

## Humbling Turkishness: Undoing the Strategies of Exclusion and Inclusion of Turkish Modernity

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**Abstract** Kurds make up about a fifth of Turkey's population. Turkey has taken steps – albeit slowly and reluctantly – towards increased recognition of Kurdish cultural and linguistic rights. However, within Turkey there is also a steeply rising tide of Turkish nationalism, prejudice and intolerance towards Kurds, and increasing anti-Kurdish sentiment. This article brings studies of Kurdishness and Turkishness into a single conversation and traces the relationship between Turkish modernity, Orientalized Kurdishness and the construction of Turkishness as the *efendi* (master) identity. It does this by drawing attention to “strategies of exclusion and inclusion” in the construction of official Turkish history, and relates these to the way in which the tense borders between Kurds and Turks are maintained and currently reproduced. It also presents a normative argument in favour of “humbling Turkishness” and “solidarity trading zones”.

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“On the way to school” (*İki Dil Bir Bavul*) is a documentary film from Turkey. Its main concerns are communication and interaction, including the questioning of the taken for granted configurations, between Kurdishness and Turkishness in Turkey. In the film, a Turkish teacher, “Teacher Emre” (*Emre Öğretmen*) is appointed to teach primary school children in a remote Kurdish village in Turkey. When Emre Öğretmen arrives in the village, he is surprised to find that his students do not understand him at all as they only speak their native tongue, Kurdish. Emre Öğretmen is then not only faced with the task of teaching them to read and write within the jingoistic Turkish school curriculum, but also simultaneously teaching them the Turkish language. In addition, he has to grapple with his adaptation to an alien place, to an unfamiliar environment, different to his “homeland”. He experiences being a “stranger” in his own country. We learn about his estrangement and feelings of exile through his telephone conversations with his mother. As the year proceeds, he and the Kurdish students and villagers establish a warm, but nevertheless uneasy, relationship. They slowly start to learn and understand each other despite continuing to make mistakes, misunderstand, and at times face total communication

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failures. The key *relevant* message of the film is delivered when one of the parents says to Emre Öğretmen something akin to “You came here to teach; but it is you who also needs to learn”. The “learning” here need not be seen purely in terms of learning the Kurdish language. It refers to the Kurdish culture, identity and history, and most importantly learning the Kurds’ way of seeing Turkishness. It calls for prescribed roles to be swapped where the “teacher” becomes the “learner”. The Turkish teacher, the “harbinger of civilization” is invited to transform himself into a student. The “other” can then also transform, from being merely approached as an “object” or “recipient” of policies, of intervention and of discipline to being a reciprocal interlocutor.

What prompted me to preface my article by mentioning this film is that it is in fact an allegory not only for the thorny relationship and frictions between Kurdishness and Turkishness<sup>1</sup> in Turkey, but also for the normative stance I will defend in this article. It points towards how the identity that holds the upper hand (Turkishness), has to cease to see itself as the “*efendi*” (master), and bring a halt to the Orientalist construction which drives it to attempt to teach and civilize the “other”, the Kurds. It highlights that in order to establish some sort of meaningful interaction between the two main groups in Turkey, the dominant group, namely the Turks, have to engage in the demanding job of learning and discovery and engage Kurds as equal interlocutors. This learning is gruelling; not because what needs to be learnt is complex, but because such learning is uncomfortable, distressing and painful. Secondly, it entails learning the other’s way of seeing you. Thirdly, it gives recognition to the fact that learning also includes “unlearning” (Asad and Dixon 1985). It requires one to disrupt and question what one has learnt about oneself, one’s own history and culture, as well as what one “knows” about the other. It requires epistemological *humbling* (Vázquez 2011).

In order to explore such themes, the paper will employ an epistemology of interaction, namely the “Second Language Learning Thesis” (SLLT), to discuss a way in which the relationship between Kurds and Turks can be understood, represented and also how a dialogue can potentially be developed. I will do this by drawing attention to what I refer to as the “strategies of exclusion” and “strategies of inclusion” of Turkish modernity, and then by relating these to the current reproduction of the tense borders between the two groups and interlinked identities. I will discuss the ways in which spatial and temporal borders intersect with ethno-political ones and help shape the concretization of interactions in a particular way. By paying attention to both “strategies of exclusion” and “strategies of inclusion”, I also aim to contribute to an understand-

ing of the role of Turkish modernity vis-à-vis the Kurdish demands and predicament, and emphasize Turkish modernity's continuing role in the construction of notions of superiority and inferiority between the Turks and Kurds. In other words, I aim to point to the similarities and continuities between the policing of how Turkish history and modernity are constructed and told, and the way in which Kurdishness is currently perceived in Turkey. By way of these investigations, the paper will explore and elucidate how certain processes hinder, and how some others ease, the establishment of a meaningful interaction and relationship between the two identities.

### **1. Epistemology of Interaction: The Second Language Learning Thesis (SLLT)**

The second Language Learning Thesis (SLLT) is an epistemological tool which has been developed to theorize and explain contact, exchange and relations across the borders of frameworks, be they cultures, ideologies, ethnic groups, disciplines, or moral traditions. It is an "epistemology of interaction" (Demir 2011). SLLT is not about "language" per se. It is broad, and includes cultural, historical and political learning. It refers to the process of extending one's understanding, awareness, perception and knowledge in the process of engagement with another, whether that other is a historical framework or a contemporary one. It is an invitation to extend one's own categories, language, awareness and familiarity to understand the other rather than merely thrusting the other into one's own framework, forcing its representation within "our" worldview. It is geared towards challenging the mere translation and rendering of the other into our own framework. Translation is associated with appropriation and hence, as Venuti (2008) argues, can be highly ethnocentric, requiring the other to be made intelligible in the language and value system of the dominant. Instead, SLLT seeks to prioritize permeation into, and familiarization with, the other, including humbling one's dominant self, identity and culture and learning to engage in the painful and awkward process of seeing oneself through the eyes of the other. In other words, it requires not only learning the other, but also through unfamiliarizing our identity and history, it necessitates us look at and re-learn ourselves in a new context.

This epistemology of interaction does not ignore the difficulties associated with breaking established boundaries (Benjamin 1996). It invites the exploration of the processes though which those from different frameworks can engage and interact with one another whilst simultaneously paying attention to the troubles and

difficulties of communication, commensuration, comparison and evaluation across different frameworks (Demir 2011). It attempts to capture the keenness of actors (or lack thereof) to go beyond established spatial and temporal borders. This is why it attempts to draw attention to the political and ethnographic character of learning across borders. As an epistemology of interaction then, the SLLT acknowledges that communication, interaction, comparison and immersion are riddled with problems and burdens and are almost always jerky and arduous, caught up in asymmetric relations and exchanges. As it starts from the fact that the newly learnt framework, culture or value system is only a second language, it remains mindful of the fact that unfamiliarity (in the form of relative foreignness and awkwardness) is a condition of interaction across borders.

The SLLT has three specific pillars. First, it draws attention to the socially constituted nature of borders and interactions between groups, cultures, and ideologies. Secondly, it aims to expose the asymmetric nature of interactions, including social, economic and linguistic hegemony. Thirdly, it attempts to incorporate the different types and layers of second language learning, including what I call “solidarity trading zones”. In Section 2 below, the article will engage with the first two of these themes in relation to Kurdishness and Turkishness. It will discuss the historical construction of Turkishness and the simultaneous negation of Kurdishness and relate these to the current social construction of borders and interactions. It will bring together the literature on Kurdishness and Turkishness into a single conversation, and in so doing will highlight the need for the questioning of the Orientalist depiction of the Kurds in Turkey, and the related hegemonic *efendi* positioning of Turkishness, and call for the much-needed “humbling” of the latter. Section 3 will discuss how “solidarity trading zones” which consciously go beyond identity politics might allow interaction and diffusion between identities, including the re-drawing of boundaries between them.

## **2. The Hegemonic *Efendi* Identity: Socially Constituted Character of Borders between Kurdishness and Turkishness**

The Turkish nation-building project was founded upon the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, and the associated trauma and feelings of vengeance and humiliation suffered in the process of its slow and painful collapse during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As several historians, sociologists and theorists of modernity, westernization and nationalism have argued, the Kemalist Turkish nation-building project and its associated aspirations for modernity

and westernization aimed to construct a centralized, secular, and homogenized nation-state (e.g. Aktar 2010; Houston 2009; Yeğen 2009; Özkırmı and Spyros 2008; Zeydanlıoğlu 2008; Bozarslan 2007; White 2007, Yeğen 2007a, 2007b; Cagaptay 2006; Yeğen 2004; Ahıska 2003; Deringil 2003; Kahraman 2002; Yeğen 1999; Bora 1998; Soğuk 1993). Multi-ethnicity and multi-religiosity were seen as major threats to this modernization. Consequently, the religious, ethnic, cultural differences and identities which challenged this desired homogeneity were denied, erased or, at times, brutally silenced. In the eyes of the nationalist elite who mainly came from the military or bureaucratic cadres, modernity required a homogenous and centralized nation-state which would ensure not only cohesiveness, purity, strength and hence national success, but also would steer Turkey towards becoming like the “civilized” and modern European states. In opposition to the religious, ethnic and cultural diversity of the Ottoman Empire, and in tandem with what they saw as the modernist Enlightenment ideals and successful nation states of Europe, the ruling nation-building elite aspired to form a homogenous, centralized, unified state and thus, in their eyes, a modern Turkish Republic.

The nation-building project had its origins in the Ottoman Turkist movement of late eighteenth hundreds which itself was influenced by European Romantic nationalist thought. It was a top-down, elite-led, radical transformation. The desire to “reach the European level of modernity” and to be “civilized” was thought to require the negation of the (Ottoman) past which, to its detriment, had relied on multi-ethnicity and multi-religiosity. Accordingly, nation-building also required “some sections” of the society to shake off their primitiveness, feudality, tribalism, banditry and hence backwardness. In contrast to these, westernization, modernity and civility were perceived to require a homogenous Turkish nation-state. The sizable Kurdish population, along with those who had a strong Muslim identity, were seen as the two biggest impediments to the success of this secularist and modernist Turkish nation-building project (Bozarslan 2007; White 2007; Smith 2005; Yavuz 1996). Consequently, since its inception in the 1920s, the Turkish Republic and the elites have been heavily engaged in the consolidation and at times coercive persuasion of these two groups: the Kurds were “persuaded” towards Turkishness, the Muslims were “persuaded” towards a narrow and strict version of secularism which ironically meant following closely the state’s definition (and regulation) of Sunni Islam. In what follows, I will focus on the first of those groups, namely the Kurds.

As Yeğen has argued, the Turkish nation-building project required the “transformation of a non-western, de-central,

a-national and non-secular social formation (the Ottoman Empire) into a western, central, national and secular one (the Turkish Republic)" (1999, p. 559) and "Kurdish identity was one of the victims of [this] political project" (Ibid, p. 567). During this transformation, for example, the state discourse understood and presented the Kurdish rebellions of the 1920s and 1930s as reactionary, backward, religiously-oriented, and irrational, the work of bandits who longed for the old order, an order which the new republic was working hard to eradicate (Zeydanlıoğlu 2008; Bozarslan 2007; Watts 2007; Yavuz 2001). This version of Turkish history refused to consider and recognize the ethno-political dimension of the Kurdish revolts officially and publicly.<sup>2</sup> The rebellions were officially described as being an outcome of an "eastern" (*doğulu*) or "backward" (*gerici*) mindset. The Kurdish provinces were put under special measures and administration, governed as "internal colonies" (Bozarslan 2007, p. 44), at times under martial law.

The Turkish state continued with the consolidation of state power over Kurds through increased state control and restrictions, centralization, as well as through population engineering and the shaping of the demographic configuration by uprooting and dispersing Kurdish groups amongst Turks, and settling Turkish peasants and non-Turkish Muslim refugees from elsewhere among the Kurds.<sup>3</sup> These were carried out via the Settlement Laws of 1926 and 1934, continuing with the Ottoman resettlement programmes. For the Turkish modernization, population engineering and related interventions were presented as necessary acts of "civilizing", put in place to eradicate disloyal groups and backward tribal attitudes, and to ensure that the separatist threats could be dealt with (Aktar 2010; Cagaptay 2006; Dündar 2001). Such measures not only found justification through official state ideology and actions, but also via the work of one of the leading sociologists of Turkish modernity and Turkishness, Ziya Gökalp, in the early republican period.

Not only were the Kurdish rebellions of the 1920s and 1930s perceived as evidence of longing for the past order, and were therefore suppressed, but also "the lack of economic integration of the [Kurdish] region into the Turkish market" in the 1950s and 1960 were construed as evidence of backwardness (Yeğen 1999, p. 565) and "strictly in terms of regional inequalities" (Bishku 2007, p. 83), again excluding the ethno-political dimension of the problem. In the 1980s and 1990s however, the dominant construction came to be the presentation of the Kurdish problem in Turkey predominantly as a case of terrorism. This construction was made possible by the Turkish military coup of 1980, and the start of the guerrilla cam-

paign of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in 1984, the latter demanding a separate homeland for Kurds (Gunes 2012). Kurdish provinces were governed under special measures, namely the Regional State of Emergency Government (referred to as OHAL in Turkish) between 1987 and 2002.<sup>4</sup> The violence reinforced the "fetishism of the military solution" to the Kurdish problem in the 1980s and 1990s and the attribution of untrustworthiness and treacherousness to the Kurds. Since 2000, the perception has continued with new adjunct perceptions of Kurds as disloyal others in the form of "psuedo-citizens" (Yeğen 2009; 2007a) and the significant increase in anti-Kurdish sentiment, otherization and stigmatization of Kurds (Saraçoğlu 2010), including in the legal system (Bayir 2013) and the media (Demir and Zeydanlıoğlu 2010). These characterizations go hand-in-hand with the perennial characterization of the Kurdish problem in Turkey as one of pre-modernity, backwardness, banditry and the refusal to assimilate into modernity.

In order to reveal the socially-constituted borders of Kurdishness and Turkishness then, one needs to recognize first that the *exclusion* of Kurdishness was made possible through the *inclusion* of a particular Orientalist narrative (Said 1995) created around the easternness of Kurds, through the attribution of inherent characteristics to those from the east, and the "conversion" and (mis)translation of their ethno-political demands into claims about backwardness and anti-modernity. Even though Orientalist narratives were also employed during the Ottoman period, especially when the Ottoman elites resorted to Orientalist tropes in their dealings with, and representations of, their ethnic and tribal periphery (Makdisi 2002), the exclusion of Kurdishness and the simultaneous inclusion of a particular Orientalist narrative (on Kurds) was more intense and influential during the early decades of the Turkish Republic as such narratives coincided with Turkish nation-building and were posited against a hegemonic Turkishness. It is to this Turkishness that I now turn my attention.

My second point is that the modern, secular, centralized, and westernized Turkishness was constructed in opposition to this particular easternness. That is, whilst Kurds could not shake off their backwardness and easternness, Turkishness emerged as dominant, dignified and noble, claspng on to what I refer to as the *efendi* (master) identity. In other words, modernity in Turkey not only included strategies of inclusion of the discourse of "easterness" (of Kurds) but also strategies of inclusion of a "western" Turkish identity that was deemed superior. This dual inclusion is central to the construction of the superiority and centrality of Turkishness to date. Such claims of Turkishness, especially in the early

Republican period, were accompanied by racial overtones and “race science”, for example via the use of anthropometrics and biometrics to confirm the inherent characteristics of Turks as civilizers and modernizers, as well as referring to Turks’ “innate” beauty, intelligence, talent and strength and their westernness and whiteness (Engin 2008a; 2008b).

In the Kemalist political language, “Turkishness” meant a “positive atavism” containing, in its very essence, civilization, revolution, beauty, and the spirit of independence, as opposed to the Kurdish “negative atavism” which was synonymous with feudalism, ugliness, reaction, Barbary, and the spirit of slavery (Bozarslan 2007, p. 46).

Racial overtones, the discourse of eugenics, archaeology, anthropology as well as the Sun Language Theory (*Güneş Dil Teorisi*) and the Turkish History Thesis (*Türk Tarih Tezi*) placed Turks at the root of all world civilizations and languages by revealing their “innate” character. The Turkish History Thesis served a multitude of purposes. For example, it aimed to prove (and celebrate) that the glorious and ancient civilization-founding peoples of Anatolia (e.g. the Hittites and Sumerians) were Turks and therefore the Turkish race was key to the creation and dispersal of human civilization (Aydin 2010; Göksu Özdoğan 2010). It also attempted to establish that the “Turks came from a European/‘Alpine’ race, and not from an inferior Asian one” (Aydin 2010, p. 38), as such providing an innately western identity and past for Turkishness to settle into comfortably. As such, it told the past in a way which fitted the priorities of the nationalist governing elites.

This construction of Turkishness as the dominant, sublime ethnic and national identity went hand in hand with the modernization of the Turkish language. Whilst other languages were suppressed, denigrated or banned, for example via the campaigns entitled “Citizen, Speak Turkish!” (*Vatandaş Türkçe Konuş!*)<sup>5</sup>, the Turkish language was “occidentalized, “modernized” and purified from external influences” (Scalbert-Yücel 2010, p. 117). Official cultural, linguistic and historical narratives were created and propagated through state institutions such as the Atatürk Culture, Language and History High Institute (*Atatürk Kültür Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu*), the Turkish Culture and Research Institute (*Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü*), the Turkish Language Institute (*Türk Dil Kurumu*), and the Turkish History Institute (*Türk Tarih Kurumu*).

Through such interjections, Turkishness was eternalized, crowned with a proud past and a hopeful future, ready to govern, civilize and modernize its others. That is to say, it was positioned as



*efendi*. This occurred despite its being perceived as the *enfant terrible* of Europe:

As long as Turkishness contained the essential element that made the West modern, Turkey could create a distinctive tradition within modernity. Being the West's Other, or the "terrible Turk", posed no problem as long as the republican elite could convince themselves, and everyone else, that Turks were innately western (Engin 2008a, p. 297).

Thirdly, these historical constructions of Turkishness and easternness, go hand in hand with the reluctant reception of Kurdishness and the "Kurdish initiative" in Turkey today.<sup>6</sup> The intolerance and loathing shown towards the granting of Kurdish cultural and linguistic rights (Sezgin and Wall 2005), the continuing prohibition on the public use of Kurdish,<sup>7</sup> the demonization and stigmatization of Kurdish leaders (Demir and Zeydanlıoğlu 2010), the steeply rising anti-Kurdish sentiment in Turkey (Saraçoğlu 2010; Karabat 2008) vis-à-vis the steeply rising "ethno-nationalist and xenophobic [Turkish] self-image" (Çırakman 2011) as well as the dominant explanation of the relative deprivation of the Kurdish areas by referring to Kurds' backwardness without addressing structural inequalities and the dynamics of wealth creation and distribution in Turkey, are some of the many remaining legacies of the inclusion of a particular Orientalist and stigmatized narrative (easternness) together with the reinforced acceptance of a dominant and superior, *efendi* Turkishness.

This legacy of nation building in Turkey, and its strategies of inclusion and exclusion are still currently operative. Even the recent (though limited) recognition and expansion of Kurdish rights in Turkey by the governing party, the AKP, is based on a hierarchical *efendi* relationship in which the dominant identity (Turkishness) allows Kurds some rights – albeit reluctantly – rather than seeing them as citizens deserving cultural and linguistic rights equal (or at least comparable) to those that Turks already possess. The current "Kurdish" reforms do not attempt to flatten hierarchies nor involve Kurds as interlocutors either. As Somer argues with regard to the reforms: "Turkish-majority actors do not recognize explicitly Kurdish political actors as parties they should 'listen to' even if these are legitimately elected" (2008, p. 229). To this day, it remains an offence to insult "Turkishness" as per the article 301 of the Turkish penal code. No other ethno-political identity is given similar protection in Turkey. Hence, whilst I appreciate that there has been some progress with regard to Kurdish rights, the hierarchic ordering of ethnicities and the *efendi* positioning of Turkishness still remain firmly intact.<sup>8</sup>

Through bringing studies of Kurdishness and Turkishness into a single conversation, the article has thus exposed certain strategies of involvement and exclusion within Turkish modernity.<sup>9</sup> It also drew attention to the similar, though not identical, processes which arise when one begins to challenge the policing of how modern Turkish history is narrated, and when one questions the way in which existing boundaries between Kurdishness and Turkishness are currently drawn and policed. In other words, I highlighted interconnections between the construction and reinforcement of identities though both temporal and spatial policing, and in so doing attempted to open a simultaneous engagement with the past and present. Thinking through these temporal and spatial processes, I argue, requires second-language learning both of history and about those whom we continue to other. The first kind of learning I outlined summons the dominant *efendi* identity to learn the various historical strategies of exclusion and inclusion of Turkish modernity, including both “ignorant ignorance” and “learned ignorance” (Santos 2009, p. 114). The second type of learning invites the making of connections between the way in which modern Turkish history was narrated, and the way in which Turkishness is currently throned as *efendi* in Turkey. They therefore require the breaking of Turkish modernity’s (and Turkishness’s) certainty with itself. Through these interlinked processes, what I call “*humbling Turkishness*” can begin.

Humbling Turkishness requires a rigorous study of the “erasures”, that is the unpalatable aspects of history which have been left out or the horrors which have been “trivialized” via discursive strategies. In relation to the latter, though focusing on another part of world history (the Haitian revolution), Trouillot talks about how certain discourses such as “‘It’ did not really happen; it was not that bad, or that important” (1995, p. 96) serve the important purpose of erasure. He refers to them as narratives which “sweeten the horror or banalize” via utterances such as “some [Afro-American slaves] were better fed than British workers” (1995, p. 97). In the Turkish case, past injustices are sweetened or banalized by attempting to cancel their relevance through pointing to injustices others (e.g. the West, the Kurds) have committed; or via utterances such as “Turkish peasants are also poor”, “it is not a Kurdish or Turkish thing but a matter of economic underdevelopment” or “we do not have a Kurdish problem in Turkey – this is just a Western plot to divide and weaken Turkey”. Besides questioning such banalizations of the problem and associated injustices, SLLT expects a rigorous study of what the “silenced” say, that is, closely listening to the voices and stories of those who have been hushed. As such it would allow alternative knowledges and histories to

emerge, to be heard and consequently to challenge the dominant narratives. It also requires not glossing over the positive contributions the othered (Kurds, in this case) has made to Turkey (e.g. during Turkey's "War of Independence" in the 1920s, culturally via music and literature, and economically as a source of immigrant "cheap" labour, subsidizing the increasingly affluent lifestyles in "western" Turkey). The aim is not to create an alternative story of Turkish modernity, or some sort of a parallel universe. It is rather to unsettle Turkish modernity's self-image and to enable the rethinking, reconstruction and retelling of the story of modernity in Turkey which is confident enough to carry the perspectives of those whom it erased or attempted to silence.

### **3. Building and Fostering "Solidarity Trading Zones"**

The epistemology of interaction that I have so far employed brings back the perennial challenge of "identity politics" whereby occupying a particular position (e.g. being Kurdish, working class, lesbian) is thought to be necessary (though not sufficient) for questioning dominant ideologies and/or past injustices. With respect to this article, the question is then one of assuming a distinctly Kurdish voice and identity and using that singular identity as the main site of resistance and engagement with others. Following the criticisms that Bhambra and Margree (2010) have raised against identity politics, and those who challenge the false dichotomy of the homogenous universalism and fragmenting essentialism (for example, Matin 2012, Shilliam 2009). I argue that the redrawing of the boundaries of Kurdishness and Turkishness necessitates the building of what I call "solidarity trading zones" rather than the building and pursuit of reified and reinforced (ethnic) identity-based politics.

Solidarity trading zones can be thought of as sites where coordination and cooperation of activities around common political concerns and commitments are built and fostered between communities, and where "pidgins" for communication and understanding are created and cultivated. What is aimed at is not a fully shared understanding or a common language across the membership of each community. Neither is there a requirement for the members to be stamped with an exact political-view-stamp, nor with a particular social position or identity. What is sought are the convergent processes of mutual engagement, the collaboration of activities around certain concerns and solidarities without assuming a central identity, position or neutral language. In other words, it highlights the possibility and attractiveness of putting our resources towards creating solidarity zones where none of us might speak the same language, occupy the same identity or have the

exact same political approach or solutions, but we can nevertheless craft a coordination language, construct several practices and activities around specific concerns, injustices and stances (Demir 2011) “as opposed to these activities having to rely on assumed pre-existing identities (that is, being female, gay, black, dalit, etc.)” (Bhambra and Margree 2010, p. 61). This is because we recognize the danger of cherishing and developing solidarities via the cultivation of incommensurable and reified identities, stances, frameworks and languages which inevitably posit groups against one another.

The limited “pidgins” or practices that are developed in the solidarity trading zone can bridge and bond, allowing further solidarities to be established, for local coordination to be hammered out, or for existing collaborations to flourish. Despite their major differences, people, groups or clusters can build movements and mobilizations around particular issues and injustices. This means that neither a strongly shared social position, nor a strongly shared belief system is necessary. There is no requirement for having been a victim, or at the receiving end, of the injustice. Rather the requirement is one that is built around common activities which “facilitate the understanding of experiences, thus making those experiences the possible object of analysis and action for all” (Bhambra and Margree 2010, p. 62). An example of a solidarity trading zones is the co-authorship by several NGOs in Turkey and Physicians for Human Rights of a medical handbook entitled the “Istanbul Protocol” to help doctors in Turkey and elsewhere document torture. Another is built around opposing the major dam project which will flood Hasankeyf, a town in the Kurdish region of Turkey. Others can be built around identifying and exposing jingoistic phrases in textbooks in Turkey.

Moreover, it is in such trading zones that ideas, activities, concerns and issues can be traded and thus diffuse from one group to the other. Stories can flow from one to the other, across ethnic identities and allegiances. By taking part in them, actors can take back stories, experiences and concerns to the other groups, social situations and zones of which they are a part. Activities, concerns and solidarities of such zones can at times spill over and lead to the joining up of various inter-related solidarity zones. Or, what one experiences or learns in one solidarity zone can rupture, and extend beyond that zone, bring about change and lead to the questioning of hegemonic relationships in other spheres of life. Perhaps the best and most recent example of a solidarity trading zone was the recent Gezi Park protests in Turkey. The uprising, sparked by a desire to protect a public park in Istanbul, brought Kemalists, Alevis, pro-Kurdish party supporters, LGBT groups, the

left and many other social and political groups and individuals together in their battle against authoritarian, paternalistic, conservative and neo-liberal forces in Turkey. It allowed them to develop common activities, interact, coordinate, cooperate and work together. Other neighbourhoods, and cities joined the uprising, including Kurdish cities and citizens. It allowed new allegiances to be formed between disparate groups. In addition, it enabled learning (and humility) across the borders of different movements. For example, outraged by the violence the police inflicted, and the self-censorship popular Turkish media displayed in their reporting of the events, many Turks apologized to Kurds on twitter, not only sympathizing with what Kurds had to go through in the past, but also recognizing that they were misinformed by media and those in power about the Kurdish issue, and hence had failed to show enough humility and understanding towards Kurdish suffering.<sup>10</sup>

Here then, there is no necessity for an Archimedean point or identity from which to engage in activities (as per Habermas' idea of the public sphere). Nor is there a requirement for a full and fluent *translation* of injustices across reified ethno-identity politics. First, such translations are politically problematic as they will lead to getting to know the other via mediators. This in return can lead to one identity (e.g. Kurdishness) being spoken *for*, silencing certain discourses, histories or experiences, and possibly imposing unwanted and unwarranted meanings. It can lead to ventriloquism. Alternatively, a translation-focused interaction can end up putting the onus on Kurds to translate themselves, forcing them to wrap and present themselves in the language of the dominant identity. The solidarity trading zones which I argue for have the potential to overcome both of these failings. Instead of attempting to translate the other, we explore the possibility of learning, interacting, cooperating and trading at borders without necessarily having to transfer one's self into the language and value system of the dominant. As Asad argues (1986, p. 160) we need to "introduce and enlarge cultural capacities, learnt from other ways of living, into our own" without centralizing ourselves. It is only then that we can engage in "critical ground clearing" and "dislodge cannons to make space for alternatives" (Clifford 1986, p. 24).

#### **4. Contingencies of Solidarity Trading Zones**

This is not to deny the contingent character of solidarity trading zones. There is a need to explore the socio-political contexts which allow them to be built and fostered whilst paying attention to the arduous task of communicating, evaluating and commensurating across established borders and identities. In the rest of this article,

I will discuss two central contingencies on which the creation and maintenance of solidarity trading zones between Kurdishness and Turkishness depend.

The success of a solidarity-trading zone is contingent upon actors willingly making themselves vulnerable and humble. Breaking into another framework, learning its language, stories, pains, traumas and priorities, and consequently developing common activities and “pidgins” mean that we leave behind the often de facto position of being on guard, in defence, impervious and self-righteous. It demands the lowering of shields and fortification mechanisms and the exposure of our vulnerabilities to the “other” and possibly even opening ourselves up to criticism. Consequently it cannot be a sphere devoid of distress and discomfort. In Turkey there is an additional discomfort and distress which is referred to as the “Sèvres Syndrome”. This notion refers to the way in which there is a heightened fear that Western powers, along with Turkey’s “internal enemies” are conspiring against Turkey in order to weaken and dismember its territorial and national integrity.<sup>11</sup> Internal enemies of Turkey are construed as those citizens who are critical of Turkish policies, including the ethnic and religious minorities of Turkey who are asking for increased rights. They are posited as the pawns of Western powers. Demands for increased minority rights and ethno-political activities in Turkey (unless of course they are praising Turkishness) are approached with suspicion. The national reflex is to see them as plotters. It is no wonder that attempts to grant more cultural and political rights to Kurds, Turkey’s biggest ethnic minority comprising about a fifth of the population, are seen as part of a plot to divide Turkey. Even moderate voices, modest reforms and limited cultural and linguistic rights make many circles “uncomfortable” (Romano 2010, p. 51). There is “irreversible recognition of the fact that Kurds cannot be forced into becoming Turks” (O’Leary 2010, p. xi) yet, the modernist legacy, allied with the Sèvres Syndrome, does not allow much room for the epistemic reflexivity and humility needed from “Turkishness”. Whilst it might be argued that certain types of Kurdish nationalism also prevents the emergence of modest and credible alternatives, as Watts argues, the politics of polarization is primarily promoted by the Turkish state institutions and representatives via “extensive use of coercion” and a “rhetoric that marginalizes and demonizes pro-Kurdish party leaders” (2010, p. 108).

Much faith has been put in the democratization and moderation process that Turkey’s membership application to the EU could bring. Whilst it is true that Turkey’s desire to join the European Union (EU) has helped further democratization, and has “greatly contributed to a reform process that has led to some public recog-

nition of the Kurdish identity" (Kirişçi 2010, p. 76), it is worth considering that the continuing refusal and humiliation of Turkey by the EU is now beginning to make the necessary humbling of Turkishness all the more difficult. The secular and military elites, the traditionally core defenders of the EU and westernization in Turkey, have begun to take up anti-EU and "reactionary anti-western" positions (Gunter 2010, p. 199; Herzog 2009, p. 34). There is reason to think that the politics of deferral by the EU is now playing into the hands of the Sèvres Syndrome, making reified ethnic identities more likely, and solidarity trading zones less viable (see also Çırakman 2011).

Secondly, solidarity trading zones are not simply for filling gaps in knowledge and correcting error, but for identifying and remedying bias and omission, especially employing a "critical evaluation of one's memory" (Misztal 2011, p. 48) and where possible "putting the past in the service of the present" (Misztal 2010, p. 35). The success of a zone then needs to be seen as contingent upon successfully developing not just a "pluralist attitude towards memory" (Brewer 2010, p. 193), but one which would allow previously silenced memories to be verbalized, and others, especially dominant ones, to be challenged.

What is important is that rather than deliberately forgetting, or deliberately correcting error, interactions in the solidarity zones need to help us to hear the requests and pains of one another, and through developing common activities, allow support and consolidation, and the restoration of cooperation and harmonious relationships. The oft-found resistance to such ways of memory-making means that there is no guarantee of success. In the case of Turkey, due to the existence of hardened stances on both sides and few moderates (Watts 2010; Somer 2008; 2004), the "Turco-ethnicized" history of Anatolia" (Göksu Özdoğan 2010, p. 56), the potent emotional and violent legacy of the immediate past, and the lack of moral and global citizenship education, the memory re-making process is severely frustrated.<sup>12</sup> Empathy, healing and forgiveness are thus left for future generations to take care of.

## Conclusion

I started my paper by discussing a film in which a Turkish teacher, the harbinger of civilization, is called upon to rethink his relationship with his Kurdish students and their parents. I used this film as an allegory to highlight how *efendi* Turkishness has reached an impasse and that the hierarchical ordering of ethnic identities in Turkey needs to be challenged. The article argued that this process itself involves a historical dimension, requiring the dominant

identity, namely “Turkishness”, to engage critically both with its past and with modernity, as well as with the sphere of “Kurdishness” especially with the official construction of Turkish history and the place of “others” within it. When doing this, the article brought studies of Kurdishness and Turkishness into a single conversation and by using and synthesizing their insights explored not only the strategies of inclusion but also the strategies of exclusion that define Turkish modernity.

The paper, however, resisted a reified and hardened defence of ethnic identities as a resolution of the ethno-political problems in Turkey. It instead defended a different “epistemology of interaction”, arguing in favour of crafting solidarities and activities around specific concerns and stances rather than *solely* and *exclusively* deriving them from pre-existing ethnic identities. As this article has put forward, a “solidarity zone” does not mean that one is forbidden from acquiring a particular (ethnic or other) identity, or that one has to leave identities aside in the hope of building a common authentic voice. It does not demand the de-ethnification of the Kurdish question or the flattening of differences. Neither does it promote forgetting past injustice, nor the development of a systematic neglect, some sort of an “amnesic society” (Miształ 2010, p. 26). It promotes remembrances, mediations and solidarities but also remembers the mantra that we don’t have to choose between universalistic discourses and ethnic narcissism.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Kurds” and “Turks” should not be understood in an essentialist way. For example, some Albanians, Arabs, Circassians, Lazs, Kurds who live in Turkey define themselves as “Turks”, some join the Turkish nationalist parties, some even lead movements and political parties which oppose increased cultural and linguistic rights for ethnic minorities in Turkey. This is why throughout the article I mostly use the terms “Kurdishness” and “Turkishness”.

<sup>2</sup> The secret state report of 1925, the “Eastern Reform Plan” (*Şark İslahat Planı*), shows that the state acknowledged the ethnic dimension of the Kurdish struggle in confidential documents. See Öztürk 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Cagaptay notes that whilst allowing the migration of many non-Turkish Muslims from the Balkans and Caucuses into Turkey, Turkey prohibited Kurds (another group of non-Turkish Muslims) from neighbouring states to migrate into Turkey in order to prevent an increase in Kurdish population in Turkey (2006, p. 87).

<sup>4</sup> In this period, thousands of Kurdish villages were evacuated (Human Rights Watch 2010).

Members of Kurdish parties and supporters faced “extra-legal threats” and “extra-judicial killings” (Watts 2010, p. 109–110) as well as extensive coercion and torture (Zeydanlıoğlu 2009). More than 40,000 people died as a result of the violence. See also White 2007 and Gunter 2000.



<sup>5</sup> These campaigns began in 1928, and were directed at non-Muslims (e.g. Jews, Greeks) and Muslim refugees. However, as Scalbert-Yücel (2010, p. 117) argues, they were also “directed at other, unacknowledged non-Turkish populations, principally the Kurds”.

<sup>6</sup> Launched in 2009, the Kurdish initiative aimed to reduce military presence in the Kurdish provinces and to grant (albeit limited) cultural and linguistic rights to Kurds. The word “Kurdish” was later dropped, and the title “democratic initiative” was adopted.

<sup>7</sup> The ban on the use of the Kurdish language has been relaxed. It can now be taught in a “private setting”, outside of mainstream education. There is also a state-run television channel that broadcasts in Kurdish. However, the teaching of Kurdish in mainstream education is still not allowed. Article 42 of the constitution categorically bans the teaching of any language other than Turkish as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens. Speaking Kurdish in public can still earn a prison sentence (in August 2011, the mayor of Bitlis, Selim Sadak, was given a 6 month suspended prison sentence for speaking Kurdish in breach of Turkish laws governing political parties (Radikal 2011). This was later commuted to a fine of 3 thousand Turkish Liras). In addition, taking names which contain the letters “q”, “w” and “x” is still not allowed. These letters are in the Kurdish alphabet, but not in the Turkish alphabet. Ironically, if a name is Western in origin, for example if one takes the Western spouse’s surname, Turkish officials do not resist using these letters in the ID cards of Turkish citizens (e.g. Wilkinson).

<sup>8</sup> After a surge in violence, the Turkish government, in December 2012, announced the start of direct talks with Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned leader of the PKK. He is held in solitary confinement on Imrali island prison in Turkey. However, many Kurdish activists question the sincerity of the current AKP government. See also Çiçek 2011 on the limitations of the AKP’s Kurdish initiatives.

<sup>9</sup> It should be added that others, especially non-Muslims, have also been subjects of strategies of inclusion and exclusion, facing assimilation and discrimination in Turkey. See Oran 2004 for a detailed discussion.

<sup>10</sup> Final version of this article was accepted in February 2013, before the start of Gezi park demonstrations. I would like to thank the editors for allowing me to make a last minute addition on Gezi protests.

<sup>11</sup> The notion of Sevres Syndrome originates from the now defunct Treaty of Sèvres (1921) which followed the Ottoman defeat in World War One (the Ottoman version of the Treaty of Versailles for Germany).

<sup>12</sup> However, there are signs that even though this process is resisted in Turkey, the development of an increasingly articulate Kurdish diaspora (from Turkey) in the West will keep alive particular collective memories, and also ensure the continuation of Kurdish “diasporic battling” with Turkey (Demir 2012).

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