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Cultural Persistence and Globalisation

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Cultural Persistence and Globalisation

edited by

Ildikó Bellér-Hann

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Preface

The world conference 'Armenia 2000' was organised in Halle/Wittenberg in September 2000 to mark the 1700th anniversary of the foundation of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The Centre for Oriental Studies at the Martin Luther University considered it appropriate to contribute to the series of academic and festive events with a workshop, which took place at the Mesrop Centre for Armenian Studies (Leucorea Foundation Wittenberg) on 6th September 2000. The topic of the workshop, 'Cultural Persistence and Globalisation', was closely connected to the central theme of the world conference: although only one of the papers focused directly on Armenian history, it was important to situate this one within a wider, trans-national perspective. Contributions were invited from scholars whose work in one way or another concerns groups which, in popular perception, are regarded as disadvantaged minorities. The aim of the workshop was to explore some of the complex factors that influence the persistence of such ethnic groups, often in very unfavourable conditions.

We should like to acknowledge the support of the co-organisers of the workshop, the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, the organisers of the Armenian conference, the contributors and the participants for their helpful comments and questions. We should also like to thank Mrs Marjorie Willey for proofreading four of the articles and Dr Elizabeth Ewart for proofreading Yalçın-Heckmann's paper.

Introduction

It has become commonplace in social sciences and even in popular media reports to observe that accelerating globalisation is accompanied by a powerful counter-current, which accentuates local identities. The end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the new millennium witnessed the revitalisation of minority groups of many kinds, with ethnic and ethno-religious minorities especially visible. This came as a surprise to some, who had prophesied that increasing globalisation would diminish the importance of so-called 'primordial' ties. In recent decades ethnicity and nationalism have flourished everywhere, and some parts of Europe have proved to be as 'tribal' as anywhere in the 'Third World'. Large segments of populations have been on the move, either forced into migration by civil war and ethnic cleansing, or by political, religious, racial and economic discrimination. While some migrants have assimilated into host populations, others have maintained identities in their respective diasporas. Sudden, large-scale emigrations of groups often attract a lot of publicity, while smaller waves of population movements remain largely hidden from the public eye. The exodus from the homeland is rarely complete, but it may be sufficient to cause a dramatic decline of the original population: such a case, the Suryoye of the Tur Abdin, when the homeland in effect disappears, is described by Christiane Lembert in chapter 3. More often the diaspora retains a geographically definable homeland, with which fictitious or real ties can be potentially maintained regardless of whether it is a recognised entity (Kurds, Uyghur, Yezidi). In rare instances, best illustrated by the Armenian case, after centuries of diaspora existence an independent state can emerge to play a new role in the shaping of ethnic/national consciousness.

The papers presented here have a common theme, but they differ in their approach to their subject. In chapter 4 Khalil Rashow draws attention to the plight of the Yezidi by describing the present situation of Yezidi groups living in various nation states and the tactics used by governments to oppress them. Seta Dadoyan's historical analysis of what she calls the 'Armenian Metasystem' also emphasises discrimination and persecution, but she goes on to elaborate the impact of various historical events in shaping Armenian ethnic and national consciousness, and to capture the mechanisms used by Armenians over the centuries to resist and persist. One such device was to turn their new residence into 'home', while sticking to their Armenian identity. In contrast, Christiane Lembert found that the ethno-religious identity of Syrian Christian migrants from Turkey in the German town of Augsburg has been prone to fragmentation. But fragmentation and the persistence of group identity are also

noted by Bellér-Hann among the diaspora Uyghur in Kazakstan, which she compares to the Uyghur in the homeland, where quite different means are used to maintain ethnic boundaries. Lale Yalçın-Heckmann's paper looks at the complex discourses taking place in Turkey concerning the Kurdish question.

Khalil Rashow's paper stands apart from the four other articles since it makes no claim to give an objective presentation of the situation of the Yezidi in the modern world. Rather, it is very much an insider's passionate, subjective account of a group primarily defined through its religious affiliation and traditionally dispersed in several Middle-Eastern countries. Living as minorities in strong nation states such as Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Armenia and Georgia, the Yezidi have been subjected to internal displacement, confiscation of their lands, religious discrimination and worse in their respective homelands. As a consequence, the majority of them today live dispersed all over Europe, especially in Germany. Rashow demonstrates that religious affiliation is the main key to the persistence of the Yezidi, and identifies Islamic fundamentalism and strong nationalist movements among the ruling populations in the Yezidi homelands as major threats to the future persistence of his group.

The historical dimension plays a particularly important role in Seta Dadoyan's discussion of the Armenian case. Directly addressing the question of how 'persistent peoples' survive over many centuries as a group, she considers the Armenians as a 'nation', defined as a 'historically embedded dynamic phenomenon'. She attributes their persistence to complex, often contradictory processes among which mobility, migration and the ensuing emergence of diaspora communities were of special significance. While in most Islamic countries Armenians enjoyed protected minority status, their history within the Ottoman Empire is perceived as deeply problematic because of the discriminative policies directed against them. These policies culminated in the late nineteenth century massacres and the eventual tragic events of 1915. Yet paradoxically this experience has itself contributed to the persistence of group consciousness, as have the formation of an independent Armenia in 1991 and the ethnic conflicts which followed the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Collective memory is also a dominant theme in Christiane Lembert's work, who carried out fieldwork among Syrian Christian migrants from Turkey in the German city of Augsburg. She shows that although shared historical memory, language, and religion are all important but none is monolithic. Self identification builds largely on the period immediately preceding migration, and is closely associated with life in the Tur Abdin, the abandoned homeland in south-east Anatolia. Nevertheless. the dynamics of group identity show

complex patterns: while many prioritise Christianity in their identity formation, symbols of self-projection are also derived from ancient Assyrians, from pre-Christian Mesopotamia. In the diaspora situation in the Christian West, the emphasis in Suryoye self projection is gradually shifting away from religious towards national identification.

Bellér-Hann explores the strategies and mechanisms through which group boundaries are maintained by the Uyghur, a Turkic speaking Muslim group constituting the nominal majority in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in Northwest China. Islam and the Uyghur language are the main constituents of self-projection vis-a-vis the Han Chinese, but boundaries are also created in more complex and subtle ways, through components of personhood that may double as ethnic boundary markers. In contrast, the case of the diaspora Uyghur in Kazakstan highlights intra-group diversification deriving from migration history. In neither case is it appropriate to assume that ethnicity is the dominant determinant of identity and personhood.

Lale Yalçın-Heckmann's paper deals with a subject well known to the western public through media reporting: the Kurds in contemporary Turkey. Unlike the other authors, she focuses not on the self-identification of the 'underdog' but on how Kurdish ethnicity is currently projected in Turkish public discourse. She thereby draws attention to the importance of understanding the point of view of the 'great oppressor'. The modern Turkish state is often projected as the monolithic opponent of the political and cultural rights of its Kurdish populations. Challenging this view, the author introduces the high complexity of the discourse, linking history and state tradition to ethnic self-definitions.

Given the time frame of the workshop and the complexity of the themes, the papers could not do full justice to issues of identity in regions traditionally thought of as the 'Orient'. Indeed, the Uyghur paper implicitly challenges this very category. We are more concerned to look beyond the region at issues of ethnicity, identity, personhood, the persistence of some groups and the integration of others, in a wide, global context. Although there are undoubtedly cases of 'well-integrated' minorities, here we mostly focus on circumstances in which a 'full' peaceful integration is unlikely to take place in the foreseeable future. Disadvantaged groups can assert themselves in overt political ways, by demanding recognition of their distinctiveness, or, in extreme cases, by pursuing separatist aims. They also make their presence felt in more subtle and unobtrusive ways. Finally, they simultaneously contribute to the self-definition of the apparently unproblematic majorities ruling them.

Every individual belongs to many cultural minorities and disposes of a vast set of resources, to be called upon according to need. Yet, as our examples illustrate, some kinds of identity have exceptionally powerful emotional attraction for group members, loyalties that cannot be reduced to any simple calculation of interest. When combined with or reinforced by a confessional identity, these loyalties tend to become particularly salient. While territorial rootedness may play an important role in some cases, the example of the Armenians has shown that diaspora communities can remain strong over centuries. Through these papers we show the highly contingent and dynamic nature of identity building, which in changing circumstances makes use of new mechanisms, ranging from the politics of stereotyping to violent conflict. Rules of inclusion and exclusion are constantly re-negotiated and manipulated by members of the groups concerned as well as by the outsiders trying to control them.

Ildikó Bellér-Hann
Halle, August 2001.

THE ARMENIAN METASYSTEM AND THE NEAR EASTERN DIASPORA

Seta B. Dadoyan

What this paper describes as the Armenian Metasystem is basically the persistent identity system of this people. Arising from a historic process over almost thirty centuries, it explains the three levels on which the 'water table' of the nation has been sustained above a critical point. These were the Armenian nation-states (as political substrata), diaspora-minority polities, and cultures for separate peoplehood.

The issue here is what Spicer identifies as 'the defining characteristic of persistent peoples'. Race, ethnicity, homeland, geography, language, religion and land are commonly held criteria for the separate identity of 'persistent peoples'; but their analysis reveals more antinomies rather than assisting *us* in our task. We find peoples that have failed to endure in spite of the presence of the necessary conditions, and others who, in the absence of most criteria, have maintained a 'collective cultural identity' as a 'sense of continuity' of 'shared memories' and 'common destiny'.[1] This past is basically a 'system of symbols' concerning 'a unique historical past'[2] both to celebrate its glories and commemorate the grief.[3] Not necessarily 'true', the symbols constitute an 'interrelated set of meanings' that make enough sense to the group to adhere to.[4] The next issue is what mechanisms 'persistent peoples' have used and still use to endure.[5]

Armenians as 'persistent people', 'nation-state' and 'minority'- a historic overview

Since the word 'nation' will unavoidably be used in the course of the discussion, a note is in order at this point. Avoiding Perennialist as well as Modernist paradigms, this paper adopts a more flexible and 'empirical' approach: if it is generally accepted to be a nation, then whatever goes into the making of this

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[1] Smith 1990: 179.
[2] Castile and Adams 1981: xviii.
[3] Nisan 1991: 11.
[4] Spicer 1980: 347.
[5] Castile and Adams 1981: xxi, and Nisan 1991: 10-11.

nation is 'national' with respect to its historic development, at least. Consequently, if for almost three millennia, Armenians have been known to be a pre-modern and a modern nation, as well as diaspora ethnies, then all elements in their persistent identity system, or what may be called their Metasystem, are 'national' as factors in the making and sustenance of the whole.

We are often warned against the 'temptation to read back into the formation of "old" nations the assumptions of modern nationalism', or looking at 'nations as objective realities, existing through history', yet the persistence of pre-modern nations is at the core of the study of nationalities old and new, and Armenians are just an example. 'To say that nations are modern phenomena is half the story', says Smith.[6] Both as a concept and process, nations are historically embedded dynamic phenomena and hardly anyone today presupposes the nation a priori as a single continuous and homogenous entity. The realities that made pre-modern Armenian history, diffused and fragmented as it was, are to be found in the construct of the nation or the *mythomoteur* and the careers of establishment and dissident factions.

Indeed one of the 'truths' that anyone interested in Armenian history and the region encounters, is the symbiotic and complex manner of interactions and development at all times. The Armenian case in the medieval Near East was not just the story of one of the many smaller yet persistent peoples floating on the rising and falling tide of empires due to a mysterious 'essence' or in pursuit of it. Instead, it was a process of many and contradictory patterns of careers and attitudes which by virtue of their context and actors were 'national'. Nothing suggests a consistent mechanism, or as some describe it a 'national philosophy', except a mobility and a flexibility in the parts that sustained the continuity of the whole.

Although their history starts earlier, the first Armenian nation state came about under the Artaxids in the fourth century BC. The last king of the dynasty was Tigranes III (20 BC –1 AD), whose power extended as far as Egypt. The Arsacids were the second dynasty (53 AD - 429 AD) and the third, the Bagratids (884-1045). In 1198 the Rubinians established the fourth dynasty in Cilicia and lost it to the Mamluks in 1375. As of the twelfth century, there were the minor kingdoms of the Proshians and Zakarians on the mainland in the north-east. In 1918 the Republic of Armenia emerged, occupying a small part of Greater Armenia. In

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[6]   Smith 1998: 174-175.

1920 it became one of the Soviet republics until 1991, when it regained its independence. Alongside these four dynasties, and between periods of national sovereignty, there have always been independent and/or internally independent enclaves and territorial principalities, not only in Greater Armenia but also on its peripheries and further south-west of Armenia.

Political and administrative decentralization typified Armenian history. One of the factors was the geography of the country described as a 'rock mountain', situated between the southern Caucasus, the Black Sea, the western Euphrates, the Taurus, north Syria, Garabagh and the Caspian Sea. Within this plateau too, the various regions were divided by difficult passages and otherwise isolated by a very severe climate. Some historians see in these harsh physical conditions the secret of the persistence of the 'Armenian spirit'. More important than its location was the political and economic geography of Armenia. Through their land ran the great trade routes connecting the Far East with Europe, and the Black Sea and Mediterranean with the Arab south. A relatively small country between east and west, Armenia hardly managed to withstand this condition politically and was perpetually fragmented on all levels. However, their culture successfully absorbed the wealth of both east and west.

All four dynasties barely held centralized power, and one of the casualties was a more or less consistent foreign relations policy. Every one of the aristocratic houses played their own political game between the major powers east and west, depending on interest and location. Following the fall of the Bagratid capital Ani to the Greeks in 1045, the massive Turkish penetration, and the dispersal of the nation and the dissident militant factions throughout Upper Mesopotamia, the Taurus and north Syria, ideal conditions developed for the creation of around ten large and small principalities. Headed by the remnants of the dynastic and aristocratic houses, military figures and local warlords, these principalities were lesser 'states' and played a very significant yet often overlooked role as substrata for the Armenians, who constituted the majority of the population in them and persisted as such.

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries Armenian military and political power in these parts and as far as Egypt, took two basic forms: Muslim-Armenian powers, and other principalities which were initially established or allowed to exist by Byzantium on its eastern borders. Such Muslim-Armenian powers were the Dānishmands in Cappadocia, the Banū Boghousags in Severek, the Palestinian state of Nāwikī/Yāwuqī/Yāruqī Aqsiz (as will be discussed below), and the

absolute vizierial authority of the Fatimid Armenians in Egypt. At the time of the arrival of the Franks around 491/1097, and between them and the Seljuks inland, there were four major Armenian principalities in the peripheral regions of al-Sham under Philaretus in Marʿash, Gogh Vasil in Kaysum and Raban, Gabriel in Melitene and Ṭoros in Edessa. Between the valleys of the Euphrates and Orontes there were several other territorial lordships, in Rawandān (just north of Killīs), Andriun (near Marʿash), Ẓovk (south-east of Ḥanzīt and Kharbert), Bīra (or Birejik) on the Euphrates south of Qalʿat al-Rūm or Hromklay, Tall Bāshir (on the river Sājūr, south of Ayntāb), Gargar (on the Euphrates, south-east of Melitene), Banū Sumbul or Sambil or Samwil (just north of Samosata). In addition, there were smaller tribal lands throughout the northern part of al-Sham. When in 1198 the first Armenian king rose to the throne of Cilicia (with the blessing of the Vatican) few of these powers were left in the immediate area, except the Proshians and the Zakarians on the mainland.

As of the tenth century, perpetual migration - by choice or force - and diaspora transitions were major factors in the shaping of Armenian history. Already open and subject to eastern and western cultural influences and because of constant mobilization, they had to maintain a balance between mono-ethnism, at least as myth and ideal, and pluri-culturalism and hyphenated identity as a historic and lived reality. Obviously, a core persisted and experience was gained in developing mechanisms for opposition and survival in the precarious diaspora conditions. One of the ways in which the 'water table' of the nation was kept above a critical level was mobility. In other words, a minimal stability of the whole of the diaspora parts was achieved through various waves and types of migration.

Perpetual migration and survival through mobility created what this paper calls the Armenian *ecumene* in the Near East. The Armenian homeland as a narrow and exclusive political-geographic unit is a modern development. Throughout the Middle Ages and generally during the Ottoman period, in addition to Greater Armenia and Cilicia, North Syrian cities like Edessa, Melitene and many others along the Euphrates, Tigris and the Orontes, were inhabited by great numbers of Armenians who, apart from their ethnicity, acted as natives in developing the location they were in. This observation can be generalized to what may be called the 'Armenian condition' in the Near East. An example of later periods is in order here: during the first few years of the seventeenth century, after being dragged by Shah Abbas from Old Julfa on the Araxes in Nakhijevan and transplanted to the barren land which became the New Julfa in north-west Iran, it took the survivors

only thirty years to be in a position to impress travelers with the architecture of their city and boast of exquisite crafts, a printing press and a university. The same community was compelled to move to India about a century later and treated the new locations in Delhi, Madras and Bombay just as other spots of the Armenian *ecumene* to persist upon. Volumes could be filled with the description of models of Armenian diaspora transitions.

New and hyphenated manners of existence and identity were constantly reinvented under new circumstances, and 'home' became 'a mode of interpretive in-betweenness as a form of accountability to more than one location', as Radhakrishnan says. Because one cannot live thoroughly, 'and still continue to call it "not-home"'.[7] 'Doubleness and ethnic hyphenation bring together the two driving psychological motivations for identity'. When oppressed, some have unavoidably 'militarized their sense of identity', and some have forgotten 'where they come from' and been 'active participants in domination and aggression'.[8] There are historic models of these and other manners of reaction.

Ethnic identity is primarily a mental-emotional attitude and as such it needs constructs to rest upon. In the case of Armenians the constitutive myths of the nation were initiated by the Church and State as a combined force. The author suggests that the Armenian identity-making and persistence processes during the medieval period had at least four aspects: the adoption of Christianity as the state religion in 301, the discovery of the alphabet in 401 by Mesrop Mashtots, historiography of the fifth century, and religious-political dissidence from the fourth to the fourteenth century. After the consecutive divisions of Armenia between the Persian East and the Roman/ Byzantine West, and in 428 the fall of the Arshakunis, new structures were required for the Armenians to survive as a distinct people. Christianity had penetrated the region much earlier and interacted with pagan and gnostic religious cultures; it was now a major factor in the restructuring of national identity. The language that was already in a surprisingly advanced state (despite the absence of an alphabet) was now the language of education and the Church, by the conditional consent of Byzantium. At any rate, the Bible and the liturgy were Armenized, philosophical works (mainly translated from Greek) and apologetic texts became available. The third major phase in the

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[7]   Radhakrishnan 1996: xiii-xiv.
[8]   ibid.: xxvi.

process of identity-making constructs was the writing of national history. The end of the fifth century saw several histories and one major work by Movsēs Khorenatsi, a student of Mashtots and the 'father' of Armenian historiography. His three-volume monumental work on the history of the Armenians established the Armenian myth of origin. It consisted of a whole pantheon of ancestral heroes, Christian saints and martyrs, aristocratic houses, the geographic panorama of the land and the epic struggle of the nation. The literature of the fifth century, or the Golden Age of Armenian culture, was comprehensive and contained 'desirable' moral-political implications of the national symbols and images. This package became the criterion of 'orthodoxy' as a general attitude. Genocide, exile and resurrection were relatively new additions to this *mythomoteur*. Herein consisted and still consists the core of Armenian romantic nationalism as the expression of the *Volkgeist* or the unique character of the nation as a 'soul and spirit', in Hegelian terms. The role of political and religious dissidence in generating new images of identity is another subject.

Eventually, each one of the diaspora entities developed their own mechanisms against the background of this *mythomoteur*. The condition of constant mobility gave rise to a new type of pre-modern nationalism, which I call 'atomic' or rather 'monadic nationalism'. In the near absence of political structures in the Diaspora and in view of the pluricultural and multilocal nature of the nation from the earliest times, the consciousness of Armenian identity focused on the unit or the monad, which could be as big as a kingdom and as small as the community or the family. This was primarily a feeling of being part and making sense of the Armenian identity system or the Metasystem, complicated as it was by the absence of a homeland, a political structure, language, etc. It was a 'monadic' sense of identity and action in accordance with the almost Leibnitzian monadic 'system'. This complex Metasystem, which was both a concept and process, was eventually mythified. This paper is an attempt to re-conceptualize the modern nation in this context.

The modern Near Eastern diaspora: the 'flux' and the 'fix'

What most Armenian historians seem to overlook is that the modern Near Eastern diaspora has always been part of the Armenian *ecumene* in the Islamic world,

where they obviously were one of the religious minorities.[9] When the survivors of the 1915 Genocide arrived in the Arab world, the paradigm of historic memory was simply revived: the people in all locations received and protected the refugees despite orders from the Ottoman administration to complete the task of obliteration. These fragments settled and prospered in the locations where their ancestors had been many centuries earlier.[10] No attempts were made to dissolve or eradicate Armenian ethnicity within the larger political units in which they had minority status. No religious persecution or assimilation was exercised against Armenians in the Islamic world. The classical language was used in church liturgy; the vernacular and dialects were very much alive. The *mythomoteur* found expression in the arts and literature. The diaspora communities prospered economically and stood out on account of their education, occupational specialization, folklore and traditions.

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[9] McLaurin defines a minority group as 'any body of persons with a sense of cohesion who, taken together, constitute less than one-half the population of any entity. ... Generally, we tend to think of minority groups as identity groups, such as religious, racial, or linguistic communities'. (McLaurin 1979: 5.)

[10] See Alboyajian, 1941, 1955, 1961. After the fall of Manzikert in 1071 to the Turks, Mayyafāriqīn became a Christian city of Armenians and Syriacs. The valley of the Orontes in north Syria had many Armenian villages (Alboyajian 1955: 446). Antioch, Lattakieh (in 1179, bishop Sargis) and Aphamia (1179 Bishop Costantin) had their Armenian bishops as of the tenth century (ibid.: 449). Suweida (five villages), Jisr al-Shughur, Ghenaya, Ya'qubiye, Kasab founded around the eleventh to twelfth centuries (ibid.: 450). Before the end of the century, Fatimid Egypt had a community of one hundred thousand. Aleppo started attracting Armenians after its fall to the Mongols in 1259 and the armies of the Cilician King Hetum I. The city had an Armenian community as of the eleventh century, and for six years, from 1016 to 1022, its governor was an Armenian known as 'Aziz al-Dawla. During the fourteenth century the city became an Armenian center between the north and the Holy city (ibid.: 451). There were Armenians in Tripoli, too, during 1232, judging from the diaries of a Dominican priest (ibid.: 453). As of 1222, the Armenians had a special hotel in Jerusalem. (ibid.: 456). There were many in Karak and east of the Dead Sea. There were many Armenians in the Kurdish Ayyubis and among the Mamluks despite the negative attitudes of both towards the Armenians. During the late thirteenth century (ibid.: 469) there were Armenians living in Egypt: in the fourteenth century, when Cilician King Levon V was taken there by the Mamluks in 1375 (ibid.: 470), his hosts were compatriots. Large communities had formed in all countries of the Near East by the fifteenth century. The fate of the nation was particularly somber following the deportation of large factions into north Iran by Shah Abbas during the early years of the seventeenth century. In these locations they were caught in regional conflicts between Iranians, Turks and the Russians.

However, circumstances were different during the Ottoman period, and in the later periods in particular. Under the pretext of the requirements of the Islamic *umma,* various ethnic groups became targets of Turkicization. Perpetual harassment and brutalities were practiced for centuries. Responses to discrimination included various strategies and mechanisms, even at times joining the Kurds and Arabs.[11] The 'religious definition of the Armenian people'[12] was a consequence of the *millet* system; after the 1863 National Constitution for the Armenian *millet,* the Patriarch of Constantinople was their sole representative.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Armenian intelligentsia prepared the ground for a nationalist movement and armed struggle flared up in the eastern provinces of Turkey or the historic land of the nation. 'The link between a problematic geography and an inferior demography suggested military weakness', comments Nisan.[13] Early nineteenth century slogans of 'Liberty or Death' eventually mobilized the Black Cross movement in Van then Erzrum 1878-1881. Massacres of 1894-96 took the lives of three hundred thousand Armenians and the world stood by and watched. 'At the dawn of the 20th century, the Armenians had awakened to the awesome task of making their own national history', which was now secularized and internationalized. The Genocide of 1915 was one way the Turks used to 'keep the parts of their crumbling empire together', although it was also part of a 'long history of Turkish racism'.[14]

The first Republic of Armenia was proclaimed in 1918, after over six centuries of no national state and a loss of almost half the nation. Two years later, Hajun in Cilicia was devastated by Atatürk. At the same time, and as a consequence of international politics in the Near East, a great exodus took the population of Cilicia, the Euphrates and the Tigris into Syria and other parts of the world. The Treaty of Sèvres (August 10, 1920) failed to persuade Turkey to recognize an independent Armenia; the Treaty of Lausanne (July 24,1923) made no mention of an independent Armenia, the six *vilayets* were a Turkish 'security zone' (Erzrum, Bitlis, Van, Diārbekir, Kharbert, Sivās). Armenia was part of the Soviet Union.

In the mid-1970s and early1980s, as the Arab world saw liberation movements, Armenians, too, launched some of their own: in 1975, ASALA (Armenian Secret

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[11] Alboyajian 1961: 65.
[12] Nisan 1991: 136.
[13] ibid.: 138.
[14] ibid.: 143-144.

Army for the Liberation of Armenia) and in the 1980s the Dashnak GCAG (Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide) working for the realization of an independent Armenian homeland in the lost lands of the Western Provinces and in defiance of Turkish Pan-Turanism. 'Meanwhile, Armenian life...continued with a linguistic, cultural, and artistic vitality on three continents ...Armenian identity is solid and independent of extraneous circumstances ...And all along, remembering the genocide and propagandizing against the Turks fill Armenians with unforgettable pain and unbounded purpose'.[15]

What is it that sustained the persecuted and segregated Armenian minorities in semi-rural areas of eastern Turkey, where all sorts of discrimination policies were applied over several centuries? To mention a few, there were 'negative (repressive) segregation', enforced 'acculturation politics' to pressure them into internalizing the language and culture of the majority, 'assimilation politics' to reduce differences, and outright physical persecution.[16] 'It is not the image of a more legitimate identity, says Liebkind, which motivates people to stick to their identity aspirations ...it is their image of what is desired and valued' acting as a 'motivating force behind persistent identity negotiations'.[17] This 'desired image', ambiguous and folkloric as it may seem, was maintained through strict closure, a common mechanism practiced by Armenians in the Ottoman East.

Minority discrimination, radical as it seems, often becomes a shortcut mechanism to assist the group to be distinguished and persists by the choice of the 'other'. Once segregated, alternative channels to express and develop identity will evolve and a U-turn back to the oppressive majority will be made by the group, this time with claims of even more substantial rights of recognition than expected otherwise. Indeed, over and above the so-called categories of separate peoplehood or 'national identity', it is minority experiences and reactions that metamorphose into mythified images of identity and function as stimuli both for the individual and the group. The success of many Armenians under Ottoman rule and the diasporic centers in general, is now an integral part of their identity and the modernized *mythomoteur*. The latter is now simply the expression of the dynamics between the opening and closure, between the majority and the minority and

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[15] ibid.: 155.
[16] For minority policies see Dahlstrøm 1971.
[17] Liebkind 1984: 72.

actions and reactions on both sides; new myths of identity are now added to the classic *mythomoteur*.

The massacres of 1894-1896, then 1915 (about which there is no mention in the 1978 document on minorities issued by the UN Human Rights Commission) created a new epic for the nation with powerful images and sets of bigger-than-just-Armenian values for the world to deal with in the twentieth century. The event united the survivors around claims for a right to posterity achieved by the blood of the martyrs and victims. While almost five centuries of Ottoman rule had at times flattened the *mythomoteur* into mere folklore in rural areas, the Genocide brought together the various levels of the nation into a singularity of unprecedented coherence. Just as a forest fire is a phase in the cycle of the life of the forest, the Genocide created the modern Armenian Diaspora from the shores of the Pacific in the west to the Tigris and the Nile in the Near East. Post - Genocide diaspora culture grew out of this devastation and restructured the *mythomoteur* with a concept of death/resurrection.

In the pre - Genocide era, the concept of a historic homeland was diffused in the vast Armenian *ecumene*, but for the survivors 'in exile', the concept took specific content. Each individual, family and community came from a specific locality that was 'home'. Nostalgia towards both rural and urban habitats is now a potent element in the Armenian Identity System. The last representatives of the post-genocidal intelligentsia died within the last decade of the twentieth century; their legacy is a wealth of literature, art and cultural symbols around the single theme of the 'lost home', the locus of national identity. Coping with the pan-national tragedy created a work-area, as it were, for the diaspora communities in the Near East to forge ways of persisting. The traditional Armenian minority ideals of excelling in education, skills, crafts and education, lifted both the individual as well as the community above refugee status.

However, there is a very broad terrain between existence as a successful minority and a politically active group of citizens. The Armenians were granted citizenship, and through extra-political careers soon emerged as one of the most constructive of all the minorities living in these Islamic countries. In a study on the minorities in the Middle East, W. Y. Adams says that Armenians, like the Greeks, were the most educated. They particularly excelled in crafts requiring precision, and professions that needed university education, similar to the Jews in the US.[18]

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[18]   Adams 1981: 9.

Of all the Near Eastern minorities, as McLaurin observes, 'Armenians have shown the highest degree of assimilation of capabilities among the minorities', and like the rest, they too were unlikely to be assimilated.[19]

In a comparative table on patterns of Adaptation of Dispersed Minorities in the Middle East, Armenians display the following features: attachment to the idea of an original homeland; urban residence; a high level of education and training; full literacy; pursuit of enrollment in learned professions; financial entrepreneurship; petty trades; technically skilled crafts; no manual crafts; no domestic services; no 'despised' professions; high and intermediate economic status.[20] The massive and abrupt dispersal of Armenians provided them with opportunities to have access to and excel in certain occupations and with chances for growth and adaptation. In the case of economically advantaged minorities - the Greeks, Armenians, Chaamba and some Jews, says Adams, it is easy to accept the primacy of economic motivation. Obviously it is the cultural and social circumstances of being Greeks, Armenians, and so on, with all the implications of educational and communicative advantages, that allowed them to dominate in highly lucrative areas of commercial and professional life; the economic advantages of minority status may be assumed to have outweighed the social disadvantages.[21]

Similar to other minorities in the evolution of Muslim countries, Armenians did make their contribution too, and were highly appreciated by the respective societies. The obstinate question however imposes itself: how and to what degree were the Armenians politicized in the Near Eastern countries? And next, was full politicization ever considered by them as a 'persistence mechanism'?[22] The answer may be partially provided by what follows.

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[19] McLaurin 1979: 263.
[20] Adams 1981: 14.
[21] ibid.: 22.
[22] The following passage from Nisan presents a view on the subject about the role of minorities in the development of the Near Eastern countries: 'Almost by definition, a minority lives a marginal existence in opposition to the fullness, or potential fullness, of the life of a majority people. Unable to achieve all its aspirations because of a deficiency of resources and opportunities, the minority lives in a world of discontinuous experiences. Success in one area cannot be repeated in other areas; the minority must find its niche, an opening to exploit, but not the gateway toward completeness. In this fractured reality alternative avenues must be reckoned and difficult choices made. Not everything can be done or won. The minority suffers from incoherence, extracting its victories and yet accommodating to deprivation that cannot be totally eliminated....In the Middle East, minority survival was never equivalent to minority

'Both the source and the continued existence of a people', says Spicer, 'appear to lie in an "oppositional process".'[23] The 'degree of opposition is a critical variable in the survival of the enclaved peoples', because too much stimulates hostility and too little will lead to their assimilation.[24] Closure is not a winning game, and it has never helped the survival of political groups. the creation of 'viable niches' for survival will cost minorities a higher human and economic price than adaptation will. Eventually individuals may refuse to pay this price and the groups will lose them. But 'the thing that survives and must survive is the identity system itself, and this system must maintain a minimal structure and a minimal membership. The enclave may lose many, even most, of its members, but as long as a core endures to preserve continuity the people remains. Membership can always increase if the core is intact, but if *all* structures are broken and *all* the membership is dispersed, the people ceases to exist.'[25] Having said that, in Near Eastern countries there is a more systemic problem: allegiance to the nation-state is counterbalanced with that to the clan, tribe, or *ethnie*. In addition, citizenship rights within oppressive regimes is a further complication.[26] Minorities that stand at a greater variance of culture than the rest - like the Armenians in the Islamic world, will encounter difficult choices. Despite special cases of success, minorities may not often attain an advantageous status and the ultimate question remains 'Why would they want to persist?'.[27]

Nationalistic ideals 'derive their power not from a sober historical assessment, but from the way events, heroes and landscapes have been woven by myth, memory and symbol into the popular consciousness. For the participants in this drama, ethno-history has a "primordial" quality, or it is power-less'.[28] In the case of Armenians, the reason why they should want to persist as a modern nation is precisely the 'landscape' of the Genocide and the perpetual loss of membership

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power holding. Elemental existence was ensured by the exertion of collective will to preserve the ethnic, cultural, and historic specificity of each minority group. Primitive strength, inwardness, and separateness were key ingredients always. Political horizons were limited, but tactical agility was impressive.' (Nisan 1991: 255).

[23]   Spicer 1971: 797.
[24]   Castile and Adams 1981: xx.
[25]   ibid.: xxi.
[26]   Dannreuther 1999: 144.
[27]   Castile and Adams 1981: xxi.

[28]   Smith 1990: 182.

vital for the persistence of the *ethnie*. Survival became a central ideal and a pivotal concept of the post-Genocide myth of the nation and its identity system. This is how the Armenians interpreted the event of mass annihilation and reacted to it. Counteraction to the Genocide is a new element in the Metasystem as one of its oppositional mechanisms. Individual strategies varied from withdrawal to apostasy, to creating occupational niches, to emphasising folklore and ritual,[29] and sometimes to complete enclosure in a ghetto. One of the most current policies of the Armenian diaspora is the partial metamorphosis of the *millet* system and the significance of the Church as a representative institution. The Catholicosate of Cilicia in Lebanon and of All Armenians in Armenia assumed leading roles. Naturally, the confessional structure of Lebanese society provided ideal conditions for this to happen and in Armenia at present, the new zeal for the Apostolic faith as the essence of the nation, after seventy years of communism, is another issue.

Despite an otherwise perfect coexistence with the local Arabs in the various Near Eastern centers, the Armenians seemed to be politically unprepared to assume 'political' citizenship. They fell back on 'surrogate' cultural-social institutions of their own. These were the church, the school, the cultural/sports/social clubs, and above all the political parties. These surrogate structures of which the Armenians were virtual citizens functioned as long as no pressing problems disturbed the conspicuous dichotomy between 'ethnic' citizenship in these structures and their citizenship in the given countries. During the fifties and sixties Armenians of the Near East had prospered to an unprecedented degree. But the biggest exodus of Armenians was recorded after the socialist-nationalist movements in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and a few other locations, the massive defeat of the Arab world by Israel, and especially, after the collapse of the Lebanese formula of coexistence in the early 1970s. The move was first from the surrounding areas to Lebanon, then considered a safe haven for all; the next phase took many thousands to France, North America, and some other countries.

The genesis of the nation-state – post-World War I and modern Armenia

Dichotomies between state and nation so typical of the Near East, are even more conspicuous in the case of minorities. The last part of the twentieth century saw the rise of 'nationalist' movements some of which involved ethnic minorities with

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[29]   Castile and Adams 1981: xix.

no state of their own. On the other hand, new 'nations' arose out of *de facto* states, and Arab nationalism is still another category in modern nationalism. Armenians constituted a modern nation-state in 1918 over a fraction of historic Armenia, three years after the annihilation of half the nation. The event was a corollary to the Genocide and politicized the culture almost immediately. Two years later, the Soviet Republic of Armenia simultaneously divided and united the nation politically into pro and anti-Soviet. New formulae of motherland/diaspora developed. The present Republic of Armenia is just another phase in its evolution through shifting centers of gravity on national and international levels. The paradigm of *nostos* to the land on which the massacres took place and from which all the Armenians were evacuated, remains unchanged as a basic human right.

In all cases, the independent Republic of Armenia as of 1991, is the new and ever changing element in the Metasystem. It took dramatic dimensions as it immediately followed the conflict in Garabagh. The cause and effect of this episode was the renewal of the claim for the historic homeland (an issue that was dormant in the Soviet system). As part of this land, Garabagh formed a bridge between the present and the past and brought the scattered parts of the nation together. The perpetuation of the struggle revived the paradigm of violence and martyrdom; new heroes emerged and new blood was spilled from the whole of the nation as men died both from Armenia and the diaspora.

The near-victory in Garabagh tabled the larger issue of citizenship in a modern nation-state and the status of the ideal 'citizen' of the Metasystem both inside and outside the Republic. For the first time perhaps, the problem of distinguishing between ethnicity and citizenship for separate peoplehood in a globalizing world was presented in its sharpest terms.[30]

The problem is as much 'national' as it is global. Indeed, globalization is the context in which the persistence of the *ethnie* and the significance of the nation-state will have to be reconsidered today. Ulf Hannerz joins many in believing that 'there is now one world culture' and that 'all the variously distributed structures of meaning and expression are becoming interrelated, somehow, somewhere'.[31] Consequently, 'the nation as imagined community and source of identity' may lose its significance in the face of globalization and what is called 'transnational

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[30] See Dannreuther 1999: 146-147.
[31] Hannerz 1996: 111.

structures'.[32] The scenario is particularly relevant to the smaller nation-states. But the problem is not as simple as another case of 'globalization versus ethnonationalism'. Everyone has realized by now that 'the nationalisms of the modern world are not the triumphant civilizations of yore'. Some may be 'ambiguous expressions' of both 'assimilation into the universal' and adherence to the particular. Indeed, it is almost a classical case of universalism through particularism, and particularism through universalism.[33] Even if a nation or an *ethnie* triumphs today the phenomenon should not be simplified to seeing it as a continuation of its past. The process is peculiar to the contemporary world and rules and criteria are systemic to the latter. As Bourricaud says, 'the process of modernization is ... the challenge hurled at groups closed in by their own contingencies and particularities to form themselves into an open ensemble of interlocutors and partners...'[34] This is the challenge facing Armenia both as a nation state and the natural vehicle for modern Armenian nationalism. Perhaps the most expressive statement in this context was Italian nationalist Massimo d'Azeglio's: 'We have made Italy', he said, 'now we have to make Italians'.[35]

More than ever before, identity now seems to refer to people's attempts to '"fix the flow" and mark boundaries in the ongoing flux of globalization processes.'[36] With a massive flow of emigrating Armenians from the homeland towards north America, the inflation of the American diaspora and the deflation of the Near Eastern communities, Armenians find themselves simultaneously as a nation-state, a minority in diaspora localities and as one of the 'persistent people' facing globalization. If survival through modernization is the ideal now, then the challenge is the manner in which Armenians as a Near Eastern modern nation and diaspora minorities will translate their specificities in a global yet typically Near Eastern historic sense.

The global and the national may, as they must, coexist throughout the world. Consequently, 'the dichotomy between the global and the national or ethnic is too crude and simplistic'.[37] Besides, globalization is 'not a single all-conquering homogenizing force', nor a recent phenomenon that has been overwhelming

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[32] ibid.: 81.
[33] Wallerstein 1984: 166-167.
[34] Bourricaud 1987: 21.
[35] See Hobsbawm 1990, Holton 1998: 144.
[36] Meyer and Geschire 1999: 7.
[37] Holton 1998: 160.

nation-states. It is a process of profound influences on 'patterns of social change'. Naturally, there cannot be a *tabula rasa* situation[38] and maintaining the continuity of the modern nation as an economically and politically viable project in a complex world is an ongoing process. 'Local thinking will persist', says Smith, 'because national myths and memories provide the group with its collective dignity and guard the nation against individual oblivion and collective disintegration'. For the mobilization of the vernacular and politicization of the culture, not just the intelligentsia but a new project for the nation is essential.[39] In this respect, the slogan which proposes to 'think globally, act locally'[40] must make sense.

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[38] ibid.: 146.
[39] Smith, 1990: 182-183.
[40] Holton 1998: 186.

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DEBATES ON KURDISH ETHNICITY IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY

Lale Yalçın-Heckmann

In international discussions about Turkey's role in and relationship to Europe, the status of Kurds and their political and cultural rights within the Turkish state are usually given much attention and consideration. How Turkish state and society have been debating the ethnicity and cultural status of the Kurds in Turkey is, however, not always common knowledge; it is generally assumed that the Turkish state does not recognise the cultural and political rights of the Kurds. The reasons are assumed to be related to the endemic nationalist ideology of the Turkish state. This article aims to show various ideological and political positions concerning Kurdish ethnicity and to summarise the development of these positions in Turkish political discourse since the 1980s. The thesis held in this article is that the debate on Kurdish ethnicity is a lively one, and being far from monolithic, embedded in oppositional ideological views and interests. The debating parties are not homogeneous and stable either; industrial business circles, who would normally be thought to be the logical and ideological opponents of a Marxist-Leninist organisation like the Kurdish Workers' Party, the PKK (*Parteyê Karkeren Kurdistan*) have been in the recent years, for instance, among the most articulate supporters for a peaceful solution to the conflict, such that the Kurds would be permitted to exercise various cultural rights. To introduce this complexity of positions and opinions, I begin with a citation from Şahin Alpay, a well known journalist and author of political studies in Turkey, who describes the continuing political and intellectual struggle in Turkey as follows:

> One could say that within the last twenty years Turkey has been debating how to fight against 'separatism', that is Kurdish separatism, and religious 'fundamentalism', that is those who aim to set up a religious state in Turkey. The parties taking sides within this debate firstly cannot agree on the nature of the danger. Depending on the point of view in power, both of these threats arise and are supported from 'outside', they are 'clear and close' threats. In order to overcome them, one needs to take imminent, forcible, extraordinary and authoritarian action. According to the views of the opposition, although these are significant and worrying 'threats', they remain marginal

movements; and their roots are primarily within Turkey. The policies of suppression, prohibition and their authoritarian nature in fact feed these movements.

Thus the debates focus on the question of methods. Those in power assume that the transition to democracy in Turkey occurred too soon. Therefore, Turkey, with its level of economic development and of education or its geopolitical position, is not ready to apply all the rules of a liberal constitutional and pluralist democracy. (..)

For these reasons the bureaucracy should hold the guardianship over democracy. Until the conditions are right, it is wrong to expect transparency from the governing body; it is normal 'to break the routine' (i.e. to suspend certain rights). If one were to dispute and use scientific arguments on these issues, this would mean nothing less than 'breaking the will to struggle'. Only the restrictive, authoritarian and suppressive methods produce results. Therefore freedom of expression can be limited and political parties suspended. (..)

According to the opposition, on the other hand, one cannot learn democracy under tutelage but only by living it. The conditions in Turkey do not hinder but necessitate democracy. The social, economic and cultural factors which may be posing 'threats' to democracy should be scientifically analysed; problems should be discussed without denying the realities. There should be no limitation to the freedom of expression and organisation, as long as these are exercised non-violently. No opinion should be pushed underground. One should try to get to the roots of problems instead of occupying oneself with their appearances. It is wrong to equate the demand for the recognition of Kurdish identity with separatism; or Islamic religion with 'fundamentalism'. In fact one should do just the opposite, that is develop policies which help to distinguish between these issues. (..)

The duty of the bureaucracy should be to defend justice. If the state adheres to justice, then society adheres to it as well. The strength of the state could be best measured not by its ability to

apply restrictions and pressure, but by the sincere loyalty of its citizens to the state.[1]

This long passage gives in a nutshell the variety of dimensions of the discourse on Kurds in Turkey. It situates the debates on Kurdish ethnicity or on religious fundamentalism within the framework of debates on the nature of democracy Turkey has and needs. Furthermore Alpay points out the dialectical nature of these debates as continuously contested and reformed positions.

Some of the themes from this passage deserve further exploration and analysis. Concepts like 'threat to state and democracy' or 'separatism' and the role of the state vis-à-vis society are recurrent themes in most of the debates on Kurds in Turkey. The two poles of opinion, described in the citation, concerning the stability and future of the Turkish state recur in all the public discussions on the Kurdish issue. I propose to look at these debates under three headings: debates related to the nature of the conflict between the Kurds and the Turkish state; debates related to the background of the conflict; and finally debates concerning the future of this problem.

1. The nature and the origins of the conflict

Concerning the nature and the origins of the conflict, there are different ways of interpreting the place of the recent conflict in time and history. **To begin with**, to some, the conflict, by which is meant here the armed struggle of the militant Marxist Leninist Kurdish organisation, the PKK (*Partiyê Karkeren Kurdistan*), against the Turkish state and military, beginning in 1984 and formally continued until 1999 – even if some fighting still occurs -, is only one, and the longest one, of a series of armed rebellions by Kurds against the Turkish regime(s), from the Ottomans to the contemporary Turkish Republic. This position is often taken not only by the supporters of the PKK and of other Kurdish nationalists but also by some academicians and by the Turkish left. However, the leader of the PKK distinguishes his own movement as the first real and widespread nationalist one and classifies the earlier uprisings as being more local and regionalist, serving the interests of local Kurdish elites, *mîr*s (princes) and sheikhs.[2] According to this view, the PKK was able to mobilise the Kurdish people by awakening their national pride and consciousness, offering them an organisation following a Stalinist model and challenging the

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[1]   Alpay, Şahin *Milliyet* 17.8.2000.
[2]   Cited in: İnsel 2000:51, quoting Abdullah Öcalan, *Kürt-Türk İlişkileri Üzerine Barış ve Demokrasi Konuşmaları 1988-1999*, İstanbul, 1999: 31.

mighty Turkish military and state structures at least with partial success. Hence Kurds are conceived to be a people, who were intimidated from claiming their national identity and were suppressed and deprived of their national and cultural rights. In this view, the border between the ethnic and national aspirations of the Kurdish movement is mostly ambivalent and strategically drawn.

The second opinion concerning the nature of the conflict is that it is not an ethnic or national problem but one of underdevelopment of the south-eastern region of Turkey. Accordingly, the underdevelopment of this area is exploited by extremist groups and misused for purposes of agitation. The underdevelopment of this region is, otherwise, only a result of bad governmental policies, but not a result of ethnic discrimination. This position recognises the ethnic difference of the Kurds, but does not consider this difference to be of fundamental importance for past and future policies. Kurds, therefore, are considered to be an integral element of Turkish society, and as often formulated by prominent politicians like Ecevit or Demirel, they are 'first class citizens' of the Turkish state, thus emphasising equal citizenship instead of ethnic discrimination and differential treatment.

A third position on the nature of the conflict can be said to be a mixture of the first two positions: according to this view, the conflict does indeed originate in the underdevelopment of the south-eastern region, but Kurdish ethnicity has also been an important factor in this underdevelopment. The Turkish state has failed to fulfil the demands of the Kurdish people, who have suffered from dismal governmental policies as well as exploitation from their own traditional elites. Recognising Kurdish ethnicity as a significant factor in addition to the misgovernment and underdevelopment of the region are, therefore, the central elements of this position, which could be said to be the overall position of the social democratic party of Deniz Baykal and his colleagues.

The Islamist positions of the major political parties in Turkey concerning the Kurdish issue are again a mixture of the above positions, and have been changing, depending on how close the parties have been to coming to power. It should be added, however, that the Islamists recognise Kurdish ethnicity even if they see it as a by-product of Turkish nationalist policies, which try to emphasise Turkish ethnic and national identity. They claim that, such an identity is exclusionist compared to an Islamic identity, which would be inclusive without denying Kurdishness, hence the separate ethnic identity.

2. *Debates related to the background of the conflict*

These debates on the origins and nature of the conflict concerning the Kurds in Turkey are usually accompanied by discussions and contestations concerning the background and the history of the conflict. In general there are four points of contestation, which involve academic as well as political concerns and statements: a) the state and nature of the Kurdish language, b) the issue of the ethno/racial origins of the Kurds, c) the issue of culture, d) the issue of history.

The state and nature of the Kurdish language – although a topic, which should ideally be discussed by the experts and linguists – is a highly controversial issue, especially when it is linked to the Kurdish nationalist movement or to the cultural policies of the Turkish state. As is well known from other nationalist movements and in relation to nation-building processes, language as an ethnic and national marker is highly significant. Hence the origins, the development and the richness of the Kurdish language, and the processes of its spreading out and borrowing from other languages of the area are themes which are of interest not only to linguists. At one extreme of the range of theories about the Kurdish language, one could mention the position held by Turkish nationalist political parties, that Kurdish is a language which shares common roots with the Turkish language but which got isolated and hence developed into a different dialect amongst the 'mountain people'. At the other extreme, some Kurdish cultural nationalists, for instance, provide equally far-fetched and magnificent theories, claiming Kurdish to be one of the original Indo-European languages, which spread out from Asia to the world.[3] Although these are extreme and rather idiosyncratic positions, it should be noted that such debates influence the common understanding of the Kurdish language as a language which should be supported by the state's cultural politics. Such arguments create confusion and uncertainty when demands are put forward to the Turkish state concerning media in the Kurdish language. Anti-Kurdish arguments, for instance, support the view that it would be unfair to the speakers of smaller Kurdish dialects, if a state supported TV channel were to broadcast and hence disseminate only one dominant dialect.

The issue of the ethno/racial genesis of Kurds in Turkey is another controversial topic, which again is of concern not only to academics. The debates are based on identifying Kurds as a distinct ethno-racial group,

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[3] One of the most famous supporters of this view has been Musa Anter, who argued Kurdish language and culture to be the source of the languages and cultures of the Middle East, the 'cradle of mankind'. See Musa Anter, *Ülke ve Gündem Yazıları*, İstanbul, 1996, cited in İnsel, Ahmet 2000: 54.

separated from other ethnic and religious groups in the region through a long history. The debates are usually related to explicit or implicit claims to 'authenticity' or 'purity' despite long residence and hence distinctiveness or origins and culture. The extreme Turkish nationalist position on this issue has been characterised recently by Tanıl Bora and Kemal Can[4] as being a position of ambivalence, of both exclusion and inclusion. The inclusive position supports – to put it simply – the view that Kurds are descendants of Turkic tribes from Central Asia. The exclusive position, although following the common origins theory, sees the separatist Kurdish movement as a real threat and hence excludes them from the Turkish 'nation' as having another national spirit, no longer sharing the ideal of unity under the Turkish state. So the exclusionist position reflects the reinterpretation and in fact the process of rewriting Kurdish ethno-genesis under the pressure of contemporary political concerns and tensions.

The issue of Kurdish culture is mostly conceived as a theme connected to debates on the origins of Kurds. It has, however, less weight and significance in political discourse on Kurds in Turkey, although some cultural signifiers of the Kurdish political movement like *nevruz* (the traditional New Year celebrated by many Iranian, and also Turkic peoples, as well as the Kurds) has had a very interesting fate of being suddenly acclaimed as a 'real' and 'authentic' Turkish celebration and custom, which had been somewhat forgotten. Hence, even customs and cultural traditions can be objects of politicisation and of adverse political struggles. Maybe I should add here that in fact, some cultural signifiers, like certain colours claimed by the Kurdish political movement to be 'their' colours as found on their national flag, or the usage of some names as signifying Kurdish rather than Islamic or Turkish identity have sometimes led to severe conflicts in public and private domains. One of the best known public debates and controversial issue about the use of 'Kurdish colours' has been the colours used by a woman MP, Leyla Zana, of the pro-Kurdish party DEP as she was taking her oath as a member of the newly elected parliament in mid-1990s. She was strongly criticised for making a 'separatist' claim and using the colours of the Kurdish nationalists.

Debates relating to the history of Kurds in Turkey can hardly be thought of separately from debates on Kurdish origins, language and culture. But under this heading I would like to draw attention to a further dimension of the discourse on Kurds in Turkey; namely that various interpretations of Ottoman

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4   Bora, Tanıl & Can, Kemal 2000 'MHP'nin güç kaynağı olarak Kürt meselesi' in: *Birikim*, Haz.-Temmuz, No.134-135, pp.56-72.

and Republican history in Turkey suggest a strong involvement of 'foreign' elements in the relationship between the Kurds and the Turkish state(s). Turkish nationalist interpretations of the Kurdish movement usually take the activities of the European missionaries within the Ottoman Empire,[5] as the starting point for their arguments, accusing and developing a demonising discourse on the international links of the Kurdish movement. Kurds can in this way be represented as 'the enemy within' by Turkish nationalist circles. Turkish communists, on the other hand, have been accusing the Kurdish movement for being 'the tools of imperialist powers', again underlying the international links as the basis of their allegations. That the international dimensions of the Kurdish issue in Turkey are relevant to the Kurds themselves could be seen in the recent demands by the PKK and other Kurdish political activists. Accordingly, Turkey should adhere to the conditions set by various international treaties like that of the Copenhagen Summit on membership to the European Union (1993). Here Turkey is expected to carry out certain measures within its legal system, like recognising a form of cultural and political rights for ethnic and religious groups within the country.

3. Debates on the future of the Kurdish issue in the country

Here the views vary depending on positions taken in relation to the above points. **The first view** is that Turkey will solve its problem with the Kurds by speeding up the democratisation processes of Turkish state and society. This brings us back to the position described by Şahin Alpay above. How democratisation should proceed and what sort of consequences it should have for the Kurds are issues increasingly being debated. One view proposes some sort of cultural autonomy for Kurds without giving them the status of an ethnic minority, as this status is already legally defined in relation to the minorities recognised by the Lausanne Treaty in 1924. (The minority status was given to the largest non-Muslim minorities in Turkey: Jews, Armenians and Greeks.)[6] An alternative model for effective democratisation involves strengthening regional administrative structures to a certain extent, so that some kind of regional autonomy could be achieved and the demands of Kurds could hence be more effectively dealt with. What is significant in these models is that they do not see a thorough change of the Turkish state as a necessity.

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[5]   See Bruinessen, van Martin 1992, for a discussion of the role of the missionaries in awakening the aspirations of Kurdish nationalists.

[6]   For a discussion of this point of the status being already 'occupied' by other groups in the Turkish legal system, see Kirişçi 1998.

The second view concerning the future of the Kurdish issue in Turkey follows the position favouring an authoritarian state, as suggested by Alpay above. Accordingly, the Kurdish separatist movement started and developed as a terrorist organisation with international links, so it should be handled as such, that is fought against as an international terrorist organisation. This position seems to be the dominant, but not the only one, among the Turkish army as well as among some politicians close to the army. The paradox of this position is of course the total neglect of the social dimension of the conflict, for Kurds as well as Turks. The army seems to favour a rather naïve division of labour between the military and politicians, saying that once the army has done its job, it will withdraw and the politicians as well as Turkish industrialists and bureaucrats should only then come and deal with the social dimensions of the problem. Let me name a few of these problems: the devastation of the pastoral economy, of tourism and of the rural economy in general, due to the war lasting fifteen years, displacement, forced and voluntary migration of millions of people, mostly from rural settlements to big cities, not to mention the mistrust and resentment which has arisen on both sides in this conflict.

The third view suggested a thorough and radical change of the Turkish state for the Kurdish issue to be resolved. In this view, it was necessary to change the structure of the unitarian Turkish state either to a socialist Marxist or an Islamic federational type. These models which were proposed by the PKK or its pro-Islamic wing now seem to be outdated. The PKK seems to have changed its fundamental position on this issue and favours now a 'democratic Republic of Turkey' (*demokratik cumhuriyet*), where Turks and Kurds are given equal weight and equivalent status as 'the primary founding elements' (*asli kurucu unsur*) of the Turkish Republic.[7]

Concluding, I have tried to give a rough outline of a variety of positions concerning Kurdish ethnicity in contemporary Turkey. I have tried to illustrate the complexity of discourse, with its links to state traditions, history, political movements and self-definitions of ethnic groups. I should add that all of these positions reflect the multi-dimensional quality of ethnic relations and processes. In the case of the Kurds in Turkey, these have been embedded into the social dynamics of the change from a multi-ethnic imperial state system to a Unitarian republic, and into the processes of nation-building and democratisation.

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[7]   See İnsel, Ahmet 2000.

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THE ASSYRIANS.
THE FORMATION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY IN A DIASPORA COMMUNITY

Christiane Lembert

The Syrian Christians[1] were domiciled in an area more or less corresponding to ancient Syrian Mesopotamia, now Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Lebanon. Later they spread to the Iranian highland, south India (the so-called Thomas-Christians), and Central Asia and China. The eastern dioceses have been defunct since mediaeval times. Within this region there is a small territory in South-East Anatolia, the Tur Abdin, also called North-Mesopotamia or Beth Nahrin. Most of the Syrian Christian migrants in Germany come from the Tur Abdin, a mountainous landscape that borders the Tigris River in the north and east and the Syrian-Mesopotamian plain in the south. The Tur Abdin is a 'multi-ethnic and multi-denominational contact zone'.[2] In translation, Tur Abdin means 'mountain of [God`s] servants'. Almost all of the migrants from there belong to the Syrian-Orthodox Church. Their classic language is Aramaic. The inhabitants of the Tur Abdin speak north-west Aramaic or

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[1]   The Syrian Christians are divided into West Syrian and East Syrian Christian, also known as Jacobites and Nestorians respectively. The official names of these churches are the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and the Orient in general and the Old Apostolic Church of the East. According to their geographical and political distribution members of the Syrian Orthodox Church were called West Syrian; members of the Old Apostolic Church East Syrians. They share Syriac as their liturgical language but there are disagreements in their teachings. (Yonan 1989: 11). The West Syrians use West-Syriac, and the East Syrians East-Syriac, the main difference being in the pronunciation of some vowels. Following the Council of Chalcedon in 451, which could not settle the theological differences, the Christians of the Persian Empire adopted the theology of Nestorios' teacher Theodore. The designation 'Nestorian' is misleading: the Christians in Syria and North-Mesopotamia, i.e.the Roman Empire, were divided into Chalcedonians and Monophysites: the latter were organised as a church by Jacob Baradai. The 'Jacobites' are the 'West-Syrians' or Syrian-Orthodox, the Chalcedonians are Greek-Orthodox. The former seat of Antiochia has three patriarchates: the West-Syrian, the Greek-Orthodox and the Maronite. These churches (including the East-Syrian) have a branch which concluded a union with Rome in the past. Assyrian interlocutors reject the terms 'Jacobites' or 'Nestorians' because they regard them as abusive and an invention of western scholars.
I should like to thank Professor Jürgen Tubach (Martin-Luther-University, Halle) for his comments concerning religious and linguistic terms.

[2]   Armbruster 1999: 33.

Turoyo[3], a branch of modern Eastern Aramaic: it is a development of classical Aramaic with an admixture of Kurdish, Turkish and Arabic.[4]

Mesopotamia has always been a territory of great political and strategic importance and the Christians lived mostly as a minority in a non-Christian society.[5] In addition to external attacks or persecution, different beliefs, e.g. regarding the nature of Christ, created internal dissent. The formation of different Christian confessions or churches among the Syrian Christians had not only ecclesiastical but also political causes. I do not want to go any deeper into these issues as my subject covers the contemporary situation. Nevertheless, I consider these issues important because the intermingling of political and ecclesiastical power and the struggle for influence in both areas within the community can also be observed in the countries of migration.

Denotation

Denotation is a constant source of confusion: the groups in question have been known under a variety of names: Syrians, Assyrians, Aramaeans, Nestorians - and that is only mentioning those better known. Behind these various names lurk specific religious, national or ethnic attitudes and considerations. In Turkey the Christians call themselves almost exclusively Suryoye (Syrian or Syrian-Orthodox) or Suroye. The Turks call them Suryani, the Arabic pronunciation is Syrieny. I will use the terms Syrian[6] or Suryoye - corresponding to their common meaning - as synonyms for Christians and as a neutral denotation of overriding importance.

The names 'Assyrian' or 'Aramaean' refer to the historical roots that some Suryoye wish to emphasise. They see themselves as the descendants from the ancient Assyrians and Aramaeans of old Mesopotamia. At the end of the nineteenth century, the term 'Assyrian' acquired special significance. A sort of European enthusiasm regarding the Orient explains the interest of western societies in this region. Henry Layard is assumed to be the inventor of the

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[3] Yonan describes the language as 'Westneusyrisch' (new West-Syrian). Nearly every village has its own dialect (Yonan 1989: 7). The Christians themselves call their language Suryoyo.

[4] Most of the Suryoye are multi-lingual and speak several languages, like Turoyo, Kurdish, Arabic and Turkish. In some villages, like Idil (Hazach), Arabic is spoken as a first language; in other locations the villagers speak only Kurdish.

[5] See Björklund, 1981: 13.

[6] The term Syrian has nothing to do with an affiliation to the modern state of Syria but refers to the Syrian language, which became the literary medium of the early Christian culture in that area. See Armbruster, 1999: 32.

ethnonym 'Assyrian'. His excavations of ancient Niniveh brought him into
contact with the Christians (so-called Nestorians) of the Mosul plain. He
believed them to be the descendants of the ancient Assyrians. The emergence
of modern European nationalisms in the nineteenth century and their spread in
Asia and Africa gave rise to a national movement among the Christians of the
Syrian Churches.[7] Today, a lot of Syrian Christians call themselves Assyrians,
despite their affiliation to different confessions.[8]

The 'birth' of an ethnic group and identity

I consider the 'rebirth' of the Assyrians as an ethnic group to be a sort of
ethnogenesis, meaning the birth of an ethnic group, and this may have come
about or been intensified by their history of migration. The designation
'Assyrian' is an attempt by the Christians to draw a clear dividing line between
them and the Muslim people of that area, or Muslim immigrants from the same
country. They define themselves as a group distinct from the majority
populations of the Middle Eastern states, such as the Iraqis or Turks. As
mentioned before, the formation of an Assyrian identity gained momentum in
the nineteenth century. 'Archaeological knowledge, together with its adoption
by missionaries provided the material on which later Assyrian nationalists
based their claims of descent from the ancient Assyrian people. In their search
for a secular authentic identity, they popularised the continuity of the Assyrian
"race" and "people".'[9] This would mean that the denotation 'Assyrian' was
given to the members of the East Syrian Christians. According to Madawi Al-
Rasheed, in the view of Anglican missionaries the name 'Assyrian' was also
chosen 'to distinguish these Christians [East Syrian Christians or Nestorians]
from the Jacobites to whom the name of "West – Syrians" was more
commonly given in the West....'[10] Although the term 'Assyrian' is still

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[7]   'Unter dem Einfluss anglikanischer Missionare in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts
      wurde ein Rückgriff auf eine Ethnie des Alten Orients gemacht und der Terminus
      „assyrisch" hinzugefügt. Im Zuge der Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts entstehenden
      assyrischen Nationalbewegung wurde dieses Attribut schließlich auch als
      Eigenbezeichnung angenommen' (Baum, Winkler: 2000, 11).

[8]   'The formation of the Assyrian movement as a national movement has its origins in the
      general awakening of national thoughts and the search for the roots of the people of the
      Near East since the last century' (Merten, 1997: 32 (Translation: C.L.).

[9]   Al-Rasheed, 1998: 43. The term 'Assyrian' surpassed also the heresy which was implicated
      by the term 'Nestorian'.

[10] Al-Rasheed, 1998: 40-41. See also: Joseph, John The Nestorians and their Muslim
      Neighbors. A study of western influence on their relations, Princeton, 1961: 14-15.

associated with the East Syrian Christians, followers of the West Syrian Church like the Syrian-Orthodox (a common but mistaken denotation is Jacobites) have a tradition of calling themselves 'Assyrians'. The first document of West Syrians in which the term Assyrian is used to name the community dates from 1899 and was published in the United States of America.[11] In the Tur Abdin the denotations Assyrian or Aramaean are rarely used.

Common western associations of 'home' with shelter, state support and, at least, a certain territory, do not fit the Suryoye image of the Tur Abdin. They remember their home as unsafe and their history as a history of resistance – not only resistance to hostile neighbours of different faiths or the political system but also resistance to changes in their Syrian-Orthodox rites. The Church provided the main shelter. That does not, however, mean that they lack affection for the Tur Abdin, for their villages, the landscape or their way of life. When the migrants left the villages of the Tur Abdin, they left more than just oppression and fear behind. They left evidence of an ecclesiastical history of nearly 2000 years in the form of churches and monasteries, scenes of miracles and legends and, of course, a social system. In the Tur Abdin they had constituted a fringe group between Muslim Turks or Muslim Kurds and Yezidis, based on the foundation of an austere religion. The Suryoye today consider themselves a historic people speaking Aramaic, the language of Jesus, and the guardians of the original Christianity so unlike western Christianity, which has been weakened by secular influences.

It must have been apparent to the migrating Suryoye that in the West, despite being among Christians, it is not religion but territory or national feelings that form the pillars of identity. Furthermore, ignorance of their background led their hosts to regard them as Turks, and therefore Muslims. Mentioning the name 'Assyrian' in Germany still causes astonishment: 'I thought those people died out thousands of years ago,' is a common remark. In addition, migrants have encountered Western individualism which is contradictory to the Suryoye perception of society, which prioritises the community over the individual.

The process of emigration (or flight) and settling in the West has had a deep impact on Suryoye self - perception. New forms of adaptation or acculturation

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[11] In a telephone conversation Gabriele Yonan told me of some new documents which prove that the West – Syrians were the initiators of the first Assyrian cultural association in the USA: refugees from Diyarbekir, Harput and Mardin (Turkey/Anatolia) founded the first Assyrian group. The missionaries (in the Near East) spoke of a 'mission in Assyria' and called the Christians 'Syrian Christians'.

and demarcation marking re-grouping and individualisation have emerged. The balance sheet of 'gain and loss' caused by migration is drawn depending on individual experience and group affiliation. In my observations the choice is not between 'either...or'; instead the juxtaposed categories of 'both....and' are simultaneously recognised. The question of self-definition or *Selbstverortung* is an important topic in the Internet discourses of the Suryoye.

> I have learned that the answer to the question "Who are we?", is that we are Christians because we adhere to the Christian faith. But that was not the question the authorities asked. They wanted to have a precise answer. To their insistent questions I replied that I was Syrian-Orthodox. But that was not the answer to the question either. ... I have to find new answers to the question concerning my identity, questions I did not ask before my time in the diaspora. In the diaspora they want to know what my nationality is, because nationality derives from identity. I have to define myself anew. The definition of being a Christian or Syrian-Orthodox Christian is not a definition of nationality, but a definition of religion and confession.... For us the denotation "Christian" was regarded as the identity. Because in Europe the term "identity", which at the same time determines nationality, means something quite different, we have to define ourselves anew, we have to inquire about our identity.[12]

Besides their *historical-religious identification* as a community, the Suryoye are discovering their *historical, cultural and national identification* as a community and forming an ethnic idea of being Assyrians – or Aramaeans. Assyrians often argue that it is necessary to be recognised as a nation (people) in order to be granted rights as an ethnic and religious minority. The Western image of 'feeling national' strengthens the genesis of their own national and ethnic identity. And this identity must have a common expression, must have a name: Assyrian.[13]

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[12] Aygün, Aziz 'Wer sind wir? Woher kommen wir?' (www.assyrian.de). (Translation: C.L.).

[13] What does national mean? or: are Assyrians an ethnic group (*Volksgruppe*) or a people (*Volk*)? They do not have their own state, which might be the condition of their being acknowledged as a nation. But they identify themselves as a people, a nation (*Volk* rather than *Volksgruppe*) with a common territory called Beth Nahrin (Mesopotamia). Furthermore they are politically active and fight for their rights both to be recognised as an ethnic minority (*nationale Minderheit*) and as a people. The phenomenon could also be called 'fictional national'.

The diasporic situation in Western countries allows space for both national and ethnic self-consciousness and gives the Assyrians a chance to review their own history, the Assyrian history. This is regarded as an advantage in contrast to their former home country, Turkey, where ethnic aspirations were severely suppressed. The teaching and learning of the language in its correct written and spoken forms – in their words: pure Aramaic without Arabic, Kurdish or Turkish loan words as it is spoken in the Tur Abdin dialect - and the documentation of their own culture is a new facet of their self-perception which was not considered necessary in the home countries. I assume that these circumstances contributed to a change from a theological 'vision of being a collective'[14] to a national one.

Thus the Assyrians' modern self-perception of being a national group has both an ethnic and a religious fundament. Both categories are rooted in history. Tradition, history and origin are cited as the fundamental markers of collective identity. The past is important to embed the individual in a collective flow of history, it is 'a priority moment in the socialisation of individuals and serves to construct or to question social forms of legitimacy.'[15]

The *Assyrians* in exile see themselves as an ethnic group with a national attitude. They are open to include members of all Christian churches - not exclusively Syrian-Orthodox or 'Nestorians', but also Chaldean, Syrian-Catholic, Rum-Orthodox etc.- in other words all those who originate from the regions of historic Mesopotamia: they lack a political state like the Armenians; and they consider the historic Assyrians to be their direct ancestors. Their historical image is dominated by the pre- Christian era. Symbols like the flag or the paintings they use for decorating their homes, official brochures etc. are taken from their Assyrian past like, for example, the ruins of Niniveh or the Isthar Gate or the figure of the winged bull with the head of a man and the wings of a bird.[16]

The *Aramaeans* used to belong exclusively to the Syrian-Orthodox Church. They also trace their roots back to the pre-Christian Aramaic people. They see the correctness of their theories of origin confirmed, among other things, by their language, Aramaic, which was the main language during the time of

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[14]   Armbruster 1999: 39.

[15]   Singer, 1997: 90 (translation: C.L.).

[16]   Several homepages of Assyrian organisations show a 'gallery', where actual paintings by Assyrian artists with motives of the antique Assyrian world and the persecution of the contemporary Assyrian people are juxtaposed (cf. www.assyrian.de).

Jesus.[17] They also have their own flag but emphasise the history of the Syrian-Orthodox Church. The 'Aramaean Movement' is a recently emerging reaction by some Syrian-Orthodox migrants to the national or ethnic identification patterns of the Assyrians. During the migration from Turkey to Europe, a serious split occurred between the two groups - Aramaeans and Assyrians - although the members of both groups came from the same villages, sometimes even from the same families and shared the same (Syrian – Orthodox) faith.

Some years ago in addition to the Assyrians and the Aramaeans a new movement within the Suryoye was formed. It is mainly supported by the young generation. They are not interested in disagreement over names and call themselves Assyrer/Aramäer/Chaldäer, or Assyrer-Suryoye or Dauronoye. Discussions range from ethnic origin – i.e. Assyrian – to the significance of geographical origin – Beth Nahrin (Mesopotamia). Members of this group are politically very active. The Assyrian and Aramaic associations display a variety of attitudes ranging from suspicion to outright rejection.

History of Migration

The migration of the Suryoye from Turkey (Tur Abdin) and Iraq is not a phenomenon of the last 35 years. What makes the exodus taking place since the 1980s special is its final, irreversible character: a lot of former Christian villages are abandoned or now inhabited by Kurds. Today in the Bavarian town of Augsburg there are as many Suryoye as in the whole Tur Abdin.

In the course of the recruitment of so-called guest-workers, the first Christians from Turkey came to Germany in the 1960s and 70s. Initially there was no major difference between the Turkish Christians and Muslims. They came to earn money and intended to return to Turkey. In the mid - seventies the situation in Turkey changed. The formation of the PKK and the growing influence of political Islam created a negative attitude towards Christians. Discrimination against them in their native Tur Abdin increased. They found themselves caught between the Kurds on the one side, and the Turkish army on the other side, whose abuse of Christians included confiscating their livestock,

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[17]   In the first and second centuries the Aramaic language spread together with Christianity into the eastern Mediterranean region as well as to the north of Mesopotamia. It became the *lingua franca* of the population which had converted to Christianity. Syrian became the literary medium of the early Christian culture of the Near East and 'Syrians' were the people who belonged to that culture. Their own designation 'Suryoyo' refers to this historical situation and has nothing to do with an affiliation to the modern state of Syria. (Armbruster 1999: 32. See also footnote 6. Translation: C.L.).

burning their houses or killing. After the end of the recruitment phase in 1973 many Christians applied for asylum in Europe and left their native country. Today about 2500 to 3000 Christians live in the Tur Abdin. This represents a sharp demographic decline compared to figures in 1960 of about 20,.000 to 25,000 and 200,000 at the beginning of the twentieth century. The persecution of Christian people in the lands of historic Mesopotamia over the centuries, the pinnacle of which were the massacres of the Christians, mainly Armenians, in Turkey during the First World War (1915) which became known as the *seifo* (year of the sword), plays an important role in their collective memory.

Many of the Suryoye coming to Europe had already experienced migration within their native country. They had left their villages for the big cities of Istanbul or Ankara to seek employment as labour migrants. In addition to higher income, the anonymity of a metropolis was estimated to be an advantage over the religious discrimination in the rural areas of the Tur Abdin. However, this opinion often turned out to be a delusion. Several Assyrians described their life in Istanbul to me as a succession of discrimination and fear.[18]

Migrants in Augsburg

In Europe, Germany and Sweden are the preferred countries of destination for migrating Suryoye. This is closely connected with the economic advantages offered to the guest workers and with chain migration. Augsburg, a German city with nearly 300,000 inhabitants, is considered today a 'stronghold' of the Assyrians. The headquarters of several Assyrian associations are situated here, like the 'Assyrian Democratic Organisation, Europe' (ADO) and the 'Zentralverband der Assyrischen Vereinigungen Deutschlands' (ZAVD, Central Federation of Assyrian Associations, Germany). The first Suryoye came to Augsburg in the mid-1960s. They built the core of the Augsburg community: three brothers from Barsibrin, two brothers from Enhil and one Suryoye from Midiyat. Up to today, migrants from these villages are in the majority amongst the Suryoye in Augsburg. The first migrants worked in the same factory and shared the huts near by. The possibility of integration into a Syrian-Orthodox community was cut off. To the Augsburg authorities the men claimed to be Roman-Catholics. This seemed to make things a lot easier and at the same time ruled out the possibility of their being mistaken for Muslim Turks. Social life was limited to the growing circle of migrant families. In 1971

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[18]   Apart from internal migration within Turkey many Suryoye went to Syria and Lebanon and from there to Europe.

in Augsburg the first Syrian Orthodox parish of Germany was established. In 1977 the priest of the parish, Bitris Ögunc founded a Syrian Centre, to teach the Aramaic language and religion to Assyrian children.[19]

Over the years the Suryoye have established several associations which work on a local, national[20] or international level. Local associations are united under umbrella organisations such as the *Augsburg Mesopotamien-Verein* (Augsburg Mesopotamian Association) which is a member of the *Zentralverband der Assyrischen Vereinigungen Deutschlands* (Central Association of Assyrian Associations of Germany). In Augsburg the following organisations are dominant:

1. *Mesopotamien - Verein*

In 1978, a group of Assyrians established the *Mesopotamien - Verein*, a cultural association. Its aims are as follows:
- to help Syrian-Christian compatriots who experience difficulties in the country of migration, e.g. in finding a job or accommodation, dealing with the authorities, translating at the doctor's or helping with other official business etc.
- to serve as a contact address for any personal or family problems, and to provide a sort of home and a meeting-point for Assyrian migrants in a strange environment. They established a youth club, a women's association, a folklore dance troupe, a football team, a theatre group and also organised lectures about social problems such as 'youth and drugs' or the role of women in a changing world.
- to cultivate the cultural heritage defined in terms of native language, traditions and religion but also in terms of recognising and disseminating a history connecting them to the ancient Assyrians.

From the very beginning, the founders of the Mesopotamia Association wanted to encourage integration into German, or rather Augsburg society. They worked together with several municipal authorities like the immigration office, the cultural office and some other associations. They tried to be present in local life and have succeeded in becoming well-known and respected in Augsburg. The *Mesopotamien - Verein* sells 'Assyrian Specialities' at city events. The Assyrian theatre group once performed two plays - one called 'Gilgamesh' the

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[19] See also Yonan 1978: 171 – 174.
[20] In this case 'national' refers to the state territory of the country of migration.

other 'Babylon' portraying stories from Assyrian history. Significantly, none of the Assyrian actors had ever heard of Gilgamesh before.

The founders of the *Mesopotamien-Verein* regarded the Association as a sort of Assyrian or Syrian Christian political representative. Since they do not perceive the Turkish state as their motherland nor do they regard the Turkish embassy as their representative, the founders of the *Mesopotamien-Verein* saw themselves as the advocates of the Assyrian people.

2. *The Syrian-Aramaic Association*

The Syrian - Aramaic Association was founded in 1982. Officially they also call themselves 'Syrians' or 'Suryoye' and are connected to the Syrian-Orthodox Church. Their aims and functions are quite similar to those of the Assyrians. Unlike the Assyrians, however, they do not co-operate enthusiastically with municipal institutions and show little presence in common city life. Like the Assyrian *Mesopoamien - Verein* they, too, are bound to an umbrella organisation.

3. *Smaller Groups*

In addition to these dominant groups, a number of smaller groups exist. In Augsburg there is an association of people from the village of Bsorino (Basibrin) called *Mar-Dodo-Verein*. Some consider themselves members of the politically active group of the Dauronoye, who call themselves 'Assyrer/Suryoye/Chaldäer' and who want to improve the situation for the Christians in their native countries.

4. *Assyrian Democratic Organisation*

While the *Mesopotamien - Verein* and the Aramaic Association both pursue social aims and the cultivation of Assyrian (Aramaic) culture and language, the Assyrian Democratic Organisation (ADO) has explicit political aims. The principles of the ADO are the basis for the national and ethnic self-perception of the Assyrians that expresses the characteristic features of a diasporic people in contrast to immigrants. I want to cite here some principles of their statutes:[21]
* *The Assyrian people are the LIVING and uninterrupted continuation of the people and the civilisation of Mesopotamia (Beth Nahrin) under its*

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[21] *Assyrische demokratische Organisation*, 2001. translation: C.L.

numerous denotations and through all historic periods: Sumerian, Babylonian, Chaldean, Assyrian, Aramaean and Syrian.... (2nd principle).

In other words, the Assyrians recognise the parallel use of different names but favour the term 'Assyrian'. As a consequence, they 'assyrianize' their culture and speak sometimes, for example, of the 'Assyrian language' (instead of the Aramaean language). The construction of historic roots which date back to ancient times is an important part of their self-consciousness. This topic is also expressed in the 3rd principle:

- *The historic home of the Assyrian people is the region of Mesopotamia...*
- *The Assyrian people have the right to enjoy their national and human rights in their birthplace* [Mesopotamia,] *and to live with all people in this territory in a democratic way of judgement and equality.* (4th principle)

These principles express the right (or claim) to possession of a certain country and at the same time the wish to live in peace with all peoples of this country.

- *On account of the extraordinary circumstances in the home country the Assyrian people temporarily live in countries of emigration and asylum. But the Assyrian people have the right to preserve their national identity (nationale Identität) in these countries. Thus they preserve their right to go back when the conditions are favourable.*

The tasks and aims of the Syrian-Aramean Association (*Vereinigung der syrisch-orthodoxen Aramäer in Augsburg*) do not differ much from those of the *Mesopotamien - Verein* regarding the preservation of culture and language. But while the Assyrians do not mention the cultivation of the Syrian-Orthodox faith and practice, it is specifically mentioned in the Aramaean regulations. This marks the secular and political character of the Assyrian standpoint and the religious or ecclesiastical orientation of the Aramaeans. The different regulations do not mean that the Assyrians do not respect and believe in the Church and the Syrian-Orthodox faith while all of the Aramaeans are deeply religious. It rather shows the tendency of the Assyrians to separate ecclesiastical and political power while the Aramaeans stick to the (secular and spiritual) authority of the Syrian-Orthodox clergy.

As a consequence of the widespread activities of the *Mesopotamien - Verein* most of the Augsburgians recognise the Syrian-Orthodox Christians as Assyrians rather than Aramaeans. The term Suryoye is not known at all.

In general, we have no access to reliable statistical data concerning the size of the Assyrian or Aramaean community. The number of association members does not reflect the real situation. During my fieldwork, I learnt that the affiliation to any of the groups within the Suryoye community is, in most cases,

only important to some families and far from being homogeneous. The degree of identification differs widely. They use the appropriate name depending on the situation. Most young Suryoye have no interest in their parents' disagreement over ethnic designations.

Assyrians – a diaspora community

The tendency towards trans-national and internal splitting in migration stands in opposition to the processes of globalisation. In spite of quarrels about the right ethnonym, history and identification, the national feelings of a stateless people have been awakened in migration that is spatially associated with the abandoned homeland, Mesopotamia. These sentiments seem to have been emphasised by migration, or may have evolved because of the migration. In current anthropological discourse the term *diaspora* has taken on special significance. Diaspora describes an area where members of a religious or ethnic group live as a minority. They live all over the world in so-called *diaspora communities*. They think of themselves as having a unique relationship to their (virtual) native land (like Mesopotamia), and they organise themselves in global action and ethnic connections. 'These, then are the main features of diaspora: a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation from the host country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship.'[22] The difference between immigrants and a *diasporic population* is obvious. They do not come from elsewhere in the same sense as immigrants do. Clifford argues that 'immigrants may experience loss and nostalgia, but only en route to a whole new home in a new place' while 'peoples whose sense of identity is centrally defined by collective histories of displacement and violent loss cannot be "cured" by merging into a new national community.'[23] Appadurai favours the term ethnoscapes, landscapes of group identity around the world. The base is de -territorialisation: groups are 'no longer territorialised, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogenous'.[24]

Most of the Suryoye in Europe or overseas accept the citizenship of their new country. They have no problem giving up the passport of their home country because it does not constitute part of their identity – in fact passports play no part in determining their sense of identity. For them a passport is no

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[22]   Clifford 1997: 247.

[23]   ibid.: 250.

[24]   Appadurai, 1991: 191

more than a travel document. Most of them do not really believe in the possibility of returning to Turkey or in the formation of their own state - possibly Assyria. Clifford's categories of immigrants on the one side and diasporic populations on the other appropriately describe the situation of the migrating generation. However, the young generation, born in western Europe, shows a split into different trends. The emerging tendencies range from assimilation efforts to strict Assyrian nationalism, which is characterised by the conscious upholding of religious, cultural and moral traditions and separation from the host country's population..

During the migration an international network developed. Contacts are forged through families and are maintained on a religious, cultural or political level. A complex network for exchanging information and joint activities has emerged. Despite large distances, kinship ties remain very strong, as do the ties between the former inhabitants of the Tur Abdin villages. The Suryoye migrated in groups. As a consequence, several diaspora communities developed in the countries of migration with a concentration of people who came from the same villages. In Augsburg, the people from Enhil, Midyat and Bsorino make up the majority. The place of origin (in the Tur Abdin) determines the places of contacts in the diaspora where members of a family or a village have their residences. Political contacts do not follow village-ties slavishly but group affiliations such as Assyrian or Aramaean usually do.

The various Internet homepages of Assyrians, Aramaeans or Suryoye reflect the multi-faceted nature of life in a diaspora, especially among the younger generation. The search for the 'right' national or ethnic identity (Assyrian? Aramaean? Suryoye?), and social changes within the community regarding religion, marriage or family life are the most frequently discussed topics, for example in the *Suryoyo online forum*, an Aramaic web-site. As a rule the German language is used, but texts and statements may also be published in English, Turkish or Turoyo.

Turoyo, the common language, is very important in communicating with members of the group and family in Europe and overseas. Nearly all my older informants emphasise the necessity of learning Aramaic/Turoyo. Due to their multi-lingual social environment in Anatolia, many Suryoye learnt to speak several languages and dialects. In exile Aramaic[25] is always designated as the mother-tongue, no matter what language the mother actually speaks. 'I come from an Arabic village in the Tur Abdin', an Assyrian woman told me. Her mother tongue is Arabic. 'My husband forced me to learn Assyrian. He said he

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[25]   Aramaic as well as Turoyo.

would not marry me if I didn't learn Assyrian.' Her children have to learn Turoyo - in her words 'the mother tongue Assyrian'. Classical Aramaic written in Syrian letters is also taught in special classes at school or in the Church. Aramaic is seen as the unique treasure of the Syrian Christians and therefore it is one of the most important connecting links of their identity. The lack of interest among young Suryoye in learning the language combined with their lack of interest in the church, are interpreted by the older Suryoye generation as signs of the decay of community values.

Alongside the prevalence of the Assyrian-Aramaic discourse about denotation we should not ignore the virulence of former structures of identification. Kinship ties and responsibility to the family, traditional patterns of social control and the subordination of the individual to the community are moral values that are beginning to waver but still retain influence in the daily life of the Suryoye. For example, the power of influential families from the home villages endures migration. But new hierarchies may also arise. Families without influence in Turkey may gain prestige through an increase in their family size and economic prosperity. Inter-ethnic and inter-confessional marriages remain problematic. The search of the Suryoye for their identity is a perpetual process. Like for many other groups, for the Suryoye the question 'Who are we?' is as important as the question 'Who are we going to be?'

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THE YEZIDIS TODAY

Khalil Jindy Rashow

Introduction

The Yezidis are representatives of the oldest culture of Mesopotamia, the land situated between the Tigris and the Euphrates. Their ancestors came to this region with Iranian and Indo-Iranian settlers, and theirs is the oldest Kurdish religion.

The Yezidi religious tradition is monotheistic. They believe in Melek Tawus, the Peacock Angel, whom they regard as the Chief Angel and who, contrary to what is sometimes claimed by outsiders, is a good being who rules this world. Furthermore, they believe in the manifestation of God's power (the divine mystery), part of which became incarnate in prophets and righteous human beings. They believe, therefore, that God manifested himself in different human forms (called by many names), each of whom was responsible for the affairs of the world. Some of these great beings are: Sheikh Adi, Melik Sheikh Sin (Hesen), Melik Sheikh Fekhredin, Sheikh Shems, Pir Hesen Meman, Melik Nasirdin, and others.

Yezidism is not a proselytising religion; only those who are born of two Yezidi parents are accepted as members of the community. Outsiders cannot become Yezidi, and those who marry outside the community are excommunicated. Endogamous marriages between Yezidi are also strictly regulated. There are five 'castes' or groups whose members must marry among themselves. These groups are as follows:

1. The Adani Sheikhs.
2. The Shemsani Sheikhs.
3. The Qatani Sheikhs.
4. The (priestly) caste of Pirs.
5. The laity, or *Murîds*. This is the largest group of Yezidis.

One may legitimately wonder how this small ethnic group preserved its identity over the ages, in the face of aggressive Islamic invasion and numerous ethnic conflicts. Their very survival inspires both wonder and admiration. However, the present paper does not aim to describe the history of the Yezidis and their religion

in Islamic times, but rather to discuss the present situation of the Yezidi community as well as their future.

Geography and Demography

The original homeland of the Yezidis are the adjacent regions of Northern Iraq, Syria and Turkey. There are Yezidi communities also in Armenia and Georgia; a small number live in Iran, and there is some speculation as to a Yezidi presence in India. As no census has ever been carried out to establish the numbers of the community as a whole, we have no access to precise statistics. Their numbers are estimated at more than 500,000, in Northern Iraq, living in Sinjar, Seikhan, Zakho and the region of Duhok. In Syrian Kurdistan there are approximately 30,000 Yezidis, 12,000 of whom live in the Kurdagh mountains in the Aleppo region. A census in Turkey showed their numbers to be higher than in Syria, namely 49-50,000. In Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, there are some 30,000 Yezidis, and a greater number live in Armenia. Finally, we have been told that there are at least six Yezidi villages in Kermanshah province in Western Iran, where their centre is Garmin, south of the city of Kermanshah.

The Yezidis in Europe, the USA, Canada and Australia

As a result of a government agreement between West Germany and Turkey, prompted by Germany's need for immigrant workers, a great number of Yezidis migrated to Germany from Turkish Kurdistan from the early 1970s onwards. In the 1980s and 90s, in addition to economic factors, Yezidi out-migration was increasingly prompted by other factors, such as political and religious persecution. As a result of all this, more than 98 % of Yezidi villages in Turkey are now empty as their inhabitants have fled, mostly to Germany. Most of the estimated 50,000 Yezidis now living in Germany come from Turkey. Smaller groups of Yezidis are found in Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway, the USA, Britain and Canada. Some families have migrated to Australia.

Yezidi Life in the Homelands: Social and Economic Conditions

In spite of the political and economic discrimination literacy rates have increased in recent decades as more and more Yezidis, especially males, have started going to school. At present many children of both sexes attend school, but older people tend to be illiterate.

In Yezidi society the family plays a central role. Kinship ties and specific socio-religious relationships between individuals are honoured. It is a paternalistic society, with the father as head of the family, but women are also much respected. Furthermore, the relationships between the various clans also play a role, particularly in Sinjar, Duhok and Zakho, but less so in the Sheikhan area and in Ba'shiqa and Behzani.

The Yezidis, both men and women, wear distinctive clothes, which vary from region to region. In Sinjar men wear a white woollen turban wound around a red kerchief or a piece of black cloth. Others wear a white head-dress held in place by black bands, similar to that worn by the Arabs. Women wear white clothes, wrapping a white cloth around their head or wearing it loose, as a sort of headscarf.

The men of the Sheikhan area mostly wear white clothes, and special trousers (*serwal*) with a short jacket (*demir*); they also wear a red turban (*jemedani*). The women don colourful dresses, and their headgear consists of a round turban wound around a black kerchief. The women of the Duhok area are similarly dressed. The men wear trousers and jacket (*shal u shapik*) like most Muslim Kurds of Badinan. In Turkey, Georgia and Armenia, Yezidi women's clothes are similar to those of Christian women, and in Syria both men's and women's clothes resemble those of Arabs.

The Yezidis traditionally celebrate many festivals. The most important of these tend to be seasonal. These include the New Year, which is celebrated on the first Wednesday of April (Eastern); the 'Feast of Khidir – Ilyas' in January; the 'Forty days of summer' in August; the 'Feast of the Assembly' in September; and the 'Fast of Ezid', 'Sheikh Shems', 'Belinda' and 'Batizmi' in December and January.

The Yezidis in Iraqi Kurdistan

Before 1975, the Yezidis were persecuted in Iraq both as a religious and ethnic minority, but they managed to survive and went on with their traditional lifestyle, working on their land and taking part in religious rites by their holy shrines. Most

of the Yezidis of Iraqi Kurdistan had lived in small villages which either belonged exclusively to them, or which they shared with Christians. Their main source of livelihood was animal husbandry; they kept sheep and cattle. The availability of good pasture and therefore their livelihood essentially depended on rain.

However, since the Baath party came to power in Iraq in 1968, the government's position has been that the Yezidis are originally Arabs and merely constitute an Islamic sect. In view of this, the government has systematically sought to destroy the territorial integrity of the Yezidi community. On 9 May 1975 the Iraqi government ordered that all Yezidi villages in Sinjar (approximately 160 in all) were to be evacuated, and their inhabitants were forcibly resettled in twelve collective villages (*mujamma'at*), seven of them to the north of Mt Sinjar, the other five to the south. The villages were destroyed, their wells blocked; the farm lands of the Qirani clan were confiscated and given to Arabs. The policy also involved renaming villages in Arabic.

Sinjar, which lies on the border between Syria and Iraq, is considered a sensitive area and has been declared a military security zone. In 1975 the government confiscated the weapons of the Yezidi population, while at the same time arming the neighbouring Arab tribes. The inhabitants of several villages were joined together in a large collective village, so that they could be easily controlled by the ruling party and the secret police. In 1982 the government sought to introduce Islamic mosques, but these were rejected by the Yezidi inhabitants. Furthermore, the government forcibly resettled the inhabitants of three Yezidi villages in the Arab town of Ba'aj in the south, so as to reduce Yezidi presence in Sinjar.

Finally the 'Leadership of the Iraqi Revolutionary Council' ordered the secret deportation of the population of Sinjar to Hadar, some 100 kilometres south-east of Sinjar, and the distribution of their land among the Arab population, in order to wipe out Yezidi identity. In response, the Yezidis threatened to flee to Syrian Kurdistan and the government backtracked. Under these circumstances many Yezidis were forced to migrate to big cities such as Mosul and Baghdad in order to find work. As a result, the social structure of the community disintegrated, which greatly added to the Yezidis' social and psychological problems.

The Yezidis in the Sheikhan Area

The Iraqi regime regarded the Sheikhan area, to the east of Duhok, and Zakho to the north-west, as a strategically sensitive region. The government began to deport the Yezidis living there and to settle Arabs in their villages. On 16 March 1978 the Iraqi Revolutionary Council issued a decree (No. 358), that all Yezidi lands in the Sheikhan area should be confiscated and redistributed among Arabs, a policy which had in fact been continuously implemented since 1975, and the government forcibly resettled the Yezidis in nine collective villages, leaving only seven villages untouched.

This policy had very serious adverse effects on the psychological, economic and social conditions of the Yezidi population, and caused the Yezidis to migrate to big cities such as Mosul and Baghdad in search of a livelihood.

The Yezidis in Turkey, Syria, Armenia and Georgia

In Syria, the Yezidis mainly inhabit two areas: 1. the north and north- east, as well as forty-four villages in the Province of Hasaka, Ras al-'Ain, Amuda, Terba Sipî, and al-Qahtâniya. 2. the second group lives in the Qaradagh Mountains (Afrin) in the Aleppo region.

Ideologically (from an Arab nationalist point of view), the Syrian government sought to define the Yezidis as Arabs, and their religion as a deviant Islamic sect, but in practice it regarded them as Kurds. In Syria, if Kurds obtain citizenship at all, they remain second-class citizens; very often they are treated as foreigners and cannot obtain citizenship. Evidently, without citizenship they are barred from many important and high-level jobs. Those Yezidis lucky enough to be able to send their children to school must accept that they are taught Islam there.

In Turkey the religious discrimination and indeed persecution of the Yezidis is stronger and more barefaced than in the other states, and this obliged most Yezidis to leave their homeland and flee to Germany and other west-European states. At present there are a few hundred Yezidis left in Turkey, most of whom are old. Their former villages in Midyat and Nisaybin in the Mardin region, and in the Viransheher and Khaliti areas in the Diyarbekir region stand empty, as their inhabitants (numbering around 50,000) now live in Germany.

The Yezidis of Armenia and Georgia report that, as far as religion, language and general conditions are concerned, things were better under the former Soviet

regime; religious and ethnic minorities enjoyed a certain degree of freedom without being dominated by the majority groups. In Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, and Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, the Yezidis had their own radio broadcasts; and published the journal *Riya T'aze* on a regular basis. Yezidis were not discriminated against in the job market; they had access to academic foundations, and illiteracy was decreasing. On the whole there was equality among the ethnic groups, polygamy was forbidden, and women's rights were respected in accordance with the constitution.

The collapse of the Soviet Union put all religious and ethnic minorities at a disadvantage in the face of the nationalistic pride of the emerging new majority communities. Moreover, in both Armenia and Georgia the Yezidis are strongly associated as beneficiaries of the Soviet regime, and they have now lost their former position in society.

Another point is that, with the emergence of Kurdish political parties and Kurdish nationalist sentiments, which were shared by some Yezidis particularly in Armenia, some Armenians became suspicious of Kurds. In this context they refer to the Ottoman massacre of Armenians in 1915, disregarding the fact that Yezidis, who did not serve in the Ottoman army, could not have played a role in it. In this context, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the Yezidis in fact saved Armenians at the time of this terrible massacre. Some two thousand Armenian and Assyrian families fled to Syria and to the Sinjar area, where they found refuge among the Yezidi population. The chief of the Sinjari Yezidis, Hamo Shero, offered them shelter, and about twenty of these families are still living in the Sinjari villages of Milik, Jadale, and Khane Sur, and have a church (Mar Georgist) in Sinjar itself. The other Armenians and Assyrian Christians migrated; six families went to Syria (among them the family of Mersho Sibhan) and others migrated to Europe.

Because of Hamo Shero's stance on this matter, and the protection he gave to Christians, the Ottoman official Haji Ibrahim Pasha mounted a campaign against him, but he staunchly defended his protégés. When in 1917 Iraq came under British Mandate, the British honoured Hamo Shero for his protection of the Armenians by giving him the rank of Pasha, and by appointing him ruler of Sinjar and Talafer.

Owing to the aforementioned problems, the Armenian and Georgian Yezidis left their homes and migrated to Belorus, Ukraine, Russia (esp. Krasindar,

Moscow and St. Petersburg), Kazakstan and Kyrgyzstan. Others migrated to Germany, France, Belgium and Australia.

Conclusion: two factors affecting all Yezidis

The current nationalist movements prevailing in the states where Yezidis live, as well as increasing Islamic fundamentalism in some of these countries, are proving extremely detrimental for Yezidi communities. In fact the Yezidis face not only the threat of the loss of their religious heritage, but also the danger of extinction as an ethnic group. Yezidis, therefore, are deeply concerned, and wonder what the position of the international community, and in particular the United States, on this matter is. Will the Kurdish Secure Zone remain as it is, in a state where there is neither war nor peace? Will it be forced to come under Iraqi control again? Will it be granted a form of independence? In the latter case, what guarantees will be given to the Yezidi community?

The unsettled conditions of the Kurdish Free Zone in Iraq have led to a bloody conflict between the various Kurdish Parties, notably the KDP and the PUK, and the KDP and the PKK, as well as between secularist and fundamentalist Islamic parties. This situation has given rise to an increased influence of Islamic fundamentalism. Its representatives exhort people in the mosque every Friday to fight the Yezidi 'infidels' (i.e. those who do not worship God and are not followers of the Prophet Mohammad). As a result, Muslims are now boycotting Yezidis.

The Yezidis living in Europe are also facing an uncertain future, as they are torn between two cultures: their indigenous culture, which includes their customs, social structure and traditions, but also negative phenomena such as polygamy and blood feuds, and the cultures of the European host countries, which are very different from what they are accustomed to. It remains to be seen which culture will prove dominant.

In an age in which all European countries, the United States, the United Nations and other international organisations are singing the praises of globalisation, democracy and human rights, it cannot be stressed enough that ethnic and religious minorities, such as the Yezidi, need far more international support and protection.

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LOCKED IN CONFLICT. PARAMETERS OF UYGHUR IDENTITY, IN CHINA AND IN THE DIASPORA

Ildikó Bellér-Hann

Introduction

The geographical focus of the paper is the north-western region of the People's Republic of China (PRC), where behind a façade of socialist multiculturalism Han Chinese in effect still rule over non-Han minorities. In the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the Uyghur, a Turkic speaking Muslim group, form the most numerous, officially recognised national minority. However, their autonomy remains nominal and Uyghur - Han Chinese relations are typically characterised by some foreign observers in terms of internal colonialism.[1] While some have argued against such characterisation,[2] and the debate remains unresolved, we can agree with the statement of the American historian, James Millward, according to which the answer to the question both in pre-modern, imperial times and in the present era depends largely on our definition of the concept of internal colony, and adds that 'it seems safe to say that in the current climate, many Uyghurs *feel* colonised.'[3] The first thirty years of socialism meant long periods of economic underdevelopment and political and religious repression for the Uyghur. The end of Maoism was followed all over China by the introduction of the 'socialist market economy' and opening up to the West. Ostensibly an era of new freedoms, the new policies have not been accompanied by the expected democratisation, at least not in Xinjiang. As June Dreyer convincingly argues, long term investment in infrastructure and in economic development of the region remains in conflict with the central government's wish to retain social control over a region where ethnic conflict and unrest are rife, and faced with a choice between the two, the Chinese authorities are likely to opt for the latter.[4] This point has been ethnographically documented among Uyghur peasants of the Kashgar oasis: keeping a tight grip

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[1] Gladney 1997, 1998, 1998/9.
[2] Recently the 'internal colony' theory has been challenged. Barry Sautman argues that none of the constituents of the classic internal colony definition are sufficiently present to describe the region as an internal colony. (Sautman 2000).
[3] Millward 2000:124.
[4] Dreyer 2000. For a recent study of the region's economic situation see Bohnet u.a. 1998, 1999.

over peasants continues to have priority over economic considerations.[5] The list of the Uyghurs' complaints is long: it includes economic underdevelopment, exploitation of natural resources, religious repression, discrimination in employment in favour of Han Chinese settlers whose migration into the region from poor, overpopulated provinces in the rest of China is actively encouraged by the state. In addition, the vast desert area of the province has been the scene of China's nuclear tests, and this is where many of her notorious labour camps are located. Finally, since the early 1990s the minorities of Xinjiang have been subjected to national family planning policies from which they had previously been exempt, even though these policies remain somewhat more generous than those applied to Han Chinese.[6]

Ethnicity, ethnic conflict, ethnic relations and ethnic identity constitute the subject matter of several books and dissertations produced by western social scientists.[7] While the study of ethnicity and its many facets is no doubt of paramount importance within a context of growing ethnic tension, other aspects of social identity and personhood have remained relatively understudied among most groups in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkestan.[8]

In this paper using the Uyghur as an example, I wish to problematise the category of ethnic group, which is so often used in opposition to the concept of nation. Both categories rest on assumptions about common descent, which in turn is held responsible for the emergence of a by and large homogeneous culture concept, shared by all members of the group. Although the granting of ethnic minority status is often associated with improved conditions for members of the group and lack of such recognition with violation of human rights, numerous examples, among them that of the Uyghur, cast doubt on this association as a general rule. Instead of ranking ethnic affiliation higher than other types of identity, I want to show its highly contingent, complex and dynamic nature, which may draw on and make use of many other components of personhood without interfering with their other meanings.[9]

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[5]   See Bellér-Hann 1997, Hann and Bellér-Hann 1999. Peasants in 1990 constituted 70 % of Xinjiang's population. (Sautman 2000: 250).

[6]   The realisation of the family planning policies among the Uyghur, especially in rural areas, has not been sufficiently documented. See Toops 2000: 168, Hoppe 1998: 45-6. The other factors have been summed up by Dillon 1995, Weggel 1984 and Grobe-Hagel 1991.

[7]   Toops 1990, Rudelson 1997, Millward 1998, Hoppe 1998, Smith 1999.

[8]   This may have much to do with problematic access to indigenous sources, the limited information provided by Chinese sources on social practices, the difficulties of fieldwork in Xinjiang as well as the trends dominating modern social science research.

[9]   The homogeneity of the Uyghur as an ethnic group within the Xinjiang context is convincingly questioned by Smith 2000.

After snapshot examples of identity building from Xinjiang I shall briefly describe aspects of boundary drawing among the Uyghur living in Kazakstan. Within the homeland in China aspects of material culture play just as an important role as differences in the perception of time, space, and character. In contrast, among the diaspora population in Almaty important elements of self-definitions are primarily derived from intra-group identities. An ethnic identity persists and is reproduced in both cases, but the processes involved are complementary, not identical, as a consequence of their differing structural positions in the Chinese and Kazak states respectively.

The Uyghur in Xinjiang, China[10]

The emergence of the Uyghur as an ethnic group is essentially a twentieth century phenomenon, comparable to developments among other Turkic speaking groups in the former Soviet Union.[11] After 1949 Chinese policies concerning 'minority nationals' followed the Soviet model in many respects. These policies comprised an attempt to *control* rather than *integrate* them.[12] In a study of the Chinese Muslims, Dru Gladney has shown how the intricate, dynamic interplay between self-perception and state interference shapes ethnic identity in the People's Republic. I shall look at other levels of identity and consider some of the many strategies employed by the Uyghur of Xinjiang to reproduce and reinforce ethnic boundaries vis-à-vis the Han Chinese. On the ideological level modern Uyghur claim common descent, a shared language, shared religion, shared history and common culture. It is on the basis of such assumptions that claims for extended autonomy and even the right to self government are put forward by many. In these aspirations the concepts of 'ethnic' and 'national' become almost identical. Nevertheless, the projection of the Uyghur as a cohesive group, curiously reinforced by the minority policies of the Chinese government, have been challenged by several western authors. For example, Justin Rudelson emphasised local, oasis identities based on regional belonging,[13] while Joanne Smith argues that younger and older generations of Uyghur today construct their attitudes towards ethnic/nationalist aspirations on the basis of their historical experiences and pragmatic considerations (such as having a job and a family to protect). As a result,

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[10] The ethnographic material included in this part of the paper appears in Bellér-Hann forthcoming.

[11] Hoppe 1998: 56-69.

[12] Bergère 1979, Gladney 1991: 66.

[13] Rudelson 1997.

members of different age groups have very different attitudes towards separatism and Uyghur national ideologies.[14] Similarly, although his title implies the homogeneity of ethnic groups in Xinjiang, Thomas Hoppe cautiously points out the pitfalls of such an approach, when he looks at groups such as the Lopliq, the Dolan and the Abdal, officially lumped together with the Uyghur even if the people concerned are themselves reluctant to accept this label.[15] Other components of personal identity, such as the rural - urban divide, or gender differences have so far received little attention from ethnographers.

While recognising the need for deconstructing homogeneous ideal-type images of ethnic groups such as the Uyghur, it needs to be emphasised that studies focusing on ethnic differences between Han and Uyghur reflect a real tension between the self-perceptions of people who in various social contexts consider themselves members of a distinct group, and others who they perceive as both different from themselves and simultaneously constituting a threat to their 'bounded' culture and its persistence. Thus viewed, the Uyghur - Han Chinese relationship may be presented as the meeting of and clash between two clearly defined groups, which are in 'ranked' relationship to each other. In this hierarchically ordered relationship the Han Chinese are dominant and the Uyghur are dominated.[16] In spite of this in some aspects of daily interaction the rules are often dictated by the low-ranking group, the Uyghur. Although within the Xinjiang context the most often discussed markers of difference between these two large groups are language and religion, I shall show that a host of other distinguishing features augment the repertoire of boundary markers to emphasise difference.

The linguistic situation is asymmetrical. Many urban Uyghur have a basic knowledge of some spoken Chinese and few a more limited knowledge of written Chinese. Han Chinese, though perceived as monolingual Mandarin speakers, may in practice understand more in Uyghur than they like to admit, but the majority never learn to speak Uyghur.[17] The urban Uyghur have penetrated the Chinese linguistic domain in line with the wishes of the authorities: the acquisition of the language of the dominant group is an important step towards acculturation.[18] The Uyghur articulate this imbalance in

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[14] Smith 2000.

[15] Hoppe 1998: 57.

[16] Horowitz 1985.

[17] The dilemma faced by Uyghurs concerning language and schooling has been tackled by several authors, see e.g. Rudelson 1997: 115, and Smith 2000: 209-211.

[18] Ethnographic material in this section was collected in the oasis town of Kucha, over a period of two months.

terms of favourable self-stereotyping: it proves their own superior mental abilities over the Han Chinese. Similar imbalance may be on occasion articulated in religious terms: adherence to Islam is also explained in terms of moral superiority. Nevertheless, here religious difference on its own does not have sufficient force as an ethnic boundary marker: in the multi-ethnic environment of Xinjiang the Uyghur are careful to distinguish themselves from their co-religionists, the Chinese Muslims, and from other Turkic speaking Muslim groups represented in the region.

In crowded oasis centres where most interaction between Han Chinese and Uyghur takes places, the observer is struck by apparent dichotomies often articulated by actors themselves. To these belong perceptions of time and space. Han Chinese in the province live according to the official, 'Beijing time', which is also observed in all public places, bus and flight timetables. But the Uyghur live according to local, Xinjiang time, which follows the position of the sun and is two hours behind Beijing time. Ethnic affiliation can thus be literally read on the watch of its wearer. Yet this apparent spatial apartheid is deceptive. In reality the rhythm of the day of the Chinese office or construction worker perfectly harmonises with that of his Uyghur counterpart.

Spatial segregation in the oasis towns goes back to Chinese imperial times, which separated the new, colonial town from the old, Muslim city. Old and New Towns are still distinguished in most cities and the old town, which has a much larger concentration of Uyghur, has often preserved the main features of the Islamic city. The modern, geometrical streets of the New Town house the major government buildings and offices, and this is where most Chinese and Chinese Muslims also live. But behind this façade of socialist modernity once again we find the landmarks of Muslim quarters. Apparent spatial segregation is seen in the permanent marketplace where Chinese and Uyghur vendors occupy separate stretches. Yet behind this sharp segregation interaction takes place regularly. (Such interaction may take on peaceful forms, such as when an Uyghur girl buys an item of clothing from a Chinese merchant, but she may provoke the disapproval of members of her own group for 'going Chinese'. In other cases interaction in the marketplace over faulty merchandise or mistaken calculations may be articulated in ethnic terms and end in violence.)

Occupational patterns also appear to replicate ethnic segregation.[19] Services such as catering, tailoring, hairdressing and local education all reflect ethnic duality. Uyghur traders tend to attract Uyghur and other minority customers, Han-Chinese Chinese customers. Once again, a certain subtle intermingling

may be observed at all levels. At one end of the social scale we see very poor Chinese labour migrants (often with their families) arriving as members of the so-called floating population of China who are not registered with any government offices and therefore, officially, do not exist.[20] They settle among the Muslims of the Old Town and their children learn to speak better Uyghur than Chinese. Neighbourly relations in such instances are said to be good and evaluation of the other runs against ethnic stereotypes.

At the other end of the social scale interaction takes place between cadres and the intelligentsia in general: not only do Uyghur and Chinese cadres share space in the offices and in their respective apartment blocks (work units), but some Uyghur are educated in Chinese schools throughout their careers. These intellectuals will invariably have brilliant career prospects, better than their counterparts educated in minority schools. The price they pay for these privileges is that their own group regards them as somewhat anomalous, as Uyghur with a Chinese temperament, as only half-Uyghur.[21]

Mijäz or temperament is an important component of personhood and identity among both urban and rural Uyghur. Hot and cold disposition is thought to be determined at birth. It is commonly held that it may be influenced and regulated by diet, by the consumption of foods which are regarded as essentially endowed with cold or hot nature. A person's well-being depends on the healthy balance of hot and cold in his/her own body, which in turn affects his /her character as well. Inter-ethnic hospitality shows a distinct asymmetry: the Uyghur entertain Chinese colleagues occasionally when they wish, but always deny them the right to reciprocate. One may suspect that the diet of the Chinese is viewed by the Uyghur with considerable suspicion, not only because of their inclusion of pork but because of their complete disregard for the required balance of hot and cold which produces persons with uncontrolled (and therefore unpredictable) dispositions.

Various traits that are evoked as ethnic boundary markers serve also as intra-group markers of difference. Uyghur male headgear is loaded with meaning. It may indicate the age of its wearer, his regional belonging or his social status. In the 1950s poor peasants adopted the skullcap previously worn by landlords only, while the emerging new style of government cadres in the 1980s was already appropriated by peasants in the 1990s. All these styles are also clearly

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[19] Sautman mentions the ethnic division of labour in terms of the rural-urban divide, but not within the oasis centres (2000: 240).

[20] See Toops 2000: 166.

[21] On the anomalous position of the Uyghur educated in Chinese schools see Rudelson 1997: 127-9.

distinguishable from the skull-caps worn by Chinese Muslims. But whatever style, these, together with the turban and the recently fashionable straw-hat decorated with the inscription *World Cup*, preferred by Uyghur intellectuals, all mark the wearer out as Uyghur. Thus various expressions of intra-group identities may simultaneously acquire meanings as markers of religious, regional and ethnic belonging.

Intermarriage between Uyghur and Han Chinese is said to be non-existent although many stories circulate of love affairs and even marriage between members of the respective groups. Stereotypical representations from both sides focus on Han Chinese men wishing to marry Uyghur women but seldom the other way around. In these stories the Uyghur are projected in a superior position as potential wife-givers, who typically refuse to give their daughters in marriage to Chinese. Like in the imbalance in dietary relations, this may also be perceived as a one sided form of ethnic boundary-crossing which is regulated by the dominated group.[22]

To summarise this section of the paper, I argue that Uyghur identity has been consolidated in the socialist period as a consequence of the minority policies of the Chinese state. It is a new identity in the sense that most Uyghur previously acknowledged local/oasis identities rather than ethnic or national identity, but it nevertheless draws on old persistent traditions. In spite of the multiple sources of collective and personal identities which unite and re-group individuals along regional origins/residence, gender, occupation, education, generation etc., the mounting ethnic tension between Han Chinese and Uyghur fosters ethnic cohesion among the Uyghur (and the Han Chinese as well). Even if there is great variation among the indigenous population as far as forms of resistance and political action are concerned, ethnic nationalism among the Uyghur is ultimately strengthened in an atmosphere of economic discrimination, religious repression and tightening social control from the Chinese government.

The Uyghur diaspora in Kazakstan

This section is based on ethnographic data collected in Almaty, the former capital of Kazakstan. In contrast to the Uyghur living in the Xinjiang/East Turkestan homeland, the diaspora Uyghur in Almaty clearly articulate internal divisions. These divisions follow a temporal axis. The most basic dividing line

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[22] For further detailed ethnographic examples to illustrate the many components of personhood see Bellér-Hann forthcoming.

separate those Uyghur whose ancestors migrated to Kazakstan from China at the end of the nineteenth century or early in the twentieth century from the recent migrants, who arrived from China mostly in the early 1960s.[23] The early arrivals are known as 'local Uyghur'(*yärlik Uyğur*) and the more recent arrivals from China are known as 'Chinese Uyghur' (*Xitay Uyğur*). Both groups have retained their Turkic language as a primary ethnic marker and as the main means of communication within the group. They have remained Muslims and they all share some idea of common descent. However, only the recent migrants have retained active family ties with relatives left in the homeland. For many local Uyghur the homeland in China has taken on the dimension of a mythical place which they have never seen, though some might visit the place for commercial purposes. These and other perceived differences are articulated through stereotypes. Chinese Uyghur claim that local Uyghur have been alienated from Islam, as manifested in their consumption of pork. They have become ignorant of traditional customs, including the preparation of authentic Uyghur food. Having adapted to Russian ways, their temperament has become Russian (*mijäzi orus*), an outcome accentuated by frequent intermarriage with Russians. In contrast, the 'Chinese Uyghur' are projected by both groups as embodiments and maintainers of tradition, who, according to some, help the 'local Uyghur' to re-learn what they had forgotten. Nevertheless, this positive stereotyping of the newcomers is augmented by negative features propounded by local Uyghur who describe recent migrants as more conservative, traditional and backward than themselves. They are considered underachievers in post-socialist Kazakstan, both in terms of educational levels and professional attainment. The division is further accentuated by differences in script traditions, which in turn have much to do with political attitudes and orientation. If they write in Uyghur at all, local Uyghur use the Cyrillic script, while first generation Chinese Uyghur prefer the Arabic script even though they have mastered Cyrillic characters during the decades spent in their new place of residence. The difference in script tradition and political orientation is reflected in their local publications. The two groups publish separate journals, the local Uyghurs' printed in Cyrillic, that of the Chinese Uyghur in the Arabic script. Although the contents of the two journals largely overlap, articles with

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[23] This simple model does not do justice to the complex realities of many families, who experienced several phases of migration. Some of those who migrated out of China in the end of the nineteenth century returned a few decades later, fleeing religious persecution in the Soviet Union, only to make their way back again in the 1950s or 1960s. A number of those who returned to China from the Soviet Union in the 1930s never gave up their Soviet passports and used these during the time of the most recent wave of re-migration.

explicitly anti-Chinese contents are usually not included in the local Uyghur version. Political support for Xinjiang Uyghur appears to be the exclusive domain of first generation Chinese Uyghur, and militant, separatist tendencies are embraced by many but not all. Their members may be occasionally united in joining a demonstration against Chinese nuclear testing in Xinjiang or communal commemoration of Uyghur youths killed by the Chinese military, but many are likely to stop at that and would not go as far as supporting separatist activities. Given their collective and individual memories of discrimination, repression and violence, many first generation Chinese Uyghur regard the Chinese with a great deal of hostility. Their children, however, direct their discontent toward the Kazak leadership, which is typically blamed for the economic mismanagement of the country and discriminatory policies against small groups like themselves. In this they resemble the local Uyghur, who tend to hold moderate views concerning relations with the Han Chinese. These regard China as a powerful neighbour with whom good relations must be maintained. In the absence of personal memories of humiliation and atrocities, there is little or no sign of anti-Chinese sentiment among them; instead of talking about the plight of the Uyghur living in Xinjiang they prefer to focus on ethnic discrimination within Kazakstan.

Although both Xinjiang and Kazakstan constitute multi-ethnic societies, demographic factors in Xinjiang favour the projection of competition for natural resources and jobs in terms of an Uyghur-Han Chinese dichotomy.[24] The Uyghur in Almaty see themselves as lesser players alongside the formerly dominant Russians and the presently dominant Kazaks.[25] The neighbourhood where I lived in Almaty had a large concentration of Uyghur: nevertheless, its multi-ethnic character was apparent to all. In this environment Uyghur self-definition was not exhausted in an artificially simplified 'them and us' dichotomy: rather, it often assumed the form of an endless moral scale, where one's position had to be determined by constant references to others below and above in the imagined ranking. Efforts were sometimes made to claim moral superiority for the Uyghur as a homogenous group over other groups, for example by attributing higher levels of family cohesion and solidarity or a higher degree of religious devotion to themselves than to other ethnic groups (e.g. Kazaks, Russians). However, such statements were almost always followed by references to intra-group divisions, especially by the less

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[24] Today the total population of Xinjiang/East Turkestan is about 17 million. Of these the Uyghur comprise 47% and the Han 38% (Toops 2000: 155).

[25] Kazakstan's total population is about 17 million, and the Uyghurs' numbers there are approaching 200 000 (Akiner 1997: 19, 22).

integrated Chinese Uyghur. They claimed to be more endogamous than the local Uyghur (who frequently intermarried with Russians) and to maintain close contacts with people who came from the same oasis of Xinjiang.

References to the homeland among the Chinese Uyghur typically evoked regional divisions. Although most of the Chinese Uyghur originated from the northern parts of the province, those from the provincial capital Urumchi meticulously distinguished themselves from those coming from Ghulja. Chinese Uyghur emigrating from the city of Ghulja liked to distinguish themselves from immigrants from the rural areas of the same general region. Local and Chinese Uyghur often claim that ultimately their families originated from the south, namely from Kashgar, which is widely regarded as both the place of origin of all Uyghur and the stronghold of Uyghur-Islamic civilisation.[26] While at one level proudly claiming Kashgar as their place of origin, at another level the sophisticated northerners often project the southerners as uneducated country bumpkins who cannot even speak proper Uyghur.[27] Linguistic and religious differences, differences in clothes, forms and styles of accommodation etc. from the surrounding groups is not as important as the invisible markers which are conveniently summarised under the label of 'temperament'. Even intra-group differences are articulated by the Chinese Uyghur in such terms, by claiming that the local Uyghur have adopted a Russian temperament. (Inversely, they may be accused of having a Chinese temperament by the local Uyghur, although I rarely heard such statements.)

Both groups emphasise that intra-group marriage is infrequent, a claim I found difficult to substantiate. On the contrary, a great deal of interaction takes place between the two sub-groups. Upon arrival, like other first generation migrants, the 'Chinese Uyghur' were disadvantaged in their new place of residence because they did not speak Russian; many could not use qualifications acquired back in China. Although the two sub-groups appear to be in an unranked relationship to each other (as opposed to the Uyghur - Chinese hierarchically ordered, ranked relationship), intra-group relationships in practice often followed a pattern of patron-client relations, in which the recent migrants from China sought favours from influential local Uyghur. Due to their 'being there first' local Uyghur clearly enjoyed a more favourable position in Soviet Kazakstan than the more recent arrivals, especially in the labour market. By the late 1990s the newcomers had mastered Russian well enough to get by in daily life and their children were all fluent Russian

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[26] Collective memory has clearly preserved earlier migration history (Millward 2000: 123).

[27] The linguistic superiority attributed to the North may have much to do with the fact that the modern literary language was formed on the basis of the northern dialect.

speakers. However, they still appeared to be more vulnerable to post-socialist unemployment than the same generation of local Uyghur.

The purpose of this brief comparison is to show structural differences in integration patterns in the homeland and in the diaspora. Although suffering repression and discrimination, the Uyghur in Xinjiang/East Turkestan are still competing for demographic dominance within the region and for a larger measure of autonomy. In the more liberal atmosphere of post-Soviet Kazakstan the Uyghur cannot aspire for a dominant position, and individual integration into the mainstream offers them the best chances. The fragmentation of group identities may be temporary and may disappear in time with the partial Russification of the second generation of Chinese Uyghur. At present, however, intra-group fragmentation seems to play just as important a role as the maintenance of ethnic boundaries.

Conclusion

In the People's Republic of China official policies recognise minority rights as part of a strategy to control them. These encourage the fragmentation of minorities and the acculturation of élite groups in the urban environment. Here local perceptions dichotomise life, and boundary maintenance by the Uyghur reinforces a duality imposed by the state. In addition to differences in religion and language, numerous other, seemingly 'trivial' visible symbols and ideas concerning the body and personhood are employed to mark and emphasise real and imagined differences between the two groups. These ethnic markers largely overlap with strategies which have been used for centuries to mark internal status and identity in local Uyghur society. In this sense we can see a cultural persistence deeper than Uyghur ethnic identity, which is a relatively new idea. In the self-definition of members of the Uyghur diaspora in Almaty, intra-group divisions become accentuated. Although self -definition as Uyghur is never questioned, belonging either to the local or to the Chinese Uyghur becomes articulated and emphasised. For the Uyghur in Xinjiang the main reference point of ethnic self-definition in a multi-ethnic environment are the Han Chinese. In contrast, the Chinese Uyghur in the diaspora have multiple reference points for comparison and self-definition: the Chinese, the formerly dominant Russians, the presently dominant Kazaks and the local Uyghur, who are also doing better in the new society than themselves. A history of multiple domination may be a contributing factor to the diaspora's propensity to emphasise intra-group differences.

Cultural persistence within the same group relies on different strategies. As

far as the concept of globalisation is concerned, the Uyghur so far have remained by and large untouched by these processes. Despite cross-border trade with Kazakstan, the existence of a diaspora in the USA and Internet networks, globalisation has had little impact on the lives of the Xinjiang Uyghur, especially in rural areas. This continuous enforcement of relative isolation and strong government control may serve only to further strengthen Uyghur ethnic consciousness which the state wants to prevent.

Acknowledgements

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