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Süleyman KASAP

PhD, Associate Professor, Department of English Language Teaching, Van Yuzuncu Yil University
(Bardakçı, Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Kampüsü, 65090 Tuşba/Van Türkiye)

Email: suleymankasap@yyu.edu.tr

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8367-8789>

Between Two Names: A Study of Kurdish Naming Practices and Identity in Türkiye

Abstract

This study explores the experiences of Kurdish individuals in Van, Türkiye, who were given both Kurdish and Turkish names by their parents. Twelve participants, aged 43 to 56 (6 men and 6 women), were interviewed to understand how this practice shaped their sense of self and culture. Utilizing a qualitative, phenomenological approach, the interviews focused on why their parents chose to give them two names, the emotional effects of having two names, and how it impacted their Kurdish identity. The findings showed that this dual naming practice was a direct parental strategy for navigating state-led assimilationist policies. Consequently, many participants used their Turkish names in public as a protective mechanism to avoid discrimination and secure access to education and employment. In contrast, their Kurdish names were cherished as important, intimate symbols of cultural pride and heritage, used within the private sphere of family and community. Some participants reported internalizing a sense of fear or shame about their Kurdish identity due to pervasive negative perceptions and securitization of Kurds in Turkish society. Despite these challenges, many expressed a deep, resilient sense of pride in their Kurdish roots and harbored hope for positive changes in the future, particularly energized by recent political shifts that might offer greater recognition of Kurdish culture and language. This study highlights the complex, dualistic relationship between naming and identity, revealing how anthroponomic practices serve as a site of both struggle and resilience for Kurdish individuals navigating an often-marginalizing societal landscape.

Keywords

socio-onomastics; anthropological linguistics; anthroponymy; dual naming; Kurdish identity; cultural resistance; Türkiye

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Сулейман КАСАП

PhD, доцент кафедры методики преподавания английского языка, Университет Ван Юзюнчу Ыыл (Bardakçı, Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Kampüsü, 65090 Tuşba/Van Türkiye)

E-mail: suleymankasap@yyu.edu.tr

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8367-8789>

Между двух имен: практики именован- ия и конструирование идентичности у курдов Турции

Аннотация

Данная статья посвящена исследованию социокультурной ситуации, в которой представители курдского населения турецкого города Ван получают от родителей как курдские, так и турецкие имена. В исследовании приняли участие 12 респондентов в возрасте от 43 до 56 лет (шесть мужчин и шесть женщин). Цель автора статьи — выявить, каким образом наличие у человека двух имен — турецкого и курдского — влияет на формирование индивидуальной и коллективной идентичности. Использовался качественный феноменологический подход, в рамках интервью обсуждались три ключевых вопроса: мотивы родителей, обусловившие выбор двух имен; эмоциональные последствия наличия двух имен; влияние данного явления на курдскую идентичность респондентов. Результаты показали, что двуименность — осознанная родительская стратегия, ставшая ответом на проводимую государством политику ассимиляции. В публичной сфере большинство участников исследования используют турецкие имена в качестве защитного механизма, позволяющего избежать дискриминации и получить доступ к образованию и трудоустройству. В то же время курдские имена продолжают служить маркерами культурной принадлежности и символами этнической гордости, значимыми элементами внутрисемейного и внутригруппового общения. Часть респондентов отметила, что в результате общественного давления и бытующих в социуме негативных стереотипов о курдах у них сформировалось чувство страха или стыда, связанное с собственной этнической принадлежностью. Тем не менее многие участники подчеркивали чувство гордости своими курдскими корнями, а также выражали надежду на позитивные изменения, обусловленные недавними политическими трансформациями, которые могут способствовать признанию курдской культуры и языка. Исследование высвечивает сложный, двунаправленный характер взаимосвязи между именованьем и идентичностью и демонстрирует, что антропонимические практики функционируют как пространство одновременно символической борьбы и культурной преемственности в условиях маргинализирующего социального контекста.

Ключевые слова

социономастика; антропологическая лингвистика; антропонимия; двуименность; курдская идентичность; культурное сопротивление; Турция

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1. Introduction

The practice of dual naming — where individuals use different names in varying social contexts — is not unique to any single culture but rather a widespread sociolinguistic strategy found across historical and geographical settings. While existing scholarship often examines Kurdish dual naming in Türkiye through the lens of ethnic discrimination and state repression, this study situates the phenomenon within a broader theoretical framework, emphasizing its typological relevance across cultures. Dual naming arises from diverse motivations, including spiritual and secular distinctions (e.g., African ritual names), colonial impositions vs indigenous resistance (e.g., Native American autonyms), migration-driven identity negotiation (e.g., Chinese diaspora naming practices), and even everyday social hierarchies (e.g., Russian formal and diminutive name forms). By engaging with anthropological literature — such as Fredrik Barth’s work on ethnic boundary-making, James C. Scott’s concept of “hidden transcripts”, and Jean Jackson’s studies on indigenous naming as resistance — this analysis moves beyond a narrow focus on discrimination to explore how dual naming functions as a dynamic tool for navigating complex identity landscapes. In doing so, the discussion not only enriches the understanding of Kurdish naming practices but also contributes to comparative scholarship on onomastic strategies worldwide.

Names are more than mere identifiers; they are deeply embedded in cultural, political, and social structures, serving as markers of belonging, resistance, or adaptation. The Kurdish case, where individuals may conceal ethnic names under state pressure while preserving them in private, exemplifies a pattern seen in other marginalized communities. For instance, Native American and First Nations peoples often retain traditional names within their communities while using state-imposed legal names in official contexts — a duality reflecting both colonial legacies and cultural resilience [Jackson 1995]. Similarly, in Indonesia, the coexistence of Christian *nama baptis* with local names illustrates how naming mediates religious and ethnic affiliations [Keane 1997]. These examples align with Barth’s [1969] theory that ethnic identity is maintained through symbolic boundaries, where names act as key demarcations.

However, dual naming is not solely a response to oppression. In many African societies, individuals bear separate spiritual and public names, with the former often concealed to protect sacred identity [Geschiere 1998]. Likewise, Chinese diaspora communities frequently adopt Western names for integration while retaining given names for familial and cultural continuity [Eickmann 2020]. Even in non-marginalized contexts, such as Russia, the interplay between formal names and intimate diminutives (e.g., *Aleksandr* vs. *Sasha*) reflects social

hierarchies and relational dynamics [Ury 1993]. These cases demonstrate that dual naming operates along a spectrum of intentionality — from resistance to pragmatic adaptation — and is shaped by the interplay of power, tradition, and mobility.

James C. Scott’s [1990] notion of “hidden transcripts” proves particularly useful here, as it captures how subordinate groups employ discreet cultural practices — like concealed naming — to assert agency under constraint. Meanwhile, Jean Jackson’s [1995] research on indigenous Amazonian naming reveals how “unofficial” names sustain collective memory despite external erasure. Applying these frameworks to Kurdish naming practices underscores their universality while highlighting their local specificities. By placing Kurdish examples in dialogue with global cases, this study not only broadens the discourse beyond Türkiye-specific analyses but also reinforces the anthropological significance of naming as a lens into identity negotiation across cultures.

2. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach, which is well-suited for exploring complex social phenomena like identity, language, and culture [Denzin & Lincoln 2011]. A qualitative methodology allows for a deeper understanding of the personal and cultural implications of dual naming practices, providing rich insights into the lived experiences of Kurdish individuals in Türkiye. Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method, enabling the researcher to engage with participants while also allowing flexibility to explore emergent themes [Kvale & Brinkmann 2009]. This method is particularly effective for exploring sensitive topics, as it facilitates open and in-depth discussion [Charmaz 2006].

2.1. Participants

The study includes 12 Kurdish individuals (6 male, 6 female), aged between 43 and 56, living in Van, a Kurdish-majority province in eastern Türkiye. This sample was selected to represent a variety of experiences and backgrounds, ensuring that generational differences in the practice of dual naming were captured. The participants were chosen based on their personal histories with Kurdish and Turkish names, which allowed the research to encompass a range of perspectives from those who have experienced the direct effects of state policies on Kurdish identity. The inclusion of both male and female participants further helped to ensure gender diversity and the consideration of any gender-specific experiences related to the topic [Britten 1995].

Participants details

	Kurdish Name	Meaning	Age	Gender
1.	<i>Xalid</i>	‘Eternal’, ‘Immortal’	48	Male
2.	<i>Baran</i>	‘Rain’	52	Female
3.	<i>Dilan</i>	‘Love’, ‘Heart’	45	Male
4.	<i>Rojin</i>	‘Daylight’, ‘Sunlight’	50	Female
5.	<i>Azad</i>	‘Free’, ‘Freedom’	54	Male
6.	<i>Şiyar</i>	‘Conscious’, ‘Aware’	46	Female
7.	<i>Nalin</i>	‘Flower’, ‘Delicate’	43	Male
8.	<i>Lavin</i>	‘Pray’, ‘Beg’	56	Female
9.	<i>Jiyan</i>	‘Life’, ‘Existence’	51	Male
10.	<i>Heval</i>	‘Friend’, ‘Companion’	49	Female
11.	<i>Avesta</i>	‘Holy book’, ‘Scriptures’	47	Male
12.	<i>Berfin</i>	‘Snow’, ‘Pure as snow’	44	Female

The Table presents the Kurdish names of the 12 participants, along with their meanings, ages, and genders. These names reflect the cultural heritage and identity of the individuals, offering insight into the symbolic importance of names within Kurdish communities in Türkiye. The meanings of the Kurdish names also highlight the cultural values tied to identity, resilience, and family. While the official Turkish names of the participants are omitted for reasons of anonymity and sensitivity, the table still provides useful information about how Kurdish names help people express their cultural identity in a difficult social and political environment.

2.2. Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely used approach in qualitative research that allows for the identification of recurring patterns and themes within the data [Braun & Clarke 2006]. This method is particularly effective for examining cultural and identity-related issues, as it provides flexibility in analyzing complex experiences and emotions [Guest et al. 2012]. Through this process, we identified key themes that reflected the participants’ experiences of having to navigate their Kurdish identity in a largely Turkish society. Thematic analysis was employed to systematically explore the data, highlighting both shared and individual experiences, and categorizing them into overarching themes [Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006]. Preliminary analysis revealed five significant themes related to dual naming: dual naming as a coping mechanism; fear

and shame of being Kurdish; Kurdish name as part of cultural identity; disconnection and isolation; pride in Kurdish heritage and desire for change.

3. Results and Discussion

The theme of dual naming as a coping mechanism emerged strongly in the interviews with Kurdish individuals in Türkiye. The use of two names — one Kurdish and one Turkish — appeared as a strategic response to navigate the complex socio-political landscape that required conformity to the state's policies while simultaneously preserving one's ethnic and cultural identity in private settings. The dual naming system enabled Kurdish individuals to adapt to the demands of an oppressive regime while maintaining their Kurdish heritage within their families and communities.

3.1. Dual Naming as a Coping Mechanism

The interviews clearly revealed that the Turkish name was primarily used in public spaces such as schools, workplaces, and official documents, as it was legally mandated and socially accepted. In contrast, the Kurdish name was generally kept private, used only at home or within intimate social circles. This practice reflects the survival mechanism adopted by individuals to avoid discrimination, social ostracism, and even legal consequences. Example quotes:

We used our Turkish names because we had to. The government told us we had to. It was on our ID card, and we had to use it at school, when we went to the hospital, or when we talked to strangers (Şeyma, 45).

At school, my Turkish name was required. But my Kurdish name, I only used it when I was at home (Hasan, 47).

These interviews indicate that Kurdish individuals, from an early age, learned that using a Turkish name was essential to be accepted by society. In particular, this was enforced through the education system and state bureaucracy. The compulsory use of a Turkish name in official and public spaces exemplifies how the state systematically imposed assimilation practices on its Kurdish citizens. The fact that individuals felt obligated to use a different name in private settings highlights the tension between conforming to the state's demands and maintaining one's authentic identity.

The practice of dual naming can be traced back to the state policies following the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye in 1923, when the government aimed to create a homogenous national identity. The Kurdish language and culture were actively suppressed, and the state implemented policies that forced Kurdish people

to adopt Turkish names [Aslan 2010]. The adoption of a Turkish name became a symbol of compliance with state policies and was often seen as necessary for social and legal survival.

Historically, the adoption of Turkish names served as a way to blend into the larger Turkish society and avoid the negative consequences that often accompanied an overt expression of Kurdish identity. McDowall [1996] explains that the forced assimilation of Kurds, including the erasure of Kurdish names, was part of a broader attempt by the Turkish state to suppress ethnic minority identities and foster a unified Turkish national identity. For many Kurds, however, this duality was not just about survival; it was a way of negotiating their place in a society that consistently marginalized their cultural and ethnic roots. While the dual naming system served as a coping mechanism, it also came at a significant emotional cost. The need to separate one's Kurdish name from public life and the requirement to adopt a Turkish name in official contexts led to feelings of alienation and internal conflict. This is reflected in the interviewees' statements about the emotional strain of living with two identities. Example quotes:

When I used my Turkish name outside, I felt like I was not really myself. It was like I was wearing a mask (Ayhan, 53).

It was like I was pretending to be someone else. My Kurdish name felt more real to me, but I had to hide it (Veli, 44).

These experiences suggest that the practice of dual naming was not without its psychological toll. The forced adoption of a name that did not reflect their cultural identity created a sense of disconnection, as individuals felt like they had to live two separate lives. The "mask" they wore in public by using a Turkish name symbolized a denial of their true selves, which led to a loss of connection to their Kurdish heritage in public spaces. In line with Zapf's [2002] research, this emotional dissonance between the public and private self is a common result of forced assimilation. It is a form of cultural adaptation where the individual conforms outwardly to the dominant cultural norms while struggling internally to preserve their identity. As a result, the dual naming system was not just a functional adaptation, but a daily negotiation of personal identity within the context of a larger social and political system that sought to erase it.

While the public use of the Turkish name was a survival strategy, the private use of the Kurdish name served as a sanctuary for cultural preservation. The home became a space where individuals could express their true ethnic identity, free from the constraints of state-imposed policies. This pattern is evident in the interviews, where participants described how they maintained their Kurdish names in private settings to keep their cultural identity intact:

My Kurdish name was only for my family and close friends. It felt like a secret, but it was also part of who I am. When I said it, I felt like I was in the right place (Sibel, 46).

At home, my Kurdish name was a way to connect to my roots. It was the name my parents gave me, and it meant something important to them (Emine, 48).

The family, therefore, played a crucial role in preserving Kurdish culture and language. The private use of the Kurdish name helped individuals maintain a connection to their heritage in an environment that was not influenced by the pressures of the state. These interviews show that the family and close community bonds became spaces of resistance, where Kurdish identity could be safeguarded. This aspect aligns with Cengiz Güneş [see Gunes 2012], who argues that the family structure, while being a source of cultural resilience, also became the primary space where Kurdish identity was transmitted and preserved in the face of state oppression. The use of dual names in the context of Kurdish individuals in Türkiye reflects a powerful coping mechanism for navigating an environment where their ethnic identity was not only marginalized but actively suppressed. As the interviews demonstrate, the Turkish name was used publicly to conform to state regulations and to avoid social and legal repercussions. This practice allowed individuals to maintain some semblance of normalcy in their interactions with the state, even if it meant concealing their Kurdish identity. However, the emotional and psychological costs of this dual identity were significant. The constant tension between the public and private selves led to feelings of alienation and identity fragmentation. The Kurdish name, while providing a sense of connection to one's cultural roots in private settings, was rendered invisible in public life, symbolizing the broader cultural and political erasure of the Kurdish people in Türkiye.

3.2. Fear and Shame of Being Kurdish

A second key theme that emerged from the interviews was the fear and shame that Kurdish individuals felt when using their Kurdish names in public. Many participants shared how using their Kurdish names outside the home could lead to negative consequences, such as discrimination, bullying, or even punishment. As a result, the fear of revealing their Kurdish identity became a strong reason for using their Turkish names exclusively in public spaces. The interviews clearly showed that the use of a Kurdish name in public created anxiety among many Kurdish individuals. The fear was not just about being different, but also about facing potential social rejection or even legal problems. Participants described how they avoided using their Kurdish name because it could bring unwanted attention or trouble. This fear of being identified as “Kurdish” was deeply tied to the social and political risks of standing out from the majority Turkish population. Example quotes:

If I used my Kurdish name in school, the teacher would get angry, and other students would look at me funny (Murat, 50).

We felt scared to use our Kurdish names outside. It felt like we were showing we were different, and that could bring problems (Ayşe, 50).

These statements illustrate how the use of a Kurdish name, even in a seemingly neutral setting like school, could lead to immediate negative reactions. Participants recalled how their teachers and peers would either treat them harshly or make them feel uncomfortable, creating a constant fear of being singled out. The fear of revealing one's Kurdish identity went beyond just personal embarrassment. Many participants expressed concern that using their Kurdish name could lead to serious social or political consequences. In an environment where Kurdish identity was suppressed, showing any sign of being Kurdish could invite discrimination or even punishment. This fear was deeply ingrained in Kurdish individuals' daily lives, influencing everything from their interactions with classmates to their relations with authorities. For example, many participants feared that their Kurdish identity might be reported to the authorities, which could result in negative consequences, such as being ostracized or punished. This fear often led individuals to suppress their Kurdish names, even though those names were central to their sense of self and cultural identity. Example quotes:

I never used my Kurdish name outside because I didn't want to be treated like a criminal. We were always taught that being Kurdish was something wrong (Fatma, 55).

My Kurdish name could make me stand out. If I said it in public, people might ask me where I was from, and that could be dangerous (Veli, 44).

This fear of being associated with Kurdishness in a negative way is tied to the broader history of Kurdish marginalization in Türkiye. The Turkish state has long viewed expressions of Kurdish identity with suspicion, often associating it with political activism or separatism [McDowall 1996]. As a result, many individuals learned to conceal their Kurdishness to avoid being caught up in political or social problems.

The fear of using a Kurdish name in public was not only about avoiding discrimination; it was also linked to feelings of shame. Many interviewees discussed how the state's policies — such as banning the use of the Kurdish language and forcing people to adopt Turkish names — created an environment where being Kurdish was seen as something to be ashamed of. This sense of shame was often reinforced by family members, schools, and broader society, who told individuals that being Kurdish was something to hide. The interviews revealed that the shame surrounding being Kurdish was internalized by many individuals, leading them

to feel embarrassed about their heritage. This is consistent with the work of Aktaş [2008], who argues that state-sponsored policies of assimilation not only tried to erase Kurdish culture but also created a social atmosphere in which Kurdishness was viewed as inferior or undesirable. Example quotes:

We were told not to speak Kurdish in school. If we did, we were punished. It made me feel like being Kurdish was bad, like there was something wrong with us (Emine, 48).

At home, my parents told me not to speak Kurdish outside, because it was dangerous. We were made to feel ashamed of our language and our names (Şeyma, 45).

These experiences suggest that Kurdish people, especially younger generations, were taught that their cultural and linguistic practices were undesirable, fostering feelings of shame about their ethnic identity. For these individuals, the Turkish name served as a way to distance themselves from that shame, offering a means of protection and safety from the stigma associated with being Kurdish.

While many Kurdish individuals hid their Kurdish names out of fear, this practice also came with hidden costs. In the interviews, participants shared how constantly concealing their true identity caused emotional distress and contributed to feelings of self-alienation. Many described how they felt torn between two identities — the Kurdish name they used at home and the Turkish name they used in public — and this conflict created an ongoing internal struggle. Cf.:

It felt like I was living two lives. My Turkish name was for the world, but my Kurdish name was who I really was. It was tiring to hide that part of me all the time (Zeynep, 52).

I was always worried about who I was showing myself to be. It felt like I couldn't be fully me, like I was hiding something important (Ayhan, 53).

This internal conflict between their public and private selves left many Kurdish individuals feeling disconnected from both their cultural heritage and the larger Turkish society. It also created a deep sense of frustration, as they were forced to live in a way that did not align with their true identity.

The theme of fear and shame associated with being Kurdish highlights the emotional and social challenges faced by many Kurdish individuals in Türkiye. The fear of using a Kurdish name in public was not just about avoiding negative reactions from others; it was also deeply connected to the broader political and cultural environment that marginalized Kurdish people. The suppression of Kurdish identity through state policies, such as forcing individuals to adopt Turkish names and restricting the use of the Kurdish language, contributed to a climate where being Kurdish was not only discouraged but often stigmatized. As demonstrated

in the interviews, the fear and shame of being Kurdish were powerful motivators for individuals to conceal their true identities. By using Turkish names in public, many Kurdish people could avoid discrimination and potential punishment, but this came at a significant emotional cost. The constant need to hide one's cultural identity led to feelings of alienation, internal conflict, and even shame, as participants struggled to reconcile their private Kurdish selves with their public Turkish personas. The internalization of shame about being Kurdish shows how deeply state policies can affect the personal and cultural identities of marginalized groups. While the use of a Turkish name allowed individuals to navigate a hostile environment, it also revealed the painful realities of living under a system that sought to erase their cultural identity. Despite this, the desire to preserve their Kurdish names in private spaces reflects the resilience and strength of Kurdish identity, even in the face of ongoing oppression.

3.3. The Kurdish Name as Part of Cultural Identity

A third theme that emerged from the interviews is the idea of the Kurdish name as an integral part of an individual's cultural identity. Despite the challenges associated with using a Kurdish name in public spaces, many participants emphasized that their Kurdish names held significant personal and cultural meaning. These names were seen as symbols of pride, cultural heritage, and family connection, representing not only their true selves but also their historical roots. For many participants, the Kurdish name was a tangible link to their family history and cultural roots. The name was seen as an embodiment of the Kurdish community, its traditions, and values. As participants shared, their Kurdish name was not just a label but a part of their larger identity, carrying with it the weight of generations and the legacy of their ancestors. This connection to family heritage provided a sense of belonging, even when the individual was forced to conceal the name in public spaces. Example quotes:

My Kurdish name made me feel close to my family. It was part of who I am, part of my identity (Emine, 48).

Even though I had to use my Turkish name outside, my Kurdish name was always something I held dear. It made me feel connected to my roots (Hasan, 50).

These responses suggest that the Kurdish name served as a marker of cultural identity, a symbol of continuity, and a reminder of the participant's origins, particularly in the face of assimilation pressures. The Kurdish name was also seen as a source of pride for many participants. It represented not only personal identity but also the broader Kurdish community's perseverance, resilience, and cultural

richness. Despite the political and social pressures to conform to a Turkish identity, many participants maintained a deep pride in their Kurdish heritage, which they felt was reflected in their names. Example quotes:

My Kurdish name is who I am. It's the name I want the world to know me by. But I had to hide it (Fatma, 55).

Using my Kurdish name was like honoring my ancestors. It was my way of resisting assimilation (Veli, 44).

Here, participants reflect on the tension between the pride they felt in their Kurdish names and the necessity to hide them. The name was not only an expression of personal pride but also a political act of resistance to cultural erasure. Despite the pride and cultural connection associated with their Kurdish names, many participants described the painful inner conflict of having to hide this name in public spaces. The fear of social rejection, discrimination, or punishment led them to suppress their true identity in favor of the Turkish name in official and formal settings. This dual identity often caused emotional distress, as individuals felt torn between honoring their Kurdish heritage and protecting themselves in a society that devalued their cultural identity. Example quotes:

It was always difficult to hide my Kurdish name. I felt like I was lying about who I really am. But at the same time, I couldn't risk the consequences (Murat, 50).

I was proud of my Kurdish name, but it felt dangerous to use it outside of my home. I had to keep it hidden to stay safe (Ayşe, 50).

The inner conflict highlighted by these quotes reveals the psychological toll of living in a society that demands cultural assimilation while still holding on to personal identity. For some, the Kurdish name was not only a part of personal identity but also a subtle act of defiance against state-sponsored efforts to suppress Kurdish culture and language. In a society where Kurdish identity was often marginalized, retaining and using a Kurdish name in private or family settings was seen as an assertion of cultural pride and resistance. Example quotes:

Even if I couldn't use my Kurdish name at school, I used it proudly at home. It was my way of resisting the system (Şeyma, 45).

When I called my children by their Kurdish names, I was sending a message. I wasn't going to let them forget who they were (Zeynep, 52).

These examples suggest that for some individuals, holding on to their Kurdish name was not only about personal identity but also about making a statement in the face of political oppression. Using the Kurdish name, even in private,

was an act of maintaining control over one's identity and culture. The theme of the Kurdish name as part of cultural identity reveals the deep emotional and cultural significance attached to names within the Kurdish community in Türkiye. Despite the societal pressures to conform to Turkish norms and suppress Kurdish identity, the Kurdish name was regarded as an essential part of personal and cultural identity. It represented a connection to one's family, heritage, and community, and for many, it was a symbol of pride and resistance to the pressures of assimilation. This theme also highlights the emotional cost of having to hide such a significant part of one's identity. The inner conflict of using a Turkish name in public while holding on to a Kurdish name in private caused psychological stress, as individuals were forced to live a divided life between their cultural roots and the demands of the state. As participants shared, the act of concealing their Kurdish names created a constant tension, leading to feelings of shame, frustration, and alienation.

3.4. Disconnection and Isolation

A recurring theme that emerged from the interviews is the profound sense of disconnection and isolation that many Kurdish individuals experienced as a result of having to hide their Kurdish names in public. This duality of identities — using a Turkish name in public and a Kurdish name in private — created a deep emotional divide, making many feel as though they were torn between two worlds. The public and private identities were not seamlessly integrated, which led to feelings of being disconnected from both their Kurdish community and the wider Turkish society.

For many participants, using their Turkish name in public spaces felt like a form of deception. It was as though they were hiding their true self, making them feel like they were wearing a mask or pretending to be someone they were not. The tension between these identities made them feel estranged, as if they didn't belong fully to either group. Example quotes:

When I used my Turkish name outside, I felt like I was not really myself. It was like I was wearing a mask (Ayhan, 53).

It was hard because I couldn't be true to who I was. I felt like I was living in two worlds, but not fully belonging to either (Ali, 50).

Ayhan's statement reflects the feeling of disguising one's true identity, as if adopting a different name was equivalent to adopting a different persona. It illustrates the emotional strain of living a life where one must constantly hide a part of themselves.

Ali's quote highlights the psychological toll of trying to navigate between two conflicting worlds — one defined by the Kurdish identity and the other shaped

by societal expectations. The sense of not belonging fully to either identity led to a feeling of alienation, causing emotional distress.

Many participants mentioned how this separation between their Kurdish and Turkish identities resulted in feelings of emotional dissonance — they felt disconnected from both cultures. This disconnection was not just about a name but about how their whole sense of self was divided. In private, they could embrace their Kurdish heritage and feel at home with their family and community. In public, however, their Turkish name forced them to conform to a society that often viewed their Kurdish identity with suspicion or disdain. This contradiction led to a sense of isolation, as participants struggled to reconcile these two conflicting aspects of their identity. For example, Hasan (48) shared:

It was difficult to have these two identities. At times, I even felt that I was losing myself. I was neither completely Kurdish nor fully accepted by the Turkish society.

His experience reflects how the duality of identity can lead to a sense of alienation, as individuals are not fully accepted by either group, making them feel marginalized from both sides. This feeling of being neither fully Kurdish nor fully Turkish further intensified the sense of isolation, making it harder for individuals to build a strong connection to either community. The lack of acceptance from both sides often led to deep emotional distress and a longing for belonging that was never fully realized

3.5. Pride in Kurdish Heritage and Desire for Change

The final theme that emerged from the interviews was a deep sense of pride in Kurdish heritage and a strong desire for change in the future. While many individuals had to hide their Kurdish names out of fear of social rejection or punishment, there was an underlying desire for a future where they could openly embrace and celebrate their Kurdish identity without fear or shame.

The participants expressed a strong hope that one day they would be able to use their Kurdish names publicly and without consequence. This desire for freedom of expression was tied to a larger wish for recognition and respect of Kurdish identity within Turkish society. Many felt that they should not have to hide a crucial part of who they are simply to fit into a society that has long marginalized their culture and language. Example quotes:

I hope one day, we won't have to hide our Kurdish names. I want to be proud of who I am, and I want others to accept it too (Zeynep, 52).

I wish that people would see us for who we really are. I don't want to feel like I'm hiding anymore (Aylin, 49).

Zeynep's statement expresses a longing for acceptance and recognition, not just within the Kurdish community but in the wider Turkish society as well. The hope for a day when being Kurdish would no longer be something to hide reflects a desire for social change.

Aylin shares the pain of living in hiding and the desire to be seen authentically by the society around her. This desire for visibility and acceptance reflects the participants' yearning for a society that honors their true identity.

For many of the interviewees, pride in their Kurdish heritage was strong and unwavering, despite the pressures to conform. The Kurdish name was seen as a symbol of resistance, and the desire for cultural recognition and acceptance was tied to a larger hope for societal change. These individuals expressed hope that, in the future, they could pass on their Kurdish names and cultural heritage to the next generation without fear of discrimination [cf. Kasap 2025]. This thematic analysis reveals the emotional complexity of Kurdish naming practices in Türkiye. The use of dual names — a Kurdish one in private and a Turkish one in public — was largely a survival strategy to navigate a society that sought to erase Kurdish identity. However, the fear and shame associated with using a Kurdish name in public led to deep emotional distress and a sense of disconnection and isolation. Many participants felt torn between two identities and could not fully embrace either, leading to feelings of alienation from both their Kurdish community and the broader Turkish society. Despite these struggles, the Kurdish name remained a powerful symbol of cultural pride and resistance. The interviews also revealed a strong desire for change, with participants expressing hope for a future where they could proudly use their Kurdish names and be accepted for who they truly are.

Conclusion

This study shows how Kurdish people in Türkiye face deep struggles — and find resilience — through their names. For them, a name is more than a label; it's a connection to culture, family, and pride. Yet, many must hide their Kurdish names in public, using Turkish names instead to avoid discrimination or trouble with authorities. This “dual naming” acts as a survival tactic but comes at a heavy emotional cost. Participants described feeling split between two identities — like “wearing a mask” or “living two lives” — which left them isolated or disconnected from their true selves. Despite this pain, their Kurdish names remained powerful symbols of resistance. At home, these names kept their heritage alive, serving as a quiet rebellion against decades of policies that erased Kurdish culture. As one participant shared, their Kurdish name “felt like a secret, but part of who I am”.

Families became safe spaces to pass down traditions, showing how ordinary acts of naming can defy oppression.

Hope also emerged strongly. Many participants dreamed of a future where their children could use Kurdish names freely, in a society that respects diversity. This mirrors broader research: when minorities reclaim their language and culture, it strengthens identity and fosters pride.

In the end, this dual naming practice reveals both vulnerability and strength. It highlights the harm of forcing people to hide who they are, but also the courage of those who keep their culture alive against the odds. Their stories remind us that dignity lies in being seen fully — name, heritage, and all. Creating a world where everyone belongs starts with simple acts: respecting names, celebrating differences, and listening to those long silenced.

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