
Communicative ethnocide and Alevi television in the Turkish context



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Abstract

The attempted coup in Turkey in July 2016 provided a justification for the Turkish government to silence oppositional voices in the media and close down many television stations. Though the stated aim was to clamp down on the pro-coup Gulenist movement, the closure of TV channels has resulted in what I call a ‘communicative ethnocide’ silencing Alevi television in particular. Following Yalcinkaya, who builds on Clastres concept of ethnocide, I define ‘communicative ethnocide’ as the annihilation of the communicative capacity of a particular community by the state with the aim of destroying that community’s cultural identity. Although the closure of TV stations was not confined to Alevi channels, it has particular implications for the Alevi community by destroying its communicative capacity, infrastructure, relations with the viewers, and representation regime which are driven by the community’s political ambitions and attempts to sustain transnational connections. Parallels are drawn between Alevi and Kurdish TV to illustrate the Turkish context.

Keywords

Alevi, communicative ethnocide, ethnic media, Kurds, transnational television, Turkey

Introduction

Turkey was shaken by an attempted coup d’état on 15 July 2016 allegedly orchestrated by Gulenists, an Islamist movement which until very recently had been a close ally of Turkey’s ruling party the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – Justice and Development Party). Afterwards, as of July 2017, more than 50,000 people have been arrested

including 12 members of parliament; over 111,000 civil servants including more than 6000 academics have been sacked and banned from public service; and 110 media institutions have been closed down (<http://www.chp.org.tr/Public/0/Folder//66594.pdf>, accessed 31 July 2017). The coup attempt and the following measures taken by the government have also had serious implications for the Turkish media landscape with 159 journalists arrested and 31 television channels and 34 radio stations closed down (<http://www.chp.org.tr/Public/0/Folder//66594.pdf>). Although the government claims that they have supposedly targeted the Gulenist media in particular, the attempted coup has provided an excuse for the Turkish government to silence the opposition, including Alevis, the Kurdish movement and leftists.

Alevis are the second largest religious group in Turkey with an estimated population of 15 to 20 million, but their religion is not recognised by the Turkish state and Alevis have a long history of persecution dating back to the 16th century (Sokefeld, 2008; White and Jongerden, 2003). More recently the 'illegitimate' status of Alevis in Turkey, along with economic reasons, has resulted in many leaving Turkey for Western Europe and today there is a vibrant Alevi community in Europe with an estimated 400,000 to 600,000 Alevis in Germany (Massicard, 2010) and 300,000 in the United Kingdom (http://www.alevynet.org/SAP.aspx?pid=About_en-GB, accessed 15 July 2017). Transnational Alevi television has been a significant tool for connecting Alevis living in different countries and has been significant in constructing a transnational imagination for them (Emre Cetin, 2018). Three Alevi television stations, Cem TV, TV10 and Yol TV were on air before the coup attempt of July 2016, but following it, TV10 was closed down in September 2016 by decree under the government's state of emergency and Yol TV's broadcasting was suspended in December 2016 by the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTUK) on the grounds of insulting the President, praising terrorist organisations and broadcasting without a Turkish licence. Cem TV remains in operation and is based in Turkey while TV10 and Yol TV now only use Internet broadcasting mainly from Europe. Given that each TV channel represents a different political orientation within the Alevi community, the fact that the Turkish government approached each one differently is significant in terms of the communicative ethnocide and its nuances that will be discussed in detail in this article.

By looking at the current Turkish media landscape, and Alevi television in particular, my aim is to demonstrate that ethnocide as a cultural annihilation also has serious consequences in terms of media communication. I argue that the closure of Alevi television stations in Turkey is an attempt at the communicative ethnocide of the transnational Alevi community by silencing the multiple voices within that community, weakening its transnational connections, and damaging the multispatiality between the local, national, and transnational that was fundamentally supported by Alevi television. I start by providing a theoretical framework on ethnocide by drawing on Appadurai (2006), Clastres (2010) and Yalcinkaya (2014) followed by a discussion of the context in which the ethnic media operates in Turkey with a particular focus on Kurdish and Alevi media. I then introduce the concept of communicative ethnocide and discuss its relevance for the contemporary transnational Alevi community. The discussion primarily draws on data from interviews with 14 TV channel workers such as producers, executives and presenters based in Germany who worked

for TV stations closed by the Turkish government and which were conducted as part of a broader research on Alevi television.

Ethnocide: the cultural annihilation of a community

Genocide is a legal term which refers to the destruction of a community by persecuting its members. Although the term is primarily used to address the persecution of the Jewish community by the Nazis during World War II, this was not the first act of genocide and many communities were intentionally destroyed before this time including the Armenians in Turkey during the First World War (Akcem, 2013). Lemkin (cited in Clavero, 2008), who coined the term genocide, has suggested that the term ethnocide can also be used as a synonym and in legal studies ethnocide often refers to cultural genocide and the cultural destruction of indigenous cultures (Clavero, 2008). In the 1970s, it was particularly used in relation to indigenous cultures in the Americas (Barabas and Bartholeme, 1973; Escobar, 1989; Lizot, 1976; Venkateswar, 2004), although later the concept has been used to explain the cultural destruction of different communities living in different countries (Casula, 2015; Clarke, 2001; Lemarchand, 1994; Williams, 2002). A report by the United Nations on the genocide of indigenous populations refers to ethnocide as follows:

In cases where such [state] measures can be described as acts committed for the deliberate purpose of eliminating the culture of a group by systematically destructive and obstructive action, they could be deemed to constitute clear cases of ethnocide or *cultural genocide*. (Cited in Clavero, 2008: 99)

Ethnocide can be regarded as a cultural weapon which aims to destroy the culture of a community with or without killing its members. While genocide, according to Clastres (2010), aims to annihilate the body as the marker of race, ethnocide annihilates the mind; it is, he argues, 'the systematic destruction of ways of living and thinking of people from those who lead this venture of destruction' (p. 103). Although Clastres makes a comparison between genocide and ethnocide, he does not equate one with the other, and acknowledges that the destruction of bodies is worse than the destruction of a culture but only on the grounds that 'less barbarity is better than more barbarity' (p. 103). Williams' (2002) definition of the 'culture as ordinary' allows us to reflect on the everyday dimensions of ethnocide where we can see how it interrupts, transforms and distorts the everyday practices of an ethnic community, including its rites and rituals, that provide it with its particular characteristics. Ethnocide can take different forms such as suggesting the adoption of alternative rituals to those specific to the community or forcibly replacing them with different practices, or the destruction of culturally significant spaces where everyday practices and encounters take place, and so on. Hence, ethnocide can be thought of as a programme which attacks the culture of communities on a day-to-day basis.

Essential to both genocide and ethnocide is the concept of the 'Other', since in both cases the Other means difference and this difference has to be dealt with. For this reason, in making sense of ethnocide, it is useful to compare it to genocide's vision of the Other. While the genocidal mind sees the Other as evil and wants to eliminate it, the ethnocidal mind wishes to transform it by eliminating the difference and making the Other identical

to itself. Whereas the genocidal mind sees a hierarchy of races with its own superior to others, the ethnocidal mind presupposes a hierarchy of cultures (Clastres, 2010). In this sense, ethnocide involves a cultural war against the Other with the aim of diminishing the characteristics of what makes the Other different and foreseeing an eventual assimilation of the Other into the mainstream, thus ‘reducing the Other to the same’ by ‘the dissolution of the multiple into one’ (Clastres, 2010: 108).

For Clastres (2010), it is a universal fact that all cultures are ethnocentric but being ethnocentric does not necessarily entail that a culture is ethnocidal. For this to occur, particular tools and opportunities are required and these are afforded through the formation of the state. For Clastres, the state is a requirement and precondition for ethnocide:

All state organizations are ethnocidal, ethnocide is the normal mode of existence of the State. There is thus a certain universality to ethnocide, in that it is the characteristic not only of a vague, indeterminate ‘white world’, but of a whole ensemble of societies which are societies with a State. (p. 111)

Simply put, the systematic cultural elimination of the Other requires the state’s organised and institutionalised power. To this can be added the observation by Appadurai (2006) that it is not minorities who are violent but rather the state which engages in violence because of how the state reacts to them. Minorities according to Appadurai (2006):

[...] create uncertainties about the national self and national citizenship because of their mixed status. Their legally ambiguous status puts pressures on constitutions and legal orders. Their movements threaten the policing of borders. Their financial transactions blur the lines between national economies and between legal and criminal transactions. Their languages exacerbate worries about national cultural coherence. Their lifestyles are easy ways to displace widespread tensions in society, especially urban society. Their politics tend to be multifocal, so they are always sources of anxiety to security states. (pp. 44–45)

For both authors, violence is seen as inherent in the existence of the state and the need to engage in systematic violence both leads to and requires the organisational capacity of the state. It is important to emphasise this interconnection in order to understand the complexity of ethnocide as a cultural form of violence. While Clastres sees ethnocide as an inherent characteristic of state societies and considers ethnocide as a tool that can be used by every state, he also recognises the potential for resistance by the Other in such societies. For Clastres, ‘the ability of resistance of the oppressed minority’ means that ethnocide is not an inescapable fate for the Other (p. 103). Whether the Other is able to resist ethnocide or not depends on the community’s history and the way that the community is organised. One needs to look at the community’s capacity as well as the state’s approach in a given historical context in order to understand the extent of ethnocide.

According to Yalcinkaya (2014), the Turkish state’s approach towards Alevi must be seen as a form of ethnocide even though Alevi themselves have tended to view it rather as assimilation. Yalcinkaya (2014: 23) argues that the state’s policies towards Alevi is an attempt at getting them to comply with the state’s definition of the ideal citizen, and for this reason, ethnocide is a more accurate concept to understand the state’s approach towards Alevi. Unlike assimilation which aims at destroying Alevi as an identity along with Alevi

cultural practices so that culturally Alevis become indistinguishable from the Sunni Muslim majority, the Turkish state is concerned with redefining Alevis and their culture to produce a political identity commensurate with that of the ideal Turkish citizen. Yalcinkaya adopts a Foucauldian approach which sees ethnocide as a creative activity that creates an identity while transforming it according to the desires of the state. The state's ethnocide does not aim at destroying Alevis per se, instead it seeks to destroy the community's internal order and its power of self-regulation (Yalcinkaya, 2014: 32) and lying at the core of this ethnocidal project is the religious practices of Alevis. The state wants to transform Alevi identity through displacing, redesigning and re-conceptualising Alevi rites and rituals (Yalcinkaya, 2014). The discussion of whether the *cemevi*, a place where Alevis conduct their religious ceremony of the *cem*, is a place of worship and whether the *cem* itself is a religious ceremony exemplify this approach. The state resists recognising the *cemevi* and the *cem* as essentially and distinctively religious and instead attempts to redefine them as 'culturally deviant' practices. Similarly, Alevism is treated as a branch or sect within Islam despite the denial of many Alevis that this is the case.¹ In this respect, Yalcinkaya (2014) particularly focuses on the period in which the AKP government launched various projects involving Alevis, such as the Muharrem Fast Breaking, the Alevi Opening, the Alevi Workshops and the Mosque-Cemevi project. At the Muharrem Fast Breaking in 2008, Alevi faith leaders, *dedes*, were invited to break their Muharrem fasts according to Islamic conventions and at some official meetings such as the Alevi Workshops in 2009 the *dedes* were treated as though they were *tariqa* leaders, that is leaders of an Islamic school of Sufism (Borovali and Boyraz, 2015; Ecevitoglu and Yalcinkaya, 2013; Lord, 2017).

With the fundamental change in the political climate since the 2016 coup attempt, the government's attitudes towards Alevis have hardened and Alevis have been targeted by a programme of communicative ethnocide. However, before discussing the nature and extent of this communicative ethnocide, it is necessary to discuss the Turkish state's approach towards the ethnic media, and in the next section, I examine not only Alevi television but also another ethnic media, Kurdish television, to provide a wider understanding of the Turkish context.

The ethnic media in Turkey: Kurdish and Alevi television

Kurdish television

Originally dispersed into four states, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey, the Kurds are currently a large community of which there are an estimated 14 million in Turkey and 850,000 in Europe (<http://www.institutkurde.org/en/kurdorama/>, accessed 15 July 2017). While the Kurdish movement dates back to the late Ottoman period, the struggle gained considerable momentum in 1978 with the formation of the Kurdistan Workers Party (*Partiye Karkeren Kurdistan* (PKK)) and their policy of armed opposition to the Turkish state and call for independence, later for autonomy and cultural rights. Kurdish television broadcasting in the Turkish context has been very much framed by this armed conflict and political struggle as well as international crises in the region. It makes an interesting case study of a medium for an ethnic group which does not have a state yet is aiming to build a national identity through television in a transnational context (Hassanpour, 1998, 2003;

Sinclair and Smets, 2014; Smets, 2016). I shall argue that the experience of Kurdish broadcasting in Europe, starting with Med TV and followed by Medya TV and Roj TV, illustrates an active form of communicative ethnocide which has strong parallels with the fate of Alevi television broadcasting.

Med TV started its broadcasts from the United Kingdom in 1995 with a licence from the Independent Television Commission (ITC) granted for 10 years. However, as a result of diplomatic pressure from the Turkish state, less than 4 years later in March 1999 its licence was revoked by the ITC (Sinclair and Smets, 2014: 324) with accusations that the channel supported 'terrorism' and broadcast 'hate propaganda' (Hassanpour, 1998, 2003). This was followed by raids on the studios of Med TV, arrests of the television staff and the seizure of its computers and hardware from its offices in Belgium, Germany and the United Kingdom after which it began its broadcasts via the French based Eutelsat until France Telecom refused to renew its licence (Hassanpour, 1998, 2003). Following a similar pattern to the political parties established by the Kurdish movement which were continuously closed down and re-opened in different names, Med TV was re-established again as Medya TV in France in 1999 from which it broadcast until 2004 when the 'Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (CSA), the French licensing authority, found that Medya TV was merely a successor channel to Med TV and revoked its broadcasting licence' (Sinclair and Smets, 2014: 325). Following Medya TV's closure, Roj TV, which was primarily based in Denmark, replaced the channel. Sinclair and Smets (2014) provide a detailed account of how Roj TV led to another international crisis, this time between Denmark and Turkey, involving various parties such as Eutelsat and Reporters Without Borders in a long judicial process. In the event the Danish court ruled against a ban on Roj TV and also Nuce TV, the latter having been designed as a replacement in case of Roj TV's closure. Recently, the Kurdish television landscape has expanded to include various local, national and transnational channels as well as thematic broadcasting such as news and children's television. However, the state of emergency has given an opportunity for the Turkish government to silence Kurdish media by arresting Kurdish journalists, closing down news agencies and blacking out television channels such as Jiyan, Mezopotamya and Denge.

Alevi television

Being a silenced and invisible community, the first explicit presence of Alevis in the media was through Alevi radio channels during the unregulated media environment in Turkey in the 1990s. The neo-liberal economy of the era, along with the discourses of 'being free' (meaning free from state regulations), allowed various radio stations to flourish (Algan, 2003; Kaya and Cakmur, 2010). Alevis had been able to establish their presence, raise their voice and reach a broader public than could be achieved through the various Alevi magazines that were published at this time. However, due to various reasons, an Alevi presence on television was relatively late and had to wait until the 2000s. Until then, the invisibility of Alevi identity in Turkish society had not allowed the development of a sustainable financial system to support the Alevi media. Due to the fear of persecution in Turkey, Alevis had been unable to organise in large numbers and to represent themselves through associations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This lack of community resources, along with the fear of Alevi individuals such as business

people who might have held sufficient economic resources to finance media organisations, held back investment in Alevi media. However, the Sivas Massacre of 1993, where 35 people who came to Sivas for an Alevi festival were burned to death in a hotel, proved to be a turning point for Alevis and was a major boost to the ‘Alevi revival’ which had already started in the Alevi community in Europe in the late 1980s (Sokefeld, 2008; White and Jongerden, 2003). This can be taken as a turning point for the Alevi media, and by the beginning of the new century, it had paved the way for the establishment of Alevi television born out of a burning necessity felt by Alevis to become more visible in the public sphere and the need for the self-exploration of their identity.

The 2000s can be seen as an experimental period for Alevi business people and organisations who explored the use of satellite broadcasting mostly through European based stations. Among the stations that were established were TV Avrupa (based in Germany), Dem TV (based in the United Kingdom), Su TV (based in Germany and later in France), Duzgun TV and Kanal 12 (both based in Germany), Cem TV (based in Turkey), Yol TV (based in Germany and later in Turkey), and TV 10 (based in Germany and in Turkey) (Emre Cetin, 2018). Most of these television stations had only a brief existence, largely as a result of economic reasons along with the political disagreements among the owners that reflected the different political orientations within the Alevi community. More recently, there have also been political pressures and under the state of emergency declared by the Turkish government after the attempted coup, TV10, which had been on air since 2011, was closed in September 2016 and Yol TV, which had been broadcasting since 2006, was suspended in late 2016. Both, however, still broadcast on the Internet, although with a reduced audience. Currently, only Cem TV, which has been on air since 2005, remains as an Alevi station broadcasting from Turkey.

What distinguishes these channels from each other is their different interpretations of Alevism and their different political orientations, as well as their ownership by different organisations and individuals. TV10 is owned by a group of individuals who, in my interviews with them, emphasise their commitment to representing the ethnic, religious and political differences within the Alevi community. TV10 is also distinguished by its close-knit ties with the Kurdish movement and is thereby primarily regarded as the voice of Alevi Kurds. On the other hand, Yol TV is run by individuals who act on behalf of the European Confederation of Alevi Unions which owns the station. The Confederation regards Alevism as separate from Islam and as a faith in its own right. It is interesting to note, as we discuss later, that Cem TV, the only station not forced by the Turkish government to suspend its broadcasting, fits in most with the Turkish government’s attempts to define Alevism within Turkishness. This is most likely explained by the fact that, as I have observed previously, ‘*Cem TV* is run by the Cem Foundation which espouses an Islamic understanding of Alevism, regarding it as a sect of Islam within the *sufi* tradition, and also emphasises its Turkish origins’ (Emre Cetin, 2018: 97).

Communicative ethnocide: destroying the communicative means of a community

Yalcinkaya (2014: 32–35) describes the particular methods through which ethnocide operates. These are displacement of the community, destroying its locality and geography,

destroying the memory of the community, and the displacement of the community's performances. I would like to add another to these, destroying the communicative means of the community and it is this which I refer to as communicative ethnocide. Being 'the suppression of cultural differences as deemed inferior or bad' (Clastres, 2010: 108), ethnocidal violence can target the locality, memory, performances and the communicative capacity of the community. In other words, communicative ethnocide is not an isolated process but is part of the ethnocidal project undertaken on a particular community. Its aim is to destroy the communicative means and capacity of that community with the goal of interrupting and eventually annihilating its cultural formation. Communicative ethnocide can take place through various means and media including cultural events, social gatherings, press, television, social media and so on. While each venue through which communicative ethnocide operates deserves to be investigated in depth, for the purpose of this article, I would like to focus on the communicative ethnocide that takes place in the context of television broadcasting.

Communicative ethnocide requires the power of the state because currently states are the main actors regulating communication policies through such means as television licences, channel allocations and infrastructural regulations. Furthermore, states are the primary actors which hold particular agendas and policies concerning minorities. Taken together therefore, ethnocide can be seen as a planned and regulated action of the state. Communicative ethnocide can take both a passive form, where the state, for example, sets up legal barriers to the operation of ethnic media, and an active form, such as imposing a ban on broadcasting in particular languages or interrupting and censoring broadcasting. In both cases, the aim is to hinder the interaction between the members of the community and their ability to stimulate and guide their social imagination as to what their community is, and to eliminate the multivocality within the community and interrupt the cultural self-reproduction of the community through media. Therefore, it has significant implications in terms of identity politics, minority rights and the way collective identities that are underrepresented in the media express themselves.

Communicative ethnocide has a number of consequences for ethnic communities in four main domains: representation, language, space and civic engagement. For those communities that are underrepresented in the mainstream media, the ethnic media provides opportunities to raise their own voice (Matsaganis et al., 2011), something which communicative ethnocide seeks to eliminate by burying communities in order to silence them through demolishing the potential for a multivocal media ecology. The ethnic media is also crucial for the linguistic survival of many communities as it serves as a mean to revive dying languages and popularise them among community members. Communicative ethnocide diminishes this opportunity as well as interrupting the transfer of native languages to the new generation. It also has serious consequences in terms of the spatiality of community identity in an era of satellite broadcasting where members of the same community in different localities can connect through television. Especially for those minorities that are usually dispersed through different locations or migrant communities, communicative ethnocide means the interruption of self-imagination which is constructed through transnational satellite television. Finally, the ethnic media is able to engage and mobilise ethnic groups in an active way to become involved in everyday politics and right movements as well as community politics (Matsaganis et al., 2011).

Communicative ethnocide diminishes this potential for civic engagement by destroying the community's own public sphere.

The contemporary situation of Alevi television exemplifies these features of communicative ethnocide where Alevi culture is being silenced in the media as a direct policy of the Turkish state. Drawing on interviews conducted with producers and managers of TV10 and Yol TV, I look at how the communicative ethnocide of Alevi television and its effects can be analysed in terms of four different dimensions: infrastructural, audience, transnational and resistance. For ethical concerns and given the current political climate in Turkey, in order to preserve the anonymity of my interviewees, I have used pseudonyms and have not specified their titles or the positions they hold in their organisations. I mention only the television station they work for.

Infrastructural dimension

Along with 11 channels most of which were Kurdish channels, TV10 was closed down under the state of emergency in September 2016 which also meant that all its equipment and infrastructure were confiscated to be sold to third parties. An appeal by TV10 to resume broadcasting was rejected by the state of emergency commission under the state of emergency which was still in effect as of October 2017.² However, TV10 still operates online, albeit with limited resources and a reduced programme schedule which has resulted in a loss of a wide section of its audience who do not have Internet access. Yol TV's blackout also took place in late 2016 under the state of emergency; however, the way it was silenced was different, but like TV10 it is also available online as well as through Internet Protocol Television (IPTV), which similarly has also resulted in a loss of audience.

It is important to understand that communicative ethnocide is not necessarily totalitarian in the sense that it is possible for it to recognise and respond differently to the differences, even nuances, contained within ethnic identities. The Turkish state's varied approach to different Alevi television stations can be seen to be a result of this nuanced approach. Since the first Alevi TV station, TV Avrupa, started broadcasting, Alevi television has explored a variety of ways of representing Alevism and the Alevi identity from broadcasting video clips of Alevi music to producing programmes on Alevi religion. Until recently, the different Alevi TV channels could be clearly differentiated in terms of their loyalty with regard to the differing political orientations to be found within the Alevi movement and the effect that these loyalties had on programming content in relation to Alevism itself. Thus, as well as reflecting different political orientations within the Alevi community, Cem TV, TV10 and Yol TV also adopted different definitions of Alevism. Within this variety of representations of Alevism, the state has a particular 'preferred Alevism' which clearly defines it as being a sect within Islam, and it is this definition of Alevism which is exemplified by the broadcast content of Cem TV. For many of my interviewees, the Cem Foundation and Cem TV is a state project which works to assimilate Alevis into the Turkish-Islam synthesis.³ This accounts for the fact that while TV10 and Yol TV, which do not promulgate this 'preferred' definition, have been subject to different forms of communicative ethnocide, Cem TV has remained untouched and is still on air. As Clastres (2010) and Yalcinkaya (2014) argue, ethnocide

does not aim to annihilate ethnic identity, as is the case with genocide, but aims to make the Other resemble the Same and the more similar to the Same (in this case, Turkish-Sunni-Muslim), the better. This is the role that Cem TV assumes in its representation of Alevism, one that approximates Aleviness (Other) to Islam and Turkishness (Same). In many ways, it is similar to the Kurdish TV station TRT Kurdi, which was established by the Turkish state to fulfil the requirements of the European Union (EU), which can be thought as serving the same mission and representing the 'preferred Kurdishness'.⁴

The fact that different Alevi channels with different political orientations have been subjected to different measures is itself indicative of the complexity in understanding how communicative ethnocide works and how it needs to be distinguished from more crude forms of censorship. While both are violations by the state, communicative ethnocide works by targeting a community and obstructing its communicative means in order to destroy the community's cultural formation. Hence, I argue that the closure of TV10 and Yol TV cannot simply be seen as attacks on the freedom of speech but are deeply rooted within the state's ethnocidal policy against Alevis and must be regarded as a specific part of Alevi ethnocide.

Audience dimension

While it is more common to interfere in the content, production and regulation of ethnic television through the means of censorship and control, communicative ethnocide can also encompass the audience. In the case of Kurdish TV, the viewership itself can be regarded as an ethnic manifestation and communicative ethnocide has set its sights on viewership practices. The satellite dishes on top of the roofs of Kurdish residents were distinguishable with the change of satellites from Eutelsat to Intelsat and because of this the Turkish authorities were able to detect who was watching Med TV since the dishes acted as flags of identity. This resulted in

the smashing of satellite dishes, the intimidation of viewers, dish vendors, dish installers, and coffee-houses; a more effective form of repression is cutting off electricity from villages and small towns during prime time hours when MED-TV is on the air. (Hassanpour, 1998: 61)

This has not happened to the viewers of Alevi television as it is not possible to detect who they are by simple surveillance techniques as was the case of the Kurds. On the other hand, the closing of TV channels and limiting them to online communication has necessarily had an effect on the audience and the interviews conducted with those who work for Alevi television suggest that the closure of the channels has been a challenge, especially for those Alevis who live in remote and rural areas. The interviewees emphasised the significance of Alevi television for Alevis who live in villages:

For instance, before Yol TV we hadn't been in contact with many communities [living in different regions]. With Yol TV we saw that there are Alevis living in different regions which we never thought of before. The Alevis [living in those regions] found an opportunity to express their feelings of fear, nervousness, hiding, all those human feelings. They felt 'look, we have a television, we can talk and express ourselves'. A common value has been created [thanks to Yol

TV]. In this sense, establishing television stations enabled us and Alevi organisations to reach the remote localities that we've never been able to before. This is very valuable, very meaningful. (Haydar, Yol TV)

Our live broadcast vehicle enters a village. One of the women starts shouting and ululating 'I said they will definitely come here!'[in Kurdish] This is a need... One of the characteristics which distinguishes TV10 from other channels is that it is not concerned with popularity. Many people can appear on the screen and give good talks. But TV10 with great respect put a mic in front of Alevi who live in villages where nobody visited and cared to ask about their opinion or thought who cares if they talk ... (Seyit, TV10)

Alevi living in rural areas find it much more difficult to represent themselves and to get their voices heard in local media and local politics. In this sense, Alevi television holds a symbolic significance for Alevi who live in remote places, particularly where there is a Sunni Muslim majority. On the other hand, one can argue that the closure of oppositional television stations in the aftermath of the attempted coup has pushed urban Alevi to rely more on Alevi television in order to receive information other than that provided by the government-supported media organisations. During my informal discussions with Alevi living in Ankara and Istanbul, especially those who do not or cannot use social media, they argued that they find it difficult to access reliable news sources after the closure of oppositional television channels including Alevi television. In this way, communicative ethnocide is more destructive during periods of authoritarianism and increasing censorship where communities require more information about the political agenda in order to protect and defend themselves.

Transnational dimension

The presence of Med TV and the studios, offices and production facilities of its successor stations in different European countries such as the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, Sweden and Russia reinforced the identity of Euro-Kurdishness which as Soguk (2008: 185) notes is cultivated through such a sense of aterritoriality and borderlessness. Despite its Euro-Kurdish identity, Kurdish broadcasting from Europe has been subjected to a transnational form of communicative ethnocide where various countries have been involved in the Turkish state's attempt to silence Kurdish television. In Sinclair and Smets' (2014) words, '[n]ever before in the history of European television broadcasting has there been a case in which the EU countries have aggressively fought to fine, censure and close down television channels broadcasting from within the EU' (p. 320). This aggression by these EU countries has been stoked by international initiatives arising from the Turkish state. As Hassanpour (1998) comments, '[a]mong the Middle Eastern countries, Turkey is the first and the only one to use its full state power to silence MED-TV', and in order to implement its communicative ethnocide the state has used different methods (p. 53). Within Turkey, it has 'unleashed its coercive forces to prevent the reception of the airwaves within Turkey, whereas in Europe, it used diplomatic power, espionage, jamming, and various forms of intimidation to stop the emission of television signals' (Hassanpour, 1998: 53).

Even though the Turkish state has attempted to intervene in Alevi politics in European countries with, for example, its attempt to change the curriculum for Alevi lessons taught in Germany (as communicated in an interview with a member of the Federation of Germany Alevi Unions), there has been no direct interference by the Turkish state in the broadcasting by Alevi television channels in Europe, unlike the situation with Kurdish television. However, the threat of possible action in the future and the measures taken against Alevi television in Turkey means that communicative ethnocide proves a risk to the transnational connectivity of Alevi community and thereby a transnational issue. Ali from Yol TV explains the extent to which Yol TV serves as a means of transnational connectivity for Alevis living in different countries:

Because this television does not belong to individuals, firstly the German Federation of Alevi Unions then other European countries [the members of the Alevi Unions living in European countries] had to watch it. In such a position it means say you live in Cologne then you are able to watch what Alevis in Sweden do. You could watch what Alevis in Denmark do. Before that Alevis had to meet together once a year or every six months and they would explain the situation in the UK, Sweden, Denmark and so on. But thanks to this system which has started a year ago, those in the UK were able to follow activities in Duisburg. (Ali, Yol TV)

This is not only the case with Yol TV which is run by the European Confederation of Alevi Unions. As well as having a studio in Germany, TV10 also serves as a medium for the transnational connectivity of the Alevi community in Turkey and Europe. Both channels have specific programmes which are produced in and about different localities in Turkey and Europe giving voice to the Alevi communities living in these various local contexts. As most of the channels have been based in Europe and have appealed to Alevis in Turkey as well as Europe, Alevi television has made a significant contribution towards the transnational experience of Alevis. As my interviews with television workers in Germany and Alevi audiences in Europe suggest, Alevi television has reflected and re-constructed the transnational Alevi public sphere as they have culturally bonded Alevis living in different countries and localities, have helped Alevi organisations to expand transnationally, and have enabled the Alevi community to gain confidence in being more explicit about their identity. Hence, the closure of Alevi channels and the consequent reduction in its audience has had significant transnational consequences for the community. It interrupts the circulation of information in different localities and hinders European Alevis' involvement with Turkish politics and the interconnectedness of Alevis in Turkey and in Europe. In this regard, it is not the communicative ethnocide of only those Alevis in Turkey but also the transnational Alevi community which is connected on a day-to-day basis through satellite television.

Both Kurdish and Alevi television broadcasting in the Turkish context demonstrates communicative ethnocide does not necessarily have only a national dimension despite the fact that it is implemented by the nation state. Instead, in the era of satellite and digital technologies, communicative ethnocide can and does take place in a transnational context where various national and international actors are involved as has been the case with Med TV and its successor television stations.

Resistance dimension

Communicative ethnocide is not a one-way stream so to speak. Communities which are targeted by it can also resist ethnocide through different methods and means. These include the use of different media like broadcasting online, finding more creative ways of engaging in media activism such as encouraging citizen journalism, and transferring their human resources to different media organisations or using them for different media productions. The experience of Kurdish and Alevi television epitomises the resistance against communicative ethnocide. Both TV10 and Yol TV do not regard their closure as an end but are looking for alternative ways to continue broadcasting, as well as seeking out temporary solutions in order to survive conditions under the Turkish state of emergency. Hasan from TV10 explains how they are planning new documentary projects, some with the help and sponsorship of the community, despite the fact that their equipment has been confiscated:

We signed contracts with some of our friends [previous workers] after the closure of TV10. We are trying to produce some programmes that we've been unable to do when TV10 was on air. As a preparation, as a transition to a new television, there is a crew of five to six people in Turkey. They are working on documentaries on Alevi ocaks, significant Alevi women in history such as Ana Fatma and Elif Ana. They co-produce and work as separate groups simultaneously. We've been unable to do these while on air, even if we wanted to because responding to the daily agenda and daily routine of the channel did not allow us. (Hasan, TV10)

In this case, the production of documentaries also operate as a mean of resistance which can help the previous workers of the channel remain engaged and used for researching and producing more about Alevi culture. This also operates as a means of existing during the period of political chaos as the future of media freedom in Turkey does not seem very promising and TV10's future in particular continues to be uncertain due to legal complications arising from the decree laws passed as part of the state of emergency. The fact that TV10 has been based both in Germany and Turkey has, according to Hasan, also helped a great deal in ensuring the survival of the channel. Even though they have no access to the technical infrastructure in Turkey, they have been able to broadcast online thanks to their equipment in Germany and, in this regard, transnationalism has helped Alevi television to survive and has worked against the attempts of communicative ethnocide. In this, they have been more fortunate than their Kurdish counterparts. Currently, there have also been demonstrations taking place in Istanbul every Saturday with the attendance of various Alevi organisations protesting at the closure of TV10.

Yol TV has also employed various strategies to retain its audience during the black-out. It broadcasts online and tries to encourage its viewers to move to the IPTV system where viewers can watch Yol TV on their television through the use of a special device fitted to it. Yol TV benefits from events organised by the European Confederation of Alevi Unions which are used to inform the community about this new system and at which the IPTV boxes are available for sale. My interviews with, for example, Ali, Haydar and Turabi from Yol TV explain how the channel seeks a long-term solution to the disruption caused by the instabilities of Turkish politics and the pressures from the

Turkish state. These include changing the satellite through which Yol TV is broadcast as well as using terrestrial broadcasting. Both of these solutions suggest a Europe-centred vision which anticipates the future of Yol TV in the European broadcasting market.

Conclusion

Communicative ethnocide does not take place in a vacuum, instead it should be seen as part of a broader project of ethnocide. Even though it has taken place within the specific conditions of the period after the attempted coup, during which the AKP government has aimed to re-establish its authority over different factions of the opposition, the closure of TV10 and Yol TV must be regarded as part of the pre-existing ethnocide policy of the Turkish state for whom satellite broadcasting is regarded as a further challenge to its broader national policies and its project of constructing the 'ideal citizen'. At the same time, satellite broadcasting has proved an opportunity for migrant communities like Alevis to reaffirm existing identities while constructing an imagined transnational one within a transnational public sphere and to pursue their political ambitions. But satellite technology does not guarantee a realm which is free from state interventions as Kurdish and Alevi television exemplify, even though Alevi television, through the use of online broadcasting technology, managed to circumvent these interventions, although with a more limited size of audience.

The Alevi case demonstrates that the opportunities for resistance to communicative ethnocide are very much bounded by the community's transnational capabilities, including community organisations, the political mobilisation of its members and the community's infrastructural media investments. The attempt by Yol TV to promote IPTV technology among the members of the European Alevi community can be regarded as an example of this resistance. The need to promote new types of digital communication technology for Alevis in Turkey as well as audiences abroad presents a challenge for Alevi broadcasting that wishes to resist communicative ethnocide. While technological advances do not necessarily guarantee the creation of a freer transnational public sphere for communities such as Alevis they can provide short term, and possibly even longer term, opportunities for survival in the face of a communicative ethnocide directed by the state. But the future of transnational Alevi broadcasting and the fight against communicative ethnocide is uncertain and may well take different directions in Turkey and Europe.

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Notes

1. Within the Alevi community, there is an ongoing debate about whether Alevism is or is not part of Islam. In line with the views of the Alevi Unions, my interviewees from Yol TV regard Alevism as a religion in its own right and have coined the term 'a religion of nature' with reference to its respect for nature. My interviewees from TV10, on the other hand, tend to embrace many different interpretations of Alevism including those which consider it as a sect of Islam or is in some sense a 'truer' form of Islam.

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2. TV10 has received an official document indicating that it was closed as a result of the decree. However, the appeal submitted to the State of Emergency Commission was rejected on the grounds that the channel was closed down not by the decree but by the decision of a commission working for the Prime Ministry.
 3. The Turkish-Islam synthesis can be regarded as the founding principle of the Turkish Republic where the ideal citizenship is described around the composition of Turkishness and Muslimness. However, the term Turkish-Islam synthesis became an ideological programme in the 1980s and was reinforced by the state (Guvenc et al., 1991).
 4. Smets (2016: 742) mentions that TRT 6's editors are journalists who were recruited among the Gulenists before the coup and at a time when the Gulenists were supported by the government. This also indicates the state's approach to the communicative ethnocide of the Kurds which is one of Islamising them through the means of a religious organisation, in other words, reassembling the Other (Kurdish) as the Same (Turkish) through the use of the common ground of religion (Islam). It is no coincidence that TRT 6 has been more attractive to those Kurds who are more religious and for whom their Muslim identity matters (Arsan, 2014).

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