BEYOND MOTHER LANGUAGE: KURDISH AS A REGIONAL AND INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

The association between language and territory is particularly significant in terms of indigenousness. Therefore, the argument of this paper is to examine this aspect of the Kurdish language through the interpretation of the Kurdish political movement in Turkey based on self-identification, an essential component of indigeneity. Since the 1990s, the Kurdish political movement has been demanding mother-tongue rights with the growing grassroots support. This study examines pro-Kurdish political party programs, statements/press releases, and interviews with deputies of the HDP, current parliamentary party. The article explores acquiring Kurdish as a native language by Kurds and non-Kurds in the region, mainly through mothers, homes, and the community environment. The process of acquiring the Kurdish language varies according to how individuals interact with the local Kurdish community, such as marrying into Kurdish families, systematic settlement, and growing up in the region. Whilst Kurdish is regarded as the mother language of the Kurds by Kurds and non-Kurds members of the Kurdish political movement in Turkey, this article draws further attention to the regional and local aspects of Kurdish, including its natural learning process of non-Kurds within the region.

Keywords: Kurdish, mother language, indigenous language, regional language, , Kurdish political movement, Turkey

Anadilin Ötesinde: Bölgesel ve Yerli Bir Dil Olarak Kürtçe

ÖZ

Dil ve bölge arasındaki ilişki özellikle yerlilik kavramı açısından kritik bir önem teşkil etmektedir. Dolayısıyla, bu makalenin argümanı, Kürt dilinin bu yönünü yerliliğin temel bir bileşeni olan öz-tanımlama presibine dayalı olarak Türkiye'deki Kürt siyasi hareketinin yorumu aracılığıyla incelemektir. 1990'lardan bu yana Kürt siyasi hareketi artan taban desteği ile anadil haklarını talep ediyor. Bu çalışmada Kürt haklarının tanıması doğrultusunda siyaset yapan siyasi parti programları, açıklamalar/ basın açıklamaları ve mevcut meclis partisi HDP milletvekilleriyle yapılan görüşmeler incelenmektedir. Makale, anne, ev ve toplum ortamının bölgedeki Kürtler ve Kürt olmayanlar tarafından Kürtçe'nin anadil olarak edinilmesindekı rolünü araştırıyor. Kürt dilini edinme süreci, bireylerin Kürt aileleriyle evlenme, sistematik yerleşme ve bölgede büyüme gibi yerel Kürt toplumuyla nasıl etkileşime girdiğine göre değişmektedir. Kürtçe, Kürtler ve Türkiye'deki Kürt siyasi hareketinin Kürt olmayan üyeleri tarafından Kürtlerin ana dili olarak kabul edilirken, buna ek olarak, bu makale daha çok Kürtçe'nin bölgesel ve yerel bir dil olmasına ve bölgedeki Kürt olmayanların da Kürtçeyi doğal öğrenme sürecine dikkat çekmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kürtçe, anadil, yerli dil, bölgesel dil, Kürt siyasi hareketi, Türkiye

Ji Zimanê Dayîkê Wêdetir: Kurdî Wekî Zimanekî Herêmî û Xwecih

Kurte

Peywendîya di navbera ziman û herêmê de xisûsen di peywenda çemka xwecihîbûnê de giringiyeke xwe ya hesas heye. Loma armanca vê gotarê ew e ku hêla xwecihîbûna Kurdî, li ser esasê xwepênasekirinê ku yek ji pêkarên yekûna xwecihiyê ye digel şiroveya tevgera siyasî ya Kurd a li Tirkiyê vekole. Ji salên 1990î û pê ve ye ku tevgera siyasî ya Kurd digel piştgiriyeke xurt a girseya xwe talebkarê mafên zimanê dayîkê ye. Di vê xebatê de li dor peywenda nasîna mafên Kurdan, bername û daxuyaniyên hizbên sîyasî yên çalak û hevdîtinên bi parlemanterên HDP re hatine nirxandin. Gotar li ser rola dayîk, mal û civakê di bidestxistina zimanê dayîkê (Kurdî) de radiweste ku gelo vê rolê çi karîgerî li Kurd an kesên ne Kurd ên li herêmê kiriye. Pêvajoya bidestxistina zimanê Kurdî, li gorî çend pêkarên peywendîdanînê ya bi Kurdan re ji hev cuda dibe ku ev jî zewicîna bi malbatên Kurd re, bicihbûna sîstematîk a li herêmê û avakirina derdoreke fireh a li herêmê ye. Kurdî li cem Kurdan û li cem kesayetên ne Kurd ên di nav tevgera sîyasî ya Kurdan de weku zimanê dayîkê tê pejirandin. Ji vê yekê wêdetir ev gotar balê dikêşe ser wê yekê ku digel Kurdî zimanekî xwecih ya herêmî be jî kesên ne Kurd ên li herêmê bi awayekî siruştî û hêsan fêrê wê dibin.

Keywords: Kurdî, Zimanê Dayîkê, Zimanê Xwecih, Zimanê Herêmî, Tevgera Sîyasî ya Kurd, Tirkiye

Introduction

In this paper, I analyze the significance of language-territory relationships in the discourse about Kurdishness. The research reported here is a part of an interdisciplinary empirical study conducted to explore the indigeneity concept within the discourse about Kurdishness formed by the Kurdish political movement in Turkey. The struggle of the Kurds (for over a century) and other indigenous peoples of the Middle East have received very little scholarly attention in terms of their indigenous identity. Alkadry (2002) argues that the deliberate practice of undermining the notion of indigenous people of the Middle East led to the emergence of artificial nation-states, which created challenges for the democratization process in the region.

The growing body of literature devoted to Kurdish studies suggests a distinct Kurdish community within their various host countries (Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria). They have their own language, traditions, customs, and history concerning the region known as Kurdistan. They have also experienced oppression, denial of their identity, assimilation policies and marginalization within the states in which they are living (Houston, 2009;Onar et al., 2014; Harris, 2008; Hassanpour, 1999). Although ethnic identity, a distinct language, culture and the idea of a homeland have always been part of the Kurdish struggle for self-determination, the Kurdish political movement has been almost invisible in the international arena when it comes to the concept of indigeneity. As such, the study examined the Kurdish political movement in Turkey through the lens of indigeneity related themes: self-identification, language/culture, homeland, and self-determination claim to contribute the field has had limited attention.

The limited visibility of the Kurdish political movement in this sense and the question of who has indigenous status has also been one of the main concerns of global indigenous rights movements that emerged in the late 1960s, also of expanding indigenous studies. As indigenous peoples have been a subject for various scholars, international organizations, civil society and indigenous peoples themselves, indigeneity discourse has emerged along with identity consciousness and political awareness (Barcham, 2000). Indeed, the differences between ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples have been a fundamental argument for scholars and international institutions. Although the concepts of ethnicity and indigeneity are still contested (Guenther et al., 2006), studies argue that they are distinct concepts and that indigenous peoples require exclusive rights (Trigger and Dalley, 2007).

Since the turn of the 1990s, when indigenous peoples and minorities started to be distinguished from each other, indigenous issues and rights have gained wider recognition on world political stages and in international agreements. However, it is imperative to state that "indigeneity is defined differently in different countries. For example, New Zealand has a relatively liberal definition that accepts the multiformity of the Maori culture. The basis of definitions is also in bloodline or indigenous languages (Sarivaara et al., 2013:376).

Contrary to modernist nationalism scholars, primordialist nationalism scholars suggest that the link between language and nationality dates to ancient times: "In Ancient Greece, those who did not speak Greek were labelled barbarians" (Hobsbawm, 1992: 51), while in Biblical times, there was talk of: "Holy people, Holy land, Holy language" (Fishman, 1972: 44). While the language is one of the core components of a nation and its national identity, this paper is particularly concerned with the

indigenous aspect of language. Toyosi Olugbenga Samson Owolabi and Nahimah Ajikanle Nurudeen (2020) defines indigenous languages as home languages; they carry the people's knowledge, culture, and identity. And more specifically, "An indigenous language is a language native to a region and spoken by indigenous people" (p.34). In this line of thought, the below map, which is a work of the leading scholar in Kurdish studies, Amir Hassanpour, shows the language and ancestral territory link in the Kurdishness case.

Figure 1. Map of language varieties spoken by the Kurds
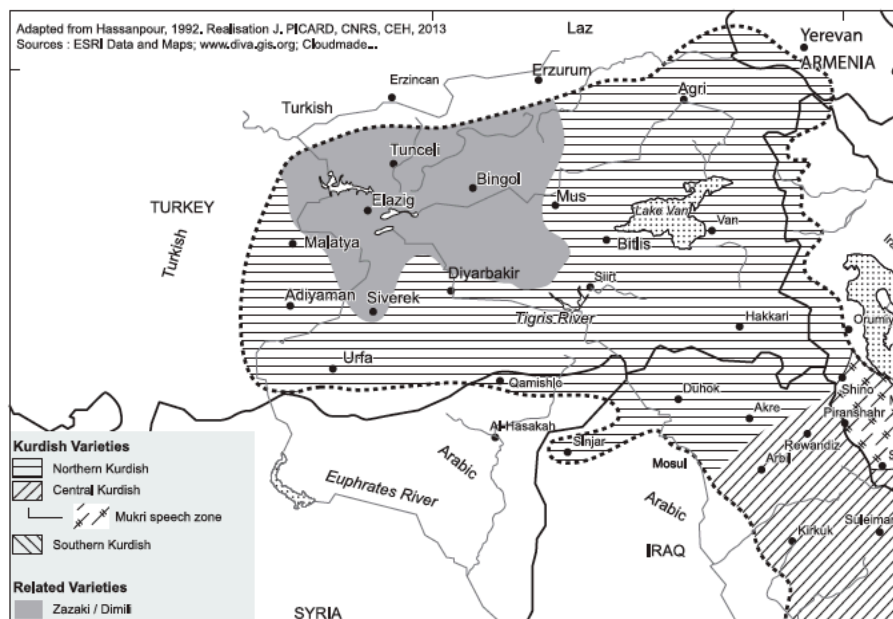
Source: Eppler and Benedikt (2017) A perceptual dialectological approach to linguistic variation and spatial analysis of Kurdish varieties, p.111.

This map also emphasizes that Kurdish is a local/regional language as well as an indigenous language; the Kurdish populated regions shown on the map are designated as the Kurdish historical, social, and cultural homeland. Although Kurdish is one of the first and second languages to be acquired in the region, it has been unrecognized and denied since the establishment of the Turkish state. More interestingly, through the assimilation practices of the state, it has also become the language of people who immigrated from the Western part of the state. This paper's initial intention is to discuss the survival of Kurdish as an indigenous language by analyzing the discourse about Kurdishness constituted through pro-Kurdish political programs, statements and semi-structured interviews with the deputies of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). Therefore, based on self-identification, the concept of internal colonization and the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) in Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) are employed to analyze the discourse. The DHA has been an effective tool in this research to examine the Kurdish language from social, political, and historical perspectives. It was used to investigate how social actors, events, processes, and phenomena are identified, named, and characterized as the nomination and predication discourse strategies in Kurdishness.

1. Background: Indigenousness, Language, and Territory Interrelations

Indigenous peoples can claim minority rights under international law due to their distinct language, culture, and beliefs; they also have specific rights under special international laws and regulations. These include the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) and the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No. 107), which the International Labour Organisation introduced (ILO) and, more recently, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), 2007. According to ILO Convention 1989 (No. 169), land right is the most significant right:'lands where indigenous and tribal peoples have lived over time, and which they have used and managed according to their traditional practices. These are the lands of their ancestors and which they hope to pass on to future generations. It might, in some cases, include lands which have been recently lost' (ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples 1989 (No. 169) cited in MacKay 2002:17).

Collective rights for indigenous peoples are based on the right to self-determination, which includes their own institutions and cultural rights. In particular, Article 13(1) of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) addresses indigenous languages that follow: 'Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literature, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons' (Quattrini, 2019: 11). Although no extensive data are addressing all those heterogeneous states, in this study, a reasonable number of data show that native peoples within nation-states either are denied or have minimal those granted rights.

As stated earlier, the definition of indigenousness or self-determination may vary from region to region; however, below self-definition of indigenous language indicates fundamental similarities. Since the entire research was carried out based on self-identification, which is one of the main principles of indigenousness, it is essential to clarify what it is meant by indigenous language. The Native people of Alaska explained the relationship between territory and language/culture.

> While there are special meanings that are sometimes used to distinguish between "indigenous languages" and "heritage languages," the terms are used interchangeably in this document to refer to languages that originated in the particular region in which they are used (indigenous) and are the embodiment of the cultural heritage of that region. (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 2001)

Minnie Degawan, a Kankanaey Igorot from the Cordillera in the Philippines, also points out the significance of indigenous languages. She states:

> For indigenous peoples, languages not only identify their origin or membership in a community, but they also carry the ethical values of their ancestors. These indigenous knowledge systems make them one with the land and are crucial to their survival and the hopes and aspiration of their youth. (Degawan, 2019).

As such, it can be advantageous to integrate an official perspective into language definition in another region. There are four categories of non-dominant languages that, according to the Culture and Education Committee (CULT) of the European Parliament, excludes lesser used state languages like Irish and Luxembourgish:

- autochtonous languages: indigenous languages without state-language status (stateless languages like Breton in France);
- autochtonous cross border languages: indigenous languages spoken in more than one state without state-language status: North Sami spoken in Sweden and Finland;
- cross-border languages that are autochthonous minority language in one state and a state language on the other side of the border (German in Poland);
- non-territorial languages, such as Romani or Yiddish, do not belong to one specific territory or state (Pasikowska-Schnass, 2017:7).

The Council of Europe, Language and Policy Division also points out the distinction between regional, minority and migrant languages through the territory and language link: "The term regional or minority languages are used to refer to indigenous languages traditionally used by a minority group over a long period within a country, to non-territorial languages (e.g. Romani) and sign languages". The term "migrant languages" is used to refer to the mother tongues of migrant children(Council of Europe, 2009:3).

However, because of its importance, as I have mentioned several times before, self-definition is the main subject of the concept of indigenousness. While the European Union uses minority and indigenous languages in the same sense and draws attention to the homeland, the example of Uyghurs in China can distinguish between minority and indigenous languages. The official PRC state policies and rhetoric refer to Uygurs as a minority nationality and the Uygur language as a minority language. As Beckett and MacPherson (2005) state: "The Uygur people, however, think of themselves as Indigenous people and their language as an Indigenous language-one of the native languages of Xinjiang. The Chinese population transfer policy and practice caused the language to become a minority language (p.304)."

It appears that both self-definition of indigenous language by indigenous persons from different regions emphasize the relationship between language and region/homeland. Despite oppression, indigenous languages that have survived for centuries and passed down from generation to generation are in danger of extinction. It is estimated that at least 40% of the 7,000 languages spoken around the world are endangered. Despite the difficult nature of finding accurate data, it is widely agreed that indigenous languages are particularly vulnerable because many of them are not taught at schools or used in the public domains (UNESCO, 2021).

The systematic practice of nation-states that the main reason for the extinction of indigenous and minority languages is discussed by prominent scholars such as Tove Skutnabb-Kangass (2005) and Johannes Morsink (1999). Both scholars point out how linguistic genocide was introduced as a central part of cultural genocide in the first version of the 1948 International Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Specifically, Article III defines cultural genocide as;

Any deliberate act committed with intent to destroy the language, religion or culture of a national, racial or religious group on the grounds of national or racial origin or religious belief, such 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 (Skutnabb –Kangas, 2005:653).

However, as a result of against votes of 16 member states, including Great Britain, the United States and Denmark, Article III on the cultural and linguistic genocide clause was not included in the convention. Skutnabb –Kangas (2005) suggests that states' repression of language is practiced directly or indirectly. While those who spoke formerly oppressed or banned languages were subject to corporal punishment, humiliation or even fined, oppression took different forms over time.

The Kurds are also among those nations face policies of ethnocide and linguicide since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2012). Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Sertaç Bucak (1995) also point out, "To kill a language, you have to either kill the individuals speaking it or make these individuals change their mother tongue. Turkey tries to change the mothertongue of the Kurds and make Turkish their mother tongue" (p.362). As Billing points out as well, " the Turkish government officially denies that its Kurdish citizens are Kurds and that there is the existence of the Kurdish language: the Kurds really are 'mountain Turks', who have forgotten their native, Turkish tongue" (1995:34). Here, referring to the Turkish state's language policies is vital in relation to Billig's argument. That indicates a direct link between the hegemony of states and their official language strategy. While host nation-states in the region either do not recognize the Kurdish language or claim it is a distorted version of their language, Hassanpour (1992) emphasizes the strength of Kurdish by stating, "in terms of numerical strength, the Kurdish language ranks 40th among the several thousand languages of the world" (p. xxvi). In spite of all systemic oppression, it is evident that Kurdish has retained its strength.

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Given the scholarly contribution , Kurdish will be examined beyond its role as a mother tongue, with its relationship to a concept of homeland as a place of home and local language. Whilst the notion of a "mother language" is commonly referred to for native languages, Kroon (2003) suggested "home language" for language acquisition since the mother is not the only individual with an influence on language learning in the home environment. That point becomes significant when acquiring native languages before getting into the mainstream education system, which is different from the mother's native language.

Moreover, the second important aspect of Kurdish is its identification as "the second native language" by those who are non-Kurd and were born and grew up in the Kurdish region. According to Field (2011), there are many possible scenarios or routes for cultivating community-wide or societal bilingualism. Often how a language is learned determines how it will be used in a community. It is possible to acquire languages sequentially, consecutively, or successively (in succession). It may also be possible to acquire them roughly at the same time, which is called simultaneous acquisition. He then suggests to native bilingualism: "When the languages are acquired simultaneously, there is no obvious demarcation line between NL and SL. Both languages are learned natively, so a more accurate term for a speaker who has learned he languages in this manner may be native bilingual (p.35)". In the light of Field's work, native bilingualism in Kurds' case is significant in this sense since it indicates the multiculturalism of the region. Additionally, as will be discussed later, the local and established characteristics of Kurdish in the region also paved the way for it to become the language of Turkish settlers.

2. Methodology

Multiple methods were used to conduct the study: a. conducting semi-structured interviews with twenty deputies of the HDP. b. analysis of the party program and rules of the pro-Kurdish parties from 1990 to the current parliamentary representative, HDP, c. analyzing press releases and statements regarding Kurdish matters by the two parties, the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) and the HDP. Field observation, including the HDP's parliamentary group meetings, a general congress, and visits to Ankara headquarters, also contributed valuable aspects to the research. The emerging Kurdish political movement of the 1990s and Turkey's negotiations to enter the European Union were instrumental in developing a pluralistic Kurdish political identity in Turkey, according to Tekdemir (2018). 'The agonistic relation between Kurdish sub-identities can be conceptualized in terms of 'many Kurdishness' (p.30)distinguished between the advanced-modern Kurdish (sh) liberal identity, the traditional Kurdish(sh) Islamic identity, and the pragmatic-opportunistic Kurdish hybrid identity. In this paper, I emphasize that the focus has been on parliamentary politics of the Kurdish political movement since the 1990s, built on grassroots support.

Considering the similar experiences Kurdish people have within their host countries with indigenous peoples in general, this article investigates the indigenous aspect of the Kurdish language through a study of the Kurdish political movement in Turkey. In the 1990s, the Kurdish political movement in Turkey entered a new era marked by the emergence of various political parties after the PKK turned to guerrilla warfare against the Turkish military in 1984.

The first pro-Kurdish political party, the People's Labour Party (HEP), was founded in 1990 with the participation of Turkish socialists (Gunes 2012). Following this, the DEP emerged in 1993, the successor party to the HEP (Watts 2010; O'Connor 2017). The People's Democracy Party (HADEP), founded in 1995, was regarded as a pro-Kurdish party. The party participated in the elections of 1995 and won 22% of the votes in the east and southeast Turkey, the majority populated Kurdish region. Accordingly, four more pro-Kurdish parties have been formed along the same ideological lines that demand the fundamental rights of Kurds and other unrecognized ethnic and religious groups.

DEHAP	Democratic People's Party	24 October 1997	19 November 2005
DTP	Democratic Society Party	9 November 2005	11 December 2009
BDP	Peace and Democracy Party	2 May 2008	22 April 2014 (merged with HDP)
HDP	Peoples' Democratic Party	15 October 2012	still active (Source: HDP Europe, 2017)

Since the 1990s, pro-Kurdish parties have gained extensive grassroots support, mainly in the Kurdish region. Before the June 2015 general election, the pro-Kurdish political parties were unable to pass the 10% electoral threshold (Yegen, 2016). Despite some of them being closed, many members being detained, and some individuals being suspended from political activity, the HDP entered the Turkish parliament in 2015 as the first pro-Kurdish political party.

The obtained data of this research from three types of sources have been analyzed by employing the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) in Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) to investigate the language territory relations within the discourse on Kurdishness. Using the DHA has enabled me to

analyze dominant nomination and predication discursive strategies (Wodak and Meyer, 2016) and thus explore how social actors, events, processes and phenomena within the discourse on Kurdish are named, identified and characterized. This research has been conducted on a long-standing controversial issue by studying contested concepts such as indigeneity, ethnicity and nationality. Through three types of data, it aims to maintain the central focus of self-identification.

3. Theoretical Framework: Internal Colonialism

There is general agreement that the colonial era had a severe impact on indigenous people in terms of administrative practices, including implementing special laws to segregate, assimilate, and oppress (Kingsbury, 2008). Alpana Roy (2008) argued that colonialism not only massively traumatized colonized nations but also maintained control over them in different ways. For her, "Colonialism does not end, except in a legal sense, as the effects of colonization are enduring for both the colonizers and the colonized" (p. 318). In this sense, indigenous critics of colonial practices is particularly significant.

Whilst this colonial practice towards indigenous people had already been established within the settler colonialism context, it also exists within post-colonial heterogeneous societies toward unrecognized indigenous peoples. Apart from the neo-colonialism concept, which is part of critical postcolonial studies, the analysis of collective identity, mobilization, and resistance in a postcolonial context and the relation to decoloniality has led to the emerging concept of "internal colonialism" (Martins, 2018). The adaptability of the internal colonial idea concerning indigenous matters is not seen as another theory. Instead, it is appropriate to look at indigenous peoples' experiences with states within the same frame of postcolonial theory. Studies of the concept of internal colonialism in the Latin American context suggest, "the exploitation of Indians in certain Latin American countries continued with the *"same characteristics"* after independence" (Hind, 1984:548). In other words, the new governance system of the previously colonized maintained the colonial principles over indigenous peoples. Whilst use of the words of internal colonialism came to light with the civil rights movements in the United States, with the prominent leadership of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, the concept has been used significantly for indigenous peoples' struggles in the US, Canada, Africa, Australia and Latin America (Hind, 1984; Hics, 2004).

Internal colonialism has appeared within postcolonial and decolonial criticism, and it is relevant to heterogeneous societies where an internal colony is defined. These societies were founded as nation-states by privileging ethnic and religious groups that deny other, pre-existing native communities. This concept, therefore, is seen as a critical perspective to look at indigenous matters. In recent years, ethnographic studies have increased our understanding of indigenous issues, such as culture, identity, land, and the relationship between indigenous and mainstream societies, and helped to offer unique insights into the traditions, cultures, and politics of indigenous peoples. (Hodgson, 2002; Canessa, 2007; De la Cadena, 2010).

Another important point on disadvantaged indigenous people's experiences is the close link between the community's well-being and the preservation of cultural/linguistic identity (McLaughlin et al., 2008). It appears that the disadvantages indigenous peoples

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had within host states are similar to Turkey's treatment of the Kurds, which reveals characteristics of colonial practice.

To exclude the Kurds from every aspect of the newly founded Republic, the Turkish state implemented various strategies. The immanent one was creating a new constitution after declaring the Republic in 1924, which abolished the previous Constitution of 1921, Article 88 officially stating that "Everyone who lives within the Republic of Turkey, regardless of their religion or ethnicity, is considered a Turk" (Yeğen, 2004:59).Whilst the Turkish constitution went through various changes in 1961 and 1982 after military coups that made subtle changes to this article, the denial of Kurds has remained an integral part of the official ideology.

However, to maintain its accountability, this official ideology also created a way to convince people that this was an unwavering scientific fact: there is no such thing as a Kurdish identity or language. This ideology has been implemented through the Turkish History Thesis and Sun Language Theory, creating a new Turkish history and language based on the denial of the uniqueness of other civilizations and languages. These language and history theses also claimed that the Turkish race is at the root of all other civilizations (Beşikçi, 1977; Xypolia, 2016; Zeydanlioglu, 2012). These colonizer–colonized relations and the role of the Kurdish political movement in Turkey is exemplified in the work of Zeynep Gambetti. Gambetti (2010) looked at significant developments in Diyarbakir, one of the largest cities in the Kurdish region of Turkey, after People's Democracy Party (Turkish: Halkın Demokrasi Partisi, HADEP) won the municipality in 1999, which was a significant success for the Kurdish political movement as it was the first time a pro-Kurdish party was elected as the local authority. Moreover, this noticeable change in Diyarbakir has led to creating tolerant spaces for Kurdish identity and culture that had been oppressed since the establishment of the Turkish Republic.

4.Self-identification of Kurdish in the Discourse on "Kurdishness"

While addressing the Kurdish language and culture within party programs has remained one of the priorities of pro-Kurdish political parties, there have been some changes from the Kurdistan Workers Party (Kurdish: Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, PKK) in 1978 to the present. After the PKK and until the emergence of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) in 2008, the Kurds were a prioritized nation when language and culture matters were addressed. The linguistic and cultural rights of other ethnic identities in Turkey have become the central part of pro-Kurdish parties' political agendas since the BDP, later establishing the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) in 2012.

The demands of pro-Kurdish political parties were based on equal constitutional recognition, equal rights, education, media, and communication in the mother language. Moreover, the HDP has addressed rights for the Kurdish language and culture from an even broader perspective. That is, the HDP, as the first political party and pro-Kurdish party, recognized the Kurdish issue along with other peoples with different ethnic backgrounds (Tekdemir, 2016).

Table 1 has been constructed using the content of pro-Kurdish party programs, selected statements from the newest pro-Kurdish parties—the BDP and HDP—and interviews conducted with deputies, to illustrate how members of the Kurdish political movement addressed the language and cultural aspects of the discourse on "Kurdishness," from 1984 to 2018.

Table 1: Discourse sub-topics on the linguistic and cultural Aspects of "Kurdishness"

Genre	Topics concerning language and culture in the discourse about Kurdishness
Party Programmes	1. Underdevelopment of Kurdish language and culture • Outsider influence • Insider influence 2. Mother language as a fundamental human right 3. Modern Turkish state politics on Kurdish language and culture 4. Education in mother language within all stages 5. Use of Kurdish language in media and communication 6. Legal and equal constitutional recognition of Kurdish 7. Constitutional identity recognition instead of Turkish supra-identity
Party releases from the two newest pro-Kurdish political parties (BDP, HDP)	1. use of mother language in the public sphere 2. state response to mother language demands 3. constitutional recognition 4. education in mother language 5. education in mother language as a natural right 6. demands of the hunger strike • education and recognition of Kurdish language • legal defence in mother language
Semi-structured Interviews	1. Self-identification of mother language 2. Use of mother language as a fundamental human right 3. Kurdish as a rooted language 4. Right to speak own mother language 5. Grass-roots demands 6. Unique language, culture and identity 7. Preserving language and identity • Geography – living in mountains and uplands • Resistance • 'sitran' and 'dengbej' (oral history) • The role of mothers 8. Marginalization/discrimination • Name-calling 9. State politics on Kurds • 'Şark Islahat Planı' (Orient Reform Plan) banning and fining for using Kurdish • Use students as informants in schools • Oppression/maltreatment/assimilation policies • Forced migration

Source: Research data, 2019

Table 1 illustrates the topical development of linguistic and cultural aspects of the discourse on "Kurdishness" in party programs, dwelling on three main areas: *first, recognizing Kurdish as the mother language of the Kurds; second, criticism of state politics regarding Kurdish language and culture; and third, demanding the right to practice them as a fundamental human right.*

Moreover, the newest pro-Kurdish political party statements indicate significant changes. Given the stance of the BDP on equal constitutional recognition of Kurdish language and culture in its party program, these statements also emphasize the significance of language rights under two main headings: education and legal defense in the mother language.

Lastly, the main linguistic and cultural topics of the discourse on "Kurdishness" arise from my interview data, which also indicate language rights and the self-identification of Kurdish as the mother

language. Having provided the general frame of topical development of the significance of language and culture within the Kurdish political movement above, Table 2 presents nomination and predication discursive strategies on how the elements of language and culture are named, described and characterized.

Table 2: Discursive strategies and linguistics means of language and culture in Kurdishness

Nomination Strategies	Predication Strategies
How are persons, objects, phenomena/events, process, and actors relating to linguistic and cultural identification of Kurdishness named and referred to linguistically?	What characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena/events, and processes?
Kurdish nation	people with a unique culture and language
Local governors ('bey' in Turkish)/tribes/outsiders	caused the underdevelopment of Kurdish culture and language
Turkish constitution	not recognize Kurdish language
Turkish Penal Code	aimed for assimilation of the Kurds
Political Parties Law, Law no:2932	allow restrictions on practice of Kurdish
Kurdish	- mother language of the Kurds - rooted language - second native language - regional language - a natural right - a human right - a fundamental right - a basic human right - a solution to the Kurdish issue - demanded in primary education - demanded in higher education - should be used in public spaces - should be used in media and communication and developed, promoted, and pursued in literature - should be practiced in TV and radio
Other ethnic nation	Should have the right to have education in their mother language
Kurdish, Arabic, Persian, Laz	Should be the education language of their communities and an elective module in the West.
Nowruz	the cultural practice of Kurds
Mem û Zin	Kurdish romantic poem written in Kurdish
sitran' and 'dengbej	enabled the survival of the Kurdish language
Geographical features	a second important factor that enabled survival of the Kurdish language
State's assimilation policies	failed to meet expectations

Source: Research data, 2019.

As data collected from three main sources, semi-structured interviews particularly provided deeper perspective on the perception of language. It is worth emphasizing that five of the 20 deputies had a non-Kurdish ethnic background, but three of them were elected from east and southeast Turkey, and two of them speak Kurdish at an advanced level. As they identify their native language as Arabic, they defined Kurdish as their second native language.

4.1. Kurdish as Self-Identified Mother Language

It is imperative to state that the recognition of the Kurdish language and the demand for education

in the mother tongue struggle is not limited to political parties that continue to exist as civil society movements as well. To give an example, the TZP Kurdi Movement (Tevgera Ziman ü Perwerdehiya Kurdi /Kurdish Language and Educational Movement) that founded by mother tongue activists and in 2006, It has become an important factor in the struggle for education in mother tongue (Sidal, 2019). Recognizing the struggles of various civil and institutional entities outside the Kurdish political movement over the claims of Kurdish mother tongue rights, the Kurdish parliamentary political movement in Turkey has a long history to demand the use of the Kurdish language in education and other aspects of communication against the ongoing oppression and mistreatment of the state involving denial and assimilation policies. A senior Kurdish politician in the Kurdish political movement, Deputy 1, highlighted recent developments regarding the restriction of Kurdish.

> Deputy 1: Today is World Mother Tongue Day, but as a parliamentarian, I cannot speak my mother tongue in the parliament. Besides, even if I do, it is not recorded as "he spoke Kurdish. "My speech is recorded as "x." That is, when I speak Kurdish, it is not indicated as "he spoke Kurdish." It says just "x," not even a language, just "x" (2018).

Deputy 2 also talked about how forced internal migration, resulted from the state's assimilation practices, created new challenges for Kurds in Turkey.

> Deputy2: So many things have been used to name Kurds, like Kurds are barbaric, animals, their lifestyle is savage. These have all been used since the beginning of the 1930s. For this reason, Kurds have had to protect themselves within their own spaces. That is, it became an issue to cover them up from the outside, but they have practiced their own culture and language inside their community (2018).

The assimilation practices, oppression by the state, and marginalization by the mainstream society, according to Deputy 2, in a way led the Kurds to preserve their language and culture.

> Deputy 2: Moreover, when we look at the Republic period, Kurdish children were even used by teachers as informants in schools to determine whether Kurdish was spoken in their homes. As they oppress more, Kurds have developed more resistance to protect themselves. It did not end up how they planned, like suppression, destruction. On the contrary, it has created massive resistance, and our nation has been able to stand up on its own feet and protect its language, culture, and history (2018).

As the Deputy pointed out, the resistance of Kurds to state practices and social attitudes has been based on collective identity consciousness that did not start with the political movement. Deputy 2 , who also holds a law degree, suggested that the protection of the Kurdish culture and language has been at the very center of the struggle. Moreover, that claim is supported by scholars, such as Stephen Blum and Amir Hassanpour (1996), in their discussion of the oppression that Kurds have faced. Even the Kurds' awareness of identity and expression of the nation's ancestry in their songs has disturbed the state. "For precisely this reason, in 1967, the Turkish government made it illegal for Kurds to own or distribute recordings in 'a language other than Turkish'" (p.325). Therefore, this systematic discrimination and oppression on cultural and linguistic practices has become a vital part of the main agenda of the Kurdish political movement.

4.2. Non–Kurd Speakers: Kurdish as Home and Second Natural Language

This intimate connection between indigenous people and a particular territory, which is also defined as an ancestral land/homeland, is a significant theme that has been interpreted to distinguish them from ethnic minorities. One of the most striking results to emerge from the data is that both Kurd and non-Kurd members of the Kurdish political movement in Turkey do not identify Kurds as an ethnic minority. They firmly state the pre-existence of the Kurds in the region as one of the autochthonous nations of Mesopotamia. For example, one interviewee said:

Deputy 3: We are the children of this nation who have lived in this land, Kurdistan, for 5,000 years (some resources suggest 3,000 years). How come we can be separatists, and how come speaking this language can do any harm? (2018)

Recognition and understanding of Kurdish as the mother language of the Kurds also draws attention to the significance of language when people seek self-determination. As presented in Table 1, language is a crucial part of the discourse about "Kurdishness," which leads to "a politico-cultural concept of 'mother tongue'." This concept is closely related to national or regional identity formation or state formation (Kroon, 2003:36).

While the notion of "mother language" is commonly referred to for native languages, Kroon (2003) suggests "home language" for language acquisition, since the mother is not the only individual with an influence on language learning in the home environment (p. 35). That point becomes significant when acquiring native languages before getting into the mainstream education system, which is different from the mother's native language. As a native language, a crucial part of ethnic identity indicates the importance of collective identity. This point very much applies to one of the deputies who identifies himself as a Kurd but does not identify his mother language as Kurdish. Deputy 4 can explain this more clearly as:

Deputy 4: Kurdish is not my mother tongue because my mother was a Turk. Since we grew up in that region, my late mother also started to speak Kurdish, even though she had some accent disorders. So, I have been speaking both languages for as long as I can remember. I learned English later, as well. Kurdish is not my mother tongue, but it is one of my primary languages. However, I call myself Kurd (2018).

Moreover, my data indicates that there are different ways of recognizing and identifying Kurdish within the Kurdish political movement. First, as mentioned above, the mother language or one's "own language" is mostly used by political party programs and Kurdish deputies. The other one is its identification as "the second native language" by those born and raised in the Kurdish region (east and southeast Turkey); for example, Deputy 5 and Deputy 6 speak Arabic and Kurdish, as well as Turkish. Deputy 5 explained how he learned Kurdish:

Deputy 5: My father was a civil servant at the district registry office. I was born in Silvan. I had part of my primary school education there and another part in the Hazro district of Diyarbakır. At that time, I learned Kurdish as well, while I was there.

Deputy 6 who is currently co-chair of the HDP and is a professor of public and constitutional law. He also speaks four languages, Kurdish, Turkish, German, and English, apart from his mother language, Arabic. He similarly stated:

Deputy 6: I was born in Mardin in 1963. I'm from the Arab people of Mardin. I am saying that I think it is necessary now. Otherwise, I do not feel stress specifically. My mother tongue is Arabic. I speak Kurdish very well, too.

The ways of learning Kurdish of those who come from a non-Kurdish ethnic background also indicate the Kurdish region's significance and Kurdish language because this learning process is developed voluntarily and naturally. Above last two statements from the deputies also make the multiculturality of the region appear obvious. These deputies' self-identification of bilingualism is indicated before mainstream education, which is only in Turkish. Deputy6 also pointed out the multiculturality of the region and why it is identified as Kurdistan.

Deputy 6: There are Armenians, there are Kermanis, there are Arabs, the group I belong to, in Turkish Kurdistan. However, there were already all these peoples in the Middle East; it is not accurate to assume that the region could be homogeneous. It cannot be said, because peoples are intertwined. However, the region we call Kurdistan is a piece of land developed more with the unity of language and culture of the Kurdish people since ancient times (2018).

Referring back to Field (2011) regarding native bilingualism in multicultural societies, as Deputy 6 states, the way a language is learned often determines how it will be used in a community. Being a member of a multicultural community might lead to developing a second language without formal education, as in the Kurdish region. In addition to various religious beliefs in the area, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Shamanism, and Yazidism, different ethnic groups such as Kurds, Syriacs, Arabs, Turks, and Armenians live together in this region even today (Işık and Güneş, 2016).Below table presents a more comprehensive study on the regions and its languages.

Table 3. The percentage of languages used at homes, in local communities and official institutions.

	Spoken Language %			
	Kurmanji	Turkish	Zazaki	Arabic
Household	65.8	26.6	3.6	4
Community	57.4	38.2	2	2.4
Official Institutions	11.7	88.1	0.1	0.1

Source: Adapted from Center for Socio-Political Field Studies (2020) Research on Language Use in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia Regional Provinces.

The above findings originate from research carried out by the Center for Socio-Political Field Studies in 2020. Table 3 presents collected data in sixteen provinces the eastern and south-eastern Anatolia regions including Diyarbakır, Şanlıurfa, Şırnak, Batman, Adıyaman Dersim, Kars, Iğdır and 49 districts of these provinces. The research interviewed face-to-face 5600 people also clearly shows

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the multilingual nature of the region and the dominance of the Kurdish as a household and community language (Sosyo Politik Saha Araştırmaları Merkezi,2020).

In another study focused on mother tongues conducted in Mardin, a city in Southeast Turkey, Erkinay (2009) suggests that individuals reported Kurdish, Arabic, and Syriac as their mother tongues. On the other hand, Turkish was included in the "Other languages" category regardless of the native language of the respondents. Although the multilingualism of the region, stated clearly above in both studies, has not been officially recognized, the region has been largely preserved until today.

As the Deputy also pointed out, this unity of culture and language of the Kurds is another important reason for them being a target of the state's systematic assimilation policy and practices. Forced displacement of the Kurds and Turkification of the region through relocation have been among the Republic of Turkey's primary practices since its early years.

5. Resettlement Policies: Adaptation of Settlers to Kurdish Language and Culture

The Kurds' collective identity consciousness, who are also the largest non-Turkish ethnic group, led them to become the main target of the state's ideology of Kemalism, which was introduced as the founding ideology of modern, civilized, nationalist, secular Turkey. The evidence from the early years of the Turkish state indicates that the state approached the Kurds and the Kurdish region systematically to eliminate further challenges.

A report prepared by the Interior Minister following the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925, for example, called the "Eastern Reform Plan" (in Turkish: Şark Islahat Planı), proposed that Kurdish provinces be ruled "in a colonial way" and that the region be Turkified through forced resettlement. As part of the "reform" of the region, the Settlement Law (in Turkish: İskan Kanunu) of 1934 ordered the dispersion of Kurds to break up their social cohesion (Zeydanlioglu, 2012:106).

In the early years of the Turkish Republic, decreasing the Kurdish population's density in the Southeast regions was one of the state's primary political practices, implemented in two ways. As the Kurds were forced to migrate to primarily Turkish inhabited cities, Turkish immigrants from Europe were settled in Kurdish areas in the 1920–1940s (Kendal, 1980). Although this assimilation policy has affected thousands of Kurds throughout the country in the subsequent decades, another significant wave of displacement occurred during the 1990s (Taş, 2013). Even official statistics show that about 3,500 villages and hamlets in the southeast have been evacuated (Yeğen, 2015).

The aim of the state was to block the development of Kurdish language and culture, which, to some extent, was achieved through the forced displacement policy implementation. Marginalization, oppression, and the stigma attached to the Kurds in Western Turkey have given Kurds fewer opportunities to speak Kurdish and practice their culture. However, as this paper argues for the rooted and regional aspect of Kurdish, another significant outcome is that the population relocated in Kurdish regions acquired Kurdish instead of assimilating the Kurds into "Turkishness."

Despite all the policies implemented to assimilate the Kurds since the early years of the Turkish Republic, Kurdish has remained as the regional language. One of the interviewed deputies of the HDP is, Deputy 7, who was born and raised in Batman, a city in the south-eastern Anatolia region of Turkey. Before getting involved in politics, the Deputy also served three terms as president of The Batman Branch of Human Rights Association. Despite the negative consequences of the underdevelopment of the region, Deputy 7 suggests that the deliberate abandonment of the region to social and economic underdevelopment also causes Kurdish to remain as the primary language there. The Deputy elaborates that more as follows:

> Deputy 7: People were not being able to leave their villages to cities much, because there were no roads, no vehicles. There was also no electricity, so they used to have only gas lamps. They had to go to bed at 6 p.m. and get up at 5 a.m. Naturally, they did not have opportunity to learn the Turkish language. Therefore, the language of communication has been mainly Kurdish. When you go to Batman and its neighborhoods today, where the population is mostly immigrants, you would see that the women do not know Turkish (2018).

The Deputy's remark on this point was also a significant concern of the government in the 1940s. When the government sent an inspector to assess the development of cultural assimilation in south-eastern Turkey in 1940, the inspector reported that Turkish in the provincial towns of Diyarbakir in which most of the population was Turks was a second or even third language. Kurdish and Arabic across the countryside were spoken in public places and in houses (Üngör, 2009). In other words, whilst since the early years of the Turkish Republic, the underdevelopment of the Kurdish populated region has been one of the major concerns of the state, however, this underdevelopment has been addressed to oppress the Kurdish ethnic and cultural consciousness rather than providing economic and social development. As a result, such a disadvantage could also turn into an advantage as Deputy 7 pointed out.

Another important detail in the Deputy 7's statement was that Kurdish also became the native language of people who settled there through the state's assimilation policies. As mentioned above, the main aim of resettlement was to subsume the Kurds into "Turkishness." Yet, as Deputy 7explained, people relocated to the Kurdish region were assimilated into "Kurdishness," including linguistically, culturally, and even politically.

> Deputy 7: Families were brought and given vast lands, thousands of acres. The logic was that, if a landowner were wealthy, since poor Kurdish villagers would obey Aghas and Sheikhs, the Kurds would be assimilated, Turkification would be successful. However, something interesting, opposite happened. For example, when I first met a girl called Zehra who seemed different, with green eyes, I thought she was Kurdish. Well, she was in a Kurdish dress, spoke Kurdish. When people referred to her as "Ew Tirk in," (in Kurdish: Turks), I asked, "Why do you say that?" They said that was because their origin was Turkish (2018).

The statement of Deputy 7 emphasized the significance of the Kurdish language and culture in the region, which have been denied and oppressed systematically. The state's assimilation policies have had a severe impact on the Kurdish region; however, the initial aim has not been achieved as it was intended. Another interview with a regional Deputy, 5, who identified himself as Mihallemi, that are Arabic-speaking people and with Arabs form the largest community in Mardin after the Kurds who are

among the oldest known ethnic groups in Turkey (Bozkurt 2020) also shed more light on the outcomes of assimilation practices.

> Deputy 5: In fact, the plan was to Turkify the Kurds who came to the West, and for the Turks who went to the region to Turkify the remaining Kurds. However, the opposite happened. None of those who were driven here (in the West) became Turks; on the contrary, they preserved their "Kurdishness," or many of those who were driven from here to there also became Kurdish. They have been assimilated. Many Turkmen villages in Urfa and Diyarbakir are evidence of this(2018).

There are also scholarly views that do not agree with the definition of the ethnic identity, language and homeland of the Kurds. However, they do state that the Turks who were settled in this Kurdish region for the purpose of assimilation of the Kurds became Kurdish. Metin Herper (2007) evaluates the assimilation policy of the state through the analysis of the well-known nationalist sociologist Ziya Gökalp and continues as follows:" as already noted, he has argued that the process, or 'de-nationalization as he put it, had been a two-way street; that is, one came across both the Turkification of some Kurds who lived in urban areas and the Kurdification of some Turks who lived in rural areas (p.53)"

Considering that the Turkish state does not recognize the Kurdish language as a rooted or native language, the above statements emphasize these crucial points. Firstly, it shows that Kurdish is defined as the local language of the Kurdish region, which is identified as the historical homeland of the Kurds. The second significance suggests that Kurdish is a deeply rooted and actively used language by people from other ethnic groups in the region, too.

Conclusion

Based on research exploring indigeneity principles in "Kurdishness," this paper has presented the indigenous aspect of the Kurdish language. Regardless of having a Kurdish or non-Kurdish background, all the interviewed deputies stated the importance of recognizing Kurdish as well as the right to use it in education and all forms of communication. Alongside this significant finding, this paper aimed to draw attention to the language–territory relation by studying Kurdish as an indigenous language that is spoken by the indigenous peoples of the region (Owolabi and Nurudeen, 2020).

The denial, oppression, and marginalization of Kurdish have been officially carried out under the Turkish state's policy and regulations by implementing forced migration and resettlement practices. Although the research data also suggest that these assimilation policies had a severe impact on Kurdish culture and language, decades after all these efforts, the state made peoples from the region and other parts of the country identify themselves as Kurds and claim their native/mother language rights.

Besides the fact that Kurdish is a rooted language, it being a regional/local language has been a crucial factor in the resistance to the state and its assimilation policy. For this reason, the policy of resettling Turks in the region, which began in the early years of the Republic, did not yield the state's expected result. On the contrary, the data show that they were assimilated into the Kurdish culture and language. The second important finding is that Kurdish is a regional language in the area. This language is naturally learned by individuals without a mainstream education from other indigenous communities, as non-Kurdish people speak Kurdish through inter-community interaction.

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