Ethnic media, conflict, and the nation-state : Kurdish broadcasting in Turkey and Europe and mediated nationhood

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Abstract
Drawing on fieldwork among Kurdish broadcasters in Turkey and Europe, this article shows how ethnic media mediate nationhood in a conflict context. Despite rising interest in the media-nationhood nexus, and the expansion of studies on ethnic media, little is known about ethnic media in conflicts involving state and non-state actors. This study investigates three Kurdish broadcasters, Roj-TV, Gün-TV and TRT-6. The collected data include expert interviews and ethnographic conversations with employees. Through a grounded theory approach, a model is developed that proposes four modes of mediated nationhood, in which the relation to the state and the role of ethnicity are key elements. Next, it is demonstrated how mediated nationhood in conflicts is characterized by multiple constraints, and how this affects the perceived roles and ethnic belongings among media professionals.

Introduction
In recent years there has been a renewed interest in the media-nationhood nexus. Going against the grain of overly optimistic post-nationalism, a vast range of studies has argued that 'nations matter' (Calhoun 2007) and that the nation is of continuous relevance: 'ontologically, it offers a sense of territorial stability and security while epistemologically it can supply a sense of familiarity and order in the global landscape' (Roosvall and Salovaara-Moring 2010: 9). The key role of mass media in the imagination and construction of nationhood returns time and again, often in reference to the nation as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) finding its origins in the spread of print capitalism. The nation-state remains a powerful analytical unit, even in times of media globalization (Flew and Waisbord 2015). At the same time, mass media have been regarded as crucial to the way in which diverse conflicts within and among nations and nation-states are 'mediatized', 'performed', 'enacted' or 'narrated' (Cottle 2006; Matar and Harb 2013). Such conflicts often subvert the legitimacy of nation-states. At the intersection of both strands of research, the question remains how nationhood is mediated in conflict situations. This question is particularly relevant when ethnic media are concerned, because ethnic media historically have a complex relationship with nation-states and central systems of power and governance (Matsaganis, Katz and Ball-Rokeach 2011: 26-27).

This article describes Kurdish broadcasting practices in Turkey and Europe with the aim of pushing forward our understanding of the media-nationhood nexus in contexts of conflict. At the same time it aims to reflect on the increasingly complex links between politics and media in Turkey, where censorship and freedom of speech are key concerns (Yeşil 2014). After discussing the theoretical relations between mediated nationhood, conflict and ethnic media, the Kurdish conflict in Turkey is presented as a case study. In the empirical sections I examine three different Kurdish TV channels – Roj-TV, Gün-TV and TRT-6 (recently renamed TRT Kurdî).

Mediated nationhood, conflict and ethnic media

Before moving to the empirical part of the article, I want to delve into some of its central concepts – mediated nationhood, conflict, and ethnic media – and explore their links. Mediated nationhood is probably the stickiest of these concepts since there are many diverging views of nationhood and nationalism and how these are communicated, transformed and given meaning through media technologies. Being concerned with the (re)production of cultural meanings, it may not surprise that I subscribe to a constructivist perspective on nationhood that emphasizes the 'socially constructed nature of nations' (Karolewski and Suszycki 2011: 18-19). In such a perspective, the imagination of the nation through media (Anderson 1983; see also Mihelj 2011: 11-14), the construction of national identities in discourse (Wodak et al. 2009) and the everyday, banal qualities of nationhood (Billig 1995) are essential. In the contemporary world, there is an intense mediation of nationhood. Mediation is more than mere communication over time and distance (Livingstone 2009: 10; see also Silverstone 2005). It refers here to the way in which media transform and reorder social relations (Siapera 2010: 6), i.e. how media are not only tools of communication, but an integral part of modernity (Thompson 1995). The process of mediation is thus both constitutive and constituting social reality (Williams 1977: 100, cited in Madianou 2012: 6). So when investigating the mediation of the nation, or mediated nationhood, I am mainly concerned with the way in which the construction of national identity is transformed through processes of mediation.

Mediated nationhood becomes particularly interesting in times of conflict, when the construction and legitimacy of national identities are at stake. Conflicts are struggles between opposing interests among (groups of) people, and the diversity of conflicts in the world is so wide that it is impossible to grasp their scope within one theoretical approach (Cottle 2006: 4-5). In order to keep my argument about mediated nationhood and conflict coherent, my claims mainly relate to one specific type of conflict, i.e. structural conflicts between state and non-state actors. Conflict over identity is a key problem for many nations, and across the world violent conflicts appear mostly within (rather than among) states. The majority of the studies that deal with media and such conflicts focus on their news coverage and representation. And although ethnicity and its relation to national identity are central in some of these studies, little is known about the way in which ethnic media organizations and the professionals involved in them deal with issues of mediated nationhood and contested national and ethnic identities.

According to Matsaganis, Katz and Ball-Rokeach (2011: 5-7; 10), ethnic media are media that are produced <u>by</u> and <u>for</u> immigrant groups, ethnic, racial and linguistic minorities, as well as dispersed populations. This definition includes a wide variety of media, ranging from neighbourhood newspapers to transnational satellite channels. A key overarching characteristic of ethnic media is that they differ from 'mainstream' media, which are produced by and for the mainstream of society (which includes, but is not necessarily limited to the 'ethnic majority' of society, see Matsaganis, Katz and Ball-Rokeach 2011: 10-11). In many cases, ethnic media are the result of migration movements, but their expansion can also be explained by a wider emergence of 'community, alternative, oppositional, participatory and collaborative media practices' (Deuze 2006: 263). Ethnic media producers and professionals often have strong ties with the specific community they work for, which results in challenges with regard to professionalization and community advocacy (Matsaganis, Katz and Ball-Rokeach

2011; Matsaganis and Katz 2014; Shumow 2014) as well as negotiating and balancing professional and ethnic identities (Husband 2005).

Ethnic media, the state, and conflict: Kurds as a case study
The case of the Kurds effectively illustrates the complex relation between ethnic media and conflict. Kurds are regarded as one of the largest transnational stateless nations or ethnic groups. They are a linguistically heterogeneous population that faces particular political, social, and cultural challenges within the different states in which they live. Kurdish populations inhabit the region mainly overlapping parts of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, holding a different political status in those countries (for instance, Iraqi Kurdistan has partial, de facto autonomy). This makes it challenging to study 'Kurdish media' across different states. Hassanpour's (1996) overview of Kurdish media culture is still one of the few works having adopted such a wide scope. Others have focused on Kurdish media in one particular state (especially in Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey) or on diasporic and transnational Kurdish broadcasting that emerged in the 1990s. With the exception of Iraqi Kurdistan after 1991, mass media in the region populated by Kurds have long been the monopoly of the different states, which used them to 'serve and promote their own dominant and official culture, language and political agenda, and to work towards assimilating the Kurds and other minorities' (Sheyholislami 2010: 293). Ever since, this hegemony has eroded for several reasons: the emergence of Kurdish diasporic satellite broadcasts that challenged the dominant nationalist-militarist discourse (especially of the Turkish state, see Hassanpour 2003), changing language policies, the spread of internet (enabling Kurds worldwide to set up transnational networks, and the Kurdish language to develop as a major part of Kurdish identity, see Sheyholislami 2010) and the weakening of central regimes (particularly in Iraq and Syria, where Kurds have established more autonomy).

In this staggeringly complex context, I will focus on the case of the Kurds from Turkey and the Turkish-Kurdish diaspora. There are valid reasons to do so: the largest part of the Kurds in the region lives in Turkey, where they form the largest minority (among many other ethnic groups), and the Kurdish conflict is high on the political agenda. The Kurdish conflict in Turkey is multi-layered and historically complex and finds its roots in the demise of the Ottoman Empire. The Kurdish conflict is an armed conflict between the Republic of Turkey and Kurdish insurgent movements (notably the PKK, the Kurdish Workers' Party) that demand autonomy, separation or greater political and cultural rights. The conflict has escalated notably between 1984 and 1999, and again since 2004. Despite continuing violence and incidents, there are some signs of peace building. Partly due to its bid for EU membership, Turkey has seen democratic reforms that have a positive effect on the Kurdish conflict. Yet, recently pessimism about the on-going peace negotiations is increasing, as mutual threats are being expressed and new violence between the Turkish army and the PKK has occurred.

The transnational mobilization of Kurds is a crucial factor in the conflict. Mass media have been decisive in these processes, and the establishment of Kurdish satellite television by European Kurds in exile has been regarded as the creation of 'sovereignty in the sky' by absence of a nation-state (Hassanpour 2003). Satellite technology has intensified the mediated war between the Kurdish nationalist movement and the Turkish state. In mainstream Turkish media, meanwhile, Kurds

have traditionally been portrayed in a highly stereotypical way (Sezgin and Wall 2005).

Methods

The findings are based on interviews in three different Kurdish broadcasters, gathered in Turkey (Istanbul, Ankara and Diyarbakır) and in Belgium (Denderleeuw near Brussels, where the main studios of one of the TV stations in this study are located) between May 2013 and January 2014. In total 14 expert interviews were conducted with journalists, producers, media policy makers and other media professionals such as managers of TV stations. Five additional interviews were conducted with academics and policy researchers specializing in the Kurdish issue in order to gain more insight into how ethnic media practices and policies are historically embedded within the conflict. Moreover, I visited studios, newsrooms and offices of the channels multiple times. During those visits I also had 16 informal conversations with employees of the channels, giving insight in their experiences, motivations and ideas vis-à-vis the relation between ethnic media and the Kurdish conflict. While the interviewed experts were people with a high position within their organizations, the professionals I met during informal discussions were usually situated lower in the organizational hierarchy (including interns, young freelance journalists and editors, administrative staff and even volunteers).

Although significant effort was put in reaching a diverse group of participants, the majority of the participants were male. This was presumably not only because of the underrepresentation of female staff in all three TV stations, but also because of the cultural context that sometimes made it less appropriate for females to chat informally with a male 'outsider'. When speaking with female employees – especially at the state channel TRT-6, it was also confirmed that the channels were predominantly male workplaces. All interviewees were selected with the aim to cover a wide professional, hierarchical and ideological range. The latter was particularly important in the case of the state channel TRT-6, where a significant number of editors and journalists were known to support the Hizmet movement of Islamic preacher Fetullah Gülen. While the movement was initially an ally of Turkey's current leading party AKP (Justice and Development Party), it is in recent years involved in a grim power struggle with it. This has also had its effect on Turkish media outlets (Corke et al. 2014), including the state broadcaster.[1] The other channels, Roj-TV and Gün-TV, were more homogeneous in terms of their employees' ideological profiles, particularly leaning towards support for PKK or pro-Kurdish left-wing parties and movements.

The audio-recorded expert interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically (mainly focusing on themes such as respondents' views on the roles of ethnic media, views of the conflict between state and non-state actors, relation to the Turkish state, purposes of the media activities), while the informal interviews and observations were summarized in field notes. Inspired by Glaser (1992), I have followed a grounded theory approach in which the observed phenomena and discourses were constantly compared in order to structure the observations, and in order to generate a more abstract theoretical perspective on mediated nationhood in conflict.

Case studies

The channels under scrutiny represent only a fraction of the many Kurdish channels that have popped up in recent years. It is estimated that today around 10 (partly) Kurdish-language channels are active in Turkey, and the number rises when considering Kurdish broadcasting elsewhere such as Iraqi Kurdistan, Iran, Syria and the diaspora, although few channels are sustainable and the media landscape is rather volatile. Besides Kurdish-spoken channels there are a few pluralistic Turkish media outlets that devote attention to minority populations (notably İMC TV and Bianet) and that are regarded as 'pro-Kurdish'. The selected channels are highly distinctive cases, both theoretically and empirically. All three channels are general-purpose, programming news magazines, cartoons, serials, documentaries, educational programs and music shows. All channels include broadcasts in multiple languages, including different Kurdish dialects (Kurmanji, Sorani, Hewrami) as well as Farsi, Zaza, Arabic and Turkish.

Roj-TV

Roj-TV was the successor channel of MED-TV (1995-99) and MEDYA-TV (1999-2002), established by Kurds in Europe. Considering these channels as a mouthpiece of the outlawed PKK, the Turkish state has fought to prevent their broadcasts through different means such as diplomatic pressure, interrupting broadcasts and technical interferences (Hassanpour 2003; Sinclair and Smets 2014). In 2004, Roj-TV replaced the two previous channels. Largely run by the same people as its predecessors, its main studios were located near Brussels, and its head office in Denmark. After a series of lawsuits and fines, a Danish court announced in March 2014 that the station's license would be revoked. Anticipating a permanent ban, its initiators have launched yet other channels, Stêrk-TV and MED-Nûçe TV. All these channels have been deemed highly significant in studies on Kurdish nationalism and activism since they were 'established by a diasporic political movement, considered otherwise without agency in the international system of states' (Soğuk 2008: 182). The analysis here focuses on Roj-TV since this was the main diasporic channel at the start of the study, but its structure and ideology are largely in line with the other diasporic Kurdish channels. The channel mainly transmitted to Europe and the Middle East through Eurobird satellite, but it could also be watched via streaming. Little audience research has been conducted so far, but it has been noted that Roj-TV (and its predecessors) are particularly successful among the Kurdish diaspora (Schmidinger 2010), especially among PKK supporters.

Gün-TV

Gün-TV is a local channel based in Diyarbakır, one of the largest cities in south-eastern Turkey and considered the unofficial capital of the Kurdish region in Turkey. Together with a few radio stations, the channel was one of the first to start broadcasting in Kurmanji (the Kurdish dialect that is mostly spoken in Turkey) in 2006. The broadcasting was first restricted to specific weekly hours, and despite it being legally allowed to broadcast in Kurdish, the station has faced significant problems, notably with the supreme council that oversees national broadcasting regulations. In 2011, these regulations were reduced in order to allow more linguistic diversity (see below: TRT-6). Gün-TV broadcasts locally in the wide region around Diyarbakır, but has plans to extend its activities nation-wide and across the Kurdish

region. The case of Gün-TV is particularly interesting because it demonstrates the paradox of many ethnic media outlets as being mainstream on a local community level while having a minority status at the level of the nation-state. Illustrative of this paradox is the fact that the channel, like many other local cultural and media organizations, has good relations with the pro-Kurdish municipality of Diyarbakır (which is part of the national opposition).

TRT-6

TRT-6 is Turkey's first public station broadcasting in Kurdish, launched by the Turkish public broadcaster TRT (Turkish Radio and Television Corporation) in 2009. The public network had some experience with broadcasting in minority languages during specific time slots, but the launch of an all-Kurdish channel has been regarded as a highly symbolical event. Many Kurdish activists and politicians have evaluated the arrival of TRT-6 critically: while its symbolic significance is recognized, the channel is regarded as an assimilation tool of the Turkish state, obscuring the work that remains to be done in terms of human rights for Kurds (Zeydanlıoğlu 2012). While a substantial amount of its programs are in-house or commissioned productions, the channel also has mainstream Turkish and foreign programs, dubbed in Kurdish. Like the other public broadcast channels, it can be viewed worldwide through different satellites and digital TV, as well online and on a mobile version. In the field of ethnic media, TRT-6 seems to be a thought-provoking case: it is primarily produced by and for a specific ethnic group. However, it is financed and controlled by the very state that has since long seen this group as a threat for its continuity. In January 2015, the channel was renamed TRT Kurdî, an event that was explained by the broadcaster as an effort to attract more Kurdish audiences (also outside Turkey) and to reflect Kurdish culture even more.

Recently, Arsan (2014) found that, despite criticism on the assimilationist agenda behind the channel, TRT-6 seems to have found a loyal audience among Kurdish-speaking people in Turkey. Interestingly, the study found that particularly those Kurds who strongly identify as Muslims are attracted to it, which may be explained by the current's government pro-Islamic policies that have also resulted in increased religious programming. Another study by Çakır and Bozkurt (2014) found that viewers of TRT-6 tend to have lower levels of education and income. These studies show that not only ethnicity and but also religion and social class are defining factors when it comes to the different status and character of ethnic media. Moreover, this again complicates the distinction between ethnic and mainstream media, as TRT-6 can be regarded as an ethnic TV channel, voicing the dominant religio-political mainstream in contemporary Turkish society.

Findings
The findings are organized in two sections. First I will use the case studies to describe four different modes of mediated nationhood, based on the key components of the analysis: the relation between ethnic media and the contested state, and the position of contested ethnicity in ethnic media organizations. These modes are the approaches of ethnic media organizations to mediated nationhood. Aiming for a more contextualized and detailed understanding of ethnic media in conflict contexts, I then move from a descriptive to a more analytic level, looking at the different constraints

ethnic media in conflict contexts are faced with (i.e. macro- and meso-level perspective) and how media professionals working in such environments cope with their roles as professionals, ethnic subjects and community advocates (micro-level perspective). The idea of expanding the analysis in this way is inspired by Matsaganis and Katz' (2014) ecological approach to ethnic media organizations, which sees them as part of a larger social system, and Husband's (2005) community of practice approach to ethnic media organizations, which highlights the challenges of institutional dynamics and identity politics within ethnic media enterprises.

Ethnic media organizations, nation-state and ethnicity

The analysis suggests that there are two decisive factors to the way in which the TV channels relate to national identity in the context of the Kurdish conflict: the contested nation-state, and contested ethnicity. On the one hand, national identity is tightly associated with the institutions that represent the Turkish Republic (government, army). This can be explained by the long tradition of assimilationist politics vis-à-vis minority groups, and the fact that the Kurdish conflict itself has become framed as a revolving around the continuity of the Turkish state in its present form. Among the three channels, there are two highly contrasting cases: TRT-6 is a state-run channel whose content must be in line with the vision of the current government, while Roj-TV rather operates <u>against</u> the Turkish state (which seems to be synonymous with 'fighting for the Kurdish case' for most respondents at Roj-TV). Respondents across all channels clearly saw TRT-6 and Roj-TV as the extremes of a spectrum when the state was discussed. The third channel, Gün-TV, has a less explicit relation with the state that it contests. Its main focus is on the local community and the regional audience. Its official dealings with the state are mostly pragmatic (for instance to obtain the necessary licenses). Employees admitted that by focusing on Kurdish culture, their channel pushes the boundaries of the national identity as promoted by the state. Tellingly, a high-ranked employee of the channel said that 'we work <u>within</u> the state, but we would rather not.' Another manager mentioned that the local channel has no choice but to operate within the state that it contests, because 'we can not make programs about the people here in some studio thousands of kilometres away from here'. This is a clear reference to the politicized diasporic channels (like Roj-TV), who they found 'far away from reality'.

   On the other hand, and closely related to the previous factor, there is the role ethnicity – understood by participants as 'Kurdish culture' – plays for ethnic media organizations. Again, ethnicity is considered as 'contested', in the sense that is seen as something that has been oppressed for decades. The relative position of ethnicity varied greatly across the different channels. For Roj-TV, ethnicity is part of the core business of the channel: representing Kurdish culture and its diversity is one of its key aims. This ethnicity is salient, in the sense that it is clearly supreme compared to other dimensions of belonging such as the state or the local level. For the executives at the station, this salient ethnicity serves the political purpose of the Kurds' cultural and political empowerment. This is different for both TRT-6 and Gün-TV, where representing Kurdish culture is also a key objective, but this seems subordinate to something else. In the case of TRT-6, Kurdish culture can only exist within the context of the Turkish state, and Kurdish culture is inferior to the larger political framework of the 'mosaic republic' in which all citizens are Turkish in the first place. As a program manager of the channel said: 'Of course, for us there are Kurds… But

these Kurds they live in Turkey, we must not forget that. They need a strong [Turkish] state.' A senior news editor said that '[TRT-6] is here to show that Kurdish culture can only flourish if the Kurds accept to be part of the state that takes care of them. Above all, they are Turkish citizens'. In the case of Gün-TV then, Kurdish culture seems essential, but only in so far as it reflects the local and regional 'reality' of Diyarbakır, and the Kurdish region more generally. According to two managers of the station, this reality is multicultural, multilingual and multi-religious, and so their aim is to 'show the Kurdish culture as part of this web of people and communities'. Ethnicity, especially in its politicized form as used by respondents at the other channels, is secondary to the channel's interest in reflecting the regional manifestation of 'universal phenomena', as one of the managers called it, such as 'living together in diversity'. It was noteworthy that all experts talked about their channel's approach to nationhood in reference to other channels. The imagination and mediation of nationhood in conflict situations is thus the result of a dialectic process that involves polarized relations to contested political structures and its media outlets.

Both factors can be epitomized as axes along which the channels are positioned: one axis representing how ethnic media organizations relate to the state that is contested in the on-going conflict, the other representing the position that a particular contested ethnic identity occupies in those organizations (see Figure 1). Having laid out these axes, I distinguish different modes of mediated nationhood, i.e. different ways in which ethnic media organizations in conflict contexts understand their practices as shaping and being shaped by nationhood. I differentiate four modes: subversive-ethnic mediation, assimilationist-ethnic mediation, assimilationist-subordinate mediation and alternative-subversive mediation. Table 1 describes the main characteristics of these modes, which are theoretical positions derived from the grounded-theory analysis of the interview data.

As is clear from Figure 1, this study does not include any ethnic media organization that pursues a conformist-ethnic mediation of nationhood. It could be assumed that this is merely a result of the limited sample, however after reviewing all interview data, it became apparent that the conformist-ethnic mediation is an ideal-type that is unlikely to occur in practice – at least in the current context of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey. Most interviewees sense a juxtaposition between a strong Turkish state on the one hand and an empowered Kurdish identity on the other, mainly because of the perceived politically subaltern nature of the latter. In search for other channels that may fit within this category, I did not come across any additional cases to further clarify the scheme. This led to the conclusion that in order for such an ethnic media organization and such a mediation of nationhood to materialize, a reconceptualization of both Turkish and Kurdish identity would be necessary, and indeed the conflict would have to be settled in a way that would accommodate empowered Kurdish cultural identity within a de-polarized state-supported environment.

I argue that these modes illuminate the diversity of ethnic media organizations and their various approaches to national identity, to ethnicity, and to the nation-state that is challenged in a particular conflict. Due to the intensity and longitude of the conflict, the positions of the different ethnic media organizations, which often align with particular political parties or movements, are highly polarized. The scheme is mainly based on how leading professionals present their own organizations through official discourse or 'business talk'. When we move from strategies to practices of ethnic media in conflict, more levels of analysis come into play. In the next sections, I particularly address two crucial aspects that help better understand the role of

national identity and ethnicity for ethnic media in conflict settings: the constraints of the TV channels, and the way people working in the channels experience their own roles as ethnic media professionals.

- Figure 1 here -

- Table 1 here -

The multiple constraints of ethnic media organizations

The wider context in which ethnic media organizations operate is characterized by multiple constraints that include political, financial and technological limitations. Political constraints are experienced as having an impact on the content of broadcasting (types of programs, themes, etc.). This is most obviously the case for the channel run by the state, TRT-6, since it has to represent the government's perspective. In general, the channel broadcasts content that reflects the idea that Kurdish culture can only flourish within a strong Turkish state (as summarized by one of the experts). A clear illustration of direct political constraints is a long list of words that cannot be used by the channel, such as Kurdistan, Amed (the Kurdish name of Diyarbakır) or Öcalan (the imprisoned PKK leader), among other words that allude to revolution or independence. There is strict top-down control over its approach to nationhood. Moreover, the channel also reflects the current government's Islamist politics through its religious content. As a result the channel is widely perceived as the government's political and religious propaganda tool (Arsan 2014). Political constraints also determine the broadcasting practices of the other ethnic channels, albeit often less explicitly. The top-down control over content at Roj-TV and Gün-TV is much less rigid, but the channels' managers do experience greater external political constraints and pressure by the Turkish government. As described earlier, both channels have faced various fines, the withdrawal of licenses and boycotts: Roj-TV (and other diasporic channels) for being a mouthpiece of the PKK, and Gün-TV for various breaches of national broadcasting regulations in terms of content or language use. This has created an uncertain atmosphere within the organizations, making them subjected to volatile political circumstances. According to the experts interviewed, this has resulted in a highly uncertain business climate: next to the financial burden of fines or (temporary) broadcasting restrictions, interviewees also mentioned the reputation damage towards their business partners or potential employees. For Roj-TV, the political pressures of the Turkish government also impacted its reputation in the European countries hosting their activities, as they experienced increased hostility from those countries they once considered champions of free speech.

The political influence on the channels similarly affects their financial and technological limits. Here too, we see a clear difference between TRT-6 and the other channels. As the government's key tool for conveying its messages to the Kurdish populations (and voters), TRT-6 benefits from a comfortable state subsidy as well as the scale and infrastructure of the public broadcasting services in which it is embedded. When asked about financial and/or technological restraints, the interviewed managers at the channel indicated that 'this was not an issue', and that 'they have the support of the government and the parliament'. Moreover, they emphasized that they would do anything within their means to reach the Kurds in Turkey and beyond, whether by producing attractive and entertaining programs, or by

magnifying mobile streaming or the channel's presence on social media. This stands in contrast with the limitations of the other, smaller channels that ultimately struggle for survival. Although many experts see the Kurdish population and Kurdish-language media as an underdeveloped market segment, few of the small Kurdish stations can capitalize on this potential. Most respondents agreed that this mainly had to do with the limited financial resources of the 'alternative' and 'non-mainstream' media in Turkey in general, and the difficulties of Kurdish media in particular. Experts often contrasted the financial situations of the commercial mainstream media (embedded within large business holdings) and state media (generously subsidised) with those of the small, independent outlets, including Roj-TV and Gün-TV. Interviewees at the latter two, as well as several academic experts, referred to the fact that few companies want to advertise in Kurdish media outlets because they tend to opt for mainstream media in order not to risk their brand image or not to face political repercussions (especially in the case of a highly politicized channel like Roj-TV). Moreover, as one expert mentioned, 'Kurds usually have less purchasing power because they are kept in the lower classes of society […]. Even if you have a lot of viewers, nobody wants to advertize their products to poor audiences.' The limited viability of the non-state Kurdish channels also restricts its possibilities to innovate (e.g. with mobile content and social media) and to produce or buy programs with higher production values. This leads to a vicious circle, 'in which [independent channels] cannot attract the audiences that we need to attract advertizers, whose money we need to make programs to attract audiences', as one editor at Gün-TV noted.

The role of ethnic media professionals

Mediations of nationhood in ethnic media organizations, particularly in conflict contexts, are not static. While they are to a great extent shaped by the 'external' political as well as the related financial and technological constraints outlined above, they are even further complicated by the diversity of people working in those organizations. Having spent substantial time getting to know these channels from the inside, and having talked to different employees, it became clear that organizational modes of mediated nationhood are not shared consistently, nor given the same importance, among all professionals.

     Previous research shows that ethnic media professionals have highly diverse backgrounds and motivations (Matsaganis and Katz 2014: 928; Matsaganis, Katz and Ball-Rokeach 2011: 228-9). Negotiations between professional and ideological roles and values are essential to the profession of journalism (Deuze 2005), but professionals in ethnic media organizations are faced with particular challenges (e.g. Pietikäinen 2008). Ethnicity may play a key role in formulating normative positions as media professionals (Wasserman and Maweu 2014). In the case of the Kurdish media professionals studied here, too, there is a constant tension between professional values and ethnic identity politics. The polarized context of the Kurdish conflict adds another layer, that is, the relation to the Turkish state, which represents not only an oppressor or facilitator of ethnic identities, but also a (potential) employer of ethnic media professionals.

     When asked about their professional role perceptions, professionals described their role in the first place as being 'the representatives of Kurdish culture'. When probed further, respondents articulated different roles vis-à-vis the Turkish state.

These different roles could be described as either loyalist (advancing government policies, articulated by those at TRT-6) or watchdog (investigating claims made by the government, by those at Roj-TV and Gün-TV), following the definitions set out by Relly et al. (2014) in their study on the professional role perceptions among Iraqi Kurdish journalists. However, the analysis also suggests that these ethnic media professionals have additional considerations about ethnic media practices that go beyond such ideological or ethical perceptions of their profession and the role they may play in shaping (solutions to) the Kurdish conflict. Rather, those perceptions intersect with more personal concerns such as job stability, financial security and personal well-being. Many of these have to do with the specific context within which Kurdish ethnic media operate: the development of the Kurdish media landscape is rather recent and limited to only a few viable players. There are hardly any Kurdish professional organizations for media professionals, and there is no Kurdish instruction in journalism in the Turkish education system. This means on the one hand that professionals have a limited number of options if they want to work in the Kurdish media industry. On the other hand, media outlets sometimes have to search actively for graduates who are fluent in one of the Kurdish dialects. Both supply and demand of work in Kurdish media are limited.

In line with the politicization of media in Turkey and media's role in the Kurdish conflict, all media outlets are perceived as having a very outspoken political profile. However, only at Roj-TV this was a decisive factor for the interviewees: they wanted to contribute actively to the political struggle carried out by the channel. Many interviewees had a background in the Kurdish activist movement, had gone into exile in Europe, or had made particular sacrifices in order to join the channel (e.g. migrating, job insecurity, threats for anti-Turkish productions). The channels that are not affiliated with the state also had much more people working as volunteers, unpaid interns or on low-paid temporary contracts. In contrast, TRT-6 provided relatively more job stability and better financial perspectives. Moreover, interviewees also assumed that '[at TRT-6] they had better infrastructure and more budgets to make qualitative programs', as one news editor put it. Both elements – job perspectives and better infrastructure – were highly important for those working at the state broadcaster. It seems thus that those working for the state broadcaster had mainly pragmatic motivations rather than ideological ones. Some interviewees at TRT-6 acknowledged that they (temporarily) suppressed their ideological and political inclinations, and particularly their opinions on how the Turkish government deals with the Kurdish conflict. Knowing that voicing criticism would cost them their position within the current climate of fierce government control on media content, they noted that they 'avoided being openly political' (a young intern) or focused on 'safe topics such as sports' (journalist). Interestingly, some noted that for the young professionals such self-censorship had a temporary character, while awaiting other opportunities at independent and more critical media outlets. As one journalist at TRT-6 put it: 'I just work here until there is a commercial Kurdish TV. I will go there and then I can be more independent'. One of his colleagues, a female intern, similarly said that 'I am learning how it works here, and later I will use the skills somewhere else, somewhere freer'.

Still, as pragmatic as some of these statements may sound, the work of ethnic media professionals in a conflict situation is not without personal struggle. This is the case not only for the way in which they try to reconcile professional and ethical ideals with a stable working life, but also in terms of how they experience ethnic belonging. More precisely, it became clear that several interviewees felt uncomfortable working

for the Turkish state, which in their eyes made them traitors to the cause of Kurdish empowerment. A young journalist who acknowledged having had luck because TRT-6 was massively recruiting Kurdish-speaking graduates voiced this most explicitly: 'I could never have worked for such as big TV station if I wasn't a Kurd. I am grateful for that, but I have mixed feelings. You know, many see me as a bad Kurd now.' Similar statements were made during a conversation with an editor and a journalist:

> Journalist: They [the public broadcaster] suddenly needed people that could work professionally for TV and who speak Kurdish… different Kurdish dialects. And also Turkish. So this was a good opportunity for many.
> Editor: Yes, the whole generation of young people now […]
> Journalist: But it's weird for some of them.
> *Researcher: Weird in what sense?*
> Editor: You know, they work here for the government, but they would rather be more critical, show the real problems, give a real voice to the Kurdish people.

And although some interviewees indicate they work only temporarily for a specific broadcaster, they are aware that it will influence their reputation. As one journalist at Roj-TV put it: 'Once you have worked for one channel, it is very difficult to work for a channel of the other side. You have to be reliable.' He continued saying that 'working here is like being a terrorist against the state, so I could never work again in Turkey'. Also at the state channel TRT-6, a journalist noted that 'the name sticks to you, you will always have a label saying: I worked for the government.' In nearly all cases, ethnic media professionals indicated that their (future) work as well as their individual experiences of ethnic belonging were highly influenced by the way in which the Turkish nation-state is contested in the Kurdish conflict, since working for the government was often framed normatively as being 'a bad Kurd'.

Conclusions

The ideas that are developed in this article are based on the specific study of Kurdish broadcasters and the Kurdish conflict in Turkey. However I believe that there are some wider implications for the study of minority and ethnic media. Building on the idea that the nation is still a prime unit of analysis when studying contemporary media cultures, I have investigated how nationhood or national identity becomes mediated in times of conflict. Mediation of nationhood deeply transforms the social and political relations of modern nation-states. Having identified contested state institutions and contested ethnic identities as the two key dynamics along which ethnic media organizations position their approach to nationhood, I discerned four modes of mediated nationhood. These correspond with the organizations' political-ideological strategies and represent their position as central actors within an on-going conflict. Indeed, the ethnic media organizations studied here are seen not as mere 'conduits' of discourses and constructions of nationhood that are external to them. Instead, they are regarded as key players in the conflict. This is already clear from the jargon used to describe these media outlets as extensions of the parties active in the conflict, such as 'assimilation tool', 'propaganda channel', and 'terrorist channel'. This is further intensified by the antagonism between a strong ethnic identity on the one hand and a strong state on the other hand, as experienced by the participants. As a result, the role of the state for ethnic media organizations in conflict contexts becomes essential, as it can be regarded as either a facilitator or an oppressor of

ethnic identity. Across different regulatory contexts, ethnic media organizations define themselves to a great extent through their positions vis-à-vis the state that is contested within the conflict. The politicized, ethnic media outlets that are actors in the conflict do not construct the same nation, as they have opposing ideas of how this imagined nation should be embedded in a state.

Different modes of mediated nationhood among ethnic media organizations also entail particular political, financial and technological constraints, most of which have to deal with limited resources and regulatory situations that position the organizations either within or outside conventional media industries. While the analysis differentiates organizational modes of mediated nationhood, one should be cautious not to project them automatically onto the professionals working within them. However, it is clear that a conflict context intensifies the complex negotiations between individual working situations, ethnic advocacy and professional ideals. This study not only presents a coherent scheme to identify ethnic media organizations and their mediation of nationhood. It also suggests that ethnic media organizations are not necessarily the opposite of mainstream media (as suggested in common definitions of ethnic media) as they may also voice the mainstream political discourse. This should stimulate more refined investigations of ethnic media organizations in conflict situations that cut across different levels of analysis. This means investigating the contexts of constraint of these organizations in a conflict, studying mediated nationhood within organizations and also giving attention to individual motivations and identity struggles that take place within them.

Having said this, I recognize the limitations of this study. To start with, despite the elaborate set of interviews and fieldwork conversations, the sample of this study is limited to three broadcasters, which were mainly selected for their ideological diversity and distinctive position in the emerging Kurdish media landscape. For future inquiry, it may be worthwhile to look at a broader sample to find out of the suggested modes of mediated nationhood can be broadened. Moreover, an important perspective to be added in future research is the interplay between political and technological developments, especially the way in which the on-going peace process between the Turkish government and PKK relates to increasing levels of internet surveillance in Turkey. In addition, more audience research could reveal how people who feel affected by a particular conflict experience modes of mediated nationhood. Kurdish people want a free and unbiased Kurdish channel (Arsan 2014: 14). But what this means, and if such independent media exists at all at this point, remains to be studied.

Finally, I have deliberately made abstraction of the specificity of the medium television in order to fully focus on organizations, contexts and professionals. It should be clear, however, that these specificities deserve further inquiry. The advance of technology, and globalization more broadly, provide different groups and institutions with new opportunities to construct the nation (Mihelj 2011: 1). More specifically, the possibilities offered by new media are worth exploring. In the Kurdish case, television has played a huge role in the conflict. In other contemporary conflicts new media technologies are mobilized to mediate nationhood in various ways. It is my hope that the results put forward here serve such inquiry.
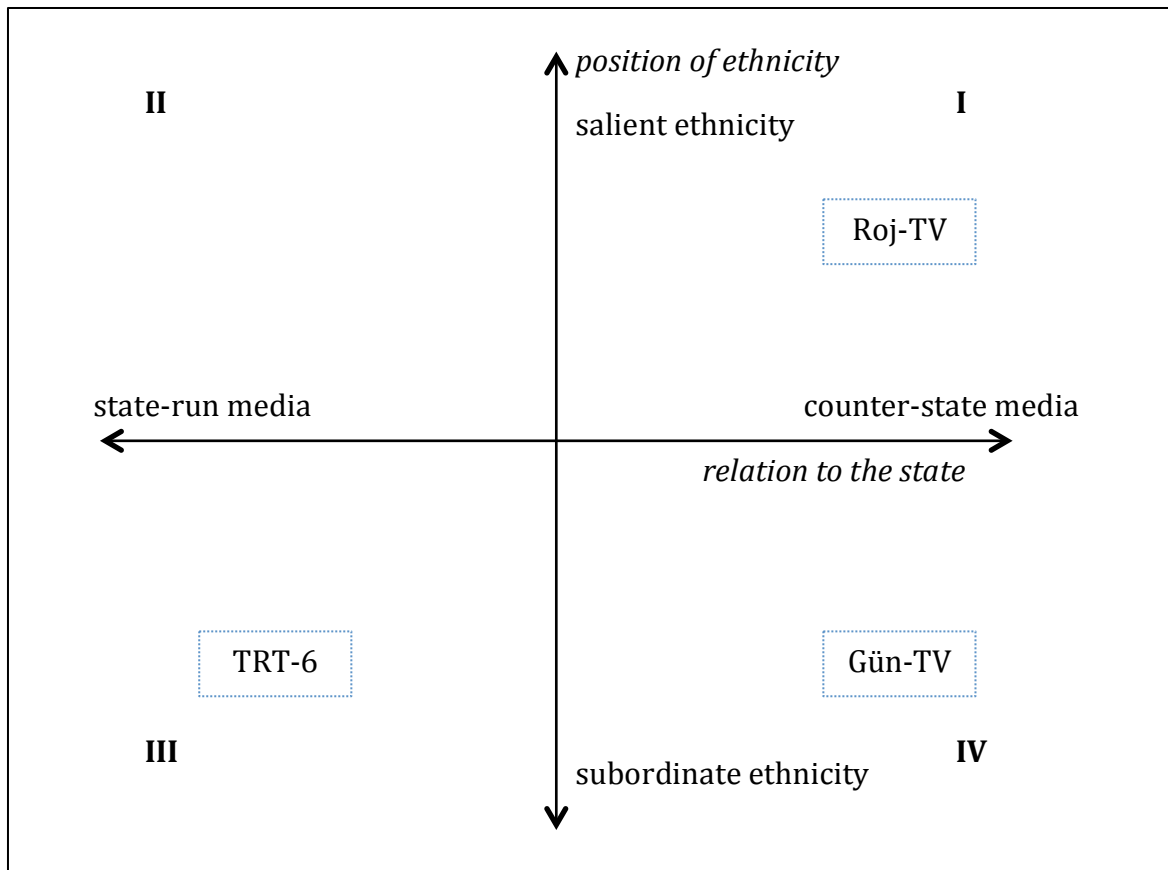

Notes

1   The power struggle between AKP and the Gülen movement has intensified after the data had been collected, hence this was not a major topic during the interviews at the time they were conducted.

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II

position of ethnicity

salient ethnicity

I

Roj-TV

state-run media

counter-state media

relation to the state

TRT-6

Gün-TV

III

subordinate ethnicity

IV

Figure 1: Relation to the state and the role of ethnicity as key factors in mediated nationhood

Modes of mediated nationhood	Key characteristics of ethnic media organization	Role of ethnic identity
I: subversive-ethnic mediation	Representing counter-state nationalism Operating outside state framework and conventional industries	Ethnic identity is a prime driving force
II: assimilationist-ethnic mediation	Representing ethnicity within the nation-state Under control of the state	Ethnic identity as a key element of state power and national identity
III: assimilationist-subordinate mediation	Ethnic media as a tool of state nationalism Under control of the state, representing political mainstream	Ethnic identity is subordinate to national identity
IV: alternative subversive mediation	Ethnic media as a tool to enhance sub- or supra-state identities (i.e. local, regional, pan-ethnic) Operating as independently from the state as possible	Ethnic identity is subordinate to national identity

Table 1: Main characteristics of the four modes of mediated nationhood