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# *The Kurdish Diasporic Mobilization in France. From a Restricted Political National Frame to a Translocal Sphere of Contention? The Case of Kurds in Marseille*

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## **Abstract**

Based on a sociological case study on Kurdish mobilization in Marseille, France; this article aims to expose the intricate dynamics that affect the transformation of mobilization forms and strategies in diaspora. By conceiving the mobilization process as a career, it aims to analyze the evolution towards different situations like the host country's politics or the critical events occurred in homeland or diaspora. In addition to these cornerstones increasing the legitimization of the Kurdish movement at local and global levels, this article aims to point out the emergence of a hybrid sphere of contention, which allows the inclusion of new actors in the transnational space of mobilization such as anarchist, anti-fascist activist networks. Acting together with traditional forms of contentious practices such as rallies and petitions; these hybrid mobilization strategies contribute to the durability and extension of the scope of diasporic action.

## **Keywords**

France; Immigration; Kurdish diaspora; Marseille; Mobilization strategies.

## *Introduction*

The Kurdish case provides a good ground in understanding plural dynamics of diasporization<sup>1</sup> built on experiences of oppression, forced displacement and exile, labor migration and insecure environment. Lately, by highlighting the plurality of diaspora experiences, some researches draw attention to the roles of transnational political activities and the diaspora's relation with the

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<sup>1</sup> The term "diasporization" is used to emphasize the processual dimension of a diaspora's construction.

host states (Mügge, 2010; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). Earlier theories used more essentialist categorizations shaped around exile and dispersion (Safran, 1991; Sheffer, 1986). As Adamson (2012) and Sökefeld (2008), this article conceives diaspora as socially constructed and generated by politics and as an *imagined* transnational community<sup>2</sup>. It results to a mobilization process at a transnational level led by political entrepreneurs. The Kurdish diaspora has been transnationally active and efficient in both raising the awareness of the immigrants on its main claims concerning the recognition of the Kurdish identity in Turkey, and the visibility of the Kurdish issue at a European scale. Whilst remaining a military organization, the PKK<sup>3</sup>, known as the Kurdistan Workers' Party, has evolved into a political and social movement with large transnational networks -including associations- since the 1990s (Jongerden and Akkaya, 2016). One can even argue that the party managed to relatively monopolize the Kurdish cause in Europe (Grojean and Massicard, 2005).

The politicization of Kurdish migratory space lies within a specific mobilization process. It was led by the political refugees who immigrated to Europe in the early 1980s, and coincides with the beginning of the guerilla war in 1984 conducted by the PKK. Some of the refugees, who had concrete links with either the PKK and/or the fringe parties representing Kurdish movement, evolved into the diaspora elite, due to their high position within the diasporic social hierarchy but also because they benefit from both an activist know-how and a social capital within and beyond the Kurdish immigrant group. However, the diasporization does not rely solely on the mobilization strategies and resources of the diaspora elite in order to *construct* the diaspora; it also benefits from the changing of local, national and global political landscapes.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on Anderson's (1983) theorization of nation as an imagined community.

<sup>3</sup> *PartiyaKarkerên Kurdistan* (PKK), Kurdistan Workers' Party, founded in 1974, leads the Kurdish movement and guerilla war which had its peak in 1990s. The resolution process, started in 2009, led to the declaration of a ceasefire by Öcalan in March 2013. This process had been hindered since June 2015.

Through the case of Kurdish community in Marseille<sup>4</sup>, this article focuses on the transformation of mobilization forms and strategies as part of the diaspora politics. Therefore, the term diasporization allows considering the constant (re)construction of a diaspora. Several actors participate in this process (States, immigrants, immigrants' organizations, etc.) at varying levels and with multiple, often uneven, capacities. Indeed, within a transnational space of mobilization, plural elements can affect diaspora's repertoire of collective action in a complex way. The effectiveness of the Kurdish diasporic politics relies on the diaspora's own resources, as the strong intricacy of immigrants' social networks that enables the mobilization process. Host country's dynamics, such as providing political opportunities to the immigrants also shape the political mobilization process. Still, the restricted national political frame, as in the case of France, should be considered together with the local and international social and political contexts, as well as the actors' capabilities and strategies. This helps avoid considering the diaspora as a homogenous block, and to sociologize the issue of collective action in diaspora. In this regard, this article conceives the Kurdish diaspora's mobilization as a *career*<sup>5</sup>. Examining the mobilization process as being a career allows underlining the dynamism and subjectivity of diasporic experiences -based on diaspora actors' strategies, capabilities and the sense they give to their diasporic identification- and the evolution towards different situations met - like the host country's politics or the critical events occurred in homeland or diaspora.

Within this conceptual framework, this article will first expose the characteristics of French political context and of the Marseille city as scenes of Kurdish diaspora's contentious performances. Then, it will focus on the organizational structure of the mobilization, the Kurdish

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<sup>4</sup> The data represented in this paper is a part of the fieldwork conducted between April 2011 and December 2015 in Marseille, France, for my ongoing PhD research on the community building process in Kurdish diaspora through political engagement.

<sup>5</sup> This concept, first used by Becker (1963), has been re-appropriated by Filleule (2001) and Massicard (2013) in their analysis of collective action and especially of individual commitment.

cultural association, to better grasp the mobilization mechanisms between a centralized model and decentralized application. Then, the external factors of the transformation of contentious performances will be exposed. It will especially focus on the role of the extra-community links combined with the increasing legitimization of Kurdish movement and on the emergence of hybrid forms of contention between political and cultural fields.

*1. Diaspora politics in an assimilationist national frame and in a de facto multicultural city*

The Kurdish Institute of Paris (2014) estimates that there are over 200,000 Kurds living in France -the second biggest country of reception after Germany. Like other host countries, France categorizes Kurds as nationals of their countries of origin unless they are asylum seekers. The historical motives of Kurdish immigration from Turkey to France are entangled; starting with the bilateral convention on labor migration in 1965, it donned a more political characteristic after the military coup in 1980. In 1990s, the flow increased as the conflict between the state's armed forces and the PKK deepened. The Kurdish migratory space politicized by establishing several political organizations in Europe (e.g. FEYKA, KON-KURD) thanks to rights provided by the host countries, using their transnational network, the political entrepreneurs of diaspora could then focus on the establishment of cultural associations, media channels and publishing houses built on the diasporic identity.

The Kurdish immigration in Marseille follows the same pattern. In the Bouches-du-Rhône department, where Marseille is located, the executives of the Kurdish association estimate their number around 5,500-6,000 people<sup>6</sup>. This number might seem insignificant; especially for Marseille where Kurds are far from being the most populous immigrant group.<sup>7</sup> Still, this city is considered a vital place of pro-

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<sup>6</sup> Based on an interview from May 2015.

<sup>7</sup> According to the 2012 census, Algerian immigrants constitute 2,82% of the

Kurdish mobilization by diaspora's political entrepreneurs due to the high frequency of contentious actions. Thanks to dual nationality rights which allow practicing long-distance citizenship, Marseille is important for the vote-catching strategies of the pro-Kurdish political parties in Turkey.<sup>8</sup> Thus, a diaspora's population-based extent is not always directly proportional to its mobilization force. A relatively small group can provide the positive conditions for the mobilization as it is not characterized by strong ideological differences (Başer, 2013). How should the political dynamism in Marseille be understood if the French political system is less open to transnational political practices of immigrants, in comparison to Sweden (Khayati, 2008) or Netherlands (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2001)?

The strategies of a transnational movement are often examined by considering the political opportunities offered in different national contexts where the movement is implanted (Koopmans and Statham, 2001; Ögelman, 2003). Yet, the political opportunity structure of the host country, with its varying degrees of exclusion/inclusion of transnational political practices, is not by itself the frame that allows the realization of the mobilization. This last can occur in both cases but the strategies change. The immigrants' integration and the homeland interest in their political practices are not antagonist issues. Nell (2008) argues the same in her study on the link between the homeland-oriented politics of immigrants from Turkey and the evolution of Turkish radical left movement in Netherlands. Moreover, the state should be examined as an arbitrary structuring actor and not as a stable entity with regular policies towards all the immigrant/foreigner groups. Hence the scientific challenge is "to assess the balance between state authority and non-state autonomy" (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003: 779), in understanding how the immigrants' homeland oriented political practices occur.

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global population of this department, while Turkish immigrants, including Turks and Kurds, represent 0,44%.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, Selahattin Demirtaş, the co-president of HDP, Democratic Party of Peoples, visited Marseille besides Paris during his electoral campaign in 2015.

2. *The French national context: which space for immigrants' homeland oriented politics?*

In France, even though research on transnational ties and activities such as associative practices and cross-border commercial links are increasing, little is known about diasporas with a social movement dimension. The French republican political system is still strong despite the relative recognition of the French diversity in the 2000s (Simon and Amiraux, 2006). The requalification of integration policies as anti-discrimination and integration policies, following the adoption of European Union law in 2000, might offer an opportunity for the construction of minority politics, even it does not rely on identity recognition politics (Fassin et al., 2006). Yet, the multiculturalism *à la française* is practiced in the new forms of public intervention illustrated by urban policies like the territorial affirmative action mechanisms (Doytcheva, 2007).

The French civico-assimilationist model does not provide the immigrants with the necessary cultural resources for legitimizing their ethnic differences, unlike civico-pluralist models of Great Britain and Netherlands. Moreover, as in most countries in EU, the weakness of the opportunities given to collective action favor highly institutionalized actors and conventional forms of mobilization like lobbying. In this context, the popular mobilizations are not recognized to a great extent. Finally, the only way to have full access to the French political system is to obtain citizenship; a concept based on nationality. Immigrants from Turkey do not possess the right to participate in the municipal elections, unlike their EU counterparts. The host state still has a determinant role by setting boundaries of inclusion/exclusion through citizenship, immigrant/foreigner rights and limits of political mobilization forms (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2006). Furthermore, the homeland orientation in political transnational activities is perceived negatively in the French integration discourse due to the apprehension of the foreigners' and immigrants'<sup>9</sup> non-identification with the national community (Kastoryano, 1997).

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<sup>9</sup> The INSEE defines foreigner as 'a person who resides in France and does not



In this national frame, the city of Marseille seems to crystallize the state policies between selective valorization of the multiculturalism and stigmatization of immigration.

### *3. Kurdish activism in Marseille*

Marseille is dominantly pictured for its urban anomaly widely associated with successive flows of immigration often badly managed by public authorities. The immigration phenomenon constitutes a deeply politicized issue, swinging between promoted cosmopolitanism and stigmatizing rhetoric associated with criminality. Without real multiculturalist politics, the cosmopolitanism is used in political speeches as well as cultural projects, but in a selective way. In some manner, it serves as a way-out from the integrationist system's confines (Gastaut, 2003). Yet, the presence of immigrant populations is also considered as the main factor for the stigmatization of the city in political and media speeches that tend to reduce this demographically diverse state to a factor of delinquency (Mucchielli, 2013).<sup>10</sup>

The stigmatization of immigrant communities influences the perception of Kurdish activism, especially when it is associated with violence including acts of the PKK. Nonetheless, the fieldwork showed that it facilitates the perpetuation of a victimhood discourse<sup>11</sup> used as a mobilizing strategy to strengthen the diasporic community links. Under these circumstances, political transnational practices

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possess French nationality' and immigrant as 'a person who is born a foreigner and abroad, and resides in France.' In this paper, the term Kurdish immigrant is used not to exclude the ones with foreigner status but to mention a group with immigration history.

<sup>10</sup> Since mid-2011, the French government and most of media, have created a sort of constant alert about the unsecure environment of Marseille, based on illegal cannabis traffic and some violent actions. For more information, see: Mucchielli (2013).

<sup>11</sup> Many references to discriminatory and violent acts, as well as massacres Kurdish people have suffered during both Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic histories, are used in diaspora's political entrepreneurs' speeches.

and identities can emerge or consolidate as a reaction to a deficient process of fragmented integration in the host society.

However, one should not see in integrationist French policies an equitable consideration of its immigrant groups, since some recognition of ethnic-religious diversity is practically operated in local scale of governance. In case of Marseille, some scholars argue that the public authorities *invent* and *consolidate* the community notion, while still not offering equal integration policies (Mattina, 2016), and pursuing a notability-favoring logic concerning the assertion of an ethnic or identity affiliation (Peraldi et al., 2015). Whether in the framework of the vote-catching strategy based on redistribution of the resources or of the symbolic recognition, the various communities are not provided equally of this relative right to make community. Besides being statistically invisible, perception of Kurdish immigrants by local political actors alternates between a worker-migrant group and a diasporic community as illustrated by the words of a Socialist Party representative, Henri Jibrayel:

I like this silent and hard-working community; this Kurdish community that does not come to exploit the nation, demands very little assistance from the state, and respects the French government. I support the liberty of Kurdish people.<sup>12</sup>

This arbitrary political position shows that when the benefits of immigrants are higher than their cost to the French state, the latter wants to welcome them. Yet, communities are not only *invented* by the political decision-makers, their self-legitimization modes are not always concomitant with the public ones. They have their own bottom-up mechanisms of *invention*, as for the political mobilization process in the diaspora context. In this regard, how the diasporic mobilization is (re)shaped between the imagination and structuration of the diasporic community by its political entrepreneurs?

To understand the intricate dynamics of the diasporic mobilization evolution, the methodology chosen was to lead an ethnographic fieldwork. Allowing a quasi-immersed presence of the

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<sup>12</sup> Extract of his speech during the congress of Kurdish popular assembly in April 2012.

researcher in the field this method offers a better understanding of the processual aspect of the change within the diaspora. It also allows completing the explicit discourses of actors with the 'implicit significations' (Lichterman, 1998), i.e., the everyday meanings of individuals' activist practices such as the ways they define activism itself, practice the ideological founding principles or the ways they build social ties within the mobilization sphere. Fifty individuals participated in recorded semi-structured interviews, in addition to informal conversations. The sample included, regardless of gender and age, employers and employees in the food-service and construction industries, staff and members of Kurdish and Alevi<sup>13</sup> associations, non-adherent visitors of these associations, and participants of political demonstrations. The legal status of the interlocutors varied from irregular immigrants, asylum seekers, political refugees, to foreign workers and immigrants who came via family reunification. Multiple entries to the field and participant observations were vital to go beyond the formal rhetoric of Kurdish activists solicited by many researchers and journalists. In addition, to capture various levels of interactions, significant time was spent observing the participants at their workplaces (excluding the construction sites), within the aforementioned organizations and at political meetings as well as during public representations of political activism such as marches, rallies and sit-ins. The data collected from the press and media's online archives, and the Kurdish association's archives complemented the analysis<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Alevism is as a heterodox confession of Islam. Non-recognition of their worship and discrimination policies, led to the emergence of contentious mobilization in Turkey and Europe. The Alevi Cultural Center of Marseille, subordinated to the Federation of Alevi Unions of France which is linked to the Alevi Unions Confederation of Europe, operates as both an association and a place of worship.

<sup>14</sup> The association's activity reports are used to see the part of political and cultural activities regarding the general activities of the association. Data was compared with the online archives of Kurdish diaspora's and, of local and national French press and media's, to understand to what extent is the Marseille's Kurdish diasporic mobilization practices publicized.

#### 4. *The Cultural Center of Mesopotamia as a mobilizing structure of the diasporic community building*<sup>15</sup>

The political entrepreneurs of diaspora work within Kurdish cultural associations established in Europe on behalf of the PKK's ideology. Their main objective is to convey a collective Kurdish identity within the diaspora context, as explained by the president of the Cultural Center of Mesopotamia (CCM):

We aim to give a roof to Kurds who are dispersed in several countries because of the war in their territories. People who are devoid of their origins, their identities suffer from alienation. It is then complicated to control them. A good organization of the community assures the acquisition of good values, of an essence and a form that corresponds to this essence.<sup>16</sup>

*Identity, community and control* are used together to emphasize the necessity of uniting Kurds in the context of dispersion, to consolidate the *communalization*. This discourse points to the approach of political entrepreneurs who consider the whole Kurdish population -without differentiating between the individuals' ethnic, confessional and national affiliations and their self-definition of Kurdishness- as a part of the diasporic community that needs to be organized both socially and politically. To create 'coherent categories, discourses and symbols that can merge dispersed social networks under a single diasporic category' (Adamson, 2012: 33) is, for the diaspora elite, the first step towards building a diasporic community via the activation of transnationally settled immigrants with entangled social networks.

The internal organization of CCM<sup>17</sup>, subordinates to the central model of the KCK the Union of Communities of Kurdistan<sup>18</sup>. The

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<sup>15</sup> 'Community building' is used to emphasize the processual and interactive dimension of the community to analyze the communalization (Weber, 1922) together with the socialization processes and strategies.

<sup>16</sup> Extract of an interview on Radio Galère with the president of Cultural Center of Mesopotamia, on 04.04.2013.

<sup>17</sup> The Cultural Center of Mesopotamia was founded in 2009. After its dissolution in 2014, the Kurdish Democratic Center took its place.

<sup>18</sup> Founded in 2005, the Union of Communities of Kurdistan is based on a self-

association is one of the committees constituting the Kurdish popular assembly in Marseille area. The association is the legal front of the political network due to the lack of legal structure in these assemblies. The configuration of popular assemblies and their committees consider the local scope of human resources/needs among the Kurdish population and vary in nature, from women's to faith, education to media and press. They show how the political entrepreneurs of diaspora aim to build a politically engaged community formalized in regarding with norms and values diffused by the PKK's ideology.

As for the relation with the host state, the association acts under the French 1901 association law and thus can benefit from state's subventions. However, the long-term observations on the association's activities show the limits of the relations with the local authorities like the General Council of Bouches-du-Rhône and the Prefecture, apart from the organization of the political demonstrations. This avoidance strategy is related to the will of creating a maneuver space far from host state's criminalizing practices. Like other pro-Kurdish establishments in Europe, CCM deals also with the host state's interventions.<sup>19</sup> The association undergoes quasi-regular police checks because of its financial support to the PKK. The PKK being still classified as an illegal organization<sup>20</sup>, the diaspora's political actors cannot organize a professional fund raising campaign. The police inspections impact the legitimacy of the association by criminalizing the institution and its workers<sup>21</sup> which makes it impossible for Kurdish activists to involve lobbyists directly, leaving them reliant on their networking capacities with NGOs, political parties, and individuals to extend their claims.

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government model within the PKK complex, and operates through open councils, town councils, local parliaments and larger congresses.

<sup>19</sup> Such as the TV channels like Roj TV closed by Denmark government in 2013.

<sup>20</sup> [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/fr/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX: 32015D2430&qid=1457362568874&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/fr/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32015D2430&qid=1457362568874&from=EN).

<sup>21</sup> The House of Kurdish People in Marseille was dissolved after a trial's verdict in December 2013, because of financial support to the PKK via the associative structure.

This ambiguous relation with the public institutions portrays the heterogeneity of the state's function. The state must be conceived as a set of institutions that can be in conflict (Jessop, 1990). It can apply contradictory policies simultaneously, such as partial recognition and discrimination. Yet, these constraining state maneuvers are not absolute barriers for the Kurdish activism. The insufficiency of institutions offering services oriented to immigrants in Marseille<sup>22</sup> helps CCM strengthen its representative and intermediary roles within the host society. On this issue, Wahlbeck (2007: 467) also underlined the role played by Kurdish organizations in helping newly arrived refugees within the host countries that mainly depend on charities and NGOs concerning the resettlement of refugees. Similar to immigrants' homeland associations' function, CCM is a sociability place for Kurdish immigrants. The association combines 'hot nationalism' practices such as political demonstrations with 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995) that implies everyday political representations, through daily use of the association premises.

CCM structure carries out the politicization of the Kurdish migratory space but, it does not own a strict authority and holistic functioning. The various affiliations (kinship, homeland, confessional and ideological), the different social trajectories of individual actors, lastly their socialization within and beyond the community, influence and process the so-called homogeneous mobilization forms in a complex way. The impact of intra-community dynamics on the evolution of the diasporization process is another major issue which will not be developed in this article This last instead focuses on the articulation between the Kurdish diasporic mobilization and the local, national and global political frames, for a better understanding of the socialization role of diaspora politics in the migratory career of a specific group.

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<sup>22</sup> There are few establishments of this kind, except the reception centers for asylum seekers (*Centre d'Accueil pour Demandeurs d'Asile*), an office of CIMADE (*Comité Inter-Mouvements Auprès Des Evacués*) which offer a service of solidarity specialized in immigrants' and refugees' rights, and a couple of translation / interpreting offices.

5. *Diaspora politics as a socialization factor*

Even though the discriminatory politics of the French state can hamper Kurds' transborder citizenship and long-distance nationalism practices, the restricted national political framing can be bypassed by the extra-community cooperation, allowing the immigrant group access to the local activist and associative patterns. How can the extra-community factors widen the scale of diasporic activities? This scale jumping, referring to its conception by Gambetti (2009), implies the expansion of spaces of visibility, and mobilization of the Kurdish movement in Marseille, while building or consolidating its place in the local, national and transnational political and activist fields. The scale jumping process of the Kurdish mobilization has been accelerated by the war in Syria and Kobane resistance. These critical turns can be referred to as 'bifurcations'<sup>23</sup> in the activist career of Kurdish diaspora.

The emergence of the second generation within the activist career of Kurds in Marseille - having lived different political socialization processes - plays a major role on this evolution. The term generation is not used here as a biographic phase of the life cycle, but to mention a socially constructed group. This is not in strict parallel with the ages of immigration, even if it intersects for some of actors, as there is already the third generation of immigration from Turkey in Marseille. It is conceived here as the second dynamic within the Kurdish activist career and differs from the first generation, by its larger networking capacities and relations with the local, national and transnational spaces of mobilization that become vital mobilizing resources within the scale jumping process. This second generation activism does not render invalid the first one that has more direct links to the PKK network and adopts more traditional strategies; but it offers, a *third space*, as in Bhabha (1996), of contention that includes more networking with external actors and more *hybrid* strategies capable of opening a space of negotiation. In

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<sup>23</sup> A bifurcation implies an action sequence on micro level has more consequences than others. These consequences concern the macro level (Bessin et al., 2010).

this perspective, how and to what extent do certain events turn around diaspora's activist career?

### *6. Jumping scales: the Kobane impact*

Critical events become efficient tools for the diasporization process only when they are articulated by mobilization actors with 'new forms of action, discourse and ways of conceptualizing the world' (Sökefeld: 2006: 275). The increasing recognition and legitimization of the Kurdish movement on the international level might change the marginal position of Kurds in the eyes of both politicians and social scientists.

In a national scale, the war between the YPG<sup>24</sup> and ISIL produced a partial recognition of the Kurdish movement by the French state.<sup>25</sup> In April 2015, a delegation of the PYD was received by the then-president François Hollande. Together with the increasing publicization of the Kurdish issue in the national media, it improved the effectiveness of the Kurdish mobilization in France. However, it is imperative to mark the influence of diplomatic relations between home and host states in the way the latter perceives and recognizes certain aspects of diaspora and its claims. For instance, whilst France recognized the Kurdish delegation, they continue considering PKK as a terrorist organization. In that sense, the diasporic community feels the need to walk a tightrope; on one side, they carry the heritage claims and on the other, they need to deal with international political developments. To resolve this fragmented recognition of the Kurdish movement, the Kurdish associations in Europe amplified the work towards the removal of the PKK from the list of terrorist organizations with the solidarity of non-Kurdish associative and political actors.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The YPG (People's Protection Units) is the military section of the PYD (the Democratic Union Party).

<sup>25</sup> Founded in 2003 and ideologically affiliated to the PKK, the PYD controls the Kurdish zones of the North Syria since 2011.

<sup>26</sup> In Marseille, the Amazigh associations, the Collective 13 for Women Rights, the



The most relevant example of the impacts of pro-Kobane resistance mobilization was triggered by a conflict between Kurdish activities and local authorities. During September 2014, the CCM organized several marches and gatherings, and occupied a part of the Vieux-Port, the most central and touristic area of the city, during one week throughout the day and night, despite being permitted only for the day hours. This legislative and spatial transgression shows how the activist groups try to transform the public spaces into their advantage, while the state tries to control them. The spatial transgressions have a symbolic dimension as they challenge the social order. The space being normatively constructed by the public authorities tends to exclude the *others*, in terms of social class, race, gender, ethnicity, etc. (Bourdieu, 1993). Yet, these social constructions are not static; they are continually contested and transgressed by the others who have been excluded. Indeed, the sub-prefect's words were revealing the limits on political participation practices when the spatial public order is violated:

You have your sisters and brothers there [in Kobane], you must help them one way or another. It's not by acting like idiots under the Ombrière [a big parasol located in Vieux-Port] that you will help them. (...) The people from Marseille don't give a damn, French people, generally speaking, have other worries, people don't give a damn. (...) Don't take us for fools, Mister who is not French."<sup>27</sup>

The foreigner status of the activists is accentuated to mark the legitimacy concerns around homeland oriented activist practices though there is no legal restriction on foreigners' political demonstration rights. Considering these grey zones between legality and legitimacy, the host state tries to keep its stakeholder role in its populations' political involvement, especially when this engagement is homeland oriented. However, bifurcations such as violent actions on Kurds in Kurdistan(s) or in diaspora are capable of raising awareness among both the Kurdish community and the host society.

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Communist Party, among others, participated in these demonstrations.

<sup>27</sup> A Kurdish activist has recorded their dialogue that was diffused online on local and national presses' websites.

Another example of the multiplying effect of a particularly violent event on mobilizations (Oberschall, 2007) was the assassination of three Kurdish activist women in Paris in 2013.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the conflict with local authorities during pro-Kobane mobilizations passed on a national scale with its publicization through media channels. At this point, one could say that the 'Kobane event' generally contributed to the increasing recognition of perceiving Kurdish movement as an efficient warrior against the Islamist radicalism in the Middle-East.

The role of women in the Kurdish movement has made itself a place in feminist activist networks and rhetoric too, as seen in the starting of the "World March of Women" from Rojava, in 2015, an international feminist action movement that declared solidarity with Kurdish women's fight. For the International Journey for Women's Rights, several French TV channels diffused, in 2016, documentaries and debates about the Kurdish fighters against ISIL and Sakine Cansız, the emblematic female leader of the PKK, assassinated in Paris.<sup>29</sup> This was conceived as an 'opportunity to seize' by the Kurdish female activists, 'in order to transform this publicization to a durable mobilization resource'<sup>30</sup>. Indeed, the committee in charge of social and cultural activities for the emancipation of Kurdish women became an assembly in 2014 and established an association named 'Arin Mirkan Center of Kurdish Women' in 2015.<sup>31</sup>

At the same time, this specific conflict has multiplied the interactions between the Kurdish activist sphere and the host society's space of mobilization. Non-Kurdish activist establishments like 'SOS Racisme'<sup>32</sup> or 'La Ligue des Droits de l'Homme'<sup>33</sup> showing

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<sup>28</sup> A march was organized in Marseille with the participation of twenty-five political and associative organizations, from left-wing political parties such as French Communist Party to associations like Collectif Solidarite Maghreb, Collectif 13 Droits des Femmes.

<sup>29</sup> The documentary "Femmes contre Daesh" diffused on LCP, the parliamentary channel, and the "Kurdistan, la guerre des filles" diffused on Arte TV, a franco-german channel.

<sup>30</sup> Interview done in April 2015.

<sup>31</sup> The transformation of a committee into an assembly implies certain autonomy in the decisive and executive processes.

<sup>32</sup> Founded in 1984, these associations aim to fight racism, anti-Semitism and all

solidarity with Kurdish activists might help them in long run to access more legitimate national spheres of activism.<sup>34</sup> These solidarity forms might encourage the evolution of the Kurdish mobilization in diaspora from a homeland oriented mobilization to a new form of transnationalism, defined by more universalistic ideologies and human rights issues (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). These opening strategies approach the Kurdish mobilization to new contentious movements that do not just oppose one actor (the Turkish state), but also question the framing logic of their collective action as seen in the case of altermondialist movement in France (Sommier, 2006).

This change being recent, it is difficult to see how the Kurdish activist rhetoric and mobilization strategies would evolve in long term, and influence the non-Kurdish activist sphere in Marseille. Still, the increasing new collaborations produce a certain self-validation sense among the activists, in particular among the women for whom the political engagement operates as self-emancipation instrument. In other words, the growing collective integration to the local field of mobilization contributes to the individual integration of immigrants, while producing a positive identification process within the diasporic context.

These new extra-community links also gives rise to a hybrid sphere of contention, hybrid not only because of its actors but also thanks to the politico-cultural performances of contention.

### *7. Towards a hybrid sphere of contention?*

The extra-community links refer to interactions between some Kurdish activists and actors from other activist and/or cultural networks in Marseille. A recent cooperation of this kind is the

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forms of discrimination within the French society.

<sup>33</sup> This association, founded in 1898, aims to defend and promote the human rights within the public sphere in France.

'Collective Rojava-Marseille', built with the initiative of the anarchist activist network and of some second generation Kurdish activists. This collective organizes debates, demonstrations and cultural activities with the aim of raising awareness on the Kurdish struggle in Syria. They also lead charity projects like a library foundation in Rojava, thus, transnationalize their sphere of action. The main information diffusion channel remains online, reminding how the informational activism practices allow a reinterpretation of the symbolic management of conflict by giving new instruments to those who are mobilized (Granjon, 2001).

At this point, it is not surprising to observe that the Kurdish actors in question have a good knowledge in French; they are actual university students or graduates in Turkey or in France. This explains their ability to diversify their extra-community links. They define themselves more integrated to the host country, yet with strong pro-Kurdish identity claims. Indeed, as indicated by Başer and Mügge, the integration does not spirit away the ethnic identity nor the political mobilization related to that. This second generation of activists has lived their first activist socialization in the host territories, within the Kurdish associations. On the other hand, their second socialization happens within the local activist spheres. They are also mobilized for other causes such as rights for irregular immigrants, bi-national couples, LGBT or volunteering for other political groups like left-wing political parties or anarchist groups. The extra-community activist relations are not absent in the first generation either; there are cooperations and links with activist or political actors such as Amazigh Cultural Association<sup>35</sup>, French Communist Party or feminist groups like Collectif 13. However, the second group opens themselves to more heterodox groups. In the case of United Kingdom, Østergaard-Nielsen (2003: 773) mentions also 'surprising coalitions' emerged between local political organizations and immigrants' organizations seeking for legitimization, like the exchange between the Welsh Independence

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<sup>35</sup> This association promotes cultural diversity and aims to facilitate the integration of Marseille's Franco-Berber community.

Party and a German-based pro-PKK Kurdish organization. Lastly, and perhaps more importantly; the new hybrid organizational structures allow a better integration within the local sphere of political and/or cultural contentious mobilizations.

Regarding the reception of these new links by the local diaspora elite, mainly formed by first generation of activists, one should notice a consolidation strategy of these ties in the absence of formalized collective projects. The Kurdish actors taking these extroversive initiatives are also members of committees; which facilitates the relative control on their external activities. Even so, the choice of external partners or the contents of the collaboration sometimes lead to interpersonal conflicts within the political network. 'Our objective has to be to integrate the political parties to have a voice within the National Assembly; not to collaborate with the marginal groups. After all, we are being marginalized ourselves; we must be able to connect more with major groups', say for instance a member of Marseille's popular assembly.<sup>36</sup> This latent conflict could hint at a potential challenge by these emerging links of the existing strong ones and diaspora elite's ideological monopoly.

On the extra-community organizational structures, one should finally notice that similar structures to 'Collective Rojava-Marseille' have emerged in other countries of Europe, witnessing their transnational implantation.<sup>37</sup> Several Facebook groups, websites and online blogs have been founded around the world in such sense to build a transnational network of mobilization. At this point, one should note that cooperations with anarchist and anti-fascist groups were already present in Germany in 1980 and 1990's (Grojean, 2008). Nonetheless, the Rojava and Kobane events had a multiplier effect on this effervescence. Yet, these cooperations are still new; it is not possible to say if it might produce a new radicalism in Kurdish repertoire of collective action.

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<sup>36</sup> Interview done in May 2014.

<sup>37</sup> In Spain for example, committees of solidarity with Rojava have been established in several cities such as Madrid and Granada.

## *Conclusion*

The mobilization is a multilevel process depending on political events in the homeland, the diasporic political entrepreneurs' mobilization activities, and the individuals' migratory experiences in the host land. In this perspective, this article sought to question the plural dynamics affecting diaspora politics in an exclusive national frame of political opportunities for immigrants and foreigners. The article showed that the restricted national political framing can be bypassed by the global communication -reinforced by technological tools- of critical events that may result or strengthen the diasporization process. This contributes to the scale jumping of the mobilization, as seen in the example of Kobane resistance on the increasing effectiveness of the Kurdish diasporic projects in the host land. In addition to these bifurcations, this article pointed out the role of the second generation of activists who rely on higher networking capacities with local and transnational activist fields and on ability of multiplying different mobilization forms and strategies. These hybrid strategies of mobilization, act together with traditional forms of contentious practices such as rallies and petitions; in such sense that they extend the scope of diasporic action. This transformation being an ongoing process, pursuing this analysis with a specific focus on the new strategies deployed by the second generation activists, would allow better understanding if the translocal space of contention in diaspora context, by reaching beyond geographic or national boundaries, will lead to new sources of identification and action, depending on both local and global reference systems.

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