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The thesis of internal colonialism offers a controversial center-periphery approach to the diffusion model when explaining the persistence of peripheral ethnic identities in Western nation-states. Associating persistent nationalist mobilization in the ethnically different peripheral regions with the cultural division of labor showed some potential in explaining the cases observed in the British Isles, Brittany and Quebec. In some other cases with solid peripheral national economies, such as Basque Country and Catalonia, however, the thesis of internal colonialism was considered paradoxical and became the target of criticism. This study examines the role of internal colonialism in the radicalization of the Kurdish movement in Turkey. The empirical field research based on in-depth interviews with PKK militants from three consecutive generations provides qualitative evidence regarding the impacts of colonial settings in this process. Social consequences emerging from internal colonialism constitute an essential motivation and justification expressed by actors involved in armed struggle against what they define as Turkish colonial rule.

Keywords: internal colonialism, peripheral identities, Kurdish conflict, radicalization, PKK
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On 4 September 2020, video footage revealed physical aggression against a group of Kurdish seasonal workers from Mardin province who had headed to the western Turkish city of Sakarya to pick hazelnuts.[1] Although the 'claims of attacks' against 'workers of Kurdish origin' were reported as an 'isolated incident' by the Turkish Ministry of the Interior,[2] a special report issued by the Human Rights Association in Turkey revealed that at least fifteen people were killed and 1,097 wounded in some 280 similar incidents between 2010 and 2020 (İHD 2020). The number of recorded cases of racial discrimination, in which physical and symbolic violence against Kurds occupies a significant place, suggests delving into the underlining social conditions.

The phenomenon of violence concerning discriminatory and racist attitudes towards a specific ethnic group, however, is not limited to these practices. This article argues that responsive violence adopted as a generation style by a particular generation-unit (Mannheim [1928] 1952) and developed over time is closely related to these social practices and attitudes experienced as a consequence of asymmetric relations between antagonistic identities (Rumelili and Çelik 2017). Qualitative data based on in-depth interviews with PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan – Kurdistan Workers' Party) militants from northern Kurdistan reveals significant empirical evidence regarding the impacts of pre-militancy everyday life experiences in this regard.

1 Theoretical Framework and Methodology

1.1 The Internal Colonial Approach in Stateless Nations

The thesis of internal colonialism was first voiced in the early 1960s. Referring to disadvantaged ethnic groups under the nation-state system established following the anti-colonial liberation processes in Latin America, González Casanova pointed out that the new colonial situation was based on administrative, political, social, and economic inequalities between the culturally different dominant and subordinate communities that share the same territory (1965, 29).

[1] See https://observers.france24.com/en/20200915-attacks-kurdish-seasonal-workers-turkey-highlight-continued-racism

[2] See https://www.icisleri.gov.tr/sakaryada-mevsimlik-tarim-iscilerinin-darbedildigi-iddiasi

The use of the concept was later extended to other cases in Latin America, such as Colombia (Havens and Flinn 1970) and Peru (Epstein 1971), as well as Afro-American movements in the U.S. (Blauner 1969).

American sociologist Hechter was the first to employ the concept of internal colonialism in relation to national minorities persisting despite systematic acculturation and assimilation policies implemented by the corresponding nation-state. In his comprehensive structural analysis, he argues that the diffusion model fails to explain the persistence of Celtic peripheral sectionalism in the British Isles despite the advent of industrialization. Based on exhaustive quantitative data, Hechter suggests that status group political orientations persist in peripheral regions on the basis of a 'cultural division of labor', making the ethnic minorities resist cultural assimilation and political integration (1975, 209–212).

Hechter's internal colonial approach had a great impact among social scientists in the period of ethnonational revivals of stateless nations (Keating 1997) within the established Western nation-states. The controversial center-periphery dichotomy was embraced to explain such cases as Palestine (Zureik 1979), Quebec (McRoberts 1979), Brittany (Reece 1979), and Corsica (Hainsworth and Loughlin 1984) whilst rejected in certain others like the Basque Country and Catalonia (Linz 1985; Díez Medrano 1999), where the dominant bourgeoisie consisted of members of the peripheral ethnic groups due to specific characteristics of national development (Hechter and Levi 1979, 188). In the face of these criticisms, Hechter revised his initial thesis a decade later, underlining other potential factors that might have strengthened or lessened the group solidarity, as observed in the paradoxical economic structure of the Spanish periphery and of Scotland (1985).

Despite its initial resonance among scholarly circles, the thesis of internal colonialism has lost its popularity over time, and, consequently, the social impacts of colonial structures are not discussed adequately. In his pioneering study, Hechter occasionally touches on certain characteristics of the colonial situation in terms of racial stereotypes, migration and mobility of peripheral workers, residential and occupational segregation of the members of the subordinate group, and the consequences of cultural and political integration of the internal colony into the dominant core (Hechter 1975, 30–42, 109–60). However, his analysis is primarily focused on and, therefore, limited to quantitative data in the historical sociology of the British Isles, which is largely excluded in other cases where such accumulated data rarely exists.

Some other scholars, who do not primarily focus on the impacts of internal colonialism, emphasize the role of political and economic deprivation and grievances, which are often present in colonial settings, as sources of ethnonationalist warfare. Referring to the concept of 'horizontal inequalities' based on structural asymmetries, Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch propose compelling global empirical evidence extracted from reliable datasets that demonstrates the causal relationship between grievances and the likelihood of civil wars (2011). Political and economic discrimination by governments towards a particular ethnic group enhances the probability of eruption of violent manifestations by the members of the disadvantaged group and increases the risk of war reoccurring (Gurses and Rost 2013). Empirical findings revealed in the above-mentioned studies emphasize the presence of several different ethnic identities competing with one another in an asymmetric political and economic setting. This phenomenon fits in with the thesis of internal colonialism.

Unlike other relevant cases, the internal colonial approach does not seem to have attracted much scholarly attention in the Kurdish case. Northern Kurdistan has only been defined as an internal colony in the recent scholarly works (Entessar 2010; Güneş and Zeydanlıoğlu 2014; Yadirgi 2017; Kurt 2019) which offer limited empirical data.[3] The absence of systematic quantitative indicators covering an extensive period (from the initial phases of Ottoman centralization in the late eighteenth century and continuing through the Turkish state-building of the early twentieth century) is probably the most challenging question with this regard. While earlier (M. E. Bozarslan [1966] 2002; Beşikçi [1969] 2014; van Bruinessen 1992) and more

[3] Yadirgi's comprehensive study on the social, economic and political development of Kurdistan during the Ottoman and republican eras (2017) provides exceptional indicators in this respect, despite the scholar's repetitive emphasis on the scope and limitations of available data.

recent studies (Kaygalak 2009; Keser 2010; Küçükkırca 2012; Duruiz 2015; Uzun 2015; Pelek 2022) provide some qualitative indicators regarding the internal colonial state of Kurds in Turkey, there is no empirical study that delves into the relationship between the colonial situation and long-lasting armed conflict (Bergmann and Crutchfield 2009, 147). Therefore, a life-history analysis based on qualitative data collected from the three generation of PKK militants who legitimize the use of political violence as an anti-colonial struggle can be expected to contribute significantly to the field of Kurdish studies.

1.2 An Empirical Study on Internal Colonialism Through Life-History Analysis

A qualitative analysis on the impacts of colonialism in a given period requires observing the socialization processes of the members of a particular group, beginning from early family transmission and continuing through schooling and workspace relations. To this end, life-history analysis based on in-depth interviews provides more satisfactory outcomes than other available research techniques (Bertaux 2010, 84). Due to their dynamic character, processual changes in politico-military organizations are best measured through systematic data based on diachronic time intervals that best fit the longitudinal research method (Janson 1981, 20).

This study is based on field research conducted between December 2014 and March 2017 in southeastern Turkey and northern Iraq, in which 71 PKK guerrillas (29 female and 42 male) participated voluntarily,[4] 34 of whom, from three consecutive generations, were selected for this analysis (see Table 1). The selection of interviews is based on sociodemographic criteria in terms of sex,[5] geographic origin, and the place where the participation in the guerrilla took place. All interviews were voice recorded and fully transcribed, lasting between 42 minutes and more than three hours, for an average of 77 minutes per interview. They were all conducted face-to-face, in either Turkish or Kurdish Kurmanji.

The qualitative data analysis applied in this study aims to obtain information regarding the social actor's perception of reality concerning the colonial situation. Narratives that individuals retrospectively reconstruct out of their memories inevitably reflect their present interpretations. Additionally, the interlocutor in open-ended interviews constructs an image of personality out of biographical material (Levinson 1988). As precisely underlined by some scholars who discuss life-history analysis in generational studies (Braungart and Braungart 1986, 224), by selectively processing information the social scientist constructs a representation of reality narrated by the social actor. Therefore, it would be pertinent to consider these epistemological questions when evaluating research outcomes presented here.

2 Northern Kurdistan as an Internal Colony

2.1 The Kurdish Question from an Internal Colonial Perspective

As already noted, there was little scholarship on Kurdistan in the period of ethnonational revivals from a colonial perspective. Turkish left had handled the Kurdish issue as a mere question of underdevelopment, ignoring its national aspects (TİP 1965, 110–11).[6] The treatment of Kurds in Turkey from the perspective of colonialism became possible only when Kurdish youth movements and organizations in this country broke away from the Turkish left in the early 1970s and began to act more autonomously.

Notwithstanding, while not employing the term internal colonialism as such, Beşikçi in the late 1960s described a specific internal colonial form in 'eastern Turkey', by drawing attention to the structural causes behind feudal exploitation in Kurdistan. According to Beşikçi, the non-industrialized bourgeoisie in Kurdish towns and cities, formed by *aghas* and *begs* (tribal

[4] The field research in northern Kurdistan (Turkey) was conducted by Barış Tuğrul. The field research in southern Kurdistan (Iraq) was carried out by a research team consisting of Barış Tuğrul, Neslihan Yaklav, and Caroline Guibet Lafaye.

[5] The first generation of PKK militants constitutes an exception with this respect as it was not possible to contact any female militants. The PKK sources confirmed that most women cadres who joined the party in its founding period have either died in combat or dropped out of the organization.

[6] Türkiye İşçi Partisi (Workers' Party of Turkey). For its program, see https://acikerisim.tbmm.gov.tr/xmlui/handle/11543/628.

Table 1: Sociodemographic data of participants

	Interview Code	Date of Interview	Place of Interview	Province	City/Town	Age*	Sex
1st Generation	K - I/01	12/5/2014	Diyarbakır	Erzurum	Varto	52	Male
	K - I/02	12/17/2014	Diyarbakır	GAP/Ruha	Hilvan	54	Male
	K - I/03	7/15/2015	Ankara	Dersim	Dersim	56	Male
	K - I/04	10 - 20.07.2016	Southern Kurdistan	*CONF*	*CONF*	60	Male
	K - I/05	10 - 20.07.2016	Southern Kurdistan	Amed	Diyarbakır	57	Male
	K - I/06	10 - 20.07.2016	Southern Kurdistan	Serhat	Kars	50	Male
	K - I/07	10 - 20.07.2016	Southern Kurdistan	Güneybatı	Maraş	61	Male
	K - I/08	10 - 20.07.2016	Southern Kurdistan	GAP/Ruha	Derik	61	Male
	K - I/09	10 - 20.07.2016	Southern Kurdistan	Serhat	Kağızman	60	Male
	K - I/10	10 - 20.07.2016	Southern Kurdistan	Dersim	Dersim	54	Male
2nd Generation	K - II/01	12/11/2014	Diyarbakır	Amed	Diyarbakır	38	Female
	K - II/02	12/17/2014	Diyarbakır	Amed	Lice	42	Male
	K - II/03	12/18/2014	Diyarbakır	Garzan	Batman	38	Male
	K - II/04	12/18/2014	Diyarbakır	Serhat	Ardahan	42	Male
	K - II/05	19 - 31.03.2017	Southern Kurdistan	Botan	Cizre	42	Female
	K - II/06	19 - 31.03.2017	Southern Kurdistan	Amed	Diyarbakır	41	Female
	K - II/07	19 - 31.03.2017	Southern Kurdistan	Garzan	Bitlis	42	Male
	K - II/08	19 - 31.03.2017	Southern Kurdistan	Ankara	Ankara	44	Male
	K - II/09	10 - 20.07.2016	Southern Kurdistan	Adana	Çukurova	49	Female
	K - II/10	10 - 20.07.2016	Southern Kurdistan	Mardin	Nusaybin	42	Female
	K - II/11	10 - 20.07.2016	Southern Kurdistan	Erzurum	Varto	43	Male
	K - II/12	10 - 20.07.2016	Southern Kurdistan	Garzan	Batman	47	Female
3rd Generation	K - III/01	19 - 31.03.2017	Southern Kurdistan	Garzan	*Istanbul***	34	Female
	K - III/02	19 - 31.03.2017	Southern Kurdistan	*NA*	*NA*	34	Female
	K - III/03	10 - 20.07.2016	Southern Kurdistan	*NA*	*NA*	36	Female
	K - III/04	10 - 20.07.2016	Southern Kurdistan	Botan	*NA*	36	Male
	K - III/05	10 - 20.07.2016	Southern Kurdistan	Amed	*Istanbul***	38	Male
	K - III/06	10 - 20.07.2016	Southern Kurdistan	Amed	Lice	38	Female
	K - III/07	19 - 31.03.2017	Southern Kurdistan	Serhat	Doğubeyazıt	32	Male
	K - III/08	19 - 31.03.2017	Southern Kurdistan	Serhat	Van	28	Female
	K - III/09	10 - 20.07.2016	Southern Kurdistan	Garzan	*Istanbul***	37	Male
	K - III/10	10 - 20.07.2016	Southern Kurdistan	Güneybatı	Maraş	34	Female
	K - III/11	19 - 31.03.2017	Southern Kurdistan	Garzan	*NA*	27	Male
	K - III/12	10 - 20.07.2016	Southern Kurdistan	Serhat	Tatvan	31	Female

NA: Not answered

CONF: Confidential information

* Indicates the age that the participant has at the moment of the interview

** While initially being from Kurdistan, some participants indicate the place where they joined the PKK

Table 2: The regional distribution of industrial enterprises, 1927–1955

	1927 (1)		1939 (2)		1955	
Region	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Marmara	19,170	29.6	581	51.0	1,961	47.8
Aegean	11,550	17.9	232	20.0	812	19.8
Central Anatolia	10,220	15.8	83	8.0	448	10.9
Eastern Black Sea	7,947	12.3	73	6.0	280	6.8
Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia	11,448	17.8	96	8.0	316	7.7

(1) Figures include the small industrial enterprises.
(2) Only includes industrial enterprises benefitting from the 1927 Law for Encouragement of Industry.
Source: Serin 1963, 147, as cited in Yadirgi 2017, 191.

chieftains controlling large territories) had no other choice than to penetrate Turkey's national economy in the absence of national market conditions in the Kurdish region. This symbiotic coalition between eastern feudalism and western capitalism was the key reason for the east's underdevelopment and the west's increasing growth, as well as the emergence of a class struggle between the Kurdish aristocracy and peasants (Beşikçi [1969] 2014, 47–50, 184).

These integrated structural conditions analyzed by Beşikçi coincide with Hechter's internal colonialism model. The latter explains the persistence of a separate peripheral identity in two ways: The initial penetration of the national economy into the peripheral region provokes a 'cultural division of labor', in which those individuals who adhere to their peripheral identity find themselves in the lower stratum of society. Secondly, due to dependence on the national economy, economic development in the periphery remains relatively slow, which, in the long-term, favors the interests of the national bourgeoisie by providing low-cost labor as well as arbitrary flexibility of labor conditions (Hechter 1975, 302; 1978, 299–301). Both features provoke inevitable social consequences in and outside the periphery, which consolidate the acquisition and defense of peripheral identity. Along with other essential factors such as the lack of democratic channels to demand fundamental rights (Tuğrul 2021) and indiscriminate state repression of Kurds (Gurses 2018), PKK militants from all the generations analyzed here affirm that everyday life practices related to the consequences of internal colonialism constitute motivations and justifications for the armed struggle.

2.2 Social Consequences of Internal Colonialism Outside of Kurdistan

Low-cost labor flow from the economically disadvantaged periphery to the core is one of the characteristics of internal colonialism. The economic backwardness and the lack of employment opportunities in the peripheral region force its residents to emigrate to the urban centers, leading to residential and occupational segregation (Hechter 1975, 42–43). This phenomenon generates identity encounters between the members of the dominant culture and those from the culturally and linguistically different periphery, which is the most distinguishable characteristic of internal colonialism in its classical form (González Casanova [1969] 2006, 190).

Consolidation of the national economy in Turkey from the early years of the Kemalist regime took an attitude of deliberate denial of Kurdish economic development, coinciding with Roy's concept of de-development (1995). The new regime deemed Kurds a potentially secessionist threat to national unity. Kemalist cadres were concerned that economic growth and development would accelerate nationalist consciousness and ambitions among Kurds, which led to further peripheralization of economically disadvantaged Kurdistan (Yadirgi 2017, 165–167). The uneven liberal economic growth model adopted roughly from the 1950s onwards created specific industrial zones in western Turkey. In contrast, central and eastern Turkey stayed

marginally underdeveloped, making the regional differences very obvious (Keyder 2013, 489). The numbers presented in Table 2 illustrate the trend of industrial enterprises in different regions of Turkey, with the eastern and southeastern regions experiencing constant decline.

The structural transformations that occurred in western and eastern Turkey as a result of this lopsided capitalist development generated asymmetric encounters between different identity definitions. The low-cost labor migration flow from underdeveloped Kurdistan towards western Turkey is one of the social consequences of this economic structure. A lack of industrial manufacturing and land ownership–related problems in the agricultural system push many Kurds from the countryside into the Kurdish cities. Due to the lack of employment opportunities and the dominance of bourgeoisified chieftains, they eventually end up emigrating to Turkish urban centers where they work as *hammal* (porter) or low-cost labor in the vast construction sector (M. E. Bozarslan [1966] 2002, 44; Kutschera 1997, 251–252).

The labor environment and ethnically mixed lower-class living quarters play a crucial role in asymmetrical identity interactions (Pelek 2022, 69), through which group solidarity is established and reinforced among the members of the same ethnic group, defined as the 'segmental dimension of the cultural division of labor' (Hechter and Levi 1979, 186). These routine encounters of antagonistic identity narratives and pejorative myths constructed upon imaginary racial peculiarities have made Kurds discover 'themselves' and concern for their ontological security (Rumelili and Çelik 2017, 281). *K-I/02*, who had not been aware of his Kurdish identity in his native Hilvan, narrates how he found his Kurdishness as a teenage worker in the construction sector in western Turkey:

> I went to Tekirdağ in 1975. I was around 13 or 14 years old. There I was on my way, walking down the street towards the apartment we'd rented. Some people around my age, maybe a couple of years older, blocked my path. They encircled me, and while I was quarreling with one saying, 'what's the problem?', I felt another one was putting his hand between my legs from behind. I had a *shalwar* [baggy trousers] on, one that we wear in Urfa and Siverek. Anyway, I grappled with them this-and-that, and I managed to slip away from them, to a distance of 20 to 30 meters. Then one of them shouted, 'Hey man, where's his tail?' Then I realized it was about the tail. They were searching for a tail between my legs: [*in their mind*] the Kurds have a tail, that's the reason why we wear *shalwar*, and they thought I was wearing a *shalwar* to cover up my tail. Probably, their parents had told them so. They said, 'Kurdo, *kıro*! [bumpkin] where's your tail?' [*silence*] That made me remember my Kurdishness; that provoked a wound inside of me. It was damage to my honor, my pride, my dignity, my personality. There I became a Kurd; I realized that I was Kurd. [...] Turks made me remember that I was Kurdish. Otherwise, it was not my parents or the revolutionary stuff so far and so forth. That Kurdishness of mine in that period was the first motivation that drove me until today. It was how I got to know myself. It was the attempt to search for my Kurdishness between my legs. I didn't realize it in Kurdistan because of Kurds; I realized what Kurdistan was thanks to Turks. (K-I/02, male, 54, Hilvan)

These humiliating attitudes towards the peripheral identity coincide with the 'dehumanization of the colonized', which manifests itself in many aspects of social life, including neighborly relations, schooling and administrative dealings (González Casanova [1969] 2006, 196–197). In such cases, the salience of objective cultural distinctions goes beyond the distribution of occupations and rewards, as Hechter notes (1975, 316), involving a broader questioning by the peripheral members in the core. Among Kurdish migrant families in western Turkey, the initial positioning of individuals tends to manifest itself as rejection of and alienation from the disadvantaged identity and its ethno-symbolic elements, the most obvious of which being the mother tongue (Bocheńska 2018, 7). *K-I/04*, one of the founding cadres of the PKK and a current member of KCK Executive Council, explains this attitude of distancing from Kurdishness among his Alevi family living in western Turkey:

> … the tendency in our family was sympathetic towards the revolutionary line. In that period, there was already a general sympathy towards leftists in Turkey. Naturally, this sympathy was based on the revolution-socialism axis then existing in Turkey; we didn't have anything about the Kurdish issue yet. I mean, Kurdishness was something that had gradually been forgotten, which had been declared undesirable. We found ourselves in a paradoxical situation, such as getting rid of the effects of Kurdishness as immediately as possible, getting rid of Kurdishness itself to be free from social pressures. (K-I/04, male, 60, *CONF*)

Conflictive social interactions as a result of internal colonialism have the potential to transform these initial attitudes and reactions towards the 'undesired identity' into quite the opposite forms, manifesting themselves in accepting and embracing it in the

Fanonian sense ([1952] 2001, 109). These interactions play a significant role in identity awareness among the second generation of PKK cadres too. *K-II/09*, whose family immigrated to the Çukurova region, where the Kurdish labor force has traditionally been involved in cotton-growing (Clay 1998), underlines these two commonly observed antipodal attitudes (refusing or embracing the native Kurdish identity) among Kurdish communities living and settling outside of Kurdistan:

> I was around seven years old; I fell out with our neighbor's daughter. Her mother came over and put her hands on her waist. She said, 'You dirty wild Kurds! Get the hell out and go to your Barzani's place!' That has always stuck to my mind, like 'why are Kurds wild?' or 'who's Barzani?' I mean, a seven-year-old child cannot know who Mullah Mustafa Barzani is. Besides, we didn't grow up in Kurdistan; we grew up in a different place. This discourse has always remained in the corner of my mind, my heart. [...] Although you have a period of desiring to assimilate [with Turks], later on, you once again return to your identity, such things help you regain your consciousness and tell you all the time: 'you're a wild Kurd'. You notice this when people stare at you, when you're pushed around, everything orders you to embrace your own identity. (K-II/09, female, 49, Çukurova)

Beginning from the early 1990s, the PKK became active in recruiting people in big Turkish cities, particularly in Istanbul, which hosted many Kurdish citizens pursuing better economic prospects (Marcus 2007, 133). Idealistic Kurdish university students subjected to systematic exclusion from influential positions within the state administration (Tezcür and Gurses 2017, 226) were motivated to intervene in the Kurdish process and sought the organization as an alternative mobilization mechanism. Instead of denying their Kurdishness to occupy a respectable place within the society, adhering to and fighting for this identity became a vital source of motivation. *K-II/07* describes the panorama he witnessed when he arrived in Istanbul from his village in rural Garzan, which made him question the 'colonial situation' and, consequently, led him to join the PKK:

> One of the topics which affected me so much, maybe you've also noticed, you pass by a station, workers are waiting there, all of them come from Kurdistan, don't they? It hurts you terribly. One offers a job, and tens of hands are lifted. You say to yourself, 'why are these people in such a situation?' All of them are Kurds, well, maybe coming from different cities, maybe they're not your relatives, but you speak the same language, or you witness things like this. Moreover, it's always Kurds who work in the toughest jobs like blacksmiths and construction. When you see such things, it hurts you. You look and see every day that a family emigrates from Kurdistan, they come and have nowhere to go, they look for accommodation or a job. Their village is burnt down. I mean, all these become a question of calculation. Sure, it depends on each individual. If you put up with it, you just go forward, and if you can't put up with it, you look for a way out. (K-II/07, male, 42, Bitlis)

Economic and structural characteristics and the intensification of asymmetric war between the Turkish state and PKK guerrilla through the 1990s further exacerbated the conditions of internal colonialism in the 2000s. Growing income inequality, high unemployment rates, internal displacements, and labor mobilization and unplanned urbanization due to neoliberal policies from the 1990s onwards accelerated this process (Boratav 2003, 171–75). Apart from the low-cost labor flow towards industrialized western Turkey, forced migration as a result of evacuation and burning of villages in rural Kurdistan was estimated at around 380,000 in official state statistics and between three and four million according to Kurdish civil society organizations (Keser 2010, 53; Küçükkırca 2012, 200–201), amounting to a large-scale internal displacement (H. Bozarslan 2009, 70). These consequences of conflict caused severe threats to the ontological security of Kurds, fueling societal polarization further (Rumelili and Çelik 2017, 280). *K-III/04*, who immigrated to Istanbul after his village in rural Botan had been burnt down, explains the attitude taken by his schoolmates based on the very same type of pejorative stereotypes during his primary school years:

> I was constantly asking questions, like 'why can't we live like normal human beings? Why are we marginalized as others?' Well, there was a lot of labeling. Even when we were going to school during childhood, I remember those primary school years; it was like 'these are Kurds, these are kıro [bumpkin], they came from mountains, these are Kurds with a tail' Well, there were many insults. Sure, we were new in that environment; we were trying to comprehend certain things. (K-III/04, male, 36, Botan)

Cultural division of labor also led to discriminatory attitudes towards the members of disadvantaged ethnic group. Individuals in this generation frequently reported that they had been subjected to discrimination in terms of distribution of occupations and salary policies, which made them feel they were treated as second-class citizens. *K-III/06*, who went to Gemlik, a district of the western industrial city of Bursa, said:

> All of us, those who had to go to metropolises, hear stuff like, 'Oh! We used to have a Kurdish neighbor; she was cleaning our windows. She was very nice!' I realized many things in metropolises; they make you feel like you're second-class. Sure, I have [Turkish] friends, I have quite cherished friends, but in society, they make you feel that you don't belong here! For example, a mother once turned and said to me, 'If you didn't come here, our children wouldn't stay hungry here; you come and take all jobs, and our children stay hungry!' Because you're a low-cost laborer. When you have a job interview, you don't have a home or anything in that city like them; you've gone to a metropolis, most probably you've got a family [to take care of], there's no bread [income], when the children are involved, of course, the emotional side of the issue is quite different. If he [employer] employs a worker for 500,000 Turkish liras, he offers you 300,000. You even don't ask how much the other one works for; you accept either way. (K-III/06, female, 38, Lice)

As observed among the previous generation, the interviewee affirms that the reaction developed due to having been subjected to racist comments by Turkish workmates pushed her to embrace Kurdish identity in a protesting manner:

> I'd just completed one month or two at work. My colleagues told me, 'as your Turkish is proper unless you say that you're Kurdish, nobody would figure it out!' It's curious, I hadn't lived in Amed [Diyarbakır], so I didn't have an Amed accent. That provoked a reaction in me, and indeed, I realized this later on, I began to put some Amed accent into my Turkish. I mean, I felt embarrassed as my Turkish was proper; I did feel embarrassed. I didn't understand it much, but from that moment on, I realized that I'd put an Amed accent into my Turkish. Especially when I was talking to Turks and those people who think that way, I included Kurdish words in my Turkish. I kind of forced myself. (K-III/06)

Although the *de facto* cultural recognition of Kurdish identity in Turkey had begun in the early 2000s, it had little impact on preventing discrimination and otherization of Kurdishness through 'exclusive recognition' (Saraçoğlu 2011) based on the social reproduction of pejorative attributions. Besides, the intensification of conflict and the constant propaganda on 'separatist terrorism' strengthened prejudices and discriminatory attitudes towards Kurds even further. As demonstrated by Bilali, Çelik and Ok, during such periods of high-intensity conflict, Turks were more likely to view the PKK as representative of all Kurds (2014, 258–260), labeling them all as potential 'separatist terrorists' (Uzun 2015, 115). This created social pressure on Kurds in their living space in Turkish metropolises (K-III/01) and labor environments, as narrated by *K-III/07*:

> We worked in construction there in Muğla along with the family members and some friends. There the foreman who gave us the job was a Turk from Aksaray. He was a good person. However, there were sub-contractors from Kayseri who'd undertaken the rest of the work in the construction project. Apparently, they also set their eye on the painting job. One day the foreman came and said: 'Well, folks, I'm delighted with your performance. Although you're Kurds, I have no problem with you at all; however, this foreman from Kayseri walked into the director's office and made a complaint saying stuff like, "These are terrorists; they employ terrorists here." I suppose I won't be able to work with you anymore.' The son of my elder uncle went directly to talk to that subcontractor foreman and said, 'Why did you do such a thing? Why are you taking the bread out of our mouth? We're here, just working. You're working too, like us. Let us earn our bread, don't stand in our way'. Anyway, while discussing, they attacked us. [...] Then the gendarmes came over and took us all to into custody. Both sides told their sides of the story there. After receiving some insults at the gendarmerie station, we were released as neither side complained. Once freed, we said, 'let's get back to our home, there's nothing here for us!' (K-III/07, male, 32, Doğubeyazıt)

Almost all individuals who had spent a considerable period living in western Turkey before joining the PKK reported similar life experiences. However, the consequences of internal colonialism have equally affected those who joined the PKK directly from Kurdistan, which is worth analyzing from the same perspective.

2.3 Social Consequences of Internal Colonialism in Northern Kurdistan

Besides the interactions between members of the dominant culture and the subordinate community living in the core, denigration of the 'indigenous' culture is also observed among the very members of the peripheral nation themselves. Along with the political incorporation of the periphery, dominant cultural forms and symbols acquire a superordinate status among the indigenous elites, creating a social conflict between the 'gentry' and 'rude and barbaric' countrymen (Hechter 1975, 109–10). Those who stick with indigenous rituals and lack good command of the dominant vernacular are qualified as inferior members of the society, not only by the members of core culture but also the peripheral gentry of their own ethnic group.

Kurdishness, depicted and reproduced as an archaic and therefore undesirable identity by the Turkish state institutions, becomes a source of shame for most

Kurds, provoking a social conflict between those who refuse it and those who embrace it. Economic relations between Kurdish peasants and the Turkish bourgeoisie have long been considered a driving factor for the sense of inferiority among the former, socially reproduced by intermediating actors such as sheikhs, aghas, urban civil servants and tradesmen (M. E. Bozarslan [1966] 2002, 101). This relationship creates a subtle but severe cleavage based on an urban-versus-peasant dichotomy: While the former is depicted as a positive model of the modern and literate Kurd with a good command of the Turkish language, the latter *gundîs* (peasants) are considered primitive, an obstacle to being a 'civilized' citizen. *K-I/08*, a native of rural Mardin, describes the sense of solidarity among his fellow *gundî* schoolmates against discriminatory attitudes by urban children:

> In that period, this contradiction between the urban and the rural existed during childhood, even at primary school. For this reason, we had a group formed by obligation, a group consisting of children who didn't know one another. Due to the attitude of those townie children who looked down upon us, who made fun of us, who were unfair to us, we, the children of peasant origin, were coming together. […] … when there was an attack, we resisted with all our might; I mean, we didn't let them get away with it; we tried to take our revenge. Well, we also formed our group that way; it began in the first or second grade [of primary school] and lasted until we got to know the PKK. (K-I/08, male, 61, Derik)

This common perception based on institutionalization of ethnic group categories reifying intergroup comparisons (Lieberman and Singh 2012) is observed among all other individuals in this period. While Kurdishness with its symbolic universe and traditional way of life is characterized as a sign of primitiveness, the dominant identity is institutionally promoted and socially praised by Kurdish urban elites and tribal leaders. Apart from institutional mechanisms that imposed the symbolic elements of Turkish nationalism such as language, flag, folk dances and anthem (K-I/02, 05, 06, 08, 09), Kurds themselves also showed a certain degree of eagerness to acquire and reproduce those elements (Cansız 2014, 35).[7] The PKK leadership harshly criticized this subordination among native Kurds, encouraging the young recruits to stand against and refuse the role assigned them by the colonial power:

> The Kurd is wild, the Kurd is stupid, the Kurd this-and-that', colonialism has made a clump of false definitions. We are nothing in the language of colonialism. […] Why would you play the poor, the dumb? We have not opened the path to life a little; we have opened it extremely wide. If you say 'we will live like old Kurds', no. There is no way back to the old Kurd. If you do, I will stand in your way; I will shoot you all to hell! We say 'no' to life as the Kurd that the enemy wants us to be. (translated from Öcalan [1996] 2009, 231–32)

K-I/01, a Zaza-speaking Alevi Kurd from Varto, narrates an example of a contradictory situation that impacted his later life, making him question the reasons behind it. This occurred when he was about to begin primary school in his native village:

> When I was about to go to primary school, my mother took me to register at school. We knew the teacher; she was almost from our circle, a family friend, she would come to visit us. When my mother took me to register, she spoke in the Zaza language with the teacher. I mean, the teacher normally knew Zazaki, she was local and spoke it at home, but she didn't respond to it there because it was a school, as if it'd broken the formality, as if my mother had betrayed that formality. But that attitude of her left a severe psychological mark on my family, on my mother, and it affected me too. (K-I/01, male, 52, Varto)

Compared to the discrimination that Kurds living in western Turkey are subjected to, conflictive identity definitions among Kurds living in Kurdistan constitute a larger-scale threat to the 'ontological security' of Kurds as a nation. This means that asymmetric conflict and horizontal inequalities do not only have impacts on intergroup cleavages between Turks and Kurds but also on intragroup narratives constructed by Kurds regarding their ethnic identity. Conflictive encounters between the 'civilized' and the 'uncivilized' form part of everyday life through following generations, and are crucial in later political socialization and militancy periods. *K-II/12* narrates one of her own childhood experiences that led her to react against symbolic violence through colonial institutions by resorting to political violence in the later periods of her life:

[7] Beşikçi's survey-based ethnographic study among Alikan tribe members provides significant results in this respect: When they were asked about the reasons that motivated them to participate in Turkish military service, 'Learning how to write and read Turkish' (45.9%) and 'Being able to socialize in towns, markets etc. without being embarrassed' (21.6%), and 'gaining knowledge' (10.8%) were the most important motivations, while 'service to the motherland (16.2%) and 'obligation' (5.4%) remained significantly low (Beşikçi [1969]2014, 240).

> The best example which comes to my mind is that I was sick, and my mother took me to the doctor. The doctor was talking to me, and he was a Kurd himself. He asked about my complaints. My mother was answering in Kurdish, but I answered in Turkish. He ignored my mother and began to talk only to me. My mother knew my symptoms and problems better; I wasn't able to express them as well as she could. However, as I was speaking Turkish, the doctor, who was from my identity but had accepted and got used to being a Turk, or a fake Turk, pushed my mother aside and said, 'You shut up! You don't know how to speak!' in a humiliating way. He addressed himself to me. Yes, I spoke that day, but when we got home, I really felt so bad. [...] This particular example was the one that has stuck to me, and afterward, I've lived through the same thing in every institution I've been to. It'd been triggered off once inside of me. Everywhere I went, once we spoke Kurdish, there were many eyes humiliating me in my own country, my own land, my own city, many people keeping an ear to the ground. It isn't necessary to beat me there because there is already violence. (K-II/12, female, 47, Batman)

Almost all participants from all the generations analyzed in this study reported that the first violent practices they experienced were of symbolic character. These experiences usually corresponded to the secondary socialization environment during the schooling period, which best exemplifies the 'ethnicization of the state' (Tezcür and Gurses 2017, 213). Republican schools appear to be the most visible mechanisms through which the subordinate culture is substituted with the dominant national elements. Most individuals affirm by retrospectively constructing their memories; however, they only become aware of the colonial character of these institutions once they are engaged in political activities in their early adolescence, as *K-II/01* narrates:

> At schools, they were saying, 'Kurds don't exist, you must forget this language, it's archaic, you shouldn't speak this language', and pressure like this was being exerted. I had an advantage, though, as my teacher was kind of leftist, she didn't put much pressure [on us]; however, the pressure did exist at the school in general, and this shaped you. Even when I said one day, 'Dad, are we Kurd or Turk? Why is it that Kurds are bad?' My father said, 'No, we're Kurds, and Kurds aren't bad; why do you say so?' I said, 'because they always say so at the school'. [...] Well, this was the sort of tone given to a child, which naturally gave way to doubts. It was like, 'Once for all, we're humans like them too, why do they ignore us? What did Kurds do? Why? Aren't we a people?' Well, maybe you're not fully conscious, but this makes you doubt and settles in your subconscious. Once you grow up and see some facts, you say, 'Aha! Sure, so it was for this reason!' I mean, as you grow older, your questioning gets further deeper. (K-II/01, female, 38, Diyarbakır)

K-III/11, from the following generation, also affirms the very same symbolic and physical violence exercised in these institutions when entering the classroom for the first time:

> Our daily language was Kurdish. We walked in, a strange place for us! I saw that the teacher called us, saying 'walk in', so we did. If I'm not mistaken, he asked our name, and we didn't understand. We stared at each other. As he asked a second time, his voice raised. We stared at each other once again; we couldn't say anything. Then, this time as he asked, he began to shout, and my brother, in a panic, said, '*Ev çi dibêje?*' [what does he say?] in Kurdish, and all happened at that moment! The teacher began to beat us, saying, 'it's forbidden to speak Kurdish here!' That day was the first day that I tasted blood. At that time, we saw signs for the first time in what kind of place we were living. The fact that those two children went to sit down in their seats in a welter of blood was something like the beginning of a movie for us. In fact, that process mapped out my present. (K-III/11, male, 27, Garzan)

Among the last generation who joined the PKK in the early 2000s, the positioning of Kurds towards Kurdishness largely depends on spatial variables, constituting a consistent link with the empirical evidence proposed by Tezcür and Gurses concerning Kurdish nationalist mobilization (2017). Once again, those who live in rural Kurdistan, more isolated from the state influence and in closer contact with the guerrilla, tend to preserve their ethnic characteristics (K-III/04, 06, 07, 11, 12). In this period, the Kurdish liberation movement led by the PKK became more present in more cosmopolitan towns and cities. The phenomenon of *Serhıldans* (popular uprisings), which had widespread impacts since the early 1990s in Kurdistan, and the penetration of the PKK into the working-class struggle opened the door for the guerrilla to get involved in urban political activities. In cosmopolitan cities like Van, where Kurds, Turks and Persians coexist in the same life and labor environment, class conflict develops along with national conflict. *K-III/08*, who joined the PKK after the *Newroz* of 2008, explains how her involvement in labor movements led her to join the PKK:

> Before that, I didn't have much consciousness of Kurdishness, national consciousness or anything related to the PKK and Kurdish movement whatsoever. As I've said, it was rather the syndical struggle, the working-class struggle, that pushed us a bit into the [Kurdish] struggle. Sure, when you get involved in the labor struggle in Kurdistan, as a natural result, you end up getting to know closer the national consciousness, national struggle too. Because it's this way in Kurdistan,

> both struggles are intermingled; labor struggle and national struggle go together. (K-III/08, female, 28, Van)

Despite the clash among asymmetrical identity definitions and the continuing institutional dominance of official state discourse, the long-lasting armed conflict extends the idea of defense and preservation of Kurdish identity in northern Kurdistan. Although the impacts of the colonial situation carry on eroding the use of ethno-symbolic national elements, they equally have counterproductive effects on Kurdish nationalist sectors who are concerned for their ontological (in)security as a people.

3 Conclusions

The internal colonial setting in the case of Kurds in Turkey has several social and political impacts both in and outside of Kurdistan, going beyond the mere economic reverberations of the cultural division of labor. The social consequences of colonialism in everyday life practices, which begin with in-family relations and continue through the secondary socialization processes like schooling and labor environment, consolidate the feeling of injustice and concerns for ethnic survival and ontological security of Kurds as a people. While economic factors as such are not directly voiced to a significant degree among the motivations and justifications of armed struggle by actors, social consequences deriving from inequalities as a result of internal colonial structure feature prominently in their agenda. Qualitative data analyzed in this study supports the findings of existing literature based on quantitative indicators regarding the role of horizontal inequalities, political and economic discrimination, and exclusion in ethnonationalist mobilization and collective violence. Life-history analysis of three generations of PKK militants affirms the impact of life experiences based on grievances related to multidimensional inequalities. Besides inequalities in terms of economic and political opportunities, the discrimination and exclusion that Kurds are subjected to reproduce the sense of being second-class citizens and, consequently, influence the decision-making process concerning armed struggle. The theory of internal colonialism, in this sense, not only sheds light on the persistence of Kurdish national identity in and out of Kurdistan but also points to a subtle underlying structural cause in the emergence and continuity of political violence due to the social consequences of the very same phenomenon. Broader social and political impacts of internal colonial structure on the Kurdish communities living in Turkey are yet to be further investigated.

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