), and the state’s response was to create government programs in the east. However, with the military coup of 1960, and the 1961 constitution, Kurdish self-awareness was revived. The new constitution allowed for certain freedoms in the forming of political organizations and, as a result, left-wing politics began to emerge (van Bruinessen 1984 p. 3). These years brought a semblance of improvement: some Kurdish books and magazines were even published (van Bruinessen 1984 p. 4). Moreover, as the left-wing proliferated, the Kurdish youth became increasingly interested in this ideology. Bozarslan (2008) explains the reason for the Kurds sympathy for the left wing as:

First, the left advocated social justice and equality, therefore becoming the main channel for challenging the prevailing political order and demanding social and economic development in the underdeveloped and marginalized Kurdish towns. Second, although it did not disown Kemalism, and even to some extent tried to rehabilitate it, the left constituted an open challenge to the state and, ultimately, to state-sponsored Turkish nationalism. Finally, the ‘Marxist-Leninist’ left offered new universal perspectives for the Kurds” (p. 345).

Similarly, Wahlbeck (1999) states that the left’s influence on the Kurds should be understood in the context of the economic underdevelopment of the Kurdish region, as well as the cultural, social, and political oppression of the Kurds (p. 43).

Groups on the left often planned mass demonstrations in order to highlight social and regional inequalities⁵. Throughout the late 1960s to the early 1970s, the state was able to oppress the left and their message. In fact, during this period, many left-wing Turkish and Kurdish intellectuals and activists were put in prisons, tortured or killed (Bozarslan 2008 p. 346). Scholars often cite the Worker's Party of Turkey (TIP), which was established in 1961, as the only party that officially recognized the Kurdish problem in Turkey in 1970 (van Bruinessen 1984; Bozarslan 2008). However, a year after this recognition, TIP was banned.

2.6 Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK)

While many organizations and parties emerged during the 1960s and 1970s to challenge the Turkish state, the most notable one was *Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan* (Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK), founded in Ankara in 1978 by Abdullah Öcalan and his university friends (Tezcür, 2014 p. 249). The PKK championed the belief that Kurdistan was colonized by Turkey; as such, their sole mission was to “undertake the war of national liberation of the Kurds of northwest Kurdistan against Turkey” (Özcan, 2006 p. 60). The party saw the use of violence as the most effective tool to inspire the liberation of Kurdistan (Bozarslan 2008; Van Bruinessen 1984). However, it is important to note that the PKK only launched a guerilla campaign in 1984 after the military coup of 1980. Over the years, the PKK gained a lot of support and sympathy from the Kurdish people. Secondly, the 1980 coup that traumatized many Kurdish people was yet another contributing factor to the PKK's success (Bozarslan 2008; Galip 2015; van Bruinessen 1984). In order to “bring back order,” the military regime reinforced Turkishness. In so doing, the regime enacted Law 2932, which banned the speaking of Kurdish (Zeydanlioglu 2012 p. 111), imprisoned many Kurdish activists, and tortured and killed hundreds of people. It is also important to note

⁵ However, it is important to note that although these leftist organizations had many Kurdish members, the word “Kurd” was never formally used in any of the demonstrations (van Bruinessen 1984 p. 4).

that, during the years of fighting between the PKK and the Turkish military, many villagers were deported from their homes (Jongerden 2001 p. 83), and villages were destroyed and burned (Yeğen 2011), as will be seen in the findings section.

The more the state traumatized, oppressed, and disenfranchised the Kurdish population, the more the PKK retaliated against the Turkish military. Bozarslan (2004) argues that “the use of violence was promoted by the narrow political space and should be considered instrumental and rational, in the sense that it was guided by and based upon a political program in circumstances in which there was no alternative avenue of genuine political expression” (p. 23). Initially, the PKK was influenced by the 1970s Turkish revolutionary leftist groups, who also drew inspiration from Marxist ideology (Jongerden and Akkaya 2011, p. 125). However, after the capture of Öcalan in 1999, the PKK underwent an ideological shift. The PKK shifted to “radical democracy.” In their article, Akkaya and Jongerden (2014) neatly break down what is meant by radical democracy. The authors state that democracy is radical “in the sense that it tries to develop the concept of democracy beyond nation and state... Radical democracy developed in three projects: one for a democratic republic (of Turkey), one for democratic confederalism, and one for democratic autonomy” (p. 187). The aim of these projects, and ultimately of radical democracy in its entirety, is to disassociate citizenship from nationalism, democratic self-government, and democratic autonomy. In this case democratic autonomy, as Akkaya and Jongerden (2014) explain, refers to “the right of people to determine their own economic, cultural, and social affairs” (p. 187).

Since its formation, the PKK has declared a unilateral ceasefire on five occasions: in 1993, 1995, 1998, 1999, and in 2013 (Güneş 2007). During the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the armed conflict was at its peak between PKK and Turkish military, Kurdish villages were evacuated and burned down; civilians were harassed and “discrimination against Kurdish citizens with both political rights and the basic rights of property and settlement [were] violated” (Yeğen 2011 p. 75).

The capture of Öcalan ultimately resulted in a slowdown of the PKK's activities and, in the same year, they withdrew from Turkey and transitioned to the Kurdistan region of Iraq (Güneş 2007). As said above, the PKK also experienced an ideological shift of sorts; here, they transitioned from an armed guerilla organization, operating under the Marxist/Leninist framework, to a movement that fosters ethnic identity formation based on human rights for the Kurdish people. Also, in 1999, Turkey's candidacy for the European Union (EU) was recognized.

All these events led to a little progress in the Kurdish question (Yeğen 2011 p .75). However, in the early 2000s, with the establishment of Iraqi Kurdistan, the PKK ending its ceasefire, and EU pushing Turkey to further recognize the cultural rights of Kurdish people, the national sentiments of the Turkish people were once again awakened (Yeğen 2011 p. 76).

2.7 Current Situation

Today, Kurdish people in Turkey are more visible; in essence, they are often unafraid to express their identity or speak their mother tongue in public. In fact, some universities even offer Kurdish language and literature courses and there is a state-owned channel that uses Kurdish language in all its programs. However, none of this means that there is absolute freedom. Turkey still lacks the democratic conditions necessary to adequately address the Kurdish question. Today, politicians, activists or ordinary citizens can get arrested if they defend Kurdish rights and criticize the government. It is additionally important to note that all of these improvements in the treatment of Kurdish affiliates in the public sphere have been realized by the Kurdish movement. Due to unfulfilled promises, and multiple clashes between the current state - Justice and Development Party/*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi* (AKP) and the Kurdish people and politicians - there remains a strong oppositional sentiment towards AKP.

It would not be wrong to assert that, through its political parties, Kurdish activism re-established itself in early to mid-2000s. In 2009, the AKP proposed a "Kurdish opening" to the

“Kurdish issue” in Turkey. While this was initially seen as bold and progressive, as it allowed flexibility in use of Kurdish language, in the days following, the state quickly banned the only Kurdish party at the time: Democratic Society Party/*Demokratik Toplum Partisi* (DTP). Additionally, the state also carried out operations where many Kurdish people, specifically those who were representatives of the DTP, were arrested. A year later, members of the newly formed Kurdish political party, Peace and Democracy Party/*Baris ve Demokrasi Partisi* (BDP), were taken into custody (Casier, Jongerdan, and Walker 2013 pp. 142-143). The reasons for which they were arrested links back to the PKK. Ironically, the repressive actions taken to silence Kurdish political members instead helped the Kurdish party and, in the 2011 elections, the BDP increased its representatives in the national assembly (p. 144). Additionally, the AKP’s initiative made little to no progress in improving the human rights of Kurdish people in Turkey. In 2014, after another election, the BDP joined the new Peoples’ Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi* - HDP). Regardless, the situation has not changed; since 2016, many Kurdish members of the Turkish Parliament, including the leaders of the HDP, have been in jail for more than a year. In order to justify this treatment of Kurdish activists, the state often cites their engagement in activities that are unconstitutional (claiming that HDP makes terrorist propaganda).

The state is not only suspicious of the Kurds in Turkey, but also of the Kurds in neighbouring countries. The Turkish state sends troops across borders in order to defeat what they view as Kurdish terrorism in other nations. Simply put, Turkey perceives any advancement that Kurds make as a possible threat to its territorial sovereignty as they understand it (see: case of Syrian civil war and Turkish state involvement). So, the Kurdish question in Turkey continues to be a question that is painfully unresolved; one that very well may not be solved in the near future, as the Turkish state continues to discriminate and propagate pro-Kurds as “separatists.”

2.8 Kurdish Diaspora

Kurdish people have experienced internal deportations since the 1920s; these have often been a result of uprisings or attempts to Turkify the Kurds (Izady 1992; van Bruinessen 2000; Jondergen 2001). However, migration to Western Europe reached its peak during the late 1980s to early 1990s. Traumatized by the brutal 1980 coup, Kurdish civilians' lives worsened when the PKK launched its armed campaign. As said above, many were killed and kidnapped; homes were also destroyed and occupants evacuated without the ability to resettle, which left the population in severe poverty. As a result, many Kurdish people, including politicized groups and activists, took refuge in Western Europe (van Bruinessen 1998 p. 42). The Kurdish diaspora is a very integral component of the Kurdish movement in Turkey; notably, the diaspora group strongly supported the PKK during the 1990s. They became the vehicle through which to broadcast the suffering of Kurdish people under the Turkish state. In addition to humanizing the plight of their fellow Kurds, the diaspora also sent monetary support to Kurdish groups (van Bruinessen 1998 p. 45). In the literature, the European Kurdish diaspora is thus historically discussed in relation to the PKK.

Table 2: The size of the Kurdish diasporas

Region	Country	Number
Europe	Germany	500,000 ^a
	France	100,000-120,000 ^b
	Netherlands	70,000-80,000 ^b
	Switzerland	7,531 ^c
	Belgium	50,000-60,000 ^b
	Austria	50,000-60,000 ^b
	Sweden	25,000-30,000 ^b
	United Kingdom	20,000-25,000 ^b
	Greece	20,000-25,000 ^b
	Denmark	8,000-10,000 ^b
	Norway	4,000-5,000 ^b
	Finland	3,916 ^d
	Russia	35,000 ^b
	Krasnodar	30,000 ^b
Central Asia	Kazakhstan	30,000 ^b
	Turkmenistan	50,000 ^b
	Kirghizia	20,000 ^b

	Uzbekistan	10,000 ^a
	Tajikistan	3,000 ^a
Caucasia	Armenia	75,000 ^a
	Azerbaijan	12,000-30,000 ^c
	Georgia	40,000 ^a
Middle East	Lebanon	75,000-100,000 ^a
North America	Canada	7,140 ^b
	United States	15,000-20,000 ^b
Oceania	Australia	2,845 ^d
	New Zealand	603 ^d

^a Estimate 2000, German parliament.

^b Institut kurde de Pads (2003), estimate.

^c Number of Kurdish speakers, Switzerland census 2000.

^d Number of Kurdish speakers, Finland census 2002.

^e Kurdish Human Rights Project (1996), estimate.

^f Mtiller (2000, p. 70).

^g Meho (2001, p. 28).

^h Number of Kurdish speakers, Canadian census 2001.

ⁱ Number of Kurdish speakers, Australian census 2001.

^j Number of Kurdish speakers, New Zealand census 2001.

Source: Hassanpour and Mojab (2005 p. 214)

It should be noted that table 2 was generated in 2005 thus, it does not reflect the reality of today; it is only estimation.

The diaspora also helped to advance and proliferate the Kurdish language. As Öpengin (2012) puts it, “during the period after the 1980s until the turn of the last century, the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden and other western European countries has been the centre for terminological modernization and material development in Kurdish” (p. 158). Furthermore, it can also be said that the diaspora has helped to lift the negative connotation tied to the Kurdish language by the Turkish state. Van Bruinessen (1998) extensively notes how the diaspora helped to revive Kurdish language and literature. He states that “the Kurdish institutes, Kurdish print media and Kurdish language courses that operate in western Europe, largely impervious to control by the Turkish state, have provided the Kurdish movement with instruments of nation building comparable to those traditionally employed by states” (van Bruinessen 1998 p. 47). For example, the first Kurdish satellite television channel, MED-TV, was licensed in Britain. Turkey, as always, was “the only state to use full-state power to silence MED-TV [and believed that the channel was] the mouthpiece of [...] the Kurdistan Workers’ Party” (Hassanpour 1998, p. 53). Eventually in 1999,

the television channel's license was revoked (Sheyholislami 2011, p. 86). Additionally, Roj-TV was founded in 2004 and managed by the Kurds from Turkey and licensed in Denmark (Sheyholislami 2011, p. 86). Yavuz (1998) notes that these new media opportunities increased the "awareness of difference" while establishing shared collective identity (p. 15). In addition, the Kurdish print media is perceived as "the organ of Kurdish nationalism" (Hassanpour 1992, cited in Sheyholislami 2011, p. 80) by some Kurdish intellectuals. The first ever printed periodical was *Kurdistan* published in 1898 in Ottoman. However, due to many political obstacles, the Kurdish press was not advanced in the Kurdistan region. Furthermore, as Sheyholislami (2011) points out, the Kurdish press did not reach great numbers of Kurds because most of the population was, in fact, illiterate in Kurdish (pp. 82-83). However, in the diaspora, the Kurdish press is consumed and published, and used to mobilize Kurds. For example, "a significant development in terms of the expansion of Kurdish media in Europe occurred in 2009, when *Le Monde diplomatique* began printing news articles in Kurdish" (Baser 2013, p. 50).

Furthermore, McDowall (2004) also emphasizes the importance of the Kurdish diaspora for the advancement of the Kurdish identity; he states, "the desire to discover 'who I am' led to a significant surge of interest in political and linguistic identity among younger Kurds during the 1980s and 1990s" (p. 457). Moreover, the majority of the Kurdish people who migrated to Europe in the 1980s, and onwards, were sympathetic to the PKK and created organizations that supported it. This ultimately demonstrated their ability to attract attention through their demonstrations.

There are a few well-recognized organizations that have successfully helped to advance the Kurdish movement and its aims. The first of which is KOMKAR, founded in 1979 in Germany. This organization initially focused on helping Kurdish workers in Europe; however, after the 1980s, it became more politically active in the promotion of Kurdish rights (Baser 2013, p. 18). The Kurdish Institute in Paris, founded in 1983 in France, focused on advancing Kurdish literature

and publishing. Many other small-sized organizations that drew inspiration from the structures of pre-existing organizations, began to flourish across Europe. Another important organization worth mentioning is the Kurdish Parliament in Exile, which was set up in 1995 in Western Europe and renamed to *Koma Civakên Kurdistan* (KCK) in 1999 (Ayata 2008). The KCK mission focused on lobbying supranational institutions in Europe so that these institutions would pressure the Turkish state on the matter of Kurdish rights (Ayata 2008, p. 22). Also, crucial to note is the fact that the KCK is committed to operating under radical democracy (democratic confederalism and autonomy) (Akkaya and Jongerden 2014, p. 192).

The Kurdish diaspora population count is also not reliable due to the same reasons given above. This is mainly a result of the census questions, and how the population is measured. However, the main European countries with a significant Kurdish population are as follows: Germany, France, Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium, Sweden, and United Kingdom (Hassanpour and Mojab 2005, p. 214).

2.9 Summary

This chapter briefly examined recent historical events that have shaped the Kurdish movement, starting with the Ottoman Kurds and ending with the current situation. While the history of the Kurds and their identity can be traced back to Mesopotamia, due to the wealth of information, I have only included the more recent events. Also, I would like to note that the Kurdish case in Turkey is very dynamic due to the political climate in Turkey, as well as the history between the Kurdish and Turkish people. Hence, I did not include all of the details and all of the events that took place.

The next chapter will provide a deeper understanding of the Kurdish case. In an effort to do so, I will examine the main debates and scholarly works that make up the discourse on Kurdish identity, political activism, language, and diaspora.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will review the scholarly literature dealing with the Kurdish language, identity, and diaspora. There is a wealth of literature dealing with the historical context of the Kurdish people in Turkey. The majority of the scholars writing on the Kurdish nationalism/movement are from the disciplines of political science and anthropology. The literature pays specific attention to the formation of Kurdish nationalism, which is framed as growing in response to Turkish nationalism. The underdevelopment in eastern Turkey is greatly discussed within the literature, suggesting that it contributed to the ignorance and backwardness of Kurdish people. However, the impact of this underdevelopment and of the strict military presence in the eastern region from the 1980s to 2002 (Çali 2010 p. 317), which spurred the Kurdish people to adopt a defiant attitude towards the Turkish government, has not been greatly discussed. This region was under military rule for several decades, and “foreigners were not permitted to travel there up to 1965” (Haig 2004 p. 9). Researchers were mostly limited to state data and information sources. Thus, they arguably were unable to gather reliable information regarding the realities of the military rule. For these reasons, the literature that best attempts to illustrate and document this situation is incorporated. The review is divided into two main sections: The Kurdish language and the Kurdish diaspora. There will be subsections for each main section in order to better deal with the scholarly discussions pertaining to Kurdish language and the diaspora.

3.1 Language

Perhaps the most widely accepted statement concerning language is that its definition is contested; indeed, different theories put forth varying definitions. For example, sociolinguistics tends to look at the “societally patterned variation in language usage” whereas the sociology of

language “is concerned with language varieties as targets, as obstacles, and as facilitators, and with the users and uses of language varieties as aspects of more encompassing social patterns or processes” (Fishman 1971 pp. 8-9). Simply put, language consists of words that are structured in a way to communicate with other people. However, it would be wrong to assume that language is used only for communicative reasons. As Bourdieu (1991) convincingly argues, language also holds immense symbolic power (p. 37). Language can be readily used as an instrument to create and maintain power relations. The categorizations of language -- standard, nonstandard, dialect or non-existent -- also imply power and hierarchy. Peñalosa (1981) argues that language is a tool for social order; it controls people’s behaviours (p. 38). Furthermore, language is often tied to a culture, ethnicity, nationality, or identity. As such, it is often argued that language is one of the strongest markers of ethnic and national identity. I will not delve into the nuances of the aforementioned concepts as it is beyond the scope of this study. However, I will briefly provide general discussions surrounding language and nationalism, language and ethnicity, and language and identity in the paragraphs below.

3.1.1 The Kurdish Language

The Kurdish language is known to be within the family of the Iranian language (Hassanpour 1996). Divided between nation-states, the language is fragmented, and this has, in turn, resulted in different dialects. Some of these dialects are: Kurmanji, Sorani, and Gorani (Sheyholislami 2009). Kurmanji, which is mostly spoken in Turkey, and Sorani, which is mostly spoken in Iran and Iraq, are considered to be the most standardized dialects of the Kurdish language (Hassanpour 1996; Haig 2002). Furthermore, the codification of the Kurdish language is also divided into at least three scripts; these are as follows: the Arabic-based alphabet that is used in Iran and Iraq, the Latin-based alphabet that is used in Turkey and Syria, and the Cyrillic alphabet

which was mainly used in Armenia and the Soviet Union (Sheyholislami and Sharifi 2016)⁶. Analyzing the theoretic distinction between language and dialects, O'Driscoll (2014) notes that these classifications have more to do with politics than the language itself “and when social, political, and cultural factors are taken into consideration, it becomes evident that groups like Kurmanji, Zazaki, Sorani, etc., are all Kurdish and thus speak the Kurdish language” (p. 274). Hence, throughout this thesis, I will not focus on the differentiations between the dialects; rather, all will be treated as a unified front: the Kurdish language.

As stated above, the historical analyses and information on the Kurdish language is vast. Under the jurisdictions of different states, the use of Kurdish language was limited, and/or banned. In these circumstances, keeping the Kurdish language alive was nothing if not challenging. Decades under the rule of a nationalist state taught Kurds that language is the spirit of a nation, and its decline would mean the nation's extinction. The Turkish state implemented bans and restrictions surrounding the Kurdish language, which are often discussed in terms of nation-building and nationalism. When considering that the Kemalist ideologies in Turkey have strongly emphasized Turkish identity, intolerance of other identities, and the subsequent abuse of Kurdish identity, Turkish nationalism can be seen as a key factor in Kurdish uniformity (Yavuz 1998).

Many publications address the Kurdish language; however, they frequently discuss it in relation to the Turkish language and nation-building efforts engendered by the Turkish state. For example, Güneş (2014) points out that it was the othering practiced by the Turkish state that led to the politicization of Kurds (p. 264). As van Bruinessen (1984) puts it, “to the average Turkish patriot, all Kurdish attempts to hold on to their own language and traditions are inherently reactionary” (p. 1). Seeing the proliferation of the Kurdish language and culture as reactionary is not a fruitful discussion. Just as in the discussions of language and ethnicity, the Kurdish language

⁶ It is important here to note that this thesis does not differentiate between dialects.

is at the core of the Kurdish ethnic identity and culture; thus, holding on to the language is seen as crucial to preserving ethnic identification. In his article, Sheyholislami (2009) notes that the “Kurdish language is arguably the most salient symbol of Kurdish identity, both culturally and politically” (p. 3). Furthermore, the author argues that language is considered to be a “prime means of constructing and reproducing identity” (2010, p. 290).

In every nation-state, citizens are often required to speak the official language of said state for work and other governmental business (Preece 2004). Regardless of the minority linguistic rights of the country, minority languages have always been affected by the official language of the state. In Turkey, the official language, Turkish, was the only language to be formally recognized; as a result, other languages, like that of the Kurdish people, were repressed and subjugated⁷. In the Kurdish case, the defence of Kurdish language rights as well as attempts to implement them has often been seen as a separatist activity in the eyes of the state (see: Stuknabb-Kangas and Desmond 2008).

Fernandes (2012) looks at the relationship between modernity and linguistic genocide. He claims that the Turkish state has committed linguistic genocide, and other forms of genocide, against the Kurdish minority population. Referring to Article III of the Genocide Convention, Fernandes (2012) defines linguistic genocide (linguicide) as “prohibiting the use of the language of the group in daily intercourse or in schools, or the printing and circulation of publications in the language of the group” (p. 78). Additionally, he notes that the standardization of language has often been espoused under the guise of civilization. In this standardization process, minority languages are often eliminated. Fernandes (2012) cites the bans, deportations, and killings of the Kurdish people, throughout the years, as evidence of their linguistic and cultural genocide. The linguistic rights of

⁷ The right to be educated in the Kurdish language and the overarching minority rights of the Kurds have been discussed by several authors (see: Stuknabb-Kangas and Buck 1995; Stuknabb-Kangas and Desmond 2008).

Kurds have been repressed since the formation of the Republic. In fact, conditions were only alleviated from the 1990s onward, and specifically after Turkey's candidacy to the European Union. O'Driscoll (2014), who also discusses modernity, nationalism and language, states that "the industrialization of the printing press in the nineteenth century was an important tool... consequently, modernity had a profound effect on the enforcement of ideologies and as the attempted linguicide of Kurdish was part of the Turkish nationalist ideology and happened entirely in the modernist era" (p. 273).

The ban on the Kurdish language limited the Kurdish language to its oral manifestation. Many authors writing on the topic of Kurdish literature pay special attention to the advances made by the Kurds within the Soviet Union, from the 1920s to the 1980s; this was the only state that published Kurdish literature (Galip 2015 p. 75). However, the new media freedom law "led the Kurdish speakers to develop more positive perceptions on Kurdish by attributing new perceptual and practical functions to it in educated and widely urban daily life" (Öpengin 2012 p. 158).

In contrast, Haig (2004) uses the concept of invisibilisation in order to explain the assimilation of the Kurdish people. The author explains how the invisibilisation of the Kurds happened in stages. He defines invisibilisation as a deliberate removal of a culture by rendering it invisible. The author believes that the primary motive for the invisibilisation of the Kurdish people was to create a homogenous nation from the weak multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire (p. 7). Haig (2004) notes that because the Turkish and Kurdish languages are vastly different, the Kurdish language became the primary mark of 'otherness.' Furthermore, through historical analyses, the author advances his arguments by stating that "schooling is the first opportunity a state has to exert pressure on language choices among its citizens. If children can be weaned off their native tongue at an early age, they are unlikely ever to acquire full competence in it, and thus, presumably, will have irrevocably lost the most powerful bond with their own culture" (p.18). It is true that

compulsory education and the building of boarding schools in the eastern regions of Turkey were powerful tools in the effort to Turkify the Kurdish population. Üngör (2012), a scholar who studies education in Turkey, quotes Mazıcı (1996), to note that “in a confidential report, [Şükrü Kaya, the internal affairs minister of the time] deplored especially the fact that during their lives, most Kurdish women stayed in their native regions and spoke a perverted Persian called Kurmanji, thus, they do not speak even a word of Turkish, and therefore cannot teach their children Turkish” (pp. 141-142). This fact then soon became a problem for the state officials, and opening boarding schools seemed to be a solution to the problem.

3.1.2 Education and Kurdish Language

Coskun, Derince and Ucarlar (2011) claim that in the first few years of compulsory education, schools were not built in the eastern region. This was attributed to “the fear that a Kurdish middle-class would emerge along with a Kurdish national consciousness as a result of education” (p. 29). Regardless, in the 1960s, the state decided to open boarding schools in the East of the country with the aim of using education as a tool to “Turkify” the Kurds (Hassanpour 1996). Zeydanlioglu (2012) notes that the boarding schools in the eastern provinces encouraged, or rather forced, Kurdish children to forget their mother tongue. This was achieved by forbidding them to speak their mother tongue in school, as well as circulating propaganda of Kurdish as a “dirty” and “bad” language (p. 108). While these boarding schools indeed managed to assimilate and Turkify some Kurds, education also resulted in the rise of the Kurdish identity. To expand, a segment of the Kurdish people may have viewed this initiative critically, thus refusing to send their children to an institution of assimilation. This, in turn, contributed to the high rates of illiteracy among certain generations of Kurds. In contrast, other Kurds may have seen going to school as a necessity for survival and success despite the dangers of assimilation (Öpengin 2012).

Üngör (2012) notes that, in the eastern region, the majority of people continued to speak Kurdish, even during the legal ban; this resistance continued until the 1980 military coup that caused destruction, kidnappings, and the killings of many Kurdish people in the eastern villages. Furthermore, Üngör (2012) notes that as the Kurdish people moved from east to west, they “became immersed in Turkish-language culture and media and sent their children to state schools. Within a generation, Kurdish was hardly spoken any longer among this large segment of the Kurdish population.” (p. 147). It is crucial to note that, while Üngör’s (2012) observation on the declining use of Kurdish in the west is plausible, it is difficult to corroborate and prove empirically. Indeed, it is not known whether or not the Kurdish language was still being used in the homes. Üngör’s (2012) claim that “girls in particular needed to be placed in the schools since mothers were seen as the carriers of the Kurdish culture that needed to be exorcised from their minds” (p. 142), suggests that women were, and can still be seen today, as significant contributors to the transmission of the Kurdish culture and language.

Öpengin (2012) also finds a trend similar to that identified by Üngör (2012). In his research, Öpengin (2012) found that the Kurdish language was not promoted, especially in the cities. Öpengin (2012) further notes that some people were even “reluctant to transfer Kurdish to their children.” However, this finding is explained, in part, alongside the notion of economic and social success (pp. 159-160). The author notes that since the Kurdish language did not hold economic value in the society, the transmission of the language was motivated for the purpose of identity transmission (p. 163). Since the Turkish language retained hegemonic power, the social capital that was associated with speaking it far exceeded that of Kurdish. However, Öpengin (2012) also states that “since the second half of the 1990s, the increasing visibility of Kurdish in the public sphere and in political domains has added to the development of positive perceptions regarding Kurdish among its speakers and other components of society in Turkey” (p. 164). Similar to

Öpengin (2012), Gökalp (2015) believes that there is a clear hierarchy among the languages in Turkey. Her dissertation research found that Kurds living in cities undeniably valued the Turkish and English languages more than Kurdish (p. 185). In stark contrast, through interviews in cities with Kurdish women, Coskun, Derince and Uçarlar (2011) found that children who attended Turkish schools continued to speak Kurdish at home. It can be said, then, that in cities, the inability and/or unwillingness to transmit the language to children does not hold true for all cases.

3.2 Nationalism

The study of nationalism is truly a rich domain filled with commentary from influential theorists. The understanding of nationalism is enriched by the works of Anthony D. Smith's *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (1994), Ernest Gellner's *Nationalism* (1997), Karl Deutsch's *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality* (1953), and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983). Gellner (1983) believes that nationalism is a natural trait in modern societies, and defines it as "a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent" (p. 1). The position of Gellner (1983) is considered to be an ideological approach to nationalism, where nationalism deals with set of ideas, its focus is on the elites, and its goal is to achieve political sovereignty (Bonikowski 2016). On the other hand, there is another approach to nationalism that deals with the everyday practices and manifestations of nationalism (Bonikowski 2016). Furthermore, we often find this overarching topic further categorized into cultural nationalism, ethnic nationalism, sub-nationalism, and civic nationalism to name the few. Furthermore, as Kellas (1991) specifies in his definition, nationalism can be both an ideology and a form of behaviour (p. 3). Additionally, further definitions of nationalism can be considered in terms of their contextual use and the specific nation being analyzed. Kellas (1991) states: "as a form of political behaviour, nationalism is closely linked to ethnocentrism... nationalism is based

on the feeling of belonging to a community which is the nation, and its strongest form is seen in the supreme sacrifice of death for one's nation" (p. 4).

In discussions of nationalism, we also often come across an essentialist vs. constructivist dichotomy. While the essentialist view on nationalism relies heavily on ideas that take nations as natural and organic, the constructivist view relies on the production of feelings of solidarity, traditions or, as often cited by Anderson (1991), a political imagined community, imagined because there is no community larger than a village, and that even when people do not know each other there is a sense of community with each other. Billig (1995), on the other hand, writes about what he calls 'banal nationalism.' In doing so, he looks at the daily use of national symbols and how they reproduce and reinforce national sentiments. In opposition to the views of nationalism as a constructed phenomenon, Carmichael (2000) writes that nationalism, even if it is constructed, derives from real "non-fictive past solidarity" (quoted in Ferguson 2006 p. 20). I will attempt to sketch the main distinctions of nationalism as a concept and its theories as an introduction to the literature on Kurdish nationalism.

3.2.1 Kurdish Nationalism

There has been a significant body of literature on the historical analysis of the conflict between Turkey and Kurdish people, ranging from its first catalyst to its current state. The literature concerned with Kurdish people in Turkey always begins with the history of Turkey's modernization. Kiliç (1998) is one of the authors who pays a great deal of attention to the agenda of modernity and democratization that the Young Turks brought to the politics of the Ottoman Empire. For Kiliç (1998), the aim of the Republic of Turkey was to create a homogenous Turkish nation. Kiliç (1998) argues that the Kurdish issue in Turkey is not merely an ethnic issue, but rather an issue of democracy and human rights. Here, it is noted that for democratization to occur, the millet system was introduced, where an individual's identity was determined by religious

affiliation. Within this system, “the Kurds were not a minority, but rather a part of the ruling millet” (Kiliç 1998 p. 95). In order to enforce the ideal of homogeneity, the Kurdish people of Turkey, who mainly resided in eastern Turkey, were named “mountain Turks”, in order to imply that they were originally Turkish but merely forgot their identity when living in isolation (Yanarocak 2014; Izady 1992; Kreyenbroek 1992; Atlas 2014). Izady’s (1992) work on Kurds, also, acknowledges that the desire for “ethnic homogeneity (was) a prerequisite for the European model of the nation-state” (p. 108). Agreeing with previous scholars, Aytürk (2004) analyzed historical language policies in Turkey, and found that the language reforms “put the ancient Turks on the highest pedestal possible, extolled their contribution to civilization and reminded the Western nations that they had to acknowledge the Turks as part of their family, as a nation which contributed most generously to their civilization” (p. 2). It is evident that scholars who seek to discuss Kurdish nationalism often agree on the centrality of Turkish nationalism in order to better understand Kurdish nationalism, and its formation.

Güneş (2007) also notes that it is “violence of this kind against Kurds that led to the cultivation of radical and separatist Kurdish nationalism” (p. 25). As said above, the othering of the Kurdish people through the state’s initiatives probably spurred the Kurdish people to become more attached to their identity and thus led to the creation of a counter-nationalism.

On the other side, scholars like Tezcür (2009) contribute to the discussion of Kurdish nationalism by disassociating themselves from the dichotomy of ethnic nationalism versus civic nationalism. His work seems to be influenced by Barth’s ethnic-boundary making approach to nationalism. The author provides multiple examples that demonstrate the interaction between Turkish and Kurdish nationalism, and how that interaction affects ethnic identity formation. Tezcür (2009) argues that Kurdish nationalism benefited from what he defines as ethnic-boundary making. Furthermore, Tezcür (2009), with references to his personal communications with the

Kurdish villagers in the east of Turkey during 2007-08 and to speeches by the Kurdish political party members, states that some Kurdish people hide their ethnic origins because of the social stigma attached to being Kurdish (p. 7). “Nationalists on both sides strive to draw rigid boundaries while ethnic identities tend to be fluid and permeable at (the) popular level” (Tezcür 2009 p. 8). Both sides mould each other and organize around ethnicity. Hence, there is extensive literature on Kurdish nationalism in relation to Turkish nationalism, and as a form of counter-nationalism.

3.2.2 Language and Nationalism

Nearly every discussion surrounding language and nationalism mentions the German romantics, such as Herder (1744-1803), Fichte (1762-1814), and Humboldt (1767-1835). Kedourie (1960), one of the influential writers on the topic of nationalism, indicates that the roots of the nationalist ideology lay within the works of German romantics. According to May (2011), these three scholars often define nations as ethnocultural communities with fixed characteristics, like a common language (p. 61). This is all to say that these scholars often claim that the “mother tongue expresses a nationality’s soul and spirit...language [is] also the surest way for individuals to safeguard the authenticity they had inherited from their ancestors as well as to hand it on to generations yet to unborn” (Fishman 1973 p. 46). While language is seen as a crucial pillar in a nation, it is also important to note that this holds true only if the language is more important than other national symbols. Needless to say, this notion of language having a foundational role in nationalism gained much popularity in Europe. In the 20th century, some scholars further championed strong arguments about the connection between language and a nation. For example, Fernand Braudel insisted that the “French language is the French nation” (quoted in Safran 1999).

When language and nationalism are discussed simultaneously, the notion of ethnicity becomes inevitable. Hall argues that “the term ethnicity acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity as well as the fact that all

discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge is contextual” (quoted in Procter 2004 p. 122). In addition, when speaking on ethnic groups, Spencer (2014) indicates that “what makes an ethnic category an ethnic group is the sense of ‘we-feeling’ and common interests in advancing the group’s position in society through collective actions” (p. 57). On this note, Fishman (1989) states that ethnicity is “an aspect of a collectivity’s self-recognition as well as an aspect of its recognition in the eyes of outsiders” (p. 24). Additionally, when addressing the relationship between ethnicity and language, Fishman (1989) argues that there is an unavoidable link “[between the two] as a result of the general symbolic function of language as well as because of its specific implication in the paternity, patrimony, and phenomenology dimensions of ethnicity experiences” (p. 47).

Furthermore, ethnicity is often divided into two main approaches: primordial and instrumental. The primordialist approach considers the biological aspects in the formation of ethnic bonds (Spencer 2014 p. 98) and sees ethnicity as fixed. One of the most influential voices on the topic of primordial ethnicity, Clifford Geertz (1926-2006), “suggest[s] that ethnic identity developed from certain givens of social existence, including blood and kin connections, religion, language, region, and custom” (quoted in Spencer 2014 pp. 98-99). It sees ethnicity as natural; the characteristics of a person born in a certain location will share the same characteristics from the previous generation. On the other hand, if a behaviour with ethnic attachment benefits an individual or collective people, then the behaviour would be considered as instrumental. So, under the instrumentalist theory, ethnic action is calculative. Furthermore, the instrumentalist theory of ethnicity implies that those who are in the upper social strata — for instance, intellectuals — can attain political interests by using the common national identity framework to garner support from the rest of the community (Hutchinson & Smith 1996). Hence, ethnicity is interpreted more as a political phenomenon, understood as the pursuit of interests.

In relation to the connections between language, nationalism and ethnicity, there are also writers who look more closely at the connection between language and identity; these, too, spur sentiments of ethnicity. Fishman (1991), who indicated that “the destruction of a language is the destruction of a rooted identity” (1991 p. 4), can be considered to be one of the academics who espouses the connection between language and identity. The scholarship on identity is vast and, if I may say, fuzzy. Once again, the essentialist vs. constructivist dichotomy seemingly persists. The essentialist camp posits that identity is something that we are born with, whereas the constructivist camp views identity as something that is socially constructed, unfixed, multiple and changing. Additionally, the relationship between identity and language is well documented in the fields of sociolinguistics (Labov 1966), the sociology of language (Fishman 1999), and applied linguistics (Ivanič 1998). Finally, identity is often researched in relation to other phenomena: for example, self-identity, collective identity, ethnic identity and national identity. While the study of identity is exciting and dynamic, I will not delve into the general discussions surrounding identity and language, as it does not serve much for this thesis.

3.2.3 Kurdish Language and Nationalism

Kreyenbroek (1992) notes that the Kurdish language is an important aspect of identity formation and is, thus, applied as a symbol of distinctiveness with respect to the Turkish people (p. 68). Certain scholars, who have written extensively about language and nationalism, have also incorporated discussion surrounding genocide. O’Driscoll (2014) maintains that the “ideology of nationalism led to the drive to unite and nationalize the masses under a dominant linguistic identity” (p. 273). The strong attachment to language can be observed both in the Turkish and Kurdish contexts. Atlas (2014) argues that language plays an important role for the Kurdish identity and can, thus, be seen as a vehicle for nationalism. He states that the attempted suppression of the Kurdish language, by the Turkish state, provided a basis for the Kurdish language to be used

as a political tool (p. 156). Drawing on a variety of scholars, Atlas (2014) writes that language is one of the most important displays of identity. By extension, it is also one of the most important factors in the creation of nationhood and nationalism.

Furthermore, the authors of *Scar of Tongue* (2011) state, “language has two main implications; language is primarily a symbol; it is the concrete manifestation of the shared identity in nation construction; it is the symbol of ‘we’-consciousness” (Cokun, Derince and Uçarlar, p. 14). This formation of a distinct identity helped the Kurdish people, particularly Kurdish activists, to use language not only as a political tool to organize communities, but also as a tool to advance nationalist views. Klein (2001) argues that, in the nation-state system, Kurds recognized that they also have to prove that they too were a nation. He states, “for this to work, Kurds needed to be instilled with ‘national sentiments’” (p. 31). The emergence of this intellectual or nationalist consciousness, as van Bruinessen (1992) asserts, led the Kurdish people to define their ethnic identity (p. 48), and pay tribute to their distinctiveness through language.

Taras (1998), on the other hand, in his exploration of nationalism and language, states that “the erosion of the status of a language in a given society is no cause for alarm since a group can compensate by embracing other markers of identity-intermarriage, food and folk customs-to identify the least convincing” (p. 81). However, Taras (1998) goes on to note that language policies are often used to promote and/or create a sense of community. The author nonetheless asserts that language cannot alone provide a shared sense of nationhood.

3.3 Political Activism

Louis, Amiot, Thomas & Blackwood (2016) argued that gaining knowledge of the political issues fuels political behaviour. An individual who is aware of the political issues and how their contribution matters can also promote future political behaviour (Louis et al. 2016 p. 244). Political activism is often discussed in relation to the available contextual information of events.

Furthermore, political activism is often discussed in the general area of social movement studies. Nevertheless, in simple terms, we may assert that certain political engagements can come to be classified as political activism. Sullivan and Esmail (2007) state that political activism has been defined in the manner of voting, lobbying, signing petitions, protesting and marching, to name a few political activities. (p. 283). There is not a well-documented and accepted definition of political activism; it is often a category of activism, but in simple terms, it involves actions as a means of achieving political goals either by pushing for political reforms or creating awareness. As McClurg (2006) argues, communities and social networks can help to enable political activism. In general, it is argued that “the membership stimulates a collective interest in politics..., makes people available to elites for mobilization..., and helps people learn skills that make participation easier” (McClurg 2003 p. 450).

Hence, while there are various reasons for political engagement and activism, I will only attempt to discuss the reasons pertaining to sentiments of collectivity and the ‘we-feeling’. In order to meaningfully discuss political activism, it is important to address collective identity, because for social and political movements to be successful, especially for ethno-national groups, there needs to be a collective identity. Chesters and Welsh (2011) note that collective identity formation, or how the “I” becomes “we”, rapidly becomes the main goal of the movement itself. Poletta and Jasper (2001) define collective identity as: “a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities, although it may form part of a personal identity” (p. 285). In the case of the Kurdish movement, collective identity formation is strongly tied to cultural symbols and language. Furthermore, the stories of resistance, when transmitted, can be integrated with the domains of injustice; this, in turn, can help the participants of the movement in their construction of an “us” (Poletta and Jasper, 2001 p. 292). The creation of “us” versus “them,” in the Kurdish case, extends beyond borders.

3.10 Diaspora

In simple terms, diaspora is defined as a dispersed group of people who share the same origin and are now scattered around the world (Ben-Rafael, 2013). The Jewish case has been widely considered to be the origin of the diaspora concept. However, the concept was later applied to the Greek and Armenian case, and now extends to other migrant groups living outside of their homeland. Under these circumstances, it is not a surprise to then say that the concept “diaspora” has become an increasingly contested concept. According to Spencer (2014), diaspora is a term “to convey the dream of a homeland, a shrine of the past where the flame of memory is kept alive for the migrant group” (p. 233). In addition, Sheffer (2003) defines an ethno-national diaspora as:

A social-political formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one of several host countries. Members of such entities maintain regular or occasional contacts with what they regard as their homelands and with individuals and groups of the same background residing in other host countries. Based on aggregated decisions to settle permanently in host countries, but to maintain a common identity, diasporans identify as such, showing solidarity with their group and their entire nation, and they organize and are active in the cultural, social, economic, and political spheres (pp. 9-10).

Contrary to Sheffer (2003), authors like Schiller and Fouron (2001) carefully differentiate between ethno-national diasporas and long-distance nationalists. Schiller and Fouron (2001) elaborate on Anderson’s (1992) long-distance nationalism concept. The authors assert that when diasporans make claims to nation-states and are politically active, they should be called long-distance nationalists instead of “diasporans” (p. 23). Additionally, Baser (2013), who has spearheaded numerous studies on the Kurdish diaspora in Europe, also defines diasporas as “composed of certain members of immigrant communities who maintain their ties to the homeland and possess a strong sense of belonging to it, regardless of whether it is an existing country, or an imaginary one” (p. 6).

3.10.1 The Kurdish Diaspora

It is important to note that the Kurdish diaspora, like the community itself, is very heterogeneous in language dialects, religion, socio-economic status, political affiliations and so forth. Hence, this part of the literature review will attempt to focus on the scholarly work on the diaspora originating in Turkey; no further classification will be undertaken with respect to dialects or religion.

Kurdish immigration to Western Europe is said to have begun around the 1950s and 1960s; the demographic of this immigration was largely in the form of students or economic migrants (Berruti et al. 2002). However, as the violent military coups in Turkey began to escalate during the 1980s, Kurds and other leftist Turks began to migrate to Europe in mass numbers, seeking asylum. The majority of the Kurds who migrated sought asylum in Germany, making the third-party country most affected by Turkey's internal conflict (Eccarius-Kelly 2002). As the Kurdish diaspora grew in numbers and became increasingly politicized, scholars paid closer attention to their movements and practices across Europe. One of the events celebrated by the Kurds became one of the most important events studied by scholars. This event is *Newroz*, and scholars often analyze how it has been transformed into a political event and an ideological battlefield in Turkey (Aydin 2014 p. 68).

Newroz, symbolizing the arrival of spring, is celebrated annually on March 21 as the New Year. Scholars argue that, historically, *Newroz* has been celebrated by all the major cultures of Mesopotamia (Aydin 2005; Güneş 2013). While there are many historical narratives regarding the origins of *Newroz*, the general Kurdish population draws a connection between *Newroz* and the *Kawa* legend. In short, it is believed that many years ago, there was a tyrant named Dahkak (an Assyrian King) who terrorized Kurdistan and its people. Eventually, *Kawa the blacksmith* ignited a movement and liberated the Kurds (Aydin 2005 p.57). When Kawa liberated the people, fires

were lit to celebrate the freedom. On the same day flowers began to open, and trees began to bloom, signaling spring. Aydin (2005) states that the *Kawa* legend's transformation into a tale of resistance began when a journal, *Jin*, was published in Istanbul by Kurdish intellectuals during 1918-1919 (p. 59). The suppression of the Kurdish rebellion, also known as the silent years, further developed the myth of *Newroz* as a form of resistance. Aydin (2005) states that "during the so-called years of silence, *Newroz*, perceived as a value pertaining to Kurdishness, was tried to be kept alive" (p. 70). Eventually, with the rise of leftist organizations in Turkey, around the 1970s and 1980s, *Newroz* was once again reference in discourses of resistance (p. 73). While the celebrations of *Newroz* were practiced during these times, the events following the 1980 coup only served to further amplify the emotions of the Kurdish people and the meanings which they attributed to *Newroz*.

The violent and brutal treatment of minority groups, mainly Kurdish people, at the hands of the military resulted in the incarceration of hundreds of Kurdish people and activists. In the Diyarbakir prison, several PKK prisoners organized hunger strikes and rebellions. Needless to say, the events culminated on March 21, 1982, and ultimately became a significant and long-lasting component of *Newroz* celebrations (Aydin 2005 p. 79). On *Newroz* Day, Mazlum Doğan⁸ hung himself in his cell. Following this suicide, four PKK prisoners set themselves on fire (p. 79). Shortly after these tragic events, PKK increasingly used "Newroz as the symbol of the ideology of resistance" (quoted in Aydin 2005 p. 79). Furthermore, the 1990 celebration of *Newroz*, which turned into a violent ordeal as security forces intervened, also revitalized the importance of *Newroz* in the eyes of the Kurdish peoples.

Going back to the Kurdish diaspora, Ammann (2005) notes how celebrating *Newroz* came to be a very important event for the diaspora largely due to the fact that it became seen as a form

⁸ He was a member of PKK, and an activist

of ethnic reaffirmation (p. 1015). Demir (2012), also writing on the Kurdish diaspora in London, notes that attending *Newroz* celebrations can be understood as an expression of ethnic and cultural identity (p. 819).

In its early years, the host states (mainly Germany) associated the activities of the Kurdish diaspora with violence due to their association with the PKK (Baser, 2013; Berkowitz and Müge 2014). The conflict in Turkey between the PKK and the state, as well the oppression of the Kurds in the east, led the Kurdish diaspora in Germany to become increasingly active. Baser (2017) indicates, “each time there was an event in Turkey related to the conflict, Kurdish activism became discernible: blocking highways, invading Turkish consulates, and vandalizing Turkish properties—which was proof for the German authorities that the conflict had been imported to Germany by the migrants from Turkey” (p. 681). Additionally, in explaining the activities of the diaspora, Baser (2017) quotes a president of a Kurdish organization in Germany who states: “the diaspora had two important goals at that time: visibility and media attention, which would bring about recognition of their ethnic identity and awareness of their situation back home” (p. 681). However, with the ideological shift in the PKK, the activities of the diaspora also became less violent. Regardless of the negative stigma engendered in the early years, the diaspora made itself visible and acceptable to the international community.

It is often acknowledged that the Kurdish community in Germany was the most politically active in Europe while the community in Sweden was viewed as a more intellectual community who prioritized attention to language and identity formation, though they still remained politically active (Khayati 2008). The two European countries attract the most Kurdish migrants. As a result, Germany (Ostrergaard-Nielson 2003; Eccarius-Kelly 2011; Amman 2005; Baser 2017) and Sweden (Khayati and Dahistedt 2014; Khayati 2008; Eliassi 2016; Eliassi and Alinia 2014) are the most studied communities of the Kurdish diaspora. It is also important to note that France also

attracts a significant number of Kurdish people; however, because of the French civic-integration model, the Kurds in France are not seen as politically active in comparison to those in Germany or Sweden (Karagöz 2017). Furthermore, in noting the importance of the host country's political systems, Baser (2013) states "if the host country is sympathetic to the Kurdish cause, as in the case of the Sweden, the Kurdish diaspora's lobbying activities and claims-making efforts can expect to meet with greater acceptance than they would in other countries" (p. 39).

Certainly, the Kurdish diaspora in other European countries have also been studied. For example, Wahlbeck (2005; 2012) and Toivanen and Kivisto (2014) studied the Kurdish diaspora in Finland, while Demir (2012) has undertaken extensive studies on the Kurdish diaspora in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, it seems as though the majority of the studies on the Kurdish diaspora focus on one, or some of the following: identity formation, the sense of belonging to the homeland (long distance nationalism), relations to the host land, or political activism. Scholars are seemingly united on the fact that, regardless of the host land, the Kurdish diaspora tends to retain an attachment to their origins and a feeling of long-distance nationalism (Baser, Emanuelsson, and Toivanen 2015; Wahlbeck 2005; 2012; Toivanen and Kivisto 2014; Baser 2013; Eliassi 2016).

This attachment to their origin has been studied under different lenses and by different scholars. For example, scholars like Eliassi (2016) and Eliassi and Alinia (2014) associate the resilience of the Kurdish identity with the "othering" engendered by Turkey's assimilation policies. According to this framework, because the homeland's regime repressed forms of Kurdish expression, those Kurds who migrated to countries where they could practice their identity without restriction did so as much as possible. Here, they often employed it as an informal form of everyday resistance. Other scholars like Ammann (2005), Toivanen and Kivisto (2014), and Karagöz (2017) focused more on the host country's attitude towards the migrant groups; in so doing, these scholars often analyze sentiments regarding racism, discrimination, and a sense of belonging. This frame

suggests that the reason for the resilience of Kurdish identity can be largely attributed to overt or covert racism in the host land. In this framework, the immigrant group's economic behaviour, education level, and political participation in the host land are often analyzed. While each diaspora will react, organize and lobby in differing manners depending on their host land, Kurdish diaspora activities have historically contained "organizing petitions and campaigns, violent and nonviolent mass demonstrations and protests, sit-ins, highways blockades, hunger strikes, and self-immolation" (Baser 2011, p. 15).

Khayati and Dahistedt (2014), who examine the ways in which the diaspora in Sweden has contributed significantly to the development of Kurdish literature, state that in addition to books and magazines, film productions and radio broadcasts in Kurdish have also led to the development and preservation of the Kurdish identity in the diaspora (p. 59). The authors suggest that "the Kurdish diasporic identity appears as a result of both the collective memory from the former homeland and the transnational relations that the Kurds maintain in their residing society" (p. 60). Citing Khayati (2008), Baser (2013) also notes how Sweden attracted many Kurds who saw the potential to freely practice their identity and actively participate in politics. Furthermore, Baser (2013) notes that "the percentage of diaspora members in Sweden who could speak fluent Kurdish, especially among those of the second generation, was much higher when compared with the German diaspora" (p. 15). This strongly implies that the Kurdish community in Sweden pays more attention to Kurdish culture and language compared to other Kurdish communities in the diaspora.

A few scholars have also looked at the differences between first and second generation behaviours in the diaspora. Østergaard-Nielsen (2001) states that political identification and a sense of belonging varies between the first and second generations. Furthermore, Baser's (2011) research shows that it is "not possible to make any generalizations about the correlation between integration of the Kurds in European societies and their involvement with homeland politics" (p.

10). However, those who are the descendants of politically active persons will indeed show more interest in the realm of politics (p. 11). As well, according to van Bruinessen (1999), second generation diasporans tend to be more interested in politics and the formulation of a Kurdish identity than their parents (p. 10).

3.10.2 Political Activism and Diaspora

There exists a variety of literatures on the Kurdish movement, especially pertaining to diaspora activism. A significant emphasis is placed on the mass Kurdish immigration to Europe after the 1980 military coup attack. The military coup of the 1980 killed thousands of Kurdish people and made it illegal to practice any form of Kurdish culture. In her book, Grabolle-Çelikel (2015) notes that the ability of Kurdish migrants, particularly those in Europe, to practice their identity without fear contributed to creating a Kurdish community and Kurdishness (p. 99). Many scholars writing in this area note that the refugees of the 1980s were already politicized; they, as a result of their circumstances, sympathized with leftist ideologies. The diaspora's political activity is often associated with the PKK and its activities in Europe. The majority of the studies conducted on the political activism of the Kurds in Europe rightly pay attention to the PKK and their recruitment processes. For example, Baser (2011) notes that the PKK saw those who had previously been imprisoned at Diyarbakir prison as a recruitment base; this is, arguably due to the fact that almost all of those people who had been imprisoned there had experienced severe physical and psychological violence (p. 9). The PKK's advantage was that the majority of refugees in the 1980s either experienced state violence or knew someone close to them that had experienced state violence. Channeling these grievances against the Turkish state became one of the overarching goals of the movement.

Eccarius-Kelly (2011) is another scholar who focuses on the political activism of the Kurds, especially those residing in Germany. She states that the Kurdish movement espoused a

nationalist agenda, as they strove for a separate and sovereign state (Eccarius-Kelly 2011). The author argues that, under the control of the PKK during the years of the 1980s to the 1990s, the Kurdish movement was not successful. She claims, “when Diaspora Kurds shifted the centres of resistance away from PKK structures in the late 1990s after critical discourse related PKK military failures in Turkey to weaknesses in Kurdish political organizations in Europe did moderate voices gain influence again” (p. 295). Here, the author implies that the PKK’s armed branch deviated from the movement by espousing a separatist agenda. Güneş (2012), on the other hand, states that “although the PKK is usually seen as the main advocator of violence as political practice, the necessity of armed struggle was part of the general debate that took place within the Kurdish nationalist movement” (pp. 91-92). Güneş (2012) explains the violence that was caused by PKK by referencing the past actions of the Turkish state, and notes that violence seemed to be a requisite for national liberation.

In addition, Ammann (2005) also notes how the goals of the diaspora shifted from establishing sovereignty to demanding cultural and/or political autonomy (p. 1015). Nevertheless, this shift made the diaspora more visible and palatable to the international arena. Writing on the French Kurdish diaspora, Karagöz (2017) indicates that the diaspora, acting transnationally, has been very effective in raising awareness of the Kurdish people in Turkey and in increasing the visibility of Kurds in Europe (p. 80). The author acknowledges the importance of the opportunities provided by the host land in helping and enabling the diaspora to establish organizations and practice their identity freely. More importantly, he also notes that “the effectiveness of the Kurdish diasporic politics relies on the diaspora’s own resources, as the strong intricacy of immigrants’ social networks that enables the mobilization process” (p. 81). In similar fashion to Karagöz (2017), Østergaard-Nielsen (2001) notes that the receiving countries indeed affect the political practices and activities of the Kurds.

Additionally, in her 2013 work, Eccarius-Kelly provides examples and details of how the diaspora is mobilized through different channels and framings. The author notes how events like *Newroz* and the anniversary of the Roboski massacre⁹ are used as unifying tools. The author states that nationalists rely on the use of narratives of repression (the PKK does as well) to continue the discourse on resistance. She notes that, “individual and collective acts of defiance, disseminated and magnified by Kurdish media channels allow Kurdish communities to experience a sense of unified resistance against state efforts to control them” (p. 274).

Certainly, there are other works that also deal with the Kurdish diaspora in Europe. For example, Baser (2013) looks at both the identity formation and political activism of the Kurds in Europe. Like most of the scholars who have worked on Kurdish diaspora activism, she notes that most of the Kurds migrating from Turkey to Europe were already politicized. Furthermore, “their reasons for leaving Turkey, their political or social background, and their host country’s relations with Turkey all affected their propensity for political activism” (Baser 2013 p. 12). The author also asserts that the activities of the diaspora in Europe consist of organizing petitions and campaigns as well as non-violent demonstrations. On the other hand, Berkowitz and Müge (2014) look at how the Kurdish movement is becoming increasingly Europeanized through the political activism of the diaspora, especially through the lobbying of the European Union. Thus, whether it is contributing to ethnic identity formation, maintaining cultural and ethnic identity, lobbying, or organizing demonstrations, the political significance of the Kurdish diaspora cannot be ignored.

⁹ Between the borders of Iraq and Turkey, on December 28, 2011 at 9:37 pm (local time) 34 Turkish Kurds, from Roboski village, were killed by Turkish airstrikes as they were crossing the border. According to the Turkish state these people were members of PKK. In reality they were civilian, and 19 of which were children.

3.11 Summary

In this literature review, I have outlined the general discussions surrounding the Kurdish people, their movement, and the diaspora. I have touched upon two main topics, language and diaspora. As mentioned above, language often appears in connection to other concepts. In this review I discussed the Kurdish language, language and education, and language and nationalism. Studies on Kurdish people point to their language, dress, and kinship as symbols of their distinctiveness. The Kurdish resistance movement and its political activity have contributed to the awareness of their distinct identity and language.

In the later sections, I introduced the relationship between political activism and diaspora and touched upon the debates surrounding the topic. As the literature shows, the Kurdish case is very dynamic and highly political. In addition, the diaspora's attentiveness towards the homeland politics contributes to the dynamic nature of this topic. Much of the literature addressing the Kurdish diaspora focuses on Europe. When we consider the Kurdish population in Europe and its timelines, it is not surprising to see the emphasis on the Kurdish diaspora in Europe. As the tensions were further exacerbated between the Turkish state and PKK or pro-Kurdish people, many already politicized Kurds migrated to Europe in the 1980s and 1990s. These politically active people organized social networks and mobilized other members of the diaspora in order to make the Kurdish plight visible to the international world.

3.12. Research Question

The Kurdish movement throughout the years have brought awareness to the general Kurdish community about their distinct identity and language, and in their terms or ideologies, justified their right to separate their community from the Turkish state. When we closely observe the debates on Turkish-Kurdish conflict, we see that language is at the heart of the conflict. Both ethnic groups promote and prize their language; however, Turkish is promoted with the power of

the national state. Because of the language reforms in Turkey and the denial of Kurdish ethnic minority status, speaking and practicing Kurdish identity in Turkey has been framed as resistance or a political act (Atlas 2014). One of the ways to protect the Kurdish language has been to speak the language inside the Kurdish community. According to van Bruinessen (1999), the importance of Kurdish language and cultural activities are very significant for Kurdish political activism and are well-used mechanisms for community-creation and the politicization of Kurdish people in the diaspora.

Studies on ethnic migration and diasporas have also been pretty popular in academia. The growing trend of diaspora groups' political activity in host countries demands academic attention. As seen in the literature review above, there are many studies available on the political activism of the Kurdish people in the diaspora, especially in Europe. We can observe similar trends, mentioned above, in Canada with its much smaller Kurdish population. However, due to its relative size and age, the Kurdish diaspora in Canada has not been studied in detail. In addition, many of the studies looking at the Kurdish diaspora activism in Europe, utilize the same approach that is opportunity structures. While this approach is indeed valuable and provides great understanding of how the Kurdish diaspora mobilizes given the opportunities in the host lands, it seems that it often generates very similar results, as many of these countries have similar democratic understanding of politics and opportunities provided to diaspora groups.

By looking at the Canadian Kurdish diaspora, residing in Toronto and Montréal, this study will fill a huge gap within the Kurdish movement literature that has been dominated by European diaspora studies. In addition, this study will not only contribute to the general understanding of Kurdish diaspora activism, but it will also analyze the role of the Kurdish language in said activism. As apparent in the review, while there are hundreds of studies and articles observing the Kurdish language, those that look at the role of the Kurdish language in political activism are limited, if

present at all. As mentioned often in different areas of this review, the Kurdish language is constructed as very significant to the Kurdish identity and movement. However, there is only very limited studies looking at the Kurdish language practices in diaspora groups, none of which explores the role of the Kurdish language in political activism.

In addition, this study will contribute in filling the gap in the discussion of Kurdish diaspora movement by using different conceptual approaches, that have not been widely used. Using the frameworks of Adamson (2012) on conceptualizing diaspora as social construct and Zenker (2013) on representational and represented practices of language, I will answer two research questions, which are 1) what form does the political activism of Kurds originating in Turkey take in Canada? And 2) what role does the Kurdish language play in the political activism of these Kurds in Canada?

The next chapter will look at the conceptual frameworks that I will utilize for this thesis. I discuss diaspora activism through a social movement framework, paying specific attention to identity construction, framing and mobilization, as Adamson (2012) suggests. The second part utilizes Zenker's (2013) analytical distinctions between representational and represented practices of language, agency and structure, and biographical trajectory.

CHAPTER 4

FRAMEWORKS

This chapter outlines the conceptual, and methodological approaches taken for this study.

4.1 Conceptual Approaches

According to the general consensus among social scientists, the term diaspora is both an old and controversial concept. The contention surrounding this phenomenon stems from the fact that there is no universally accepted definition. Previously, as apparent in the case of the Jewish diaspora, forced dispersal from a homeland and traumatic experiences of exile were considered to be important elements in the definition of diaspora. It appears as though homeland orientation is a common requirement when classifying groups as a diaspora, in addition to sharing the collective memory of a real or imagined homeland. The designation of the term ‘imagined’ does not mean they are unreal, but rather “they are imagined as real...and have very real effects on social life” (Sökefeld 2006 p. 266).

In the preceding chapter, we saw that the concept of diaspora is often used to define ethnic groups who have been dispersed from their homeland, who keep strong ties to it, who want to return to their homeland one day, and who have a collective identity and solidarity. The importance of host countries is often discussed as well. In many cases it is the behaviour, government, and social practices, of the host land that affects the diaspora identity. “Host-land policies may be designed to create conditions that lead to the de-diasporization of a minority; conversely, the moribund diaspora consciousness of an ethnic minority community may be resuscitated as a result of pressure from the government of the host country” (Safran, 2007). An example would be Israel using the Jewish lobby residing in the United States to advocate positive American policy towards Israel.

Given that I discussed the differences in definitions of diaspora earlier, I will provide greater emphasis on two of the criteria: *diaspora consciousness* and *mobilization*. As shown in the literature review, diaspora formation does not just occur with the crossing of borders. There are many other criteria for diaspora formation such as living “here” and “there”, an attachment to a real or imagined homeland, awareness of a collective identity, solidarity, and mobilization. I think diaspora consciousness and mobilization criteria have the potential to successfully group some of the other criteria together. For example, in order to have the consciousness or to mobilize, the group needs to have a collective identity.

According to Vertovec, (1997) “there can be no diaspora community without a consciousness of diaspora, without an idea of shared identity, of common belonging to that group” (p. 7). Cohen (1997) defines diaspora consciousness as “a strong and enduring group consciousness about the homeland, and feelings of solidarity more or less shared by the members of a diasporic collectivity in the host country” (quoted in Duarte 2005 p. 316). Whereas, Gilroy (1997) argues that, for diaspora consciousness, “identity is focused [...] more on the social dynamics of remembrance and commemoration defined by a strong sense of the dangers involved in forgetting the location or origin and the process of dispersal” (p. 318). This implies that there is significant effort spent on remembering “over there” while being “here”. As a result, we can assume that diaspora consciousness deals with the awareness of multi-locality.

While the consciousness of diaspora is a key in the formation of diaspora, Sökefeld (2006) notes that consciousness remains incredibly difficult to reveal or detect in empirical research. As such, he suggests using ‘discourse’ instead of ‘consciousness’ “because consciousness needs to be expressed in discourse in order to produce social and political effects. Hence we have to refer to discursive constructions of imaginations of community” (p. 267). Additionally, a diaspora will not be formed unless there are agents who give voice to the discourse of the community (p. 278):

meaning, actors who will take the initiative and immerse themselves in the creation of a collective identity and the formation of diaspora. In some instances, these actors are called political entrepreneurs. So, diaspora consciousness deals with the idea of shared collective identity. As Cohen (1997) states, it is about having group consciousness, feelings of solidarity and a collective memory at the host land.

Diaspora consciousness relates to identity, and identity is an intrinsic and deep-seated process. Diaspora identities are thus always multiple and always reproducing. Because of this assertion, we can explore how diasporic identities come into existence or fade into oblivion. Story and Walker (2016) examine the meaning of identity in a contemporary context. Here, they set out two forms: first, identity is to be understood as something unique that defines the group/individual, or second, as “specific sets of characteristics, expressed in particular ways, to which both individuals and groups may subscribe in order to emphasize who they are and to distinguish themselves from others” (p. 138). This thesis will employ the second definition of identity. It is also important to clarify that identity will not be used in the context of an individual identity but rather as a collective identity.

Polletta and Jasper (2001) understand “collective identity as an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities, although it may form part of a personal identity” (p. 285). We can assert that in order for identities to become political, they need to be endorsed by groups. As Klandermans (2014) states, “collective identity becomes politically relevant when people who share a specific identity take part in political action on behalf of that collective” (p. 2). Moreover, other reasons can also motivate people to mobilize. For example, instrumental (asking for change in circumstances) and ideological (expressing their views and feelings) sentiments can also

engender mobilization. Additionally, Klandermans (2014) asserts that every protest is centered on the existence of salient grievances. The author expands on this argument as he states, “the more people feel that the interests of the group and/or the principles that the group values are threatened, the stronger is their motivation to take part in protest to defend their interests and principles” (p. 5). Thus, the diaspora consciousness is crucial because it provides consciousness of communal belonging to the community in question. This consciousness then eases the road to mobilization through use of identity and strategic framings.

Following the discussion on consciousness and mobilization in relation to collective identity, I will borrow principles from the social movement theory. Tarrow (2011) posits that social movements “build organizations, elaborate ideologies, and socialize and mobilize constituencies, and their members engage in self-development and the construction of collective identities” (p. 8). Roughly speaking, social movement processes chiefly include “mounting collective challenges; second, drawing on social networks; common purposes, and cultural frameworks; and, third, building solidarity through connective structures and collective identities to sustain collective action” (Tarrow 1998 p. 4). Furthermore, social movement theory allows us to analyze why and how people mobilize for collective purposes. Thus, in this regard, as expressed in the works of Adamson (2012), borrowing from the social movement theory can help us to effectively conceptualize the mobilization of diasporas. The scholarship on social movement theory is vast, and exceeds the scope of this thesis; hence, as suggested by Adamson (2012), I will focus on the identity construction, framing, and mobilization aspects of the social movement theory.

In order to better conceptualize and answer my first research question the approach that I will be taking in this thesis will be aligned with that of Adamson (2012). In doing so, the thesis will employ the understanding that diasporas and diasporic identities are social constructs that are formed through mobilization fostered by political entrepreneurs. Adamson (2012) argues that

transnational social movement theory enriches the social construction argument on diaspora because it effectively “emphasizes the strategic social construction of transnational identity communities through processes of framing and political mobilization by diasporic entrepreneurs” (p. 32). On issues of diaspora mobilization and civil wars, Adamson (2013) argues that there are five mechanisms, which are divided into two sets. The first set deals with the process of mobilization and includes transnational brokerage (members/brokers who link diasporic networks together), strategic framing (diaspora groups’ exercise to create frames to resonate with members), and ethnic or sectarian outbidding (“refers to politicization of ethnic differences by elites” p. 70). The second set is about impact mobilization, which includes resource mobilization (addresses recruiting resources for diasporic activities), and lobbying and persuasion (engaging host land actors in process). These mechanisms are more useful when looking at violent diaspora mobilization and civil wars.

However, Adamson (2012) largely argues that diasporas are constructed mainly through framing and mobilization. To expand, while claiming that diasporic identity is about asserting a political identity (Adamson 2012, p. 29), Adamson (2012) understands that in order to be constructed, political entrepreneurs need to employ identity frames that will be used to construct collective identity (p. 13). In this way, the use of frames not only constructs identity/consciousness but also leads to mobilization.

Additionally, Adamson (2008) conceptualizes diaspora as a collective identity enabled through the mobilization process. Borrowing from Tilly (1978), Adamson (2008) sets out two categories for conceptualizing diaspora as collective identity; “the first category consists ‘people all of whom recognize their common characteristics, and whom everyone else recognizes as having that characteristic’. The second consists of networks of people who are linked to one another. ‘A set of individuals is a group to the extent that it compromises both a category and a network’”

(quoted in Adamson 2008 pp. 13-14). Here we can assert that the collective identity of a group differs based on the characteristics of the group, but also based on the strength of the collective identity. In terms of political relevancy, this framework demonstrates that creating symbols and frames connect social networks together. And the creation of identity frames involves the works of political entrepreneurs. Hence, the formation of a diaspora involves creation of consciousness which allows them to be connected to the homeland. Furthermore, as the diaspora group finds social networks, such as community centres as in the Kurdish case in Canada, the consciousness of being a member of a diaspora strengthens. The political entrepreneurs in these networks successfully influence and interact with the group members, instilling the collective identity through different framings.

So, in order to become a diaspora, a group needs to attain mobilization through strategic framing and the construction of identities. Initially, framing was developed by Ervin Goffman (1974), and applied to social movements by Snow, Rochford, Benford and Worden (1986). Frames are argued to be schemas of interpretation, to mobilize bystander support or used as “persuasive devices to ‘fix meanings, organize experience, alert others that their interests and possibly their identities are at stake, and propose solutions to ongoing problems’” (quoted in Adamson 2013 p. 69). The social movement literature includes three types of frames: diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and mobilization framing (Benford and Snow 2000). When all these framings are used by the actors, “the former fosters or facilitates agreement whereas the latter fosters action, moving people from the balcony to the barricades” (Benford and Snow 2000 p. 615). The framing then begins when actors find a problem, advance tactics for a solution, and resonate with individuals as much as possible in order to gain support from bystanders (Benford and Snow 2000). For instance, as my literature review suggests, members of the Kurdish community grow up with stories of resistance leading to the commonly held belief that every Kurdish family has historically

experienced oppression and violence firsthand. Hence, frames of injustice and resistance can easily resonate with most Kurdish individuals. Moreover, if some frames refer to specific events, those too can trigger people into mobilizing and taking part in activism.

As apparent in the literature review, the Kurdish movement relies heavily on historical events. Gourlay's (2018) ethnographic study also shows that many Kurdish youth learn about the oppression of their people through the narratives told by the older generations (p. 134). Thus, the frame of an "oppressed group" remains effective and encapsulating, drawing people to the movement. The oppression frame inspires sentiments of justice and human rights. The use of human rights as a frame for mobilization also draws attention and support to the Kurdish movement, creating a clear distinction between "us" and "them." Along with these narratives of oppression and human rights, the framing of resistance also emerged, as seen through the activism of the Kurds in both the diaspora and in Turkey. Another frame that the movement uses is language. The use of language as a frame works in two ways: first as a right to the Kurdish language education, and second as a right to practice a culture and identity.

With the mobilization of the diaspora, certain framings are applied in order to give the group a sense of collective identity. This collective identity, in the Kurdish case, pays special attention to the notion of language. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the Kurdish language became a key marker of identity and distinction. Therefore, by employing frames of language rights, entrepreneurs instill a sense of consciousness to the diaspora group. This is usually done through the transmission of oral history and stories of resistance. In the present day, many Kurds from Turkey struggle to speak Kurdish not only because their language was banned until recently, but also because they were educated in Turkish. Hence, there are a great number of frames associated with rights and a mother tongue language in the Kurdish movement/activism. This thesis will pay special attention to language frames. In order to better understand how language

plays a role in the political activism of Kurds in Canada, I will use Zenker's (2013) analytical dimensions.

Zenker applies his framework specifically to the context of the Irish language and Irishness. His book examines language and ethnicity in the Catholic West Belfast. The author sets out two research questions:

How had the Irish language been practically experienced and represented by and to Irish Gaeilgeoiri in their respective interactions with various structural contexts, creating the present configuration, and why had their experiences and representations taken on these particular forms? Second, how had Irishness been practically experienced and represented by and to Irish Gaeilgeoiri in their respective interactions with various structural contexts, creating the present configuration, and why had their experiences and representations taken on these particular forms? (Zenker 2013 p. 36)

Zenker (2013) proposes three analytical dimensions to interpret his data. His analytical frameworks rely directly on Eriksen (1991, 2000, 2002) and Jenkins' (1997, 2004) narrow and constructivist approaches to ethnicity. Zenker (2013) explains the first dimension as the relationship between representation and practices, the second as the relationship between agency and structural contexts, and the last dimension as the relationship between biographical time and the presence of the past. He applies these dimensions in order to effectively understand the entanglement of ethnicity and language.

As stated, his first dimension focuses on representation and practices. On his understanding of ethnicity and its application, Zenker (2013) provides two levels:

The first level comprises the representational practices through which individuals are categorized and labelled as members of an envisioned group, and through which certain practices are represented as metonymically referring to a distinctive culture that is viewed as internally shared, while simultaneously making members different from non-members. The second level comprises the totality of actual practices to which the representational practices of the first level putatively refer [...] this second level [...] consists of the totality of variously representable but actually realized practices of a defined plurality of actors during a defined period of time. These practices are not biologically or naturally determined; they are acquired or creatively invented by members of the group in social interaction" (p. 30).

Here, Zenker (2013) draws from Eriksen's boundary maintenance concept, in addition to Barth's ethnic group boundary making, and Jenkin's nominal and virtual representations. What is different in Zenker's organization of representation and practices is that he does not afford more importance to one over the other. So, when applied to the Kurdish ethnic identity, the representational practice includes self-identifying one as Kurdish, which is accomplished through language, music, or other visual forms (adopted from Zenker 2013 p. 28). Whereas represented practices deal more with the experiences of that identity, "different things mean to actors in practice and to its different consequences for their lives" (Zenker 2013 p. 28). In other words, represented practice is what representational means as lived experience.

In applying this representation and practices to language, we can investigate how the Kurdish language is represented in political activism, and how it is actually used in daily life. In the diaspora, Kurdish language practices can include speaking at home with friends and family, language classes in community centres, and self-learning through online classes. Thus, the representation of the Kurdish language in the diaspora can be focused on diasporic entrepreneurs' lobbying for language rights, minority rights, and human rights. Also, the representation of the Kurdish language is notably framed as resistance, and language is represented as a fundamental element of the Kurdish ethnicity.

This analytical dimension also helps to build the first part of conceptualization - diaspora as a social construct. However, when the two dimensions and concepts are combined, the implication is that representational practices, though not more important, can indeed be more visible in political activism—especially in a diaspora. This is verified simply by observing the activism of the Kurdish diaspora in Canada. Here, it is evident that protesting is one of the main methods of activism for the group. Within the protests, we can observe the behaviours towards the Kurdish language by looking at the poster/banner/slogan languages, and/or the language of

communication within the protesting group. However, in order to observe and understand the represented practices of Kurdish language, we must venture further than merely observing the use of language in protests from the outside. Thus, Zenker's (2013) first dimension will allow me to investigate how Kurdish language is practiced and, on the other side, how Kurdish language itself is represented.

In his second dimension, Zenker (2013) advances his arguments by shedding light on the reasons why people do certain activities/practices. While the author draws inspiration from Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1977) when discussing the relationship between agency and structure, Zenker (2013) concludes that Weber's (1978) four ideal types of social action is the most suitable in the formulation of what he calls the theory of motivation. Zenker (2013) formulates and uses "the theory of motivation [...] to analyze why individual actors deploy their agentive capacity in particular ways" (p. 35). Weber's four ideal types are a) traditional social action-actions controlled by tradition; b) affective social action-actions controlled by emotions and affections; c) value rational-actions controlled by conscious belief; and d) instrumental rational-actions taken to achieve a goal/result. Weber's four ideal types are more suitable because "it not only allows for a distinction between discursively conscious and practically conscious/habitus-like motives but also because it is more highly differentiated with regard to the realm of discursively conscious orientation" (p. 36). The second dimension allows one to investigate "a relationship in which the actually realized practices of these actors can be investigated in terms of" the four ideal types (p. 36). While no action falls in only one of the types, using the four ideal types to look at the use of language allows for the classification of motivations. In this way, we can see the motivations behind the language use (i.e., if it is merely for cultural reasons or more political reasons).

Lastly, the third dimension focuses on the role of time and biography. Here, Zenker (2013) asserts the importance of understanding or recognizing how past histories, in relation to ethnicity

and identity, impact present formations. Specifically, to quote Zenker (2013), “the third dimension is the potential significance of non-simultaneous trajectories of identity formation, which render the present into a co-presence of divergent individual pasts, and hence make biographical time a crucial focus for an understanding of the present” (p. 36). This third dimension might seem rather obvious when doing social science research that deals with people’s experiences; however, it is also easy to forget, especially when we try to make generalizations about a phenomenon. In the Kurdish case, it is crucial to consider each member’s own biographies and experiences with oppression and resistance. If we do not consider the biographies of the people, we may not understand their actions or their reasoning. Hence, the third dimension of Zenker’s (2013) analytical tools is highly useful for this study.

All in all, in order for any ethnic group to be politically active, they must possess and employ a collective identity. During protests, or at events that draw large number of people, frames become important in creating these collective identities. In addition, frames help to organize grievances and draw in crowds. As Poletta and Jasper (2001) argue, “movements also transform cultural representations, social norms - how groups see themselves and are seen by others” (p. 284). Thus, in these activities, where the group employs frames, the representational practices are also being molded, redefined, or crystallized. But to return to my point, the Kurdish diaspora actively uses the frames of resistance, human rights, language rights, suffering, and injustice. This thesis will focus specifically on the frame pertaining to language. While the first theorization on diaspora as collective identity will help me to analyze the role of language in political activism at the collective level, Zenker’s (2013) analytical dimensions will help in the analysis of the role of language in political activism as it unfolds at an individual level.

In conclusion, the hegemonic discourse on oppression and injustice is used meaningfully by political actors in order to remind the community of their past traumas and give it a sense of

collective identity. This consciousness of collective identity then fosters mobilization and political activism. Following the clarifications that I made in the preceding paragraphs, I expect to see that there will be differences in representational practices because of biographical trajectories. I assume that the more a person is exposed to the political environment, the more they will practice and protect the rights of the Kurdish language. Regardless of the representational practices of the Kurdish language, at the represented level, I expect to see fluidity in Kurdish language use. With the bans on, and stigmatization of, the Kurdish language, I expect language to become a fundamental representation of Kurdishness. With regard to political activism and the role of language, I expect to see that representation of Kurdish language will be political, viewed in frames of resistance, and will be viewed as a fundamental part of the ethnicity. However, due to the unique locational and political climaxes in Turkey and state politics, I expect to see contradictions in practices of the Kurdish language in daily life.

4.2 Methodology

It is undeniable that qualitative methods are heavily used in studies of Kurdish communities. The unreliability of data on Kurdish ethnic origins and/or language abilities makes it hard to conduct secondary quantitative research. Another reason for the dominance of qualitative methods in this area of study is merely the nature of the work. Qualitative methods are widely used in studies that deal with the human condition, allowing researchers to investigate the proposed phenomenon deeper. Given the unique position of the Kurdish population in global politics, and their heterogeneity, qualitative methods are the more persuasive choice among many researchers. Hence, this study follows suit and uses qualitative evidence to investigate the political activism of Canadian Kurds, who originated from Turkey, and the role of the Kurdish language in political activities. In this section I will outline my approach, sampling, data collection, and then I will elaborate on how I analyzed the data.

4.2.1 Research Locations

The two research locations for this study came to be Toronto and Montréal. The two cities are Canada's two largest cities, hosting many of Canada's immigrants. Toronto is located in the province of Ontario, while Montréal is in the province of Québec, respectively the official languages are English and French.

While I was not heavily immersed in the Kurdish culture, as a Kurdish immigrant in Canada, I have nonetheless been considered an insider. As an insider, I did not have problems accessing the community members in Toronto, but I did face some difficulties with finding participants in Montréal. Prior to the start of my project, I attended events that the Toronto Kurdish community centre organized — specifically those events pertaining to *Newroz*. As I started my Masters, I had the opportunity to do a pilot study for my thesis, in a context of a qualitative course. With that project, I had the opportunity to observe the Kurdish community in Montréal.

Immediately noting the differences between the Kurdish communities in Montréal and Toronto, I decided to prioritize both of these major host cities. Both cities have community centres that organize events, demonstrations, and lobbying activities for the Kurdish cause. The difference between these communities is the language usage; this difference is evident not only in the use of the English and French languages, but also in the use of the Turkish and Kurdish languages. Prior to the thesis research, I observed that in Montréal, Kurdish people spoke Turkish much more widely. When I spoke to workers at one of the community centres in Montréal, she said that Kurdish people in the city did not really know or speak Kurdish. This was in contrast to the Kurds in Toronto who mostly spoke Kurdish.

Before delving further into the methods and data collection, I will briefly describe the Kurdish communities in Toronto and Montréal. The Kurdish community in Toronto can be considered as dynamic and young. While the Kurdish group in Toronto is by no means homogenous, many come from the eastern parts of Turkey. The firstcomers often have connections to other Kurds who also reside in Toronto. The Kurdish community centre in Toronto has been around for approximately 23 years. Its members have been very active in promoting Kurdish culture, Kurdish rights, and mobilizing Kurds in Toronto. The centre or organization is composed of director(s), and other board members, who are elected yearly. Together, they promote activities like youth groups, arts classes, and religion. While there is no requirement to be Kurdish or to be from Turkey in order to be a part of the group, many people that participate do tend to be Kurds from Turkey. Quite a lot of Kurds go to the centre in order to meet people and spend some time with their friends. The Toronto Kurdish population is often employed in the construction sector, as they either do not have diplomas or their diplomas are not valuable in the Canadian context. The older generations within the community often own construction companies and they often choose to employ other Kurds as workers.

The Kurdish population's establishment is older in Montréal. Often, young newcomers choose to stay in Toronto rather than Montréal; hence, the Kurdish demographic in Montréal does not change as much. The Kurds in Montréal are mainly from the southeast or Mediterranean region of Turkey. With respect to labour market participation, many of them either own a restaurant or manage one. The Montréal Kurdish centre - *Foundation Kurde Du Québec* - has been around for about 8 years. There was in fact another centre prior to 2010. However, the violent demonstrations that took place in Montréal in 1999 as a reaction to the Turkish state's arrest of Öcalan led to the closure of the Kurdish community centre in Montréal. Until 2010, the Montréal Kurdish community did not have an umbrella institution. The current Kurdish centre in Montréal operates similarly to its counterpart in Toronto; both hold elections once a year for different positions. Here too, most of the members of the centre are Kurds from Turkey, though there is no such requirement to participate at the centre.

4.2.2 Methodological Approaches

This research is grounded in a critical ontological view: the social phenomenon that is studied is shaped by social, political, and cultural values, and is crystallized over time (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba 2012). In addition, the epistemological framing of the research study is critical theory. Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2012) define critical theory as: "research driven by the study of social structures, freedom and oppression, and power and control" (p. 19). By now, it must be understood that the dominance of the Turkish state's ruling over Kurdish people is deeply rooted in power dynamics.

To best conduct the study, I decided to use a case study. Creswell (2007) defines a case study as "a methodology in qualitative research in which the investigator explores a bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving

multiple sources of information” (p. 73). A case study employs a different array of methods, as it allows for an in-depth study of a case.

4.2.3 Data Collection

I began my research in the winter of 2018. I used two types of data collection: participant observations and semi-structured interviews. I began with participant observations; within two months, I completed four participant observations. Participant observations are noted as a key practice in ethnographic studies, which allow the researcher to participate in the activities while also observing and learning with other participants. Of the four participant observations, two were protests/demonstrations, and two were celebrations of *Newroz*.

Both of the demonstrations were organized in response to the Turkish state’s invasion of Afrin¹⁰ – a territory mainly held by Kurdish groups. The first demonstration I attended was the Montréal demonstration on January 22, 2018, organized by the *Foundation Kurde Du Québec*. Then, for the second demonstration that I attended, I observed that, while the protest happened in Ottawa, it was organized by the Toronto Kurdish Community Centre in partnership with the *Foundation Kurde Du Québec*. This demonstration took place in front of the Parliament of Canada on January 24, 2018. Each of the demonstrations took about two hours long. During each demonstration, I was actively taking notes and recording my observations through my audio recorder. Once the protests were over, I immediately transferred my notes and expanded upon them in a Microsoft word document.

The other observations occurred during the *Newroz* celebrations in Toronto on March 30, 2018, and in Montréal on April 01, 2018. These events were organized by the respective community centres. Similar to the demonstrations, during the celebrations, I constantly took notes

¹⁰ Afrin is a city in northern Syria. During the Syrian civil wars, and the fight against ISIS, a new Kurdish forces (YPG) was formed to fight against ISIS. They were successful in pushing ISIS away from Afrin, however in January 2018 Turkish government employed a military operation in Afrin against YPG, and within two months took the control of the city away from the Kurdish YPG.

and recordings of the sentiments expressed. The celebrations in both cities lasted about 6 hours. Immediately after the events, I transcribed my notes and recordings into a document.

The reason for choosing demonstrations/protests as one of the events for participant observations is self-evident, given that I am interested in the forms of political activism displayed by Kurds here in Canada. In these demonstrations, I also noted the variety of languages and their use among the participants. In this way, it was beneficial to see the use of language in a political activity. In addition, I chose *Newroz* as another event to observe for particular reasons as well. In the recent Kurdish history, *Newroz* is highly regarded as a symbol of resistance. The stories of *Kawa*, and the political events that took place in the history of *Newroz* in Turkey, are widely shared among the Kurds; it has been upheld as a highly political event since then.

Two months after the participant observations, I began to conduct interviews. Initially, I posted recruitment posters in the community centres for Toronto and Montréal. However, soon enough, I was told that Kurdish people do not attend the community centres every day, unless there is an event happening in the centres, and that they do not pay attention to posters on the walls. Thereafter, I employed the snowballing technique in order to recruit participants. I made my first contacts with the people at the demonstrations and, through them, I was able to contact other community members, who reached out to me for interviews. However, finding participants in Montréal proved increasingly difficult. In terms of positionality as a researcher, I went into the interviews with an open mind, knowing that everyone's experiences are unique, and their biographical past differed. As a Kurdish immigrant myself, I was able to connect with the participants at a more personal level, this provided benefits as the participants felt comfortable and confident in answering the questions and sharing their experiences openly. On average, the interviews took one hour.

All of the participants in the interviews were self-identified political activists. In order for people to come to a common understanding of being politically active, I had to include a very simple definition on my recruitment poster; I also had to further explain and clarify the matter in some face-to-face interactions. So, political activism was the main criteria for inclusion in this study, along with being Kurdish from Turkey. In terms of the participants' "Kurdishness," again self-identification was required. In total, I conducted 11 interviews, 7 of which were conducted in Toronto in June 2018, and 4 were conducted in Montréal from July to August 2018. I had initially planned to interview seven respondents from Montréal, but this was not possible. All of the interviews were semi-structured and allowed spontaneous and flexible responses from the participants. The interview protocol was divided into two sections; the first dealt with language and identity, and the second with political activism and language. The interviews were recorded on a recorder after receiving the permission of the participants with the signed consent forms. Because of my own linguistic limitations, I was only able to interview Kurds that were able to speak either English or Turkish. Hence, for linguistic reasons my sample population was limited to English or Turkish speakers. Whilst some participants were able to speak English, all, except one, interviews were conducted in Turkish and then translated into English. This was done with at the request of the participants themselves, as they said they felt more comfortable speaking Turkish.

4.2.4 Data Analysis Approach

The data was analyzed according to the case study approach. For data analysis. I used NVivo. In doing so, I uploaded all of my fieldwork notes and interview transcriptions into the software to start coding. In order to start the analysis, I used thematic clues. Initially, as I was conducting interviews, I was able to note some of the themes and patterns that were emerging.

Hence, going into the analysis of data, I already had a list of codes and themes that emerged from the interactions, my research questions, and from my conceptual framework.

Once a theme repeated itself three times, I decided to treat it as a salient theme. The segments of the interviews responding to the themes were then coded and categorized for organization of the data. I kept a separate memo as I was doing the coding, because some of the first analyses were made during the coding sessions.

4.2.5 Assumptions and Clarifications

Going into this research, I assumed that the Kurdish language was going to be valued highly, especially by political activists. Perhaps being a Kurd myself and not speaking my native language, along with my own biographical trajectory, made me think that politically active individuals would be more aware of, and attached to, the language issue. It is common knowledge in Turkey that Kurds, especially those from the east, tend to be increasingly political or pro-Kurdish; this reality is often attributed to the fact that they have faced discrimination and oppression first-hand from the state. The experiences with, and the awareness of, these issues can lead one to take on a more active role within the Kurdish movement. When migrating to different host countries, those language attitudes would either change or stay the same. Irrespective of the fact that political entrepreneurs may choose to paint an image in which every Kurd goes through the same type of oppression, I assumed that different experiences would result in different attitudes to language. The daily life of the individuals could show differences in the language use and attitudes, due to biographical trajectories. In the next chapter, I will be presenting the findings from the participant observations and the interviews. The findings chapter will also summarize the biographies of the participants.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from the four participant observations — two demonstrations, two *Newroz* celebrations — and the interviews with 11 Kurdish political activists. The chapter begins with summaries of the interviewees' biographies, followed by the findings from the participant observations and, lastly, the findings from the interviews.

5.1 Brief Biographies of the Participants

This section provides the biographical trajectories of the 11 participants. These biographies will help to contextualize the findings and analysis by providing necessary background information.

Xunav: “Our existence is Kurd”

Xunav is a 39-year-old female. She was born in Siirt, immigrated to Canada in 2013, and currently resides in Toronto. Xunav believes that her mother was politically active because she would always listen to the news. Therefore, she posits that even a seemingly simple act like listening to news can have political connotations for a Kurdish person. Xunav served in the armed branch of PKK for many years but does not want to elaborate on her role within the organization. She is proud of being Kurdish, “because the name of resistance is Kurd.” For Xunav, being Kurdish is strongly associated with resistance. She speaks Kurdish fluently, in which she learned from her mother. Xunav draws special attention to her relationship with the Turkish language, stating that because it was taught by force, she gets shy when speaking it. She believes that language is the most important part of identity and the nation. She understands the predicament of those who did not have the chance to learn Kurdish in Turkey, but she says that she deeply resents when Kurds speak Turkish to their kids in Canada.

She strongly believes that the state pushes Kurdish people to live a lie. She gives an example of how every Kurdish child speaks Kurdish at home, but as soon as they go to school, they face a different and harsh reality. She remembers her school years and states:

And all Kurdish people, for example, especially those who live in Kurdistan, have corrupted psychology. So, we live inside a lie, you have a reality, mother and father, community, geography but the system that you live in is something different. You can't say you are Kurdish in there, "I'm Kurd, I live as Kurd" or you can't say "rojbaş" (good morning in Kurdish) instead of "günaydin" (good morning in Turkish). Because you don't know "günaydin" you have to learn it. If you don't learn...well every Kurdish person or kid sees the first violence in school.

Xunav grew up as a Kurd, with stories that would be told as fairytales, about how her ancestors were being murdered while resisting the state oppression. Xunav talked about how this experience of speaking Kurdish at home and Turkish in school affected her psychology:

You see your difference in school, with that difference you somehow live... My mother does not know Turkish, but I go and learn, and it becomes who I am, identity but I am not that!

She explains her political activity, joining the PKK, by talking about how different she felt and how the life she was living was contradictory:

It was a way out for me – I have to go there – I need to do something for this case, I need to do something for my Kurdishness because I can't live.

Here, she discussed her identity maintenance and stressed the importance of being with one's community in order to maintain the identity; she says, "I exist with my people." Her political activities also included attending demonstrations, talking about the Kurdish cause, and reading and speaking in Kurdish.

Rozerin: "I think every Kurdish[person] needs to be political."

Rozerin is a 29-year-old female who came to Canada in 2017 on a student visa. She was born in Istanbul and currently lives in Toronto. Her family moved from Mardin because their village was burned down in the late 1990s. Both of her parents were politically active, participating in Kurdish political parties' election campaigns and taking part in other Kurdish or leftist

organizations. Rozerin became politically active in 2008, a year before she started university. Her first activity included working with Kurdish political parties on their election campaigns. Her first arrest was in her second year of university. She states that she was taken because of her Kurdishness, and the fact that she was aware of it, and defending Kurdish rights.

She was subjected to psychological violence while she was in custody. She thinks that this form of violence was nothing compared to the traumas she faced as a result of the deaths of so many of her close friends. Following her arrest, she was sentenced to 6 years and 3 months, but the sentence was reduced to a probation period. At the time of the sentencing, Rozerin finished her school and went back to Istanbul. There she continued working with Kurdish political parties; in doing so, she attended demonstrations, gave out booklets, and put posters up all around the city. She describes being Kurd as something special, and beautiful; while it engenders a resilient soul, it still causes affliction. When I asked her how she maintained her identity, Rozerin said that she frequents the community centre, and that she actively participates in events, and that is how she maintains to be politically active.

Rozerin learned to speak Kurdish at home, but because her education was in Turkish, she thinks that her Kurdish is not that advanced. She also notes how the language at home slowly switched to Turkish as people began to work in the city and kids began to go to school. However, Rozerin always attempts to make a conscious decision to speak Kurdish at every opportunity:

Because our language was always banned till today and was always oppressed, when you find the opportunity, you don't give that up and use that opportunity to speak.

When I asked her about her thoughts on Kurds who cannot speak Kurdish, Rozerin said:

I also grew up in that oppressive situation. So, when someone does not speak, I don't judge because I know what they have done to them, what the system has done. But I would just be sad.

She also believes that speaking Kurdish can constitute a political act because it makes a statement about one's existence. Rozerin mentioned how her friends in university were helpful in terms of practicing Kurdish, and that they themselves paid special attention to the Kurdish language. She describes her motivations for being politically active as:

You go to Newroz and that is a crime...Kurdish music, books, magazines, whatever there is. So, I was seeing this and then hearing about the tortures of the people I knew. News about deaths in the struggle for freedom. So, you grew up with these pains.

She believes that every Kurd needs to be politically active and help the Kurdish cause. She also believes that the Kurdish language should be used in political activities. In Canada, her activities are limited to the community centre's organizations and mobilization.

Vejîn: "I have to be engaged with politics because I am Kurdish"

Vejîn is a 27-year-old female, currently living in Toronto, but born in Diyarbakir. She immigrated to Canada in 2017 via a student visa. She and her family migrated to Istanbul in 1995, after their village was burned down. She was attending grade 3 at the time, and she subsequently completed all her studies, including university in Istanbul. Vejîn became politically active at a young age because of her family. As she remembered her grandfather, she could not hold back her tears, and started crying. Her grandfather's life is very personal to her, and she remembers him as a strong Kurdish leader.

She describes being Kurdish as something beautiful and explains how her family is very much attached to their culture. She notes that her mother never spoke to them in Turkish, but mainly because she did not know much Turkish. Vejîn remembers her father saying, "know Turkish but don't ever give up your language." She remembers her grandmother visiting and telling real life stories as if they were fairytales, with themes of oppression and resistance. She maintains her Kurdish identity by speaking Kurdish and wearing traditional clothes. She notes:

I am not meaning this in racist terms, but if I am going to converse, then let me do it with a Kurdish friend... If I will have a friend, it will be Kurdish... Other than that, I always have this hope, I am saying if I get married one day my child should speak Kurdish. Because I realized that in Canada, no one is speaking Kurdish with their children. Like very rare, if the mother is very dominant.

Vejîn pays special attention to language, as that is what was done in her family. So, at the centre, she tries to converse in Kurdish with everyone that can speak Kurdish. Vejîn finds speaking Turkish in Canada to be, in essence, a tragic ordeal. Vejîn also mentioned how doing the interview in Turkish was making her uncomfortable, but her English and my Kurdish were not good enough to do the interview. She remembers struggling with the Turkish language when they moved to Istanbul:

Istanbul Turkish is very different. When I first came, I started school and my classmates were just very bad... So, I was speaking Turkish like with an accent and everyone was making fun of me. Like oh look she has an accent, look how she talks, she can't speak Turkish...

The accent issue for her was traumatizing, and even today talking about it makes her eyes watery. As a result, she remembers questioning her identity in Istanbul when she was exposed to the differences and, in turn, gradually became more aware of her Kurdish identity. She became more active during and after her years in university. She participated in Kurdish political parties' campaigns and demonstrations by giving out booklets, and pamphlets. Vejîn says that her mother was working a lot with the political Kurdish parties. Her mother was arrested in 2002 because she wrote a petition to the Ministry of Education, in which she asked for elective Kurdish courses in schools. So, seeing and hearing about all these injustices pushed Vejîn to be an active member of the Kurdish movement. She mentioned how, although it was tiring to attend all these demonstrations and work with different groups, it was very exciting. She remembers having to do campaigns in secret after the elections in 2015:

After the June 2015 elections, the November elections had a lot of problems. There was a new group created, something like Ottoman Turk Association, and this was AKP's nationalist section, so they were walking around everywhere with knives in their hands, that period was like that...

Vejîn believes that knowing Kurdish is important in political activities, so much so that she thinks those who do know it should use it in their activities. She states:

I still continue to speak Kurdish even if I throw some English or Turkish words there. Because I want to master this language because it is mine.

When I asked about the incidents that shaped her political identity, Vejîn mentioned her arrest in 2010 during the *Newroz* celebrations in Istanbul. The treatment that she received from the police motivated her to be more politically active. She describes the incident as follows:

I got arrested there. It was terrible...when they touch you I don't know if you ever felt defiled, but when they touch your hair or other parts and the grip over you and you don't know what they are thinking when they do it, the struggle to put you in the car....When I was thrown inside the car, after that the swearing... stuff like whores, you say you are revolutionary but who knows what part of your body itchy, disgusting things. After that my hatred grew so much...the oppression, the behaviour there... It is very bad.

However, what made her come to Canada was what occurred during an event organized for the Armenian genocide, during the emergency rule in 2016. She noted that the purpose was to merely light candles to remember the lives that were lost. However, the police came and took the group in custody and with that investigation Vejîn, got sentenced to prison for 4 and a half years. But before her sentence was approved, she was able to get a student visa for Canada.

Rona: "I always emphasize my Kurdishness because it was so hidden, it feels like the more I tell the less hidden it will be"

Rona is a 37-year-old female from a city called Sivas, and who currently resides in Toronto. She immigrated to Canada in 2001. She completed her primary education in Sivas, and her middle and high school in Adana. She describes being Kurdish as being the other:

In Turkey, being Kurdish must be hidden, kept secret, it is about not being respected or accepted, oppression. It is painful, not being able to live the beauty of what you are.

When I asked about how she feels being a Kurd in Toronto, she said that it is a very beautiful feeling to say I am Kurdish here without being scared. Rona was not politically active in Turkey;

this can be attributed to the fact that she was not only hiding her Kurdish identity, but also her Alevi identity. She subsequently detailed her journey to uncover her identity. Initially, she was not aware of her Kurdish origins, but she always knew that she was Alevi. When she started high school, Rona began to ask questions. For example, she was faced with the reality that while she would sing the Turkish anthem every day, she would still speak Kurdish. Additionally, she also questioned why her friends did not know the native language that she spoke. This, coupled with her move to a bigger city with many more differences, made her increasingly question her identity. Here in Canada, she feels freer, so she tries to attend all the cultural and political events that are organized by the community centre in Toronto.

Rona learned Kurdish at home from her grandparents; she said that she also learned Turkish before starting school by watching television. She notes that her parents would speak Kurdish to each other, but they would use Turkish with the children. When I asked why, she said:

Maybe because our pronunciation and knowledge of Kurdish were not very strong because the television was there, we learned Turkish more quickly, with us the other older generation also started learning Turkish. So, communication with us was easier in Turkish. Not because their Turkish was good but because our Kurdish was not as good.

Indeed, since she moved to Canada, she has been able to speak to people in the community centre in Kurdish, which has improved her proficiency level. She also attended classes one time:

I speak a lot of languages but not speaking my mother tongue, made me feel like I had a responsibility. And speaking my own language was also a cultural responsibility because people exist with their language and saying I am Kurdish but not being able to form any Kurdish sentence is a big lack of something.

To her, speaking Kurdish means existence. Language is the most important part of her identity. She maintains her identity through participating in the community centre's activities.

Bejno: "I had no other choice but to be political"

Bejno is a 30-year-old male. He currently lives in Toronto, but originally resided in Bingöl. He came to Canada in 2001, when he was 14 years old. He studied primary school in Turkey and

the rest of his education took place here in Canada. He learned Kurdish at home and began to speak Turkish when he started school. When I asked about what being Kurdish meant to him, Bejno said that it feels like you do not belong anywhere even though you have a land. Bejno has been an active member of the community centre since the day he came to Canada. He said that his father would always take him to the centre. While his parents were not politically active members, they nevertheless supported the centre and attended most of their events. In regard to the organization and activities at the centre, Bejno said:

We do demonstrations whenever there is something going on back home. And we do celebrations, events, organize meetings and memorial days at the community centre.

He remembers the home invasions conducted by soldiers, who would search for anything that symbolized Kurdishness. For example, they would confiscate Kurdish cassettes, or yellow, green, and red colours in proximity to each other (these colours together represent the Kurdish flag):

By doing this they actually tell you exactly who you are and who you should be, and they actually tell you that this is a fascism that you have to be against. Because they come into your house trying to get stuff that belongs to your identity and if they find something, they may either beat you up at that moment which they have done it many times, or they take them to the prison. So, they actually help you with how to become a Kurdish.

On the issue of speaking Kurdish, he said that even today they speak Kurdish at home, and that he maintains Turkish because he has many friends here that speak Turkish. He explains this dilemma by noting that a lot of people received their education in Turkish and, hence, that became the language of communication. He said that he learned to write and read in Kurdish through the news and self-practice. He thinks that language is the main marker of identity and that without language, the struggle is useless: “So, I believe the language is the first and most important point for the Kurdish people”.

He noted that there are those who are politically aware of the language issue, and who choose to speak Kurdish. He identifies as a member of this camp as he feels proud to speak Kurdish. He clarifies that he is proud because:

Many people died as a result of speaking this language, went to prison, still are in prison. So, myself as one individual if I can still speak this language then this is what I am proud of.

He said that he tries to use the Kurdish language in his public speeches to show people that this language is ours and that no one should feel ashamed when using it. On his political identity, he says that he had no other choice but to be a political Kurd. He explains that:

I had no other choice to be who I am today because of the place where I was born. For example, there were nights when we could hear the war... Sometimes you would see dead people on the streets... So after I came to Canada we went to the Kurdish community and I have been in the movement and following it daily, what is going on there and what we can do here... I really had no other choice.

Kejê: “What determines your Kurdishness is your knowledge of Kurdish”

Kejê is a 30-year-old female, who lives in Montréal and was born in Germany. Her family migrated to Batman, Turkey when she was 5 years old. The reason for their migration to Turkey was due to the strict immigration laws in Germany. After a year or so in Batman, she and her family migrated to Istanbul and stayed there for a year. Finally, in 1996, at the age of 8, she migrated to Canada with her family. She remembers that in Germany, they only spoke German and Kurdish, but when they went to Batman — mainly a Kurdish city — they saw that everyone was speaking Turkish. So, as time passed, Kurdish was used less and less in their home. Nonetheless, she said that she did not forget Kurdish; she understands it very well. However, in order to speak it well, she believes that she still needs practice. Nonetheless, she feels very proud to be Kurdish:

Looking from the outside when you say Kurd for me it is automatically someone who is strong, lived through a lot of problems, even if we did not see it, like the ones in Turkey. Resisting through everything, being fond of their identity, I think that is something to be very proud of.

When I asked about how she maintains her identity, she said she tried to be active in the community centre, talking about Kurdishness, and interacting with the youth. When I asked her to expand, she said that she feels very responsible towards her people: she always tries to help them and does not want people to lose their identity. In sum, she thinks there is nothing worse than being assimilated.

When I asked her more questions related to identity and language, she said:

I knew the language difference. In Turkey, for example, we did not mention Kurdishness that much. It was hidden; people were scared their kids would go and say to people, “I am Kurdish, I don’t like the government,” etc.... For example, the text of the anthem, saying how everyone is Turkish, I did not want to read it. You knew there was a difference because you would speak Kurdish, and the more Turkish you learned, the less you would talk to your grandparents. So, after we came here, we started being more aware, because you get freedom, and you see that in your parents too: they talk more comfortably.

In Montréal, Kejê and her friends organized classes on the Kurdish language in order to learn how to write and read in Kurdish. This happened around 2007-2008, when they did not have a community centre in Montréal. However, those classes did not last long, so she is always looking for ways to improve her Kurdish proficiency. She also mentioned that last year within the community centre, they tried to organize Kurdish classes, but it received no support from the Kurdish community. She thinks that a lot of people in Montréal find speaking Turkish easier because they were never educated in Kurdish, and once they came here to Canada, Turkish was sufficient in terms of employment. She identifies language as a very important pillar of her identity, but also as an important pillar of the wider community:

It is illogical for me; I think it is shame: how can I say I am Kurdish but can’t express myself in Kurdish? Then why am I Kurdish, like it’s illogical to me... what determines your Kurdishness is your knowledge of Kurdish.

She believes that resistance is not merely holding up a banner during a demonstration, but also protecting the language. Kejê explains her political activism as result of seeing and hearing injustices:

I can't lie I heard so many things, like my distant cousins' disappearance, being taken at night, or invasions at night and people being murdered. It does not have to be experienced, I was not in situations with a lot of oppression or torture.

So, the injustices she hears motivates her to become more politically active. Kejê tries to attend all demonstrations, and other activities that are organized by the community centre.

Hêja: "I think the main vein of Kurdish, is Kurdish language"

Hêja is a 36-year-old male, living in Montréal. He was born in Kayseri and came to Canada in 1991. He studied in Turkey until grade 3, and the rest of his education was completed in Canada. He learned how to speak Kurdish at home, and explains his life in Turkey as the following:

Our village is a Kurdish village surrounded by few Kurdish villages. So, at home we spoke Kurdish and everywhere else, and then at the age 6 or 7 you go to school, and all of a sudden, you speak another language.

Hêja elevates the Kurdish language and says that it comes before the culture. Nonetheless, he notes the differences in language usage in homes. He says that when they came to Canada, his parents began to speak more Turkish. He says that people around them spoke more Turkish than Kurdish; their shows on television were Turkish, and the newspapers they read were Turkish and, hence, they became more comfortable in conversing in the Turkish language.

Like Kejê, Hêja also went to Kurdish classes that he helped organized. When I asked about what motivated him to learn more of the Kurdish language, he said:

Well we were active in the centre, and we were doing everything in Turkish...We said our goal is for Kurdish youth to continue the culture and language and know their history...I think Kurdish, its main vein is Kurdish language...So, what to do? First, we have to teach Kurdish language to people. So that is why we opened the course.

His activities include attending events organized by the community centre like the *Newroz* celebrations, doing interviews with radio stations, and filming galas where information is provided on Kurdish issues. He also ensures that he follows the news on Kurdish issues and speaks the language with those who can. He feels strongly about the Kurdish language; he believes that the Kurdish language is endangered. Hêja also believes that Kurdish means politics:

In Turkey let's say you are a Kurdish even if you do Erdoğan's propaganda, they look at you as a Kurd, they make you the other, and you become political. The moment you make Kurdish propaganda you become a terrorist, a separatist, etc. When you say I am Kurdish, when you speak Kurdish you are directly political.

When I questioned him further on the matter of identity, he said that he actually learned that he was Kurdish when he came to Canada:

I only did grade 3, and yeah there was another language, but I did not know the problem. So, you learn when you come here, there is a centre you go to, and people speak Kurdish.

He said that his father was also very political, always taking him to the community centre and reading a lot of news on the PKK. He said seeing and reading about the issues that Kurdish people face, and of the injustices they faced, led him to be politically active. However, he believes that people here do not see the importance of the Kurdish language. He says that some people say that there is no point in learning Kurdish:

But people say, "What are we going to do with Kurdish?" then I say, "What will you do, Turkish?" So, just like how Turkish is made obligatory in Turkey, Kurdish also needs to be obligatory if we want to implement Kurdish.

Hêja ties the language issue to Alevism, and states that Sunni Kurds speak much more Kurdish than Alevi Kurds. While he does not know the reasons for this, except for the fact that Alevi Kurds are usually from the southeast region, he notes the difference nonetheless.

Ronahi: "For someone to say, "I am Kurdish" even that is an act!"

Ronahi is 49-year-old male living in Montréal. He was born in Sivas and migrated to Canada in 1999. When he was 2-3 years old, his family went to Istanbul. He received an education up to grade 5. He could not further advance his schooling as his father needed economic support.

So, at a young age, Ronahi started working at a car shop in order to help his family:

I experienced certain hardships as a result of being Kurdish. For example, my mother and I went to a hospital; my mother did not speak Turkish well: she had an accent and spoke a little Kurdish. So, the nurse like a fascist started yelling at my mom saying, "if you don't speak Turkish what are you doing here?" Stuff like that, and also being Alevi was something, we are Kurdish but also Alevi, so like the places we worked we also experienced discrimination, for example we did not go

to the mosque but forcibly they would take us to the mosque. And this was traumatizing, we were saying like why we came to this world as Alevi or Kurd, if only we came as Turkish...we should speak better Turkish so they don't learn and so they don't oppress us.

So, he explains that because he did not have national consciousness, he saw being Kurdish as an insult and hated his Kurdish identity. However, after completing his military service of 18 months, he started hearing more about the Kurdish nationalist struggle:

So, at first, we were not interested, our family was even saying that they were Sunni Kurds, we don't have business with them [Kurds]. So, there was like hegemony, of course, this was not because of bad intentions from family, but it was because they also did not have national consciousness. So, it continued like this till 1990s, and at that time, the national Kurdish struggle slowly came to cities, and naturally we started getting influenced by this, when we found documents from media, we read them or when in different environments we listened to the conversations of the people. And in 1992-96 there was a lot of killings, tortures, and missing people...With these oppressions, an action and reaction thing, when there were oppression people started to be more interested.

He notes that he still speaks Kurdish (Zazaki). He says his family was never political, with the exception of his older brother, who went to jail for 10 years for working with the PKK. After Ronahi gained awareness, he started working with HADEP – a Kurdish political party. In so doing, he helped those Kurds who migrated due to their villages being burned down deliberately by the Turkish state. He says that even though it was a legal party, the state was closely following them and, in 1994, he got arrested after being taken from his home at midnight. He remembers the details as follows:

They took me to Istanbul Gayrettepe. They took me downstairs, and they were asking something about names, and I said, "I don't know..." So, we went down it was somewhere cold, and they took off my clothes. So, I knew what was going to happen. I realized it because we knew what was happening; there were people who go there and comes back talking about torture... There is something, they call it strappado (corda) a torture, where they reverse hang you from your arms... So, at the same time they were also giving electric, so it was a terrible thing...

Ronahi was released from detention after 11 days. He said that he never stopped being active; he just tried to be more careful. But eventually, for economic reasons, he decided to migrate to Canada

with his family. Today, he says they speak Turkish at home because his wife does not speak Kurdish, and so the common language between them is now Turkish. Though they do not want to pressure their kids into learning Kurdish, they are trying to at least educate them regarding the history and culture of the Kurds:

Kurdish language is the most important indicator of Kurdish identity. Forgetting the language makes it easier to forget your identity. So, for me, if Kurdish cannot be an educational then keeping the identity alive will be hard.

For those who do not speak Kurdish, he says it is not their fault; it is the system's fault. He also believes that just speaking the language at home will not help to maintain it, and that Kurds need to have their own academic institutions. Nonetheless, he believes that everyone can contribute to the Kurdish movement, and that even stating that 'I am Kurdish' is a political act in itself.

Lorin: "I left the struggle because I wanted to become a part of normal life"

Lorin is a 30-year-old female living in Toronto. She was born in Mersin, but for economic reasons, when she was 6 years old, her family moved to Istanbul. She migrated to Canada in 2016. Her family is very political and, unfortunately, she does not have a lot of beautiful memories from her politicized childhood:

I got involved with politics when I was a kid while studying at school. But my identity, and private life was always hidden because of my family's political work. So, it was always a childhood that was stuck in between the two... I had this experience, I was in high school my mother would wake up us forcibly to go to May 1 events (labour day). So naturally because of what my family lived through, I got more opportunities to learn my identity, talk with people, and exposed so how can you be senseless in this situation?

Lorin understands that her family has had a very big impact on her becoming a politically active individual. She says that because of this hidden identity, they always spoke Turkish at home, even though her mother could speak Zazaki. When I asked her how important language is to her, she said:

Language is everything, but the language that you can express yourself in seems more attractive to you. Today, Kurdish identity's presence is the Kurdish language.

But like now it is easier to speak the language that you can express yourself in. Is it not the same here too? In the institution, everything has Turkish description, but we don't accept the system right but like here there is an option, but we are still using Turkish.

She identifies her family as socialists; in sum, they are not only active in just the Kurdish movement, but also in every leftist/socialist movement. To her, being Kurdish means being a part of a repressed nation, precious and honourable. She worked very actively in Turkey. This desire to be active followed her here in Canada as well. Even though Lorin is fairly new to Canada, she held leadership positions in the community centre in Toronto. She says that in Toronto, there are a lot of obstacles to pursuing a politically active life. She thinks that many members do not know the historical struggle and that this is why they do not retain a strong political stance. She states that, in order to maintain her identity, she often reinforces her Kurdishness by rejecting Turkey, stating: "I don't even want to see that flag!". She feels that her activities are limited here in Canada. All that they do is hold demonstrations, and, at the end of the day, everyone goes back to their comfortable lives. When I asked her why she decided to leave Turkey, she said that she got arrested due to the Suruc events. Lorin said that she was beaten up while in custody, but it is a reality that has become normalized:

Well, they just beat you, women police come, and they hit you like they will kill you hitting your face with their boots, like so many... So, after a day I was released, and then I realized how policemen in plain clothes were following me, and that had a big effect on my psychology. And then I decided to come here with my father.

Jêhat: "There is not a serious attachment to Kurdish language here"

Jêhat is a 39-year-old male living in Toronto. He was born in Diyarbakir and came to Canada in 2014. He completed all of his schooling in Diyarbakir. He learned how to speak Kurdish at home, and Turkish at school. To this day, he feels strange speaking Turkish because he learned it forcibly. Jêhat notes that he became aware of matters on identity and repression at young age because of where he is from:

Even though we did not have political knowledge, we knew something was going on around us but did not know what. Like I never forget this, when I was like 12 years old, my father got me a bicycle and it had some ornament thing in front, very colourful. We were in emergency rule at that time. So, I was riding my bike and one of the counter-guerillas stopped me in middle of the road, in all of those colours he apparently saw yellow, red, and green, so I was beaten up at age of 12 because of that.

His political awareness also started at a young age, around 15 years old. He was first arrested when he was 16-17 years old, when he tried to attend a demonstration during the region's emergency rule. Though nothing happened in custody, he says that this motivated him to become more active because he was confronted with reality. At the time, Jêhat describes what he felt was like an emotional attachment rather than full political awareness. When he started university, his political identity and awareness increasingly manifested itself through his interactions with friends. His second arrest happened while at university and, this time, he was beaten with bats while in custody.

So, when I asked what being Kurdish means to him, he said that being Kurdish actually made him more aware of the bigger issues:

We can't look normally to the world that everyone looks at. We can see the depth, the contradictions, the unseen things, and gaining this consciousness requires unbelievable questioning, inquisition. Your empathy grows very much.

Jêhat said his activities in Turkey consisted of attending demonstrations, working with political parties and mobilizing people. He remembers the *Newroz* events in Diyarbakir and says that he cannot accept how *Newroz* is celebrated here in Canada, as though it were a mere fashion show:

The community here does not really have the concept of country...I can say it like this, someone [who was] political in real terms, would do this, how can I protect my native language; at least I can speak at home or with my kids, so my child does not forget...But speaking Kurdish is not enough. Because the contradiction is everywhere. Today, Kurds that come here are apolitical, they do not have political experience but come here and create a story.

For Jêhat, there is a clear difference between someone who is really politically active, and someone who holds only an emotional attachment. The political ones are the ones protecting language, while the emotional ones are only defending the cause when there is an event, so their activism is not

ongoing. He also states that some Kurdish people here in Canada claim that they are political activists and take refuge in Canada, when in reality they are not or should not be considered as political activists. Thus, Jêhat thinks that there is a lot more work that needs to be done; in fact, there exists contradictions in the community, and he thinks that these need to be solved.

Perwer: “I thought myself as Turk and then became a Kurd”

Perwer is a 52-year-old male currently living in Montréal. He was born in Maras and migrated to Canada in 1991. He travelled between the cities of Mugla, Denizli, and Mersin because of his father’s work. Perwer said that his father would only speak Kurdish with his mother, but his mother always spoke to them in Kurdish and, hence, he is able to speak Kurdish today. He said that he did not know Turkish at all when he first started school, and he only started learning after a year or so of schooling. He began to learn Turkish quicker when he moved back to their Kurdish village. He only stayed in the village for a year, then he moved to a city populated with many Alevi families. He remembers their whole neighbourhood being leftist:

Those times I did not see myself as a Kurd, or if that had importance, I was not aware. Like my race did not matter to me, being a leftist was enough for me.

So, while his family was never political, his neighbourhood certainly had leftist sentiments. However, when he started working with an American company, he increasingly became aware of his identity:

I went to Aruba, I was 25 years old, after the army, so there was a big refinery, so we worked there. There I had a roommate from Mardin. One day he asked me who I was and then I said I am Alevi, and he was like OK but Turkish or Kurdish. It was the first time there someone asked me that. I also need to mention that I worked in Iraq too for one year in Base City when I was 23 years old in 1987. There we had a Kurdish worker and he was talking to us in Kurdish; this made me start asking myself like oh there is Kurdish here too but how are we Alevi and we speak Kurdish. And then I got this book from Ismail Besikci named Dersim Genocide, and I had thunderstorms in my head! And that book really affected me...In a few months I changed my race, I thought myself as Turk and then became Kurd.

So, in order to remain politically active in Canada, he decided to open a community centre with some friends. However, in 1999, the centre was closed down because members of the community centre participated in violent protest in reaction to the PKK leader's arrest. So, Montréal did not have a community centre until 2010, when Perwer and others were able to open up a community centre, which is still running today. Though he speaks Kurdish with his wife, he said that he does not speak Kurdish with his kids. The common language is Turkish. Perwer explains that it is because the children were born and grew up in Turkey and, back then, he lacked awareness.

Table 3: Summaries of Biographies

Name	Xunav	Rozerin	Vejîn	Rona	Bejno	Kejê	Hêja	Ronahi	Lorin	Jêhat	Perwer
Age	39	29	27	37	30	30	36	49	30	39	52
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female	Male	Male	Female	Male	Male
Current city	Toronto	Toronto	Toronto	Toronto	Toronto	Montréal	Montréal	Montréal	Toronto	Toronto	Montréal
Languages	Kurdish, Turkish, Arabic, some English	Kurdish, Turkish, some English	Kurdish, Turkish, some English	Kurdish, Turkish, English, French, Persian	Kurdish, Turkish, English	Kurdish, Turkish, French, some English	Kurdish, Turkish, French, some English	Kurdish, Turkish, French,	Turkish, some English	Kurdish, Turkish, English	Kurdish, Turkish, French
Immigration year	2013	2017	2017	2001	2001	1996	1991	1999	2016	2014	1991
Main languages spoken at home	Kurdish	Turkish	Kurdish	Kurdish	Kurdish	Turkish	Kurdish	Turkish	Turkish	Kurdish	Turkish
Politically active in Turkey	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes	no
Politically active in Canada	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Family background	Political family	Political family	Political family	Not political family	Not political family	Not political family	Political family	Not political family	Political family	Not political family	Not political family

5.2 Participant Observations

This section will discuss the findings from the two demonstrations and the two *Newroz* events. One demonstration was conducted in Montréal and organized by the Montréal Kurdish community centre. Another demonstration was held in Ottawa and was organized by the Toronto Kurdish community centre in coordination with the Federation of Kurds in Canada. Both demonstrations were organized in response to the Turkish state's invasion of Afrin, Syria. Following the discussion surrounding demonstrations, I will also present the findings from the annually organized *Newroz* events in Toronto and Montréal.

5.2.1 Demonstrations

As the main findings from the interviews highlight, both Kurdish communities in Toronto and Montréal are very connected to their homeland. In both cities, the demonstrations occur in reaction to the events taking place in the homeland. The demonstrations that I observed were organized in response to the Turkish state's invasion of the province of Afrin, in Syria. In these demonstrations, the Kurds used posters and slogans that called out for help from the Canadian state, and also to generate interest and awareness. This strategy was evident in the slogans and posters that were used in both demonstrations. For example, in Ottawa, the posters said: "Defend Afrin", "We Stand with Afrin, Afrin is Not Alone", and "Stop Turkey's War on Kurds". Unfortunately, I was unable to see or read all the banners, but they all conveyed a similar message. Some of the posters read: "Stop the dictatorship against the Kurds", "Kurdish towns are under Turkish military", "Solidarity with Kurdish cities", "Stop Turkey's War on the Kurds", "Turkey out of NATO", "Turkey Hands OFF Afrin", "No to Erdoğan's Dictatorship", "Shame on you Turkey", "the New Dictator (with Erdoğan's picture)", "#NoFlyZone4Rojava", "Canada Must Condemn Turkey's Aggression on Afrin", and "Everywhere is Afrin, Everywhere is Resistance".

With regard to slogans, they read: “Long live Rojava/YPG/Kurdistan”, “Stop Turkish Terrorism”, “Unite against Fascism”, “Done with Turkish regime”, and “Erdoğan is ISIS, ISIS is Erdoğan”. When we look at these slogans and posters, it is apparent that there is commonality between those of the Toronto and Montréal communities, which suggests that protests are highly organized. For example, the demonstration organized by Toronto, in collaboration with the Montréal community centre, occurred in Ottawa. Although it was very crowded, everyone knew how they were participating. For example, every time the person leading with slogans stopped a group of three demonstrators would begin to throw the slogan: “Terrorist Turkey”. Overall, though similar slogans were used in the Montréal demonstration, the one in Ottawa was far more organized, bigger, and livelier in terms of crowd participation. One of the reasons for this could be related to weather conditions, as Montréal was severely cold on the demonstration day, which changed the planning; instead of Turkish embassy, the Russian embassy was chosen as final destination stop. At one point in the Ottawa demonstration, the person who was shouting out slogans did so in Kurdish, but shortly after they were urged to switch to English as no bystander would understand the Kurdish slogan.

Furthermore, the walk to the Russian and US embassies illustrate that the protests had a transnational agenda, urging other nation-states to address the issues occurring in Syria with Turkey. Aside from the banners and posters, both demonstrations also used a lot of YPG and Öcalan posters; they also featured many pictures showing the destruction in Syria, children’s faces, and army vehicles, to name a few images. In this way, photos can be forms of recruitment: they can tap into emotions and spur up focus on certain targets. For example, during the beginning of the demonstration in Montréal, one person was showing pictures on his phone to different people. I observed one woman, who was shown this picture, raise her hands and put them together as if

she was praying. Later, the same person showed me the images on the phone, and they were of a collection of dead bodies, and some caricatures of Erdoğan.

5.2.2 Newroz

The politics of the homeland also finds its way into Newroz celebrations. The findings show that Newroz is not just a celebration of spring's arrival, but it is also a highly political event. While there were more people attending the Newroz events in Toronto, both cities had over (or about) 200 people attending the celebrations. In both cities' events, a number of people discussed the Kawa tale—a story of resistance. In doing so, they connected it to the Kurds' resistance to their oppressors and the events taking place in Afrin. In both cities, the first two hours were dedicated to information sharing on the situation in Afrin and Turkey, and the meaning of Newroz. Also, it is important to note that the Newroz celebration in Toronto included a videography of the Kurdish resistance; this included speeches of Öcalan, members of the PKK armed group, and Kurdish music. Another significant aspect is the music that people dance to; even though the music was in Kurdish, a little translation showed that many of the lyrics were political. For example, a popular musical piece that was sang had lyrics stating “berxwedan jiyanî”, meaning “resistance is life”.

In Toronto, the organization was bigger, and there were quite a few dances and songs performed by different age groups. Whereas in Montréal, there were no shows or performances organized. In both cities, there was a former YPG fighter, who read a letter that was sent from Syria. The letter provided information regarding the events taking place in Afrin, the organizations' strengths, and sentiments of continual strife; indeed, there was no place for melancholy in the resistance.

Both events were held in a hall, and the walls were covered with multiple images of Öcalan, YPG, and Kurdistan. In the Montréal event, outside of the hall, there were some posters urging passersby to boycott Turkish products and services. With regard to language use, in Toronto

Kurdish, Turkish and English were spoken, and in Montréal, Kurdish and French were spoken. In both cities, however, all the singing was in Kurdish alone. The Montréal Newroz was calmer in comparison to Toronto's. In essence, people in Montréal took their time eating food and socializing with each other. In contrast, in Toronto, there was no designated time for eating, but rather constant shows and songs.

5.3 Interviews

The data presented in this section comes from the interviews with 11 Kurds from Turkey, all of whom are politically active. The section is organized into five sections: diaspora, community centre, Kurdishness, political activities, and language.

5.3.1 Diaspora

Knowledge of the diaspora is common within the Kurdish communities in Toronto and Montréal. The participants often mentioned that when they identify their ethnicity in Canada, they tend to mention being Kurd first and then being from Turkey. This answer changes depending on the interaction sometimes. For example, Vejîn said that if she is talking to someone who is a politically active Kurd, she says that she is from North Kurdistan. However, if she is talking with an ordinary person, then she says that she is of Kurdish ethnicity and from Turkey. For Rona, her emphasis on her Kurdish identity stems from her past experiences. She stated:

I put my Kurdish identity more forward. I say I am from Turkey but don't leave the sentence there. I always emphasize my Kurdishness because it was so hidden, it feels like the more I tell the less hidden it will be.

For the participants Bejno, Kejê and Hêja, who came to Canada at a young age, they either say Kurdish or Canadian Kurdish and then, if further prompted, they mention Turkey:

"I say I am Canadian Kurd. Those how know ask from which region you are, and then I say Kurdish from Turkey." – Kejê

"I say I am Kurdish, if they don't have any knowledge about Kurds then I explain who the Kurds are, but I never identify myself as Turkish. I say I am from Turkey but before that I make sure to say Kurdish." - Bejno

“I say Kurdish and when they say what country I say Turkey.” -Hêja

The following section will look more closely to mobilization and the activities of the participated Kurds.

5.3.2 Being Kurdish

The findings show that when the participants were asked how they maintained their identity in Canada, every interviewee talked about being an active member in the community centres. However, Vejîn mentioned that she tries to speak Kurdish with everyone, cook traditional food, and wear traditional clothes as a way of maintaining her identity in Canada. Also, Kejê talked about how she helps other Kurds as her profession allows, such as doing translations. This is how she maintains her Kurdish identity. For all other participants, their activities in the community centres were the first and only answer that came to mind. This finding shows that, for my sample, identity maintenance is associated with being active within the wider community. For example, Xunav said: “a crow that does not fly with his own flock will always have a broken wing”. This implies that being with the community is a way of keeping her identity. This makes sense considering how, in the centre, they often come together to talk about, and share, their experiences. For example, Rona stated how her knowledge of the Kurdish language has improved here in Canada, by attending the community centre and engaging with others in Kurdish. These answers to the identity maintenance question do not only suggest the collectivity of the Kurdish people in Toronto and Montréal. In some instances, a few interviewees strongly associated being politically active with Kurdish identity maintenance. For example, as Vejîn stated: “I have to be engaged with politics because I am Kurdish”. In similar fashion, many of the participants implied that, as Kurdish individuals, they must be political in order to protect their identity. While resistance is being discussed in terms of the “soul”, of the Kurds that is natural, being political is not, rather it is

something they have to be. Frequently, participants discussed having a political Kurdish identity as something that is not chosen, but rather forced due to their homeland's social and political rules.

The connection to the wider community also happens through sharing the same types of stories or experiences. For example, Xunav recalls the psychological state of the children in the eastern parts of Turkey. She says that she grew up with contradictions, and that, "it is the state itself that makes the Kurdish children feel these contradictions." Further, she says: "we were always told stories as if they were fairytales, how our ancestors were murdered." In addition, Vejîn also mentions how real-life struggles were relayed as if they were merely fairytales. Also, while trying to share her experiences, Vejîn stated that no matter what she says, people cannot empathize from ten thousand kilometers away. Nonetheless, we have the same historical experiences:

Those who grow up here, like the country is so far from you, like 10 thousand km, and you try to empathize with them, but you can't...But I can do it well, you know why? Because I lived that for about 20-21 years that political life and always, at all periods saw the oppression but you did not and so you can't empathize with me right now. But all of our family experienced something, you can be sure that your family lived the same experiences as my family.

So, identity in the Kurdish community can be said to feed off of a common historical oppression that their ancestors lived through. For example, Vejîn believes that if I did not go through the oppression, surely my parents or grandparents did. Our historical realities are the same and, had I not been in Canada at a young age, our present realities would have been similar if not the same.

Lastly, but most importantly, Kurdish identity has a strong relation to the Kurdish language for every participant. All the participants, regardless of whether they speak Kurdish at home or not, believe that the Kurdish language is the main marker of Kurdishness. The section on language will delve more into the Kurdish language.

5.3.3 Community Centre

The interviewees identify the community centre as the site that organizes demonstrations and protests in reaction to the events taking place back in the homeland. For example, Xunav stated:

So, whatever it is, demonstrations or other activities, whatever we can do...we don't have a problem with the system here, we have a problem with the system in our own country, that is why we are here.

The community centre, in both of the cities, takes the role of an umbrella institution that seeks to bring the Kurdish community together through different cultural and political events. Both Bejno and Ronahi confirmed during their interview that the centres organize events in order to mobilize and bring the community together. Participants from Montréal noted that the community centre is currently not very active; however, prior to 1999, the centre was very active. Perwer mentioned how the violent protest that broke out in 1999 led to the shutting down of the Kurdish community centre in Montréal and, by extension, slowed down activities for Kurds in Montréal. In 2010, after 10 years of not having an umbrella institution for Montréal Kurds, Perwer stated:

In that 10 years of nothingness we lost a lot, can't find people to participate in cultural activities, and the worst part is that we can't find someone that will even make an effort.

This suggests that in order to mobilize the community, there needs to be an operating and overarching institution for the Kurdish community. The case of Montréal is a clear example of what happens to diaspora mobilization when there are no such efforts being made by political entrepreneurs. In terms of language use in Montréal's community centre, both Hêja and Kejê think that Turkish is the common language:

"I think people who are in the centre now should open Kurdish classes, maybe even classes would not be necessary if people spoke Kurdish amongst themselves." - Hêja

"I really like going to Toronto because everyone speaks Kurdish there. I don't have a lot of opportunity to speak it...or there is not an environment to speak Kurdish here." - Kejê

To return to the importance of the community centre and its role in diaspora, Hêja says that he learned that he was Kurdish in Canada, when he started going to the community centre with his father, as he was exposed to Kurdish propaganda. In conclusion, as both Kejê and Bejno note, the role of the community centre is to provide support, not only to Kurdish people, but also to the Kurdish movement. As Kejê says:

The role of the centre is to provide help, support the people. For example, when I am active, how does that happen? I think about the past centre and what we did, so trying to recreate that.

5.3.4 Political Activities

All participants, regardless of the cities they reside in, are politically active within the community centre. They all attend the activities in the community centre. These include demonstrations, *Newroz*, cultural events, and celebrations of significant Kurdish days. The interviewees Xunav, Rozerin, Vejîn, Ronahi, Lorin and Jêhat were politically active either because of their families, or because of the environment in which they grew up. However, for Rona, Bejno, Kejê, Hêja and Perwer, political identity is shaped in Canada by attending the community centres. This is with the exception of Perwer, who became aware of his Kurdish identity first in Iraq, then Aruba, and finally in Canada.

When I asked the participants why they became politically active, they all mentioned the effects of experiencing and witnessing oppression. It is inescapable. Xunav said that, for her, it started as a child, with all the things she saw and experienced. Perwer was also motivated to be active as a result of seeing and hearing stories of Kurdish struggle:

Seeing the oppression on Kurdish nation, the tortures that I followed in news... These always motivated me to do something.

Similarly, Rona was also motivated by injustices:

I think the main reason for being politically active is conscience, if you have a conscience and see injustice, you gain a stance there.

But, for Lorin, political activism is highly associated with her family's activism, stating:

I think family is a big influencer, it provides awareness, consciousness... I probably would not be active if my family was not

For Rozerin, it is also associated with family: “Since I was a kid, my family was in politics. So, I was always seeing it...”. Lastly, Ronahi explained that he started to become active after attending one demonstration where he talked to people who were already in the struggle:

It is hard to take the initiative alone, like you have friends and an environment, saying like we are Kurds lets go get our rights etc.

When asked about their political activities in Canada, they all said attending demonstrations, community centre events, helping with the organization of events at the centre, and attending *Newroz* celebrations. As noted in the findings from the participant observations, *Newroz* has come to be known as more than a celebration of spring’s arrival; it is now a political event. While my participant observations allowed me to note that the events were quite political, both Lorin and Jêhat commented on how here in Canada, *Newroz* is not celebrated in accordance with its meaning. Lorin commented that:

Newroz here is like a wedding, not same or in any way similar to the ones in Turkey. Here you go to a wedding hall for people to dance, entertainment. The goal of Newroz is important in Kurdish movement because with Newroz we lost so many people, so it became a political event.

Jêhat agreed with Lorin, also noting how the celebrations in Canada are not similar to the ones in Turkey:

Here, like I am not used to celebrating Newroz in a hall. So, it was more like a fashion show everyone is dressing up. So, it is actually against the spirit of Newroz. For Kurds it started with revolutionist Kawa. It is a symbol for resisting oppression.

In relation to *Newroz*’s importance and its power in mobilizing and recruiting people, Bejno gave an example from his childhood. He stated that he learned of the story of Kawa during *Newroz*:

When I was at my first Newroz, I was 12, so I went, and I saw big banner behind the stage with a picture of an old man’s picture. So, I asked my father who is this and he told me he did not know and then I started doing some research, I wanted to make sure to know who that person was.

Another comment that touches on how the *Newroz* can influence people came from Hêja. He talked about how *Newroz* mobilizes people because, even if there is nothing else to take away from it, you will see a picture of Öcalan. Ronahi also noted, in relation to the use of Kurdish during Montréal's *Newroz* celebration, when children attend, they can learn that there is a Kurdish language and that people are using it.

5.3.5 Language

As discussed in the various chapters of this thesis, the Kurdish language has become the main indicator of the Kurdish culture and identity for many Kurdish people. The significance of Kurdish mothers and women in preserving the Kurdish language is unavoidable. As all of the interviewees noted, with the exception of Lorin, they all learned Kurdish at home through their mothers. While Xunav, Rozerin, Vejîn, Rona, Bejno and Jêhat speak Kurdish at least at an intermediate level, and use it as often as they can, Kejê, Hêja, Ronahi, Lorin and Perwer do not use Kurdish as much in their daily life — including at home. Kejê, Hêja, Ronahi and Perwer say that they speak more Turkish than Kurdish, and they all say that this has to do with the community in Montréal using Turkish as a common language. For example, Hêja said that his parents spoke more Kurdish in Turkey than in Canada. This was because of their environment in Montréal, stating that everyone around him speaks Turkish.

On the other hand, Ronahi, who is fluent in Zazaki, says that he does not speak it because his wife does not speak Kurdish; hence, it is very hard for him to teach his children Kurdish at home. In addition, he noted that the children spend most of their time in school, speaking and socializing in French. He stated that, as parents, they do not pressure the children, but they still “tell them the truth, yes we live in Canada, but we should not forget our culture.” Similarly, Perwer said that even though he speaks Kurdish with his wife, to their children, they speak in Turkish. For

Lorin, the case is a little different. She did not learn Kurdish when she was growing up, even though she really wanted to learn, stating:

I can't, like to learn a language you really need to practice a lot, and when you look at it there was no one speaking in Turkey, the resources are limited, parents don't speak it.

Regardless of the fact that Lorin cannot speak Kurdish, she still strongly believes that the Kurdish language is at the heart of the Kurdish identity.

When prompted with the question of how important the Kurdish language is to the participants' ethnic identity, without any exception, all of the participants said that it is the most important part. In some occasions, certain participants even said that the Kurdish language is what makes someone a Kurd. For example, for Kejê, language is the most important part of being Kurdish. She adds that she understands how some people cannot speak the language. She understands that the inability to speak and learn Kurdish is due to the following two reasons: (1) speaking Turkish has become a habit, or default language; and (2) everyone received an education in either the Turkish language, or another language. Similarly, Xunav also pays attention to the relationship between language and identity: "Every nation is known with their own language. And our existence is our language". Nonetheless, she, too, understands that when people cannot speak Kurdish, it is something that the system has imposed upon them as Kurds. However, she still believes that Kurds, especially here in Canada, should learn Kurdish.

Quite a few participants also noted the importance of language for nations, and the necessity of transmitting Kurdish language so that the culture and nation does not become extinct. Nonetheless, most of the interviewees also noted that language maintenance or transmission is practically impossible when the language of education is one other than Kurdish. For example, though Ronahi stated that speaking Kurdish is the main indicator of being a Kurd, he also strongly believes that, without making Kurdish a language of education, it is destined to be forgotten. So,

there were quite a few complicated perspectives with the participants' ideas of what the Kurdish language means for Kurdish identity. For example, here is an excerpt from the interview with Perwer:

Question: Do you think Kurdish language is part of your identity?

Perwer: Yes absolutely, identity can't exist without language and vice versa.

Question: And what are your thoughts about Kurds who do not speak Kurdish?

Perwer: Ah, I am in that situation (does not practice speaking Kurdish), and I know a lot of people that would give up their life and do not know any Kurdish.

Question: But language is still the most important for Kurdishness?

Perwer: No, Kurdish [language] is not that important for being Kurdish [ethnicity]. Because there are people who give their life and do not speak Kurdish.

Another finding with regards to language was that all of the participants agreed that speaking Kurdish today can be considered as taking a political stance:

“Yes, speaking Kurdish is political stance, speaking it, defending it requires a serious job.”
– Kejê

“Speaking Kurdish means denying the argument made towards you.” – Perwer

“If today, there is someone getting arrested as a result of speaking Kurdish then that is a political issue.” – Xunav

“Even if you don't do anything political, when you say I am Kurdish, when you speak Kurdish you are political.” – Hêja

On speaking the Kurdish language, interviewees in Montréal made some distinctions within the community based on religion. For example, Hêja said that Alevi Kurds always speak Turkish. He explains this with their identification: he says that due to a double discrimination based on religious tradition and ethnicity, most of the people identify themselves as Alevi first and then as Kurdish. His claim is also confirmed by the Jêhat:

But the assimilation is still there, the guy comes here and identifies himself with his Alevi side, staying away from his Kurdish identity. And, like the state

committed the Maras massacre¹¹ and they are (Alevi) still talking about Kemalist ideology (which is assumed as the main ideology of the previous Turkish state), they feel like they belong there (a part of the Kemalist ideology - Turkish).

Moreover, if we look at Lorin, Ronahi and Perwer, their experiences attest to this claim. They all first identified with Alevism, then later on with Kurdishness. Though in the preceding chapters I noted that religion is not a dividing factor among Kurds, the findings suggest that the attitudes towards the Kurdish language can be different based on the religious traditions of the Kurdish people. For example, Alevi Kurds reliance on Turkish. Though, it is also important to note that this should not be taken as definitive finding, as I did not explore religious and identity formation amongst the Kurds.

5.4 Conclusion

While every participant recognizes Kurdish language as the main marker of identity, they also tend to empathize with those who cannot speak it. In Turkey, because the language of business is Turkish, many Kurds prioritize Turkish. However, in Canada, contradictions arise when Kurds continue to teach their children Turkish. As the findings above convey, Kurds pay a lot of attention to the Kurdish language. Most, if not all, believe that the language is the most important part of the Kurdish identity. However, when it comes to speaking Kurdish regularly, the findings reveal differences. In Montréal, though the participants commented that they do not utilize the Kurdish language in their daily life as much as the Turkish language, they still try to pay attention to the language. The most apparent example is that of the *Newroz* celebration in Montréal, in which Kurdish was heavily used despite Turkish being predominantly spoken by the participants and others in the city.

¹¹ In 1978, a religious conservative community perpetuated violence against left-wingers, and Kurdish Alevis, the massacre lasted few days, and more than a hundred people were killed.

When we look at the biographies of the interviewees, we can see how their political activism is shaped by either their family or their environment. However, we cannot really make a clear distinction when the topic is on language. For example, Perwer, who spoke Kurdish at home throughout his childhood, stopped speaking it. In contrast, Vejîn, who also spoke Kurdish throughout her childhood, never stops looking for opportunities to converse in Kurdish. The next chapter will analyze these findings using the frameworks of Adamson (2012) and Zenker (2013).

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

This chapter is divided into two sections corresponding to the two research questions: 1) what form does the political activism of Kurds originating in Turkey take in Canada? And 2) what role does the Kurdish language play in the political activism of these Kurds in Canada? Hence, the first section deals with the forms of political activism of Kurds originating from Turkey in Canada while the second section looks at the role of the Kurdish language in political activism of these Kurds in Canada. Lastly, at the end of this chapter, I will incorporate political activism with language as the findings show the two connect together when certain key factors are counted.

6.1 Political Activism of Kurds in Canada

This section will draw on Adamson's (2012) conceptualization of diaspora, introduced in chapter 4, in which diaspora is understood as a social construct that can be formed when a dispersed group is mobilized toward homeland politics. In my analysis, I draw on concepts from the social movement theory, particularly the concepts of collective identity, framing and mobilization, equally introduced and discussed in chapter 4.

Political Identity

My participants saw their political identity as a core component of their ethnic Kurdish identity. For example, Xunav believed that everything that has to do with being Kurd is political, stating: "our existence is Kurd". In addition, Rozerin believed that every Kurd should be politically active. So, at least in the context of my sample, Kurdish people see political identity and their activism as being tightly linked, whether they choose it, or have it imposed on them. Louis, Amiot, Thomas, and Blackwood (2016) argue that the increase in political knowledge increases activism (p. 244). Political knowledge, as the authors state, means exposure to political information and social issues (2016, p. 243). The interviewees support this, as they mentioned how historical and

contemporary knowledge led them to political activism. Hearing stories, they claimed, of what their great grandparents or even their parents experienced as Kurds, under state oppression, and defending their rights, encouraged them to become politically involved in the Kurdish movement. This also draws attention to the state's role in politicizing the Kurds. As the interviewees noted, state brutality, both in the past and present, contributed to making them political.

Equally important is family influence on political activism. While some of the participants stated that their political activism started as early as their university years in Turkey, some only started to be active when they came to Canada. Divided into categories, we can say that there are three trajectories leading to political activism. The first refers to those who were born and raised in the eastern part of Turkey (i.e. historically Kurdistan), have politically active parents, and experienced politicized environments as a result of living in the east. The second group includes those who were also born and raised in Turkey, however in more central or western parts, and did have politically active families and environments. The last refers to those who were not active in Turkey either because they were too young or lacked awareness of the situation. Those in this last category became politically active through interactions in community centres here in Canada. Of course, there are exceptions to these groups, for example, Lorin, who was born and raised in the western part of Turkey and had a highly political family. Consequently, as Lorin states, she became politically active because of her family. For those who were born and raised in the east of Turkey, there is the exception of Jêhat, whose family was not politically active.

However, a politicized environment, in the middle of the Kurdish and Turkish struggle, had an impact on his political activism. Consequently, the political and social environment, and the family, appear to be significant contributors to the political activism of Kurds originating from Turkey. Kurds who have come from Turkey, and who were active there, continue to be active in Canada. And, those who were not active in Turkey can become politically active in Canada. This

is the result of interacting with people who are already politically active and who participate at community centres. This points to the importance of the diaspora as politically mobilizing entity, as suggested by Adamson (2012).

Collectivity and Mobilization

In both Toronto and Montréal, it is evident that the community centres are crucial spaces for Kurdish mobilization in Canada. It is true that the participants are recruited through the community centres, hence it only makes sense that these spaces are seen and understood as necessary for mobilization. While mobilization outside of community centres is possible, it is also known by the researcher that many, if not all, Kurds originating from Turkey take part in at least some events of the centres and would consider themselves as a member of the centres. The importance of the Kurdish community centres in Toronto and Montréal with regards to mobilization, instilling a sense of collectivity, and functioning as a bridge between the host country and the homeland is a recurrent theme in my interview data. For example, some interviewees said:

“With limited ways we are trying to help the community here, we are trying to hold the community together.” – Ronahi

“I talk about Kurdishness. Read in Kurdish, we do it or try to do it together under the centre.” – Xunav

“We do demonstrations whenever there is something going on at back home. And we do celebrations, events, organize meetings memorial days at the community centre, for people to get used to each other. We try to have Kurdish people to be united and stay together and so the only way is by organizing events.” – Bejno

In her article, Karagöz (2017) argues that the Kurdish diaspora in Marseille is mobilized through communalization in the city’s cultural centres (p. 88). She also utilizes Adamson’s (2012) conceptualization and highlights the significance of political entrepreneurs’ use of such centres to mobilize and establish social networks. Therefore, the diaspora in Canada functions similarly to European ones. Political entrepreneurs are required to bring the dispersed Kurdish population in the host land under the same roof. The interview data suggests that Bejno, Perwer and Rohani take

or have taken on the role of the political entrepreneur. They talked about their role in the community centres, mobilizing the Kurdish community. Ronahi, for example, notes:

If you can create a motivation within your community or consciousness, then yes with that consciousness your community can resist the oppression.

Also, as shown in Bejno's statement above, the centres actively try to work to foster a sense of community.

In centres, or at events organized by the centres, there are multiple opportunities to invoke, perform and reinterpret themes of resistance and to instill a collective identity. Hêja, for example, states that he is influenced by the community centre:

You learn everything when you come here, there is a centre you go to, and people speak Kurdish or share Kurdish propaganda, talk about political things, saying we don't have rights in Turkey, in Turkey people die, are tortured, etc.

In addition, sharing diasporic experiences contributes to a sense of collectivity, especially when experiences are shared in centres. For instance, most of the participants talked about how they had to leave their homeland for better living conditions. The causes of their diaspora experience, the sense of solidarity, and the sharing of historical experiences are repertoires that contribute to building a collective identity.

Gourlay (2018) notes that the formation of Kurdish ethnic identity occurs at the intersection of the oppression of the Turkish state and the Kurdish resistance to the state. Resistance is embedded as a theme in stories, music, art, and films. In the literature review, we saw how resistance as a character quality has been utilized for the mobilization of the Kurds, especially through narratives of events of historical rebellion, and *Newroz*. In addition, Xunav said:

We got that resistant personality, because we were always told stories as if they were fairytales like how our ancestors were murdered. For example, my grandfathers are my heroes. Our heroes are not cartoon characters: they were the people from our families, ancestors.

Vejîn also mentioned the theme of resistance:

I remember when I was younger, my grandmother would come to our house and would tell us amazing stories. Actually, they were about the real stories lived in the past but turned into stories. Like the oppression because of being Kurdish. In a way like, there was a man, people would invade his home, but he was dauntless, never gave up his Kurdishness.

As a result of state oppression, the Kurdish movement, like a flame, burns stronger with resistance. Every participant associated being Kurdish with resistance. This is consistent with Kurdish struggles elsewhere; as Tezcür (2017) notes, one of the strategies of Kurdish nationalism is “reinterpreting key historical events... in an attempt to establish continuity in the Kurdish resistance” (p. 6). In Canada, we see this formation with the ongoing activities in the community centres. This suggests that the national consciousness of the Kurds is mainly shaped, and continues to be shaped, by the remembering of historical events and conditions of oppression. This is also explained when we account for the transnationality of the Kurdish movement. The Canadian Kurdish centres are well connected to the European centres/organizations (personal communication). Hence, it is not striking to see reoccurring themes within the Kurdish movement mobilization regardless of the location of activism.

Collectivity is reinforced through these narratives of oppression and resistance, and through the rhetoric of shared experiences. As Jasper and McGarry (2015) state, a collective identity can stir emotions and fuel mobilization. Adamson (2013) argues that diaspora mobilization depends on strategic framing, which often occurs through shared narratives of historical events, but not exclusively. As we saw in the literature review, the changes in ideologies for both the Kurdish movement organizations and the diaspora groups also caused changes in the framing of political activism. Today, diaspora groups pay more attention to narratives of education in the mother tongue, and human rights more generally, rather than the prospect of a separate Kurdish state. This is also apparent in the data from the participant observations at demonstrations. For example, some of the banners that were used during demonstrations said: “stop Turkey’s war on

the Kurds”, “we call every international institutions and democratic forces to take concrete measures against the violent anti-democratic actions of the Turkish state against the Kurdish people”, and “to save lives, we need the security forces to cease operations against the civilian population and allow members of parliament and independent international observers access to these areas”. These banners illustrate how the narrative was focused on the invasion of the Turkish state in the Kurdish city, causing casualties. It also calls for support from the other international organizations that deem to protect democratic and human rights.

Political Activism and Organization

In my sample, most of those who live in Toronto immigrated to Canada in the mid-2010s, while those in Montréal immigrated to Canada in the late 1990s. In the Montréal group, one of the interviewees, Perwer, mentioned that when he first arrived, there was no community centre. So, he convinced a few people and opened a Kurdish centre for the community. He explained that as a member of an ethnic group, he felt the group needed a communal place to gather with other Kurds in the city. In comparison, the community centre in Toronto was already established when my participants immigrated to the city. The data from the interview shows that the community centres are the most readily available umbrella organizations for the diaspora group in Canada.

As discussed in the literature review, the studies on Kurdish European diaspora activism reveal that the diaspora in Europe is very dynamic. Baser (2015) notes that with mass immigration to Europe, the Kurdish diaspora established ethnic organizations, and these organizations engaged in a variety of forms of activism, ranging from signing petitions, engaging in violent or non-violent demonstrations, to hunger strikes. The community centres in Canada, similar to European establishments, organize the same type of ethnic and political events, including hunger strikes. Additionally, the centres also provide language classes, folk dance classes, and musical instrument workshops, from time to time. Some of the interviewees mentioned that being in a country like

Canada provides them with opportunities to support the broader Kurdish movement. Hence, being aware of their opportunities, in terms of Canadian policies enabling every citizen to freely practice their freedom of speech, they try to utilize this freedom in at least influencing bystanders and lobbying for the Kurdish movement.

The diaspora group recently established what is called a Kurdish Federation. As the interviewees explained, the group is supposed to deal with lobbying on Kurdish issues in Canada. Three of my interviewees noted disagreements and miscommunications within the group, and saw the Federation as being rather unsuccessful. However, following many demonstrations organized by the Kurdish centres in Toronto and Montréal, Canadian foreign affairs minister, Chrystia Freeland, issued a statement regarding Afrin. This suggests that if the group is motivated and leverages its resources effectively, it can influence host land politics to a certain extent. My interview data reveals that despite an interest in engaging in lobbying work, as a result of opportunities in Canada, the Kurdish Federation group appears not to be sufficiently motivated to do so or effectively organized (i.e. in Toronto vs. Montréal).

Another form of activism that is worth mentioning is petitions. Especially in the context of Afrin, the diaspora groups made themselves visible not only to bystanders through demonstrations, but also to governments through petitions. One of the interviewees mentioned how in Montréal, they had a very violent demonstration when Öcalan was arrested in 1999. Though they made headlines, their visibility in the media was negative. Recently, with respect to the Afrin case, Kurds once again were in the headlines, but this time portrayed more positively. Poletta and Jasper (2001) argue that movements “transform cultural representations, social norms – how groups see themselves and are seen by others” (p. 284). So, while the 1999 demonstrations cast the diaspora group as being violent, demonstrations for Afrin cast the Kurds as resisters and as a disadvantaged group in society.

As Snow and Bendford (1992) have written, framing an event as unjust cannot predict direction of mobilization alone; there also needs to be a sense of blame and a sense of responsibility (p. 137). One can see that these three conditions existed in the Afrin case: the posters showing the military invasion and a vulnerable population in distress created the frame of injustice. The blame for this injustice was placed onto the Turkish state, communicated through banners and slogans such as “terrorist Turkey” and “Turkey out of Afrin”. Lastly, a sense of responsibility was communicated to bystanders during the demonstrations at the embassies of Russia and the United States that were meant to pressure these countries to condemn the Turkish state’s military operation in Afrin. These embassies were visited because both Russia and the United States played a significant role in Syria’s war, and the Kurdish armed organization was one of the strongest allies of the West in defeating ISIS in Syria.

The demonstrations, and the political events organized by community centres, provide a powerful platform to reinforce collective identity, mainly through the use of frames. The main frame that was used in the demonstration was injustice. This frame allowed the Kurdish group to relate its narrative of oppression, which it also aligned with the focus on human rights. The frame of military resistance also resonated with the encompassing framing of resistance as a crucial marker of Kurdish identity discussed above. Adamson (2013) states, “the process of diaspora mobilization is dependent on the ability of actors to devise and articulate frames that resonate with members of diaspora groups in ways that successfully align the perceptions, values or interests of diaspora members” (p. 70). As the interview data reveals, my respondents strongly believe that they have collectively been treated unjustly, and Afrin is another contemporary example of this.

Differences Between Toronto and Montréal Activism

The community centres in both Toronto and Montréal are characterized by different dynamics. Investigating these dynamics enables me to identify some of the conditions that are

important for political activism. More specifically, the differences between the Toronto and Montréal communities' activism reveals that the success of mobilization arguably relies on three factors. First of all, it needs a well-functioning centre that provides a range of political and non-political activities. Interviewees noted that in Montréal, people tended not to go to the community centre that often unless there was an important event. However, in Toronto the community centre is open every day, regardless of whether a special event is scheduled. The data reveals that the community centres' activities are important in nourishing motivation for political activism. Mobilization for any group happens through a process; in the Kurdish case within the Toronto community centre, the political entrepreneurs are able to communicate the framings of injustice and language rights more readily through the activities they offer at the centre. Also, because of its ongoing activities, the political entrepreneurs are able to instill a sense of collectivity, and motivations for activism. In Montréal, participants mentioned how the centre is open only if there is a special event. In relation to the community centre in Montréal, Perwer said:

It is so empty; we can't do any activity... Can't find people for folklore, can't find people that will attend to language courses, and the worst part is that we can't find someone that will make an effort.

Secondly, the success of mobilization relies on successful political entrepreneurs. While the success of the diaspora's political activism relies on the Kurdish community's sense of collectivity, the political entrepreneurs' social capital is also highly important (Adamson 2013 pp. 75-76). The entrepreneur's know-how, and her/his relation to the general Kurdish movement and connections to activists in higher positions within the Kurdish movement, can make the entrepreneurs appear more trustworthy. In Montréal, interviewees mentioned the problem of choosing a chairperson for their community centre. One of the interviewees mentioned how having a young Kurd as the chairperson or co-chair made certain people doubt their authority and their ability to successfully mobilize people. In Toronto, while there are similar issues with regards to selecting the

chairperson, generally finding a chair is not hard for the Toronto community centre so long as the person is liked by everyone. Therefore, there are fewer criteria for the selection of a chair or a political entrepreneur in Toronto than in Montréal, which contributes to their success.

Thirdly, the success of mobilization relies on the continued influx of new migrants. New immigrants bring new energy to movements. The Toronto community centre has more Kurdish members than in Montréal, and these members are mostly young and new immigrants. As the new immigrants arrive, they go to the community centre. As some of my participants noted, their activism often starts in Turkey through membership to organizations, thus they have become accustomed to using social networks to keep people in touch and to have an establishment as a hub for mobilization. So, community centres can become attractive to many of these activists. Quinsaas (2013) argues that immigration waves can impact mobilization (p. 960). New immigrant cohorts bring new resources and motivation. Hence, while Toronto continues to receive new immigrants who have been active in Turkey, Montréal has had the same immigrant cohort since the late 1990s. If we look at the activities in Montréal back in the late 1990s, we can see that they were very active (for instance, the 1999 protest). This correlates to the arrival of the Kurdish community in Montréal in the late 1990s, who brought with them their experiences of oppression and the need for political struggle. The Montréal community is also aware of this. When asked about his thoughts on why the two communities were different in terms of their activism, Ronahi said:

When you compare it to Toronto, it is somewhere that always takes in immigrants, but here it is very stable, everyone came early, there is not really a newcomer.

6.2 Role of the Kurdish Language in Political Activism

The second section of the discussion deals with the question of the role of Kurdish language in the political activism of the Kurds in Canada. In discussing this, I draw on the distinction between representations and practices of language, developed by Zenker (2013), discussed at length in chapter 4. The formation of the framework involves two other dimensions, namely,

motivations and biographical trajectories. The data reveal that the Kurdish language plays a role in the political activism of the Kurds, whether it be by speaking it, or by bringing them together through shared views on language.

Despite the importance of language, the data collected in this study reveal very contradictory attitudes towards language. Without a doubt, it is clear that all participants see the Kurdish language as one of the biggest components of their Kurdish identity. This is not surprising, as in the literature review chapter, we saw how language is often considered to be one of the main ways of defining nations and ethnicity, for instance, in building Turkish national identity around the Turkish language, and politicizing the Kurdish people and crystallizing the Kurdish identity around language (Yavuz 1998). Moreover, the heavy attempts to suppress the Kurdish language allowed political entrepreneurs to make language an important part of Kurdish identity. As mentioned in the above paragraphs, today, one of the key frames in the Kurdish movement surrounds language rights and is precisely the right for education in the mother tongue.

Amongst my interviewees, all, except Lorin, were able to speak Kurdish, even if they had received their education in Turkish, or lived in Turkish cities for most of their lives. All of the participants who knew how to speak Kurdish, at different levels of fluency, mentioned that they had learnt it at home either from their mothers or grandmothers. So, while the state plan was to erase or silence the Kurdish language, in most instances, it provoked the opposite effect and made Kurdish people more sensible to the Kurdish language. This is not a surprise when we consider how in the 1990s, political entrepreneurs significantly encouraged Kurdish women to speak Kurdish at home with their children, to make sure that the Kurdish language continued to be transmitted (Acik 2014).

The role of the Kurdish language in political activism is more apparent in Turkey, as a result of the stigma associated with speaking Kurdish. In Canada, the role of the language is more

ambiguous. While the Kurdish language is represented as a vital part of Kurdish identity, not every Kurdish respondent speaks the language on a regular basis or at all, even if they know how to speak it. More than half of the respondents said that they speak Kurdish at home, while the rest (4) do not speak it — though three of them know how to speak it. This is not just particular to Canada; Adamson (2013) notes that sometimes “even highly politicized Kurds may speak Turkish, rather than Kurdish” (p. 77). When it comes to discussing whether they use Kurdish language in their political activism, those who have had leadership experiences in the centre, sometimes use Kurdish language when giving speeches to their community in the centre. However, Kurdish language is not concretely used in their political activities.

Representational Practices of Kurdish Language

Representational practices of language mean what people think the language represents. The representational usually embodies putative ideas about what language demonstrates or makes a statement of. My interview data shows that the Kurdish language is represented as a main identity marker, a language of a nation, but also something more. It is intrinsically represented as something political due to efforts of the Turkish state to suppress it. For all of my interviewees, the Kurdish language is important because it is their native language, and it is the main representation of their Kurdish identity. Thus, even Lorin, who does not speak Kurdish, said that “today, Kurdish identity’s presence is the Kurdish language.” As mentioned, the Turkish state’s oppression on the Kurdish language crystallized the importance of the language:

“That is the reason why Turkey banned it, and it was illegal to speak the Kurdish language in the country because they knew that if the Kurds stopped speaking Kurdish within time, they could assimilate them easily. So, it shows that Kurdish language is the most important thing.” – Bejno

“Every nation is known with their own language. And our existence is our language, for example you can’t have a Kurdish ID, it says Turkish. There it won’t say “Kurde” (Kurdish) it will still say “Kürt” (Turkish). So, if the language is not their ID it is not important. Because what makes nation a nation, is their language” – Xunav

For many of my respondents, speaking Kurdish is seen as a political act in itself. To some of the participants, the act of speaking Kurdish is an act of resistance precisely because it was historically banned in an attempt to erase the Kurdish identity. For example, Xunav sees her mother as an activist because her mother taught her and her siblings a language that was banned by the state. Other interviewees talked about how speaking Kurdish is a political activity because there are people arrested and sentenced to prison for speaking it in Turkey. Today, speaking Kurdish alone will not lead to jailing unless it is spoken in the Turkish Parliament; nonetheless, defending Kurdish rights will elicit some manner of repression in Turkey.

While the actual language practices differ, which will be discussed below, among the respondents, those who said they knew and spoke Kurdish in their daily life were more assertive when discussing the importance of speaking Kurdish. For example, Vejîn, whose English was not sufficient for the interview, stated her discomfort at doing the interview in Turkish. Similarly, Jêhat found doing the interview in Turkish absurd and tragicomic. Rozerin said that wherever she is, she tries to speak Kurdish; Xunav mentioned how the Kurdish language was fundamental to whom she and her people are; and Bejno said that speaking Kurdish is important to create awareness of Kurdish identity. The common thing they all share is that they are from eastern Turkey, which has a higher proportion of Kurds that are also politicized at a younger age. Rozerin and Vejîn are both from families that were forced to migrate to western Turkey because their village was burned down. Xunav, Jêhat and Bejno both remember the political air, tension and the direct experience of state brutality in their childhood. So, one can see how trajectories play a role in respondents' attitudes towards language just as it does on their activism, as seen in the preceding section.

Those participants from Montréal, originating from the more western parts of Turkey, also confirmed that Kurdish language is important not only for identity, but also in terms of politics.

For example, Kejê was convinced that Kurdish language knowledge would determine one's Kurdishness, stating:

Resistance is not just opening a banner, or boycott, protecting the Kurdish language is also a resistance. Because if you want to wipe off a nation, you wipe off their language.

In attempts to revitalize and spread knowledge of the Kurdish language in both Toronto and Montréal, language classes have been organized. Toronto has organized multiple Kurdish classes over the years. The community in Montréal also organized some language classes, but the interviewees said that they were never popular. Hêja stated that a few years ago, a couple of his friends, including Kejê, decided to organize Kurdish language classes in Montréal. They rented a classroom in a college, as they did not have a community centre back then. The aim, as he said, was to improve their Kurdish, as well as engage in fun and educational activities. Kejê also said that she wanted to perfect her Kurdish language skills because it was her own language, and that she had never had the chance to learn it academically, so by choosing to attend Kurdish classes she regains her agency. This aligns with Archanjo and Arpacik's (2016) findings that some people chose to learn the language because it was banned, so it was a way for them to restore their agency (p. 24). Their study also found that the people attended Kurdish classes not just out of interest in the language, but rather as a political statement. This, again, aligns with my interview data findings as participants reiterated the fact that speaking Kurdish is a political act.

Represented practices of Kurdish language

Represented practices is the second level in Zenker's (2013) first analytical dimension. It is about the actualized practices of language. Essentially, it is what the language attitude is in daily life, and how it is practiced. To recap, with the exception of Lorin, all of the interviewees know how to speak, and to a certain extent, write and read Kurdish. However, when it comes to using Kurdish in their daily lives, there are variances. Six of the interviewees use Kurdish in their daily

life, whether at home or in the community centre. Amongst the remaining interviewees, four of them do not use Kurdish in their daily life. As stated briefly above, trajectories influence language attitudes, not only in how language is represented, but also mainly in how it is practiced. When it comes to actualizing the importance of Kurdish language by practicing it or learning it, the data shows contradictions. For one, the participants from Toronto said that they all speak Kurdish at home, at the centre, and anywhere else they have the opportunity to speak. Nonetheless, they said that Turkish is still part of their life. For example, Bejno said:

I have many friends that speak Turkish, and this is very understandable. It may sound weird Kurds speaking Turkish here, but we never went to Kurdish school, there is no such education in Kurdish language. I feel more comfortable speaking Kurdish with my family members but with my friends, Turkish automatically becomes the common language.

Though they all understand how Turkish language is still part of their daily life, some interviewees did mention their discomfort with this. For instance, Xunav stated:

When I see Kurdish people talking Turkish to their kids, I deeply resent it. Because here we learn English anyways, every mother has to teach their kid Kurdish.

Vejin also mentioned something similar with Kurdish parents speaking Turkish to their children. So, it seems that while they understand why certain people speak Turkish in daily life, when it comes to speaking with children, the tolerance for Turkish usage decreases. In addition, often there was a shared sense of pessimism when talking about maintaining Kurdish as a language. Perwer, who is fluent in Kurdish and yet does not talk Kurdish to his kids, mentioned how even back in Turkey in his village, many people speak Turkish rather than Kurdish. He was quick enough to point out that the Kurdish language is also not being spoken in Turkey. This was his defence, suggesting that in a diaspora context, it is harder for him to transmit the Kurdish language. Similarly, Ronahi said:

There are a lot of disadvantages with being far. Because you live in Canada, kids go to school daily for 8 hours, learn the language here, and at the same time we want the kids to get our culture but it's also hard for kids. So instead of pressuring

them we still tell them the truth, yes, we live here in Canada, but we should not forget our culture.

Kejê also talked about the language issue, and in the context of Montréal, said how she could expect people to learn Kurdish when they did not even properly learn French. So, there is also this understanding of being in a different country and having to learn the language of the host land country. While it is true that speaking Kurdish will not help Kurdish people in terms of economic benefits anywhere in the world, it can help them practice their identity through language. Some people may choose not to practice their identity through language, especially in a diaspora context. Nonetheless, it is still not clear as to why Kurdish people speak Turkish, the language of the oppressor, and not French or English as a common language. It could be argued that this has to do with integration, especially if the diaspora group does not speak the host land languages. It is worth remembering, here, that it is the Kurdish diaspora in Europe that helped to standardize Kurdish as much as it could, and enabled multiple publications, contributing to Kurdish literature (Akin 2011). So, the language practices in diaspora are multi-directional.

To sum up, the participants from Toronto often speak Kurdish; however, they are also aware of the fact that the Turkish language has also become a part of their lives that cannot be easily removed. For example, Bejno says that he is okay with talking Turkish, but he is not okay with people who choose to speak Turkish because they are ashamed of their Kurdish identity.

For speaking Turkish, I can't say it is a problem, we all speak Turkish. But speaking Turkish just because you don't want to or ashamed of speaking Kurdish that is the problem. There is a war going on, many people are dying for them to speak the language.

So, on the one hand, the interviewees hold that those who know how to speak should speak, or that those who do not know should make an effort to learn it. On the other hand, none of the participants from Montréal speak Kurdish at home, or in the community centre. As noted above, though two interviewees organized a language class to learn the Kurdish language, neither of them speaks

Kurdish on a daily basis. Though all of the interviewees voiced their discomfort with this, they said that they could not do anything about it. Ronahi strongly maintains that unless the Kurdish language makes its way to education, speaking Kurdish will no longer be a reality. This view undermines the significance of practicing a language non-academically, in daily life. After all, the reason why there are still Kurdish speakers in Turkey is due to the daily life language practices of mothers, grandparents, and other members of the Kurdish community, who were able to circumvent state oppression in the private sphere of the home. Nevertheless, the interviewees in Montréal said that the reason why they spoke Turkish instead of Kurdish was due to habit.

In his conceptualisation, Zenker (2013) suggests that when looking at the motivation for speaking Irish, Weber's four ideal types of social action is helpful. If we consider this, then the Montréal Kurdish community falls into traditional action. Accordingly, actions are "determined by ingrained habituation" (quoted in Zenker 2013 p. 35). While their language use can fall into more than one action type, the predominance of Turkish implies traditional action.

Another reason for speaking Turkish rather than Kurdish is, my respondents claim, the status of Turkish as a common language. This might be true to a certain extent; especially when we account for the differences in dialects, Turkish might very well seem to be a common language that is understood by most Kurds from Turkey. This raises the significance of the existence of a Kurdish common language, a topic that goes beyond the scope of this research. Nonetheless, while the common language might be true in Turkey, this is not true in Canada, where French or English can function as a common language for those who do not speak Kurdish.

In trying to explain this, Hêja brought in the question of religion, and said that Sunni Kurds speak more Kurdish while Alevi Kurds speak more Turkish. This view was also confirmed by Jêhat and Ronahi; for the two, this also had to do with national consciousness. The fact that Alevi Kurds live closer to the west side, regionally speaking, exposed them more to the Turkish language

and culture. It is also important to note that in the cities in the western Turkey, the population tends to be made up of a mix between Turkish and Kurdish people. Whereas in the eastern Turkey, many cities are mainly Kurdish. Hence, in addition to an oppressed Kurdish identity, being a part of the religious minority turned some Alevi Kurds towards Turkish.

Political Activism and Role of Language

Throughout the thesis we have seen the interaction between political activism and language. However, if we focus on a number of factors, which my data and conceptual frameworks identify as relevant, we can have a better idea of the actual connections. These factors include family, location/environment, and immigration dynamics. Firstly, as the data shows, family has an important role in the political activism of the people. We have seen that the participants who have politically active families are also politically active, such as in the case of Xunav, Rozerin, Vejîn, Hêja and Lorin. When we look at the language maintenance or transmission, we can also see how family plays a role in this. Generally, while the participants in Toronto mentioned how their families speak Kurdish often, those in Montréal often complained that their families were quick to switch over to Turkish. For example, Hêja said that his family started speaking more Turkish as they engaged more with other Kurdish community members in Montréal. All of the participants, except Lorin, mentioned how they all speak Kurdish at home, and learned Kurdish through their families. So, while families in Montréal speak Kurdish less, in Toronto they speak it more, and this contributes to maintaining Kurdish in the wider community in Toronto.

Another factor that connects activism with language is the location/environment. Zenker's (2013) analytical dimension of trajectories can be used to shed some light here. Generally speaking, those who were born and raised in eastern Turkey or more predominantly Kurdish cities tend to be politically active or more aware compared to those who were born and grew up in the western parts of the country. Though as is usually the case, there are exceptions to this, these

people—from the eastern parts—often have an earlier transition to politically active life due to their environment. To refresh, Xunav, Bejno and Jêhat grew up in predominantly Kurdish cities with a lot of Turkish military presence and oppression. As Bejno stated, there is not much of a choice but to be politically active when the environment is highly political. It has also been mentioned in multiple places in this thesis how language became political and has been used as a tool for mobilization. Hence, one can say that those who were more exposed to the Kurdish struggle might have stronger representations — as in stronger views about the role of the Kurdish language as a main marker of identity and resistance — and practices of language — as in speaking Kurdish in daily life.

Another way of understanding the connection between political activism and language is immigration patterns. As noted in the above paragraphs, Toronto takes in more newcomers than Montréal, so while these newcomers revitalize the political mobilization, they, also, revitalize/rejuvenate language attitudes. In a way, it keeps the language practices alive, by always having people speak Kurdish especially in the community centre. Therefore, while the Toronto community finds itself refreshed in terms of political mobilization, and language representations and practices, the Montréal community does not. This is something that is also felt by the Montréal community. For example, Kejê strongly believed that if she was in Toronto, her Kurdish would significantly improve as the community there speaks Kurdish more often.

Thus, language and political activism are powerfully intertwined, clearly at the level of representations, and given the right conditions as an everyday practice. The attempt to assimilate Kurds by suppressing their language has made Kurdish a rallying point for Kurdish nationality. Indeed, today, the human right to Kurdish education is a rallying point for Kurdish political activism in Turkey and in the diaspora. In consequence, language and political activism are tightly linked. Speaking Kurdish is a political act; it is an act of resistance against the Turkish state. Even

while recognizing the difficulty of keeping Kurdish alive in the context of the Canadian diaspora, the interviewees represented Kurdish as central to their struggle and their identity. On the other hand, the practice of Kurdish in everyday life in the Canadian diaspora confronts many obstacles. Indeed, those most committed to Kurdish recognize the difficulty of the transmission and practice of Kurdish in the daily life of the diaspora. This is in part because the Turkish state has succeeded in its effort to create a shared cultural experience amongst Kurds, through Turkish, as a result of its assimilation strategies, even in the diaspora.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Kurds are mainly divided into four states; in all four of those states, they have been oppressed, ruled under different states resulting in heterogenous Kurdish identities, and many refugees. Nonetheless, one thing seems to be constant in all of this: the politicisation of Kurdish identity. The socio-political situation of Kurds is different in each state, but it is commonly known that the Kurdish identity has suffered most in Turkey. These differences have resulted in variances in the Kurdish political movement as well. The PKK has been the one political movement that has dominating the scene since its formation. It successfully mobilizes and recruits many people for the Kurdish movement. While the significance of PKK in the Kurdish movement is not minor, the Turkish state's own rules and regulations have also contributed significantly to the politicization of Kurdish identity and the Kurdish language.

The main questions in this thesis have been; 1) in Canada, what are the forms of political activism of Kurds originating in Turkey? and 2) what is the role of the Kurdish language in this activism? These questions were investigated by conducting participant observations and semi-structured interviews with politically active Kurds originating from Turkey, who reside in Toronto or Montréal.

There is an ample work on the activism of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe. Much of this, however, explores the early migration of Kurds to Europe, as well as their political mobilization. While there are certainly newer studies coming out on the topic of Kurdish movement, and mobilization in Europe or in Turkey, the subject area still needs some more exploration. Equally important, there is also a need to better understand Canadian Kurds, and their experience of diaspora. Additionally, much of the already existing literature on the Kurdish movement in diaspora uses similar theoretical frameworks, which often provides very similar findings/analyses.

This thesis attempted to fill the gap of knowledge by using a different framework and conducting research in Canada.

I used the framework developed by Adamson (2012) in order to meaningfully capture diaspora mobilization. Accordingly, I have framed diaspora as a social construct where mobilization is oriented towards homeland politics. In addition, following Adamson (2012), I drew on three concepts from social movement theory to study diaspora; collective identity, framing, and mobilization. For my second question which dealt with the role of language, I used the framework developed by Zenker (2013). His analytical approach is composed of three analytical dimensions: 1) the relationship between representation and practices, 2) the relationship between agency and structural context, and 3) biographical time and the presence of the past.

The introductory chapters, historical context and the literature review, provided an overview of how the Kurdish movement came to be shaped by the oppression from the Turkish state. However, sketching the conflict in binaries renders the discussions too narrowly. Borrowing from Alberto Melucci's definition of political movement, Chesters and Welsh (2011) note that political movements push "to extend the criteria for inclusion within decision making, to reveal and fight bias that privileges certain interests over others within the political system, to open up new channels for the expression of previously excluded demands" (p. 135). Among the majority of Kurdish groups, it is a shared belief that the Kurdish movement is now asking for cultural and linguistic rights in Turkey instead of full separation from the Turkish state (Öpengin 2012; Zeydanlioglu 2012; Demir 2012; Celebi, Verykuten, Smyrnioti 2016).

The analysis of the findings reveals that political activism in Canada, includes protesting, lobbying, and attending community centre events. These activities are undertaken to perform a sense of collective identity and to change the narratives of Kurdish issues, which have been historically framed by the Turkish state. The diaspora community challenges these narratives and

presents alternative narratives of resistance and demands for justice through their collective understandings and experiences. From my analysis of the interview data, it is clear that the political activism of Kurds in my sample takes place within the context of the community center's organization of demonstrations and events. The community centres not only operate as an institution for mobilization, but it also helps form close knit circles in diaspora. However, while the centre in Toronto operates daily, the centre in Montréal only opens if there is an event.

In these community centres, the group shares its experiences and histories, reinforcing the collective Kurdish identity. In short, the interviews show that those Kurds who directly experienced state oppression tend to have a much more politicized Kurdish identity. The study also revealed that Toronto community centre tends to be much more politically active than the Montréal community centre. In sum, the factors influencing political activism of these Kurds are family, location/environment, and immigration. If their family is politically active, they tend to be active, if they are from eastern cities of Turkey, and/or grew up in a political environment they tend to be active, and lastly if they are recent immigrants, they tend to be more active. Locality and immigration are also linked when we look at Toronto and Montréal. Due to the lack of recent immigrants to Montréal, the community is not being rejuvenated, while the influx of new immigrants into the Toronto community has rejuvenated it providing a common understanding, shared experience, and collective identity.

When it comes to the role of Kurdish language in political activism, my study reveals that the role is more significant at the representational practices, and less in the represented practices. The Kurdish language is represented as the main identity marker, and a marker of resistance. However, when it comes to the practices it is seen that Kurdish is not spoken that often. While the Toronto community speaks more Kurdish than the community in Montréal, both communities have significant Turkish language usage as well. The interviewees revealed that the Montréal

community uses Turkish much more than Kurdish, some interviewees said that this has to do with their dual identification; Alevi and Kurd. While Alevi Kurds contribute significantly to the Kurdish movement in terms of political activism, their activism with Kurdish language (language activism) is less apparent. One of the most common reason for speaking Turkish, given by the interviewees, was its commonality among the Kurds from Turkey. In the historical context chapter, I noted that most Kurds do not consider dialect as a dividing factor. However, while this is not an absolute finding, the interview data shows how a common language is important for the community in order to communicate. So, the differences in dialects does not divide them, but it seems to push them towards the usage of the Turkish language. Turkish allows them to practice a (Kurdish) unity that is partly constructed in opposition to the dominance of Turkish as the language of the oppressor state.

Nevertheless, at first glance, it is still puzzling to understand why the community chooses Turkish over English or French as a common language. In addition, the language practices, as opposed to their representation, projects a pessimistic view with respect to the continuity of the Kurdish language in Canada. As some interviewees said, without official Kurdish education, the Kurdish language is going to be forgotten in the coming years. As noted by some respondents, while mother tongue education might make sense in Turkey, achieving this goal in Canada seems impossible. The community in Canada, advocates for education in their mother-tongue in Turkey, so their language activism is oriented towards homeland politics. This perhaps, also, explains why speaking Turkish in Canada, does not seem to be at odds with the political project of preserving the Kurdish identity through the Kurdish language. The latter is fundamentally a diasporic project.

In addition, one can see that the Turkish state assimilation policy has worked to a great extent and is continuing to work even in the diaspora. The fact that every participant rationalized speaking Turkish, shows how the community knows that Kurdish identity, because of state policies

of assimilation, relies on its nemesis, the Turkish language, in order to continue existing, a bitter realization. Moreover, one should not dismiss how consumption of Turkish materials also shapes Kurdish identity. For example, Hêja mentioned how they all (Kurds from Turkey) watch Turkish television. While this is not an out of the ordinary behaviour for Kurds from Turkey, it is definitely worth mentioning how this can contribute to the fluidity of the Kurdish identity, and language usage at home, again contrasting language as represented in political views and as practiced in everyday life.

Moreover, as is the case with political activism, we can say that there are three factors influencing the language practices; family, location/environment, and immigration. The same factors and trends hold constant for language practices. This shows that political activism and language are intertwined, especially at the level of representations.

7. 1 Limitations and Future Researches

This thesis is not representative of all Kurds in Canada; thus, the results of the study are only applicable to Kurds originating from Turkey. A study encompassing all Kurds from different homelands in Canada would depict different findings and can be beneficial for the Kurdish studies.

A limitation of this study is connected to the difficulty of recruiting Kurds in Montréal, which resulted in conducting only four interviews instead of seven as initially planned. Most people in Montréal did not consider themselves as politically active even if they attended most demonstrations or community centre events. Also, the inactivity of the Montréal community centre – being closed for most of the times, made it harder to recruit people. This, however, might be taken as support for the importance of immigration that I identified in my discussion of the findings. In relation to this, while the community centres became significant to this study, this happened because of how the participants were recruited – through the centres. While centres play a role in mobilizing, as they organize the demonstrations, political activism is not realized only

through community centres. Hence, a study focusing on sites for the mobilization of Kurds can be a potential future area of interest.

The total number of interviews (11) is also another limitation, future research should consider conducting more interviews, and more participant observations. Future research should delve more in-depth at the differences between representational practices and represented practices of the Kurdish language in Canada, or in diaspora. Language practices within the Kurdish diaspora is surely a complicated yet intriguing area to study. Another exciting research topic within the Kurdish diaspora is language and dialects. As the study findings show, many Kurdish people claim that Turkish is spoken because it is a common language, it would be noteworthy to study the dialects and what it means for the Kurdish national identity. Lastly, while structural opportunities in Europe and how the Kurdish diaspora has used these opportunities have been studied vastly, there is still lack of such study in Canadian context. Canada provides many political and mobilizing opportunities to its ethnic communities, hence how Kurdish diaspora uses these opportunities and to what extent would be a significant contribution to the Kurdish studies as well.

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