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‘Sold Out to the Enemy’: Emerging Symbolic Boundaries in Kurdish Politics and the Strategic Uses of Labeling Treason

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'Sold Out to the Enemy': Emerging Symbolic Boundaries in Kurdish Politics and the Strategic Uses of Labeling Treason

Mustafa E. Gurbuz

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Treason doth never prosper; what's the reason?
For if it prosper, none dare call it treason.
Sir John Harrington (1561-1612)

- 1 In February 2011, renowned Kurdish poet and singer Şivan Perwer met with Turkey's deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç in Germany, declaring that he would support the Turkish administration's efforts to find a political solution to the Kurdish question. Immediately afterwards, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) accused Perwer of being a 'jash.' *Jash* is a Kurdish word, literally meaning 'donkey's foal,' and a highly political term that is used to imply 'collaborator' and 'traitor.' Perwer's prompt response was a Youtube video in which he explained his service to Kurds and Kurdistan for decades.¹ Speaking in Kurdish, Perwer condemned the PKK leaders for not knowing Kurdish language and concluded: 'Be ashamed and apologize to the Kurdish people. You do not have a right to proclaim anyone as traitor. If there are traitors, they are those who accuse others of being traitors.'²
- 2 Şivan Perwer's experience cannot be considered as an exceptional case in recent years. Some other pro-Kurdish leftists such as Ahmet Altan, Taner Akçam, and Roni Margulies were among those who received similar allegations for their 'treacherous' activism

(Botî 2010). Lately, forty-one Kurdish intellectuals issued a joint declaration condemning threats against prominent Kurdish writers and artists by the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (Sabah 2011).³ Strikingly, the PKK-led Kurdish movement⁴ did not respond in the same way to Sezgin Tanrikulu, another well-known figure among Kurds and a long time human rights activist, when he joined the Republican People's Party (CHP).

- 3 Why do the pro-Kurdish activists *selectively* condemn some leftists of treason? Why was Perwer, who flirted with the AKP (the Justice and Development Party) publicly accused of being a *jash*, whereas Tanrikulu, who joined the CHP, was not? This article offers a symbolic niche perspective to study the strategic logic of labeling treason. In recent years, the AKP has become a major rival in defining the Kurdishness as an identity marker, an unprecedented development in modern Turkish politics. Therefore, not those Kurds who favor the CHP but those who flirt with the AKP breach the symbolic line of authentic Kurdish-ness defined by the PKK-led Kurdish activists. Symbolic borders are drawn as a matter of symbolic niche overlap in defining the Kurdish identity. Since the leftists such as Tanrikulu are no rivals in defining Kurdish-ness, they are not labeled as *jash*. The strategy of labeling treason is employed in a social process wherein the collective consciousness (Durkheim [1893] 1984) is constructed in opposition to 'threats' or 'enemies.'

Unique Kurdish Cultural Repertoires: A Deficient Explanation

- 4 Do the pro-Kurdish activists invoke the strategy of labeling treason because it strikes a strong cultural chord among Kurds? In other words, does treason have a special meaning in Kurdish society? Scholars who emphasize the uniqueness of the Kurdish culture argue that *jash*, i.e. 'collaborator/traitor,' is among the most prominent Kurdish local cultural archetypes⁵ (Strohmeier 2003: 116-27; Özcan 2006). For example, the most famous Kurdish epic, *Mem û Zîn*, depicts sufferings of Kurds due to their disunity, petty jealousy, revenge, and rivalry within. *Bekir*, embodying these qualities in the epic, is one of the key figures. He betrays the ruler, and therefore, causes unbearable pains to Mem and Zîn. Bekir is disloyal and self-serving, and thus, 'the traitor' (Strohmeier 2003: 30-34). Similar to some Mediterranean and Middle Eastern societies (Bourdieu 1998), the concept of honor is central to the everyday Kurdish life and betrayal is considered dishonorable and humiliating (King 2008). In collective representations, certain patterns of conduct are conceived of as honorable or dishonorable (Bourdieu 1998: 47). In everyday Kurdish culture, treason is a dishonorable act and the archetype of *jash* has been reproduced.
- 5 Proponents of the cultural uniqueness perspective also perceive the collective reproduction of *jash* to be the result of the historical trajectory of the Kurdish societal structure. In his work, *Turkey's Kurds: A Theoretical Analysis of the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan*, Özcan (2006: 139) argues, for example, that the tribal structure of the Kurdish society has long been decisive for a tendency towards collaboration and betrayal among Kurds:

This undying device [*Aşîret*, i.e. Kurdish tribe] has echoed the uniqueness of Kurdish existence as the intrinsic nature of the Kurdish ethnic tradition which has coagulated in its national consciousness: the Kurds' temptation to be on the alert

not to miss out a subordinate 'space.' That is, the ethnicity has a consistent tradition of seeking not to be the leading entity but a trusty 'right arm' of the superior power. *Aşîret* has been the only structural means of the survival in the cradle of civilization for the 'right arm' - consequently 'traitor' - Kurds.⁶

- 6 Noting 'the twin heritage of Kurdishness' as tribe and treason, the author concludes that treason has a *unique* meaning among Kurds: 'Treason is a cursed phenomenon in every society, no matter whether it occurs within the framework of national, class or personal relations. It is, of course, cursed in Kurdistan too. However,...it has infiltrated the Kurdish personality considerably and is to some extent appreciated in Kurdistan- at least within some components of the societal structure' (2006: 153). Özcan also cites European travelers and observers who describe 'treacherous habits' of Kurds (Millingen [1870] 2009; Soane [1912] 2007; Nikitin 1956). Yet, the author seems to contradict himself when he argues that treason against the tribe is not tolerated among Kurds since 'tribal loyalty has been jealously and stubbornly preserved' (2006: 153).
- 7 In this paper, I dissent to the cultural uniqueness perspective. The persistent characterization of *jash* and its strategic use are not exclusive to Kurdish cultural codes or the Kurdish societal structure. Explaining dynamics of civil wars in a comparative perspective, Kalyvas (2003; 2006: 87-110) points out that local political structures and rivalries among local groups have a great impact on shifting alliances, which are considered as acts of treason by rival factions. Likewise, studies indicate that patriotic discourse becomes dominant during times of war and social conflict (Cohen 2008; Woehrlé, Coy, and Maney 2008) and when the presence of external threats to the social body tightens moral boundaries so that deviance is not tolerated (Erikson 1966; Lauderdale 1976; Alexander, Giesen, and Mast 2006). Cohen (2008), for example, demonstrates how a discourse of treason was rampant during the Palestinian struggle against the Zionist movement between 1917 and 1948. Moreover, many revolutionary groups as well as nationalist mobilizations engage in a 'commemoration of treason' (Fine 2001). In the light of comparative studies, we can conclude that the 'traitor' as a cultural archetype is not unique to Kurdish society; yet, it might strike a strong chord in Kurdish collective memory because of its traditional tribal local structure as well as its modern nationalist boundaries that are shaped by external threats.
- 8 As we eliminate the argument of uniqueness, we need to reformulate our question: Why do nationalist organizations label some nationalist activists as traitors, even when these activists contribute to their cause? Comparative studies shed light on how strategic priorities of insurgent organizations can run counter to the goals these organizations purport to defend (Stedman 1997; Kalyvas 2006). Supporting this line of research, Tezcür's (2010) study analyzes how the PKK's organizational strategic priorities have prevailed in the long-term goals of the pro-Kurdish movement. Tezcür (2010: 785) utilizes organizational theory and contends that 'the paradox of the Kurdish nationalist radicalization,' i.e. re-armament of the PKK, 'during the most ambitious period of democratization in modern Turkish history' could only be explained by the PKK's willingness to retain its hegemonic power over its constituency.
- 9 Introducing the symbolic niche perspective below, I aim to expand insights of organizational theory. Despite its usefulness, the organizational theory perspective neglects the symbolic dimensions of competition, which are important aspects of strategic action. This article analyzes the PKK-led Kurdish movement's selective allegations of treason as an outcome of the growing competition to define the Kurdish national identity and as the result of the fragmentation among the Kurdish

nationalists. Focusing on recent contestations over Kurdish national identity will illuminate how the construction of external threats and symbolic boundary making (Lamont and Molnár 2002) appear in the form of labeling treason and function as an *embedded local strategy* in social relations (Fine 2010).

Symbolic Niche Overlap and Emergence of Competing Kurdish Nationalisms

- 10 Niche is a key term to study competition in population biology (Roughgarden 1979). Thinking about reproductive and survival capacity of species' niche, ecologists suggest that species might engage in a fierce competition as they have similar resource requirements. According to the niche theory, *niche overlap* occurs when two species in a local environment need the same resources for survival and reproduction (Pianka 1974, 2000). The niche theory has been applied to various sub-fields in sociology including media studies (Dimmick 2003; Dimmick, Feaster, and Hoplamazian 2011), social movement studies (Langton 1987; Levitsky 2007), sociology of consumption (Turow 2006), and in ethnic studies (Olzak 1992). Scholars of ethnic competition theory, for example, propose that racial and ethnic displacement and exclusion escalate under the conditions of *niche overlap*, which refers to the intersection of living habitats where groups have a set of potential roles for exploiting resources within (Barth 1956, 1959; Olzak 1992).
- 11 Inspired by sociological applications of the niche theory, this article offers the concept of *symbolic niche overlap* to analyze the dynamics of competition in the production of meaning. I define symbolic niche overlap as competing actors' proximity in cultural habitats that offer symbolic resources to contending parties. When symbolic niche overlap occurs, cultural habitats become the 'arenas of competition' (Jasper 2004) and 'strategic action fields' (Fligstein and McAdam 2011) in which actors engage in symbolic contention.
- 12 Kurdish politics in Turkey has witnessed a transformation of cultural habitats during the last decade. The PKK leader Öcalan's capture in 1999 coincided with Turkey's EU accession talks wherein the requirements to fulfill the Copenhagen Criteria (signed in 1993) were emphasized, including democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and the protection of minorities. Accordingly, Turkey undertook significant reforms to harmonize its policies with the EU criteria following the 1999 Helsinki Summit (Balci 2008: 89). With respect to the Kurdish issue, the EU process led to the abolishment of the extraordinary OHAL zones [i.e. Kurdish populated cities that were governed by martial law], changes in the Turkish penal code allowing for more freedom of thought and expression, the permission to give Kurdish names to children and to teach/learn Kurdish at private language institutions, and regulations to allow private radio and TV broadcasting in Kurdish dialects (Balci 2008: 100-105).
- 13 The consolidation of Turkish democracy in the 2000s opened up new civil spheres in which cultural habitats of Kurdish-ness emerge. Examples of emerging cultural spheres for Kurdish identity includes dengbêj performances (Yücel 2009), newroz celebrations (Watts 2010), Kurdish film festivals, fine art houses, popular art streets, youth centers, women's fraternity clubs, and Kurdish language schools. Although cultural spheres of Kurdish activism such as Mesopotamia cultural centers date back to the early 1990s,

competition over the definition of the Kurdish identity within these spheres is a recent phenomenon. Now, these emerging cultural habitats witness a number of competing Kurdish activists who vie for their niche in authentic Kurdish identity (Figure 1).



FIGURE 1. Audience of a *Dengbêj* performance takes a tea break in the Diyarbakır House of *Dengbêj*, which has been supported by the Turkish Ministry of Tourism and Culture, June 2009.

Author's collection

Challenge of Rival Kurdish Nationalisms and the Strategy of Labeling Treason

- 14 A striking example of symbolic niche overlap has appeared in the cultural habitat of the Kurdish TV channels and internet media. Since the establishment of MED-TV in 1994, the PKK-led Kurdish ethno-nationalists have been heavily involved in the production of Kurdish identity through modern communication technology (Hassanpour 1998; Romano 2002). In recent years, however, the ethno-nationalists are not the sole players in the field. Surprising to many and called as 'a great revolution' by some Kurds,⁷ the Turkish state launched an official Kurdish TV channel, TRT şêş, in 2009. Encouraged by the foundation of the official TV station, private enterprises took remarkable steps. Kurdish supporters of the pro-Islamic Gülen movement, for example, opened Dünya-TV, which is broadcasting in Kurdish and entirely devoted to the Kurdish culture and folklore.⁸
- 15 Likewise, new social media outlets that target a Kurdish audience are very diverse. Kurdish Islamist Hizbullah's websites are quite professional in challenging their ethno-nationalist counterparts.⁹ The Hizbullah's cultural activism in Kurdish art, literature, and music has been growing since 2004 (Gurbuz forthcoming).¹⁰ In addition to the Hizbullah, there are various Kurdish Islamist groups that publicly denounce the state policies over the Kurdish issue. As an Islamic voice, Mizgîn magazine (2004-2011), for example, published many articles (in Kurdish as well as in Turkish) calling for a radical change in the Turkish state structure. Therefore the authors of the magazine were constantly harassed by the state agencies (Figure 2).¹¹
- 16 Regarding Kurdish leftist nationalism, online platforms such as Nasname and Kurdistan Aktuel have become centers of attraction among Kurds. In these virtual platforms, one

could find many intellectual criticisms of the PKK and its leader Abdullah Öcalan from various Marxist and socialist perspectives. Interviews with İsmail Beşikçi and other independent radical leftists are frequently featured and the PKK's renunciation of an independent Kurdistan is strongly criticized.¹² Hence, new developments in the cultural habitat of Kurdish social media challenge the PKK-led ethno-nationalist monopoly over the Kurdish identity.



FIGURE 2. Covers of Mizgîn in which independent Kurdistan (issue 55) and a Turkish-Kurdish federation state (issue 56) are proposed. The issues were confiscated by the Turkish authorities and legal investigations were held.

- 17 In this regard, defining Kurdish-ness and Kurdish national identity has become a contested symbolic sphere in which various actors play in a field of meaning production (cf. Becker 1982). Symbolic niche overlap in Kurdish media has led to fights for *authentic* Kurdish-ness and a key strategy to sustain the authenticity claims is labeling the actions of others as treason. In other words, rival Kurdish activists' proximity in the cultural habitat, making use of the Kurdish language, symbols, historical figures, and local narratives has translated into a debate over who make up genuine/authentic Kurds and who betray, i.e. the traitors. The Kurdish revolutionaries especially target those Kurds who appear in TRT şêş, i.e. the official Kurdish TV channel (Gurbuz 2009). Bahoz Erdal, the chief of HPG, the PKK's military flank, told ROJ TV that 'anyone who participates in the TRT şêş is a "jash"'.¹³ The PKK-led Kurdish activists often call TRT şêş as 'TRT Jash' pejoratively.
- 18 As a cultural space, TRT şêş has become one of the red zones or enemy zones. Of course, it is only one among many. Zealous statement of Emine Ayna, co-chairperson of the DTP (Demokratik Toplum Partisi),¹⁴ in a speech delivered in Varto (December 2, 2008) indicates the construction of red zones for authentic Kurdish-ness: 'No one who becomes a candidate of the AKP can say, "I am a Kurd." This is not acceptable because the AKP's policies deny the Kurds. Whoever becomes an AKP candidate is not a Kurd even if s/he says "I am a Kurd"' (quoted in Tezcür 2009).
- 19 Next section discusses attempts to re-draw symbolic borders through the strategy of labeling treason. As symbolic niche overlap occurs, multiple actors employ symbolic resources of Kurdish-ness in variety of ways and this very complexity leads to 'ontological insecurity' (Ostertag 2010) for the rival players. Thus, the Kurdish revolutionaries' labeling efforts are closely related with their quest to re-construct the collective conscience boundaries (Durkheim [1893] 1984; Alexander 1988; Gurbuz 2008).

Explaining the Link between Labeling Treason and Symbolic Boundaries

- 20 Labeling treason is not a mundane, spontaneous act; instead, it is a very calculated collective behavior and an effective mobilization strategy. Given its ritualistic character, the very act of labeling is a double edge sword. On the one hand, it can contribute to social conformity with the claiming party. On the other hand, however, it has a potential risk to initiate a harmful dispute within ranks of the the claiming party or its followers. This risk becomes greater if the labeled individual is a very respected or famous personality, such as şivan Perwer is for many Kurds.
- 21 This particular concern is very important in order to grasp the selectivity of the act of labeling treason. The question 'whom should be labeled' entails a collective decision-making. The cases of şivan Perwer and Sezgin Tanrıkulu might be illuminating since they are both well-respected Kurds. Why has Perwer been declared a traitor and not Tanrıkulu? Our earlier discussion over symbolic niche overlap provides a useful outlook here. Perwer's relation with the AKP is quite different than Tanrıkulu's relation with the CHP. Perwer's relation to the AKP was confined to a single meeting with a high-rank AKP official, whereas Tanrıkulu joined the CHP as party member. Yet, it is the AKP that is seen as a niche competitor over the definition of the Kurdish identity, whereas the CHP is not perceived as a rival player.¹⁵

- 22 Thus, in order to eliminate potential risks, those who have the power of labeling specifically target niche competitors. Especially the rival actors that claim the Kurdish cultural space are portrayed as snaky/masked enemies. Through mechanisms of 'demonization' and 'the construction of non-personhood' (Ducharme and Fine 1995; Fine 2001), the Kurdish constituency is invited to be a part of a 'ritual performance' (Alexander 2006) against the enemies of Kurds and the *jash*, i.e. traitor/collaborator. Specifically, the TRT şeş, Dünya-TV, and similar rival Kurdish platforms are coded as 'the enemy zones' and those who contribute, in any way and regardless of how big or small their contribution might be, are regarded as *jash*.¹⁶ These symbolic boundaries are meant to make the Kurdish lay audience see how some Kurds (especially those who are leftist activists) are making a huge mistake when they consciously dive –or accidentally are trapped into– these enemy zones. Bergesen's (1977) notes on demonization through the construction of sacred zones are very illuminating in this regard:

Political witch hunts are the ritual mechanisms that transform individuals, groups, organizations or cultural artifacts from things of this world into actors within a mythical universe. These rituals are the social "hooks" that keep sacred transcendent forces present in the lives of ordinary people and relevant for everyday institutional transactions... Trivial activity is ritually transformed into actions of large historical forces. Using one kind of fertilizer or another on a communal farm is transformed into the mythical world of "taking the capitalist road" or "following the socialist road." Reading a book or seeing a play is transformed into being "poisoned by bourgeois thoughts" or being a "communist sympathizer." Correspondence with friends abroad can be transformed into acts "restoring capitalism," making one an "imperialist agent" and "counterrevolutionary."

- 23 Demonization as a ritual mechanism¹⁷ has a particular logic when it comes to *jash*, the one who collaborates with the enemy. In the process of labeling treason, the PKK-led Kurdish activists demonize the greater enemy to indicate unacceptability of the *jash*'s behavior. As mentioned above, this particular strategy aims to remove potential in-group debates and internal strife. A striking example is the Kurdish revolutionaries' discourses about 'the Turkish deep state' and their 'collaborators' (Gurbuz 2010). Narrations of Abdullah Öcalan, the movement's jailed leader, are quite remarkable to be quoted in full despite its length:
- 24 In elimination of Ergenekon,¹⁸ the United States had a major impact. Having a new plan for the Kurds, the USA wanted to realize its aims. Yet, through an active resistance, these people [the Ergenekon convicts] did not let the USA realize its Kurdish project. The USA does not want that the PKK to remain as it is; and therefore, they develop conspiracies (against us). Those who were detained in the Ergenekon case are professional soldiers who have been trained by the USA since 1960s as intelligence and counter-guerilla officers. The USA told them, 'You screwed me up!' and later, put them with the garbage. Now, the USA wants to realize its (Kurdish) project through soft-Islam... I've become aware of their tricks and games; and, I've tried to tear down (all these tricks). That's why I'm here now: I was an obstacle for the realization of their games. My arrival (to İmralı Prison) has changed many things in the Middle East. Saddam's removal followed my exile. In this way, they have controlled Iraq. Later, they eliminated Al-Fatah. Now, it's HAMAS's turn. Soon after, they will remove Assad by using the same technique, which means that Syria will be the next one. They have similar plans for Turkey. So, I warn the government that they should not fall into their traps. I say that we should solve our problems internally. An official who visited me

some time ago was telling me that we should solve this (Kurdish) problem from within. I said 'yes' by warning him: 'do not try to use me or trick me; you would never succeed.' They could not do it. They did not have a realistic and permanent solution to the Kurdish question, neither did they have a vision to understand the Kurdish issue or the ability to solve it...One of the reasons for the USA's elimination of them [the Ergenekon generals] was their approach to me and the PKK as well as their policies on the Kurdish question. That's why I'm portrayed as someone who has relations with the Ergenekon. In fact, I did never ever collaborate with them since they had never consistent, realistic, and convincing solutions to the Kurdish question. Similarly, they associate the PKK with Ergenekon. These forces, in fact, build relations with certain individuals in the PKK such as Çürükkaya and Şemdin Sakık in order to establish control over the PKK... I did not let them take power over me and the PKK. Yet, by employing the same type of tricks, they managed to get Baykal at the top of the CHP (People's Republican Party), and thereby, eliminated the leftist movement. Likewise, they got the MHP (Nationalist Action Party) under control by making Bahçeli the leader of the party. Against the alliance of the MHP and the CHP, the USA has pushed forward its soft Islam project, and therefore, has controlled all sorts of conservative right movements by making them circle around the AKP and Erdoğan.¹⁹

- 25 In Öcalan's narrative, we see how the PKK is portrayed as the ultimate organization to support Kurdish people and their rights against evil, dark, too powerful, and global forces. The PKK leader has two major arguments in his narration:
 1. The PKK is an independent movement that has never collaborated with the enemies of Kurds despite their attempts. Those who openly criticized the PKK among them ex-PKK members such as Şemdin Sakık and Selim Çürükkaya, were also 'traitors' to the Kurdish people since they collaborated with the 'deep state.'
 2. The criminalization of Turkish deep state (through the case of Ergenekon) is a strategic choice of the United States: therefore, Kurds should not be deceived by the AKP's reformist policies. Now, the emerging menace for Kurds is the American-supported 'soft Islam,' therefore, the AKP and its supporters are sinister, masked enemies.
- 26 When they are read together with his other 'meeting notes,' it becomes clear to the audience that Öcalan's narratives put almost all the other major players in the Kurdish sphere, namely, the AKP, the Gülen movement, the Hizbullah as well as Kurdish leftists who betrayed the PKK, on one straight line. For him all of them are compromised by the Turkish deep state, which has been portrayed as an American-backed imperialist power machine. In line with Öcalan, Kurdish political activists vigorously contribute to the re-drawing of the symbolic borders by stressing the demon-like, dark, insidious character of the deep state that uses Kurds against their own Kurdish people. 'If you cut off the tail of a snake without crushing its head, it becomes more dangerous' commented Ahmet Türk, co-chairperson of the DTP, on the Ergenekon operations: 'The "covered" face of the state wants to sweep its filth under the carpet' (quoted in Olson 2009: 131). In a similar vein, Emine Ayna, underlined how the AKP's Ergenekon investigations are part of a global Western plan in the Middle East (Olson 2009: 25). Hence, while zealously defending the necessity of Ergenekon trials and many other liberating reforms, Kurdish politicians emphasize the sinister character of these actions held by the AKP. This way they want to re-draw symbolic borders.



FIGURE 3. Supporters of the AKP join the party's election rally in Urfa, May 2011.

Author's collection

Competing Kurdish Nationalisms and Labeling Treason: Implications for the Future of Kurdish Politics

- 27 Why was şivan Perwer labeled despite his enormous popularity among Kurdish nationalists? This article suggests that the act of labeling treason should be studied as a collective symbolic strategy. Similar to some other Kurdish leftists, Perwer had passed the line and stepped in the red zones by negotiating the AKP, the PKK's main competitor. Recent developments in Kurdish cultural sphere have transformed the Kurdish politics as a multi-player game in which symbolic niche overlaps occur. Labeling treason appears to be a useful and risky strategy for the PKK-led activists by which they seek to re-draw the Kurdish symbolic boundaries that have been in rapid transformation. It is functional since it re-constructs an awareness of a collective identity through social control. It is risky because it could mount to a growing criticism of those who enjoy the power of labeling. As reflected in Öcalan's narratives, those who have the power of labeling try to eliminate the potential risks through constructions of red zones and non-personhood. In this particular process, pro-Kurdish activists demonize the rival players such as the pro-Islamic AKP instead of other major political parties such as the MHP or the CHP. Why? To re-assert the PKK's prominent position among Kurds. As the concept of symbolic niche overlap suggests, the PKK-led movement loses its hegemonic power due to increasing competition in the pro-Kurdish field.

- 28 Hence, from a comparative sociological perspective, one could foresee that the increasing diversity in Kurdish nationalism(s) would eliminate the PKK's monopoly over Kurdish identity (see, for example, Mees 2003 for the case of ETA, and Todd 2010 for the IRA). Yet, as long as the Kurdish constituency perceives itself as torn between the Turkish state and the PKK, and thus, as too vulnerable, the process of labeling treason has a strategic value. As one Kurdish writer who engaged in conversations with some leftist political activists in pro-Kurdish parties observed, many leftist Kurds are still very afraid of being labeled as 'traitor': 'Imagine: you dedicate your life for a cause (in such a way that) you get imprisoned at times. Yet, one day, some people erase your life and declare you as "traitor." At that moment, you are finished, not only politically but also socially. It's because the patent of Kurdish-ness is under the sway of "those who could proclaim traitors"!' (Matur 2011).

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NOTES

1. Link to the video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FcDnLQBzs10>
2. 'Perwer: Asıl Hain PKK,' *Radikal*, February 17, 2011. URL: http://www.dha.com.tr/sivan-perwer-pkky-cevap-verdi-son-dakika-haberi_142796.html (accessed March 29, 2011). After Perwer's public debate with the PKK, tensions continued to grow. PKK supporters attempted to sabotage Perwer's concert in Netherlands, and consequently, Perwer reacted with the following words: 'Save your children and let them be educated (so that) they should not be like these clowns who assault their own people,' See 'şivan Perver PKK'ya Sert Çıktı,' *Radikal*, March 30, 2011.
3. The PKK leaders deny the direct connection with the TAK. Yet, there is no doubt that the TAK is one of the SMOs (social movement organization) in the PKK-led Kurdish movement.
4. The pro-Kurdish movement in Turkey is led by the PKK despite it has a variety of forms including pro-Kurdish political parties. Thus, in this study, the PKK-led movement does not refer to the militant PKK guerillas solely; rather it refers to broader pro-Kurdish activism. For a similar approach, see Watts 2010.
5. For cultural archetypes in sociology of culture scholarship, see Klapp 1962, Griswold 1983, Meyer 2003, Lizardo 2009.
6. Emphases in the original.
7. Author's interview with Abdurrahman Kurt, Kurdish deputy for Diyarbakır (from the AKP, Justice and Development Party). Grand Turkish National Assembly, Ankara, June 2009.
8. The Dünya-TV aims to block Kurdish separatist propaganda by reaching out the Kurds in their native language. In this sense, it goes parallel with the TRT-şêş, and therefore, puts a major challenge to the pro-Kurdish ethno-nationalist channels. Author's interview with Remzi Ketenci, the director of the Dünya-TV, Gaziantep, May 2011.
9. See, for example, Doğru Haber and İlke Haber Ajansı websites. Other prominent Hizbullah websites include Huseyni Sevda and İslâmi Davet.

10. Author's interview with M. Ali Oğuz, one of the prominent singers of the Hizbullah, Istanbul, July 2009. The Hizbullah's Kurdish magazine, *Banga Heq Ji Kelhaamed: Kovara Îslamî Çandî u Hunerî*, features Kurdish literary works. Unlike the group's newspaper, *Doğru Haber*, and monthly magazine, *Înzar Dergisi*, the *Kelhaamed* does not cover global Islamic political trends.
11. The magazine decided to shutdown as of January 1, 2011. The primary reason was the arrests of the magazine's main figures (in May 2010) on the charge of establishing a clandestine group, *Kurdistan Islamic Revolutionary Movement*, which aims to establish a Kurdish Islamic state through an armed struggle. See 'Mizgin dergisi'ne baskın, 47 kişi gözaltında' URL: <http://www.haberlink.com/haber.php?query=49099#UPUgyPL0ftk> (accessed April 10, 2011).
12. İsmail Beşikçi has been a well respected leftist intellectual (Bruinessen 2005), and his harsh criticisms of Öcalan and the PKK are very influential among Kurdish audience. His views on Kurdish right for self-determination and an independent state are widely circulated. 'Abdullah Öcalan,' remarks Beşikçi, 'recently said that "I am a free individual and thus, I oppose the nature of the state as an institution since the state as a construct is a mean of oppression." He also says that "I have nothing to do establishing a state"... Although Öcalan often repeats his opposition to the state as an institution; he never had a word against a real, materialized state that oppresses Kurds each moment every single day... It seems that Öcalan has no problem with Turkish, Arab, and Irani states. He only does not want Kurds having their own state, which is the very claim of the Republic of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria.' See 'İsmail Beşikçi : Ben Kürt milliyetçisi değilim demek bir zaafıdır,' August 23, 2009, URL: <http://www.nasname.com/tr/4638.html> (accessed April 9, 2011).
13. 'PKK Spokesman: During Elections in Diyarbakır Kurds Give a Lesson to Erdoğan,' January 4, 2009. URL: <http://www.kurdmedia.com/article.aspx?id=15328> (accessed May 10, 2009).
14. DTP was banned by the Turkish Constitutional Court in December 2009, having a similar destiny with its predecessors in the past (the Democracy Party, DEP; the People's Democracy Party, HADEP; the Democratic People's Party, DEHAP). Since then, the PKK-led Kurdish ethno-nationalists have united around the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), which has been active since 2008.
15. Close relations between the CHP and the DTP during the 2011 general election campaign sustains this claim. See 'CHP-BDP Yakınlaşmasına Kılıçdaroğlu Yorumu,' *Radikal*, May 27, 2011.
16. Author's interview with a Kurdish writer and journalist who did not want her name published. Istanbul, June 2009.
17. Ducharme and Fine (1995) explain how Benedict Arnold was publicly demonized after being cursed a traitor. In Philadelphia, where Arnold served as military governor, a two-headed figure of Arnold was carried through the streets, and a figure of the devil holding a purse filled with gold to the traitor's ear and a pitchfork to his back, stood behind (Ducharme and Fine 1995).
18. The Turkish deep state is popularly called as *Ergenekon*. Named after a mythical valley in Central Asia, the Ergenekon is a secular ultranationalist organization. The myth of Ergenekon narrates how a she-wolf rescued the Turkish nation in a most desperate situation. Some scholars noted how the modern Turkish Republic has generated the Ergenekon myth in its early years as trying to establish a secular nationhood that is disconnected from the Ottoman past (Türküne 2009). As being a secular ultranationalist network, Ergenekon has justified its extrajudicial activities and violence in the name of the fatherland (Kaya 2009: 102) and has been very active in the Eastern Anatolian cities where the Kurdish population is dense (ESI Report 2008). In June 2007, a legal case was opened to investigate the organization. The state prosecutors defined Ergenekon as a collusive terrorist organization within the Turkish state, rooted mainly in Turkish armed forces, constituted of a wide network of individuals from the military, judiciary, bureaucracy, parliament, media, intelligent agencies, academia, and civil society unions (Kaya 2009: 105).

19. Öcalan's talks from his cell are regularly recorded by his lawyers and widely distributed in Kurdish constituency as *Görüşme Notları*, i.e. the Meeting Notes. The PKK affiliated online platforms such as Rojaciwan and Firat News provide the Meeting Notes at full length. Translation by the author.

ABSTRACTS

Why do the pro-Kurdish activists selectively condemn renowned leftists of treason? Why are allegations of treachery so ubiquitous? Existing literature suggests that the Kurdish community would be particularly receptive to allegations of treason because of its tribal structure and strong cultural codes. Drawing on the niche theory, this article argues contrary that competition over Kurdish nationalism is the key to explain the growing symbolic politics. Especially in the past decade, the PKK's monopoly over Kurdish identity has been challenged strongly by both Islamic and leftist groups. Analyzing recent contestations over Kurdish national identity, the article illuminates how the construction of external threats and symbolic boundary making appear in the form of labeling treason.

INDEX

Keywords: cultural contestation., niche theory, PKK, symbolic politics

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