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ETHNICITY, IDENTITY,
CULTURAL CHANGE
Kurdish, Turkish and Turkish
Cypriot Communities in
North London

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Solmaz Tavsanoğlu

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The working paper series on *Everyday Cultures* disseminates research developed within the National Everyday Cultures Programme. We welcome comments about the work published.

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Editorial Presentation

This issue of *Everyday Cultures* carries a working paper written by Gary Pattison and Solmaz Tavsanoğlu on the theme of 'Ethnicity, Identity and Cultural Change'. It is based on a pilot research project developed in 2001 with funding from the National Everyday Cultures Programme (NECP). The research focused on the Kurdish, Turkish and Turkish Cypriot Communities in North London, to investigate the different ways of conceptualizing cultural integration in the everyday lives of ethnic communities in Britain.

Many problems are common to the integration strategies and ways of getting by of these communities. Change and reconstruction of ethnicity, cultural changes, and diverse patterns of integration, are found in the everyday processes of providing for the needs of daily life, where language and socialization figure prominently. Yet, while present everyday conditions are central, the memories of past experiences and expectations, or fantasies for the future, also play a role in how different communities, and sections or individuals within them, integrate. Pattison and Tavsanoğlu found that cultural ethnic identity can have multiple meanings for groups of individuals, and that these 'ethnic meanings' are particularly complex for those individuals who do not identify with their communities of origin.

The research addresses an important area within the contemporary everyday cultures of Britain. It employs a methodology combining interviews with selected members of the communities and participant observation. It contributes to building the NECP by increasing understanding of the role of ethnicity in organizing everyday relationships, and of the bearing these issues have on policies on culture.

I would like to thank various colleagues for their involvement in different phases of this work. Peter Redman, Tony Bennett and Peter Hamilton were in the NECP funding subcommittee which helped shape up the research issues and strategies. Dave Hesmondhalgh and Karim Murji offered comments on a previous version of this paper.

EBS

Ethnicity, Identity, Cultural Change: Kurdish, Turkish and Turkish Cypriot Communities in North London

Gary Pattison

Solmaz Tavsanoğlu

Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between ethnicity, identity and cultural change amongst North London's Kurdish, Turkish and Turkish Cypriot communities. Firstly, the paper focuses on how different ethnic organizations construct different notions of collective identities and explores how they perceive ethnic cultures and ethnic communities in North London. In doing this it takes six different ethnic organizations as case studies. Secondly, this study focuses on how individuals construct their personal identities and position themselves in everyday life as well as how they relate themselves to the ethnic organizations and ethnic communities. In doing this it looks specifically at three individual cases. The highly qualitative nature of the study aims to explore the above through a series of extracts from both in-depth semi-structured interviews with the organizations and individual's life stories. This work presents a contrasting picture of how personal and collective identities are constructed and reconstructed within differing circumstances. It concludes with Hall's (1992) argument that identity, culture and ethnicity are social constructs based on discourses specifically set, positioned and situated.

Ethnicity/culture/identity

The study explores the ways in which imaginary rediscoveries of cultural identities may be pursued through ethnic organizations. It questions how collective identity is constructed (Sibley, 1999). Hall defines ethnicity as acknowledging 'the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge is contextual' (Hall, 1992, p.257). Following this notion, ethnicity and culture are seen in this study as fluid, subject to ongoing change and reconstruction (Brah, et al. 1999; Hall, 1992; Cohen, 1999). As culture is subject to constantly changing meaning, identity is something that can be continually repackaged around points of cultural association and alignment. Identification is also based on the demonstration of a point of otherness and difference (Bauman, 1990). Very often this identification of difference leads to cultural fixation (Anthias, 1992), by which cultural positions are maintained as stable structures long after they have changed at the point or place of origin. This can lead to minority ethnic cultural positions appearing outdated and isolated when cut off from an original mainstream culture that has continued to develop and change (Mac an Ghaill, 1999). Regardless of fixation, cultures still change and adapt to new surroundings and circumstances (Hall, 1992). Ethnic cultures may therefore be passed on as a series of fragments or traces of a past cultural formation as groups and individuals struggle to salvage fragments of use to themselves and sustainable in very different social, political and economic contexts from their point of origin (Kibreab, 1999).

Identity is always constituted within the process of representation (Hall, 1990, p.222). In this sense identity problematizes the authenticity on which the notion of culture is hinged. It is not a reflection of the traditional, but rather something constituted and driven by the contemporary (Rutherford, 1990). Cultural identity, although it may lay claim to a common history, is based solidly in the here and now, it is to do with time and place. In the case of many new ethnic cultures the issue of displacement is always present (Cohen, 1999; Hall, 1990). Identity will therefore be constructed along the lines of oneness sharing common culture and historical experience. Identity is based on an 'imaginative rediscovery' of the past. Cultural identity is also about delineating points of distinctiveness. At this stage it is brought into being and takes on a wider more viable meaning (Hall, 1997). Culture is therefore subject to continual change as it repackages itself to engage with new circumstances. Cultural identity may therefore be seen to be where people position themselves. This is not to say that there are not 'traces' of earlier cultural formations but that where these are discernable they may not necessarily fit in easily with contemporary cultural identification (Pattison, 1999). Contemporary culture is almost always based on the 'hybridisation' of different features and diasporic transformation (Hall, 1992; Back, 1996). This work explores how cultural identities are formulated in Turkish, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriot communities in North London. It looks first at how different ethnic organizations construct different types of collective identities, then moves to explore how individuals identify themselves and relate themselves with ethnic organizations. Through this, it demonstrates contradictory and conflicting tendencies between the two, one consciously drawing collectivities in contrast to another struggling to establish self-being.

Background to the Study

This paper is based on a research project funded by the National Everyday Cultures Programme at the Open University. Fieldwork was undertaken between October and December 2000 in the London Boroughs of Hackney, Haringey and Enfield. These areas include by far the most concentrated Turkish, Kurdish and North Cypriot communities in the United Kingdom. People from these communities arrived in the United Kingdom at different periods. Many Turkish Cypriots settled from the 1950s onwards (Osman, 1999), while the Kurdish communities grew up from 1989 (Wahlbeck, 1998). People of Turkish ethnicity have arrived in a less concentrated way over many years from 1973 onwards. The Turkish community is a minority among the three groups.

Different groups and individuals migrated to the UK for different reasons. Many of the earlier arrivals were effectively economic migrants while more recent arrivals are often classified as political refugees. Some members of the community from the early migratory flows are second or third generation residents. Such groups are well grounded in their respective localities, speak English, some as a first language, and have held British citizenship for decades. They first settled in Hackney and Islington, but gradually moved further north of London as some of them became more affluent (Ladbury, 1977). Today, the largest Turkish Cypriot population lives in Enfield (Osman, 1999). Kurds and Turks first settled in Hackney and spread out to Haringey and Edmonton (Griffiths, 2000; Kucukcan, 1999). In part this was as a result of Haringey Council's refugee settlement policy (Haringey Council, 1997).

Many from all three communities initially found employment in the textile and catering industries and went on to establish their own businesses in these sectors (Osman, 1999; Eren, 1999). Today these economic sectors are highly visible at a street level in Kingsland Road, Dalston in the Borough of Hackney and Green Lane in the Borough of Haringey, besides several smaller visible commercial concentrations elsewhere in North London. A combination of ethnic concentration and ethnic-owned economic structures has led to a situation whereby it is possible for people to

live within the confine of a Turkish speaking environment. Much of the employment available in these sectors requires low-level skills and education and can offer a first step for new arrivals that possibly lack a full grasp of English.

Many of the first generation from each of the communities was from rural backgrounds (Ladbury, 1977). They tended to carry with them a great deal of village custom and local cultural tradition that had long since been forgotten in urban environments in the countries from where they came. This is especially true in the case of many Kurds from Turkey who came mainly from Eastern Anatolian villages in the provinces of Maras, Malatya and Sivas (Griffiths, 2000). Village life also had clear limitations on the level of educational attainment. However, even when well-educated people turned up in Britain they found that their qualifications were not accepted as being of any value by the British authorities.

Besides sharing the same spatial and economic structures two further connecting strands exist between the three communities. The first of these is the Turkish language: even those who speak Kurdish or English as the first language tend to have a working knowledge of Turkish. Only a minority amongst the younger second and third generation residents have completely lost command of Turkish and communicate in English as a first language. Secondly, there is a considerable overlap in terms of place of origin not just in terms of Turks and Kurds occupying the same original geographic areas but also in that many people from the Anatolian mainland settled in North Cyprus in the course of the twentieth century. This has also led to wider, far reaching political tensions at the point of origin many of which have had, and continue to have, an impact upon the communities based in the United Kingdom.

Community Organizations

There are well in excess of 100 Turkish, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriot organizations in the London Boroughs of Hackney, Haringey and Enfield. These organizations cover specific groups and issues based on gender, religion, politics, sports, business, culture and towns and cities of origin. Some of them simply exist as social gathering places; others are fully engaged in political or cultural issues. Some of them provide welfare and support services.

We obtained extensive lists of these organizations from the local authorities, the community newspapers published in the locality, and from the Turkish Cypriot Embassy. We selected those listed by the local authorities as community based organizations with charitable status, providing welfare and support services for individuals from the three ethnic communities. These organizations have day-to-day dealings with individuals from three community groupings without discriminating their ethnic origins, political and religious beliefs. There was no Turkish community based organization registered in the local authorities' lists. As a result, they are not included in this study.

We selected a diverse range of community organizations that have significant influence in the construction of different notions of collective identities, as can be seen from Table 1. We visited each organization at their premises, conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with, in some cases their co-ordinators, some cases their employed staff and, whenever possible, both. Sometimes informants presented their own ideas, sometimes they spoke for the organization they worked for or represented. We arranged interviews when they were holding other activities on their premises, such as luncheon clubs, to meet the individuals who were using these activities. This provided us with direct contact with users. We asked about the structure and objectives of organizations, the activities or services they provided, their wider networks, their perception of the cultural characteristics of each community and explored the way in which each organization constructs its own identities. We collected and consulted published documents, such as annual reports, newspapers, journals and leaflets produced by the organizations. We also made observations and kept a diary about the various events we witnessed in our visits to the locality. We have not presented here all of the data we collected because of the required length of the paper. The highly qualitative nature of this study aims to provide a view of the issues through a series of extracts from in-depth semi-structured interviews. The names of those consulted have been omitted or altered throughout for purposes of confidentiality. The following demonstrates how the selected organizations construct ethnic identities. It considers the confusions and conflicts arising from these processes and explores how they perceive ethnic cultural backgrounds and the everyday life of ethnic communities in London.

Table 1 Characteristics of community organizations

Data Ref.	Org. 1	Org. 2	Org. 3	Org. 4	Org. 5	Org. 6
Location	Hackney	Hackney	Hackney	Hackney	Enfield	Haringey
Date of Establishment	1977	1978	1984	1989	1996	1984
Ethnicity	Turkish Cypriot	Turkish Cypriot	Kurdish/Turkish	Turkish/Kurdish	Turkish Cypriot	Turkish Cypriot
Gender	Mix	Mix	Mix	Mix	Mix	Women
Generation	Elderly	All	All	All	All	All
Main Concerns	Elderly Well-being & Welfare	Home Care, Advice/Support	Kurdish Language & History, Youth & Elderly	Resettlement, Youth Workers' Issues	Turkish Language, Education, Home Care & Elderly	Women's Issues
Collective Identity	Turkish Nationalism/Secularism/Modernism	Cypriot Identity	Kurdish Identity/Marxism/Modernism	Multi-cultural Society	Turkish Nationalism/Secularism/Modernism	Turkish Cypriot

Organization One: Turkish national identity and culture

This is one of the oldest Turkish Cypriot organizations. It was established in 1977 when a wide range of projects and activities were run, specifically aiming at youth and the elderly, such as Turkish language classes, Turkish folk music and folk dance and health care projects. In 1997 many of these activities were cut back because of financial difficulties. Since then, it has concentrated fully on supporting the elderly and disabled with the provision of facilities where the elderly gather, socialise and watch Turkish satellite television twice a week. Ninety percent of its members are elderly (sixty years old and over). This organization has close relations with the Turkish Cypriot Embassy.

In our informal conversations with the elderly using the organization's activities, we discovered that many of them do not speak or understand English, feeling socially isolated. Many still have very favourable memories of North Cyprus. They remember it as a warm, sunny place. They idealise it and long to return. They see North Cyprus as it was when they left in the 1950s. After spending almost fifty years of their lives in North London they will clearly never return to live in Cyprus. Cyprus is obviously a very different place today from what it was when they left, from the place in their memories. Regardless, many appear to live in the belief that they will return. They clearly live with a 'myth of return'. Where the organization's co-ordinator, in our interview, showed a concern with life in North London and strongly focused on issues around youth and family life, he stated that:

They (youth) are getting married to foreigners. They don't speak Turkish. They don't have any nationalistic stand. They don't know anything about Turkish culture, history and language. They have been assimilated, engulfed in the ocean. Their parents are working long hours. Children are left uncontrolled, running wild. Their parents don't bother to teach them their culture, history and language. Everybody thinks only of how to make money as easily and quickly as possible. (Co-ordinator, M, Mid-60s, 31/10/2000)

The overall ethos of the organization is to preserve what it sees as Turkish national identity and culture. The defensiveness towards cultural hybridisation is marked. The family is seen as an important unit for the maintenance and continuity of cultural identity. The prevailing moral position blames parents for only thinking of making money rather than maintaining the Turkish identity and culture. Here culture is conceptualised not on the basis of tradition and custom, but of modernist and secular Kemalist ideology that has predominated in Turkish official discourse since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. In this sense, Turkish national identity and culture is also seen as one monolithic block, a pure, stable and fixed entity equally as applicable to North Cyprus as to the Turkish mainland. The concentrated emphasis on North Cyprus clearly acts as a blockage in terms of overall outlooks and wider engagements in North London.

Organization Two: A separate Cypriot identity

Radical Turkish Cypriot students established this organization in 1978. It has a close relationship with the Cypriot Centre in Haringey, whose management committee consists of Turkish and Greek Cypriots, financed by AKEL, the Communist Party of Cyprus. This organization is also well connected with staff in the local authorities through its members' involvements and employment. It publishes a free weekly newspaper, Toplum Postasi (Community Post). The representative interviewed described the organization's stand as follows:

Turkish Cypriots look at Turkey as a motherland, and Cyprus as her offspring. You know we say we have one motherland that is Cyprus. We don't have another country. Our country is Cyprus. We are Cypriot Patriots. We believe in that. First we are Cypriots, then we are Turkish. (Co-ordinator, M, Mid-forties, 2/11/2000)

This organization draws its identity from Cyprus as place of origin. They believe that they have a distinctive culture and history from Cyprus. They see Turkish Cypriots are experiencing an identity crisis:

We are in the middle. Are we Cypriot? Are we Turkish? If we were Cypriot, but how could we be, we don't trust Greek Cypriots; they attack us whenever they have an opportunity. If we were Turkish the Turks would attempt to assimilate our culture, they want to get rid of our culture and replace it with a Turkish one. So, what is the difference between Turks and Greeks? (Co-ordinator, M, Mid-forties, 2/11/2000)

This confusion arises out of different interpretations of Cyprus' history in the twentieth century. The dominant discourse of Turkish nationalism has played an important role in this confusion. They feel that their culture, customs and identity have been taken away by the Turkish invasion of Cyprus since 1974. This issue of confusion is seen as transcending geographic boundaries and continuing to have an effect on Turkish Cypriots living in North London.

Those we talked to argued that the immigrant experience is very often stigmatised by economic hardship in the here and now. The first generation struggled economically to maintain their lives in North London. One of them stated his personal view, saying that this has destroyed/weakened the traditional family life and values centred on children, whose future economic and social opportunities have been constrained.

The first generation was too busy making a living and paying a mortgage. The second generation was lost. Their parents worked hard but didn't pay enough attention to their kids. Their Turkish is very bad and their English is just as bad. They are not doing well. Like their parents they end up in the rag trade. Another reason for this was what I would call role models. The role models around them were Turkish Cypriots in business and driving in a big Jag. They think that education doesn't pay and therefore move into business and try to make money. (Co-ordinator, M, Mid-forties, 2/11/2000)

In this, making money is associated with business and valued, whilst education is seen as of little value to future well-being. The source of identification and the construction of identity here have shifted from the specific history and geography of Cyprus to individuals', especially youth's, social surroundings in North London. Our interviewee described:

The third generation are like youth living in inner cities. There are a few whose parents have been very careful and transmitted their culture. They are very successful. These are very few. These inner city youth: Afro-Caribbean, Greeks, Turks and Kurds, they are all more or less the same. Some of them claim that they are not ethnic; they are British, except their names. Some of them claim that they are Anglo-Turkish'. (Co-ordinator, M, Mid-forties, 2/11/2000)

Here, the experience of urban life in London's inner city is more prevalent than the transmission of specific ethnic cultural positions. They believe that when parents are able to spend more time with their children they are able to pass on something of the distinctiveness of their cultural background. This in turn helps in the establishment of a specific identity and, in their opinion, encourages higher educational achievement. This example also demonstrates the perceived value of education. It illustrates some of the confusion over cultural identities and how this may be located in the past as much as in the present. The position taken by the interviewee also raises questions on cultural hybridization. As with the previous organization, the real issue is one of maintaining cultural values and identity among the young on the basis of traditional family values and life styles.

Organization Three: Rediscovery of language and history

The third organization is Kurdish and Turkish. It is situated in a pre-eminent retail area of Turkish, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriot businesses. The building they use is impressive. The doors are open all the time so as anybody can easily enter. They have a large open area for meetings and other gatherings which also doubles up as a tea shop, being frequented mostly by middle aged and elderly men who gather there to socialise, drink tea, watch television, discuss issues concerning Turkey and Kurdistan and the problems of living in London. The members are mostly Kurds from Turkey.

This is a political organization as much as a community one. It has direct connections with the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK). It publishes a quarterly magazine that focuses on Kurdish identity, language and the need for an independent Kurdish homeland. This organization is well connected with local, national and European level institutions. A person of Turkish Cypriot ethnicity coordinates all these relations. He connects himself with this movement in two ways, first his wife is Kurdish and secondly his Marxist political standpoint is in keeping with the political outlook of the organization. The organization's position is based on the assertion of a Kurdish identity.

This organization claims that Kurds are different from Turks in terms of their customs, culture, language and religion. They claim that their 'home land', called Kurdistan, covers most of the eastern Anatolia, a part of western Iran and the north of Iraq. They are now living in exile. One day they will return to their 'home land'. The images that they draw of their 'home land' are mainly of rural life, high mountains, moors and valleys filled with lush vegetation and colourful flowers. The walls of a large room allocated for cultural activities are covered by these images. Teaching Kurdish language, folk music and dance are major activities at the centre. The 'myth of return' has been kept fresh as a symbol of their struggle for an independent Kurdish state. Reviving the Kurdish language and history are important components of their work. Again, they are interested in the politics of Turkey, in their struggle for independence and not directly with life in North London. Regardless of being conscious of the need for representation at all levels in the political institutions in the United Kingdom, their main effort is to reconstruct Kurdish identity. They see the distinctiveness of Kurdish identity as being undermined by years of assimilation by the Turkish state.

We are surrounded by two alien cultures (British and Turkish), as if this makes us multicultural. Our culture has been assimilated by these two alien cultures. We are becoming puppets of the colonialists. We have got only one weapon, which is our own culture. We should take ownership of our culture and protect it. We are not saying that we should keep ourselves away from other cultures. We should keep ourselves away from the bad side of these cultures such as wasting our lives dreaming of cars and being drunk in discos. We should accept the beautiful side of other cultures such as science and technology and carry this to our culture and so enable it to evolve. (Organization 3, Journal, 2000, No 4)

They are opposed to traditional culture as it is based on feudal land ownership and clan relations. Within this they argue that women are seen as a commodity. This all suggests that the reconstruction of Kurdish culture should be based on a rediscovery of what is good from the past, such as the Kurdish language and history, and also what they see as valuable in the contemporary world. Obviously this presents a conscious picture of a thought-out and controlled degree of hybridization.

This organization attempts to revive or reconstitute what it sees as a cultural position forcefully subsumed into a dominant culture elsewhere before arriving in the United Kingdom. It recognises further negative effects on the cultural distinctiveness of its membership arising from certain attributes associated with British culture. This has led to a sort of half-way position whereby the internationalist ideological leanings of Marxism and the realism of location allow for a degree of concern with everyday life in North London, and indeed a degree of cultural hybridization, whilst the bulk of their concern remains focused elsewhere.

Organization Four: A new homeland, living in a multicultural society

The fourth organization consulted is a Turkish and Kurdish community organization, located in a large council estate where some Kurdish and Turkish families live. This organization's concerns include workers' rights, youth and problems associated with settlement in Britain. They claim to be exiled from their homeland and see England as their new home. They still draw on points of identifiable difference between Kurdish and Turkish identity in terms of religion, language, customs and culture. Their main contribution however may be seen as helping people to settle in the UK and deal with the circumstances that they find themselves in when entering life in new surroundings. The emphasis is certainly on life in the UK rather than life in Turkey. The organization derives its identity from the shared experience of all migrant groups, workers and youth. They attempt to locate themselves in the environment where they are living, in a multicultural environment. The following demonstrates their position besides showing an acute awareness of issues such as gender differences in the process of settlement:

For all the immigrant/refugee communities, before integration there exists the cultures and traditions of the homeland left behind. In many of these cultures/traditions, even in the new homeland, women find themselves in the position of second-class citizens. Add to this the feudal customs and traditions of our own community, it becomes obvious that women of our community find it much harder to rebuild their life and much harder to adapt and integrate. ... We are all for mixing of different communities. This brings understanding, tolerance and progress for all, but this must be the result of voluntary migrations not of forceful uprooting of peoples lives. Today, unfortunately, most of the immigrant/refugee communities come to their new homelands not as a result of choice but as a result of being forced. ... We live in a multi cultural society. This is not simply an aspect of society, it is one of the paths to achieve a community spirit that encompasses all the communities giving rise to co-operation and friendship amongst all the members of all our communities. (Organization 4, Annual Report, 1999-2000)

Once a year they organize a festival with folk music and dance from the ethnic communities. They also organize a summer holiday for youth so that they can share experiences, live together, help each other and discuss relevant issues. They publish a regular magazine for youth. This does not aim at delineating or reconstructing Kurdish identity; rather it focuses on student issues, poverty, political issues around globalization and so on.

Their centre is open to everybody, there is a tea room at the entrance, visitors are mostly young people and both English and Turkish are spoken in this area. They still keep ties with their place of origin, and take a special interest in politics in Turkey, and especially the condition of political prisoners. They claim that they want to live with the reality of their present location. It is important to overcome the barriers that dwelling on mythologies of a homeland create. They are very aware of the experiences of Turkish immigrants in Germany, arguing that they live in ghettos, they do not want a repeat of this situation in London. This organization takes the desire to hybridize/mix with their environment much further than any of those previously discussed. They are keen to participate in everyday life and civic activities in Britain, seeing it as permanent home. They still cling to something of their ethnic distinctiveness, but this is more an attempt at community support and networking rather than a glorification of the past. It is about using and locating cultural fragments in the real world.

Organization Five: Supporting cultural identity

This organization was established in 1996 as a Turkish Cypriot Community organization. The associations' main activities are concentrated on education and home care. This organization took the lead in establishing the 'Consortium of Turkish Schools'. They manage and facilitate Turkish schools in their respective borough. Both the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot Embassies have provided books and teachers for the schools to teach Turkish language and history and, in some schools, folk music and dance. They want to pass on a clear cultural identity to their children through teaching them their culture, language and history.

We strongly believe that by providing our children with the opportunity to learn their mother tongue language and culture we can boost their self-esteem and confidence. We also believe that, by doing so, the learning ability and conceptual development of the children can be enhanced. (Organization 5, website, 2000)

This organization derives its identity from Turkish national identity and culture, not based on traditions and customs but rather on a notion of modernism and secularism. Turkish history and language creates a distinctive point of differentiation as was seen in the first organization.

Those we talked to showed concern for elderly members of the community, who are seen to have enormous difficulties adjusting to the different lifestyle of their children and expecting to be looked after by their children in their old age. Families end up fractured as their offspring increasingly integrate with everyday practices in mainstream British society.

Turkish Cypriots came here in the 1940s, 50s and 60s. They are all elderly now. For the elderly it's difficult to cope in a country where they are not used to the ways in which the old are treated. They know what it means being elderly in Cyprus. This is something quite different to being elderly here. Their children are married. They have jobs, they don't have enough time to visit and look after their parents. Their way of life is very time pressured. The elderly don't understand English, they are very isolated, they have very little contact with the outside world. (Home Care Co-ordinator, F, Early- thirties, 26/10/2000)

It is possible for the elderly to live within the confines of the Turkish Cypriot community, speak Turkish rather than English and so maintain culturally based expectations of family and kinship network.

According to our interviewee, many Turkish Cypriots still keep their hope to return to Cyprus:

Until it registers in their minds they still think of going back. They envisage living in Cyprus as living in a hot country with a relaxed life style. How would they manage there? No national health service, they can have pensions, benefits and the health service here. (Home Care Co-ordinator, F, Early-thirties, 26/10/2000)

Turkish Cypriot Families are seen to still maintain strict control over their children, especially their daughters.

They (parents) probably put pressure on them to try and keep the traditional set-up. Foreigners are not accepted as their daughters' husbands. There are still traditionally arranged marriages in the community. Girls are not allowed to go out, some of them accept this, but others lie about what they get up to. For some girls it's the only way they know, the traditional set-up. They are not allowed to mix with men. They go to weddings. They are not allowed to be educated.

(Home Care Co-ordinator, F, Early-thirties, 26/10/2000)

First generation and sometimes second-generation families struggle to maintain the above noted practices. They see these as representing traditional values. Such family values may be seen as selected fixation of cultural phenomena. Many simply refuse to follow traditional life styles, to look after their parents or to fall in line with traditional arranged marriage proceedings. This can create tensions and inter-generational conflict. This organization engages with issues of continuity and change. People hold onto selected traditional values that support their own ends. Those ends are often about maintaining a balanced life here in Britain. The ends may be based on contemporary everyday conditions and therefore suggest a degree of hybridization.

Organization Six: Gender and identity

This organization is based on gender. Their aim is to 'empower women' from the Turkish Cypriot community. They describe themselves as 'moderately feminist'. They claim that they have no political stand, they care about women: Turkish, Kurdish or Turkish Cypriot women or women who come to them from any other ethnic background. They see all of the Turkish Cypriot, Turkish and Kurdish organizations as politically oriented and fragmented. They argue that there is no co-ordination or exchange between them.

Those we talked to acknowledged the existence of an identity crisis in the community. One gave her personal view about identity:

Identity's such an important thing, such a differentiation. Some want to say they are Turkish. I believe I am Cypriot. I used to say I am a British Cypriot woman. If somebody asks me now who I am, I say, I am Turkish Cypriot, because of wanting to divide myself from Greek Cypriots but I don't want to identify myself as Turkish. The communities in Cyprus are becoming much more dispersed because of the division of the island, we want to say, and we still exist. We are Turkish Cypriot people. We are still about. It becomes an everyday issue. Whereas living in British society, from day one you know you are not British. (Staff, F, Mid-twenties, 7/11/2000)

Once again the issue of North Cypriot identity appears as problematic and unclear. There is a degree of confusion between place of origin and ethnicity that is very much left up to the individual to interpret in accordance with their own requirements. Nevertheless it was seen that the existence of Turkish schools in North London also raises problems for the issue of identity:

They tend to put in children, teach about what they are, who they are, where they come from, from a very early age in a (Turkish) nationalistic way. As children wanting to integrate into wider British society as they grow up, they end up with a lot of nationalistic ideas about their identity. All this causes confusion for them. (Staff, F, Mid-twenties, 7/11/2000)

Our informants said that the second generation of Turkish Cypriot women in London were brought up with close contact with other ethnic groups. They were in an environment where they had no choice but to learn English.

There is a sharp division between second and third generation. When we (second generation) were young we were integrating ourselves more into British society, because we were, kind of, in British surroundings whereas third generation Turkish Cypriots whose mothers were born here, their grandparents came over here, they are engulfed by Turkish satellite TV and the Turkish community. Everything is Turkish. They became more engulfed by Turkish identity whereas we didn't. We couldn't have Turkish music, Turkish satellite TV. It's very different now after the arrival of so many Turkish speaking people. (Staff, F, Mid-twenties, 7/11/2000)

So what is the Turkish Cypriot cultural background and how has it become fixated with residency in London:

Turkish Cypriots in Cyprus lived in villages, engaged in agricultural work, followed set moral values and evolved ideas of community based on this kind of environment. Living in Britain we were brought up with a moral code used in Cyprus in the 1950s and 60s. They thought at that time that their cultures were threatened in Cyprus. In the British environment they want to hold onto it so badly. They imposed it on their children. (Staff, F, Mid-twenties, 7/11/2000)

Gender divisions have in many cases being maintained by the Turkish Cypriot community much as they previously existed in Cyprus:

Males are much more free to express their feelings, women in the Turkish community are much more constrained by the sort of attitude they take, what role they play and by their families. Male attitudes are not constrained in such a way. They can do basically what they want. Males have been influenced by Afro-Caribbean culture but Turkish Cypriot women have to stay at home, they are well controlled by their parents. They have to follow the old traditions and be protected from outside influences. (Staff, F, Mid-twenties, 7/11/2000)

We see a group that aims a degree of hybridization but defends what it sees as its cultural distinctiveness at the same time. This organization illustrates the complexities of inter-generational difficulties and suggests that changes in culture are not to be seen as a simple linear progression. Indeed it is clear from the different things to men and women, with women being forced to hold to much more traditional structures or defiantly making a conscious stand against such structures. It may also be the case that the advent of new technologies has had an important role to play in limiting integration by spreading language and specific cultural representations on a global plain.

Summing up the Organizations

The manner in which each organization deals with constructing their ethnicity and sense of location in Britain can be seen by the way that different organizations construct different types of collective identities. Conflict and confusion can also be seen to arise from these processes. We also note how the organizations perceive cultural backgrounds and everyday life in London.

The study of the organizations clearly demonstrates the effect of dominant discourses constructed outside of the United Kingdom, both in the past and the present, such as Turkish nationality/Kemalist ideology, Kurdish nationality/Marxist outlook, secularism and modernism. Within this context, the revival of language and rediscovery of history become key components in the construction of different collective identities, while the place of origin constitutes an important part in this process. In the case of Turkish Cypriot organizations, the different interpretations of belongings, such as history, culture, language and the place of origin have caused confusions and conflicts in the construction of collective identities. All organizations stand selectively against traditions and costumes, while 'the family' is considered as an important unit in the maintenance of desirable collective identities. All expressed concerns about youth as a source for maintaining desirable identity and differentiation. Only one organization, the Kurdish/Turkish one, derived its collective identity from its new social surrounding, relating itself with the shared experience of all migrant groups, workers and youth, so positioning itself in North London's multicultural environment. Ordinary people from these ethnic groups are seen keeping traditional values, such as gender differences, alive and, at the same time, quickly taking materialistic values in, such as making money and having an expensive car.

Individual's Life Stories

This section explores how individuals construct their own personal identities and position themselves in everyday life while exploring how they relate themselves to the ethnic organizations and wider community. This provides a contrasting view between how the organizations perceive their collective identity, as explored above, and how individual members of the community construct their own personal identities.

We approached a number of individuals who willingly agreed to tell us their life stories. They were identified through a snowballing process working outwards from the members of the ethnic organizations. This section is based on the life stories of three individuals. Two of them are female and one is male (Table 2). These three have been selected because they all have a number of common characteristics: they are refugees born in Turkey, relatively young, living in Hackney and are members of the Alevi religion. We wanted to provide a flavour of individuals' views and aspirations in contrast to the organizations. All three had known each other for about eight months.

They were friends and not formally part of any of the organizations. At this stage, we changed our research technique from a semi-controlled collecting of qualitative data through semi-structured interviews towards giving our informants full freedom over the way they wanted to tell us their stories. We visited their home, gained a flavour from their living environment and met each of them at least twice. At one stage they told us their stories individually, at another time they told us their experiences as a group. We kept the setting flexible to fit their own circumstances and desires. The

following presents the way in which our informants constructed and reconstructed their identities, their aspirations, their everyday engagements and the emotive side of their lived experiences.

Table 2 Characteristics of the three individuals

Data Reference	Meryem	Ayse	Orhan
Place of Residency	Hackney	Hackney	Hackney
Gender	Female	Female	Male
Age	Mid-20s	Late-20s	Early-30s
Marital Status	Single	Married	Married
Religion	Alevi	Alevi	Alevi
Place of Origin in Turkey	Kayseri	Eskisehir	Tunceli
Period of Residency in Britain	7 years	2 years	3 years
Occupation (At present)	Waitress	Nurse	Restaurant Cleaner
Occupation In Turkey	High School Pupil	Nurse & Journalist	Doctor

Note: *The names of those interviewed have been altered throughout for purposes of confidentiality*

Meryem's story

Meryem came to London seven years ago as a asylum seeker at the age of 19 years old. She was brought up in an Alevi village in Kayseri province. Her childhood and up bringing was affected by Alevi culture. She had always been very conscious of her position as an Alevi in Turkey. A minority position is seen to be marginal and disadvantaged (Olsson, et al 1996). She came from a large family, with brothers and sisters living in different parts of Turkey although most of them now live in impoverished, peripheral migrant settlements around Istanbul. She was very keen to go to university and see something of the world. Her brother encouraged her to join him in London. Her image and expectations of London were different from what she found it to be. She thought of it as western, developed and civilised. As such she had great expectations for the opportunities that she believed she would find there. When she came she was shocked by the life style of Alevi people.

It was frightening, people hadn't changed their life styles, their expectations were the same. If you are a woman you cannot go out alone, you cannot go anywhere. Everything changed in Turkey while they were here. In Turkey I was allowed to go out and I did whatever I wanted to.

She felt that the Alevi tradition, as reconstructed in North London, was very different, primitive, conservative and oppressive towards women and especially young girls. She felt that there was enormous pressure and interference with her everyday life and behaviour. There were great limitations on what she could and could not do. Her life was controlled by two things, first her brother and secondly what other people thought and expected from her. Gender took on a new meaning that was in turn to develop as a new point of consciousness.

She had to work for long hours, fourteen or sixteen hours shifts in a textile factory. There was no time to do anything apart from working and making money. The only possible entertainment was to attend traditional weddings. Life was based on work and weddings. She felt that she had lost all control over her own life. This eventually led her to exclude herself from all social activities, regardless of her brother's objections.

I started staying in my room, apart from breakfast and dinner times. I refused to go to weddings. I had continual disputes and fights with my brother. He thought that people would start thinking and creating stories about why I was not going to weddings. He thought that they would think that he was treating me badly. I didn't go out, I didn't eat. My brother could not understand why I would not go to weddings. He took me to shops to buy expensive dresses to wear at weddings. If it was the case of going to weddings he would take me to a shop and buy me whatever I wanted and feel very happy in doing that. They all see weddings as entertainment but for me it was torture. They wanted to give me a different identity, dress me in different clothes, but not accept me. None of it was for me.

Weddings clearly hold a central position in traditional culture. The above clearly demonstrates how much control is exerted over young girls' everyday lives. What they are allowed to do is determined by the strict, tight rules and the traditions brought and kept alive. Weddings are clearly places where young girls' future husbands are to be found, places of matching. In this way, marriages outside of the community can be prevented, so that cultural continuation can

be maintained. This demonstrates how fixated cultural formation can be restrictive and eventually lead to a position where an individual had no option but to remove herself from the whole structure.

Meryem became very aware of issues of racism in the wider British context and workers' rights. This led her to be involved in left wing Turkish/Kurdish organizations. At the time she felt that she was economically independent. She had no option but to leave her brother's house in order to establish her own life. She became highly involved in the groups' activities and made a cultural bridge between her Alevi background and Kurdishness, repackaging herself as a Kurd. In time, however, she began to feel ruled by the group that she was involved in. They appeared to her as a small elite to whom her individual being was of little significance:

What they do is different from what they say they believe. When I discovered this I didn't want to stay with them. They wanted to give me an identity and control my actions. I felt totally restricted. I wasted four years of my life with them. I went to Germany and Belgium with them, but I found that I didn't want to do things with them.

Once again she was to pass through a process of self-exclusion albeit in a gradual way. Eventually she started going to a college, working as a waitress and for the first time looked at Britain as a home rather than a sort of extreme extension of her left behind background. After seven years of searching for a location and identity, she eventually found a way to realise something of herself. She still holds onto a dream of returning to her origins. She misses the mountains, rivers and the whole landscape of her home village. She signifies her background in terms of friendliness, collectivity and sincerity unlike the everyday struggles with which she had to engage in North London.

Ayse's story

Ayse is in her late 20s, she came to London two years ago with her husband. She was brought up in one of villages in Eskisehir province in Turkey. There were two Alevi families in the village. She was brought up as an Alevi and therefore, like Meryem, saw herself as different and as a minority from an early age. She first qualified as a nurse, then a journalist. When she was doing her journalism degree at Eskisehir University in the early 1990s, she identified herself as Kurdish. This was a development out of her growing sense of alienation from mainstream cultural positions in Turkey. This was further re-enforced when she took a Kurdish husband. She claims that her life changed completely after her marriage to him. She realised the amount of pressure and discrimination faced by Kurdish people in Turkey. This forced them, especially her husband, to leave Turkey. She accompanied her husband to Britain and followed her traditional role as a wife. Now, she convinces herself that they both came to do a language course.

I didn't think we were going to seek asylum in this country, I thought that we would learn English and go back. I'm very close to my family. There wasn't any idea of being a refugee, we never discussed it.

She started working as a nurse in a hospital. Her husband works on a casual basis taking whatever he can find. She does not want to stay in Britain, she wants to go back, she romanticizes life in Turkey and she misses her family and friends.

My family is there; I have a life in Turkey. I don't want to live here I want to live in Turkey, I don't want to be British.

In North London she finds people from Turkey are really materialistic, they only think about money and nothing else. They were badly treated by relatives when they first arrived in London. This may be compared to Meryem's feelings about her brother. She talked with Kurds from Iran and Iraq and other minority groups and with her colleagues from the hospital, where she works, but she could not find common ground with any of them.

When people ask me who I am I first say I am Kurdish because I share a lot of things with them, but there is no place called Kurdistan. When I meet Kurds from other regions I cannot find anything in common with them. I feel close to Turks, I feel close to people from Turkey. It's not my fault the Turkish system assimilated us. Sometimes I'm very annoyed. They did all sorts of unforgivable things to us.

It is the experience and culture of the Turkish community that she identifies with but she remembers Turkey's human rights reputation. She feels she is lost, she does not know who she is. Is she Turkish, Alevi or Kurdish, she does not know. She is here because of her husband, not out of her own desire. She maintains a traditional outlook in standing by her husband and family. She is very confused and lost as she struggles to position herself. Her workplace in the hospital, opens up a lot of contact with other people, as a result she is able to draw stark comparisons between herself and others. In this case she has moved on from initially locating herself in Britain to the stage of total self exclusion as she struggles to establish an identity on her own terms. She had never faced up to such problems of identity in her previous life in Turkey.

Orhan's story

Orhan is a Kurdish doctor in his early 30s, he came to London three years ago. He was born and brought up in a village near the city of Tunceli in Turkey. He came from a large, extended family. As a child he shared one room with his parent, two uncles and eleven brothers and sisters. His first language is Kurdish. He learned Turkish when he started school. He went to boarding schools for his secondary and high school education. In the boarding schools he experienced humiliation and discriminations by his colleagues and the teachers. Again he thought that he was Alevi before going on to align this with Kurdishness. These labels were given to him by others he only picked them up afterwards. He learned to live with such stigmatization.

He managed to go to medical school in Izmir with financial help from his older brother who was working in Germany and sent money for him to continue his education. Izmir was completely different from the cities of Eastern Anatolia. He felt that he had spent all his life under oppression and fear from the police and security forces. His first attempt to negotiate his way through the higher education system only lasted for one year in Erzurum.

It was a very different world. I lived in frightening conditions. I was doing a maths degree and the lecturer came in one day and said we should not use logarithms because they were based on Greek thinking and he didn't want to use anything Hellenistic. When we went to the canteen we wanted to sit but all of the chairs were taken by the fascists. Everyday the police came in and searched our room. Everybody was giving me a different type of ideological identity. One thought I was Kemalist, another religious, another PKK. Regardless of all this they liked me because I was quiet, kept my room clean, but I just left after one year staying there.

Orhan moved to Izmir University. Life was relaxed; students freely discussed political issues and bought lefty newspapers and magazines. This was never possible in Eastern Anatolia. He started reading and becoming involved in political movements, this further added to the development of a level of consciousness about his identity. After completion of his degree, he started working as a general practitioner in the health service in Bilecik. He realised that he could not practice his profession as a result of a lack of resources. He wanted to be good at his chosen profession, but the existing system did not allow him to be. He was also very frightened about doing compulsory military service. All of these factors forced him to leave Turkey for good. He came to London with a six months visa then claimed asylum. He accepts whatever work he can find. His medical qualifications are not accepted in Britain. He has therefore had to work as a cleaner in a restaurant to subsidise an English language course. In order to practice his profession in Britain he needs to sit an exam and then follow a three-year course. At present there is little chance of raising the money to do so.

I am very happy here. When I compare it with Turkey here is not bad at all even though I cannot practice my profession. You are throwing your identity away when you move here. I don't feel any attachment to the identity given me in Turkey. OK the English are racist, but to a certain degree. I'm against racism but you come to a certain point where you don't want to be interested in such issues. Now I have got only one aim, to learn English. I had lots of dreams in my youth, now I have only one dream, to learn English. I am struggling to establish my life here. It is not easy. I am a refugee. I stayed in a social services room and shared the space with other people. I have not had an easy life here yet. Life in Turkey would probably be easier than this but the years I spent in Turkey were really, really bad.

He is very conscious that he does not want to do military service, after years of humiliation, oppression and discrimination. He has to re-establish his life in the United Kingdom at whatever cost. He does not connect himself with any Turkish/Kurdish or Turkish Cypriot Associations. He sees them as having different agendas from what they claim.

I went to ask one of them for advice, there was a queue but lots of people were going straight in without joining the queue. There was a sort of primitive law. There were no rules. I have a lot of relatives involved in civic organizations. Although they are there they don't want to help you. If you are not following up their political stand then you are nothing. You cannot really cope with the situation after a while, for me this was like my university years in Turkey all over again. All remains in the past. I became very frightened. Most of my friends were killed in the East. I have lots of memories, we used to sit together and drink, we shared a lot of things, discussed our politics and loves. None of those friends are alive. I don't know, I think I feel really guilty.

He did not get the support that he expected from relatives already settled in Britain. Unlike in Turkey, he found their interests to be based on money rather than commonly held values. After about one year in Britain he eventually became homeless and disconnected himself from all of the Turkish/Kurdish/Turkish Cypriot based organizations and communities. He is determined to practice as a doctor in this country regardless of the structural constraints that exist.

Summing up the position of the individuals

From the ways Meryem, Ayse and Orhan constructed their stories we can see that the organizations, family, kinship and the wider community structure have an important support role when it comes to new arrivals in North London. This role is, however, not long lasting. The organizations preserved something of the cultures from people's points of origin but this tended very often to be seen as fixated and ideologically oriented. Family and kinship ties were exaggerated on those in the place of origin. Possibly out of more defensive stands in an alien environment 'the family' is seen in all three cases as restrictive and limiting in terms of the potential and opportunities of new arrivals within a relatively short period following their arrival. However 'the family' is also an essential stopping off point in the migratory process. This may have particular meaning in terms of gender relations as seen in the case of Meryem. Our informants saw family and kinship changing from what they reflected on as friendly and supportive in Turkey to materialistic and money grabbing in North London while certain cultural formations such as the high regard given to wedding ceremonies were seen as over stressed.

In these three cases it would appear that people tend to pass through a period of identification with organizations and families, into a period of self exclusion and eventually come out of this by constructing or taking control of their own identities. Although these constitute a representation of their identification within an ethnic position, this is very different from the point of arrival, they are fully in control of their own identities and able to assert this to their advantage rather than be subjugated by it as an externally imposed point of pressure and tension. It is as though it is repackaged on their terms. In the light of our cases it is only following a period of self-exclusion and re-identification that people are able to grasp at the possibility of participation in wider urban and community structures. Further research with a larger sample would inevitably prove fruitful.

Conclusion

As presented above, the notions of ethnicity and culture are subject to ongoing change and reconstruction as in the work of Hall (1992), Cohen (1999) and Brah et al. (1999). The organizations constantly struggle to form and maintain relatively stable ethnic and cultural identities, derived from the different interpretations of place of origin, history and language in respect of their ideological and political stand. This provides a very confusing and conflicting environment for individuals who struggle to establish their own personal identities. The identification of difference and distinctiveness is a powerful driving force in this process. Individuals position themselves on the basis of both past experience, memory and fantasy alongside present conditions (Hall, 1992). As such, a cultural identity based on ethnicity means different things to different groups, social categories and individuals. At the same time, the point of identification remains strong in all cases as individuals struggle to establish a sense of location and an understanding about what they are and their own distinctiveness. Regardless of the struggle to preserve the cultures that immigrants/refugees brought with them, the new social environment and circumstances are influencing and forcing them to change and transform themselves and their cultures into new forms. Only one organization acknowledged this and set objectives and activities to encourage integration in the new culture while maintaining some important fragments of the culture of origin.

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