National Colonialism: Colonization and Decolonization in Kurdistan

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the colonization of Kurdistan through the lens of *national colonialism*, a novel conceptual framework that addresses critical gaps in postcolonial and nationalism studies regarding colonial relations within nation-states. While existing scholarship on the Kurdish question has approached it through paradigms of national oppression, ethno-political conflict, or cultural discrimination, these frameworks remain partial—either neglecting economic exploitation, downplaying cultural racism, or failing to account for the systemic nature of Kurdish subjugation across all four colonizing states (Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey). This study contends that the Kurdish question must be re-theorized as a colonial project, one intrinsic to the nation-state form itself, combining political subjugation, economic exaltation, and racist exclusion.

The dissertation advances the concept of *national colonialism* to explain how nation-states, through capitalist uneven development, nation-building and maintenance, as well as nationalist homogenization and coercive minoritization, create and perpetuate colonial domination over non-sovereign peoples like the Kurds. Using a mix of primary and secondary sources, it traces the historical construction of Kurdish colonization, detailing its three pillars: (1) political subjugation (e.g., bans on self-determination), (2) economic exploitation (e.g., underdevelopment), and (3) racial regimes (e.g., anti-Kurdish racism institutionalized in law, education, and everyday practice). Through comparative analysis of all four states, it reveals how national colonialism operates discursively and materially.

The study also analyzes Kurdish decolonial thought, contrasting mainstream state-centric solutions (e.g., independence or autonomy) with Abdullah Ocalan's *democratic confederalism*. Focusing on the latter and framing it as a *democratic decolonization* project, the dissertation argues it offers a radical alternative by linking Kurdish liberation to the dismantling of capitalist modernity, the nation-state form, and hierarchical conceptions of nationhood. Instead of replicating state sovereignty, democratic confederalism envisions emancipation through decentralized, anti-capitalist, and feminist self-organization—a model with implications for other colonized peoples.

By synthesizing theoretical innovation with empirical rigor, this research redefines the Kurdish question as a case of national colonialism while contributing to broader debates on colonialism, decolonization, nation-state, and post-state political futures. Its conclusions challenge the naturalization of nation-state violence and offer a framework for analyzing similar colonial dynamics in other contested territories.

Dedication

To my mother, Mohtaram Mahmoudi — my first and most profound teacher.

Though the world of written words was not hers to navigate, she charted for me a path to this one. With relentless sacrifice, unwavering belief, and a strength that required no inscription, she did everything to ensure I could reach this height. This degree is not my achievement alone, but the culmination of her life's work, and the generous support of others who helped me along the way. Her signature is not on this page, but her handprint is on every one.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

0.1. The Kurdish Question: An Overview

The Kurdish question i.e. the suppression of Kurdish people's right to self-determination and their struggles to realize this right has been a defining issue in Middle Eastern politics for over a century. As arguably the largest ethnic group without a sovereign state in the world, the Kurds have been central to regional conflicts, international diplomacy, and debates over self-determination, minority rights, and postcolonial state-building (Gunter 2017; McDowall 1992). This stems in part from geopolitical significance of the great Kurdistan, or the land of the Kurds, which is divided among Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. The majority of Kurds live in the great Kurdistan, but diasporic communities of Kurds also live in Russia, Lebanon, Georgia, Azerbaijan as well as Europe and North America.

The Kurdish question varies in scope and intensity across the four primary states where Kurds reside, reflecting different state policies and Kurdish political strategies. However, commonalities are significant and the differences in conditions to which the Kurds are subjected and the methods of their resistance across the great Kurdistan must not be exaggerated. Generally, states dominating the Kurds have approached the Kurdish question in a variety of ways ranging from military repression and enforcing assimilationist policies to limited concessions in all parts of Kurdistan. But, while a distinct Kurdish identity was denied for decades in Syria and Turkey, this was never the case in Iran and Iraq.

In response to state repression, Kurdish political movements have evolved from fragmented tribal uprisings, initially led by religious figures with trans-tribal appeal, to sophisticated nationalist and post-nationalist movements. Early 20th-century rebellions—such as

Sheikh Mahmoud Barzanji's revolt in Iraq (1919-1924) and the Ararat Rebellion in Turkey (1927-1930)—were largely local and lacked a unified ideology (McDowall 2021; Jwaideh 2006). However, the mid-20th century saw the rise of modern Kurdish nationalism, exemplified by the short-lived Republic of Mahabad (1946) in Iran, which, though crushed, became a symbol of Kurdish aspirations (Entessar 2010; Vali 2011). By the late 20th century, Kurdish movements adopted more structured political ideologies. This is most exemplified by the paradigm shift in the political doctrine of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) from pursuing an independent Kurdish state to a post-nationalist, stateless democracy.

The Kurdish question has never merely remained a domestic matter of the states ruling over Kurdistan. On the regional scale, all these states have extended their meddling in Kurdish politics to other parts of Kurdistan, reaching beyond their borders. This has been evident, for instance, during Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) when both sides sheltered the Kurdish political organizations of the other side as well as Turkey's cross-border operations in Syria and Iraq against Kurdish forces, which further demonstrate the regional spillover of the Kurdish question. Imperialist forces and global superpowers have also engaged with the Kurdish question nearly from its creation, and this involvement has spanned from partition of Ottoman Kurdistan after WWI to tactical American support to various Kurdish movements in Iraq and Syria. Transnational Kurdish activism has also shaped international discourse. The PKK has mobilized a global solidarity network, particularly in Europe (Baser 2011). Meanwhile, the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq has engaged in diplomatic lobbying, portraying itself as a stable Western ally (Natali, 2010). The international dimension of the Kurdish question thus highlights the tension between realpolitik and normative support for self-determination (Kirişci & Winrow 1997).

Furthermore, The Kurds' demand for autonomy or independence tests the limits of the right to self-determination, enshrined in the UN Charter (Article 1.2) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. However, international law tends to privilege territorial integrity over secessionist claims, except in cases of colonial domination or extreme oppression (Cassese 1995). The Iraqi Kurds' quest for independence highlights this tension. Although the KRG has asserted its entitlement to pursue independence through the principle of internal self-determination, the Iraqi central government and neighboring states have effectively constrained this aspiration, compelling the KRG to operate within the framework of autonomous regional governance (Weller 2008). Despite Kosovo's 2008 precedent, Western powers have selectively endorsed secession, refusing to apply the same logic to Kurdistan (Ker-Lindsay 2013). Western governments often ignore Kurdish repression when allies (e.g., Turkey) are perpetrators, exposing hypocrisy in human rights advocacy. For example, the EU's silence on Turkey's attacks on Rojava undermines its normative commitment to minority rights (Dirik 2022). Further, the US abandonment of the YPG after the ISIS defeat reveals instrumentalization of Kurdish rights (Ahram 2019). Moreover, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), inspired by Ocalan's theory of democratic confederalism, presents a post-Westphalian vision, that is, decentralized governance, multi-ethnic pluralism and women co-leading all institutions (Allsopp 2014).

0.2. The Dissertation's Problematic

This overview of the Kurdish question begs a major question: what is the nature of the Kurdish question? The existing body of scholarly work on Kurdish studies consistently addresses the systemic oppression faced by the Kurdish people, framing it primarily as a violation of their fundamental right to self-determination. However, despite this shared concern, researchers

within the field have developed a variety of theoretical perspectives to explain the underlying causes and defining characteristics of the Kurdish question. These interpretations often diverge significantly, sometimes even presenting contradictory viewpoints, reflecting the complexity and multifaceted nature of the issue as examined by different scholars. In other words, while the denial of Kurdish self-determination serves as a unifying theme across much of the academic discourse, the analytical frameworks used to understand the historical roots, political dimensions, and socio-cultural aspects of the Kurdish struggle vary widely. Several scholars and Kurdish political figures (Ghassemlou 1996; Hassanpour 1999; Kendal 1980) interpret the Kurdish question through a Marxist lens, framing it as a form of national oppression. Hassanpour (2003) specifically traces its origins to early 20th-century European imperialist colonialism, as well as the nationalist policies of Turkish, Persian, and Arab states in the modern Middle East. He argues that the core of the issue lies in the systematic denial of Kurdish self-rule and self-determination, rejecting any reduction of the struggle to mere questions of "cultural identity" or "cultural survival" (Hassanpour 1999). Kendal (1980) offers a more structured Marxist analysis, defining national oppression as the totality of political, economic, and cultural discrimination imposed by a dominant nation upon a subjugated one. While he equates national oppression with colonialism, his focus remains on Bakur (Turkey's Kurdistan), which he describes as an exploited "colony" whose resources benefit the "Turkish metropole", alongside severe political and cultural repression (Kendal 1980, 82-7).

In contrast, other scholars approach the Kurdish question from a liberal-democratic perspective, analyzing it either as a consequence of suppressed pluralism and ethno-cultural diversity (Gunes 2012; Gunes and Zeydanlıoglu 2014) or as an ethno-political conflict emerging from modernization and Westernization efforts (Yegen 1999). These differing theoretical

frameworks highlight the complexities of Kurdish oppression, illustrating how ideological perspectives shape interpretations of its causes and manifestations.

The various theoretical frameworks that analyze the Kurdish question—whether through the lens of national oppression, ethno-political conflict, or ethno-cultural discrimination—all share a fundamental limitation: none offers a holistic account of the Kurdish question. Political and cultural analyses tend to neglect the systematic economic exploitation of Kurdistan, reducing its significance or omitting it altogether. Conversely, the national oppression framework, while highlighting structural discrimination, often marginalizes cultural oppression as a secondary concern. Even when it does address cultural discrimination (e.g. Hassanpour 1999; Kendal 1980), it provides a simplistic interpretation, failing to engage with the deeper mechanisms of cultural racism and its subtle manifestations. Moreover, discussions on anti-Kurdish racism remain scarce and underdeveloped. On the rare occasions when race and racism are examined, they are typically presented in a descriptive or historical manner, lacking deeper theoretical engagement. Even in the few instances where an attempt is made to theorize anti-Kurdish racism (Zeydanlıoglu 2008), the analysis falls short of capturing its intricate and multi-layered nature. To begin addressing these gaps, a paradigm shift is necessary. The Kurdish question must be re-examined through a colonial framework, recognizing the enduring structures of domination, economic exploitation, racialized oppression, and cultural erasure that define the Kurdish experience.

Several attempts have been made to explain the Kurdish question as a case of colonization. Hikmet Kıvılcımlı, a pioneering Turkish Marxist thinker, was among the first to articulate the systemic oppression faced by Kurds in Turkey as early as the 1930s. His perspective stood in stark contrast to the prevailing views of his time, as the Turkish Left would

continue to disregard or outright reject his analysis of the Kurdish question for decades afterward. Kıvılcımlı (1979) boldly characterized Kemalist policies in Kurdistan as colonial in nature, asserting that the region was subjected to violent subjugation and economic plunder. He argued that the fundamental objective of the Turkish state in Kurdistan was the total annihilation of Kurdish identity—not only refusing to acknowledge the collective being of the Kurds, but also methodically destroying their cultural foundations and violently silencing any expression of their political will. These radical critiques of Kemalism and its colonial relationship with Kurdistan would later find strong echoes in the ideological framework of the PKK and its leader, Abdullah Ocalan. In fact, Ocalan's earliest articulation of Kurdistan's colonization appeared in Kurdistan Devriminin Yolu (The Road to the Kurdistan Revolution), a foundational manifesto of the PKK that laid out the movement's revolutionary objectives. Kıvılcımlı's early theoretical contributions thus served as an intellectual precursor to the PKK's later analyses of Kurdish oppression under the Turkish state.

In The PKK's Manifesto (1978), Ocalan unequivocally frames Kurdistan's condition as one of colonialism, describing it as a divided colony subjected to external domination. He contends that the modern history of Kurdistan—ever since its partition among four nation-states—has been defined by relentless occupation, systematic violence, and economic exploitation. For Ocalan, this trajectory represents nothing less than an ongoing colonial project, perpetuated through different historical phases. While acknowledging that Kurdish lands endured forms of colonial subjugation under ancient empires (including Persian, Roman, and later Arab Muslim rule) within slave-based and feudal social systems, Ocalan—unsurprisingly, given his political stance—focuses most critically on modern colonial oppression. He identifies contemporary Kurdistan's colonization as part of what he terms the "imperialist-colonial" order

of capitalism, distinguishing it from earlier historical forms of domination (PKK 1978, 29). This analytical emphasis reflects both his Marxist theoretical influences and his immediate revolutionary concerns as a Kurdish liberation leader confronting 20th-century state oppression.

Building upon the earlier frameworks established by Kıvılcımlı and Ocalan, İsmail Beşikçi (2015) advanced the argument that Kurdistan's geopolitical fragmentation—its division among four sovereign states (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria)—along with the deliberate denial of Kurdish sovereignty over land, resources, and political self-determination, collectively constitute what he termed an "international colony" (27-28). Unlike conventional colonial models in which a single imperial power dominates a subject territory, Beşikçi emphasized that Kurdistan represents a distinctive case of multilateral colonization, wherein four nation-states simultaneously enforce structures of subjugation, economic exploitation, and cultural erasure against the Kurdish people. In developing this concept, Beşikçi aligned with Kıvılcımlı and Ocalan in identifying the interplay between global imperialist forces and regional ruling elites as instrumental in sustaining Kurdish oppression. He highlighted how Western powers, through geopolitical maneuvering and indirect complicity, have historically reinforced the division of Kurdistan, while local regimes in Ankara, Tehran, Damascus, and Baghdad function as direct enforcers of colonial violence. However, Beşikçi placed primary responsibility on these four states for the most egregious violations—including military repression, forced assimilation, and resource exploitation—underscoring their role as the principal architects of colonization of Kurdistan. His analysis thus reframed the Kurdish struggle not merely as a regional ethnic conflict, but as a structurally unique form of internationalized colonial domination requiring a transnational lens of critique.

Recent scholarly discourse has witnessed a surge in critical examinations of Kurdistan's colonization, with contemporary works increasingly engaging with anti-colonial theoretical frameworks (Kermanian 2024; Matin 2022; Soleimani and Mohammadpour 2020; Sunca 2023). These studies diverge in their conceptual approaches: Soleimani and Mohammadpour (2020) frame the Kurdish experience in Iran as a manifestation of internal colonialism, while others challenge the dominant postcolonial paradigm that reductively associates colonialism solely with Western imperialism. Scholars like Kermanian (2024) and Matin (2020) critique this "West-Rest binary", arguing that it obscures the complex dynamics of inter-subaltern oppression—colonial relations perpetuated between non-Western societies, which remain undertheorized in mainstream postcolonial studies.

Despite these advances, the literature exhibits notable gaps. Some studies (Beşikçi (2015; Kıvılcımlı (1979); PKK 1978; Soleimani and Mohammadpour 2020) often lack rigorous theoretical engagement with broader colonial studies, leaving their analyses of colonial structures underdeveloped. Meanwhile, more recent scholarship (e.g., Kermanian 2024; Matin 2022; Sunca 2023) tends to avoid thorough documentation of the exact ways in which colonization of Kurdistan was historically established and maintained across the four nation-states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Additionally, these works insufficiently address the modern dimensions of colonial oppression in Kurdistan—particularly racial orders and capitalist exploitation—which distinguish contemporary Kurdish subjugation from earlier, pre-modern forms of domination. This oversight limits a comprehensive understanding of how colonial power operates today through intertwined systems of racial hierarchy, economic exploitation, and state violence.

0.3. Research Questions

In light of this critical review of the accounts of Kurdish question, in this PhD dissertation, I intend to answer the following set of questions: 1) What qualifies the oppression of the Kurds as a case of colonization and in what ways does it differ from classical understandings of colonialism? 2) How and in what exact ways has the colonization of Kurdistan and the Kurds materialized historically? 3) What have been the concrete responses of the Kurdish struggles to counter the colonization of the Kurds and decolonize Kurdistan? To answer these research questions, I argue that existing analytical accounts of the Kurdish question have thus far proven insufficient in both theorizing the essential character of the colonization of Kurdistan, and clearly outlining its full dimensions. I further argue that the current body of scholarship on colonialism remains incomplete in its conceptualization of colonial relations in the nation-state form. Therefore, this PhD dissertation presents the concept of national colonialism as a new concept to analyze not only the colonization of Kurds and Kurdistan but generally the colonial relations in the nation-state form.

0.4.National Colonialism: An Alternative Concept to Explain Colonial Relations in the Nation-State Form

National colonialism refers to colonial relations in the nation-state form that manifest in the combination of political subjugation, economic exploitation and racist exclusion of the periphery and its population by the core. Although the concept of internal colonialism (Casanova 1965; Hechter 1977; Pinderhughes 2011) addresses colonial relations in the nation-state form, it rarely explicates the national character of colonial relations in nation-states, that is, the structural linkages of the conceptualization and practical realization of the nation with the creation and perpetuation of colonial relations in the nation-state form. National colonialism is national

because it derives, in addition to the uneven capitalist development, from the tenets of nationalism as an ideology and the processes of nation-building. Unlike the concept of internal colonialism, national colonialism foregrounds the links between the structural elements of the nation-state and the establishment and reproduction of colonial relations, hence challenging rather than assuming the material and imaginary boundaries of the nation-state. It follows that colonial tendencies are intrinsic to the nation-state and nationalism, and unless a state faces greater force opposing its colonial ambitions internally or externally, it can operationalize these tendencies and consolidate colonial relations with the periphery. By identifying the tendency to form colonial relations as intrinsic to the nation-state form, the concept of national colonialism goes beyond the east–west distinction in theorizing colonialism and underscores the universal character of colonial relations in the sense that all nation-states are prone to forming colonial core-periphery relations regardless of the national or cultural identity of the colonizers. National colonialism emphasizes a materialist conception of colonialism that, unlike culturalist narratives, encompasses both external and internal forms of colonialism and recognizes the othering and minoritization of human populations as an integral aspect of the processes of nation-building (Mamdani 2020; Miley 2018), and fertile grounds for the formation of colonial relations.

0.5. Chapter Outline

Chapter one begins with a literature review of colonization, exploring the meaning of the concept of colonialism, its various forms and multiple dimensions. Separating modern colonialism from pre-modern colonialism, and building on the existing scholarship, I will define colonialism as a relation of domination that manifests in the combination of political subjugation, economic exploitation and racist exclusion. In a colonial situation, colonizers make extraordinary material gains out of a land by way of territorial control, appropriating material resources and

exploiting the labor of the colonized. This exploitative relation is propped up by a colonial infrastructure that is built upon denying self-rule to the colonized and racially excluding them.

I will then proceed to articulate the theoretical framework of this dissertation by, first, presenting a critical appraisal of the literature on the concept of internal colonialism and identifying its flaws, and, second, discussing the ways in which the ideology of nationalism as well as the processes of nation-building contribute to the formation of colonial relations in the nation-state form. This is followed by introducing and explaining the concept of national colonialism as a theoretical invention to analyze colonization in the nation-state in general, and explicate the Kurdish question in particular. Chapter one ends with a literature review of colonization of Kurdistan. The next three chapters contain the empirical details regarding the three hallmarks of colonial relations, that is, political subjugation, economic exploitation and racist exclusion in the context of Kurdistan.

In chapter two, I will discuss the political and economic levels of colonization of Kurdistan at length using the corresponding empirical data. In the first part of this chapter, political subjugation of Kurdistan in its four parts is discussed, outlining major historical events that shaped the Kurdish question as well as the Kurdish struggles for self-determination. Relying on secondary sources, this historiography will be primarily focused on a timeline which spans from the emergence of modern nation-states and the rise of Kurdish nationalist movements in the Middle East in the aftermath of World War I. In the second part of the chapter, the economic exploitation or instrumentalization of the great Kurdistan will be detailed. Concentrating on the underdevelopment of Kurdistan and relying on a mix of primary and secondary sources, the empirical evidence concerning the economic colonization of each part of Kurdistan will be

presented in terms of the two broad categories of deindustrialization and standards of living. Both categories; however, will be broken down to smaller and specified categories.

Drawing on secondary sources, chapter three and four are devoted to the cultural or ideological aspect of colonization of Kurdistan, namely, the racialization and racist exclusion of the Kurds. Chapter three begins with a brief section identifying and examining the core structural elements of anti-Kurdish racial regimes as manifested in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Due to the complex historical depth and highly intricate nature of anti-Kurdish racism in Turkey – which demands more extensive analysis than can be adequately covered in brief – the remainder of this chapter will focus specifically on examining Turkey's racial order in comprehensive detail. The particular longevity and sophistication of racist exclusion of the Kurds within the Turkish context necessitates dedicated scholarly attention to properly unpack its mechanisms and historical development. Anti-Kurdish racism in the nation-states of Iran, Iraq and Syria will be outlined in chapter four.

Chapter 5 discusses Abdullah Ocalan's theory of democratic confederalism as a decolonizing framework. Prior to Ocalan, and in line with the dominant view of national liberation movements in the 20th century, an independent Kurdish state was predominantly seen as the answer to colonization of Kurdistan. However, I argue that Ocalan's theory of democratic confederalism not only offers a solution to the Kurdish question in particular, it also presents a decolonizing framework in general. I will begin the chapter by thoroughly examining Ocalan's early and later views on decolonization, analyzing the shifts in his thinking about liberation and decolonization. Next, I will situate democratic confederalism within contemporary discussions on the nation-state and its connections to colonization and decolonization, exploring the potential contributions of Ocalan's theory to these debates. This will include a critical evaluation of the

theoretical and practical shortcomings of democratic confederalism. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a brief reflection on the relevance of democratic confederalism for global anti-colonial movements.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Framework

1.1. The Concept of Colonialism

What is meant by colonialism? The goal of this chapter is to unpack the meaning of colonialism and its various forms and dimensions to see if it is theoretically justified to understand the oppression of the Kurds as a case of colonization. If so, the next step will be to determine the extent to which this colonization is conceptually similar to or different from other instances of colonialism. In other words, are the Kurds and Kurdish land colonized in the same manner and for the same reasons that, for example, most of South America and Africa were, or are there particular elements in terms of colonial relations and colonial methods that give a specific character to the colonization of the Kurds?

It should be noted that here the term colonialism concerns the modern, post-Renaissance practices of colonialism that differ qualitatively from pre-modern instances where some earlier empires and civilizations had colonies that were perceived inferior to the metropoles. One crucial factor in distinguishing modern colonialism is its decisive and systematic role in the creation and development of capitalism, particularly by providing raw materials, slaves and indentured labor for the expansion of industries in Europe as well as creating external markets for the sale of goods made in the colonial metropoles (Loomba 2005). British colonialism was in this sense the first example of modern colonialism whereas earlier instances of post-Renaissance colonialism i.e., Spanish and Portuguese colonization of the Americas remained a colonial plunder due to the feudal-absolutist character of their states, and failure to finance industrialization with the colonial wealth, making use of the colonies solely as mines for extracting and looting precious metals

(Anievas & Nişancıoğlu 2015; Narin 1977). Further, as reflected in this definition by Edward Said, limited though it is, modern colonialism introduced new forms of colonization like settler colonialism. Said (1993) writes: "colonialism", which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory' (8). Despite disagreements over the origins, purposes and the extent of modern colonialism, colonialism is commonly referred to as a relation of domination which is exploitative by nature. In such relation of domination, the colonized consist of a population indigenous to a territory invaded by foreign colonizers who are "racially (or ethnically) and culturally different" from the colonized. (Balandie 1966, 54). The racial or ethnic distinction of colonizers and the colonized is of great importance as it, among other traits, defines the specific form of colonial type of domination, making it different from other relations of domination like class or gender domination which are not exclusively forged between racially or culturally distinct entities. The emphasis on the foreignness of colonizers as well as their numerical minority, as opposed to the numerical majority of the colonized, are shared by many accounts of colonialism (Veracini 2010). This can be seen in a popular definition by Osterhammel who also points out two key political and cultural elements, beside the economic exploitative element, in colonialism. Osterhammel (1997) defines colonialism as

> a relationship of domination between an indigenous (or forcibly imported) majority and a minority of foreign invaders. The fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis. Rejecting cultural compromises with the colonized population, colonizers are convinced of their own superiority and of their ordained mandate to rule. (16-17)

As highlighted in the definition by Osterhammel, power relations in a colonial situation are politically manifested in the fact that the decisions about how society is ordered and administered in the colony are made not by the colonized but by colonizers. The center of decision-making lies in the metropole and unless they defy the colonial rulers, the colonized are at the behest of colonizers and are forced to act in line with their dictates. This is accompanied by the colonizer's sense of cultural superiority over the colonized, which is expressed in the racist character of colonialism. It is hard to imagine colonialism without racism and for anti-colonial thinkers like Franz Fanon and Aimé Césaire it was the ever-present racism that distinguished colonial rule from other forms of territorial expansion and annexation (Jinadu 1976, 604).

Colonialism in effect creates hierarchical relations that put the colonized, their belongings and resources, and generally their existence at the service of colonizers. In other words, colonies and the colonized people are after all nothing but instruments for the material prosperity and political superiority of colonizers. This hierarchical relation operates at multiple levels i.e., economic, political and cultural/ideological levels. In a colonial situation, colonizers make extraordinary material gains out of a land by way of territorial control, appropriating material resources and exploiting the labor of the colonized. This exploitative relation is propped up by a colonial infrastructure (with military, legal and political apparatuses and arrangements) that is built upon denying self-rule to the colonized.

When it comes to the cultural dimension of colonialism, at stake are not only ideological means and tropes employed to facilitate and justify colonial relations but also the ways in which colonial relations are manifested in the realm of culture, mind and personality (psyche) of both colonizers and the colonized. Racism functions as the cultural foundation of colonialism as it asserts the superiority of colonizers over the colonized through establishing essentialized and

normatively hierarchized differences between them. Racism, according to Memmi (1991), guarantees the social immobility of the colonized (mummification of the colonial situation) and maintains the divide between them and the colonizer. As Fanon (1967) explains in his *Black Skin, White Masks*, racism implants an inferiority complex in the minds of the colonized that forces them to abandon and even despise their culture in the hopes that they could be recognized by the colonizer.

Whether biological or cultural, the racist mentality portrays the colonized as backward, uncivilized and, in many cases, non-human beings that need to be civilized by the rational and ethically higher qualities of colonizers, hence the need for a colonial enterprise. The urge to view colonialism as a civilizing mission was a specific approach toward colonization that first became operationalized in French colonialism. In this sense, colonization was to "bring the benefits of French culture, religion and language to the unenlightened races of the earth, a convenient concept that other imperial powers quickly adopted" (Young 2016, 30). Therefore, a civilizing mission justifies the imposition of the colonizer's culture on the colonized, and the forced assimilation of the colonized to the culture of the colonizer. In some historical cases, such as the British colonial settlements in North America, a mixture of assimilatory and non-assimilatory measures was implemented, keeping certain elements of the indigenous cultures intact in the name of respecting the native culture while, for example, imposing English language on the indigenous populations (Mamdani 2020). While full assimilation of the colonized may risk the disappearance of this division and the colonial relations, assimilatory practices are encouraged and forced by colonizers in order to reaffirm the superiority of the colonizer's culture and to secure the destruction of the culture and history of the colonized.

Whatever the forms and images that colonization can be identified with, it is imbued with violence and cannot be sustained without the use of violence. This violence, as Fanon (1963) notes, is used to reaffirm the superiority of colonizers and their values. Although colonial violence is directed at the colonized and has devastating and far-reaching physical and psychological effects on them, it along with racism causes moral degradation of colonizers as well. Thus, according to Césaire (1973), the same violent methods and practices can turn against the populations of the colonizing countries as was evidenced in European Fascism. It is this omnipresent violence in the colonial situation and its significant role in maintaining colonial relations that, with few exceptions such as India, render using violence in anti-colonial struggles arguably indispensable.

1.2. External and Internal Colonialism

Colonialism is usually understood as having the same features regardless of whether the colonizers reside in colonies or they direct colonial endeavors from the metropoles. However, a growing number of anti-colonial scholars argue that the logic of settler colonialism and its characteristics are not necessarily identical with colonialism as commonly known. If exploitation and extraction of resources and labor of the colonized is the principal objective of colonialism, in settler colonialism the primary object is the land itself and not the surplus value extracted from the native labor. "Settler-colonization is at base a winner-take-all project whose dominant feature is not exploitation but replacement" (Wolfe 1999, 163). Therefore, the logic of settler colonialism is primarily one of elimination rather than exploitation, since the colonizers expropriate the natives and import labor (slaves, indenture, convicts) to work the land (Wolfe 2001, 868). Lorenzo Veracini (2010) complicates the distinction and views settler colonialism as a "triangular system of relationships" consisted of metropoles, settlers and indigenous people. To

further highlight the differences between colonialism and settler colonialism, Veracini (2010) contends that "whereas settler colonialism constitutes a circumstance where the colonising effort is exercised from within the bounds of a settler colonising political entity, colonialism is driven by an expanding metropole that remains permanently distinct from it" (6). This distinction, however, is problematic as it does not take into account the fact that the settlers remain subordinate to the metropole before they may become politically independent from it. The United States is a case in point where settlers were appropriating indigenous lands while they were also ruled by Britain until 1776.

In most, if not all, accounts of both colonialism and settler colonialism, the relation of colonizers to colonies is defined as an external one between two groups with distinct territorial boundaries (Balandie 1966; Osterhammel 1997; Loomba 2005; Said, 1993). Even in the case of settlers, although they gradually become a part of colony's population, they initially invade or are imported to colonies. Therefore, foreignness of colonizers to the colonized and geographical distance of colonizing metropoles and colonies is saliently underscored as though colonial relations cannot be formed between ethnically distinct but geographically close populations. However, if we treat colonization as a certain type of social and political relations rather than a matter of strangeness or physical distance, it is possible that colonial relations are formed between colonizers and the colonized within the same territorial boundaries or in relatively close physical proximity. It is also possible that colonial relations involve populations that are historically and culturally close but ethnically or religiously distinct. It was after all a growing awareness of such colonial relations within the boundaries of continuous territories that paved the way, especially in academic circles, for studies of internal colonialism or internal colonization.

The concept of internal colonialism has been used in reference to many contexts across the world, but it is not always properly defined and theoretically articulated. Nevertheless, it has been arguably always applied to situations where a region or a population or both within a country are exploited by and subordinated to the will of the governing authorities and ruling classes of that country and, as a result, the resources of the former are primarily used not for their benefit but for the interests of the latter. In other words, it seems that the main reason for employing the terms colonialism and colonization in contexts where colonizers are not hailing from outside of a country is the resemblance of major characteristics of such cases to the features of modern colonialism or external colonialism. It should be noted that while belonging to the same country, the colonizers and the colonized in internal colonialism often differ culturally, particularly in terms of language and religion.

Early uses of the idea of colonies or colonization existing within a country can be traced back to two political leaders belonging to two very antagonistic political traditions. Lenin described the status of some peripheries of Tsarist Russian empire as colonies in relation to its central parts. He refers to this situation as

> the circumstance that in the post-Reform period the outer steppe regions have been *colonies* of the central, long-settled part of European Russia. The abundance of free land has attracted an enormous stream of settlers, who have quickly increased the area under crops. (Lenin 1960, 257).

Also, Adolf Hitler used the term internal colonization, denoting colonization of unoccupied land within the boundaries of a country (Calvert 2010, 51). In both cases, colonization was understood more or less in terms of settler colonialism, but later usages of the term internal colonialism offered relatively more sophisticated accounts.

In 1960s and 1970s, several important contributions were made to the literature on internal colonialism, aiming at defining the concept and applying it to certain contexts. Inspired by the school of dependency theory, these two decades witnessed the most serious and rigorous attempts at theorizing internal colonialism. This was primarily carried out by scholars in Latin America whose economic development was the object of studies by early scholars of dependency theory. Andre Gunder Frank (1970) had explained the so-called underdevelopment of Latin America in terms of its peripheral relationship with the metropolitan European and American economies; a hierarchical and exploitative relationship that began with the European colonial invasions of late 15th century and continued even after the independence of Latin American countries. According to Gunder Frank, this structurally unequal relationship also created similar core-periphery relations along racial lines within Latin American societies between a dominant national bourgeoisie consisting of Creoles, Mestizos as well as Ladinos, and massive poor populations of Indians and descendants of African slaves. Theses oppressive relations explained by Gunder Frank could still be subsumed under the categories of racial and class oppression, so it was Pablo Gonzales Casanova who became the first Latin American dependency theorist that made an effort at developing the concept of internal colonialism theoretically.

Casanova deploys the term internal colonialism to analyze the social and political conditions of indigenous population in Mexico. For him, "internal colonialism corresponds to a structure of social relations based on domination and exploitation among culturally heterogeneous, distinct groups" (Casanova 1965, 33). Casanova insists that the internal colonization of aboriginal people in Mexico has taken place in post-independence era and even after the 1910 social revolution in Mexico, while Indians are venerated in national

culture and official state rhetoric. He is also keen on distancing his formulation of internal colonialism from economist explanations that reduced the issue to merely a form of uneven development integral to capitalism or a manifestation of class inequality rooted in capitalist accumulation. In Casanova's view,

> The colonial structure and internal colonialism are distinguished from the class structure since colonialism is not only a relation of exploitation of the workers by the owners of raw materials or of production and their collaborators, but also a relation of domination and exploitation of a total population (with its distinct classes, proprietors, workers) by another population which also has distinct classes (proprietors and workers). (Casanova 1965, 33)

Casanova goes on to raise another critical point which draws a fine line between internal colonialism and external colonialism, making it possible to discuss internal colonialism as a more recent and novel form of colonialism. Casanova (1965) maintains that internal colonialism is associated with the policies of "national government" as it strives to facilitate "national integration", "internal communication", as well as "expansion of the national market" (36). The association between internal colonialism and post-independence nation-state was also highlighted by Rodolfo Stavenhagen (2013), another Mexican scholar cotemporary to Casanova, who notes the continuities and changes in the colonial situation of indigenous people in transition from colonial to the so-called post-colonial period in Mexico.

> Indians of traditional communities found themselves once again in the role of a colonized people: they lost their lands, were forced to work for the 'strangers', were integrated against their will to a new monetary economy and fell under new

> forms of political domination. This time, colonial society was national society itself, which progressively extended its control over its own territory. (33)

That said, the role of post-independence states and their national development programs in creating and reproducing colonial relations within nation-states only appears in passing in Casanova (1965) and Stavenhagen (2013).

Another theorization of internal colonialism inspired by dependency theory, and arguably the most well-known and widely applied formulation of the term, was developed by Michael Hechter in his book *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development*. Hechter views Ireland, Scotland and Wales as internal colonies and peripheries in relation to the English core within Britain between 1536 and 1966. In an internal colonial situation, Hechter (1977) contends that:

> The peripheral economy is forced into complementary development to the core, and thus becomes dependent on external markets. Generally, this economy rests on a single primary export, either agricultural or mineral. The movement of peripheral labor is determined largely by forces exogenous to the periphery. Typically, there is great migration and mobility of peripheral workers in response to price fluctuations of exported primary products. Economic dependence is reinforced through juridical, political, and military measures. There is a relative lack of services, lower standard of living and higher level of frustration, measured by such indicators as alcoholism, among members of the peripheral group. There is national discrimination on the basis of language, religion or other cultural forms. (33)

In the context of internal colonialism, the peripheries are instrumentalized for the advancement of the core and the content and contours of their development are defined and designed in accordance with the needs of the core. And core and periphery regions are composed of culturally distinct populations. Out of these circumstances a cultural division of labor arises, that is, Hechter (1977) argues, "a system of stratification where objective cultural distinctions are super-imposed upon class lines" (30). As a result, high level occupations are reserved for the members of metropolitan cultural groups whereas low status ones are meted out to the peripheral populations. Thus, markers of cultural distinction become points of privilege for those in the metropole and encourage them to preserve this system of stratification while for the peripheral colonies, they represent oppression and reason for revolting against the core regions and the national state, hence the spread of autonomist and separatist sentiments.

Hechter's account of internal colonialism, perhaps more than any other ones, has come under severe criticism as well. Characterization of Scotland as an economically disadvantaged periphery, in particular, has been questioned given Scotland's privileged place in industrial development in 18th century and its economic development since then (Calvert 2010, 52). Moreover, Hechter's excessive emphasis on cultural division of labor risks downplaying exploitative economic relations between core and periphery regions as well as inequalities within the regions. This leads to a kind of 'cultural holism' and neglect of intra-regional division of labor. There is always the possibility of migration from peripheries to the core, precisely due to unequal relationship between the core and periphery, or the settlement of members of the core in the peripheries (McRoberts 2010, 295). Class divisions within the peripheries cannot be ignored, nor the strategic moves by colonizing authorities to create a

class of collaborators within the colonized, which often comes with privileged social statues at least in the local levels. What Hechter seems to overlook is that, just as his own account suggests, elementary factors in determining the internal colonial situation of a region are the lack of decision-making power on the side of the peripheries; an authority that is exclusively reserved for the core, and the instrumentalization of peripheral development for the economic superiority of the core and not vice versa. There is no doubt that racialization plays a key role in justifying and perpetuating these factors, and even if some members of ethnically different and minoritized groups secure high level occupations, internal colonial situation does not cease to exist because the overall subordination of peripheries to the core may still persist regardless.

Contemporary to the development of the notion of internal colonialism in Latin America, a number of scholars in the United States also used the same term to explain the situation of minorities, particularly African Americans, in the US. In 1969, Robert Blauner explained the situation of black communities in the United States as a case of internal colonialism. For Blauner, this characterization was justified by four common features that he identified between external and internal processes of colonialism. These features included the involuntary entry of the colonized to dominant society, transformation and destruction of culture and social organization of the colonized, the administration of the colonized by colonizers, and biological racism (Blauner 1969 396). In the same year, Robert L. Allen (1969) argued along similar lines by offering a detailed analysis of inferior class status of the majority of African Americans, and how racial and class domination of white America over African America did not change despite a historical shift from direct to indirect colonial rule by creating an intermediate class of black bourgeoisie in the wake of black rebellions of the

1960s. The application of internal colonialism in the US was not limited to African Americans, and Chicanos were also deemed as internally colonized in United States by Blauner and later on Barrera (1979). The idea of black people constituting a colony in the United States; however, has come under severe criticism. Michael Burawoy questions the validity of Blauner's criteria for defining a colonial situation, arguing that the conventional definition of colonialism has been distorted in this case. Burawoy (1974) rightly points out that biological racism was absent in some examples of colonialism e.g. in Ireland, and that 'forced involuntary entry' is an ambiguous factor as in places like New Zealand "force was an insignificant feature of colonization" (526). He also alludes to the fact that in any relation of power, the ruled are administered by the rulers and this is not exclusive to colonialism. Nevertheless, Burawoy's assertion that, for example, British colonialism reinforced rather damaged indigenous culture is not entirely true because Britain, inspired by French colonial policy, pursued a combination of assimilatory and protective approach toward indigenous cultures, at least since the late 19th century (Mamdani 2020). Other critics (e.g. Rodney 1990) have underlined absence or inadequate analysis of class divisions within the black population in the US and how the specific conditions of black working class as opposed to those of the black bourgeoisie as well as white working class is not discussed in the internal colonialism model. Therefore, it is fair to call the situation of black population in the United States as a case of racial oppression rather than internal colonialism.

In all its formulations, whether the older ones or the more recent ones (Calvert 2010; Pinderhughes 2011), there is a consensus that internal colonialism always takes shape within the bounds of a single territory and political sovereignty, or more specifically within the borders of a nation-state. However, any possible connections between the modern ideology of

nationalism or the practices of nation-building and internal colonialism is rarely made or discussed. The root causes of internal colonialism are often attributed to one of the following factors: uneven development characteristic of capitalism (dependency theory), "uneven wave of industrialization over territorial space" (Hechter 1977, 39), or the continuation of colonial relations by ruling elites in former colonies (Calvert 2010; Casanova 1965; Stavenhagen 2013)). The role of post-independence states and their national development programs in creating and reproducing colonial relations within nation-states only appears in passing in Casanova's (1965) and Stavegahen's (2013) analyses. And this is the extent to which any links between nation-state and internal colonialism in the literature on the latter are made.

Moreover, the concept of internal colonialism is frequently misapplied in case studies, leading to further ambiguity. As these studies show, broad and undifferentiated applications of internal colonialism obfuscate the specificity of the concept, blurring the demarcation lines between it and other categories such as national oppression. For example, in some cases like Catalan or Scotland where underdevelopment or inferior economic status in relation with the centre do not exist but claims of an ethnic group or a nationality to a distinct nation-state are dismissed and suppressed, we are, arguably, witnessing national oppression. Therefore, arguments in favour of describing these cases as examples of internal colonialism (Hechter 2021; McPhee, 1980) do not hold water. Moreover, the term 'internal colonialism' naturalizes the territorial boundaries of the nation-state and conceals the artificial construction of those boundaries. As Osuri (2017) points out "the very phrase 'internal colonialism' assumes the unity of the nation-state. In other words, the nation-state may be seen as colonising those within its borders, but the borders of the nation-state are assumed as given" (2432). Another reason that renders the term internal colonialism incomplete to apply to many actual cases of

colonization within the nation-state formations is that one spectacular political demand for some (Hechter 2021; Watkins 1977), if not all, scholars and politicians who have used this term has been a call for the recognition of internally colonized populations as nations, legitimizing quests for secession and forming new nation-states. Such political implication of using the term internal colonialism showcases a lack of due attention to the role of nation and nationalism in creating and perpetuating colonization within the nation-state.

1.3. Nation-State and Colonialism

Unlike most theorisations of internal colonialism, Mahmoud Mamdani's idea of the co-constitution of modern colonialism and the nation-state provides a more explicit analysis on the relationship between nation-state and colonialism. Mamdani (2020) traces the founding moment of the nation-state to the year 1492 when Castilian monarchy began to form a homogenized Christian nation by expelling or converting Jews and Moors, followed a year later by efforts to overseas colonization of Americas (8). Nevertheless, this was only the start of a longer historical process in which the association between colonialism and the nation-state was not reduced to such parallel and historically simultaneous developments but that the very politics and processes of nation-building generated colonial relations. This came about when in nineteenth century, direct colonial rule which was centered on civilizing mission and imposition of cultural norms and values of the colonizers on the colonized failed, Mamdani argues, due to immense resistance mounted by the colonized populations or the natives as they were called by their colonizers. As an alternative, British and French colonizers adopted the policy of indirect rule whereby they stopped creating a national majority, in their colonies, in the image of colonizers and instead produced a myriad of permanent minorities by turning "existing cultural differences into boundaries of political

identity that fragmented and fractured those they governed" (Mamdani 2020, 19). What transpired went beyond what is commonly referred to as divide and rule method, since by classifying the population in the colonies as races, ethnicities or tribes and using these categories as basis for territorialized political units, European colonizers effectively invented new political identities for the colonized. Mamdani (2012) finds it more aptly to call this colonial strategy **"**define and rule**"** rather than **"**divide and rule.**"** It is fair to add that "define and rule", whether carried out successfully or not, was always accompanied by "supress and rule" in colonial contexts.

When the colonies gained independence during the twentieth century, their nationalist elites did not question the legitimacy of territorial fragmentations and political identities created by their former European colonizers. Instead, Mamdani (2020) maintains, "they modeled their political imagination on the modern European state, the result being that the nationalist dream was imposed on the reality of colonially imposed fragmentation, leading to new rounds of nation- building by ethnic cleansing" (22). The association between the nation and civilization, which served as the cornerstone of direct colonial rule before it was discarded, was also incorporated into the political vision of nationalist leaders of the former colonies. Thus, the nation-building project after independence was not only undertaken on a political terrain defined by European colonizers but also informed with colonial imagination. Mamdani (2020) concludes that the nation-state as a political formation is in effect a colonial formation. Therefore, he states that "I seek to understand colonization as the making of permanent minorities and their maintenance through the politicization of identity, which leads to political violence—in some cases extreme violence" (25).

By distancing from economistic understandings of colonialism, Mamdani manages to provide a space to think through the ways in which nation-building contributes to the generation of colonial relations. Yet, his reluctance to discuss the political economy of modern colonialism leads him to see the capitalist British and French colonialism in the same light as earlier colonialism of conquest and plunder of Spanish and Portuguese imperialisms. Mamdani (2020) at one point acknowledges that

> For millennia, conquerors have bled resources from far- off places and sent the bounty home. Europeans in South America followed this playbook, taking what they could— including the labor of the locals— but steering no new course in world history" (31)

However, he fails to integrate to his formulation of colonialism the distinction between overseas colonization fueling capitalist development and that of Castilian and Portuguese pillage of South America. In turn, he lumps these two formally similar but qualitatively different processes and, in a fashion common to culturalist post-colonial scholars, ascribes them to an abstract entity called modernity.

This logical confusion is also mirrored in Mamdani's rather anachronistic recognition of the Castilian monarchy's practice of religious homogenization of their subjects as the founding moment of the nation-state, which obfuscates the distinction of empires from the nation-states. Mamdani foregrounds homogenization in his account of the nation-state as though it is the defining principle of the nation-state, but it is not clear why, for instance, the forced conversion of Jews to Christianity by the Crusaders in the 11th century (Riley-Smith 1984) or the forced conversion of non-Muslims to Islam in previous centuries (Minkov 2004) do not count as attempts at creating a homogenous national community. Besides, if we stick with Mamdani's line of reasoning, the fact that European states at Westphalia agreed to tolerate their religious

minorities, instead of continuing to forcibly assimilate them, must have meant an end to the nation-state.

The emergence of the nation-state as a new political unit was the product of a long historical process in which national consciousness and national communities were made possible in the context of the capitalist mode of production. As Neil Davidson (2016) argues, four elements were decisive in the creation of national consciousness. The first was the formation of "externally demarcated and internally connected" (56) economic areas as a result of the fourteenth century crisis of European feudalism which involved general decline of rural productivity and demographic collapse (58). The use of a common language in these areas and communities to facilitate communication in market exchanges was the second element. The third element was the absolutist states that were more centralized than estates monarchies. The fourth factor is what Davidson calls "proto-national consciousness", that is, "supra-local forms of popular identification" like Protestantism that went against the dominant form of identification in the Holy Roman empire (Davidson 2016, 61).

These four elements contributed to the formation of nascent examples of national consciousness, but according to Davidson (2016), "it was the bourgeois revolutions that effected the final transformation of the term "nation" from one that signified "a people" as a race group to one that stood for "the people" as a community" (62). It would take nearly a century after the first bourgeois revolutions in Holland and England before the first nation-states come into being. This was towards the end of the eighteenth century when industrial capitalism had made the nation a necessary associate of the state. Other states that embarked on nation-building and capitalist industrialization did so without necessarily undergoing the social developments that transpired prior to the formation of English and French nation-states (Davidson 2016, 65). In

fact, British capitalism increasingly exerted strong geopolitical pressure on non-capitalist states, including France. In response, France centralized its political and cultural institutions to organize and control its population. Unlike Britain, which relied on the abstract individual shaped by primitive accumulation, France replaced this with the collective identity of the nation. This model of creating culturally and linguistically unified nations became a template for other non-capitalist states—such as Russia, Japan, the Ottoman Empire, and Qajar Persia—to resist European geopolitical dominance and colonial expansion (Matin and Mahmoudi 2023, 723). Territorial boundaries of the nation-states were further solidified by the creation of regimes of border and immigration controls that, according to Nandita Sharma (2020), indicated a historical shift from empires to the nation-state.

In Sharma's (2020) view, in the late nineteenth century, states began to nationalize their sovereignty, starting in the Americas. And in this context, "because no nation encompasses all the world's people, nor wants to, immigration and citizenship controls become crucial technologies for nation-making (and nation-maintaining) strategies" (3). In the post WWII era, or as Sharma calls it the Postcolonial New World Order, nationalist discourses and states defined which people belong to the nation and which nation is entitled to which territory. Therefore, a naturalized and normalized association was made between a certain group of people and a certain place. Those who belong to the nation are deemed "people of a place" and classified as citizens or "National-Natives", and those who do not become "people out of the place" and categorized as Migrants (Sharma 2020, 4). While the former can make claims to sovereignty and citizenship rights, the latter are assigned legal status and rights, if any, distinct from those of the Nationals. The political segregation of National-Natives and Migrants in the processes of nation-building and nation-maintaining has historically become grounds to subject those deemed Migrants to

various types of extreme violence from deprivation of citizenship rights to forced displacements and massacres. Sharma (2020) traces the earliest examples of such violent acts to the early twentieth century when during and after WWI the Russian, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires disintegrated, and millions of people did not meet the criteria to be part of the emergent nations and were seen as out of place as well. As a result, they were moved out of territories in which they had lived for generations and many of them like Armenians died in the process (100). A stark, contemporary example of the same sort can be seen in the treatment of Rohingya people by the Myanmar state that views them as Bangali migrants deserving forced expulsion and murder (Sharma 2020, 226). All in all, for Sharma (2020), "all nationalisms are fundamentally autochthonous and productive of a hierarchical separation between National-Natives (autochthons) and Migrants (allochthons)" (13).

Although every hierarchical separation does not constitute a colonial relation, it is worth noting the tendency to othering in the idea of nation and the discourse of nationalism that leads to a variety of exploitative and oppressive situations including colonization, national oppression and racial discrimination. Othering as an essential quality of the idea of nation indicates that seeds of colonization are present not only in the uneven character of capitalist development and the practice of nation-building but also in the very doctrine of nationalism, only requiring favourable historical and political circumstances to be germinated. Since no criteria have been satisfactorily established to distinguish a nation, objectively or subjectively, from other human collectivities (Hobsbawm 1992; Callhoun 1993), the notion of a unified nation is an illusory category foisted on a human population. This illusory self, or as Benedict Anderson (1983) calls it "imagined community", is always imagined in juxtaposition with illusory others who are transformed in the process into lesser people who do not deserve the same rights and protections. As Miley (2018) argues, this

dynamics of othering in nationalism is built upon what Goldberg calls an 'abstract presumption of familialism'. "This presumption of the familiar, that 'I am like them,'and therefore that we must be 'familially connected,' of course, ultimately implies – 'if often silently' – a negation of those branded as nationally or racially other, those 'differentiated and disconnected" (Miley 2018, 13). Just as the word identity conveys contradictory connotations of 'identical' and 'unique', nationalist ideologies "simultaneously homogenise and differentiate" (Peckham 2004, 57). The nationalist trope of familiamlism also helps to conceal "inequities, injustices, and exclusions within and between the boundaries of the imagined body politic" (Miley 2018, 17). In fact, nationalism has proved after all to be a means to manipulate the many for the benefit of the few. Perhaps this claim is best captured in the Arabic saying that 'Alwatan lelaghnia, alwataniaya lelfoghara': homeland is for the rich and nationalism is for the poor.

The fictiveness of nation, however, does not mean that structures of oppression against some nations are illusory and unreal as well. Just as races do not exist objectively but racism does, national oppression is real albeit nation is an illusory category. Therefore, the right of nations to self-determination still remains a legitimate idea and a means to combat national oppression or at least mitigate its devastating effects on the oppressed nations. That said, when the realization of this right entails secession and forming a new nation-state, unlike before, nationalism and a new national state cannot be seen as truly liberating, since in both theory and practice they have failed in preventing the reproduction of hierarchical and exploitative relations between the majority and minorities or the nation and the minoritized groups. It is high time that the right of nations to self-determination be imagined in terms of an alternative political formation capable of doing away with such oppressive relations.

1.4. Nation-State and Racism

The processes of othering and minoritization, both in the theory and practice of nationhood, necessitate a deep analysis of how racism intersects with the nation-state structure. In the literature on race, there is a distinction made between racism and racialization. There is no consensus on the exact meaning of racialization, yet it has increasingly become a popular word in discussions of race and racism. For some, it refers to any kind of "race-inflected social situations" (Goldberg 2005, 88), or the filter or the medium through which we perceive race (Malik 1996), while for others it stands for the processes through which racial meanings are attributed to certain social issues and the ways in which they are defined and explained by having recourse to race (Murji and Solomos 2005, 3). It is fair to say then that racialization involves racial thinking as well as the classification of human beings to distinct groups or races on the basis of physical markers or cultural characteristics. In other words, racialization is the process through which race is socially created. Racialization turns into racism when power enters the picture. In other words, when racial thinking and racial categories are employed to inferiorize or exclude human populations, racism is operating. One also needs to note that "racisms come in different guises. All are, however, underpinned by a notion of a natural relation between an essence attributed to a human population, whether biological or cultural, and social outcomes that do, will or should flow from this" (Anthias 1995, 288). Lest racialization seem too innocent, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that racialization provides a fertile soil for the emergence and growth of racism. Without the idea of race and dividing human beings to different groups based on such an idea, it would be hard for racist structures, arrangements, and policies to take shape.

Irrespective of their association with any types of colonial relations, both the nation and the modern state have theoretically and historically maintained linkages to race categories. The modes of conceptual and practical constructions of the modern state and nation reveal complex but undeniable relationships with racialization. In fact, far from being a simple effect, race has been essential to the formation and maintenance of the nation-state. Here, I echo David Goldberg's theorization of the modern state as a racial state, which underlines the integral character of race to the "emergence, development, and transformations (conceptually, philosophically, materially) of the modern nation-state" (Goldberg 2002a, 234). Through analyzing two early modern states in Britain and the Netherlands, Goldberg contends that increased social mobilities had made the population of the metropolitan cities of Amsterdam and London conspicuously heterogenous dating back to the seventeenth century. Heterogeneity was thus seen as a threat from the unknown, the external, the outside to the stability and safety of the known, the predictable and the manageable. Therefore, the heterogenous or the other was racially configured in order to know and control it. This required the power to exclude and include people in a racial order and classify human populations differentially and hierarchically. It was the modern state that possessed this power and had the capacity to legislate and enact laws and policies, and deploy historiography, cultural ceremonies and bureaucratic technologies such as census (Goldberg 2002b, 23-34). As universal as the racial character of modern states is, it does not automatically render them racist. It is only in specific situations where a racial state becomes a racist one. The following passage by Goldberg (2002a) lays out the distinction between the racial state and the racist state.

> the racial state is racial not merely or reductively because of the racial composition of its personnel or the racial implications of its policies though clearly both play a part. States

> are racial more deeply because of the structural position they occupy in producing and reproducing, constituting and effecting racially shaped spaces and places, groups and events, life worlds and possibilities, accesses and restrictions, inclusions and exclusions, conceptions and modes of representation. They are racial, in short, in virtue of their modes of population definition, determination, and structuration. And they are racist to the extent such definition, determination, and structuration operate to exclude or privilege in or on racial terms, and in so far as they circulate in and reproduce a world whose meanings and effects are racist. (239)

The distinction that Goldberg makes between his concepts of racial state and racist state is hardly tenable. It is unfathomable how a state defines and structures populations in racial terms without including some in the state power resources and excluding others. The modern state's building and reproducing the nation always privileges the nation at the expense of excluding whoever it defines as the outsider as well as discriminating against those deemed other internally. Goldberg makes the distinction even more perplexing when he echoes Comaroff's (1998) assertion that the state employs all sorts of legal, military, surveillance procedures "-in short, all the means at a state's disposal- "to maintain the "racial rule" and adds that this represents "the interests of the ruling racial class" (Goldberg 2002b, 112). Contrary to Goldberg's theorization, the modern state's use of racialization does indeed inevitably lead to racist undertakings whether structurally or incidentally, legally sanctioned, or arbitrarily implemented. This, consequently, renders the lines of demarcation between racial states and racist states unclear and unhelpful, at least in the fashion that Goldberg suggests. Therefore, it behooves us to shift our attention from exclusion per se as a distinguishing factor, since the types of exclusion the states impose on

human populations are common to different extents to all modern states. Balibar makes the following distinction between

> a racism of extermination or elimination (an 'exclusive' racism) and a racism of oppression or exploitation (an 'inclusive' racism), the one aiming to purify the social body of the stain or danger the inferior races may represent, the other seeking, by contrast, to hierarchize and partition society. (Balibar 1991, 39)

Although Balibar immediately warns that these two general types of racism are not mutually exclusive and they can be both combined in the state e.g., in Nazism and colonial imperialisms, it is still useful to utilize this dichotomy to differentiate between states that are racist in different ways and to varying degrees, to say the least. As a result, racist states, or in effect modern states, can be divided into three categories: inclusive racist states, exclusive racist states, and states that practice both inclusive and exclusive types of racism.

The formation and maintenance of nations are also shot through with racism. Nations are made through drawing boundaries between themselves and whatever collectivity or identity they consider as different from them. In such endeavors, as Yuval-Davis points out, “processes of exclusion and inclusion” are at work (Yuval-Davis 1993, 183). Given the exclusionary nature of the nation, it is not hard to see how racism makes its way to the continuous processes of nation-building within the nation-states. Racism, as Balibar (1991) argues, is indispensable to the constitution of nationalism and “a supplement internal” to it that just like nationalism is always inadequate to reach its goal (54). This means that “racism constantly induces an excess of 'purism' as far as the nation is concerned: for the nation to be itself, it has to be racially or culturally pure therefore it has to isolate within its bosom, before eliminating or expelling them, the 'false', 'exogenous', 'cross-bred', 'cosmopolitan' elements” (Balibar 1991, 59-60). But we

should not conclude from this, Balibar (1991) reminds us, that we are living in equally racist societies (40). Similar to modern states, the racism of nationalism takes on different manifestations and extends in degrees in different contexts. This racism is closely linked to a set of what John Armstrong (1982) calls "symbolic border guards" such as language, dress, customs, architecture and manners (6-8) that identify those who qualify or disqualify to be members of a nation. Symbolic border guards demonstrate the significance of cultural elements in delimiting the boundaries of nations, and as signifiers of racializing processes and racist practices. Thus, racism centring on culture plays a pivotal role in nationalist politics. In fact, given the discrediting of Nazism (Barker 1982) and the category of race losing its scientific credibility in the post WWII era (Burton 2021), one could argue that cultural rather than biological racism has become the dominant form of racism in the nation-states.

Central to cultural racism is the idea that it is possible to essentialize culture to the point that it has the same functions as race in its biological definition (Fredrickson 2015; Gilroy 1987). In this sense, alleged cultural differences and imagined or constructed cultural distinctions are deemed to be a reasonable basis to dominate, exclude or eliminate human populations defined in racial or ethnic terms (Chua 2017). Therefore, the object of cultural racism, as Fanon (1988, 32) points out "is no longer the individual man but a certain form of existing." Although biological racism has not completely vanished, it is important to understand that the shift toward cultural racism did not occur because of progress in human morality or intellect. According to Fanon (1988, 35):

> Vulgar racism in its biological form corresponds to the period of crude exploitation of man's arms and legs. The perfecting of the means of production inevitably brings about the camouflage of the techniques by which man is exploited, hence of the

forms of racism. It is therefore not as a result of the evolution of people's minds that racism loses its virulence.

In order to specify the particular character of cultural racism, Fredrickson (2015) distinguishes between ethnocultural intolerance in which cultural differences create "conflict and misery" but they can be overcome through conversion or assimilation, and racism when differences otherwise considered ethnocultural are seen as innate and immutable (5-7). He then stresses that "racism is not operative if members of stigmatized groups can voluntarily change their identities and advance to positions of prominence and prestige within the dominant group." (Fredrickson 2015, 7). However, this formulation seems more misleading than illuminating. Fredrickson leaves the exact meaning and extent of "conflict and misery" induced by ethnocultural intolerance unexplained, so it is unclear whether exclusion or physical elimination of a population because of their cultural attributes can be called racism in one case and intolerance in another. What if attempts were made to assimilate a population and they refused and were eventually exterminated? These are not simply imaginary or hypothetical situations, and they have actually transpired. The indigenous women in Canada have experienced forced sterilization (Fabre and Schreiber, 2017), while the children of the same population were for decades kidnapped and forcibly assimilated in the so-called residential schools (Woolford & Gacek 2016). This begs the question as to what the analytical value and import of the distinction between ethnocultural intolerance and cultural racism is when they both hinge on cultural characteristics and may have the very same consequences for the populations affected by them? Fredrickson's approach is also prone to absolve colonial powers such as French colonial empire, infamously known for its assimilationist

tendencies, from the stigma of violent racism. In fact, his distinction runs the risk of being abused by the perpetrators of forced assimilation to conveniently frame their acts of extreme violence as cultural intolerance. In fact, colonizers do not seem to always make such a clear-cut distinction between innate and convertible cultural differences. For many Turkish racists, for example, Kurds have "backward mentality" or do not have "human faces" (McDowall 2021), "completely bereft of positive feelings and civilized manners" (Ungor 2011, 184). Yet, this does not stop them from conducting or supporting systematic efforts to assimilate the Kurds. As David Goldberg (2009, 5) remarks in his critical appraisal of Fredrickson's view, "Racism, in short, is about exclusion through depreciation, intrinsic or instrumental, timeless or time-bound." Racism, whether rooted in biology or culture, functions on the level of ideology. The two forms—biological and cultural—are not mutually exclusive; instead, nationalist leaders and political parties can strategically employ either or both for political purposes. What analytically and politically matters is to explore and explain how and why human populations are subject to discrimination or exclusion based merely on their physical or cultural characteristics, and not whether they have been offered an option to assimilate to the dominant human group. It will be in that spirit that I will look at the racist ideology and practice of the nation-states, particularly anti-Kurdish racism.

The racist ideology and practice of the nation-state facilitates the creation of the nation and the illusion that the boundaries of the state citizens and the nation overlap. Such an illusion, as Yuval Davis (1993) maintains,

> is one expression of the naturalising effect of the hegemony of one collectivity and its access to ideological apparatuses of both state and civil society. This

> constructs minorities as deviants from the **"**normal**"** and excludes them from important power resources. The most extreme form of such an exclusion is physical annihilation by deportation or genocide. (199-200)

The construction of minorities within the nation-states could also materialize less conspicuously when they are regarded as undesirable groups, and as such "Undesirable groups need not be conceptualized in explicit racial terms but as Others more generally" (Anthias 1995, 294). Overall, nations are created by the presence of, and not despite, minorities. As one of the earliest attempts in the creation of modern nations, the formation of Swedish nation as a homogenous nation was achieved by means of, not absence of, its Lapp minority (Mattson 2014, 321). Some states would also minoritize communities through citizenship laws which identify those who can be included as citizens as well as those who remain outside the community of citizens. The latter then continue to live within the nation-state as "objects of domination" (Marx 2012, 5).

1.5. National Colonialism

The limitations of the concept of internal colonialism necessitate reorganizing and reframing it to aptly explain the cases of colonization occurring within national borders, including the Kurdish question. As mentioned earlier, in the literature on internal colonialism, the structural links between the nation-state as a political formation and internal colonialism are rarely theorized. In fact, there is little to no evidence in this literature as to how nationalism provides ideological substance to internally established colonial relations within the nation-states. This is starkly absent even in those accounts where the practices of nation-building, along with uneven development and legacies of European colonialism, have been accounted for in the creation of internal colonies (Casanova 1965; Hechter 1977; Stavenhagen 2013). Thus, it is high time that the contributions of

nation and nationalism is underlined in the concept that is used to explain colonial relations in the nation-state. I propose the concept of national colonialism instead of internal colonialism for such contexts.

National colonialism primarily refers to a particular configuration of the hierarchical centre-periphery relationship in the nation-state form where periphery and its population are utilized primarily for the development and welfare of the centre. What makes this relationship colonial is the combination of economic exploitation, racialization and political subordination of periphery by centre. Not only does national colonialism derive from uneven character of capitalist development, but also from the exigencies of nation building. Despite varieties in the extent and depth of development in the periphery, one fact remains unchanged: natural and human resources of the periphery are geared to primarily serve the interests of the centre. Centre is politically superior and makes decisions about the periphery and not vice versa. The colonized populations in national colonialism are therefore turned to permanent minorities as opposed to the majority or nation. The dynamics of national colonialism may extend to the internally migrated communities of minoritized populations residing in the core regions and to populations and territories across the borders of the nation-state, often in the name of safeguarding the 'national security'.

It is possible that a myriad of centres and peripheries exist within a nation-state; centres wherein capital and decision-making power are concentrated. As Henry Lefebvre argues, colonization is multi-level and multi-scalar, and it is "a particular, state-bound form of organising hierarchical territorial relations" (cited in Kipfer & Goonewardena 2013, 87). As a result, Lefebvre maintains, "Wherever a dominated space is generated and mastered by a dominant space - where there is periphery and centre - there is colonisation" (cited in Kipfer &

Goonewardena 2013, 95). But, contrary to his analysis, not all centre-periphery relationships can be considered colonial. Hierarchical relations within and between provinces, cities, towns and villages exist, but other criteria must be present to consider such relations as colonial. Lefebvre's formulation of colonization elides the specificity of colonial relations and lumps all hierarchical territorial relations together. Racism is an essential element of any colonial relations, and I argue that, only those racially informed relations of economic exploitation and political subjection imposed by the state or central political authority qualify as national colonialism.

Nationalist politics plays a vital role in concealing centre-periphery relationship in the name of national development and through promoting the myth of a unitary nation. Therefore, formation of colonial relations within the nation-state cannot be understood and explained without recognizing how nationalism and nation-building contribute to the creation of the categories of centre and periphery. The point is not that nationalism automatically and inevitably leads to colonial relations but that nationalism creates favorable conditions for the establishment of colonial relations through homogenizing/differentiating practices and politicizing ethnicities or religions (or both), hence making permanent minorities. The hegemonic character of nationalism further ideologically cements internal colonization within the nation-state by framing the exploitation and subjugation of minority (or minoritized) populations as necessary for national progress and security. Nationalism allows the ruling class and the state to justify uneven development, racial domination and political sovereignty of the majority in the name of nation, and it provides them with ideological resources to mobilize the centre and even some segments of the peripheries against subversive elements. One such powerful ideological trope in nationalism is to naturalize, and even sanctify, the borders and territorial integrity. Therefore, any protests, especially from the periphery, against the injustices

of the centre in relation to periphery can be readily labelled as separatist and consequently suppressed by the centre.

The state and ruling class can rally the centre behind their coercive measures in periphery partly because the promulgation of nationalist ideas on a national level by state institutions such as educational system and media allows them to present their class and political interests as national interests, thus making fictive national interests seem real, objective and equally applicable to all citizens. Nationalist ideologies and nation-building facilitate the formation of political and social hierarchies, but all nationalisms and nation-building projects do not necessarily lead to colonial relations within the nation-states. For that to happen, national states must be strong enough i.e., they must possess necessary political, economic and military capacities to impose colonial power relations on the colonized populations and territories.

National colonialism takes place where the creation of internal colonies and permanent minorities is a product of the formation and maintenance of a nation-state. Along with being economically exploited and racially oppressed, internal colonies in national colonialism are often constituted of subordinated ethnic groups whose nationalist claims to sovereignty are dismissed by the centre and national sovereign as separatist and illegitimate. This type of denial of self-rule and sovereignty is unique to national colonialism as it stems from a contradiction in nationalism itself. Nationalism is centred on politicizing ethnicities but dominant nationalism survives only if it denies nationalism of other ethnicities. In other words, nationalism of the minoritized populations is rejected precisely on the same basis that the nationalism of the majority is justified. What legitimizes the sovereignty of the nation disqualifies the appeals of minorities to nationhood or autonomy. Further, while colonizers in

external colonialism are often a minority in comparison with the colonized, in national colonialism the colonized remain permanent minorities.

Furthermore, the uneven character of capitalist development should not be underestimated in creating colonial relations in nation-states. As a process that is uneven in both time and space, capitalist development leads to disparities and inequalities within and between different countries, regions and social groups. However, this conceptualization of capitalist uneven development has often been used to address underdevelopment and deindustrialization (McIntyre 1992). Uneven development facilitates the hierarchical relations that subordinate the peripheries, their resources, labor power and overall existence to serve the interests of the core. This means that the development and industrialization of the core areas are made possible through the underdevelopment and deindustrialization of the peripheries. While capital generally tends to move from a developed area to an underdeveloped area and may move back to the first one in pursuit of higher rates of profit (Smith 2008), states interfere with this logic of capital to create and maintain colonial relations with the peripheries and ensure that the spatial division of labor between the core and periphery areas remains unchanged. In such colonial relations, except for extractive industries, for example, mining and gas and oil enterprises, where the industrial infrastructure must be near the resources, big manufacturing and processing industries are kept in the core and away from the peripheries. As a result, capital is largely concentrated in the core regions, and when it flows to the peripheries, it does so in ways that do not raise the living standards in the colonies.

It is important to note that national colonialism is not the same as national oppression. Places like Catalonia in Spain and Scotland in Britain that are nationally or racially oppressed

but their economy is far from being instrumentalized for the advancement of central regions cannot be considered as examples of national colonialism. By the very standards of nationalism, national oppression still best describes the injustice done to such situations. In a nutshell, economic exploitation and instrumentalization as well as racism and political subordination remain the key hallmarks of national colonialism, regardless of whether the colonized is denied national sovereignty.

1.6. Colonization of Kurdistan: A Literature Review

The oppression of the Kurds within the four modern nation-states of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey is largely referred to as the Kurdish question, and is widely understood as denying the Kurdish nation or national minority of its right to self-determination. The Kurdish question is thus viewed, in both academic and non-academic circles, as a case of national oppression or a minority question that needs to be addressed by recognizing the right of the Kurds to establish their self-rule. Unsurprisingly, Kurdish movements and struggles for self-rule have often articulated their demands in nationalist terms, hence fighting for Kurdish statehood or Kurdish autonomy. The bulk of the literature on the Kurdish question is also reflected in the analytical accounts of Kurdish nationalism and the scholarship on the origins of the Kurdish nation. While a common thread of treating the oppression of the Kurdish nation as denial of their right to self-determination runs through this literature, several distinct, and at times opposing, theoretical approaches to the nature and origins of the Kurdish question can be identified among the scholars of Kurdish studies.

The primordialist approach to the Kurdish question attributes a millennia-long history to the Kurdish nation, which has possessed a distinct culture and a specified territory. According to Edmonds (1971, 87),

> The Kurds constitute a single nation, which has occupied its present habitat for at least three thousand years. They have outlived the rise and fall of many imperial races: Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Mongols, Turks. They have their own history, language, and culture. Their country has been unjustly partitioned. But they are the original owners, not strangers to be tolerated as minorities with limited concessions granted at the whim of the usurpers.

Another primordialist account (Izady 1992) dates the national character of the Kurdish people back to "the 6th millenium BC" but describes the Kurds as "a multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-racial nation" (184-5). Therefore, the modern oppression of the Kurds as a nation is only a continuation of a historical phenomenon that has existed for millennia. The only difference is that in the contemporary era, the British and French colonial powers were added to the long list of the oppressors of the Kurds, depriving them of a sovereign state (Izady 1992, 198). Taking issues with the primordial and static conception of the Kurdish nation, the ethnicist or ethno-symbolist approach underscores the modern formation of the Kurdish nation although it was created out of pre-existing cultural substance provided by Kurdish ethnie indicating soft-primordialism (Hassan 2013), or preceded by a period of precocious nationalism called "feudal 'nationalism" in 16th and 17th centuries that witnessed the emergence of a type of political awareness that expressed attachment to an entity larger than tribes (Hassanpour 1992).

In contrast to these approaches, for the modernist perspective, Kurdish nation and nationalism came into being in the modern era and following the global trend of nationalism in the 19th century. Rooted in the modern "democratic doctrine of popular sovereignty" and the discourse of rights and citizenship (Vali 2003), the modernist argument goes, Kurdish

nationalism was encouraged by the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and the disintegration of the Ottoaman empire and was a response to surrounding and dominant nationalisms whether it be Armenian, Turkish, Persian or Arab (Bozarslan 2003; Olson 1989). The causal role of "interactive coexistence" of societies in the formation of Kurdish nationalism is further emphasized by Matin and Mahmoudi. Using Leon Trotsky's theory of uneven and combined development, they argue that Kurdish nationalism exemplifies the type of response produced by minoritized peoples who were excluded and otherized by the nation-building projects of Ottoman and Qajar states which "confronted the geopolitical pressures and colonial encroachment of modernising European states through building culturally and linguistically unitary nations" (Matin and Mahmoudi 2023, 721-3).

Although both the ethno-symbolists and the modernists view the Kurdish question as the denial of the right of the Kurdish nation to self-determination by the dominant Arab, Persian and Turkish nationalisms, the ways in which the nature of the Kurdish question is explained vary between and within these theoretical orientations. Some scholars and Kurdish political leaders (Ghassemlou 1996; Hassanpour 1999; Kendal 1980) explain the Kurdish question as national oppression in Marxist terms, For Hassanpour (2003) the Kurdish question derives from colonial endeavors of European imperialism of early 20th century as well as Turkish, Persian and Arab state nationalisms in modern Middle East, and it is defined by denying self-rule and the right to self-determination for the Kurdish nation. As a result, he objects to reducing the Kurdish question to a matter of "cultural identity" and "cultural survival" (Hassanpour 1999). Kendal (1980) presents a more theoretically specific and systematic account of national oppression of the Kurds by defining national oppression "as the sum of the political, economic and cultural discrimination suffered by the dominated nation at the hands of the dominant nation" (81).

Although he uses national oppression and colonialism interchangeably and his study focuses on Turkey's Kurdistan, Kendal (1980) describes that part of great Kurdistan as a "colony" whose economy has been exploited to the benefit of "the Turkish metropole" and it is also severely repressed both politically and culturally (82-7). Other accounts analyze the Kurdish question in liberal-democratic terms either as a product of denial of pluralism and ethno-cultural differences (Gunes 2012; Gunes and Zeydanlıoglu 2014) or as an ethno-political issue derived from a broader project of modernization and westernization (Yegen 1999).

Whether perceived as national oppression, or an ethno-political or ethno-cultural question, what is common among these approaches is their failure to capture the totality of the Kurdish question. Political and cultural accounts understudy the economic instrumentalization of Kurdistan's economy while the national oppression approach treats cultural discrimination as a secondary issue or offers a narrow account of what it conceives as cultural discrimination, overlooking cultural racism and its nuances. In fact, in rare occasions when the question of race and anti-Kurdish racism is discussed it is usually presented in a descriptive-historical fashion, and when exceptionally theorized, it fails to cover the complex and multifaceted character of anti-Kurdish racism. As a necessary, though not a sufficient, step towards addressing these issues, it is required to adopt a qualitatively different approach and treat the Kurdish question as a colonial matter.

During 1970s in Turkey, a group of Kurdish and Turkish leftists called Kurdistan Revolutionaries interpreted the oppression of the Kurds as a case of colonialism. This understanding of the Kurdish question by Kurdistan Revolutionaries, which later on formed the PKK (Partiya Krikaran Kurdistan or Kurdistan workers party), in turn, considered the struggle for Kurdish self-rule as a form of decolonizing Kurdistan or the land of the Kurds.

Ocalan and the PKK are the main representatives of a tendency in the history of struggles for the liberation of Kurdish people that view the Kurdish question as a case of colonialism. But they were not the first, at least in Turkey, to analyze the Kurdish question in those terms. Hikmet Kivilcimli, a prominent Turkish Marxist, recognized the national oppression of the Kurds in Turkey as early as 1930s. Kivilcimli was palpably going against the flow as for decades later, his understanding of the Kurdish question in Turkey received little to no sympathy within the Turkish Left.

The prevalent approach among the Turkish Left, as late as the 1970s, considered the national oppression of Kurds and Armenians secondary to fight against imperialism as they viewed Turkish bourgeoisie and Kemalism as anti-imperialist (Marcus 2007). While recognizing the Kurdish people as oppressed, the Turkish Left generally refused to acknowledge the colonial character of the Kurdish question as they associated colonialism with imperialist forces and since in their view Turkey was itself a semi-colony and not imperialist, Turkey could not have been a colonizer (Jongerden and Akkaya, 2012). For Kivilcimli (1979), by contrast, Kemalism was the greatest enemy of peasants and workers in Turkey, and its conflicts with imperialism stemmed not from the fact that imperialism had made profits from exploiting hard-working and poor people of Turkey but because Turkish bourgeoisie was given a lesser share of this profit (213). Kıvılcımlı (1979) maintained that Kemalism had made Kurdistan a colony that had been 'brutally oppressed and robbed' (161) and its goal in Kurdistan was "to deny the existence of the Kurdish people there, to destroy this entity in its entirety, to crush it and silence its voice" (154). Kıvılcımlı's ideas on the nature of the national oppression of the Kurds in Turkey as well as the true character of Kemalism reverberated strongly in the PKK's and Ocalan's analyses of those issues.

Ocalan's account of colonization of Kurdistan first appeared in *Kurdistan Devriminin Yolu* (the Road to the Kurdistan Revolution or the PKK's Manifesto) —one of the founding documents of the PKK. This manifesto contains Ocalan's and the PKK's analysis of Kurdish oppression and details how to overthrow it. *The PKK's Manifesto* was also a reaction to the Turkish Left's dogmatic position on the Kurdish question. As late as the 1970's, the Turkish Left considered the national oppression of Kurds and Armenians as secondary to the fight against Western imperialism. In that light, they viewed the Turkish bourgeoisie and Kemalism as anti-imperialist cornerstones. While recognizing the Kurdish people as oppressed, this oppression was not construed in national and racial terms but class terms. Therefore, Kurds were oppressed as peasants and workers just like their Turkish counterparts. Apart from Hikmet Kivilcimli, the Turkish Left at that time generally refused to acknowledge the colonial character of the Kurdish question since they associated colonialism exclusively with outside imperialist forces. For the Left, Turkey was a semi-colony of larger global capitalist forces and as such could not be a colonizer itself (Jongerden and Akkaya, 2012, 7).

In *the PKK's Manifesto*, Ocalan explicitly defines the situation of Kurdistan as a colonial situation and refers to Kurdistan as a divided colony. Ocalan states that "The history of Kurdistan from its division into four parts until today is characterized by occupation, massacre and plunder on each part. It is nothing but the history of colonialism carried out." (PKK 1978, 29). Although Ocalan believes that the Kurds have been historically subject to colonization by various ancient Persian and Roman empires as well as Arab Muslims in slave and feudal social formations, unsurprisingly for a Kurdish political leader, it is the contemporary and modern form of colonization or "imperialist-colonial" form in the age of capitalism, as he calls it, that he is most concerned with**.**

Ocalan traces the roots of Kurdish colonization within the Ottoman Empire to the efforts of the Turkish bureaucratic bourgeoisie and nationalist intellectuals in the late nineteenth century, who, witnessing the military defeats of the Ottoman state and the successive loss of land, sought to define a Turkish homeland and draw its boundaries. Therefore, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), in its attempts to define and form a Turkish nation in the remaining lands of the empire, began to formulate a racist and chauvinist Turkish nationalism inspired by the idea of Turanism. After the First World War and during the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, under the leadership of Ataturk and with a Kemalist nationalist ideology, which in Ocalan's view was "more realistic than Turanism", the political program of CUP was pursued with greater vigor. Due to resisting the Ottoman sultan as well as the war against the Greeks and the British, Kemalism took the form of a national liberation movement to the extent that even some Kurdish sheikhs and tribal leaders supported it. But as Ocalan points out, Kemalism revealed its true face after winning the war.

> Under the republican regime, every measure was taken for the progress of the Turkish bourgeoisie. The trade carried out by the Armenian and Greek minorities was seized. All the demands of the workers and peasants were forcibly suppressed. The chauvinistic character of the new regime clearly showed that any just demand that expressed the interests of both minority peoples and Kurds would be suppressed by force. (PKK 1978, 30)

In fact, Kemalism as the state ideology of the modern Turkish Republic became a tool to justify the political and economic domination of the Turkish nation over the rest of the national minorities, so much so that the Kemalists did not shy away from depicting the occupation and colonization of Kurdistan as part of a civilizing mission aimed at Kurdish savages (PKK 1978,

30). Likening Kemalism to Zionism and the racism of South Africa's apartheid system, Ocalan notes that the Republic of Turkey, due to its weak economic infrastructure, began colonizing Kurdistan by military occupation during a process that lasted from 1925 to 1940. Another reason for this long-term military phase, according to Ocalan, stemmed from the Turkish bourgeoisie's awareness of the fact that the political, economic and cultural colonization of Kurdistan would not be possible without stabilizing the military occupation and subjugation of Kurdistan. The military phase of colonizing Kurdistan in modern Turkey was followed by, according to Ocalan and other founders of the PKK,

> a period of assimilation, symbolized in boarding schools, which were used for the Turkish state enculturation of the Kurdish youth, and then, from the 1960s onwards, a period of economic colonization, symbolized by (state-led) agricultural modernization which functioned to break up the traditional (tribal-based) structures of Kurdish society. (Jongerden and Akkaya 2012, 11)

It is important to note that, for Ocalan, the colonization of Kurdistan in Turkey and elsewhere was not merely the work of ruling classes and states of those places. Global imperialist forces were also actively involved, collaborating with regional colonizers in devising and executing colonial machinations against the Kurds and Kurdistan. Partition and colonization of Kurdistan, Ocalan notes, was part of the grand plans of the winning bloc of the WWI i.e. the Allied Forces to reshape and reorganize the world order according to their interests. While the British and French empires had occupied southern and western Kurdistan respectively as per the terms of the Sykes-Picot agreement, the internal social relations and balance of forces in Kurdistan were not helping to disrupt and thwart the imperialist agenda. In Ocalan’s view, the stagnant, feudal structure of Kurdish society did not allow for the

formation of a social class inspired and enlightened by the October Revolution, Kurdish tribal chiefs and landowners were too accustomed to the benefits of tributary economies and Kurdish nationalists were delusional about convincing world imperialists with their maps and census statistics. In such circumstances, the division of Kurdistan became inevitable (PKK 1978, 28). Since the early days of the republic in Turkey, Ocalan argues, Turkish bourgeoisie chose to side with imperialism in fear of October Revolution and the struggles of workers and peasants. This pro-imperialist stance was even further aggravated after WWII when in the US-led world order, Turkey was subject to the US neo-colonialism. However, Ocalan emphasizes that

> US neo-colonialism and development of classical colonialism in Kurdistan by the Turkish bourgeoisie does not contradict each other; on the contrary, they complement each other. In this period, strong economies develop neocolonialism, while economies dependent on imperialism can only sustain classical colonialism. (PKK 1978, 31)

Ocalan's account not only refutes the progressive, anti-imperialist character attributed to Kemalism by many Turkish leftists, it also highlights a specific characteristic of colonization of the Kurds, and some other nations and ethnicities in the Global South, that could be called double colonization. The term double colonization refers to the role of both Western as well as regional colonizers in suppressing the demands of the Kurds for self-determination. Colonization by western forces of the Kurds is most intense and direct during WWI and immediately afterwards as the British and French empires partitioned the Ottoman empire via the Sykes-Picot agreement and the treaty of Lausanne, and thus effectively divided Kurdistan into four parts; the second historical division of Kurdistan occurred after it was first split between the Safavid

empire and the Ottoman empire in the sixteenth century. The British and French mandates of Iraq and Syria in roughly three decades following the end of WWI not only made use of natural resources in Kurdish lands but also put down Kurdish nationalist organizations and insurgencies, most notably the Xoybun movement in Syria and the rebellion of Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji in Iraq, in collaboration with Arab and Turkish leaders. After Arab governments in Iraq and Syria gained independence in 1932 and 1946 respectively, they joined their Persian and Turkish counterparts in Iran and Turkey in consolidating colonial rule in divided Kurdistan. Therefore, while western colonial powers played a decisive role in creating the Kurdish question, it was the regional forces and their ethnicized nationalisms that for the most part maintained and perpetuated the colonization of Kurdistan.

Ocalan succinctly presents the main reason for the partition and colonization of Kurdistan, which satisfies the interests of both imperialists and regional dominant classes, in following terms:

> Independent Kurdistan, which is incompatible with the interests of feudal and comprador classes, and therefore inevitably gaining a democratic structure, is the greatest danger for imperialism's entire Middle East policy. A fragmented Kurdistan, which can at times be used as a trump card to extract more concessions from its collaborators and turn them into their pawns, is the most ideal for the interests of imperialism. (PKK 1978, 32)

As a result, while northern and Eastern Kurdistan were allotted to Turkey and Iran respectively, Southern and Western Kurdistan were annexed to imperial territories of Britain and France. With the support of British and subsequently American imperialisms, an ethnicized hierarchy of power was established in Iran where a privileged Persian nation dominated and

subjugated other nations and ethnicities in the country, particularly colonizing Kurdish, Baloch, Arab and Azeri-Turkish territories in Iran. Kurds of Iraq and Syria, especially under Arab nationalist rule, were subjected to colonial polities which included policies and practices such as forced assimilation and Arabization, forced displacements and creating Arab belts i.e. encircling and controlling Kurdish territories with settler Arab communities (PKK 1978, 32-33).

Nearly a decade after the writing of the PKK's Manifesto, another analysis of Kurdish colonization entitled *International Colony Kurdistan* was published by a Turkish sociologist named Ismail Beşikçi. Echoing Kivilcimli and Ocalan, Beşikçi (2015) argued that the division of Kurdistan among four countries, the systematic prevention of Kurdish control over their own natural resources and denying Kurdish rights to form their own state and distinct nation**,** renders Kurdistan what he calls an 'international colony'. Therefore, Kurdistan is colonized not by one but four colonial states at once, which makes the colonization of the Kurds a unique case in its character (27-28). In underscoring the international character of Kurdistan as a colony, Beşikçi, again in line with Kivilcimli's and Ocalan's analyses, alludes to the collaboration of Western imperialism and distinct regional ruling classes in creating and maintaining the national oppression of the Kurds. However, he blames the four states directly colonizing Kurdistan for the bulk of atrocities committed against the Kurds: Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq. The British and French colonizers, Beşikçi (2015) states,

> made no efforts to restrict the development of Kurdish language and literature. Moreover, it was not the great imperialist powers who sought to physically exterminate Kurds through the use of chemical weapons. This was also a policy of regional collaborators. (41)

A counterargument to Beşikçi's point would be that cultural racism against the Kurds and genocidal acts like the chemical bombing of the Kurdish city of Halabja by Iraq's Saddam Hussein in 1988 could not have been possible without political and military support of Western imperialism. Beşikçi goes even further in characterizing the colonization of the Kurds as unique by pointing to some contrasts between Kurdistan and some cases of classical colonialism. He contends that since, unlike African colonies whose borders were defined in 1885 by European colonizers, the borders of Kurdistan were never recognized nor defined by their colonizers, the status of Kurdistan is even lower and worse than a colony (Beşikçi 2015, 27). It is true that the boundaries of great Kurdistan as a contiguous land have never been recognized by its colonizers. That said, the fact that Kurdistan is a divided land shows that colonizers of Kurdistan drew borders that cut through Kurdish populations in the same manner that European colonizers did to many African communities and ethnicities during the infamous Berlin conference of 1885.

Beşikçi also maintains that Kurdishness as a distinct ethnic identity was denied, while in classical colonialism the distinctive identity of the colonized that separated them from their colonizers was not denied but depicted by the colonizers as backward and uncivilized (Beşikçi 2015, 28). While the ethnic identity of Kurds for a long time was denied in Turkey and they were considered as 'mountain Turks', Beşikçi extrapolates this reality to other parts of Kurdistan. In Iran, Iraq and Syria, the linguistic rights of Kurds were restricted and teaching and learning the Kurdish language was excluded from the formal education and sometimes banned in the public throughout the twentieth century. However, unlike Turkey, the identity of Kurds as a distinct group of people was not denied in Iran and Iraq. Beşikçi then concludes that the denial of Kurdish identity led their colonizers to design and enforce assimilatory measures which were non-existent in classical cases of colonialism. The latter point, one can say with certainty, is

factually inaccurate as the language of Latin American countries and some French colonies were assimilated to those of their Spanish, Portuguese and French colonizers (Betts, 2005).

In recent years, a growing literature on the colonization of Kurdistan has emerged that engages more systematically with anti-colonial theoretical literature (Kermanian 2024; Matin 2022; Soleimani and Mohammadpour 2020; Sunca 2023). Soleimani and Mohammadpour describe the situation of Kurds in Iran as a case of internal colonialism. In addition to the theoretical limitations mentioned earlier concerning the concept of internal colonialism, the authors' theoretical justification is, at least partly, built upon misattributing a direct quote to Casanova. The quote in question which is presented as the definition of internal colonialism by Casanoiva reads: "rule of one ethnic group … over other such groups living within the continuous boundaries of a single state" (Cited in Soleimani and Mohammadpour 2020, 1). However, there is no trace of this quote in Casanova's piece and it is in fact only one of the four characteristics of internal colonialism described by Van den Berghe (1978). Other works particularly interrogate the conventional approach in post-colonial studies towards modern colonialism which centres on a "dualist imaginary" or "West-Rest binary" that ascribes colonial and imperial agency to the West, overlooking "inter-subaltern" forms of oppression or colonial relations among non-Western societies (Kermanian 2024: 3-4; Matin 2020).

Despite the advances of the scholarship on colonization of Kurdistan, the literature exhibits notable gaps. Early foundational works—such as those by Beşikçi (2015), Kıvılcımlı (1979), and the PKK (1978)—as well as some recent works (e.g., Soleimani and Mohammadpour 2020), often lack rigorous theoretical engagement with broader colonial studies, leaving their analyses of colonial structures underdeveloped. Meanwhile, more recent scholarship (Kermanian 2024; Matin 2022; Sunca 2023) rarely delves into the precise ways in

which colonization of the Kurds were constructed discursively and implemented historically in each of the four nation-states colonizing the Kurds. Further, they equally understudy the modern features of colonialism in Kurdistan, racism and capitalist exploitation in particular, that distinguish contemporary colonization of the Kurds from pre-modern instances. While national colonialism does not deny the superordinate/subordinate relations between the imperial centres and Kurdish areas prior to the nation-state era, it highlights the specifically modern aspects of colonial relations to which the Kurds and Kurdistan have been subjected.

Chapter 2

Political and Economic Colonization of Kurdistan

In this chapter, I will discuss the political and economic levels of colonization of Kurdish people and territories in the countries of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey by outlining and analyzing the corresponding historical and empirical data. Hereafter, when referring to each part of divided and colonized Kurdistan, I will use the original Kurdish names as the conventional titles of Iranian, Iraqi, Syrian and Turkish Kurdistan carry heavy colonial overtones. Therefore, Rojava stands for western Kurdistan (Syria), Rojhelat is eastern Kurdistan (Iran), Bakûr stands for northern Kurdistan (Turkey) and Başûr- pronounced Bashûr- is southern Kurdistan (Iraq). It is worth mentioning that Rojhelat is located in north and north-west Iran while Rojava is in north and north-east Syria, and Bakûr is located in south-east and eastern Turkey whereas Başûr is in northern Iraq. For the sake of maintaining historical cohesion of my account and displaying the interconnectedness of political events across Kurdistan, the political aspect of colonization of all parts of Kurdistan will be presented altogether in the first part of this chapter. This will be followed by discussing the economic colonization of each part of Kurdistan in terms of specific sets of economic indicators.

2.1. Political Subjugation of Kurdistan

The most obvious indicator of the colonization of Kurdistan has been the denial of political self-rule of Kurds over the territories to which they are indigenous. Even before the arrival of a modern capitalist variation of colonialism, given the lack of political sovereignty, Kurdistan was a colony of the Ottoman empire and various Iranian dynasties by the standards of classical colonialism i.e., a territory with an inferior status in the imperial order. Although Kurdish principalities and emirates enjoyed autonomy to varying degrees within Ottoman and

Iranian empires, their autonomy was conditioned on their allegiance to the Ottoman and Iranian suzerainty. In this section, instead of writing a detailed and comprehensive history of Kurdish movements and struggles, I will outline major historical events indicating political activities of the Kurds for Kurdish self-rule and how the states reacted to them, demonstrating how politically the right of the Kurds to national self-determination has been dealt with in a world shaped by the right of nations to political sovereignty.

Contrary to what is commonly known, the partition of Kurdistan following the First World War was not the first time that the land of the Kurds was divided. Rather, Kurdistan was first split in 1514 after the battle of Chaldiran between the Ottoman empire and the Safavid dynasty. Until late 19th century when centralizing and Westernizing policies were put in practice, Kurds enjoyed a significant level of autonomy in both Iranian and Ottoman empires. Several Kurdish emirates and principalities ran the affairs of Kurdish areas, and the Kurdish local rulers had immense control over the territories they ruled (Yadirgi 2017, 94). The Kurdish principalities were in effect part of the tributary structure of the Ottoman, Safavid and later on Qajar empires. As Bromley (1994, 48-9) explains:

> Ottoman society came to comprise a structure of agrarian surplus production, linked to an urban, tributary form of appropriation, involving centralized taxation of the peasantry and direct political regulation of urban production and trade, organized by the Osmanli state and a sub- ordinate ulema. Because of the tributary character of society, there was little impetus for agricultural or industrial improvement. Any dynamic that this society possessed was based on perpetual military conquest; the Ottoman polity was a 'plunder machine (Jones 1981). In such a social order, the cessation of territorial expansion implied a gradual

> disintegration of the state and an increasingly counter-productive form of surplus extraction. External accumulation was necessary in order to provide revenue for the state and to sustain the sipabi. Once its path was blocked by absolutist Europe in the north and the existence of rival empires or desert on its other flanks, surpluses could only be raised by an increased resort to tax farming. This in turn led to growing pressure on the peasantry and the rise of provincial notables who became competing centres of appropriation and political power.

The Safavid empire had a tributary system resembling the Ottomans', but its central authority was less dominant, relying on tribal levies for its military. This highlighted the stronger influence of pastoral nomadism and tribal structures, along with powerful local landowners, in post-Mongol Iran. The Qajar state was relatively even lesser dominant (Bromley 1994, 42-50). However, it should be noted that the Ottoman empire and the empires of Persia fought a devastating conflict across Kurdistan, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, which continued until the mid-19th century. The Safavids initially sought to replace Kurdish rulers with centrally appointed governors, but faced fierce opposition, requiring massive military deployments to assert dominance over the region. Entire principalities were wiped out, and numerous tribes were forcibly relocated to Iran’s eastern frontiers. Under Shah Abbas alone, 15,000 Kurds were deported to Khorasan (Hassanpour 1992, 53). In the Ottoman empire, too, Kurdish administrative structures were unstable. Most Kurdish governing bodies had transformed from self-ruling entities (known as *hükümets*) in the 16th century into centrally controlled Ottoman districts (*sancaks*) or semi-autonomous units (*yurtluks* and *ocaklıks*) by the 17th and 18th centuries (Yadirgi 2017, 74). Despite persistent attempts by these empires to centralize power, some principalities managed to endure well into the 1800s.

Unlike capitalism, which drove sustained advances in productive forces, tributary and nomadic systems lacked mechanisms for long-term economic progress. Their social and material reproduction remained largely stagnant, or even declined in nomadic societies. Consequently, when confronted with more dynamic capitalist rivals capable of producing vast surpluses and mobilizing strong militaries, these societies lacked the capacity for self-renewal. This stagnation ultimately left weakening tributary Ottoman and Persian empires vulnerable to European colonial expansion (Bromley 1994). Faced with external pressures, both the Ottoman and Qajar Empires initiated programs of 'defensive modernization' (Matin 2013, 55). These efforts focused primarily on political and administrative centralization aimed at increasing state revenues to fund military reforms— a crucial requirement for their geopolitical survival. The Ottoman Tanzimat (Reorganization) reforms exemplified this trend, while Qajar Iran's Nizami Jadid (New Order) represented a more constrained adaptation. These modernization efforts ultimately eliminated the remaining traces of Kurdish administrative structures (Matin and Mahmoudi 2023, 724). Strict centralization of governance, as mentioned in the first chapter, were accompanied by creating culturally and linguistically homogenous nations.

The years immediately following WWI witnessed the disintegration of the Ottoman empire and the division of its territories. This division was planned by the Allied powers throughout the course of the war and afterwards, and stipulated in several agreements and treaties, most notably the Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916. According to this agreement, which was signed by the British diplomat Mark Sykes and the French diplomat François Georges-Picot, the Ottoman empire was divided into spheres of influence and control between Britain, France, Tsarist Russia, Greece and Italy (McDowell 2021, 399**).** After the war, Britain and France

promised the Kurds an autonomous and eventually independent Kurdistan as per articles 62 to 64 of the treaty of Sevre in 1920 (McDowell 2021, 437)). However, hopes for an independent Kurdistan were dashed as Britain and France reneged on their promise during the Lausanne conference in 1923 in order to appease Turkey whose troops were progressively advancing toward the frontiers of British and French spheres of influence in the region. It is important to note that the British grand strategy in the region aimed at isolating the Bolshevik Russia and this made cooperation with Turkey through conceding Bakûr indispensable. Turkey was keen on reclaiming the whole Ottoman Kurdistan, but southern and western Kurdistan were put under British and French mandates respectively, since a powerful Turkey could inflame anti-British sentiments among Muslim populations of the region (Ali 1997, 523). Therefore, in the years after WWI, Kurdistan was once again partitioned and the lands of the Kurds once under the sovereignty of the Ottoman empire were eventually split among the newly established nation-states of Turkey, Iraq and Syria while Iran kept its part (Ghassemlou, 1980). The political and social status of Kurds changed drastically thereafter and, as it will be explained in this chapter, unlike their situation under the Ottoman empire and various Iranian dynasties, the Kurds were not only stripped of their local autonomy (Vali 2011, Yadirgi 2017, Yildiz 2005a), hence their natural and human resources exploited and instrumentalized by the center, but they were also subjected to cultural racism and forced assimilation.

Initial reactions of the Kurds to the new political order of things were mixed but altogether marked by the lack of unity, tribal rivalries and religious sectarianism (McDowall 2021). A number of rebellions against the mandates transpired including the revolt of Sheikh Mahmoud Barzanji against the British mandate in Başûr during 1920s and the Murud movement (1933-1940) against the French mandate in Rojava (Tejel, 2009; Yildiz 2005a). Nevertheless,

refusing Arab rule and calling for local autonomy, many Kurdish leaders in Rojava and Başûr embraced French and British mandates respectively. In 1928, a petition was submitted to the French authorities demanding the appointment of Kurdish administrators and formal education in Kurdish in the majority Kurdish populated areas, the formation of a Kurdish regiment to guard the northern frontiers with Turkey and the French assistance in settling the Kurdish refugees. The petition was rejected by the French mandate officials (Tejel 2009, 28). After Iraq gained independence from Britain in 1932, a group of Kurdish chiefs in 1935 demanded the official use of Kurdish language as promised by the League of Nations in 1926, Kurdish representatives in the National Assembly of Iraq, and a fair share of national resources for development of Kurdish areas. The Arab nationalists in Baghdad refused to accommodate such demands (McDowall 2021, 819-820). Also, Mustafa Barzani, a powerful tribal chief, revolted against the Iraqi government in 1943 which resulted in his escape to Rojhelat in 1945. However, his revolt was less motivated by nationalist or autonomist sentiments than his personal quarrel with the government (McDowall 2021, 825-831). In Bakûr, the pan-Islamic propaganda of Turkish nationalists had attracted the majority of Kurds in wars of independence (1919-1923) against Greek and Armenian non-Muslims. Even Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk), the founder of Republic of Turkey, had insisted on Turkish–Kurdish brotherhood, and supported Kurdish local autonomy within the borders of Turkey before 1923. He declared in a public interview just before the establishment of the Turkish Republic that

> In accordance with our constitution, a kind of local autonomy is to be granted. Hence, provinces inhabited by the Kurds will rule themselves autonomously…the Grand National Assembly of Turkey is composed of the deputies of both Kurds

and Turks and these two peoples have unified their interests and fates. (cited in McDowall 2021, 163)

However, Ataturk's betrayal of his promises of Kurdish autonomy as well as national chauvinistic policies and practices of the Kemalist state following the establishment of the republic of Turkey sparked several Kurdish uprisings in the interwar period, most prominently Sheikh Said's revolt in 1925, the Xoybun (independence) movement (1927-1931) and the Dersim rebellion (1937-1938). Rojhelat was not affected by the designs of the Sykes-Picot agreement and the post-war developments, but even there the centralizing and national chauvinistic efforts of Reza Shah's government faced opposition from some Kurdish tribal chiefs among whom Ismail agha Simko was the fiercest (McDowall 2021).

The history of the Kurdish movements in the post-WWII era displays two prominent features with significant consequences for the character and objectives of these movements. The first was the increasing efforts of certain global superpowers as well as states colonizing the Kurds in manipulating the Kurdish movements for their own geopolitical and security interests. This was perhaps no surprise given the geographical standing of Kurdish areas in the frontiers of their host nation-states in the oil-rich and geo-strategically important region of the Middle East. The second was the gradually changing social structure of Kurdistan with the growth of urbanization that gave rise to the formation of educated urban elites, independent often of tribal and religious leaders. This had a lasting impact on the composition of Kurdish movements, particularly the leadership. Unlike their predecessors among Kurdish notables, this new class of Kurdish educated elites were more of a middle-class background. And while pre-WWII Kurdish movements were mostly led by powerful Kurdish tribal chiefs and religious leaders whose attitude was motivated by parochialism and a desire to maintain tribal loyalty and privileges of

patronage, the increasing presence of urban nationalist figures in the leadership of Kurdish struggles enhanced the articulation and spread of a Kurdish national consciousness beyond tribal rivalries and religious sectarianism. Life under the Arab, Persian and Turkish national states was also a catalyst for the popularization of national consciousness among many Kurdish communities. The Mahabad Republic, the first modern Kurdish government, perfectly exemplifies the relatively different dynamics of the Kurdish movements in the years and decades after WWII.

Post-WWII Rojhelat

The Mahabad Republic, also called the Republic of Kurdistan, was proclaimed by Ghazi Muhammad, the president of the Republic, in January 1946 in the Kurdish city of Mahabad in northwest Iran. Although a Kurdish Sunni clergyman, Ghazi Muhammad was simultaneously the secretary-general of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), the intellectual backbone of the Republic. The KDPI was the child of an organization called Komalay JK whose membership came exclusively from the Kurdish urban middle class and advocated a radical political project centred on ethnic nationalism and agrarian populism, whereas the KDPI remained committed to the autonomy of Rojhelat within the boundaries of the Iranian nation-state (Vali 2011, 25-26). The Republic itself was formed in a specific historical and political situation where a power vacuum was created in northern part of Rojhelat as a result of the invasion of western Iran by the Soviet and British forces in August 1941. As the war came to a close, the Soviets refused to withdraw their forces and supported the establishment of two autonomous governments in the Azerbaijan province of Iran and Rojhelat to make Tehran concede oil exploitation rights in northern Iran (McDowall 2021, 699-700). However, upon pressure by Western powers and after a tentative agreement was reached between Iran and the Soviets regarding the oil, the Red Army

left northwest Iran and the Iranian army entered Mahabad on 15 December 1946 and dismantled the Republic's administration.

For the Kurds of Rojhelat, it took more than three decades after the end of the Mahabad Republic to put up a popular resistance against the central government, even on a much larger geographical scale than that of the Mahabad Republic. In the wake of the 1979 revolution in Iran, Kurdish political parties and a few influential Sunni clergies mobilized large sections of the Kurdish population in Iran around the central demand of autonomy for all Rojhelat as one administrative entity. While the KDPI's agenda was presented in its motto "democracy for Iran, autonomy for Kurdistan," the newly formed Komala, a radical Left organization inspired by the Chinese Revolution, fought for social revolution and council democracy. Although very firm in fighting against national oppression of the Kurds, Komala was guided by decentralization rather than Kurdish nationalism and sought the liberation of Kurds of Rojhelat along with other nationalities and ethnic groups in Iran (McDowall 2021, 770-771).

Despite several rounds of negotiations between the central government and the representatives of the Kurds during 1979-1980 period, the post-revolutionary government proved to be as uncompromising and heavy handed in their response as their pre-revolutionary counterparts, failing to even acknowledge national oppression and discrimination against the Kurds let alone taking any concrete steps at addressing it. The government in Tehran resorted to violence, attacking Kurdish rural and urban areas from air and ground, but due to armed resistance of Kurdish and a few non-Kurdish leftist organizations, it took the government nearly a decade to consolidate its rule in Rojhelat and push the Kurdish peshmergas (guerillas) to Başûr. Notwithstanding the formation of another Kurdish political party i.e., The Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) in the early 2000s, and the active participation of Kurdish masses in the **"**Woman,

Life, Freedom" uprising in 2022-23, the effects of the defeat of the 1980s were so devastating that the struggles of the Kurdish people in Rojhelat for self-determination are yet far from making any political progress towards that end.

Post-WWII Başûr

In Başûr, inspired by the formation of the KDPI in Rojhelat, the Iraqi Kurdish Democratic Party was established in 1946. In fact, the idea of the party was proposed by Mostafa Barzani who at the time was a fugitive and serving as a marshal in the Mahabad Republic. In 1953, the party was renamed to Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). The overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq in 1958 seemed promising for nationalist Kurds in Başûr, and the return of Barzani as the de facto leader of Iraqi Kurds was also reassuring to them. On several occasions throughout the 1960s, some Iraqi leaders made promises regarding the official recognition of Kurdish national rights in Iraq. However, every time Iraqi nationalists, especially in the army, vehemently opposed the idea, paving the way for several rounds of war between the army and the Kurds. Meanwhile, Israel and Iran, particularly the latter, started providing military weaponry and training to Barzani in mid-1960s, and this immensely alarmed the Iraqi government (McDowall 2021, 866-896). A peace accord was reached in March 1970, which was a turning point as it recognized Arabs and Kurds as two nationalities in Iraq and granted the Kurds significant cultural and political rights including the use of Kurdish as an official language and guarantees for the Kurds to run local administration in Kurdish majority areas as well as Kurdish participation in senior and sensitive positions in Iraqi cabinet and army. This was a prelude to the draft autonomy law of 1974, but in both cases the government refused to include the oil-rich Kirkuk within the Kurdish autonomous region. Moreover, powers of decision-making and policy implementation were practically denied to the Kurds (Natali 2010, 27). The Kurdish

side was also accusing the government of failing to fully implement the 1970 peace accord. Consequently, Barzani and the KDP rejected the draft autonomy law, hence the 1974-75 war ensued (McDowall 2021, 919-933). A decisive development sealed the fate of the war and any hopes of autonomy for the Iraqi Kurds was dashed. On 6 March 1975, Iraq's Saddam Hussein and the Shah of Iran formally settled their border disputes, and Iran pledged to withdraw its support for Barzani. As a result, Mostafa Barzani was once again exiled, and several factions departed the KDP, most importantly a group led by Jalal Talabani who founded the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in June 1975.

The armed struggles of KDP and PUK against the Iraqi Ba'ath government continued throughout the 1980s, which resulted in the genocide of the Kurdish people of Başûr by the Iraqi army (details in the racism section). Following the defeat of the Iraqi army by the US-led coalition in the Gulf War, the Shi'ites in the south and the Kurds in the north were emboldened to rise in revolt. In March 1991, the uprising of the Kurdish people in Başûr resulted in taking control of most Kurdish areas. The Government's response was swift and ruthless, re-establishing its authority in Başûr and forcing over 1.5 million Kurds out of their homes. Failing to protect the Kurds, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 688 and condemned the Iraqi government's crackdown on the uprising and demanded its immediate end. In April, the US-led coalition established a no-fly zone in northern Iraq covering the airspace of Başûr. In October 1991, Saddam Hussein put the entire Başûr under siege, gradually imposing a blockade on the region. All these in effect led to the formation of a de facto Kurdish autonomous region in Iraq. The Kurds, on their part, held elections to form a local Kurdish government on 19 May 1992 (McDowall 2021, 1033-1036). It was only after the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the US that Article 113 of the Iraqi constitution in 2005 recognized "the region of Kurdistan and its existing

regional and federal authorities" (Final Draft Iraqi Constitution 2005). Yet, the political status of Kirkuk remained unresolved. It was agreed that a census and referendum would decide the fate of Kirkuk by 31 December 2007. This has not materialized even to this date (2025). Later developments further proved the fact that whatever the Kurds could achieve politically is predicated less on their will and their struggles than what the balance of forces on the ground would allow. The starkest example is the firm and uncanny combined opposition of the United States, Iraq, Iran and Turkey to the independence referendum in Başûr in 2017 when Kurds voted overwhelmingly—over 93 percent— in favor of secession from Iraq (Degli Esposti 2021). Moreover, the legally sanctioned autonomous status of KRG never stopped the neighbouring Iran and Turkey from persecuting their respective Kurdish opposition based in Başûr even if it entailed violating the sovereignty of the Iraqi state over its territory. A combination of anti-Kurdish colonial mentality and practice of Turkish and Iranian states, a weak Iraqi state and the corruption of KRG officials has allowed Iran and Turkey to not only target Kurdish peshmergas of their opposition inside Başûr by air strikes, missiles and drones, but assassinate hundreds of them over the years as well (Mahmoud 2023). Both Turkey and Iran wield tremendous political clout over KDP and PUK, and Turkey reportedly has 71 military bases in Başûr ("Turkey Establishes" 2024). Therefore, it is fair to call the current status of Başûr semi-autonomous/semi-colonial.

Post-WWII Bakûr

Extreme suppression of any political and cultural expression of Kurdishness since the end of the Dersim rebellion in the late 1930s had left Bakûr utterly subordinated to the center and socially dominated by Kurdish Sheikhs and tribal chiefs in cahoots with Ankara. Toward the end of the 1950s and throughout the 1960s, the events in neighboring Iraq and the Kurdish national

movement led by Barzani had an undisputable impact on the resurgence of Kurdish identity in Bakûr. Ironically, the first signs of the revival of Kurdish collective identity in Turkey emerged as an unintended consequence of policies of forced assimilation. Out of those young Kurds hand-picked by Turkish authorities to study in big Turkish-speaking metropolitan areas to become Kemalists, an intellectual circle was formed that started publishing in Kurdish in late 1950s. Also, the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Turkey (KDPT), the first Kurdish nationalist party in Bakûr, was established as an illegal organization in 1965 (McDowall 2021, 1111-1117). But since it evidently represented a purely right-wing approach to the Kurdish question in an era of militant leftism, the nationalist Kurds of leftist persuasion were attracted to Turkish left-wing parties, particularly the legal Turkish Workers Party (TIP). The TIP and other Turkish leftist parties did not necessarily embrace the Kurdish question and at best they saw it as secondary to socialist revolution and the fight against imperialism. Despite this reality, leftist Kurds joined these parties because they found these platforms more open to discuss their national oppression (Korkmaz 2021, 2667-69).

Later in mid-1970s, and in reaction to the dogmatic stance of the Turkish Left on the Kurdish question, a few underground Kurdish parties with leftist orientation were formed including the Socialist Party of Kurdistan. But it was in late 1970s that an underground political organization came into being, which soon dominated the Kurdish politics in Turkey. A guerilla movement modeled on national liberation movements of the twentieth century; the PKK was founded by a group of young Kurdish and Turkish Marxist-Leninists led by Abdullah Ocalan. They formulated the oppression of the Kurds across greater Kurdistan as a case of colonization, and their stated goal was to liberate all four parts of Kurdistan and form an independent Kurdish state (Akkaya 2020, 5-6). One unique and distinct fact about the founders of the PKK is that

unlike the leadership of any other Kurdish movement before them, they all came from economically poor backgrounds. Shortly after the establishment of the party and in the wake of the September 1980 coup in Turkey, except for Ocalan who had left before, the leadership of the party fled to Syria where they led the movement for the next two decades and received significant logistical support from the Ba'ath government on the condition that they avoid stoking nationalist ambitions among the Kurds of Rojava against the Syrian authorities (McDowall 2021, 1160-1163). In order to prepare for armed struggles against the Turkish army, the PKK guerrillas were trained by Palestinian groups in two military camps in Syria and Lebanon. The PKK started its operations first against Kurdish tribal chiefs, particularly those connected with the extreme Turkish nationalists, and rival Kurdish political groups in Bakûr. It was in 1984 that they commenced their fight against the Turkish military forces by attacking several garrisons across Bakûr. This was the beginning of a war that, albeit with some intervals, has continued for four decades with no end in the offing. In 1993, there were hopes for negotiations between the state and the PKK as the Turkish president Turgut Ozal had shown some positive gestures including the repeal of Law 2932 that was put in practice since 1983 prohibiting the use of written and spoken Kurdish. However, with the suspicious death of Ozal the day after Ocalan announced an indefinite ceasefire, the war resumed and continued for the rest of the decade (McDowall 2021, 1193).

In late 1998, Turkey escalated pressure on Syria to expel Ocalan, and stationed 10,000 troops near the Syrian border. Ocalan left Syria and was eventually abducted by the Turkish forces and the CIA in Nairobi airport in Kenya in February 1999. Within months of his imprisonment, Ocalan called on the PKK to completely halt its military activities (McDowall 2021, 1203-4). The ceasefire lasted nearly four years until May 2004 when the PKK ended it due

to the Turkish state's reluctance to dialogue. During the ceasefire and following Ocalan's directions, the PKK created two new bodies**,** the Kurdistan People's Congress (*Kongra-Gel*) and the Union of Kurdistan Communities (KCK) to implement the new party program of democratic confederalism. While KCK is an umbrella organization of village, town and regional communes and councils, Kongra-Gel acts as its assembly (Akkaya & Jongerden 2013, 188). By issuing a Declaration of Democratic Confederalism in March 2005 (McDowall 2021, 1453), Ocalan formally announced the formation of a stateless democracy as the PKK's goal and thus relinquished the party's initially stated aim of creating a Kurdish state.

As pro-Kurdish political parties were increasingly making progress in parliamentary and mayoral elections throughout the 2000s, once again hopes were raised for peace and settlement of the Kurdish question in Turkey. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by then Prime Minister Erdogan was key in creating such an atmosphere of hope. In his early years as Prime Minister, Erdogan had acknowledged the existence of the Kurdish question in Turkey and stressed the right of the Kurds to express their Kurdish identity; an unprecedented position from a high-ranking Turkish official since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey (McDowall 2021, 1467). It appears that both the Muslim conservatives of the AKP and the Kurds were unable to secure what they aspired to without the help of the other. On the one hand, as a minority, the Kurds needed allies among the Turks. On the other hand, the AKP could not contain the powerful and meddling Turkish army and its secularist allies among Kemalist parties without the Kurdish votes.

In September 2011, the news of secret negotiations between the PKK and senior officials of MIT, Turkey's intelligence service, mediated by a Norwegian NGO in Oslo in 2009 and 2010 was leaked in the press. Erdogan announced his government's direct negotiations with Ocalan in

December 2012, followed by Ocalan's Newruz (21 March) 2013 message to a massive crowd in the city of Diyarbekir where he proclaimed the withdrawal of PKK's armed units outside the border. In the negotiations with Ocalan in Imrali prison where leaders of the legal pro-Kurdish BDP/HDP parties were also present as couriers to the PKK in the mountains, the Kurdish side demanded the following: "constitutional recognition, a reasonable degree of self-government, integration of the PKK within the political system, and Kurdish-medium education" (McDowall 2021, 1488). While the PKK began withdrawing in May 2013, the AKP government took no concrete steps in addressing the demands made by the Kurds. As negotiations dragged on, the results of the 2015 general elections heralded the eventual collapse of the peace process. For the first time in the history of the republic, the HDP as an explicitly pro-Kurdish party had crossed the 10 percent electoral threshold to enter the parliament as a political party by attracting 13 percent of the vote. This meant the decline of AKP's overall vote and the loss of its majority.

A series of events followed that culminated in the termination of peace negotiations and the resumption of war. On July 20th of the same year, roughly a month and a half after the general elections, 34 young leftist volunteers for rebuilding the city of Kobani in Rojava were killed by an Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) suicide bomber in the city of Suruç inside Turkey. The PKK accused the government of complicity in the mass murder. Two days later, two Turkish police officers were killed in an attack initially claimed by the PKK, though the group later retracted its responsibility. On July 24th, upon Erdogan's order, the Turkish army launched air strikes on the PKK positions in northern Iraq and Syria. The war expanded to urban Kurdish areas where 18 towns declared autonomy between August and October. This was a disastrous misreading of the situation by the PKK as it provoked an onslaught by the Turkish military on several Kurdish cities, which resulted in enormous material destruction, deaths of at least 700

people and nearly 1.5 million displaced (McDowall 2021, 1537-8). Another chapter in the history of Kurdish struggles for self-rule was closed for an unforeseeable future.

Post-WWII Rojava

The years following the end of WWII in Syria were fraught with Arab nationalism. Syria gained independence in 1946, which ushered in the ascendancy of Arab nationalist excitement and the stigmatization and suppression of ethnic and religious minorities. This nationalist fervor was so hegemonic that even two Syrian presidents with Kurdish backgrounds, Husni al-Zaim (1949) and Edib al-Shishekli (1953-1954) were as committed to the Arab nationalist project as their Arab counterparts. Given the salient presence of Kurds in the Syrian military, a legacy of the French Mandate, the loyalty of Kurdish officers to the Syrian Republic was viewed by many Arab nationalists with great suspicion. As a result, Kurdish officers were purged from the Syrian army and military academies and the police force were closed to the Kurds in late 1950s (Tejel 2009, 40-46). This coincided with the experience of the United Arab Republic (UAR) which was a union of Egypt and Syria established in 1958. As McDowall (2021) points out:

> In its provisional constitution drafted after the collapse of the UAR in 1961, Syria was formally described for the first time as the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR), a warning of the ethnic exclusion that the Kurds were now to face. (1274)

The anti-Kurdish character of Arab nationalism in post war independent Syria was so formidable that any Kurdish political mobilization in Syria became virtually impossible for years and decades to come. This remained the case until 2004. During this time, there were few political outlets for Kurdish political expression. Initially, the Kurds were well represented in the Communist Party of Syria (SCP) to the point that it was known in northern Syria as the “Kurdish

Party" but towards the end of the 1950s, some Kurdish members of the party were convinced that the SCP was not committed to the rights of the Kurdish people. Therefore, they founded the Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria (KDPS) in 1957. However, the leaders of the KDPS and thousands of its members were rounded up in 1960, and the party underwent several schisms in later years. (Tejel 2009, 43- 49). These political parties proved incapable of galvanizing Kurdish masses into organized action toward achieving cultural and political rights for the Kurds.

In trying to explain the protracted absence of popular and collective political action against national oppression in Rojava, compared to other parts of Kurdistan, Jordi Tejel (2009) argues against attributing it to the relatively small population of Syrian Kurds as well as the non-contiguous character of certain parts of Kurdish areas, and instead analyses this absence in terms of what he calls "a policy of dissimulation". He maintains that

> under certain adverse sociopolitical conditions actors disguise their differences or distinguishing traits in order to challenge the official unanimist ideology at its deepest roots. But when conditions permitted, the formerly hidden group ceases to play this game of conformity and insists on being visible and exposing their differences. (Tejel 2009, 84)

The adverse conditions that Tejel identifies refer to the dictatorship and state repression, which is not fundamentally different from what the Kurds in other parts of Kurdistan have experienced. There are, however, certain factors more or less unique to Rojava in all Kurdistan that contribute to the political impasse in question. The fact that Rojava has the smallest Kurdish population relative to other parts of Kurdistan and the fragmentation of this population by geography and state policies (forced displacements and citizenship classifications) can hardly be dismissed. Contrary to Tejel's reasoning, geographical contiguity and population density have

historically proved crucial in giving rise to Kurdish mass movements. In fact, there has never been political expression of Kurdish national identity in discrete and relatively small Kurdish communities of Russia, Armenia, Lebanon, and north-east Iran. While it is true that, as Tejel argues, other minorities in Syria such as the Alawites and the Druzes have similar features but have gained from the state power in the same era, they cannot be put in the same political category as the Kurds because their ethnic identity conforms to the identity of the Syrian state that is primarily centred on an ethnic signifier i.e., Arabness, hence excluding the Kurds as the other. These factors combined with the lack of any external state support before 2012, perhaps itself due to the absence of organized Kurdish movements, must be considered when addressing the difficulties of Kurdish struggles in Syria. These unique structural limitations along with state suppression were again decisive in the relatively quick end to the 2004 protests despite the expressed will of the Kurdish people of Rojava to fight against anti-Kurdish discrimination in Syria. The 2004 protests began after a soccer game in the predominantly Kurdish city of Qamishlo and spread to other parts of Rojava (more details below in the racism section on Rojava). The uprising was the biggest anti-government protest since the 1982 protests in Hama, but more importantly, it had sparked a sense of collective identity among the Kurds of Syria after four decades of repression (McDowall 1359-1360). This was further manifested in the following years in a dozen demonstrations held by the Kurds to mark the anniversary of the Qamishlo uprising as well as other events like Newroz. That said, Kurdish political identity in Syria found its strongest expression during the Syrian Revolution that broke out in 2011.

Following the outburst of revolutionary mass protests across Syria against the government, several right-wing Kurdish parties formed a coalition called Kurdish National Council (KNC) under the auspices of Masoud Barzani, the KDP leader. Seven left-wing Kurdish

parties refused to join the KNC including the PKK-affiliated Democratic Union Party (PYD), which soon dominated the political scene in Rojava. Attempts at forging alliances with the main body of Syrian Arab opposition i.e., Syrian National Council (SNC) were fruitless as the SNC was fraught with the same national chauvinistic attitude embraced by the government, thus unwilling to concede political and cultural recognition for the Kurds (McDowall 2021, 1375-81). After the withdrawal of Syrian army from Rojava, the PYD and its armed wing the People's Protection Units (YPG) backed by the organizational capacity and military discipline of the PKK established a de facto Kurdish autonomous administration in three cantons of Afrin, Kobani and Al-Jazira in July 2012. The PYD embarked on the implementation of Ocalan's idea of democratic confederalism, aspiring to build an eco-friendly stateless democracy with particular emphasis on women's liberation. On January 9, 2014, regional autonomy was officially announced by the PYD, and elections were held in 2017 for local and regional councils and the social contract or constitution of Rojava was approved (Schmidinger 2018, 132-3).

As the war against ISIS continued and more territories were liberated, the Kurds extended their hold to Arab populated areas as well. This led to a reorganization of political and military apparatuses of the autonomous administration both as a matter of ideological commitment to the ideals of democratic confederalism regarding diversity and equality of nations and ethnicities as well as an efficient pragmatic measure to strengthen the regional autonomy by attracting non-Kurds and non-Muslims. Therefore, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) as the military wing of the autonomous administration and the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) as the ruling civil and political wing were established in October and December 2015, respectively. The SDF is a coalition of Kurdish (YPG) and non-Kurdish militias, and the SDC is composed of the representatives of political and civil society organizations. In December 2016, the title of the

administration was changed from the Democratic Federation of Rojava to the Democratic Federal System of Northern Syria, putting aside the exclusively ethnic-Kurdish connotations of the previous title (Daher 2019a, 237-240). On September 6, 2018, the federal system was renamed to Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES).

The Ba'ath government of Bashar al-Assad refused to recognize the AANES but posed no significant threat to the de facto regional autonomy due to its inability to exert its authority after years of military conflict across Syria. However, the main threat to the Kurdish-led autonomy is Turkey as it considers the AANES as nothing but an offshoot of the PKK. By conducting three military incursions into northern Syria in 2016, 2018 and 2019, Turkey has not only prevented the contiguity between Kobani and Afrin but also occupied big chunks of land, most notably the Afrin region, the oldest and most densely Kurdish populated area in Syria. Despite the presence of a small contingent of US troops in the region, Turkey continues aerial bombing of military and civilian individuals and infrastructures of Rojava as late as January 2024 (Bakisoglu 2024).

2.2. Economic Exploitation of Kurdistan

The economic dimension of national colonialism follows the logic of exploitation in colonial relations, and it is manifested in the instrumentalization of the economy of the peripheries for the benefit of the center. The ruling class and the state keep certain geographical areas, populated wholly or largely by national minorities, systematically underdeveloped and impoverished compared to the central territories knowing that accumulation of wealth leads to political strength of minorities, hence ensuing challenges to the state authority. In the case of Kurdistan, the latter point was clearly stated by Fevzi Çakmak, the Republic of Turkey's first Chief of General Staff, when he remarked that "economic development and wealth would

accelerate the level of consciousness and thus lead to the development of nationalism among the Kurds" (cited in McDowall 2021, 626).

The national state's direct role in the dynamics of development/underdevelopment in national colonialism is meant to assure and maintain the structural political superiority of the centre over the peripheries, thus keeping the structures of exploitation and political containment of the peripheries by the centre in place. In other words, the persistence of underdevelopment in certain regions cannot be merely explained through the logic of capital, and the state's agency must be taken into account for defining and upholding certain regions as subordinate and serving other dominant and central regions, hence securing a permanent division of labor between the two. This is a manifestation of continuous processes of nation-building as in maintaining the superiority of the nation (the majority) versus the minoritized populations. Just as in external colonialism the status of colonizers and the colonized are fixed and non-interchangeable, so too in national colonialism do the relationships between periphery and center remain structurally constant. Resistance to these dynamics from the peripheries may lead to significant changes e.g., the secession of colonized territories. But at the same time the state continues to maintain a centre-periphery hierarchy and its geographical divisions through ideological and coercive measures.

Underdevelopment of Kurdistan, and arguably colonies in any case of national colonialism, takes on two main forms: a) deindustrialization or lack of large-scale industrial infrastructures, thus limiting the economy of the periphery to extraction or production of raw materials especially in agriculture whereas the big industries of manufacturing and processing are concentrated in the centre. In some instances, depending on the political and economic decisions of the national states, this process is accompanied by structural weakening and

destruction of local i.e., agricultural economies of the peripheries. These processes result in the flow of raw material (including minerals and food supplies), surplus value and labor from periphery to the centre, and in some cases occupation of the land and dispossession of the colonized, indicating the structural instrumentalization of the economy of peripheries for the benefit of the centre. b) stark differences between the peripheries and the center in terms of standards of living, namely, share of national income, poverty, unemployment, and access to social services such as health and education. This section is dedicated to empirical evidence along the lines of these two major categories of exploitation in the context of Kurdistan**.**

Local Economy of Kurdistan and Industrialization

Industrialization has been central to modernizing projects and the process of nation-building to the point that the level of industrialization is often deemed as the main determining factor of development in a geographical unit. Industrialized areas generate more jobs and more profits, and are more materially developed whereas the non-industrialized areas struggle with high rates of unemployment, low wages, and scarcity. Capital tends to flow from more developed regions to less developed ones, driven by the pursuit of higher profit margins, and may later return to its origin if profitability shifts (Smith 2008). However, state intervention in the context of national colonialism disrupts this usual mobility of capital, imposing regulatory, political, and economic barriers that artificially preserve an unequal spatial division of labor. By doing so, states ensure that the hierarchical economic relationships between different geographic zones—where some regions remain perpetually dominant while others stay subordinate—are maintained rather than disrupted by market forces alone. In national colonialism, with the notable exception of resource-dependent sectors—such as mining, oil, and gas extraction, which require physical proximity to raw material deposits—large-scale manufacturing and processing industries are

systematically concentrated in core economic zones rather than peripheral regions. This spatial arrangement reflects broader patterns of uneven development, where capital-intensive production remains centralized in industrial hubs, while resource extraction is relegated to geographically fixed but economically marginalized areas. These characteristics feature prominently in all four parts of Kurdistan.

In Turkey, where the Kurdish areas are located in the east and south-east of the country, and the western parts constitute the centre, the following data on the state of industrialization during the first three decades after the establishment of Turkish Republic is illuminating.

> In 1927, 17.8 per cent of the industrial enterprises in Turkey were located in ESA [Eastern and South-eastern Anatolia]. In 1939, this figure dropped sharply to 8 per cent. By 1955, only 7.7 per cent of the industrial enterprises in the country were based in these regions. In contrast, the percentage of the industrial enterprises situated in the western Aegean region augmented from 17.9 per cent in 1939 to 19.8 per cent in 1995 [1955]. Likewise, the proportion of industrial firms sited in the north-western Marmara region increased from 29.6 per cent in 1939 to 47.8 per cent in 1955. The low level of industrialisation witnessed in ESA [Eastern and South-eastern Anatoly] provinces made agriculture virtually the sole source of income. (Yadirgi 2017, 189)

Further, while 800 kilometers of track were completed between 1923 and 1929, and another eight hundred were under construction in 1929, no railroads were laid in Bakûr during this time (Yadirgi 2017, 172-173). By 2010, except in Gaziantep, none of the top 500 industrial companies in Turkey were located in predominantly Kurdish populated areas. And only four

companies with 1000 employees were in Diyarbekir, the largest Kurdish city in Turkey with a population of one million at the time (McDowall 2021, 170). These exponentially disproportionate measures of industrialization in western and eastern Turkey also reflect the state's highly unequal investments in these regions in general. From 1990 to 2001, public investment per capita for the ESA provinces was TRL 3000 million on average whereas the same measure for other five regions of Turkey was TRL 8000 million (Yadirgi 2017, 252). By the beginning of 1990s, McDowall (2021) states that, "the Kurdish provinces, unquestionably the poorest, received less than 10 per cent of the national development budget" (1209). Even much later during the supposedly flourishing years of Turkey's economy in the 2000s, government expenditure was as unequal between the western and eastern parts of the country as before. During the years 2002-2006, subsidised investment to encourage private sector for all twenty-one ESA provinces combined was below that of Bursa province in north-western Turkey, the former's share standing at 4.44 percent while the latter was 4.45 percent. Moreover, state investment in the ESA areas during the same period was the lowest in the country (Yadirgi 2017, 251-252).

Severely low levels of investment in the predominantly Kurdish regions in the eastern and south-eastern parts of Turkey meant decreasing levels of productivity and, in a word, the destruction of local economies of these regions. This was materialized not so long after the founding of the Turkish Republic. Comparing the overall economic situation of these regions between 1890s and 1930s confirms this fact. As McDowall (2021) points out "at the end of the nineteenth century, the per capita productivity of the six eastern provinces was comparable with the rest of Anatolia, albeit slightly behind the other provinces" (625). However, "these regions had gone from inter-regionally sending goods worth more than 1 million pounds sterling in a

typical year in the 1890s to self-sufficient domains in the late 1930s" (Yadirgi 2017, 184). The underdeveloped character of the economy of Kurdish regions was acknowledged by high-ranking Turkish statesmen early on in the life of the Republic. Celal Bayar, the Minister of Economy, wrote in his report on the state of economy in eastern provinces in 1936 that "this is an entirely primitive economy without markets and production beyond what is necessary for personal use" (cited in Yadirgi 2017, 184).). Furthermore, the Kurdish regions for centuries were known for stockbreeding, producing much of the meat for the Ottoman empire by the early nineteenth century. Livestock constituted 12.3 percent of Turkey's GNP in 1970, but by 1997, it was reduced to only 2.2 percent. While livestock's share of agriculture stood at 30 percent in 1979, it was nearly halved by the end of the century (McDowall 2021, 1212).

State policies were actively directing the infliction of misery on the whole economy of Bakûr. For example, the Elaziz İktisat Bankası (the Economy Bank of Elaziz), established in 1929, was the only bank in the entire ESA regions at the time and it had only a nominal capital of 50,000 TL, making it almost impossible to acquire loans (Yadirgi 2017, 173). This is all the while that the Ziraat Bankasi (Agricultural Bank) was handling 25, 880 million TL loans in 1929 which had risen from 928 thousand since 1922, and the main beneficiaries of these and other agricultural policies were Aegean and Mediterranean regions in the west (Yadirgi 2017, 172-173). In addition to the poor state of financing for agriculture in Bakûr, the agricultural technologies were highly inaccessible in the predominantly Kurdish provinces relative to the western regions of Turkey. In 1927, Of 1, 413, 509 agricultural tools and machinery only 119, 665 existed in these provinces, although they were home to roughly a quarter of the total population of Turkey (Yadirgi 2017, 173). By 1943, agricultural income in the Kurdish region was lower than half the national average (McDowall 2021, 627). Therefore, it is not surprising

that by the mid 1990s, what the ESA regions were producing in total was lower than a quarter of what Marmara, the richest region in Turkey, was producing (McDowall 2021, 1213). Less surprising was that "out of Turkey's twenty least developed provinces at the beginning of the twenty first century, eighteen were in the Kurdish region" (Yadirgi 2017, 223).

Another structural aspect of state policies was ensuring the fulfilment of the needs of Turkey's western industrial economy by utilizing the resources of the ESA regions. From 1963 to 1983, investment in the energy and mining sectors dominated public investments in the east and south-east Turkey, but only a small portion of the production was used locally while the minerals were exported or transferred to other parts of the country and the earnings were exploited largely by the state and the private sector outside the Kurdish region. For example, in 1969, two thirds of blister copper (raw copper) produced in Elazig worth $17 million was exported to the United States, the UK and West Germany (Yadirgi, 2017, 208-209). According to McDowall (2021), although 99 percent of Turkey's crude oil was extracted in the south-east, only 6 percent of it was refined locally and the rest was sent to west for refinement and use outside the Kurdish region (1518-1519). The Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP) is another case in point. Designed and promoted by the Turkish state as a regional development project to address the Kurdish region's lack of productivity, GAP consists of building power plants and dams on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers to generate electricity and irrigate adjacent lands. However, in reality, it had very little to do with reinvigorating the economy of Bakûr and more so with fueling industrial areas, especially western parts, of Turkey. By 2006, as McDowall (2021) points out:

> sixteen years after its initiation, GAP had completed 74 per cent of its planned hydroelectric capacity (in fact, half of the country's total hydro capacity) but only 14 per cent of its planned irrigation. Its driving purpose, of course, was not

> regeneration of the south-east either in its agriculture or industry but the production of energy to drive the economy elsewhere in Turkey. (1584)

The same year, only 17 percent of the electricity produced in ESA was used locally while the rest was transferred outside of these regions (Yadirgi 2017, 253). Further, the dam projects of GAP have caused tremendous damage to the livelihood of the locals, displacing and dispossessing between 200,000 and 350,000 villagers by 2010. After filling the Ilisu dam in 2019, another 78,000 were displaced (McDowall 2021, 1508). The damages of GAP; however, have not been limited to ESA regions. Agriculture in Syria and Iraq relies heavily on the waters of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, and any changes in the amount of water flowing into these countries cause significant harm to their agriculture sector. Although originating in Turkey, the drainage area of these rivers is largely located in Syria and Iraq. It is estimated by Iraqi and Syrian officials that by the time the construction of GAP dams is completed, Iraq and Syria would receive 47 and 30-60 percent less water, respectively (Yildiz, 2005a, 69-70). Also, Turkey aggressively weaponizes water to put pressure on its neighbors, the Kurds of Rojava in particular. The water level in Syria's largest lake decreased by about a metre, and although Turkey is responsible to provide 500 cubic metres per second as per the 1987 agreement between Turkey, Iraq and Syria, it released only 200 cubic metres in 2021 (Glynn 2021).

Similar dynamics of deindustrialization and simultaneous destruction of agriculture sector can be seen in Başûr, especially prior to 2005 when the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) was recognized in Iraqi constitution. State-led industrial development in Iraq was heavily concentrated in majority Arab metropolitan areas, Baghdad in particular. This meant that after 1964, "52 percent of small industry and 78 percent of large industry remained centered in key

cities such as Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul" (Natali 2010, 22). However, by 1990 there was only 11 percent of small-scale industry and 5 percent of heavy industry in the Kurdish region (McDowall 2021, 993). But even before the industrial boom in 1960s, the economic gap between Başûr and the rest of Iraq was readily palpable. In Natali's words, "Of the 1,450 large-scale establishments and 30,000 small-scale businesses that employed 250,000 people in Iraq, only a small handful were located in the Kurdistan Region" (2010, 5). After two cement factories- largest in the country- were built in Başûr, employing 13,929 workers along with 142 small factories, they constituted less than 8 percent of all factories and workers in Iraq (Natali 2010, 23).

The historically rich agricultural economy of Başûr also lost its significance over time due to Iraqi state's policies and actions. Before the independence of Iraq, Başûr's agriculture was so productive that it was the main contributor to Iraq's annual grain export. Livestock production was also remarkable. Only in Slimani province in 1957-1958, the number of livestock was 418, 483 (Noori 2016, 8). By the early 1950s, the Kurdish region produced 70 percent of Iraq's total production of wheat and around 43 percent of the country's exports excluding oil (Natali 2010, 3). Also, in 1956, the Sulaymaniyah province produced 3, 560, 393 kilograms of tobacco i.e., nearly 50 percent of Iraq's total production of tobacco (Noori 2016, 8). Thus, Başûr had become self-sufficient in terms of food supplies. However, this situation changed gradually as the more the Iraqi modern state tightened its grip on the economy and politics of Başûr, the more economically weak and productively underdeveloped it became. A glaring example of this deteriorating situation was the fall in production of wheat and barley, two of the main agricultural products of the region. While the region's share of Iraq's total production of wheat

and barley in 1978 was 22.6 and 14.3 percent respectively, these numbers dropped to 19.2 and 3.3 percent in 1988 (Noori 2016, 8).

The Iraqi state's enormously unequal allocation of agricultural technology and public investment played a significant role in undermining the economy of Başûr. As Natali (2010) points out, "although water pumps increased from 21 to 2,400 in 1929–30, 60 percent were installed in Baghdad province. Half of the 320 combines and 50 tractors distributed in Iraq were concentrated in Mosul and Baghdad" (5). Also, from 1958 to 1982, the agricultural portion of development investments fell from 39 to 10 percent (Natali 2010, 17). In 1974, of the total loans presented to Iraqi peasants by the Agriculture Bank, only 3.36 percent was received by the peasants in Sulaymaniyah province (Noori 2016, 7). Moreover, the rising oil revenues were utilized by the Iraqi governments to subsidize food imports and develop a public food distribution system. As a result, by the late 1950s, only less than one-third of Iraq's food needs were domestically produced, with food imports accounting for about 70 percent (Natali 2010, 17). The policy of importing food instead of developing agricultural markets had a devastatingly lingering effect on the agrarian economy of Başûr to the point that in 2007 nearly 65 percent of the region's food was imported, with domestic production constituting just about 35 percent (Mahzouni 2013, 131). State violence was another factor that further destroyed the economy of Başûr. Decades of war between the Iraqi army and the Kurdish peshmergas, the exodus of more than 250, 000 Kurds to Iran in 1970s and 1980s, Saddam Hussein's genocidal campaign against the Kurds during the 1980s that killed hundreds of thousands of Kurds and destroyed about 4,000 villages, the expulsion of Kurdish villagers to collective towns and extensive outlaying of minefields wreaked havoc on the economy of Başûr, resulting in the forced clearance of about 80 percent of the rural areas and a 50 percent decrease in wheat production by 1989 (McDowall

2021, 994; Natali, 2010, 17). It follows that the economy of central and southern regions of Iraq was organized around the industrial and hydrocarbons sectors while the economy of pre-2005 Başûr was limited to an unproductive agriculture sector (Natali 2010, 21).

Such circumstances paved the way for an unequal relationship in which the economy of Başûr was to serve the centre. In the early modern Iraqi state period, despite its strategic position inside the critical trade route with Iran, Turkey, Europe as well as Mosul and Baghdad, Başûr had no significant contribution to production processes and served only as a transit zone. As Mosul developed as an industrial city, waves of Kurdish migration from the present-day governorate of Dohuk in search of employment and affordable housing ensued. Therefore, many of about 2,000 workers employed in Mosul's four big factories were Kurds (Natali 2010, 8-19). But the scope of instrumentalization of Kurdish economy for the benefit of the centre in Iraq was not limited to trade or Kurdish labor force, and it concerned almost the entire Kurdish region and its resources. The following passage by Natali (2010) provides a clear picture of the position and function of Başûr's economy in Iraq.

> Despite the Kurdistan Region's important oil reserves and natural minerals and suggestions by the IBRD [International Bank for Reconstruction and Development] to construct a plant for natural gas and oil in Kirkuk, the central government refused to build a local refinery. Instead, Baghdad sent the petroleum to Dora and Begie in Salahaddin governorate for refining, and then shipped it via pipelines to the Turkish port of Cehan. Marble deposits in Arbil were not treated in the Kurdistan Region, but rather, in a new state-built factory in Haltaniyya, Ramadi. The central government had the marble shipped from Arbil to Mosul and sent to Baghdad. Electricity from the two dams inside the Kurdistan Region was

channeled through high-transmission lines to the southern grid and redistributed throughout Iraq. (22)

Unlike Bakûr and Başûr, the de-industrialization of Rojava was not accompanied by the destruction of its agrarian economy. To the contrary, agricultural production in Rojava remained a key component of the Syrian economy throughout the years. This can be attributed to favorable conditions for agricultural production, particularly fertile land, in Jazira region of Rojava on the one hand, and the leading place of agriculture in Syrian GDP on the other hand. Also, many industries in Syria such as textile and food processing are agrarian based. Even after the petroleum sector boomed in the 1980s and 1990s following the unprecedented size and extent of discovery and production of light crude oil, the share of agriculture in Syrian GDP remained the highest among all economic sectors throughout the 1990s as it was 29.6 in 1990/91, 29.2 in 1995/96, 30.5 in 1997/98 and 29.0 in 1999/2000 (Sarris 2003, 4). Deprived of heavy industries and manufacturing, the economy of Rojava was virtually concentrated in farming, providing a large share of food supplies of the entire country. Thus, the Jazira region produced up to half of all Syrian wheat while Afrin provided 25 percent of total production of olives in the country and nearly one third of Kobani's arable land was used to cultivate wheat (Knapp et al 2016, 192). Although Rojava was known as the breadbasket of Syria, it was still dependent on other regions like Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, and Homs for processed products such as flour, bulgur wheat and pasta (Jongerden 2022, 596). In other words, the role of Rojava's economy was virtually limited to providing raw materials and being a market for products usually made from its own raw materials and produced in the center; a familiar and classic economic element of capitalist colonial relations. These dynamics were also present when natural resources were concerned as the Jazira region provided 50 to 60 percent of Syrian oil production ((Knapp et al 2016, 192).

Quite contrary to agricultural production, industrial development in Syria was concentrated in western and south-western part of the country which along with other coastal areas constituted the centre in Syria. By 1998, out of 106 public sector factories only two were in the governorate of Hasaka where the largest population of Kurds in Syria live whereas 75 percent of the total factories were located in the urban-industrial axis of Damascus- Aleppo-Hama and Homs. The biggest number of public sector factories were concentrated in Damascus and Damascus Rural governorates with 37 factories followed by Aleppo with 25 factories (cited in Master Plan, 2001, ch 6, 5). At the end of 1990s, the Syrian government built four large industrial cities in order to encourage heavy industrial private projects and seek foreign investors. Attracting investments worth SYP 441.7 billion ($9.6 billion), these cities were established in the governorates of Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Deir EZ-Zur, all of which are predominantly Arab populated regions (Daher 2019b, 7).

Moreover, according to the numbers provided by Syria's Central Bureau of Statistics, there were 99,720 industrial establishments in the private sector in 2010 of which 30,071 and 11,776 were located in the governorates of Aleppo and Damascus respectively, while there were 2966 in the governorate of Heseke (Syria's Central 2011a). Given the population of the economically active in Heseke at the time, which was 922,176 (Syria's Central, 2011b), there was one private industrial establishment for roughly every 311 persons of this population. This rate for the governorate of Hama with nearly similar number of this category of population— 988,391— was 136. The corresponding figures for the significantly smaller coastal governorates of Lattakia and Tartous were 163 and 153, respectively. Whereas in 2006 only 6.6 percent of the economically active population of Heseke was employed in industries, the same rate for Aleppo and Damascus stood at 24.6 and 18.6 respectively. Out of 14 Syrian governorates only the

governorate of Raqqa had a lower rate of industrial employment-5.0 percent- than Heseke while this rate for the governorates of Lattakia and Tartous stood at 10.4 and 7.5 percent, respectively (Syria's Central 2006). The high productivity of the economy of Rojava in terms of crop production and the lack of industrial infrastructure meant that this economy was structured to primarily serve the economy of Syria's centre. Therefore, virtually all goods produced in Rojava were sent to western and southern parts of Syria for processing. Oil and gas were transferred to refineries in Homs while cotton was shipped south for textile processing and wheat was transported to western parts of the country (Knapp et al 2016; 193; Jongerden 2022, 596).

Resembling Iraq, since the early twentieth century, capitalist development and industrialization in Iran has been primarily concentrated in the capital city and its environs i.e., the city and province of Tehran. Several other provinces in the center and north of the country along with Tehran form the predominantly Persian populated center in Iran while nearly all border areas constituting the periphery comprise almost entirely of non-Persians. Not all these peripheral regions can be called colonies, but Rojhelat is certainly one of the colonized regions within the Iranian nation-state. Iran is rightly described as a multi-ethnic and multilingual country but given the subordinated political status and underdeveloped socioeconomic conditions of many regions and national minorities, borrowing from Lenin, it is justified to call Iran a prison of nations. What will be explained here in terms of colonization of Rojhelat in Iran is similarly applicable to some other regions of the country such as Baluchistan, Khuzestan, Turkman Sahra, Lorestan and parts of Azerbaijan. All these regions are colonies to the center of Iran, particularly Tehran i.e., the center of the center in Iran.

Tehran has acquired this status mainly through rapid industrialization and concentration of big capital. In 1940, there were 251 industrial companies in Tehran which was more than the

number of industrial companies in all other provinces combined, which was 209 (Floor 1984, 33). Also, by 1945 around 26 percent of big factories and 17 percent of their employees were in Tehran (Mirmojarabian and Taghvaie 2018, 6). Tehran has also benefitted massively from state budget and investments in both industrial and agricultural sectors. As Aghajanian (1983) states

> the Central province [Tehran] with 20.7 percent of the total population of the country received 32.7 percent of the development budget in 1972-73. East Azarbayjan with 10 percent of the population received 4.8 percent of the budget. In 1974, 14.3 percent of the agricultural loans went to the Central province, while the same figure for Baluchistan was 0.7. (221)

Relative to the peripheries of Iran, the provinces of the center have also benefitted enormously from industrialization since the first Pahlavi era. For instance, by 1941 there were 25 textile factories in Iran, out of which 9 were located in Isfahan and others were in Tehran and Mazandaran (Aghajanian 1983, 221). In 2019, about 79 percent of Iran's total industrial output was produced by 10 out of 31 provinces ("The Concentration" 2020). Further, when private investments are concerned, Tehran is again far superior at the receiving end. In 1973, Tehran attracted over 47.3 percent (34.8 billion rials) of the total national private investments in urban areas while this amount climbed to 59.2 percent (131.9 billion rials) in 1982 (Sharbatoghlie, 2021 414-415). However, numbers and statistics for the same indicators in Rojhelat betray the wide gap between this region and the center in Iran.

According to Iran's statistical yearbooks, the number of factories per one million population for the predominantly Kurdish provinces of Ilam, Kermanshah, Kurdistan, and West Azerbaijan in 1978 were respectively 33, 52, 17 and 52. In 1984, the corresponding figures in these provinces were 34, 50, 69 and 81. The province of Semnan in the center with a population

on par with Ilam province had 48 and 256 factories per one million population in 1978 and 1984, respectively. The the corresponding figures for another region in the center, that is, the province of Yazd with a population about half of the province of Kurdistan were 210 and 350 (Sharbatoghlie 2021, 305). In 2020, the number of industrial establishments with one hundred and more workers for the entire region of Rojhelat was 108 whereas the province of Yazd in the center with only about 15 percent of the population of Rojhelat recorded a figure of 167. The same category for other provinces in the center such as Tehran, Isfahan and Semnan stood at 669, 344 and 78, respectively (Statistical Yearbook 2021, 320). The findings of research on all provinces' share of industrial value-added reveal that in 2010 and 2020 the province of Ilam with only 0.3 percent of the country's total in each year was the least contributor in Iran. The entire Rojhelat's share of this indicator in 2010 was 4 percent and in 2020 it was 3.4 percent of the country's total. The latter was equal to that of the province of Yazd alone which itself was 11th in the ranking of all provinces in this category (Torabi et.al 2021, 91). With regard to agricultural value-added, Ilam is again at the very bottom of the list of provinces, with 0.8 percent of the country's total in both 2010 and 2020. West Azerbaijan with 4.2, Kermanshah with 2.6 and Kurdistan with 2 percent were respectively 7th, 15th and 20th provinces in 2020 ((Torabi et.al 2021, 89). It is fair to conclude from these numbers that just like other parts of the great Kurdistan, Rojhelat remains an agrarian society. Furthermore, in 2019, the province of Kurdistan with only 0.93 percent of the total GDP for Iran was one of five provinces with less than one percent of the country's GDP. Ilam, Kermanshah and West Azerbaijan with 1/13, 1/63 and 1/89 percent of the total GPD respectively, stood slightly above the province of Kurdistan (Statistical Yearbook 2021, 850).

The very low level of industrialization has made it virtually impossible for Rojhelat to profit from its notable mineral resources, forcing the region to merely send its minerals as raw material to the industrial centre. Rojhelat is specifically rich in gold, iron ore and bitumen. Half of Iran's gold resources are located in the province of Kurdistan, and this province is also ranked 5th in the country for its iron ore resources (Bahmani 2022). Given the number of mining licenses issued, it is believed that the Kurdistan province can produce 22 million tons of minerals annually ("Annual extraction" 2023). The province of West Azerbaijan is also rich in gold as it is home to Zarshouran, the richest gold deposit in Iran and the Middle East with 108 tons of proven reserves accounting for 30 percent of Iran's gold reserves (Bizclik Editor 2020). Further, two percent of Iran's mineral resources are in the province of Kermanshah, and with 70 precent of the country's total, Kermanshah has the largest reserves of bitumen in Iran ("Kermanshah has" 2017). In 2022, the province of Ilam produced 6 million tons of minerals, which amounted to 4 precent of the country's total ("Extraction of" 2023). While provincial authorities complain about insufficient investment in the mining sector of Rojhelat ("Ilam Mines" 2020; "Head of" 2022), there are certain features common to the configuration of investment in Rojhelat's mineral resources that highlight the instrumentalization of region's wealth for the benefit of the centre. Of particular importance is the rather limited number of processing facilities and the resulting export of raw minerals abroad and to the central parts of Iran ("Mineral extraction" 2023; "Governor of Kurdistan" 2023). According to the secretary of Kermanshah's chamber of mining, only 30 percent of the province's minerals are processed locally, and the rest are sold as raw products ("Only 30 percent" 2023). Moreover, mining companies are rarely based in Rojhelat and virtually all the companies extracting minerals in the region are headquartered in Tehran. Some examples are in order.

Zarshouran mine in West Azerbaijan province is operated by Zarshouran Gold Mine and Mining Industries Development Company, which is owned by Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) and is a government-owned holding company (Szczesniak 2019, 12). Ilam Cement Company in the province of Ilam is owned by Tehran Cement Company and Omid Investment Management Group; two public joint stock companies located in Tehran (Szczesniak 2019, 9). Kermanshah bitumen mine is operated by Nikan west Gilsonite Company which is a private company (Nikan West, n.d.). Gholgholeh gold mine in Kurdistan province's city of Saqqiz is operated by Sadr Tamin Investment Company which is a subsidiary company of the Social Security Investment Company (SSIC) of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a state-owned investment company and arguably the country's largest holding company ("Iran's Top" 2020; "1250 billion",2023).

There are also allegations of massive transfer of Rojhelat's water resources to central provinces, causing economic and environmental damage to Rojhelat and benefitting the agricultural and industrial establishments of the centre of Iran (Kokabian 2021; Hassaniyan and Sohrabi 2022). However, these authors fail to substantiate their claims by providing concrete data on the specific projects, for example tunnels to divert water resources, origins and destinations as well as the amount of water transported. That said, the reality of the exploitation of water resources of the peripheries for the benefit of the centre in Iran cannot be ignored. Inter-regional water transfer in Iran began in 1950s, and while some have been intra-provincial such as Tabriz project built in 1999, other operating and under construction projects have been mainly designed to transfer water from the peripheries to the centre. Prime examples of the latter are Kuhrang 1tunnel, built in 1954, and Kuhrang 2 tunnel, built in 1985, that transfer water from the peripheral and poor provinces of Chaharmahal & Bakhtiari and Khuzestan to the central

provinces of Isfahan, Yazd, Qom, Markazi and Kerman (Abrishamchi and Tajrishy 2005; Hoominfar 2023).

The devastating effects of these projects, from damages to agriculture and environment to lack of access to drinking water, have led to several rounds of protests in recent years in provinces of Khuzestan and Chaharmahal & Bakhtiari ("Continued protests" 2021). In 2017, locals of Negl town in the province of Kurdistan protested the plans to transfer water from Azad dam to neighboring province of Hamadan ("The people" 2017). But there is no evidence that such plan ever materialized. In fact, in the spring of 2023, the deputy governor of Kurdistan province rejected the validity of news regarding water transportation schemes from the province of Kurdistan to Hamadan ("Two-week supply", 2023). That said, the possibility of water transfer from Rojhelat to other parts of Iran, the centre in particular, cannot be utterly and entirely ruled out because there are significant amounts of rainfall water in the region for which there is no known use identified by the experts. For example, renewable water resources from total annual rainfall for the province of Kurdistan is 4.8 billion cubic meters of which 4.3 billion cubic meters are surface water and the rest is groundwater. While 1.213 billion cubic meters are consumed annually in Kurdistan province, it is unclear how exactly the remaining rainfall water of the province is used. This lack of clarity has given rise to speculation about massive transfer of surface water of the province to other parts of the country especially because central provinces of Isfahan and Fars with much less water resources than Kurdistan province possess much larger areas of cultivated land (Hassaniyan and Sohrabi 2022; Sohrabi 2019). Given the central government's securitization of Rojhelat, it is also likely that water transfers to outside of the region are conducted secretly and the details about them are withheld from the public and the experts alike.

Underdevelopment: Social Services and Standard of Living

In this section, I intend to further illustrate the underdevelopment of Kurdistan by discussing certain economic and social indicators that are usually, but not exclusively, determined by the processes and developments outlined in the previous section, namely, investment and industrialization or the lack thereof. In other words, the indicators discussed in this section not only showcase the level of development and underdevelopment, but they also more concretely demonstrate the effects of underdevelopment in certain fundamental aspects of social life. They can also help shedding further light on the unequal access of people in the centre and peripheries to some basic necessities of life such as health care and education. Following Ernest Mandel, Underdevelopment can also be seen as underemployment. Mandel maintains that "underdevelopment is ultimately always underemployment, both quantitatively (massive unemployment) and qualitatively (low productivity of labour)" (Mandel 1975, 60-61). Therefore, pending availability of corresponding data, rates of unemployment and GDP per capita will also be used to display underemployment in colonized Kurdistan.

Bakûr

In the Republic of Turkey, the GDP share of northern Kurdistan has been persistently lower, often by far, than the rest of the country. In the years 1965-79, the seventeen provinces of Bakûr, with a few exceptions, had the lowest share of national GDP among the total sixty-seven provinces in the country, accounting for 8.54 percent in 1979 (Yadirgi 2017, 212; McDowall 1522). Later on, during the 1990s, the GDP share of now 21 Bakûr provinces continued on a downward trajectory as it was about 6.40 percent in 1991, 5.70 percent in 1995 and 5.50 percent by 2000 (Yadirgi 2017, 249). Moreover, according to the latest available official data, while in 2022 the average rate of unemployment was 10.4 percent, the Van sub-region (TRB2) -including

the Kurdish provinces of Van, Muş, Bitlis and Hakkari- had the highest unemployment rate in the country with 19.2 percent. The lowest rate belonged to the Kastamonu sub-region (TR82) in the west of country with 6.2 percent ("Labour Force" 2023). The average rate of employment for the same year was 47.5 percent, with the Mardin sub-region, including the Kurdish provinces of Mardin, Batman, Şırnak, Siirt, representing the lowest rate of employment at 33.8 percent whereas the northwestern sub-region of Tekirdag had the highest rate with 54.1 percent ("Labour Force", 2023).

In 2022, the Kurdish Van province with 3275$ had the lowest GDP per capita in Turkey while GDP per capita for the western province of Bilecik, the smallest province in Turkey with only one-fifth of the population of Van province, was 12470$. Whereas the national average GPD per capita for the same year stood at 10607$, no Bakûr provinces reached above 10,000$ (Geographical Statistics Portal 2022). The statistics for income are by no means less horrifying. Although the national per capita agricultural income witnessed an estimated 30 percent increase between 1935 and 1943, the agricultural income of Bakûr provinces was less than half of the national average in 1943 (Yadirgi 2017, 189). Just like the declining GDP share of ESA region over time, the region's share of national income shows a similar pattern as it was 10.39 percent in 1965, 9.56 percent in 1975, 8.17 percent in 1979, 7.7 percent in 2001, and by 2006 it further dropped to 6.9 percent at a time that Turkey's national income had skyrocketed from $181 billion in 2002 to $400 billion in 2006 (Yadirgi 2017, 206 and 243). By early 1990s, the per capita income in Turkey's southeast was hardly 42 percent of the national average and hardly a quarter of that of Aegean/Marmara region in the west of the country (McDowall 2021, 1208). By mid-2000s, Turkey was recognized as the country with the highest regional disparity among twenty seven members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

(OECD) as the country's average income per capita was 6,684$ and for Bakûr region it stood at 3,017$ below half of the national average and nearly 70 percent less than that of Istanbul which was 10,352$ (McDowall 2021, 1522; Yadirgi 2017, 245).

Access to social services has also been very poor in the predominantly Kurdish areas in Turkey. Only 900 of the country's 14,000 schools were located in these areas in 1927, and by 1950, the literacy rate in ESA regions was only 23 percent which amounted to almost half of the national average (McDowall 2021, 627). Education in a language different than the mother tongue of most inhabitants of Bakûr was a fundamental reason for such a low literacy rate, but equally important was the low amount of investment for education sector in these regions. For example, investment in education decreased from 17 to 11.3 percent of the total public investment in Bakûr between 1963 and 1983 (Yadirgi 2017, 209). It is not surprising then that by 1990, as McDowall (2021) points out, the rate of literacy in the southeastern province of Mardin was 48 percent compared to a national average of 77 percent, and even worse

> Only 70 per cent of children ever appeared at school, and of these only 18 per cent went on to secondary education, of whom only 9 per cent completed the secondary cycle. Dicle University in Diyarbakır, intended to serve the region, was actually full of students from other parts of Turkey, for whom Dicle was a last resort. (1211)

Public investment in health sector also fell from 5.0 percent in 1963 to 2.5 percent in 1983 (Yadirgi 2017, 209). In 2022, there were six provinces in Turkey with the least number of hospital beds for every 100,000 people and all those six provinces were located in Bakûr (Geographical Statistics Portal, 2022).

Başûr

In pre-2003 Iraq, concentration of wealth in the centre created a large gap between the centre and the Kurdish region in terms of income. Baghdad boasted average incomes a full 25% above the average in the Kurdish areas (Natali 2010, 22). In 1956, Baghdad's share of national income was 29.7 percent while Kirkuk's was 15.4 percent and Basra's stood at 11.5 percent. Without oil revenues, Kirkuk's contribution remained low at six percent, but Baghdad's skyrocketed to 36 percent with Mosul at 11 percent (Noori 2016, 7; Natali, 2010, 5). Moreover, Social services were both limited and unfairly distributed. Başûr possessed 32 out of 252 Iraq's hospitals, and these facilities struggled with resource deficiencies. Similarly, their 12 percent and five percent share of primary and high schools, respectively, highlighted the educational gap compared to the national average. The single university established in 1968 further demonstrated the limited higher education opportunities (Natali 2010, 23). A stark contrast existed in water and electricity access as well. Southern and central cities like Basra, Baghdad, Amara and Hilla boasted pumping stations and power plants, providing water to over half the existing municipalities, while Başûr had the lowest coverage in the country. Electricity followed a similar pattern, with major cities such as Baghdad, Basra, Kirkuk and Mosul consuming 90%, leaving the Kurdish region in the dark (Natali 2010, 5).

Rojava

Underdevelopment in Rojava also manifests in underemployment. In 2011, the governorate of Hasaka had the highest rate of unemployment in Syria with 38.8 percent whereas the lowest rate belonged to the governorate of Aleppo with 7.8 percent. All western provinces recorded unemployment rates that were lower than half of Hasaka's. For instance, the rate of unemployment for the small provinces of Lattakia and Tartous stood at 19.1 and 15.6 percent,

respectively (Syria's Central 2011c). The majority of workers in Hasaka were usually employed in short-term jobs, often rendering the province's labor force the most precariat in Syria. In 2006, Hasaka had the lowest rate of permanent employment in Syria, with only 47.1% of workers having regular jobs, and the rest were involved in seasonal, temporary, and intermittent work. Hasaka along with the governorate of Deir ez-Zur – 48.4 percent – were the only provinces in the entire country with less than half of their labor force doing regular jobs. The rest of Syrian provinces recorded figures above fifty percent ranging from 52.2 percent for governorate of Daraa to 87.4 percent for governorate of Damascus (Syria's Central 2006).

In terms of access to health care facilities and services, Hasaka province was also among the most disenfranchised in Syria. In 2011, the national average number of persons per hospital bed was 734 while the figure for Hasaka stood at 1105. Hasaka was only better off in this regard than the provinces of al-Raqqa and Idlib for which the figures stood at 1148 and 1351, respectively (Syria's Central, 2012a). Also, the national average number of persons per physician was 636 for the same year. Whereas Hasaka had one physician per 1157 persons, the province of Idlib with one physician per 1185 persons was the only province in Syria worse off than Hasaka. There were even fewer dentists, pharmacists and nurses per persons in Hasaka, making it the most deprived province on those fronts in the whole country. While on average there was one dentist for every 1276 persons nationally, Hasaka recorded the shocking number of 3543 persons per dentist. With regard to pharmacists, there was one for every 1220 persons nationally whereas there was one pharmacist for every 2321 persons in Hasaka. Out of 34,298 nurses in Syria in 2011, there were 875 nurses in Hasaka, which again was one of the lowest in the country. However, governorates of Lattakia and Tartous with much smaller populations than Hasaka had 4170 and 2373 nurses, respectively (Syria's Central 2012b).

Furthermore, if we agree that a lower percentage of income going towards food indicates a higher average standard of living within a society, the statistics on household expenditure reveal another layer of underdevelopment in Rojava. In 2009, while the national average of household monthly non-food expenditure was 54.4 percent, Hasaka's stood at 44.9 percent, rendering the province the third lowest in Syria after the other north-eastern governorates of al-Raqqa with 43.3 percent and Deir ez-Zur with 43.7 percent. In contrast, the western and south-western governorates of Damascus, Rif Damascus and Lattakia recorded the highest numbers in the country with 65.5, 60.8 and 60.5 percent, respectively (Syria's Central 2009). These data can explain the claim that in pre-2011 Syria, Rojava was one of the poorest regions (Knapp et al 2016; Abu-Ismail et.al 2011; Matar 2015). In 2003-2004, the north and northeastern region where Hasaka along with the governorates of Aleppo, Idlib, al-Raqqq and Deir ez-Zur are located, contained the highest number of the poorest in Syria (Matar 2015, 135). In 2007, the north and northeastern region with the poverty rate of 15.4 percent was the poorest in Syria while the coastal region- the governorates of Lattakia and Tartous, with 7.68 percent was the least poor (Abu-Ismail et.al 2011, 6). Between 1997 and 2004, the north and north-eastern region persistently recorded the worst illiteracy rate in the country, and the rural areas of this region had the lowest rates in virtually all indicators of human poverty (Abu-Ismail et.al 2011, 13).

Rojhelat

Over the period 2011-2019, the GDP share of Kurdish provinces was consistently among the lowest in Iran. The figure for Rojhelat provinces combined in 2011 was 5.59 percent and in 2019 was 5.58 percent which nearly equal that of the central province of Isfahan with 5.16 and 5.63 percent, respectively. While the province of Tehran had the highest share of GDP with 20.49 percent in 2011 and 22.04 percent in 2019, the province of Kurdistan recorded the lowest

among Rojhelat provinces with 0.85 and 0.93 percent respectively, rendering it one of the five provinces in the country with lowest share of national GDP (Statistical Yearbook 2021, 849-850). Rojhelat provinces are also often among the provinces with very high rates of unemployment. In 2006, Kermanshah province with 16.6 percent recorded the highest rate of unemployment in the entire country and the province of West Azerbaijan with 10 percent had the lowest rate among the Rojhelat provinces. In 2021, Kermanshah with 14.9 percent unemployment was the second lowest in Iran while the province of Ilam with 7.5 percent had the lowest rate of unemployment among Rojhelat provinces. The national average rate of unemployment for the years 2006 and 2021 was 9.2 and 11.3 percent, respectively (Statistical Yearbook 2021, 186-189).

The number of industrial workers is also useful for further illustrating the wide gap between the centre and Rojhelat in Iran in terms of the labor force. In 2020, the combined number of workers in factories with at least ten employees across all Rojhelat provinces was 57,810. This number represents only a quarter of the workers in the central province of Isfahan, which had 215,316 workers (Statistical Yearbook 2021, 323). Notably, in the same year, Rojhelat's population of 7,697,000 significantly surpassed Isfahan's population of 5,344,400 (Statistical Yearbook 2021, 128). It is not surprising then that the first destination of internal migration for the Kurds of Rojhelat is central provinces and Tehran province in particular (Mahmoudian and Mahmoudiani 2018, 30). Although different levels of development give rise to various patterns of inter-provincial immigration in Iran, migration from Rojhelat to other provinces is generally associated with underdevelopment and high rates of unemployment in Kurdish areas (Mahmoudian and Mahmoudiani 2018, 46).

Other indicators of social development in Rojhelat also expose significant challenges. In 1966, while the national average rate of literacy was 29.4 percent, all Rojhelat provinces had a literacy rate lower than the national average, with the province of Kurdistan recording the lowest in Iran with 14.3 percent. In 1976, the national average increased to 47.5 percent, yet Rojhelat was still below that rate (Aghajanian 1983, 215). Illiteracy rates in rural Rojhelat were significantly higher than the Iranian average in 1984-85 when a staggering 80 percent of rural families in Rojhelat were headed by someone who could not read or write, compared to the already high national average of 74%. This illiteracy gap widened in urban areas, where 59 percent of Kurdish families faced this challenge compared to only 42% in Iran as a whole (Koohi-Kamali 2003, 158). In 1981-82, an astonishing 73.5 percent of urban residents in Kurdistan province lacked basic literacy skills, making it the worst illiteracy rate in the country. This was more than twice the rate in Tehran and far surpassed the national average (Koohi-Kamali 2003, 160). Access to health care facilities and services did not fare better. In 1976, whereas the national average for the number of hospital beds for every 100.000 people stood at 104, all Rojhelat provinces were below the national average. Ten years later in 1986, although the numbers improved for Rojhelat provinces, they still remained lower than the national average, which had increased to 114 (Sharbatoghlie 2021, 306). The number of physicians and dentists per 100.000 population were also below the national average for all Rojhelat provinces in those years, with the exception of dentists in West Azarbaijan -11- which was above the national average of seven in 1986. In 1976, the number of dentists per 100,000 people in all Rojhelat provinces combined–10– was equal with that of the central province of Semnan. Ilam province was one of the three Iranian provinces with the worst outcomes across all the health indicators mentioned (Sharbatoghlie 2021, 306).

In terms of access to electricity, whereas less than 50 percent of households in Iran had access to this utility in 1976, 80 percent of households in Tehran province had electricity and the Kurdistan province with less than 20 percent was one of the provinces in the country with the lease access to electricity (Aghajanian 1983, 217). Even though the gap in distribution of residential electricity between the urban areas of central and peripheral provinces was relatively narrow, all Rojhelat provinces still stood below the national average which was 84 percent. In the rural areas the gap was much larger. Although the national average for rural areas was significantly low–14 percent–, central provinces enjoyed a much higher level of access ranging from 17 percent in Fars province to 37 percent in Yazd province while no Rojhelat province reached 10 percent. The province of Kurdistan was ranked among the bottom four provinces with only 3 percent of homes in its rural areas having electricity. This deplorable situation changed relatively in 1986 when that figure increased to 42 percent. The national average also went up to 64 percent, yet all Rojhelat provinces remained below this figure except for Ilam with 78 percent (Sharbatoghlie, 2021, 307).

Underdevelopment in Rojhelat has also led to diminishing quality of life and poverty over time. Nationally, over 41 percent of Iranian households in 1973 were considered poor. This rate was significantly lower in Tehran, at around 21 percent. In contrast, Kurdish areas experienced much higher poverty levels with 30.8 percent in Kurdistan province, 35 percent in West Azarbaijan and 38 percent in Kermanshah. Urban poverty was most severe in Baluchistan and Rojhelat (Aghajanian 1983, 217-218). Further, a survey on household spending conducted in 1984-1985 revealed that urban residents in Kurdistan allocated a much larger portion of their income to food, around 50 percent, compared to the national average of 39 percent for urban Iran (Koohi-Kamali 2003, 157). Recent findings about poverty in Rojhelat depict an even darker

picture. The misery index, calculated by adding inflation and unemployment rates, in Iran reached 46 percent in 2020 while Kermanshah with 55 percent recorded the highest rate in the country. Kurdistan province with 53.2 percent was ranked the third (“Misery index”, 2021). In 2022, the national average for misery index increased to 54.8 percent, and the Kurdish provinces of Kermanshah and Kurdistan with 64.4 percent and 63.7 percent, respectively, were ranked the second and third provinces in the country with highest rates of misery (“The residents”, 2023)."

Chapter 3

Anti-Kurdish Racism in Turkey

In this chapter, I will first outline the general characteristics of anti-Kurdish racial orders in all four countries of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. Then, given the intricacies and relatively longer history of anti-Kurdish racialization and racism against the Kurds in Turkey, which requires more space to discuss, the rest of this chapter will be exclusively devoted to a detailed study of Turkish racial order. The Iranian, Iraqi and Syrian anti-Kurdish racial orders will be analyzed in the next chapter.

3.1. Racial Thinking and Nationalist Imagination: The Discursive Contours of Anti-Kurdish Racism

The articulation and implementation of anti-Kurdish racism has taken place through the processes of minoritization within the nation-states of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. Common to these processes has been discursive, legal and coercive attempts by the states to forcibly assimilate the Kurds. In fact, forced assimilation to the dominant state identity, as it will be shown in detail, has been the main form of racism that Kurds have been subject to in all four parts of Kurdistan. Whereas the identity of Kurds as a distinct ethnic group was legally recognized in Iran and Iraq, it was denied completely in Syria and Turkey for decades since the formation of these two nation-states. However, the systematic forced assimilation of the Kurds was pursued by the states in Iraq and Syria and still continues in Iran and Turkey. Moreover, certain forms of racism, whether biological or cultural, have been witnessed, or have been exercised more severely, only in some parts of Kurdistan. Extreme forms of exclusion such as genocide, massacres and mass displacements were more acute in southern and northern Kurdistan, although they have transpired in eastern and western Kurdistan to a lesser extent, too.

Also, certain Kurdish communities were stripped of their citizenship status, and this included the Fayli Kurds in Iraq in 1970s and a portion of the Kurdish population in Syria following a census in 1962. Using Balibar's distinction of inclusive and exclusive racism, as will be further shown, the Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein and the Turkish Republic throughout its history have practiced both inclusive and exclusive racisms against the Kurds, while Iranian and Syrian nation-states are characterized by their inclusive racism.

Nationalist elites and movements, even in anti-colonial instances, have borrowed significantly from European nationalist thought and the historical processes of nation-building in post-Renaissance Europe. Although the extent and scope of this influence varies across non-European nationalisms, racial thinking as well as ideas such as progress, civilization and national unity were common to many nationalisms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including Arab, Persian and Turkish nationalisms. In fact, Arab, Iranian and Turkish nationalists believed that proving a biological connection between their newly formed nations and older pre-Islamic civilizations would strengthen their claims for self-determination on the world stage. As Elise Burton (2021) argues

> Because Europeans included ancient peoples like the Phoenicians, Hittites, and Aryans in their own civilizational genealogy, these ancestry claims were calculated not only to provide national populations with shared origin myths but also to establish an equivalent racial status to Europeans in a global geopolitical hierarchy. (38)

Given the centrality of "commitment to continuous progress" in modernity (Goldberg 1993, 4), the idea of "nation as progress" gained tremendous currency since mid-nineteenth century (Hobsbawm 1992, 91). In such a discursive climate, nationalists assigned "civilization to

the nation and backwardness to others" (Mamdani 2020, 337). Commonalities notwithstanding, the Arab, Persian and Turkish nationalisms diverged in their nationalist sensitivities and how they utilized European arsenal of nationalist thought for guiding and defining their respective processes of nation-building.

Persian and Turkish nationalisms and their projects of nation-building were informed by establishing direct racial connections with Europeans. Following a general trend in a world structured by racial hierarchy where modernization, civilization and national sovereignty were decided by racial similarity with Europeans and claiming European whiteness (Burton 2021; Gaffield 2020), the articulation of Iranian and Turkish nationalisms was significantly influenced by European racial thinking. This influence not only manifested in the utilization of racial philosophy and terminology as well as the technics of nation-building but also indicated a "performance for the imagined Western audience" (Ahiska 2003, 367). The latter reached its peak in the efforts of post–WWI Iranian and Turkish states at affirming the shared racial roots of Persians and Turks with Europeans by resorting to genetic science. The rise of preoccupation with race science and racial identity in Turkey and Iran coincided with the League of Nations' focus on race and ethnicity. The League, explicitly rejecting racial equality, used biased demographic data and supported methods of ethnic cleansing to settle border disputes in Europe and the Middle East. This international environment influenced both Turkey and Iran to emphasize their connection to Hittites and Aryans, which were seen as racial identities qualified for civilization and national sovereignty by the hegemonic European thinking of the time (Burton 2021, 63).

Relative to Turkish and Persian nationalisms, minoritization or racialization of minorities in early Arab nationalism was rather implicit. Viewing the progress of Europe as

the result of patriotism (Dawn 1991, 5), the primary concern of many Arab nationalist thinkers of the interwar period was thus defining and uniting the Arab nation in opposition to the non-Arab rulers of the Arab people. This was particularly pertinent to Arab intellectuals in what will become known as Iraq and Syria, which had been colonized by the Turkish Ottoman rulers for long, and their rulers had just been replaced by other non-Arabs in the form of British and French mandates. Given the direct imperialist presence of European powers in mandated Iraq and Syria, unlike Turkey and Iran, claiming racial affinity with Europeans would have undermined the vehement opposition of Arab nationalists to European colonialism. Therefore, Iraqi and Syrian nationalists and state officials barely pursued genetic research, and attempts at establishing biological links between populations in the Levant and Iraq with Europeans focused mainly on the Jewish community and Maronite Christians by Western researchers in search of modern descendants of ancient Israelites and Phoenicians (Burton 2021). Instead, the racializing efforts of Arab nationalists were centred on consolidating the singular Arab identity of Iraqi and Syrian nations. Given the presence of Kurds and other non-Arab populations in these countries, this entailed the assimilation and Arabization of non-Arabs. Although Kurdish ethnicity as a distinct identity was recognized in Iraq in the late 1950s, as will be shown in chapter four, systematic efforts at forced assimilation of the Kurds and erasing Kurdish identity were pursued with varying degrees in both countries.

3.2. The Turkish Racial Order

As pioneers of Turkish nationalism, The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) composed of modernist Ottoman intellectuals and students spearheaded the processes of forming a homogenous Turkish nation in the late Ottoman era. Founded in 1889, CUP was the most

powerful organization that sprang from the Young Turk movement that had been advocating liberal reforms in the Ottoman empire since around the mid-nineteenth century. The CUP initially engaged in ending the absolutist monarchy and forming a nation centered on Ottomanism**,** i.e., Ottoman citizenship regardless of religion and ethnicity. However, in the wake of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution and the restoration of constitutional monarchy, the Turkish nationalist sentiments of the CUP came to the fore. In a letter to the Zionist leaders in 1908, Dr. Nazim, a member of the central committee of the CUP, vividly stated the nationalist agenda of his party as follows:

> The Committee of Progress and Union wants centralization and a Turkish monopoly of power. It wants no nationalities in Turkey. It does not want Turkey to become a new Austria-Hungary. It wants a unitary Turkish nation state [einen einheitlichen türkischen Nationalstaat], with Turkish schools, a Turkish administration, and a Turkish legal system. (cited in Ungor 2011, 33)

This stance was in part triggered by the belief in the necessity of converting the highly heterogenous Ottoman population to a homogenized nation so as to protect the remaining territories of the Ottoman empire from growing separatist nationalisms of non-Turkish nationalities of the empire. It was also partly a reflection of the influence of French racial and nationalist thought. In fact, thanks to years of exile in France, many Young Turk leaders were in contact with the French Orientalist David Léon Cahun whose literary and historical works were influential on the shape and character of Turkish nationalism. As a European writer read and praised by Ataturk himself, Cahun promoted the idea that the European civilization had Turkish roots and argued that centuries of engagement with Islamic and Arab culture had harmed the Turkish race (Kibris 2019, 4; Ungor 2011, 34). Many Turkish nationalists would

echo this line of thought and some like Naci Ismail Pelister would argue that one of the reasons for the political predicament of the Turks was that non-Turks such as Arabs, Greeks, Persians and Indians were in positions of power in Turkish government and caused its deterioration (Aksakal 2004). The Young Turks of the CUP were fascinated by these ideas and found nationalism and Turkification as the necessary means to development and glory. In 1895, the CUP began publishing a fortnightly journal called the *Meşveret* (Consultation) in both Turkish and French whose motto was *intizam ve Terakki* (Order and Progress) (Zurcher 1984, 14). Note their obsession with the word Terakki (progress) which was part of not only the title of their political organization but also the motto of their official journal.

The CUP came to power in 1913, and although operating under the Ottoman sultan, it was the CUP that ruled the empire. Access to state resources and control of the military enabled the CUP to put their nationalist fantasies about Turkification into action. The mastermind behind the CUP's plans for Turkification was Ziya Gökalp, a sociologist, poet, and the main ideologue of the CUP. For Gökalp, nationality had nothing to do with race, ethnicity and geography but it was rather a subjective identification which was determined by culture, language and, above all, a person's upbringing. Be that as it may, he undoubtedly subscribed to racist ideas as he infamously believed that "the claim that the Turks, who are whiter and more handsome than Aryans, are related to the yellow race does not have any scientific basis" (cited in Foss 2014, 840). Even though Gökalp was born in the Kurdish city of Amed (Diyarbekir) to a Kurdish mother and a Turkman father, he considered himself a Turk because his upbringing was in Turkish (Parla 1985). Thus, he was a firm advocate of maintaining the cultural unity of the nation and forming a Turkish nation-state through imposing Turkish culture and language on all citizens of the empire as well as changing the demographic composition of the highly heterogenous

Ottoman population (Ungor 2011). One can see the centrality of both acculturation and social engineering as methods of nation-building in Gökalp's thought in a passage from his famous poem the red apple (*Kızılelma*):

> He said it was important to get to know the East /
> said the people are a garden and we are gardeners [halk bahçe biz bahçivanız] /
> trees are not rejuvenated by grafting only /
> first it is necessary to trim the tree (cited in Ungor 2011, 35)

Already in 1911, and before seizing power, the CUP had opened Turkish Hearths i.e., a cultural organization for spreading Turkish language and culture and disseminating Turkish nationalism. With branches in the main cities, Gökalp and his followers were hugely active in these establishments (Karpat 1963, 55-56). The project of forced assimilation of non-Turkish minorities was pursued more systematically and ferociously the moment the CUP came to power in 1913. In the same year, an organization called the Directorate for the Settlement of Tribes and Immigrants was established for the sedentarization of Kurdish, Arab and Turkman tribes and the settlement of Muslim refugees from the lost territories of the Ottoman empire. Under the supervision of Gökalp, a group of researchers was mobilized and sent to the eastern provinces to conduct ethnographic research and collect data about the locations, numbers and political loyalty of people inhabiting there. One of the researchers involved in this government-sponsored study was Naci Ismail Pelister who published a book entitled *The Settlement of Migrants: The International Method of Assimilation* in which he discussed the methods and mechanisms of internal and external colonization of a region (Ungor 2011, 36-37). After laying out the British and American methods of colonization of indigenous people, Pelister argues that to reach a successful colonization, in Ungor's words, "settlers need to be

able to sustain themselves economically, indigenous elites need to be induced to collaborate or face punishment, and the spiritual and cultural life of the indigenous populations needs to be extinguished" (Ungor 2011, 38). It is remarkable that Pelister's recommendations virtually define the contours of the settler colonial policies implemented by the Turkish authorities in the following four decades. Gökalp too had specific thoughts on how to render population policies more efficient. He believed that neighboring the Turks had benefited the Kurds as it had liberated them from feudalism whereas geographical proximity with Arabs had only resulted in "nomadism," "tribal life" and "reactionism" since "Arabs are tied to ignorance so tightly that . . . they have absolutely no talents" (cited in Ungur 2011, 38). This racial analysis was clearly suggestive of the effectiveness of social engineering and deportation for the purpose of assimilation, and it will be seen that the Turkish nationalists in charge of the mass deportations of the Kurds would in every opportunity consider sending Kurdish populations to Turkish dominated areas as part of their Turkification agenda. It was the Ottoman Armenians, however, who were first subject to mass deportations.

In 1915, as is well known and documented, the forced deportations of the Armenian population of the Ottoman empire were carried out under the directions given by the CUP leadership. It is estimated that in the process of forced transportation of Armenians to the south of the empire toward the Syrian desert, between 800,000 to 1,500,000 Ottoman Armenians (Morris and Ze'evi 2019, 486), in official Turkish sources between a range of 300,000 to 600,000 (Akcam 2007, 25), perished. Lesser known perhaps is the fact that only one year after the mass deportation and genocide of Armenians, the Young Turks of the ruling CUP embarked on the forced deportation of the Kurds. This time, the deportation of the designated Kurdish populations of central and eastern Anatolia was accompanied by the

settlement in the eastern Anatolia of Muslim migrants and refugees such as Bulgarian Turks, Bosnians and Albanians from the lost territories. It was decided by the CUP leaders that the number of Kurdish deportees and Muslim settlers must not exceed five percent and 10 percent, respectively, of the total population in their destinations (Akcam 2012, 48–49; Jongerden 2007, 179; Yadirgi 2017, 160). Talaat Pasha, the Ottoman Interior Minister and the de facto leader of the empire, set about the mass deportations of the Kurds by issuing the following order to the governor of Diyarbekir on 2 May 1916:

> - It is absolutely not allowable to send the Kurdish refugees to southern regions such as Urfa or Zor. Because they would either Arabize or preserve their nationality there and remain a useless and harmful element, the intended objective would not be achieved and therefore the deportation and settlement of these refugees needs to be carried out as follows.
> - Turkish refugees and the turkified city dwellers need to be deported to the Urfa, Maraş, and Anteb regions and settled there.
> - To preclude that the Kurdish refugees continue their tribal life and their nationality wherever they have been deported, the chieftains need to be separated from the common people by all means, and all influential personalities and leaders need to be sent separately to the provinces of Konya and Kastamonu, and to the districts of Niğde and Kayseri.
> - The sick, the elderly, lonely and poor women and children who are unable to travel will be settled and supported in Maden town and Ergani and Behremaz counties, to be dispersed in Turkish villages and among Turks...

- Correspondence will be conducted with the final destinies of the deportations, whereas the method of dispersion, how many deportees have been sent where and when, and settlement measures will all be reported to the Ministry. (cited in Ungor 2011, 110-111)

It was also included in the executive orders from the CUP leaders that the Kurds of the province of Diyarbekir were banned from returning to the province. In terms of the number of deportees and casualties, it is estimated that around 700,000 Kurds were deported, and nearly half of them died (Ungor 2011, 112-117). With the end of the war, the deportations came to a halt, and although the CUP dissolved itself after the defeat of the Ottoman empire in 1918, many CUP members continued their activities by joining the National Resistance Movement led by Ataturk (Akcam 2012, Ungor 2011). As a matter of fact, Ataturk also was in the military ranks of the CUP and belonged in the radical wing of the organization. While it is not known whether he was a member of the Fedailer, a military unit within the CUP that carried out many political assassinations, he was certainly close to some of well-known members of that unit (Zurcher 1984, 50-51). Continuities in political ideology and cadre of the ruling elites brought about an even more systematic and sophisticated racist order, especially against the Kurds, in the Republic of Turkey. Already in 1921, Ataturk issued a decree whereby he ordered the deportation of the Milli and Karakeci tribes of Diyarbekir and insisted on the handover of their homes to the settlers (Ungor 2011, 122).

The founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 ushered in an establishment and polity so explicitly racist that was not exceeded by any other Middle Eastern state in terms of the intensity and scope of its racist policies and practices. The inclusion of the racial category of Turk in the title of the newly founded nation-state was a striking testament to the emergence of

an unprecedented form of the state in the region. When in 1934 the parliament of Turkey passed the Surname Law and granted Mustafa Kemal the surname Ataturk (father of the Turks) (Turkoz 2007, 893), the patriarchal and racial character of the Turkish Republic was reassured for years and decades to come. This stands in contrast to claims that "racial discourses remained dormant for a decade in the 1920s when the republican regime was struggling for survival (Ergin 2008a, 832), or that it is since 1990s that "racialization in the Turkish context has only become possible after the difference of Kurdish identity was recognized rather than denied" (Ergin 2014, 323). Although it is true that systematic and "scientific" expressions of racialization and infatuation with whiteness took shape in Turkey in 1930s (Burton 2021; Ergin 2008a), denial of the processes of racialization, especially of the Kurds, in Turkey before 1990s can only be based on a conceptual misunderstanding of racialization. Not only did the racialization of Turks and Kurds continue unabated in the transition from the Ottoman empire to the Turkish Republic, but racist expressions and practices by Turkish state officials never really stopped. In the 1924 constitution of the Republic, the identity of the state and all its citizens were proclaimed exclusively Turkish (Ince 2012). This legal racism was even further solidified in the post 1980 coup constitution in which Article 2 enshrines Ataturk's nationalist principles, while Article 3 defines Turkey as an indivisible nation-state with Turkish as its official language. Notably, Article 4 makes these core national identity articles unamendable (Zeydanlıoglu 2012, 110).

Moreover, specific steps in erasing Kurdish identity were taken in the very early years of the Turkish Republic. As McDowall (2021) points out,

> All reference to Kurdistan was excised from official materials, and Turkish place names began to replace Kurdish ones…In March 1924, these measures reached a climax. Insistence on the sole use of Turkish in the law courts and the prohibition

> of Kurdish officially, including its use in schools, indicated the real Kemalist agenda. (580)

Top Turkish state officials were also expressing their racist and colonizing mentality toward the Kurds rather unreservedly. As early as the summer of 1922, the Interior Minister was outspoken about "bringing the Kurds to a higher level of civilization through the building of schools, roads and, more ominously, gendarmerie posts and military service." (McDowall 2021, 578). In a case even more revealing of the anti-Kurdish racism of Turkish state of the 1920s, Tawfik Rushdi, the foreign minister, expressed the following to the British ambassador to Turkey in 1927:

> In their [Kurdish] case, their cultural level is so low, their mentality so backward, that they cannot be simply in the general Turkish body politic … they will die out, economically unfitted for the struggle for life in competition with the more advanced and cultured Turks. After all there are [fewer] than 500,000 Kurds in Turkey to-day, of whom as many as can will emigrate into Persia and Iraq, while the rest will simply undergo the elimination of the unfit." (cited in McDowall 2021, 598; Yadirgi 2017, 167).

Consider, further, the following remarks made by the Minister of Justice Mahmut Esat in 1930: "I believe that the Turk must be the only lord, the only master of this country. Those who are not of pure Turkish stock can have only one right in this country, the right to be servants and slaves" (Avedian 2012, 819). Esat, who was a great admirer of Mussolini and viewed Fascism as simply a version of Kemalism, picked the surname Bozkurt for himself after the passing of 1934 Surname Law (Kieser 2011, 3). Buzkurt means grey wolf, a symbol of Turkish supremacy, and highly popular and even sacred among Turkish nationalists. In the late 1960s, Idealist

Hearths (Ulku Ocakları), commonly known as the Grey Wolves (Buzkurtlar), was founded as the youth branch of the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). The Grey Wolves has acted as a death squad since its establishment, carrying out the extrajudicial killings of many leftist, Kurdish and Alevi dissidents (Taspinar 2005).

The anti-Kurdish racism of the Turkish Republic, I argue, is defined and shaped by its approach toward the Kurdish identity and its efforts in orientalizing the Kurds. Until 1990s, the official stance on the Kurdish identity was denial, rejecting the existence of a distinct Kurdish ethnicity in Turkey (Gunes and Zeydanlıoglu 2014; Yegen 1999). During this period, there was

> a deep 'silence' on the Kurdishness of the Kurdish question. Whenever the Kurdish question was mentioned in TSD [Turkish State Discourse], it was mentioned as an issue of either political reaction, tribal resistance or regional backwardness, but never as an ethno-political question. (Yegen 1999, 555)

Kurds were considered as those Turks who had forgotten their Turkishness and thus were called "Mountain Turks" (*Dağ Türkleri*), a term that was coined by the end of 1936 (Burton 2021, 52). In a Turkish dictionary published in 1936 by the Turkish Language Institution the word Kurd was defined as "name given to a group or a member of this group of Turkish origin, many who have changed their language, speaking a broken form of Persian and lives in Turkey, Iraq, Iran" (cited in Zeydanlıoglu 2008, 163). Since the early years of the Republic, officials began to use the words Doğu (east) and Doğulu (easterner) to refer to Bakûr and the Kurds of northern Kurdistan, respectively, refusing to call the Kurds of Turkey and where they lived for what they are, and instead identifying them by their geographical location in Turkey. In a parliamentary debate in early 1930s, the Interior Minister Şukru Kaya proposed "to separate the country into west and east". He argued that in the eastern region, the government should actively

"render the Turk the master of the soil" (Ungor 2011, 149). By the end of the 1930s, the expression Kurd(ish) vanished from the official discourse (Senguk, 2012 12-13).

Orientalization of the Kurds, as a major defining feature of anti-Kurdish racism in Turkey, foregrounds the ideological principle that was for so long employed by Turkish nationalists and officials to justify the forced assimilation of the Kurds. This ideological principle was nothing but seeing the assimilation of the Kurds to Turkish culture as a civilizing mission. In other words, for Turkish nationalists, to Turkify the Kurds meant to civilize them. This required orientalizing the Kurds in the sense of casting them as primitive, backward, reactionary and, in a word, the Other of the Turks who represented civilization, progress and modernity. To this end, Turkish nationalists relied extensively on Eurocentric reasoning and European orientalist discourse and racial theories (Kahraman 2002; Zeydanlıoglu 2008). Nonetheless, they were never bothered by the contradiction between their insistence on the Turkishness of the Kurds and efforts to assimilate them. Thus, "the embarrassing question why it was necessary to Turkify a people who were said to be Turks already was never answered" (Van Bruinessen 2000, 80). One could imagine that Turkish nationalists would possibly in response bring up their thesis on the Kurds as a people forgetful about their Turkishness, hence the need to reactivate their Turkish essence. However, this hypothetical answer would only affirm their reliance on European racial theories that promoted the idea of a biologically determined and immutable racial essence in human beings beyond their cultural and earned faculties.

Dehumanizing the Kurds and depicting them as "savages" and "barbarians" was part of the orientalization of the Kurds in the racist discourse of Turkish nationalism. It would also appear in the press as early as 1930. *Cumhuriyet*, the first newspaper of the Turkish Republic and closely affiliated with the then ruling Republican People's Party, featured commentaries

about the Kurds and few other non-white peoples of the world as denigrating and graphic as the following:

> they [the Kurds] allow their emotions and brains to be led by simple instincts like ordinary animals and therefore can only think crudely and foolishly . . . there is absolutely no difference between African barbarians and cannibals and these creatures who mix raw meat with cracked wheat and eat it just like that. (cited in Ungor 2011, 184)

Writing for the same newspaper, Yusuf Mazhar, a nationalist journalist, described the Kurds in a number of articles as follows:

> Even though they may be more capable than the redskins in the United States, they are—history is my witness—endlessly bloodthirsty and cruel . . . They are completely bereft of positive feelings and civilized manners. For centuries, they have been a plague for our race . . . Under Russian rule they were prohibited to descend from the mountains, where they did not lead humane and civilized lives, therefore these creatures are really not inclined to profit from civilization . . . In my opinion, the dark spirit, crude mental state, and ruthless manners of this Kurdish rabble is impossible to break. (cited in Ungor 2011, 184)

The denial of Kurdish identity in Turkey was predicated on the racialization of the entire population of the country and subsuming them under the category of Turks. Regardless of how citizens of the country identified themselves, in the eyes of Turkish nationalists, they all belonged to the Turkish nation, which had a certain history and specific racial characteristics. A host of sciences and disciplines such as history, anthropology, archeology, linguistics, philology and genetics were deployed by the state to substantiate the claims of Turkish nationalists

regarding the racial homogeneity of the Turkish nation. Ataturk and his nationalist fellows were keen on finding ways to tackle negative characterizations of Turks among Europeans, encapsulated in the idea of "terrible Turk" belonging to the yellow race and lacking the capacity for civilization (Foss 2014, 828; Ergin 2008a, 832). History writing, in particular, occupied a special place in the republican state's efforts to address this issue and their project of building and normalizing a Turkish nation. It seemed that proving historical ties and racial affinity between Turks and the so-called modern and civilized Europeans was the answer. Therefore, common to narratives of Turkish nationalist history writing was a historically unchanging Turkish nation that was racially white and constituted the origin of European, or most, civilizations.

Ataturk personally collected about 4000 books and supervised a committee to write a new history of the Turks (Foss, 2014). This is the best indication of how strongly the father of the Turks felt about writing a history of Turkish people. There is even a line attributed to Ataturk by Mehmed Saim, a member of parliament and army physician, stating that "if necessary, we will make a fabricated history and a fabricated language" (Saim 2012, 25). Whether true or not, what Ataturk and the Turkish establishment did regarding the so-called Turkish history within the first decade of the Republic was nothing less than fabricating a history. An earlier version of this history was offered by Ataturk during his "Great Speech" or Nutuq, which was delivered in Ankara in October 1927. Ataturk's speech reimagined Turkish history, and traced it back to the very beginning of civilization, emphasizing the importance of their pre-Islamic ancestors in Central Asia. He portrayed them as heroic figures and presented a new, non-Muslim identity for the Turkish people. Additionally, he presented Turkish history as a continuous line of powerful empires, like the Huns and the Seljuqs (Wawruschka, 2016, 151).

The committee formed and directed by Ataturk produced a four-volume book titled *Outlines of Turkish History (Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları)* that was included in secondary school textbooks. This book advanced the Turkish History Thesis according to which the Turks were a white race from central Asia, the cradle of human civilization, and all the brachycephalic peoples, including Indo-Europeans, were derived from them. Moreover, the Turkish race had over time migrated in various directions and founded many ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Sumer, Minoan Greek and several others. The contemporary inhabitants of Anatolia are descendants of those Turks that had entered Anatolia around 5000 BC and created the Hittite civilization (Cagaptay 2004, 88; Erimtan 2008, 143; Aydin,2010, 41-42; Foss 2014, 830-833). The Turkish History Thesis was propagated vastly, beginning with the First Turkish History Congress in 1932 attended by Ataturk, then in textbooks and state institutions such as Turkish Historical Society and the faculty of Language, History and Geography both founded in 1935. The Kemalist intelligentsia, like their Young Turk predecessors, downplayed and simplified the Ottoman Empire's history. This silenced the histories of the many different ethnic groups who lived under Ottoman rule, such as Armenians, Kurds, Circassians, Syriacs, Arabs, Greeks and others, many of whom are still present in Turkey today. By ignoring these groups in their historical narratives, the Turkish nationalists effectively erased them from public memory. In this context, a nationalist intellectual such as Ishak Refet could conveniently and publicly state in 1927 that ‘the Kurds have no history’ (cited in Ungor 2011, 230-31).

Some elements of the The Turkish History Thesis had appeared in works dated before its publication. These included the works of mid-to-late Ottoman historians such as riza Nur’s 14-volume *Turkish History* as well as the works of European authors and orientalists like Cahun's *Introduction to the History of Asia*, *The Outline of History* by H.G. Wells, André Berthelot's

Ancient Central and Southeastern Asia and Arthur De Gobineau's *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*. As Foss (2014) points out, "the idea of an advanced people spreading out from an ancestral home and founding great civilizations" (837), was also central to *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* by Alfred Rosenberg, main ideologue of the German National Socialists. Although there is no evidence that Rosenberg's book was among the sources used by Ataturk and his committee, they may have borrowed this idea from Gobineau. According to Gobineau, central Asia was the ancestral home of the white race who founded all great civilizations as they migrated out of their homeland (Foss 2014). Ataturk took special interest in Gobineau's analysis of the root 'ar', 'ir' and 'er' which in many Indo-European languages meant honourable, attesting to the latter's another assertion that the Aryans were the most advanced people among the white race. In her speech at the first congress of Turkish Historical Society, Afet Inan, one of Ataturk's adopted daughters and an anthropologist, cited Gobineau and argued that Aryan and names like Iran and Eire come from the Turkish word "er" meaning man, suggesting a Turkish origin for all the Indo-European languages (Foss 2014, 837-838).

References to language by leading Turkish nationalists of the time revealed a strong tendency among them to use linguistics, like history, to uphold their claims about racial antiquity and homogeneity of the nation. In 1936, during the third Turkish Language Congress, the Sun Language Theory was introduced. Turkish linguists proposed that the ancient Turks, believed to be the oldest race, worshipped the sun, and their belief in the sun's importance had shaped their understanding of life and led to the development of their language. Interestingly enough, the theory was based on certain ideas and etymological arguments offered by Ataturk. Thus, the Sun Language Theory declared that Turkish was a superior language, and all other languages were stemmed from it (Cagapatay 2004, 91-92; Ergin 2008a, 833). Utilizing history and linguistics for

nationalist, or racist, purposes was underpinned by fascination with modern science, and using science to legitimize baseless ideological claims. This opportunistic approach to science reached its apex with the instrumentalization of genetics to substantiate the so-called racial purity and antiquity of the Turks.

In an attempt to prop up the arguments of the Turkish History Thesis, the Kemalist regime invested significantly in anthropological and medical genetics research. Anthropometry was the dominant method of researching human genetics for nationalist purposes in the early years of the Turkish Republic, albeit Turkey was not the only nation-state in the Middle East to do so. As Burton (2021) argues, "the Turkish Republic and Pahlavi Iran mobilized anthropometry in different ways to affirm the ethnic homogeneity of their nation-states, claim racial membership in European civilization, and even litigate territorial disputes" (24). Similar to nationalist instrumentalization of history and language, the articulation of genetics in political terms stemmed from a confluence of European orientalist perspectives and the national chauvinistic ambitions of Turkish elites and state officials. Eugène Pittard, a Swiss anthropologist in Paris School of Anthropology, played a foundational role in initiating anthropometric studies in Turkey and training the first generation of Turkish scholars of human genetics. He met Ataturk in his visit to Turkey in 1928 and conducted two major archeological and anthropometric investigations during this visit, concluding that "the Turks of Anatolia and the Balkans were racially homogeneous and, moreover, that the Turks were a brachycephalic race—just like the supposed Aryan race that founded European civilization" (Burton 2021, 48).

The first Turkish anthropologist, Sevket Aziz Kansu, received a diploma from the school where Pittard taught, and later on was appointed a full member of the Turkish Historical Society by Ataturk. Under Kansu's supervision, anthropometric research was conducted during which

hundreds of skulls were measured to identify the "racial traits" of the Turks. In 1938, Kansu published the first anthropology textbook in Turkey entitled *Anthropology Lessons I – Human paleontology and prehistory information* (Toprak 2011; Burton 2021). Pittard also supervised Afet Inan's doctorate thesis in sociology in which she analysed a massive dataset collected by the state-funded Turkish Anthropometry Survey that had documented the physical measurements of 64,000 Turkish citizens. Acknowledging significant variations that problematized the notion of Turkish biological purity and the inclusion of Turks in a white Alpine race, Inan underlined the "cephalic homogeneity" in central Anatolia linking the local inhabitants directly to the Hittites in terms of their biological traits while she attributed anomalies in regions inhabited mostly by the Kurds and Armenians to the invasion of foreign races (Foss 2014, 834; Burton 2021, 51).

Seroanthropology was another method utilized by Turkish nationalists to further verify the scientific credibility of the Turkish History Thesis. Maintaining a direct link between blood types and race, seroanthropology was built on the assumption that the distribution of blood types (A, B, and O) within a population could reveal its racial ancestry. In 1919, Polish physicians Ludwick and Hanna Hirszfeld had concluded that the Turks along with Russians, Arabs and Jews belonged to the "intermediate" type of what they had defined as a "biomedical index" or the "racial index", which put them between Europeans who had higher index values and "Asio-African" category that had lesser index values (Burton 2021, 72). Early Turkish studies in blood-based classification (seroanthropology) challenged the findings by the Hirszfelds, and argued that Turkish people belonged in the "European" category rather than the "Intermediate" one. In fact, "due to the inconsistencies generated by the index calculation, Turkish researchers ultimately settled on a dynamic historical narrative equally aligned with the Thesis: that the Turks had introduced the A blood type, along with civilization, to Europe" (Burton 2021, 84).

Together with anthropometry and sero-anthropology, the ruling nationalists of the first few decades of the Turkish Republic were also highly supportive of eugenics. Because of the prevalence of racial understanding of civilization and progress, the government actively backed the widespread propagation of eugenicist scholarship through textbooks, public speeches, the ruling party's conferences and its press. As academics adapted eugenics to fit Turkish nationalism, the ruling elite adopted a simplified version. They used this approach to promote public support for initiatives like sports, hygiene, population growth, marriage and reproduction laws, and management of criminals and those deemed mentally inferior (Ergin 2008b, 293-299). Even though extreme eugenic measures such as forced sterilization were not put into action, many among the ruling elite and the educated Turks were preoccupied with racial purity and hereditary improvement, and sympathetic to the eugenic ideas and policies of Nazi Germany. For instance, Sadi Irmak, a professor of physiology in Istanbul University who later on became the prime minister of Turkey (1974-1975), viewed eugenic policies in Nazi Germany positively and considered them essential for a modern state. He regarded Jews and Gypsies as racial groups with a propensity for criminal activities and condoned the extermination of German Jews as a logical measure to avoid racial mixing (Ergin 2008b, 288-290).

The racialization of people living in Turkey as a unitary Turkish nation was impossible without the scientific efforts of state-sponsored historians, linguists, anthropologists and physicians. It provided the Turks with a sense of pride, and pre-empted any territorial claims from external and internal challengers. But more importantly, generation after generation of Turkish citizens have been brought up thinking of themselves as belonging to a superior white race autochthonous to Anatolia and with a glorious history. For the non-Turk minorities of the Turkish Republic, this amounted to a racial order that has subjected them to institutional and

everyday racism as well as a broad range of racist exclusions and methods of forced assimilation from restrictions on cultural expression to deportations and massacres. Although multiple religious and national minorities were impacted by this racial order, the Kurds have been the main targets of this order and the assimilationist practices in the Republic of Turkey.

Since the early days of the Republic, education has been central to the processes of nation-building and the forced assimilation of non-Turks, particularly the Kurds, into the dominant Turkish culture. In effect, education for the Kemalist regime was meant to perform two main functions: "Turkification and the spread of the regime's propaganda" (Ungor 2011, 175). Turkish history and language as perceived by the ruling nationalists were central to the education system, and their imposition on non-Turks was seen, or justified by, the Kemalists as a civilizing mission. This remark by Şukru Kaya, Interior Minister of the Turkish Republic (1927-1938), perfectly captures this outlook:

> No matter what happens, it is our obligation to immerse those living in our society in the civilization of Turkish society and to have them benefit from the prosperity of civilization. Why should we still speak of the Kurd Mehmet, the Circassian Hasan or the Laz Ali? (cited in Gingeras 2011, 2)

Therefore, the spread of Turkish civilization was primarily intended to erase non-Turkish identities. Some other Kemalist elites of the time like Cemil Uybadin, the Interior Minister (1925-1927), were more explicit about this when he stated that "a strong national organization and educational propaganda will wipe out notions of Kurdishness" (cited in Ungor 2011, 177). In that spirit, the ministry of education banned the use of words referring to non-Turkish identities such as Kurdistan, Kurd, Lazistan, Laz and Circassian, labeling them divisive terms (Mango 1999, 20). Notwithstanding the alterations of the content of textbooks throughout the lifespan of

the Turkish Republic, the fundamentals of Turkish History Thesis and the Sun Language Theory have been preserved in the textbooks to this date (Ergin 2008a, 841). In addition to the textbooks, a specific practice called the Student Oath was introduced in 1937 which brazenly showcases the racist nature of education in the Republic of Turkey. The Oath started with stating that "I am a Turk" (*Turkum*) and ended with the phrase "how happy is the one who says I am a Turk" (*Ne mutlu Turkum diyene*), the latter taken from a speech delivered by Ataturk. The Student Oath was recited every morning on school days by all students in elementary and middle schools, regardless of their actual ethnicity, until the practice was ended by the ruling Justice and development party in 2013 (Sayoglu 2018, 80). The Kemalist regime also targeted traditional and established institutions of education as part of their project of modernization and homogenization of the nation. The 1924 Law for the Unification of Education was designed specifically for this purpose. This law was weaponized by the Turkish state to eliminate the seminaries of the Kurds (*Medrese*) and the Syriacs (*Madrashto*) which they labelled as "reactionary", "feudal" and "backward" (Ungor 2011, 186). Nevertheless, Turkification as a civilizing mission in the realm of education was pursued most intensely and violently in the boarding schools of Bakûr.

Similar to the residential schools for indigenous children in Canada and the United States (Miller 2009; McDonald and Hudson 2012), boarding schools were established in Bakûr as early as 1937 to transform "primitive" Kurdish children to "civilized" Turks. Educating and indoctrinating the girls was especially foregrounded because mothers were viewed as transmitters of Kurdish culture, which the government aimed to eradicate. This policy reflected Ataturk's determination to ensure children were raised only speaking Turkish. As Ungor (2011) details,

> After taking girls from a village, each one was photographed on arrival. These 'before the school' photos would later be contrasted with the 'after the school' photos to demonstrate the transition to 'civilization'. The girls would be put in quarantine for two weeks and only then began attending classes. The curriculum in the boarding school was obviously nationalist and patriarchal…Forty-four hours of class were taught in a week, and clear priority was given to Turkish language classes. (206)

Discipline at the boarding schools went beyond strict rules and regulations. It resembled a military environment with an emphasis on obedience, order, and control. The strict and almost militarized atmosphere of the boarding schools stemmed partly from Kemalist views on Kurdish culture. They believed Kurdish children were "wild" and lacked the discipline and order seen as essential elements of Turkish civilization. The conditions in the boarding schools in the early years of their operation were so unbearable that many girls fled and some committed suicide (Ungor 2011, 210).

The People's Houses were another avenue through which nation-building and assimilation of the Kurds were pursued. After the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the ruling Kemalists continued and expanded the operation of Turkish Hearths whose branches grew from 135 in 1925 to 255 in 1930. In April 1931, the ruling Republican People's Party disbanded the Turkish Hearths, and a year later in 1932 opened the People's Houses with initially 14 locations across the country (Karpat 1963, 58-59). Instead of being people's houses, they were in fact state houses run by government officials as a tool for political indoctrination of nationalist and secularist ideas of the Kemalist establishment as well as forming loyal Turkish subjects. In the Kurdish populated provinces, the mission of the people's Houses was more specific and

similar to the preceding Turkish Hearths' which, in the words of writer and politician Mehmet Emin Erişirgi, was "the reinforcement of national unity, the spread of Turkish culture, the diffusion of the real and pure Turkish language in the eastern provinces" (cited in Ungor, 2011, 183).

The promotion of Turkish as the only official language in Turkey went hand in hand with systematic efforts at eliminating Kurdish. This was in part built on the idea that a single language is imperative for the progress of the nation. As Zia Gökalp asserted, "today in Europe only those states which are based on a single-language group are believed to have a future" (Gokalp 1981, 81). The suppression of Kurdish language also served a strategic purpose for Turkish nationalists as it could prevent the growth and spread of awareness among the Kurds of their distinct ethnic identity. In fact, the elimination of Kurdish in some ways took precedence in the political priorities of the Kemalist establishment of the early Turkish Republic over the promotion of Turkish. While the 1924 constitution banned the public use of Kurdish (Olson 1989, 91), the Turkish Language Institute was founded in 1932 so as to purify Turkish by erasing Arabic and Persian words and influences (Zeydanlıoglu 2012, 103). Within this context, it should not come as a surprise that authorities deployed extreme violent measures to implement the said laws. In one documented case, the Turkish army cut out an old Kurdish man's tongue for speaking Kurdish (Ungor 2011, 204). The elimination of Kurdish was not confined to the ban on written Kurdish or speaking it in public, but it meant the erasure of any traces of Kurdish in public, including the Kurdish names of places, humans and things. The 1934 Surname Law (Article 3) banned surnames that referenced "tribes, foreign races, and foreign nations", targeting Kurdish designations. The 1949 Provincial Administration Law empowered the government to alter place names, impacting Kurdish geographical markers (Yegen 2009, 605).

Other compulsory and assimilatory measures were also taken, especially in the early decades of the Turkish Republic, to assure the homogenization of the nation. Not even local dress and music were spared in the process. As part of what they perceived as modernizing the nation, the Kemalist regime enacted a law dictating European and outlawing indigenous dress in 1934. The law cracked down on what Kemalists viewed as tradition, forbidding both sheikhs in their customary attire and ordinary villagers in their practical şalwar (baggy pants) and puşi (headgear). Instead, it imposed the unfamiliar combination of corduroy pants and top hats. Further, not only was singing in Kurdish banned while Kurdish melodies were sung with Turkish lyrics, the Kurdish folk music tradition of the Dengbej sung by bards was also forbidden (Ungor 2011).

To ensure the Turkification of the nation and eradication of the Kurdish identity, more extreme methods of forced assimilation involving massive violence, that is, mass deportations and physical eliminations also continued after the founding of the Turkish Republic. From the early days of the Republic, the use of mass violence was openly stated for homogenizing the nation. According to later interpretations, a key goal of the 1923 Izmir Economic Congress was "to dismantle the territorial unity of Kurds' and to "Turkify the Eastern population" (McDowall 2021, 626). The Turkish Republic's killing machine became operative against the Kurds following the 1925 rebellion led by Sheikh Said. After the suppression of the rebellion and the arrests of those involved, a prolonged campaign of terror was unleashed which, according to a report, resulted in the destruction of 206 villages, the burning of 8,758 houses, and the killing of 15,200 people (Ungor 2011, 129). Despite the swift suppression of the rebellion in two months, Turkish military operations continued for another two years within the affected area (Yegen 2020, 307). This suggests that the violence conducted by the Turkish troops was not

simply to put down a rebellion but amounted to an act of ethnic cleansing. The immensity of violence had not only horrified certain observers but also some Turkish officers who were repulsed by the brutality of the actions they were ordered to carry out. As recorded in an account by a British diplomat,

> No doubt the repression of the 1925 rising was accomplished with a brutality which was not exceeded in any Armenian massacres. Whole villages were burnt or razed to the ground, and men, women and children killed. Turkish officers have recounted how they were repelled by such proceedings and yet felt obliged to do their duty. (cited in Ungor, 2011, 130)

Not all those targeted had necessarily contributed to the rebellion. Following the suppression of the rebellion, two Independence Tribunals were established in Ankara and Diyarbekir to prosecute the people involved in the rebellion. While the formation and the conduct of the tribunals involved actions that violated the legal framework established by the 1924 Constitution, the first group of persons sentenced to death by the tribunals and consequently executed were a number of Istanbul Kurdish elite who were not active participants of the rebellion (Yegen 2021, 307; Ungor 2011, 131). Also, the brutal treatment of the villagers of Karaman is another case in point which stands in stark contrast to their initial act of hospitality. Despite offering water and buttermilk to the Turkish army, they were all ultimately massacred and their property confiscated (Ungor 2011, 129).

In the aftermath of the Sheikh Said rebellion, Ataturk personally oversaw population politics in Bakûr and even commissioned a special council to create a detailed plan for "reforming Eastern Anatolia", resulting in the "Eastern Region Reform Plan" (*Şark Islahat Pilani*). In the process of writing the plan, Cemil Uybadin, the interior minister, suggested

the installment of a General Inspectorate possessing a "colonial method of administration" in Kurdish provinces (Ungor 2011, 134-135). The plan made a number of suggestions regarding the Kurdish region such as dismantling Kurdish tribal structures and scattering their members across western Turkey, implementing a large-scale population transfer, settling 500,000 Turkish immigrants from neighboring regions within a decade, prohibiting Kurdish language use in public spheres, expanding state-run education and promoting Turkish literacy, particularly among women, developing infrastructure through improved transportation networks, and increasing state control by establishing gendarme stations throughout the region (Yegen 2021, 308). Meanwhile, the government deported over 500 local elites from Diyarbekir that ranged from the relatives of Sheikh Said to, surprisingly, government loyalists (Ungor 2011, 136). By the spring of 1926, the "Eastern Region Reform Plan" began to be enacted. One key measure, the Settlement Law, was passed on May 31st, 1926. This law empowered the interior ministry to identify and relocate

> (i) 'Individuals who do not fall under Turkish culture, those infected with syphilis, persons suffering from leprosy and their families, and those convicted of murder except for political and military crimes, anarchists, spies, gypsies, and those who have been expelled from the country' (the appendix to this law considered the 'Pomaks, Bosniaks, and Tatars' in the Turkish culture); (ii) 'Migratory tribes in the country and all the nomads', with the aim of 'transporting [them] to suitable and available places'. (cited in Yadirgi 2017, 170)

Unlike the Ottoman government's largely secretive approach under the CUP, the deportations and their goals were now openly promoted and discussed. In the words of the then

Foreign Minister Tevfik Ruştu Aras, the government was “determined to clear the Kurds out of their valleys, the richest part of Turkey to-day, and to settle Turkish peasants there” (cited in Ungor 2011, 138). On 10 June 1927 the “Law Regarding the Transportation of Certain Persons from Eastern Regions to the Western Regions” was passed. Targeting the eastern provinces under martial law, this law authorized the deportation of 1,400 Kurdish notables and their families, along with 80 designated “rebel families”, to western regions of Turkey (Yadirg, 2017, 170; Yegen 2021, 307).

Similar to the confiscation of Armenian property, the belongings of Kurdish elites were also reallocated to Turkish settlers. Out of the planned 75 Yugoslav settler households, 35 left for various regions, and 30 households were settled in Diyarbekir, taking the properties of Kurdish deportees (Ungor 2011, 146). Data on the number of Kurdish deportees in the 1920s vary widely. Contemporary Kurdish sources estimate over 500,000 people were deported, with around 200,000 perishing between 1925 and 1928 (Yadirgi 2017, 170). In contrast, another source cites a significantly lower figure, placing the total number of Kurds relocated to western Turkey between 1920 and 1932 at just 2,774 (Iskân Tarihçesi 1932, 137). As Ungor (2011) explains, the low deportation numbers reported by some sources can be misleading. More important than the total quantity is the social makeup of those deported. Evidence suggests these were the top tiers of Kurdish society in the east – the religious leaders, intellectuals, and social elites whose isolation appeared successful in the short term, as nationalist ideas gained less traction among the remaining Kurds (142-143).

On 1 January 1928, the government established the First Inspectorate- General in Diyarbekir. The Inspectorates General (umumi mufettişlikler) functioned as powerful regional governorships within large areas of the Turkish Republic. These entities held sway

over all civilian, military, and judicial institutions within their designated areas. Four Inspectorates General were established in Turkey's Eastern Anatolia provinces during 1920s and 1930s (Yadirgi 2017, 169). In Diyarbekir, Dr. Ibrahim Tali Ongoren was appointed as the Inspectorate General. As Ungor (2011) points out, the appointment of Ongoren, who had studied British colonial administration in India, lends credence to the idea that the Turkish government intended to implement a similar approach in its Kurdish provinces. This aligns with the call for a 'colonial administrative method' outlined in the 1925 Reform Plan. In other words, Ongoren's background suggests that the regime planned to utilize colonial methods and power structures for colonization of Bakûr (144). This theme of colonizing the eastern provinces was further stressed by the foreign minister, Tevfik Ruştu Aras, in a meeting with British representatives at the League of Nations in November 1930 when he raised the "possibility of a future intense Turkish colonization in order to smother the Kurds in a considerable mass of Turkish population" (cited in Yadirgi 2017, 180). Three major events transpired throughout the 1930s in line with the proclamation made by Aras.

In the summer of 1930, following the suppression of Ararat Republic and the Agrı rebellion, the Turkish army committed a killing spree against the Kurds in the Zilan valley of Van province known as the Zilan massacre. As reported by a number of newspapers at the time, villages deemed to have collaborated with "the bandits" were burned down, and their residents were forcibly relocated to Erciş. Furthermore, over 15,000 people were killed including not just the combatants but also their family members and "fellow tribesmen", leaving hundreds of corpses piling up in the Zilan river (Yegen 2021, 308-309). The Norwegian geographer Frodin, who witnessed Kurdistan firsthand in 1936 and again in 1939, confirms the devastation ensued after the Agrı rebellion, including the destruction of

entire villages. Frodin observed that “all Kurds who were found carrying arms were beheaded on the spot. This concerned tens of thousands. Large parts of the remaining Kurdish population were sent to concentration camps in the western provinces” (cited in Van Bruinessen 1994, 167). The next major event was another Settlement Law that was passed in the parliament in 1934 and put to motion afterwards.

Like deportation measures enacted in the past two decades, this new Settlement Act aimed at a two-pronged strategy: displacing and assimilating the Kurdish population, and resettling non-Kurdish Muslim populations in the region. Remarks made by the Interior Minister Şukru Kaya in parliament left no doubt about the Law's underlying ethnoterritorialist and homogenizing agenda. Kaya maintained that “this law will create a country speaking with one language, thinking in the same way and sharing the same sentiment” (cited in Yadirgi 2017, 181). The Law designated tribes as a primary target for dismantlement and assimilation into the dominant Turkish population. Tribal structures were to be abolished, and their property liquidated according to government regulations. All leaders, including lords, chieftains, and sheikhs, were slated for removal (*tasfiye*). To prevent the rise of new leaders, their families would be immediately deported. This approach reflected the Young Turk’s view that Kurds lacked the characteristics of a nation. In their eyes, eliminating the Kurdish elite and dispersing the remaining population (ethnic “raw material”) would pave the way for mass assimilation. The government compiled detailed reports categorizing dozens of Kurdish tribes in each province as either “loyal” or “disloyal”. These reports also included information about the relationships between different tribes (Ungor, 2011, 153). Moreover, this new Settlement Law established a three-tiered classification system for residents and potential immigrants: those considered ethnically and

culturally Turkish according to their language and race, those required to undergo assimilation into Turkish culture, and those who did not fit into either of the above categories. The second category encompassed both immigrants and existing resident groups like Kurds, Jews, and Arabs. A key objective of the law was to disperse these populations and prevent them from forming concentrated communities. This system, with its emphasis on racial background (both biological and cultural), underscored the Kemalist government's racial definition of Turkish identity. For instance, Article 7 granted unrestricted settlement rights within Turkey to anyone deemed "of the Turkish race", even without government aid (Ergin 2008b, 302-303).

Upon arrival in their destinations, Kurds often found the social environment and the humid or rainy climate unbearable, rendering their forced displacement even more traumatizing. The locals would resort to racial slurs and insults such as calling them "tailed Kurd" and would mockingly mimic the Kurdish language. According to a foreign traveler witnessing the arrival of a convoy of deportees in the city of Aydin, the Kurds were "simply moved there and distributed over the country. They are then dumped anywhere, without a roof over their head or employment. They do not know a single word of Turkish" (cited in Ungor 2011, 158). According to official records, a total of 25,381 Kurds from 5,074 households were deported during the 1930s. The same sources indicate that Diyarbakir province received 1,988 migrants between 1928 and 1938, with an additional 2,143 households expected to arrive in 1938. Meanwhile, Elazığ province received 1,571 households from 1932 onwards. These households included 6,045 settlers from Yugoslavia, Greece, Bulgaria, and Syria (Ungor 2011, 162).

The third major event was the Dersim massacre of 1937-38. This massacre, also considered an act of genocide (Besikci 1990, Van Bruinessen 1994), took place in the Dersim region renamed Tunceli in 1935. The Dersim region, in particular the central part, was special among other Kurdish areas in Turkey as it for so long had defied state's direct authority. Unlike most Kurds who adhere to Sunni Islam, the Dersim population primarily practices Alevism, a distinct religious tradition, and speaks a Kurdish dialect called Zazaki. The need to exert control over Dersim, along with military campaigns to achieve this, had been an ongoing issue since the Ottoman era's Tanzimat reforms in the 19th century. Despite several attempts, these campaigns yielded limited success. While the Ottoman central government established direct rule, during the 19th century, in formerly autonomous Ottoman Kurdistan, including parts of Dersim, they still relied on cooperation with local lords to maintain control even after the Turkish Republic was founded. However, the central regions of Dersim remained defiant, resisting both co-optation and direct rule until the 1930s. Official rhetoric towards the Kurds of Dersim was openly dehumanizing and racist. It portrayed them as "primitive", "bandits" and obstacles to progress that should be assimilated into modern civilization just like the American indigenous people (Van Bruinessen 1994, 167). The Dersim people were portrayed by the military officers as deviant outsiders. They were labeled Alevi heretics, and sometimes even accused of being Armenian sympathizers (crypto-Armenians). A senior official, Hamdi Bey, called the Dersim region an "abscess" that required an immediate "surgeon" from the Republic. This sentiment was echoed by high-ranking officials like General Inspector Ibrahim Tali, Marshal Fevzi Çakmak, and the Interior Minister Şukru Kaya. All had gathered firsthand information and advocated for implementing "reforms" in the area (Kieser 2011, 1-5).

In spring 1937, a group of Dersim tribes led by Seyyid Rıza launched a rebellion against the Turkish state. To impede military access, they dismantled bridges in the region. The Turkish army swiftly quashed the armed resistance within a few months. The rebellion's leaders, including Seyyid Rıza who had surrendered, possibly motivated by a desire to prevent further bloodshed, were executed (Yegen 2021). The severity and nature of violence in cracking down on the Dersim rebellion were in some ways unprecedented even by the standards of Turkish nationalists. The British consul in Trabzon, the closest European observer to the events, was appalled by the brutality of the violence, and he likened it to the horrific Armenian massacres of 1915. He reported that

> thousands of Kurds, including women and children, were slain; others, mostly children, were thrown into the Euphrates; while thousands of others in less hostile areas, who had first been deprived of their cattle and other belongings, were deported to [provinces] in Central Anatolia. (cited in Van Bruinessen 1994, 168)

It was clear that the targets of the crackdown were not merely the rebels but also anyone believed to be related to them. Military records from a specific period of the Dersim operations show that 7,954 individuals were captured or killed, with only 1,019 weapons recovered. This significant disparity suggests that a large portion of those casualties, as many witnesses have attested, were unarmed civilians, including women and children (Yegen 2021, 310). A high-level proposal, endorsed by the Prime Minister, Interior Minister, Defense Minister, and Military Inspectorate, suggested deploying the Special Organization to eliminate any remaining “bandits”. This organization had a well-documented history of brutal violence, including its role in the mass killings of Armenians in 1915-1916 and targeted assassinations (Kieser 2011).

A distinct type of violence used in Dersim involved the forced removal of young girls who had lost their families. Similar to the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide in 1915, many orphaned girls were taken from Dersim. Turkish military officers and bureaucrats adopted some of these girls, while others were placed in a newly established girls' boarding school in Elazıg (Yegen 2021, 310). What was particularly unprecedented was the use of poison gas against civilians in Dersim which represented a particularly brutal chapter in the event. This marked the first time in history that a state employed chemical weapons against its own citizens. Several official documents and testimonies confirm the use of chemical agents in Dersim. Ihsan Sabri Çaglayangil, a former police officer who later served as Foreign Minister in the 1960s and 1970s, acknowledged in a 1987 interview that those Dersim people seeking refuge in caves had been gassed like “rats”. Additionally, reports indicate that many people were burned alive either by burning houses or through the use of flammable substances on individuals (Yegen 2021, 310-11; Kieser 2011). A leaked report from Alpdogan, the General Inspectorate of the region, referenced in Turkish media, estimates that the civilian death toll reached 13,160, with an additional 11,818 people forcibly deported (Kieser 2011). Citing official documents on the Dersim Massacre, Prime Minister Erdogan stated in November 2011 that 13,806 individuals had been killed and 11,683 citizens displaced (Yegen 2020, 310). Taking a cautious approach, estimates suggest between 5 and 10 percent of the Dersim population were murdered during the massacre (Van Bruinessen 1994, 169). A suggested number of 40,000 victims is likely an exaggeration (McDowall 2021, 620).

After the Dersim Massacre, it was clear that the Turkish government had crushed the Kurds' ability to fight for self-determination and collectively resist assimilation. The government had successfully consolidated its power in Bakûr. Schools and military outposts were established

throughout the region in the following two decades without significant resistance. This lack of opposition showed that the Kurds were no longer strong enough to challenge the Turkish state.

Post WWII Era

Overt and unchecked racist discourse was still prevalent among Turkish elites and the public well into the 1960s. For many, the Kurds living in eastern Anatolia were "being regarded in all but official circles as foreigners" (McDowall 2021, 1119). Sometimes it was almost impossible to determine whether Turkish army men were more aggressive and violent in their anti-Kurdish racism or Turkish journalists. Standing atop an American tank in Diyarbakir, a city considered symbolically the capital of Bakûr, General Gursel, the new president of the Republic in the post 1960 coup era, made the following remarks: "there are no Kurds in this country. Whoever says he is a Kurd, I will spit in his face" (cited in Yadirgi 2017, 202). It was expressed in the journal *Otuken* that "Kurds do not have the faces of human beings…They can learn by asking their racial fellows, the Armenians, that the Turks are very patient, but when angry no one can stand in their way" (cited in McDowall 2021, 1119). Some people were more blatant in their desire for genocide: "We need a solution [to the Kurdish question] as sharp as a sword. Bring the Cossacks or Kirghiz immigrants with their weapons. This will solve the problem once and for all" (cited in McDowall 2021, 1119). Decades later, in 1982, a confidential military document circulated by the Turkish Land Forces Command labeled the Kurds as the main "divisive and destructive force". It even tried to justify this claim through a racist wordplay, suggesting the name "Kurd" itself originated from the sounds made by "Mountain Turks" when walking on the snow (Zeydanlıoglu 2012, 109).

Publicly uttering the word Kurdistan in Turkey is still practically considered an offence and punishable by the law (Akyol, 2017). Moreover, The Law No. 7267 in 1959 specified

that “village names that are not Turkish and give rise to confusion are to be changed in the shortest possible time” (cited in Zeydanlıoglu 2012, 107). The 1972 Population Law (Article 16) restricted Kurdish identity by prohibiting names that clashed with “national culture”, even if it avoided mentioning Kurdish directly in line with the state dictum of denying the existence of Kurdish identity in Turkey (Yegen 2009, 605). Given such racist discourse and practices on the state and civil society levels, it is unfathomable, to say the least, to speak of “the difference of the Turkish experience, which never led to the institution of a racist state formation” (Ergin, 2008a, 845). Quite the contrary, the so-called Turkish experience in racism or the structural and systematic anti-Kurdish racism of the Turkish state has never stopped operating since the foundation of the Turkish Republic.

After the PKK waged an armed resistance against the state in the 1980s, the ruling Turkish nationalists once again resorted to their usual methods of extreme violence. Also, the anti-communist campaign led by the military government after the September 1980 coup contributed greatly to the state violence. A Ministry of Justice report exposes widespread repression during the post-coup period. The report details over 650,000 detentions, 230,000 trials, and 71,000 punishments for alleged communist propaganda. Alarmingly, it also documents 517 death sentences, 50 executions, and 171 deaths by torture in custody. Thousands more fled the country as refugees, while citizenship was revoked for 14,000 individuals. The report also includes deaths of 14 prisoners from hunger strikes and 43 cases of suicides in jail or in custody. Beyond the violence common in other prisons, the Diyarbakır prison was a place of extreme violence, and Diyarbakır inmates faced uniquely humiliating punishments especially the Kurds accused of links with illegal Kurdish organizations. Between 1980 and 1984, prisoners there were subjected to horrific torture, including sewage submersion, forced consumption of

feces, and humiliation rituals that mocked their Kurdish identity such as saluting the prison director's dog or singing Turkish nationalist songs (Yegen 2020, 315).

The 1980s saw the government introduce large-scale resettlement programs, supposedly for forest preservation. By 1988, reports showed Dersim population had dropped from 200,000 to 162,000 in the preceding decade (Van Bruinessen 1994, 169). In July 1987, the Turkish government declared a State of Emergency in Bakûr and placed a governor-general in charge of eight Kurdish-majority provinces. This came under a special law (decree 285) that gave the government broad emergency powers until it was finally annulled in November 2002. The governor-general could forcefully evacuate entire villages, deport populations and restrict grazing rights. He also had control over the media and civilian trials involving security forces (Gunter 1990; McDowall 2021; Yadirgi 2017). By 1989, government forces had forcibly evacuated at least 400 villages, primarily near the border. This devastation intensified dramatically, with over 2,000 villages destroyed by 1994. The displacement left more than 750,000 people without homes (McDowall 2021, 1172). It was clear from the words and actions of the state officials that along with the military operations against the PKK guerillas, the entire Kurdish population of Bakûr was subject to state violence. A leaked memo from February 1993, written by President Ozal to Prime Minister Demirel, discussed possible solutions to the Kurdish issue. The following information comes from that document:

> Starting with the most troubled zones, village and hamlets in the mountains of the region should be gradually evacuated [and] resettled in the Western parts of the country according to a careful plan. Security forces should immediately move in and establish complete control in such areas. To prevent the locals' return to the

> region, the building of a large number of dams in appropriate places is an alternative. (cited in Yadirgi, 2017, 223)

Estimates of displaced people during this period vary widely. While some reports suggest around three million were forced to move (Yıldız 2005b, 78), research by Hacettepe University in Ankara puts the number between 950,000 and 1.2 million (Yadirgi 2017, 224). A parliament report reveals that 3,848 of the 5,000 villages and hamlets existing before 1985 were evacuated by 1999 (Yadirgi 2017, 224; Yegen 2021, 319).

The violence of the 1990s was marked by widespread targeting of Kurdish civilians. In fact, the government crackdown in Kurdish regions intensified, which included the emergence of death squads targeting prominent Kurdish figures. State security forces, both official and unofficial, employed brutal methods including unsolved murders by "unknown assailants" (faili mechul), enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and burning entire villages. Turkey in the 1990s witnessed a sharp rise in unsolved murders and extrajudicial killings compared to earlier and later periods. While there were 103 such cases during the 1980s, the findings for the 1990s demonstrate a staggering number of 3285 unsolved political murders and extrajudicial executions by the Turkish state and its affiliated paramilitary groups. This figure fell to 228 for the years between 2001 and 2011. Moreover, the number of enforced disappearance of dissidents rose from 33 in the 1980s to 1283 in the 1990s and declined to 37 after the 2000s (Ungor and Işık 2021, 29-30). Furthermore, throughout the military conflict between the PKK and the Turkish army since the early 1980s both sides have suffered significant casualties. The 2013 Human Rights Commission Report of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey indicates that 22,101 guerillas, 7,918 security forces and 5,557 civilians have been killed as of 2012. Although

PKK militants and security forces suffered heavy casualties, civilians died at the hands of both sides throughout this long conflict (Yegen 2021, 318).

The government's focus on promoting Turkish identity in education would also intensify whenever there was Kurdish resistance. Following the PKK's formation and the expansion of its organizational capacities in 1980s, the post-coup government of general Kenan Evren commissioned The Turkish Cultural Research Institute to conduct studies that proved the Turkishness of the Kurds. Notable among these studies were Aydın Taneri's *A Turkistani Turkish Tribe: The Kurds* and Şukru Kaya Seferoglu's *The First Turkish Inhabitants of Anatolia: The Kurds (*Yanarocak 2016, 411-12). Furthermore, although the boarding schools are not compulsory and the atmosphere may not be as violent, the assimilation of Kurdish children in these schools still continues. By 2009, according to the ministry of national education, over half of Turkey's 299 boarding schools are located in the Kurdish-populated provinces of eastern and southeastern Anatolia. This concentration is reflected in student enrollment, with 5 percent (84,442 students) attending boarding schools in these regions (Yegen 2009, 605).

In the years immediately following the 1980 coup, the prohibition of Kurdish was even more intensified. In October 1983, the Law 2932 was introduced effectively banning written and spoken Kurdish or any expression, broadcasting and publication of opinions in Kurdish, without naming the language (McDowall 1170; Yildiz 2005b, 66). Article 42of the 1982 constitution, still in force to this date, further stipulated that "no language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institutions of training or education" (cited in Zeydanlıoglu 2012, 110). Also, Turkey's Political Parties Law (No. 2820 of 1982), still in effect today, restricts political parties to "claim that there exist minorities in Turkey. It is forbidden to protect or develop non-Turkish cultures and languages" (cited in Skutnabb-Kangas and Bucak

1995, 356). In a systematic effort to erase Kurdish identity, by 1986, a staggering 81 percent (2,842 out of 3,524) of villages in predominantly Kurdish areas had been given new names (McDowall 2021, 1170). A government policy analysis revealed that over six decades (1940-2000), 12000 villages in Turkey – one in every three – had their names forcibly changed to reflect a Turkish identity. This policy was especially concentrated in areas with Kurdish populations and the Black Sea regions (Zeydanlıoglu 2012, 109).

Since the 1990s, Kurdish identity as separate from the dominant Turkish identity has been acknowledged in the official discourse. However, it is fair to call it an "exclusive recognition" (Saracoglu 2009), which indicates the continuation of racist practices against the Kurds even though their distinct ethnic identity is no longer denied. Although Saracoglu refuses to frame this exclusion as a form of racism or even racialization and reduces race-based anti-Kurdish discrimination to stereotypes about the Kurds, it is my contention that he is as theoretically mistaken and misguided about the nature and character of systematic anti-Kurdish discrimination in Turkey as Ergin (2014) is.

Other changes in the dynamics of anti-Kurdish racism in Turkey have also ensued. As part of limited reforms by president Ozal in early 1990s, the Law 2932 was repealed, lifting the ban on non-political Kurdish use. This meant speaking Kurdish and publishing Kurdish newspapers were no longer illegal activities. Yet, broadcasting and education in Kurdish were still forbidden by the law (Zeydanlıoglu 2012, 111). More constitutional reforms were introduced in early 2000s when in its bid to join the European Union (EU), Turkey pledged to make amendments conforming to the EU standards. In 2002, the new Law on Broadcasting in Traditionally Used Languages and Dialects broke ground by establishing legal regulations that permit both the state-run TRT channel and private national channels to broadcast in minority

languages. However, TRT 6, the promised state TV channel in Kurdish only started streaming in 2009 (Yildiz 2005b, 67, McDowall 1464). New legislation offered parents more freedom in choosing Kurdish names for their children, with some limitations. Parents could now choose Kurdish names as long as they were not deemed “subversive” and did not contain letters absent from the Turkish alphabet (specifically, Q, W, and X) (Zeydanlıoglu 2012, 115).

Despite these reforms, the Turkish Constitution currently allows instruction only in Turkish as a mother tongue, but does not permit other languages to be taught in the same capacity (Yegen 2009). Also, persecution of people, especially Kurdish politicians and journalists, for speaking and writing in Kurdish continued. In 2005, a member of the pro-Kurdish Democratic People’s Party received a six-month jail sentence for simply uttering “I” in Kurdish during an official event. The same year, the same party’s president faced 60 pending legal cases in Ankara for saying "Rojbaş" (good day or hello in Kurdish) (Zeydanlıoglu 2012, 115). In an utterly bizarre case, Osman Baydemir, a renowned Kurdish politician, faced charges for the supposed crime of using the letter W in a New Year's greeting card (McDowall 2021, 1465). In a 2017 parliamentary session, Baydemir declared he represented Kurdistan. When challenged with “Where is Kurdistan?” by the deputy speaker, Baydemir placed his hand on his heart, replying “it is here”. This symbolic gesture resonated with many Kurds, but resulted in a two-session ban and a two-thirds salary cut as punishment from the parliament (“HDP lawmaker”, 2017). Moreover, Turkish authorities continued their crackdown on Kurdish media in May 2010 when Azadiya Welat, the country's sole Kurdish daily newspaper of the time, was targeted. Vedat Kurşun, the paper's former managing editor who was already imprisoned for past “offences” since 2009, received a staggering sentence of 166 years and six months from a Diyarbakır court for allegedly making propaganda on behalf of a terrorist organization (Zeydanlıoglu 2012, 119).

These cases are only prime examples of the persecution of Kurds for using and promoting their mother tongue, and are in no way exhaustive of the systematic efforts to silence Kurdish expression in Turkey. Therefore, it seems justified to call Turkey's approach to Kurdish language as "linguicide" or "linguistic genocide" (Hassanpour 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas and Bucak 1995). Further, the first Kurdish album ever approved by the Turkish Ministry of Culture was released in 1989, albeit it was swiftly censored just weeks later possibly due to an initial oversight (Aksoy 2014, p 90, Ungor 2011, 199-200). Restrictions on singing and sharing Kurdish music in Turkey began to ease only in the 2010s.

Turkey's racially motivated and anti-Kurdish aggressive attitude is not limited to the Kurds of Bakûr. Since the establishment of autonomy in Rojava, Turkey has persistently targeted and harmed the Kurdish population through various means, including three military invasions in 2016 (the Euphrates Shield Operation), 2018 (the Olive Branch Operation) and 2019 (the Peace Spring Operation). The two operations Olive Branch and Peace Spring led to the displacement of approximately 350,000 Kurdish residents from the Afrin, Serê Kaniyê, and Girê Spi regions (Hevdesti-Synergy 2023, 8).

The invasion of Afrin region or Kurd Dag (the mountain of the Kurds) was rather formidable and devastating as it led to the occupation of the oldest Kurdish populated region in Syria by Turkey and its affiliated Syrian National Army (SNA) forces, the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of Kurds, and a significant shift in the demographic composition of the region. The military occupation of Afrin was followed by seizing, looting and massive destruction of Kurdish properties by Turkish and SNA fighters (McGee, 2019, 130-133). The United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria (COI) reported in 2020 that "after civilian property was looted, Syrian National Army fighters and their families occupied houses after

civilians had fled, or ultimately coerced residents, primarily of Kurdish origin, to flee their homes, through threats, extortion, murder, abduction, torture and detention" (COI, 2020, 11). Moreover, Turkey has been settling Arab and Turkman refugees from other parts of Syria in the occupied Kurdish areas since 2017. In April 2018, the deputy head of Turkey's immigration department announced that around 162,000 Syrian refugees have been settled in the areas occupied during Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch (Schmidinger 2019, 112). This ended a period of Kurdish demographic dominance in Afrin region that spanned at least 700 years (McDowall 2021, 1529). In addition, Turkey's former Interior Minister, Suleyman Soylu, announced in May 2023 that Turkey and Qatar would construct 240,000 additional housing units within three years to accommodate the over one million refugees currently residing in Turkey. As of June 2023, there were at least 28 of these settlements in Afrin alone, with over 100 scattered throughout Turkish-occupied Rojava and the province of Idlib (Hoffman 2023). In June 2024, the Qatar Red Crescent Society announced the completion of 13 settlements across north Syria allegedly for the purpose of housing displaced Syrians. Some Palestinian groups have also been accused of building homes for Syrian refugees in Afrin ("QRCS admits" 2024; Syriahr 2023).

Furthermore, Turkey has admitted officially to seizing Afrin's olives. Agriculture Minister Bekir Pakdemirli acknowledged in November 2019 that 600 tonnes of Afrin olives were taken and sold by Turkey. He justified this action by saying that "we do not want revenues to fall into PKK hands…we want the revenues from Afrin... to come to us. This region is under our hegemony" (BBC 2019). According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, by September 2018 and only few months after the occupation of Afrin region, Turkish-backed forces had taken control of over 75 percent of the olive farms in Afrin (Syriahr 2018). Turkey's olive oil production has

significantly increased since its occupation of Idlib and Afrin. The total olive oil production has reached 150,000 tons and has grown by over 3 percent. The olive oil market in Afrin alone is worth approximately 150 million dollars, but farmers only receive about one-third of this value. The Turkish newspaper Zaman reported that Turkish agricultural credit cooperative representatives sold 90,000 tons of olive oil in the United States, claiming it was Turkish. However, it was later discovered that this olive oil was actually stolen from the Syrian region of Afrin. Even Turkish officials, including the head of the Antakya Chamber of Commerce, admitted to the theft, stating that "Olives enter Turkey under the condition to be sold to foreign markets only" (Salloum 2024).

Racism is still very alive and present within political and societal levels of life in Turkey. Not only is it preserved and reproduced in legal and educational structures, but it also manifests in the everyday life of ordinary citizens. From racially informed pseudo-Hittite titles such as Etiler, an Istanbul suburb, and popular Eti biscuits to common human names with strong Turkish supremacist connotations like Gokboru and Bozkurt (both meaning grey wolf), race and racism are painfully palpable. On top of the long-held racist stereotypes like "tailed Kurd", new racial categories such as "white Turk" (beyaz Turk) and "black Turk" (siyah Tuurk) have surfaced as well. The term "white Turk" was originally coined to criticize the new urban middle class of post 1980s for their sense of class and cultural superiority. But it was quickly taken over by the members of the same class who used it to express their fear of the "black Turks", that is, presumably less sophisticated Turks with rural background, moving to the cities, and stereotyped by physical features like mustaches, body odor, and darker skin (Ergin 2008a, 843-44; Ramm 2016, 1356-7). Moreover, racist mob attacks are another persisting feature of the Turkish racial order. Turkey experienced 364 mob attacks from 1991 to 2011. Half of these attacks were

motivated by political and racist sentiments and targeted Kurds or those deemed to be associated with the Kurds. Istanbul (23.6 percent), Izmir (5.5 percent) and Bursa (4.9 percent) were the top three cities where these attacks transpired. An important commonality among these cities is that they have all experienced substantial Kurdish migration since the 1990s (Yarkin 2022, 88). But perhaps the most salient and symbolic indicator of the ongoing durability and strength of racism in Turkey is Ataturk's continuing and unabated popularity in the country, particularly among the Turkish majority. Given his unparalleled role in defining and establishing an openly racist regime that has justified and perpetrated murdering of tens of thousands of people and forced displacement of millions, it is no exaggeration to equate Ataturk with the widely known Fascist figures like Hitler and Mussolini. Some may find such a judgement uncharitable but the Nazis, above all Hitler himself, were all too aware and grateful of the affinities between their project and that of the Kemalists. The Nazi press repeatedly referred to Turkey and Ataturk as inspirations for German Nazis during the 1920s and 1930s, and Hitler was a great admirer of Ataturk, calling him "a star in the darkness", and his role model and teacher (Ihrig 2014, 113-117). As a matter of fact, on his birthday in 1938, Hitler told a delegation of Turkish diplomats and journalists that "Ataturk was the first to show that it is possible to mobilize and regenerate the resources that a country has lost. In this respect Ataturk was a teacher; Mussolini was his first and I his second student" (cited in Ihrig, 2014, 116). Hitler has become so detested that even Turkish national chauvinists find it embarrassing to point out his admirations for Ataturk. Yet, Ataturk is to this date greatly venerated and worshipped by many in Turkey, with his image plastered nearly everywhere and statues of him placed in public offices, schools, city squares and even carved in mountain rocks.

Chapter 4

Anti-Kurdish Racism in Iran, Iraq and Syria

4.1. The Iranian Racial Order

Like its Turkish counterpart, the founding principles of nation-building and the formation of racial order in Iran were heavily influenced by European racial thinking. Here too, orientalist historiography underpinned the racial and pseudo historical narrative that most nationalist elites of the time in the Middle East promoted to make the case for embracing European modernist ideals of civilization and progress. The racial and pseudo historical narrative was straightforward and crude: an imaginary glorious pre-Islamic civilization had declined due to invasion by and racial mixture with foreign races, and the only way to restore the glory was to imitate the modern western civilization which was rooted in the said civilization's magnificent ancient past through racial linkages. In the case of Iran, it was the presumably glorious civilization of ancient Persia that was historically degenerated by the arrival and domination of Arab Muslims and Mongols. Early Iranian nationalists adopted this orientalist narrative mainly through the works of a familiar European thinker, that is, Arthur de Gobineau.

Unlike Turkey, Gobineau personally and directly engaged with the Iranian context. As French empire's special envoy, Gobineau traveled to Iran three times in 1854, 1859 and 1861. Writing several books about Iran's history and culture, Gobineau considered the "Iranian nation" as comprised of a Persian race whose identity was significantly influenced by "Semitic and Turkish" peoples (Zia Ebrahimi 2016, 110). This perspective reflects the broader concept of racial hierarchy Gobineau championed, where certain races were seen as superior and their influence shaped other populations. Gobineau categorized humanity into three broad racial groups: Black, Yellow, and White. He then promoted the idea that only the "white Aryan race"

possessed true nobility and was inherently superior in terms of talent and ability. According to Gobineau, only Aryans could create genuine culture and civilization, while other races could only imitate or borrow from them (Asgharzadeh 2007, 68-69). While he believed that modern Iranians were contaminated racially by Semite and Turkish influences, in his travelogue to Iran, Gobineau claimed to have found genetic traces of Aryan race among members of certain Iranian tribes (Gobineau, 1988). Gobineau contributed significantly to the development of the myth of Aryan race, but many more European orientalists were involved in the formation and articulation of this myth.

To understand how 19th-century orientalist discourse used the concept of Aryan, let us turn to Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Said writes:

> Theses of Oriental backwardness, degeneracy, and inequality with the West most easily associated themselves early in the nineteenth century with ideas about the biological bases of racial inequality. Thus the racial classifications found in Cuvier's *Le Regne animal,* Gobineau's *Essai sur l'inegalite des races humaines,* and Robert Knox's *The Dark Races of Man* found a willing partner in latent Orientalism. To these ideas was added second-order Darwinism, which seemed to accentuate the "scientific" validity of the division of races into advanced and backward, or European-Aryan and Oriental-African. (Said 1979, 119-120)

While linguist William Jones identified Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, and Persian as belonging to one language family, suggesting shared roots between them, it was not until a few decades later that this group became known as Indo-European by Thomas Young in 1813 (Zia Ebrahimi 2016, 149-150). This later classification also led to the idea that speakers of these languages, distinct from Semitic, Turkic, and others, possessed inherent superiority.

> It was assumed that if languages were as distinct from each other as the linguists said they were, then too the language users—their minds, cultures, potentials, and even their bodies—were different in similar ways. And these distinctions had the force of ontological, empirical truth behind them, together with the convincing demonstration of such truth in studies of origins, development, character, and destiny. (Said 1979, 134)

While Aryan initially referred to a language family thanks to William Jones, German scholar Max Muller became the first to use it for the Indo-European people themselves, giving the term a broader meaning (Marashi 2008, 74). Interestingly, Max Muller, the same scholar who popularized Aryan as a racial term, later came to regret his actions. He realized that the Sanskrit word 'Arya' never referred to race or ethnicity in its original context. As a result, he argued that Aryan should strictly refer to language speakers, not a supposed race (Asgharzadeh 2007, 70).

In 1819, romantic philosopher and poet Friedrich Schlegel applied the term Aryan to a newly proposed Indo-European race. This race was seen as the source of civilization and culture, a concept that resonated with many European thinkers such as Ernest Renan, George Rawlinson and Gobineau who nurtured and developed the myth of Aryan and Aryanism (Asgharzadeh 2007, 67-68). During the 19th century, writings by orientalists studying Iran became heavily influenced by the concept of the Aryan race, and Iranian modernist intellectuals of this era were not immune to this orientalist discourse. One of the prominent Iranian intellectuals during this period was Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh (1812-1878) who stands out as a key figure in both Iranian nationalism and intellectual history. His influence was not limited to shaping nationalist ideas, but also extended to the next generation of thinkers who laid the groundwork for Reza Shah's modern Iranian state in early twentieth century. Living in Tbilisi and familiar with Russian language, Akhundzadeh

encountered the ideas of French scholar Ernest Renan. This exposure influenced Akhundzadeh's view of Iranian history. He began to see it as split into two distinct periods: a glorious ancient era and a later Islamic period (Marashi 2008, p 75). Since for Renan the Semitic "race is to the Indo-European family what a pencil sketch is to painting" (cited in Said 1979, 149), the Arabs as Semites were deemed by him as inferior to the Aryans and Indo-Europeans. Inspired by Ernest Renan's ideas, Akhundzadeh embraced Aryanism to vindicate his anti-Arab and anti-Islamic stance and his romanticization of so-called Iranian antiquity, and to establish these ideas as valid within the framework of Iranian national identity (Marashi 2008, 75).

Akhundzadeh's depiction of Iranian antiquity was also partly modeled on his understanding of 19th century Europe. In his book the *Maktubat*, he portrays this era as one of internal freedom and external respect. He even suggests a surprisingly modern system of governance, with efficient record-keeping ("bookkeepers informed"), respect for law ("nobody transgressed another's rights"), and a military well-regulated by a "separate law". Akhundzadeh goes so far as to claim remarkable social harmony, with peasants willingly paying double the taxes ("voluntarily paid twice their dues") and access to free healthcare (Zia Ebrahimi 2016, 128). To understand Akhundzadeh's view of Iranian history, consider his lament, "Alack Iran! Where is that glory? Where is that power? Where is that weal? It is now one thousand two hundred and eighty years that the hungry and bear-footed Arabs have made you miserable" (Akhundzadeh 1985, 11). Therefore, Akhundzadeh regards the conquest of *Tazian* [a derogatory Persian term for Arabs] as the beginning of the spiritual and political decadence of Iran" (Adamiyat 1970, 123).

Akhundzadeh's approach to Aryanism was not unique among intellectuals of his time. Aqa Khan Kermani, another leading figure, is credited with being the first to use the term Aryan in Farsi (Zia Ebrahimi 2016, 128). He even attempted to write a history of the Aryan nation in his

work A'eneh-ye Sekandari. The use of this term reflects the strong influence of orientalist ideas on his thinking (Kashani-Sabet 2002, 166). Kermani expressed strong negative views towards Semitic groups, including Chaldeans, Jews, and Arabs (Adamiyat, 1978, 281). In contrast, he held the Aryan nation and Iranian race in high esteem, showering them with praise while stressing the suffering, pillaging and ravaging Iran endured from Arabs who "left that Arabic nature and temperament associated with meanness, rascality, pillage… and injected the venom of Arabic nature and Bedouinism into the clean nature and pure and bright blood of the Iranian" (Kermani 2000, 177-178). He even goes so far to claim that "the Arabic temperament and character which has been rooted in the nature of Iranians in the name of Islam and by the strike of the sword of those animal-like people is never ever corrigible" (Kermani 2000, 108).

Akhundzadeh and Kermani believed that the current state of Iranian Aryans, which they saw as backward compared to their supposedly Western peers, stemmed from the Arab conquest and the cultural blending that followed. Influenced by a Eurocentric view of modernity, they held a romanticized view of pre-Islamic Iran. This era was seen as a golden age, a lost paradise filled with glory and grandeur, and tragically disrupted by the Arab invasion. To overcome Iran's perceived shortcomings, Akhundzadeh and Kermani believed that Iranians should learn from Western nations, who they considered fellow Aryans, and advocated distancing themselves from neighboring Semitic and Turkic peoples. Although it may appear contradictory to embrace modern Western culture while simultaneously idealizing Iran's ancient past, this paradox is easily explained from an orientalist perspective. The notion that races could be scientifically classified as advanced or backward, with Europeans and Aryans seen as superior to Orientals and Africans, paved the way for a specific approach to modernization. This approach relied on the assumption that thanks to shared Aryanness, Iranians are the same as Europeans. However, it follows that, a

major plague, that is, Arab invasion separated Iranians from their supposed fellow Aryans. Therefore, all Iranians need is to learn from and emulate the Europeans to restore their lost or 'contaminated' glory (Amini and Esfandiari 2013). Aryanism and the idea that "ancient Persians" belonged to a glorious Aryan race and believed in Zoroastrian religion became a central theme in Iranian nationalism, and appeared prominently in the works of influential historians, politicians, and educators of early twentieth century (Matin-Asgari 2018; Zia Ebrahimi 2016; Matthee 2010; Vaziri, 1993).

Although the 1906 Constitutional Revolution in Iran had introduced ideas from liberal democracy and social democracy into the developing discourse of Iranian nationalism, it was an authoritarian nationalism that came to define and dominate the state ideology of post WWI Iran (Matin-Asgari 2018, 43-44). It is true that, as Matin-Asgari points out, the Iranian nationalists of interwar period were significantly influenced by Germany as they viewed Imperial Germany as a counterforce to the dominance of British and Russian empires on the world stage. However, German orientalism and later on the Nazi ideology cannot uniquely account for the authoritarian and racist character of Iranian nationalism as racial thinking was a European-wide rather than exclusively German phenomenon. Such authoritarianism was also further encouraged by other European imperial powers to contain the spillover of communist and internationalist sentiments to the zones of influence of British and French empires in Iran and former territories of Ottoman empire. The role of the British empire in the rise to power of a military strongman like Reza Khan in post WWI Iran is a well-studied topic (Shahbazi 1990; Amuzegar 1991; Ghani 1998; A.M. Ansari 2003; Majd 2001). Nevertheless, the decisive impact of the nationalist and Aryanist ideas of the interwar period on the formation of a racial order and racist state structure in Iran is undeniable. The most noteworthy aspect of this period was the intellectual work undertaken by a

group of Iranian exiles in Berlin, known as the Berlin Circle (*Halqe-ye* Berlin). The Berlin Circle was composed of a group of Iranian nationalists who were scattered in Istanbul and across Europe, and were invited by Hassan Taqizadeh, a former member of Iranian parliament, to join him in Berlin in 1915 (Matin-Asgari 2018, 50-51). Most of the members of the Circle returned to Iran by the late 1920s and became journalists, politicians, historians and educators in secondary and post-secondary education. Yet in Berlin, they actively contributed to the publication of several periodicals.

Kaveh was one of these periodicals that was published by Taqizadeh between 1916 and 1922. A major component of the pages of *Kaveh* was the historical and philological scholarship on Iran produced by European orientalists. Taqizadeh's vision of Iran's past was significantly shaped by, though not solely dependent on, orientalist scholarship. For Taqizadeh, like many nationalists of the Global South at the time, reviving an ancient past served a modernizing purpose. He saw the rediscovery of the so-called ancient Iran as an opportunity for "creative anachronism". This meant selectively using elements from the past and reinterpreting them to fit with modern values and goals. Through this process, Taqizadeh aimed to create a new sense of authentic Iranian identity that resonated with the modern world (Marashi 2008, 79-82). Echoing Akhundzadeh and Kermani's historic-racial narrative of decline based on an Aryan definition of Iran and Iranians and a shared heritage with westerners, Taqizadeh promoted the idea of "unqualified acceptance and adoption of European civilization" and emulating the West as the solution to the decay of Iranian civilization; an idea held enthusiastically by many Iranian intellectuals of early twentieth century (Matin-Asgari 2018, 56-57). Taqizadeh's stance is encapsulated in his infamous remark that we need to imitate Europeans and become Westernized "from the tip of the toe to the top of the head" (cited in Asgharzadeh 2007, 189). According to

Jamalzadeh, prominent Iranian writer and a member of the Berlin Circle, among the members of the Circle it was "agreed unanimously that, except in religion and language, Iranians must follow Europeans in every way" (cited in Matin-Asgari 2018, 56). In a series of articles in *Kaveh* in 1921, Taqizadeh proposed a list of reforms for national reconstruction which included, among other things, full embrace of the principles of European civilization, the centralization of government, preserving Iran's national unity, safeguarding the purity of Persian as national language, the settlement of tribes, women liberation and education, and eradicating the "shameful" practice of same sex love. The importance of these proposed reforms lies in their alignment with the emerging nationalist sentiment within Iran. Many of these ideas, championed by Taqizadeh, would later be officially adopted by the newly established Pahlavi state (Marashi 2008, 82; Matin-Asgari 2018, 59).

After the coming to an end of Kaveh's publication, the nationalist intellectual Hossein Kazemzadeh brought a number of members of the Berlin Circle together and published *Iranshahr* magazine in Berlin from 1922 to 1927. Much in line with Kaveh's agenda, many pages of *Iranshahr* were devoted to the praising of Aryan race and the promotion of European racial ideas. In Kazemzadeh's view, although "savage foreign nations" had subjugated the Iranians for centuries, "the Iranian spirit is still alive, retaining the same innate attributes it possessed two thousand years ago… the Iranian nation has not lost its racial capability and Aryan astuteness" (cited in Matin-Asgari 2018, 70). Nonetheless, Kazemzadeh believed that a combination of rational and spiritual knowledge was needed to be taken from both Western and Eastern civilizations to restore the purported Iranian greatness. This included taking some more serious measures, so he asserted that

> Iranian blood must be purified. By what means [? The question is] whether by shedding contaminated blood, or by marriage with stronger elements or by deporting [certain] elements of the nation, and this marriage and deportation [must be] between which elements or taken from which nation [?] (Kazemzadeh 1924, 435-6)

Upon returning to Iran, a number of participants in the Berlin Circle contributed to another periodical called *Ayandeh*, launched by Mahmoud Afshar in 1925. *Ayandeh* also reflected the views of Young Iran Party which was founded in 1921 by a group of young Europe-educated Iranian nationalists whose brand of nationalism had attracted the attention of newly appointed Minister of War, Reza Khan. In a meeting with the leaders of Young Iran Party in 1921, Reza Khan encouraged them to keep promoting their political agenda for nation-building but made it clear that he would be responsible for putting them into action (Matin-Asgari 2018). Ayandeh's first editorial, authored by Afshar, served as a clear mouthpiece for the dominant strain of Iranian nationalism at the time.

> Our social goal and ideal is the preservation and perfection of Iran's national unity. . . What we mean by Iranian national unity is the political, moral and social unity of the people who live within the present boundaries of Iran. This notion has two other aspects, which are the preservation of Iran's political independence and its territorial integrity. Perfecting national unity means the spread of Persian language throughout the country, getting rid of "fractured sovereignties" (muluk al-tawa'efi) and regional differences in behavior, appearance, etc; and making Kurds, Lurs, Qashqais, Arabs, Turks and Turkomans speak the same language and dress the same . . . We believe that until national unity in language, morality,

> dress, etc., is achieved, our political independence and territorial integrity is constantly in danger. Unless we can make uniform all of Iran's various regions and different ethnicities, in other words, making all of them *truly Iranian*, we face a dark future. (cited in Matin-Asgari 2018, 83. Emphasis is mine).

The notion of "truly Iranian" reveals a definitive feature of Iranian racial order since it indicates that even though for Iranian nationalists belonging to Aryan race is the fundamental determinant of Iranianness, a true Iranian, or a true Iranian Aryan, must possess certain cultural traits among which the most important is speaking Farsi or Persian language. In other words, a true Iranian is first and foremost a Fars or Persian, and Iranian equals Persian. Unlike their Turkish counterparts, Iranian nationalists acknowledge, rather painstakingly though, the reality of immense linguistic and ethnic diversity of their country. However, this acknowledgment never signified the equality of diverse linguistic groups because a "true Aryan/Iranian" national is an Iranian who speaks Persian, and all other non-Persian speaking Iranians are Iranian qowmiyyats (ethnicities). Therefore, a hierarchical racial order is constructed where Persians make up the nation which represents modernity, civilization and progress whereas non-Persian speaking people of the country represent primitivity and backwardness. With Farsi becoming the sole language in official communication during the Pahlavi dynasty and later on enshrined in the Islamic Republic's Constitution as the only official language of the country (Kalan 2016), other languages were relegated to an inferior status as unofficial and "local" languages. This further solidified the "national" and superior character of Farsi and those whose mother-tongue is Farsi. Just as the users of so-called Indo-European languages were seen by the creators of Aryan myth as 'different' and more advanced than the speakers of other languages (Said 1979), Farsi or

Persian speakers were also deemed by Iranian nationalists as superior to other Iranians whose different mother tongues was rendering Iran's national unity imperfect.

In another piece entitled "the question of nationality and the national unity of Iran", Afshar writes:

> Even though Iran's nationhood is distinct from those of its yellow-skinned Turanianand Semite Arab neighbors due to several millennia of glorious history and Aryan racial superiority, our national unity is defected linguistically because of language differences among Turkish-speakers of [province of] Azerbaijan and Khuzistan's Arab-speakers and Farsi-speakers in other regions. (Afshar 1927, 561)

In the same article, Afshar also explains his, and arguably his nationalist fellows', anxiety over national unity by arguing that only those countries with a unified race and language have been able to preserve their territorial integrity while, for example, the Austria-Hungary empire collapsed because its people lacked racial, linguistic and religious unity and consequently did not constitute a nation (Afshar 1927, 562-3). Therefore, the presumed racial unity of Iranians made Iranians a permanently indivisible nation, but this people still needed to become linguistically homogenized, that is, Persianized to earn true nationhood.

The Aryanist terminology and ideology soon made its way to the official state discourse. In 1925, the Prime Minister Reza khan was crowned and became Reza Shah, founding the Pahlavi dynasty and undertaking a systematic program of modernization and nation-building. During Reza Shah's coronation, the then Prime Minister Mohammad-Ali Foroughi, a highly respected intellectual and statesman of his time, delivered a speech in which he stated that the

Iranian nation now has “a monarch who is pure-bred (pakzad) and of Iranian race (Irani-nezhad)” (cited in Matin-Asgari 2018, 85). In 1935, Reza Shah changed the name of country from Persia to Iran, a clear reflection of the dominance of the Aryanist idea that the word Iran meant the land of Aryans. This definition of Iran was first promoted by Max Muller in 1861 and featured prominently in nationalist writings and Pahlavi-era textbooks (Zia-Ebrahimi 2016, 157-164).

More systematic attempts were made to propagate the Aryanist nationalist ideology by the state. Hammering a national history of Iran into the minds of modern Iranians was top on the state’s agenda. To this end, the Pahlavi state relied on the works of Aryanist Iranian historians of early twentieth century who mostly had no specialization in history writing, yet produced the dominant historiography of Iran centred on the continuity of culture and history in the Iranian Plateau and a historically unified geographical entity called Iran (Vejdani 2015, 3-8; Zia-Ebrahimi 2016, 3). Using nationalist and racial methodology connecting geographical regions to racially and nationally homogenous entities, in this historiography, Iran as a sociopolitical entity stretched historically from the Achaemenids’ dynasty in 550 BC to the present day. Iranian historians relied heavily on the European orientalist historiography of Iran in a fashion that “Western sources”, as Vaziri points out, “served as catalogues of historical reference, whether the writers /historians were independent or state-sponsored” (Vaziri 1993, 151).

In 1928, Iran's Ministry of Education commissioned Hasan Pirniya, Hasan Taqizadeh, and Abbas Iqbal to develop a comprehensive history textbook for senior high school and university students. Each author was assigned a specific historical period: Pirniya tackled ancient Iran before Islam, Taqizadeh covered the rise of Islam to the Mongols, and Iqbal focused on the Mongols to the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. (Vaziri 1993, 158; Vejdani 2015, 79). A long-

time politician serving as prime minister, minister and member of parliament, Pirniya wrote *History of Ancient Iran* (*Tārikh-e Irān-e qadim*), in which a chapter was entitled "races—the white-skinned race—the Indo-European people", and it incorporated a European classification system of human populations that labeled Iranians as belonging to a white, Indo-European race.

While typically avoiding an explicitly racist tone, Pirniya occasionally strayed from his academic approach. In these instances, Pirniya, for example, argued that while Iranian civilization may have in its early stages lagged behind their "semitic neighbors", the Babylonians and Assyrians, he believed Iranians possessed a higher moral character. Or, he alluded to "ugliness" and "racial and moral inferiority" of the "pre-Aryan" inhabitants of Iran (Burton 2021, 56; Zia-Ebrahimi, 2016 157-158). The inclusion of Iranians in the Aryan race and their whiteness was replicated in not only other school textbooks of the era but also in other major contemporary historical works. In his book *World History*, the most extensive single account of both Iranian and European history written in Farsi in 1920s, Abbas Iqbal presented a historical framework that categorized people into a hierarchy of races ranked from top to bottom as white, yellow, black and red. In this framework, whites were composed of the Aryans as well as Semites, Jews and Arabs, who were believed to have superior mental capacity. Iqbal also adopted the Aryan migration thesis, highlighting the common ancestral Aryan and Indo-European root of Iranians, Greeks, Indians, ancient Romans and many modern nations of Europe and America, and attributed the decline of Iran following the rise of Islam to the Turks and Mongols. (Vejdani 2015, 85-86). Despite recognizing Iran's linguistic and ethnic variety, a strong emphasis was placed on the perennial belonging of all these groups to a single Iranian national identity.

In the 1930s, the Iranian Ministry of Education tasked historian and poet Rashid Yasami, a Kurd and staunch Iranian nationalist, with writing a history of the Kurdish

people. Yasami's book explored various fields such as race science, linguistics, religion, geography, and anthropology to establish the Kurds as an inseparable part of Iranian history and identity, sharing a common cultural, linguistic, and ethnic heritage. Yasami dedicated four pages of his book to translating a section on the Kurds from Eugène Pittard's work, *Race and History*. He then concluded, based on Pittard's findings, that current research on the Kurds primarily established their Iranian identity without offering much more specific information (Burton 2021, 55-56). This understanding became very popular among Iranian nationalists and gave the Kurds an ostensibly special status in Iranian racial order. The Kurds have even been referred to in the Iranian state's official discourse, particularly during Mohammad Reza Shah's reign, as 'authentic Aryans' (*Ariaeehay-e aseel*) who have supposedly been guarding Iran's borders for centuries (Hassanpour 1992, 128; Sheiholislami 2012, 28). However, this recognition never went beyond a lip service to the Kurds as they could never be separated from Iran and Iranianness and their identity in effect is subordinated to the Iranian, that is, Persian identity.

To extend the reach of "national history of Iran", the Pahlavi state established the Institute for Speeches and Sermons and the Organization for Public Instruction in the mid-1930s. Both institutions emphasized the teaching of history and employed professional historians to shape public perception in line with the government's nation-building goals. These institutions disseminated a nationalist interpretation of history to religious schools and the general public, and served as platforms for nationalist historians like Rashid Yasami to disseminate their historical theories and methodologies, aligning them with the Pahlavi state's Aryanist propaganda (Vejdani 2015, 67-70).

In addition to nationalist historiography, genetic research was also employed to validate the Aryanist assumptions of Iranian nationalism. Unlike their Turkish counterparts, who

attempted to redefine racial categories through physical measurements, Iranian nationalists relied on relatively rich existing linguistic and archaeological studies to support their claim of shared ancestry with Europeans. As European scholars, particularly anatomists and archaeologists, had already elevated pre-Islamic Iran as the epitome of Indo-European civilization in their 19th-century works, Iranian elites found it unnecessary to develop their own anthropological studies to assert their European lineage and claim whiteness. Therefore, government-funded anthropological research in Pahlavi-era Iran primarily concentrated on studying languages, folklore, and gathering ethnographic artifacts (Burton 2021, 57). However, there were exceptions to this general trend. In 1921, at the behest of Reza Shah, the Society for National Heritage (*Anjoman-e Asar-e Melli*) was founded by a group of Iranian nationalist elites, which initiated a project to build mausoleum complexes for renowned historical figures like Ferdowsi, Omar Khayyam, Hafez, Avicenna, and Nader Shah. The process used to examine these historical figures followed a standardized, scientific-sounding procedure. Individuals whose lives aligned with the government's narrative were chosen, their tombs located, and their remains exhumed. These bodies were then subjected to detailed autopsy and anthropometric examinations. The recovered skulls were used to create lifelike statues and portraits as well as scientifically classify these historical figures as “true Aryans” based on their skull and bone measurements (Grigor 2004, 17-19).

A number of foreign researchers; however, using their own funds, were granted permission by Reza Shah’s government to conduct anthropometric research in the country. One such team, led by pathologist Harald Krischner and his wife, measured the physical attributes of hundreds of individuals classified as “Persians” in the summer of 1931. In 1934, British-American anthropologist Henry Field led a six-week research project in Iran to study the

physical characteristics of the contemporary population. Based on data collected from fewer than 300 randomly selected individuals, Field attempted to determine the racial origins of modern Iranians. Much to the chagrin of Iranian nationalists, the findings of anthropologists Field and Krischners, which revealed a "racially diverse" population within Iran, contradicted the government's official narrative of national unity and homogeneity. While foreign anthropologists urged extensive studies that could reveal Iran's "racial diversity", the Centre for Iranian Anthropology and its affiliated museum focused almost exclusively on collecting folklore and artifacts as expressions of a single, homogenous "Iranian race". An article in the Ministry of Education's official journal defined the Anthropology museum's mission as studying the Aryan race rather than the various racial groups within Iran (Burton 2021, 57-62).

If it was impossible for Iranian Aryanists to unify the genetic characteristics of Iranians to prove their supposed long-time unity and belonging to the same nation, language policies were instead systematically deployed to homogenize the highly diverse population of Iran. After all it was linguistics and philology that had been instrumentalized to create the Aryan myth and the alleged racial unity of Iranians. Therefore, language, that is, Farsi or Persian outweighed other factors such as historiography, genetics and religion in establishing the Iranian racial order and forming the Iranian nation. The crucial and unique role of the Persian language in nation-building was vehemently underlined by Iranian nationalist elites. The prominent intellectual and three-time prime minister under the Pahlavi kings, Foroughi argued that "the best thing to make Iran homogenous is to publish Iran's and Persian knowledge, but not in such a way which becomes apparent that they [Iranians] are made Persian" (Foroughi 1950, 266). Employing an arrogant tone that betrays a sense of Persian superiority, Foroughi continues

> For example, I do not believe whatsoever that one should ban speaking in Kurdish, Turkish or Arabic. [Instead, one] should make speaking in Persian mandatory. Luckily, Turkish and Kurdish are not literary languages and our minorities do not possess literary and cultural capability, and will be easily assimilated to Persian language, literature and knowledge (Foroughi 1950, 266).

Other Iranian nationalists echoed Foroughi's call for Persianization of non-Persians in Iran, but did not share his "liberal" approach towards non-Persian languages and were adamant on eliminating them. Taqi Arani, a young member of the Berlin Circle and the founder of the Marxist magazine *Donya*, who had a Turkish-Azeri background, wrote an article in 1924 when he emphatically called for the annihilation of Turkish language in Iran's Azerbaijan province accompanied by the spread of Persian (Matin-Asgari 2018). Like many Iranian nationalists of his time, Arani was extremely anxious about the emergence of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918 and the Turkish Republic in 1923 as well as the spread of the Leninist notion of national self-determination in the region that had stoked nationalist sentiments among the Azeri Turks of Iran. In an article titled *Azerbaijan: An Existential Question for Iran*, Arani stated that

> Iranian benevolent people should sacrifice and work hard to destroy the Turkish language in Azerbaijan and disseminate the Persian language there. The Ministry of Education in particular should send many Persian-speaking teachers to those areas of Azerbaijan, and publish free and cheap books, pamphlets, and newspapers there. (Arani 1924, 254)

Mahmoud Afshar also proposed a detailed program of Persianization and forced assimilation and asked the government to implement them. Among Afshar's recommendations,

mostly put into action and maintained since 1920s, were "full dissemination of Persian language, literature and Iran's history in the entire country, especially in Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Khuzistan, Baluchistan and Turkman-speaking areas", "deporting some tribes from Azerbaijan and Khuzistan to Iran's internal [or central] regions and bringing Persian-speaking tribes to these areas", new administrative "divisions of provinces and districts, and eliminating the names of Azerbaijan, Khorasan, Kerman, Arabistan and so on", "changing to Persian the Turkish and Arabic names that foreign plunderers had given to Iran's regions, villages, mountains and rivers, and eliminating all such foreign influences", official ban on the use of "foreign languages in courts, schools, and governmental and military institutions for all Iranian citizens" (Afshar 1925, 567-568). Concerned about the potential threats posed by Kurdish aspirations for independence in Turkey, Afshar suggested that "whenever this course, i.e., Persianization (*farsi shudan*) of the Iranian Kurds is achieved, there will be no danger to us if Ottoman Kurdistan becomes independent" (cited in Hassanpour 1991, 65).

The Reza Shah's administration was thus equipped with an ideological arsenal for nation-building and embarked on a multifaceted program of forced assimilation of the country's non-Persians through various coercive measures, including the exclusive use of the Persian language in education, government, and media (Sheyholislami 2012, 27). Persianization of non-Persians became one of the guiding principles, if not the guiding principle, of modern education system during Reza Shah's reign. When he was still Reza Khan and the Prime Minister in 1923, government agencies were mandated to conduct all business exclusively in Persian. A directive issued from the Central Office of Education in Azerbaijan province to education departments of the province, including some Kurdish areas, emphasized this language policy.

> On the orders of the Prime Minister, it has been prescribed to introduce the Persian language in all the provinces especially in the schools. You may therefore notify all the schools under your jurisdiction to fully abide by this and to conduct all their affairs in the Persian language [:] and the members of [your] office must follow the same while talking (cited in Hassanpour, 1991, 63).

In 1925, the Minister of Eduction requested a significant increase in the state budget for expanding education in all provinces, especially in the "border areas of Azerbaijan, Kurdistan and Khuzistan" (cited in Rasuli 2017, 82-3). By and large, all non-Persian expressions from language to people's appearance were subject to state repression. When it came specifically to the Kurds, Reza Shah enacted a strict suppression of Kurdish identity, outlawing Kurdish customs, music and dance. In 1935, he went further by banning the written Kurdish and other non-Persian languages spoken in Iran (Hassanpour 1991, McDowall 2021, 202). In the same year, a confidential letter was sent from Reza Shah's Especial Office to the Ministry of Education, emphasizing that

> Increasing the number of primary schools in Khuzestan and Kurdistan, i.e., all Kurdish regions, is a necessary and urgent task... and this matter is not only important from the point of view of the expansion of education, but also in terms of the country's expediencies. (cited in Rasuli 2017, 83)

The reference to **"**country's expediencies" (*masaleh-e mamlekati*) in addition to "the expansion of education" is a clear admission by the Iranian government that the goal of modernizing and expanding education in non-Persian regions was not solely to educate the local population or improve their rate of literacy, but further to serve certain national "expediencies" that could hardly be anything but Persianization. Moreover, Persianization was not simply

limited to the promotion of the Persian language. It was also aimed at making non-Persian languages inaccessible and possibly eliminating them. A confidential letter from the government-appointed administration in Kurdistan province to the Ministry of Education on February 27, 1932 corroborates this claim where it reads

> In order for all residents to be compelled to speak Farsi in the future, it is necessary to create many schools in the villages and the city and send teachers from the center [Tehran] so that as a result of basic education, they will not be familiar with their Kurdish language at all. (cited in Rasuli, 2017, 86)

Further measures were deployed to ensure the Persianization of the Kurds, ranging from raising the salaries of non-native teachers as an incentive to live and teach in Rojhelat, refusing to hire Kurdish teachers and sending them to areas outside Rojhelat, to distributing Persian newspapers and magazines in Rojhelat's libraries for free. Leading Kurdish poets and authors recount harrowing experiences of both physical and emotional violence in their memoirs. They reveal how simply owning Kurdish literature, or even writing in the Kurdish language, made them targets of state violence (Sheyholislami 2012, 27). Iran's drive to suppress Kurdish identity extended beyond its own borders. The Iranian government accused neighboring Iraq of aiding Kurdish independence when it officially recognized the Kurdish language at a local level in 1931, claiming this was a British conspiracy to destabilize Iran (Hassanpour 1992, 128).

Renaming many placenames has been another method of Persianization in the Iranian nation-state. It began as part of the mandate of Iran's first language academy in 1930s. Inspired by the Aryanist idea of purifying the Persian language from Arabic and Turkish words seen as foreign influences, in the spring of 1935, Reza Shah ordered the creation of Iran's first language academy (*Farhangestan-e Iran*). The Iranian officials drafted a constitution for this new

institution modelled after the Academie Francaise (Kia 1998, 22). Since its foundation, the language academy has crafted a large number of new words, including new names to Persianize the names of provinces and towns. For example, the province of Arabistan was renamed Khuzistan, Qizil Ozan to Sefidrud and part of Kurdistan to West Azerbaijan (Abrahamian 1982, 143; Kia 1998, 35). In some cases, the Kurdish names of places have been Persianized by deforming them so that they sound Persian or are easier for Persians to pronounce them. For instance, the names of Kurdish cities of Kermashan and Jowanro are referred to officially as Kermanshah and Javanroud. In a bizarre move, towards the end of Reza Shah's reign, the government assigned numbers to provinces instead of using their traditional names to eliminate regional identities and the ethnic associations of certain provinces like Kurdistan and Luristan; a move that was reversed in 1950 (Chehabi 1997, 238).

Sedentarization and forced displacement of nomads was another method of assimilation that was employed by the ruling nationalists of Reza Shah government. The Aryanist discourse was instrumental to provide ideological justifications for the state to take on the tribes in the peripheries. Given their obsession with the categories of progress and decline, the notion of civilization occupied a central place in the minds of nationalist elites of early twentieth century Iran, in general, and the Iranian historians in particular. The concept of civilization was typically associated with the intellectual and artistic achievements of settled, agricultural, and city-dwelling communities, and Iranian historians often compared this to the supposed "savagery" of nomadic and pastoral peoples. Painted as disruptive and leading to plunder and chaos, the lifestyle of these nomadic groups, who moved across the land in search of grazing areas, was frequently blamed for Iran's decline. For Iranian nationalists of the time, nomads were the "'legacy of the Turko-Mongol hordes", and for a

historian like Abbas Iqbal nomads were the enemies of civilization (Vejdani 2015, 87-8; Bayat 2003, 224). Similar to his Turkish counterpart, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, Reza Shah himself was deeply concerned about Iran's international image. He was particularly irritated by the way European visitors romanticized nomadic life, viewing it as exotic and quaint, a perception he believed was outdated and detrimental to Iran's modernization efforts (Cronin 2009, 364-65).

At the beginning of the 20th century, it was estimated that between one-third and one-quarter of Iran's population was tribal. Some tribes, like the Bakhtiari and Qashqa'i in the south, had established confederacies, granting them significant power and a relatively organized political system. In contrast, tribes in regions such as Luristan and Kurdistan were more decentralized, with strong leadership emerging only sporadically and for brief periods (Bayat 2003). The newly modernized Iranian army was at the forefront of campaigns against the nomads, and its most significant tribal campaigns during the 1920s targeted Kurdish and Turkmen tribes as well as regions of Luristan and Baluchistan, aiming to overcome and disarm the tribal leaders and their armies (Cronin 2007; Tapper 2003). The most brutal and protracted military operation during Reza Shah's reign was the suppression of several Lur tribes (Cronin 2003; Douglas 1951) who are culturally and geographically very close to the Kurds of southern Rojhelat. The Lurs were also the initial victims of the government’s policy of forced displacement of nomadic tribes away from their traditional lands. After forcibly relocating Lurs to clear land for a new road and railway in the late 1920s, the government expanded this policy in the early 1930s to include the forced removal of various Kurdish tribes from their grazing grounds along the border (Cronin 2007, 26-35). The prominent example of the latter was the forced displacement of the Kurdish Jalali tribe. According to Ghassemlou (1996),

> Of the 10,000 members of the Jalali tribe, who lived on the borders of Iran, Turkey and the Soviet Union and deported to the central areas of Iran, only a few hundred returned in 1941, and the rest had perished. (137)

The high death toll among those forcibly relocated by Reza Shah was primarily due to the harsh conditions they endured. This included exposure to freezing temperatures, lengthy journeys on foot for weeks and months, and, most critically, a nearly complete lack of essential supplies at their final destinations, all hallmarks of the government's enforced settlement program. As Tapper (2003) notes, former nomads struggled to adapt to a settled lifestyle and experienced health issues as a result. Additionally, there was a severe shortage of medical care and educational opportunities available to them (248).

The Jalalis were not the only Kurdish nomads deported. A large number of the Kurds of Zarrin Abad were transferred to Lorestan to replace several Lor tribes who were transported from the south-west of Iran to Khorasan in the north-east of the country (Bidgoli 2019, 90). Moreover, from 1936 to 1940, Golbakhi tribe members were forcibly relocated to the desert regions of Yazd, Isfahan and their surroundings in central Iran. Once relocated, they faced numerous hardships, including poverty, unemployment, and significant communication challenges due to language barriers with the local Persian population (Bidgoli 2019, 94-6). Overall, Reza Sha's enforced settlement of tribes was a social and economic catastrophe; it was a policy characterized by devastating human cost and significant decline of pastoral production. As Lambton (1953) notes: "the tribal policy of Reza Shah, ill-conceived and badly executed, resulted in heavy losses in livestock, the impoverishment of the tribes, and a diminution of their numbers (286).

Post WWII Era

The racial order in Iran remained nearly intact after the second world war even though Reza Shah was replaced by his son Mohammad Reza in 1941.Central to this continuity was the maintenance of Aryanism and Persianization in state ideology, albeit to varying degrees. In the post WWII era, sero-anthropological investigations became the dominant type of genetic research in Iran. Until the 1970s, blood research institutions in Tehran held a dominant position in terms of prestige, funding, and global recognition. This led to a reliance on data from Tehran blood donors as representative of the entire Iranian population. For instance, when compiling data on blood groups for his book, anthropologist A.C. Mourant used statistics from over 10,000 Tehran residents as a proxy for all Iranians. That said, western medical researchers were also interested in studying ethnic and religious minorities in Iran such as Kurds, Turkmans and Zoroastrians. Similar to interwar anthropometrists who sought to identify the purest descendants of ancient Iranians, later researchers often focused on Zoroastrians as a presumed genetically isolated group. The belief that Zoroastrians represented a pureblood lineage from the pre-Islamic era became widespread in Iranian genetics during the 1950s and 1960s. This view frequently contrasted Zoroastrians with the broader population even when genetic evidence did not support clear distinctions based on religion. However, genetic data collected by various institutions consistently revealed that Iranians, regardless of how they were categorized, exhibited significant genetic diversity (Burton 2021, 119-122).

The Islamic Republic also implicitly endorsed the late Pahlavi-era framework of "domesticating" ethnic diversity within the Iranian nation-state. All forms of difference, including religious, linguistic, and regional distinctions, were categorized under the umbrella term 'qowmiyyat' (ethnicity), thus all different groups were turned to "Iranian

populations", "Iranian ethnicities" or "Iranian groups" emphasizing their belonging to an essential Iranian identity shaped by the nation-state boundaries. This approach in the 1980s and 1990s agenda of population genetics positioned all groups as sub-components of an overarching Iranian identity defined by the nation state. Consequently, minority identities were framed as secondary to and dependent upon their Iranian national affiliation (Burton 2021, 224-225).

Despite easing some of the harsh measures used to force non-Persians, including the Kurds, to adopt Persian language, Mohammad Reza Shah's regime continued to maintain Persianization as a defining feature of Iranian modern state. During Mohammad Reza Shah's reign, the publication of Kurdish periodicals and books was sporadic and often influenced by external factors. Some publications, like *Koohestan*, emerged during periods of government weakness. Others, such as *Kurdistan*, were actually supported by the Shah's secret police (SAVAK) for political gain. Similarly, radio broadcasts in Kurdish and Azerbaijani in the 1950s were primarily a countermeasure to Soviet broadcasting in Kurdish and Kurdish advancements in neighboring Iraq. Despite these developments, the Kurdish language remained marginalized. It was classified as a Persian dialect, as opposed to supposedly foreign languages such as Arabic and Turkish, excluded from the school curriculum, and not used as a language of instruction (Sheyholislami 2012, 28). The language policy under the Islamic Republic has virtually remained the same, albeit certain regulations became more legally formalized.

Article 19 of the Iranian Constitution under the Islamic Republic stipulates that "color, race, language and the like shall not be cause for privilege". However, as Hassanpour points out, the Persian language, the mother tongue of about half of the population, is privileged as the only official language in Iran (Hassanpour 1991, 67). This contradiction is reflected in the article 15 of the Constitution, which reads

> the official and common language and script of the people of Iran is Persian. Official documents, correspondence and statements, as well as textbooks, shall be written in this language and script. However, the use of local and ethnic languages in the press and mass media is allowed. The teaching of ethnic literature in the school, together with Persian language instruction, is also permitted. (Constitution, no date, 12)

While non-Persian languages spoken in Iran are prohibited from use in administration and as a medium of instruction in education according to the law, there is no evidence that the so-called "local and ethnic languages" have ever been taught in primary and secondary schools despite permission by the law. In so far as teaching Kurdish is concerned, all that Iran's Islamic Republic has conceded is confined to an undergraduate program in Kurdish Language and Literature in the University of Kurdistan after a lengthy and frustrating process of government approval. First certified by the government in 2003, the program's launch was cancelled soon afterwards, but a group of Kurdish academics persevered until finally in 2015 the first group of students in Kurdish Language and Literature program were admitted to the University of Kurdistan (Sheyholislami 2012, 36). Similar to the second Pahlavi's era, not only are public and private educational settings pressured by the government to avoid using Kurdish in their teaching and training environment (Sheyholislami 2012), individuals and civil society organizations engaged in teaching Kurdish are sometimes persecuted. Zara Mohammadi, the director of Nozhin Socio-Cultural Association, was initially sentenced to 10 years in prison in 2020 on charges of "forming groups and societies with the aim of disrupting national security" stemming from her activities at Nozhin, which included

teaching Kurdish language and literature. However, her sentence was later reduced to five years on appeal ("Iran jails", 2022).

Arguing that the Islamic Republic's language policies largely follow the same path as those established by the Pahlavi Dynasty, Sheyholislami identifies these policies as

> (a) treating multilingualism as a threat to the country's territorial integrity and national unity, (b) restricting the use of non-Persian languages, and (3) promoting the supremacy of Persian as a venue for unifying the ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous body politic. (Sheyholislami 2012, 21)

While Sheyholislami rightly alludes to the continuities in the language policies of Iranian modern states throughout the past century, his characterization of these policies misses an important feature of them, that is, the damages wrought by Persianization on non-Persian languages spoken in Iran, not to mention the physical and psychological violence on the users of these languages. What Sheyholislami calls "restricted and controlled tolerance" as the language policy of Persianization is in fact a necropolitical approach toward non-Persian languages. The concept of necropolitics was coined by Achille Mbembe

> to account for the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of death-worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead. (Mbembe 2003, 40)

We only need to replace the words persons and populations in the above passage with non-Persian languages to see how the policy of "restricted and controlled tolerance" has resulted in the hallowing out and gradual death of non-Persian languages of Iranian citizens. The

unchallenged prevalence of Persian as well as simultaneous elimination of non-Persian languages in formal education and minimal access to the literary resources of these languages have rendered them highly Persianized languages only suited for basic daily conversations. Therefore, what are considered as "local non-Persian languages" spoken in provincial branches of national radio-television organization can be often readily comprehensible to a Persian speaker with almost no knowledge of these languages. Unable to read and write in their mother tongue, many speakers of non-Persian languages in Iran are left with a highly Persianized version of their mother tongues, not to mention all those who are utterly assimilated to Persian. As a result, this so-called "restricted and controlled tolerance" creates "death-worlds" for ethnic non-Persian languages in Iran, turning them to "living dead" languages. Unless these languages have an official or semi-official status outside Iran as is the case with Azeri-Turkish, Kurdish, and Arabic, they face a serious risk of extinction.

By allowing cultural expression in non-Persian languages while prohibiting the inclusion of these languages in formal education and suppressing the efforts of the speakers of these languages to change these dynamics, the modern Iranian state has both gained a level of legitimacy by creating a façade of tolerance towards linguistic diversity, and fostered the conditions of cultural assimilation and the gradual death of non-Persian identities. This resembles a fascist ploy employed to prevent the masses from changing structural exploitative relations as explained by Walter Benjamin when he writes that "Fascism sees its salvation in giving these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves" (Benjamin 2008, 66). This idea is perfectly represented in the Prime Minister Foroughi's recommendation to make Persian mandatory while refusing to ban non-Persian languages; an

insight that has indeed guided and defined the language policy of both Pahlavi monarchy and Islamic Republic of Iran.

The racial and "national history of Iran" was also so successfully propagated that it was embraced by many opponents of the Pahlavi dynasty as well. This included the dominant Islamist faction of revolutionary coalition of the 1970s which formed the post-revolutionary Islamic Republic. As Zia-Ebrahimi (2016) points out, Morteza Motahari, a leading clerical figure and close ally of Khomeini, in his book entitled *Khadamat-e moteqabel-e Eslam va Iran* (The Reciprocal Contributions of Islam and Iran) acknowledged that Iran's pre-Islamic history could create a perceived affinity between Iranians and Europeans as "fellow Aryans". Ali Shariati, an influential Muslim intellectual known by many as the main ideologue of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, presented a stark contrast between Aryans and Semites, and portrayed Aryans as calm, introspective, and spiritually inclined, while characterizing Semites as emotional, impulsive and materialistic. Shariati further simplified historical events by framing them as a continuous conflict between these two races (Zia-Ebrahimi 2016, 210). The "Aryan and Arab races" are also mentioned in Khomeini's last will, albeit in distinction from "the races of Europe, America and the Soviet Union" (Khomeini 1989). Although the so-called Islamic period of the history of Iran has been highlighted in the post-Pahlavi Iran under the Islamic Republic, the core elements of Aryanist "national history of Iran" continue to be taught in schools and textbooks. For example, a fourth-grade textbook of *social studies* states that "Iran means the land of Aryans who are a noble and illustrious people". Textbooks for tenth-grade *World History and Ancient Iran* courses continue to promote the idea that the arrival of Aryan groups on the Iranian plateau marked a pivotal moment in the nation's history (Soleimani and Osmanzadeh 2020, 12). As Haggy Ram (2000) points out, post-revolutionary textbooks grapple

with the apparent contradiction between centuries of foreign Arab rule and the enduring sense of Iranian national identity. To reconcile this, just as the Pahlavi state did, they present the Iranian people as possessing a continuous sense of Iranian-ness. However, while emphasizing this national identity, these textbooks also portray Iranians as "genuine" revolutionary Shi'ite Muslims. Nonetheless, both pre- and post-revolutionary narratives share a fundamental assumption: the existence of a unified Iranian people throughout history (79-80).

The definition of Iran as the land of Aryans also continues to be perpetuated in both popular and scholarly works. For example, Pirouz Mojtahedzadeh, a professor of political geography in prominent Iranian universities, wrote the following in a 1995 book: "The term 'Iran' means 'the land of Aryans'. Politically, however, this term refers to the country situated in south-west Asia" (Mojtahedzadeh 1995, 14). In 1965, Reza Sha's son and successor Mohammad Reza Shah adopted the title Aryamehr, meaning the light of the Aryans. This title was a new invention, not found in any previous period of Iranian history (Zia-Ebrahimi 2016). Moreover, he stated in 1973 that "yes, we are Easterners, but we are Aryans. This Middle East, what is it? One can no longer find us there. But Asia, yes. We are an Asian Aryan power whose mentality and philosophy are close to those of the European states, above all France" (cited in Bayat-Philipp 1978, 211).

As for the policy of forcefully assimilating the tribes and containing their insurgencies, conflicts flared up between the government and several tribes, particularly in Iran's south, during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah. But unlike his father, the Shah did not need to use harsh political and administrative tactics to supress the social and economic power of the tribes. Instead, he relied on the powerful forces of capitalist development to transform tribal social organization. By the 1970s, the regime was so assured of its success in assimilating tribes

that it began to portray them as quaint, traditional remnants of the past, suitable for the tourism industry—a complete reversal of Reza Shah's view (Cronin 2009, 385). That said, the second Pahlavi monarch was as ruthless as his father wherever tribal defiance evolved to nationalist politics as in the case of the Kurds. After regaining control of the region, Tehran chose not to punish the southern tribal leaders who had rebelled during 1940s. Instead, they were given responsibility for security in their respective areas. However, the government took a drastically different approach with the Kurdish movement, exemplified by the public hanging of Qazi Muhammad and other Kurdish leaders in Mahabad in the wake of toppling the Kurdish Republic in 1946 (Cronin 2009, 381). Large-scale public executions of individuals involved in, supportive of, or suspected of aiding the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (1945-1946) is another example. These acts of violence were accompanied by the burning of books, magazines, and pamphlets written in non-Persian ethnic languages (Asgharzadeh 2007, Hassanpour 1994). Further, an uprising in western Baluchistan (Iranian Baluchistan) led by tribal leader Dad Shah in 1950s was violently suppressed and Dad Shah killed by the Iranian army (Elling 2013, 41). At times, Mohammad Reza Shah's iron fist policy in treating nationalist uprisings of non-Persian minorities extended beyond the borders of Iran. In 1973, Mohammad Reza Shah pressured Pakistan's government to dismiss the democratically elected NAP-JUI government in Eastern Baluchistan (Pakistani Baluchistan). The Shah of Iran also provided financial aid and military equipment as Iranian helicopters bombed the region, which resulted in the deaths of approximately 17,000 Baluch guerrillas (Jetly 2004, 24).

The modern Iranian state; therefore, through the process of nation-building in, at least, the past century has created a racial order in Iran, which is a hierarchy with Persians at the top and non-Persians below. This racial order was imagined by Iranian nationalists who adopted and

adapted European racial thinking and notion of whiteness encapsulated in the Aryan myth. As shown above, the Iranian racial order has been beneficial to Persians and racist to non-Persian ethnic and national minorities by privileging the former and oppressing the latter politically, socially and culturally. Although Iran's Islamic Republic has foregrounded Shi'ite identity in the state ideology and has largely abandoned the use of Aryan-related terms in its official discourse as opposed to its Pahlavi counterparts, it has maintained and perpetuated the Iranian racial order.

By elevating Farsi or the Persian language to the language of state power, the modern Iranian governments have identified the nation as Persian, hence minoritizing and subjecting non-Persians to a range of racist exclusions. In the Iranian racial order, the distinct identities of non-Persians are recognized as Iranian *aqwam* (ethnicities) due to their supposed shared and millennia-old Aryan or Iranian essence. But this recognition is predicated on the loyalty and subordination of *aqwam* to the Iranian nation-state. Their designation as *aqwam* means that they are depoliticized entities that cannot have political and even cultural rights. They are only allowed to express themselves culturally but cannot enjoy political and cultural rights as Kurds, Azeri-Turks, Baluchs, Arabs, Lurs, Turkmen and so on. Only the nation, that is, the Persians or Persian-speakers can be political and sovereign. Meanwhile, racist acts and processes of exclusion and violence, e.g., Persianization and forced assimilation, have been consistently and patiently at work to erase diversity. In other words, the Iranian racial order espouses "exclusivist recognition" or, to borrow from Georgio Agamben (1998), "inclusive exclusion" where it recognizes and includes ethnic and linguistic diversity only to exclude and eliminate them. A particular discursive technic of inclusive exclusion regarding the Kurds in Iran has been a Persian nationalist narrative that claims the Kurds by using a historic-linguistic outlook that

frames the Kurds as an ancient Aryan group and underlines the affinities between Kurdish and Persian languages (Posch 2017).

Iranian racial order in a sense is the Turkish racial order with a "civilized face". And its racism is an "inclusive racism", to use Balibar's conceptualization, as it is primarily a racism of oppression and exploitation. In the early stages of its formation, particularly during Reza Shah's reign, the Iranian racial order was expressed in the realm of ideas and language in an explicitly racial and Aryanist terminology. But since then, and perhaps due to the decline in popularity of explicitly racial ideologies after the events of WWII, the Aryanist terminology is less employed but the racial order itself and its Aryanist tenets persist and are as hegemonic. Of particular importance in the continuity and survival of Aryanist hegemony in Iran is the belief in a historical and cultural unity and essence despite linguistic and religious diversity in Iran, which was in the Pahlavi-era attributed to a shared Aryan race among so-called Iranians, and nowadays to a shared historical and cultural Iranian or Persian identity. Recent scholarship by respected and influential Iranian academics (Amanat 2017; Katouzian 2009; Mirsepasi 2021) is a reflection of such continuity by supposedly impartial scholars of Iranian history and politics.

A growing critical scholarship on Iranian nationalism has been also produced over the past few decades that explore the racist character of Iranian nationalism (Asgharzadeh 2007; Vaziri 1993), or highlight its racial overtones (Matin-Asgari 2018; Zia-Ebrahimi 2016). However, the reality and effects of Iran's racial order remain largely unexplored and understudied. Only Asgharzadeh's *Iran and the Challenge of Diversity* discusses this topic systematically, albeit he uses the term "racist order." Although Zia-Ebrahimi's *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism* debunks the Aryan myth and documents its popularity in Iranian political, social and cultural arenas, it fails to recognize a) the racial order articulated discursively by

Iranian nationalism, and b) the political and social ramifications in the form of racist exclusions and systematic discriminations against non-Persian national and ethnic minoritized groups in Iran. Aryanist and Persian racism in Iran is not confined to anti-Arab discursive racism as Zia-Ebrihimi suggests. Other works limit the racial character of Iranian state to the monarchical Pahlavi state (Adib-Moghaddam 2018; Sadeghi-Boroujerdi 2020). A more in-depth examination of this topic is outside the scope of this research, but I intend to further elaborate theoretically on the Iranian racial order and critically examine the scholarship on Iranian nationalism in separate research in near future.

4.2. Arab Nationalism and Racialization

A central theme running through the minds of early Arab nationalists was the belief in a fixed Arab identity that had persisted over centuries and whose civilisation and glory had to be revived and freed from non-Arab domination, which had caused the decline of Arab civilization. Contempt for Turks was especially prominent among those intellectuals. For example, Nagib Azoury, an influential Ottoman Arab thinker from the present-day Lebanon, accused the Turks of having "ruined the Arabs. Without them, the Arabs would have been among the most civilized nations in the world" (cited in Dawisha 2003, 25). There was, however, disagreement among the Arab nationalist intellectuals on the criteria for defining Arabness. For some like Azoury, lineage and origin were key, so Egyptians were of a different racial stock i.e., African Berbers whose pre-Islamic language had nothing in common with Arabic (Dawisha 2003). This position was somehow shared by a certain tendency among Egyptian intellectuals of the early twentieth century among whom Taha Hussein, prominent Egyptian writer, stood out as he considered Arabs as one of Egypt's many invaders in history. For others like Abd al-Rahman Azzam, Egyptians were Arabs because not only had they embraced the language, religion and culture of

the Arabs, but the blood of Egyptian people was also mostly "traceable to Arab veins" (Dawisha 2003, 81-82). It was after all the emphasis on culture and language rather than origin and ancestry that gained an upper hand in defining Arab identity. The writings of Syrian-Iraqi thinker Sati al-Husri played a crucial role in that regard.

Considered by many Arab intellectuals as the most articulate and perhaps influential theoretician of Arab nationalism (al-Azmeh 2000; Khadduri 1970; Hourani 1970), al-Husri was influenced by the cultural nationalism of German romantics such as Herder and Fichte. For al-Husri, a person's language and history determine their national identity regardless of their preferences. It follows then that anyone whose mother tongue is Arabic is an Arab. He also coined the term *al-Umma al-Arabiya* (the Arab nation) to refer to the Arab people united by shared language and history. Since for al-Husri national identity is pre-determined, he insisted that those who do not accept their identity must be persuaded and even forced to accept it if necessary. Therefore, he was keen on teaching "nationalist history" to the youth in order to foster identification with a primordial Arab identity (Dawisha 2003, 64-74). More specifically, al-Husri made a distinction between "Arabism", that is, the objective features of Arabness such as language and culture, and "the feeling of Arabism" i.e., the subjective element of Arab identity and the emotional attachment to the Arab nation. It was imperative then, in al-Husri's view, to spread the feeling of Arabism among the masses for which education was an invaluable means. Thus, a generation of Arab nationalists in Iraq took it upon themselves to disseminate the feeling of Arabism in schools and the army (Kedourie 1962, 65). As the director of the general education (1921-1927) and subsequently as the head of the higher teachers' training college in Iraq, al-Husri appointed teachers who followed his Arab nationalist doctrine and produced educational material in line with such doctrine. One example was a history textbook written in 1931 for

elementary and secondary schools entitled *Tarikh al-Umma al-Arabiya* (*The History of the Arab Nation*) (Dawish, 2003). The impacts of al-Husri's thought and his nationalist educational efforts were soon to be felt in the Iraqi political scene. In 1941, a group of Arab nationalist army officers of the first generation influenced by al-Husri's ideas staged a coup against the pro-British monarchy and appointed a short-lived pro-Axis government. When the monarchy was restored with the help of the British forces, al-Husri was deported from Iraq along with over a hundred teachers he had brought to Iraq from Syria and Palestine (Mufti 1996, 37).

The belief in an objective and ahistorical Arab identity was also popular among Arab elites in Syria since before the independence and during the French mandate. Michel Aflaq, the co-founder and ideologue of Arab socialist Ba'ath party in the 1940s, was a pioneer of cultural racialization of Arabs. He contended that

> Nationalism is racial in the sense that we hold sacred this Arab race which has, since the earliest historical epochs, carried within itself a vitality and a nobility which have enabled it to go on renewing and perfecting itself, taking advantage of triumphs and defeats alike. (Aflaq 1962, 243)

Choosing the word Ba'ath for an Arab nationalist party was also indicative of further affinity with al-Husri's thoughts. Meaning resurrection, the word Ba'ath in Arabic also denotes to vivify and to rouse (Kedourie 1962, 69). This choice of word suggests that for many Arab nationalists of the time, particularly in present-day Iraq and Syria, a dormant national consciousness exists in all Arabs that needs to be awakened and put in motion. It was only through rousing or instilling the feeling of Arabism in Arab individuals that the Arab nation could rid itself of non-Arab domination. This preoccupation with freeing Arabs from the rule of foreign rulers, whether Turkish or European, and insistence on the Arab identity of Iraq and

Syria had arguably, on the one hand, made racial identification with Europeans superfluous, and on the other hand left no room for the sovereignty of the Kurds in those countries. In fact, prior to the end of WWII, Kurdish demands for autonomy were rejected in both Iraq and Syria (McDowall 2021; Tejel 2009).

Ba'athism as a form of pan-Arab nationalism promotes the idea of a unified Arab nation. While the Baath party's constitution includes some economic provisions, the primary focus is on Arab nationalism. Its slogan, "An Arab nation with an eternal mission", emphasizes this central belief (Tejel 2009, p 56). As Michael Gunter (2014) points out,

> Articles 10, 11, 15 and 20 of the Baath party's constitution provided for an exclusive Arab nationalism that made any other political or even social groups not sharing this belief illegal. (Article I of the Syrian constitution mirrors these provisions by proclaiming: 'The people of the Syrian Arab Region are part of the Arab Nation, who work and struggle to achieve all-embracing unity.' (22)

Aflaq acknowledged the presence of ethnic minorities within the Arab nation, even though Ba'athism generally opposed any division within it. He argued that the Kurds could readily be assimilated into the Arab nation, and like other non-Arab groups would "naturally" want to remain part of the Arab nation for security and prosperity. Any resistance to this was attributed to internal Kurdish interests or external interference. Ultimately, Aflaq's recognition of Kurdish identity was contingent on the Kurds embracing Arab nationalism (Tejel 2009, 57). Syria's provisional constitution, written in 1961, officially declared the country for the first time as the Syrian Arab Republic (McDowall 2021, 1274), formalizing the racial nature of the Syrian state and the racist exclusion of the Kurds and other minorities. Arab nationalism became a fundamental part of Syrian political culture and was officially

enshrined in the 1973 constitution, making it a mandatory aspect of Syrian civic life (Tejel 2009, 62).

4.2.1. The Iraqi Racial Order

In 1920, the League of Nations officially granted Britain a mandate to govern Iraq, subject to annual inspections. The League emphasized the protection of minority rights as a crucial requirement for satisfactory administration. While Britain and Iraq repeatedly pledged to respect Kurdish language rights, both entities consistently restricted Kurdish language use and mandated Arabic proficiency for citizenship in the newly formed Iraqi nation (Hassanpour 1992). The appointment by Iraq's King Faisal of a staunch Arab nationalist like al-Husri as the General Director of the Ministry of Education was further in contrast with the provisions for the rights of minorities in Iraq. The British government was aware of the potential consequences of Faisal and al-Husri's proposed changes on their administrative policies in Iraq. In 1921, Captain Farrell, an advisor to the Iraqi Ministry of Education, presented a report outlining these concerns to the British high commissioner. The report alluded to the increased emphasis on Arab nationalism within Iraq's educational system and criticized the new curriculum for disregarding the previous one, which had better represented the country's diverse ethnic and cultural makeup (Salih 2019, 38-39).

Under pressure from the League of Nations, Britain and mounting Kurdish protests, the Iraqi government made one concession to the Kurds by passing the Local Language Law in 1931 which acknowledged the existence of local languages and allowed for their use in certain administrative functions (Hassanpour 1991). As Hassanpour (2012, 53) notes, rather than promoting the Kurdish language, British mandate authorities actively sought to diminish its status. This policy, particularly intensified after the 1926 border agreement with

Turkey, included denying Kurdish official language status alongside Arabic, imposing strict limitations on its use, restricting Kurdish language instruction to a few primary school grades, confining Kurdish language education to specific schools in limited Kurdish regions, restricting administrative use of Kurdish to a few municipalities, obstructing Kurdish language standardization efforts and exploiting Kurdish dialectal differences to curtail comprehensive language rights and restrict geographical Kurdish language usage.

Insofar as language policy is concerned, forced assimilation of the Kurds in Iraq is softer and less oppressive relative to other parts of Kurdistan. However, this reality fades away as soon as we turn our attention to the more drastic measures of population transfer and mass killings that the Iraqi state deployed, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, to carry out its grand policy of Arabization. Initial attempts at Arabizing territories inhabited by non-Arabs began after the discovery of oil in 1927 in Kirkuk. Before this time, Kirkuk was populated mainly by Kurds and Turkmans. Methods of settler colonialism were also used to extend the reach of the state's control over the Kurdish territories and ensure the flow of wealth from Kurdish peripheries to the centre. In this scenario, resourceful lands populated by the majority non-Arab, especially Kurdish, inhabitants were occupied by expelling the locals and settling Arab populations in their place (Talabany 2001, Natali 2008, Natali 2010). The first attempt at changing the ethnic demography of Kirkuk, albeit on a relatively small scale, took place in the early 1930s when some Arab tribes were sent by the government to settle in Kirkuk and Arab officers were given positions in the local administration of Kirkuk (Natali 2010).

The Post-Iraqi Independence Era

As Arab nationalism grew, Iraq's independence in 1932 heralded harsher policies targeting the Kurds. In the aftermath of a nationalist coup d'état that ousted Iraq's monarchy

in 1958, the provisional constitution positioned Iraq as an Arab nation but notably acknowledged the Kurds as equal partners with the Arabs, outlining their rights within the unified Iraqi state. This marked the first time the Kurds were officially recognized as a distinct and significant ethnic group with specific entitlements. However, it was not long after the coup that the attitude of the government changed. General Qasim, the head of the military government of what was now the Republic of Iraq, abruptly ended plans for the third Kurdish Teachers Congress, scheduled for February 1961, and shut down all Kurdish Teachers Union branches. Furthermore, Qasim explicitly denied any national or ethnic significance to the term Kurd (Hassanpour 1991, 57).

After a volatile decade of political instability, the 1970 agreement between the Ba'ath government and the Kurds formally recognized the Kurds as one of the two primary nationalities in Iraq and granted official status to the Kurdish language, alongside Arabic, in predominantly Kurdish areas. It further stipulated that Kurdish would be the language of instruction in schools within these regions, and the teaching of Arabic language will be compulsory in all schools where the primary language of instruction is Kurdish (Hassanpour,1991). The agreement outlined a plan for the establishment of an autonomous Kurdistan region after a four-year transitional period. But the autonomous government that was formed in mid-1970s was far from what the Kurds had in mind as it excluded nearly half of Kurdish territories. The Iraqi government also embarked on a full-scale campaign of Arabization that ranged from cultural assimilation to forced displacements and political violence. Arabization policies targeted Kurdish language and culture in various ways, including transforming Kurdish schools within the autonomous region into Arabic-medium schools, dissolving the Kurdish Academy and incorporating it into the Iraqi Scientific Academy, relocating Sulaymaniyah University (a focal

point of Kurdish nationalism in Başûr) to Arbil, replacing Kurdish teachers with Arabic-speaking educators and forcibly relocating Kurdish teachers and university students to predominantly Arab areas of the country, as well as changing Kurdish geographical names to Arabic. The established autonomous region was widely perceived by the Kurdish population as a "puppet government" rather than a genuine self-governing body (Hassanpour 1991, 61-62; Salih 2019, 42). Overall, before the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government in 1991, Kurds in Iraq enjoyed only brief periods of linguistic freedom. These limited instances occurred in the territories ruled by Sheikh Mahmoud Barzanji in the early 1920s and during a period of relative autonomy in approximately the first half of the 1970s following the 1970 agreement (Salih 2019).

Arabization projects assumed a more violent character since the 1960s. By the early 1960s, Arabs still formed a minority in the Kirkuk province with almost no presence in the city centre (Natali 2008, 435). According to the 1957 Iraqi census, 48.3 percent of the population of the Kirkuk province were Kurds whereas Arabs constituted 28.2 percent and Turkmans 21.4 percent (Talabany, 2001). Unlike the colonial era of British mandate when power distribution was determined by population size, the post-1960s period prioritized Arab ethnicity. It was after the nationalization of Iraq's oil industry in 1972 that the central government undertook a multifaceted and systematic settler colonial project to decisively change the ethnic balance in Kirkuk to favor the Arabs. Following the nationalization, Saddam Hussein renamed the province *al-Ta'mim* which means nationalization (Salih 2022), and "forced all non-Arab groups in Kirkuk to sign ethnic identity correction cards, register officially as Arabs, and join the Ba'ath army" (Natali 2010, 24). The Iraqi government also made it difficult for the Kurds to keep title to their properties and altered the boundaries of the governorate to establish an Arab majority. Thus,

Kalar, Kifri, Chamchamal and Tuz Khurmatu, towns with a large concentration of Kurds, were detached from Kirkuk and annexed to the provinces of Sulaymaniya, Salah al-Din and Diwaniya (McDowall 2021).

> Other distasteful measures included financial rewards to Arabs who took Kurdish wives, a deliberate encouragement of ethnic assimilation, the transfer of Kurdish civil servants, soldiers and police out of Kurdistan, the removal of Kurdish faculty from the new university in Slimani and the Arabizing of some place names. (McDowall 2021, 952)

The changes to the ethnic composition of Kirkuk were readily noticeable within a few years of the implementation of the settler colonial project. As per the 1977 Iraqi census, the Kurdish and Turkman share of the population in the Kirkuk province had fallen to 37.53 and 16.31 percent, respectively, while the population of the Arabs had jumped to 44.41 percent of the governorate of Kirkuk (Talabany, 2001). As Natali (2008) points out, "by 1987, Kirkuk had become an Arab-majority province in which 16 percent of the total population was migrants from outside the province, mainly from central and southern Iraq" (435). By 1990, an additional 300,000 Kurds from Kirkuk had been displaced to Arbil and Sulaymaniyah as well as southern and central Iraq (Natali 2010). The Iraqi government resumed its settler colonial policy of Arabization in Kirkuk in late 1990s by forcing more than a thousand Kurdish and Turkman families- about 10,000 people- to move to the autonomous region during 1998-9 (McDowall 2021). Moreover, The Shi'ite Fayli Kurds were another target of Iraqi government's policy of mass deportations. Fayli Kurds who had lived in Iraq since the Ottoman era but lacked Iraqi citizenship were considered Iranians by the Iraqi government. In 1971, the government began forcibly expelling approximately 50,000 of them (McDowall 2021).

Following the failure of the Kurdish autonomy movement in 1975, the Iraqi government implemented a brutal policy aimed at eradicating Kurdish nationalism. To achieve this, they forcibly displaced the Kurdish population along a 20-to-30-kilometer border strip with Iran and Turkey, destroying entire villages and their infrastructure. This tactic was designed to disrupt the Kurdish community's cohesion, isolate them from their kin across the border, establish a militarized buffer zone to prevent future uprisings, and advance the Arabization of the Kurds. It is estimated that at least 500 Kurdish villages were destroyed, a number escalating to possibly 1,400 by 1978. Over 600,000 Kurds, including men, women, and children, were forcibly relocated to government-controlled "*mujama'at*" resettlement camps, which were dull townships designed for surveillance and control. Any Kurdish person returning to their original home faced immediate execution. The government specifically targeted and deported certain groups to the Arab-populated south, including families opposed to government, active supporters of Barzani, and refugees who missed the amnesty deadline of 20 May 1975. Of the approximately 210,000 Kurds who had fled to Iran, only 140,000 returned before the amnesty expired (Hassanpour 1991, 61; McDowall 2021, 937-38).

The Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) provided Iraq with an opportune moment to intensify its campaign against the Kurdish population, giving a genocidal character to Iraqi government's efforts to destroy Kurdish nationalism, accelerating the Arabization policy and exercising some of the most horrendous acts of sheer brutality ever committed against the Kurds. In August 1983, the Iraqi government forcibly abducted approximately 8,000 Barzani men between the ages of 8 and 70. These individuals were rounded up from refugee camps, transported away in military trucks and were never seen again. This mass abduction is believed to be retaliation for the Iranian army's capture of a strategic border post, possibly with assistance from Iraqi Kurdish

exiles loyal to the Barzani family. According to Van Bruinessen (1994), this single act of atrocity alone constitutes a clear case of genocide according to the 1948 United Nations Convention on Genocide. In March 1987, Ali Hassan al-Majid, a cousin of President Saddam Hussein, was granted especial powers to act as secretary general of the Ba'ath Party's Northern Bureau. Known to Kurds as '*Ali Kimiaee*' (Ali Chemichal), al-Majid directed a genocidal champaign against the Kurds of Başûr that began in 1987 and lasted for almost two years.

In April 1987, the Iraqi regime launched a series of devastating chemical attacks against Kurdish civilians and political targets. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) headquarters near the Turkish border and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) headquarters in Sulaymaniyah province were struck with poison gas. Shortly after, the defenseless villages of Sheikh Wasan and Balisan were targeted, resulting in the deaths of over a hundred civilians, primarily women and children. Hundreds more victims, including those hospitalized with severe burns and blindness in Erbil, were abducted and never seen again. These attacks marked the beginning of a brutal campaign of chemical warfare against the Kurdish population, which would continue for the next eighteen months. They also signaled a horrifying escalation in the regime's willingness to inflict mass casualties on Kurdish civilians. Within a week of the chemical attacks in April 1987, Iraqi forces led by al-Majid initiated a three-phase plan to destroy Kurdish villages. The first two phases, lasting from April to June, resulted in the razing of over 700 villages, primarily along major roads. A third phase was planned but postponed due to the ongoing war with Iran. The goals of this third phase would later be achieved through the Anfal campaign (Middle East Watch 1993; Van Bruinessen 1994).

The Anfal campaign was a series of eight coordinated military operations carried out in six specific geographic regions between late February and early September 1988. Anfal (the

spoils) is the name of the eighth sura of the Quran. In June 1987, Al-Majid issued a series of brutal orders that would guide the Iraqi security forces during the Anfal campaign and beyond. The first directive mandated the complete elimination of all human life in 'prohibited zones', with a shoot-to-kill policy in place. The second order, issued on June 20, 1987, escalated these atrocities. It explicitly called for indiscriminate mass murder, ordering troops to bomb civilian areas without restriction and to execute all captured civilians between the ages of 15 and 70 (Middle East Watch 1993, 8).

The first phase of Anfal campaign began in early February 1988 and already in late February, Jalal Talabani, the head of the PUK, publicly denounced the Iraqi regime for committing genocide against the Kurdish people, claiming that 1.5 million Kurds had been forcibly displaced and twelve towns as well as over 3,000 villages destroyed (McDowall 2021, 981). The Anfal campaign followed a consistent pattern. Each phase typically started with aerial chemical attacks targeting both Kurdish civilians and military positions. Ground forces would then launch a coordinated assault on *Peshmerga* (Kurdish fighter) bases. The chemical weapons, primarily mustard and nerve gas, were particularly devastating to civilians who lacked adequate protection (Middle East Watch 1993). The largest chemical attack took place in the city of Halabja on 16 March 1988. In retaliation for the capture of the city by Iranian and PUK forces the day before, the Iraqi forces bombarded Halabja for several hours, resulting in the death of approximately 5000 civilians (McDowall 2021, 982). An international outcry ensued, albeit no sanctions or diplomatic pressure were imposed on Iraq (Van Bruinessen 1994). Up to this point, from western capitalist world to eastern communist bloc had chosen to remain silent in the face of chemical attacks on the Kurds of Başûr. The chemical attack on Halabja was the most severe breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention since Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935

(McDowall 2021). Although the chemical attacks on the Kurds of Başûr has been described as the first time ever that a government has gas bombed its own citizens (Middle East Watch 1993; Van Bruinessen 1994), as discussed earlier, it was in fact the Turkish government that for the first time in history used chemical weapons against its civilian population in 1938, and it was again on the Kurds.

The Anfal campaign alone resulted in the destruction of over 1,200 villages, bringing the total number of destroyed Kurdish villages since 1968 to approximately 4,000 out of an estimated total of 7,000. This equates to more than half of all Kurdish villages (Van Bruinessen 1994, 175). Consequently, at least 1.5 million Kurds were forcibly displaced from their homes. However, the Iraqi government's efforts to reshape Başûr continued beyond the Anfal campaign. In December 1988, they announced plans to construct 22 new towns to house displaced Kurds. This process began with the destruction of the town of Sangasar, home to 12,000 people. Subsequently, the town of Qal'a Diza, with a population of 100,000, along with its surrounding communities, was demolished. The government also threatened to destroy the town of Raniya, which had a population of 25,000. By July 1989, a vast area of Başûr, covering 45,000 out of 75,000 square kilometers, had been cleared of its Kurdish inhabitants (McDowall 2021, 988-89).

Kurdish political groups estimate that, based on counts of abandoned villages, around 182,000 Kurdish civilians vanished and most likely killed during the Anfal campaign. A report by Middle East Watch concludes that at least 50,000, and possibly 100,000, civilians were murdered during the Anfal campaign. In an audio recording of a meeting with high-ranking Iraqi military officials, al-Majid is heard admitting to the killing of 100,000 Kurds during the Anfal campaign (Middle East Watch 1993; Van Bruinessen 1994). The Middle East Watch report

further acknowledges that many of those Kurds murdered during the Anfal operations were women and children, and contrary to the notion of accidental casualties or isolated incidents perpetrated by rogue commanders, their deaths were the result of a deliberate, government-sanctioned extermination program. These civilians were systematically murdered in large numbers following their capture during military operations or while escaping from designated prohibited zones (Middle East Watch,1993). The following passage from Middle East Watch report on Anfal genocide clearly reveals al-Majid's, and by extension the Iraqi government's, attitude towards the Kurds and their actual intents in conducting the Anfal campaign.

> Al-Majid appears almost defensive in talking about the Anfal operation with unnamed Northern Bureau officials in January 1989. "How were we supposed to convince them to solve the Kurdish problem and slaughter the saboteurs?" he asks them, alluding to the misgivings of senior military officers about the Anfal operation. In addition, he adds, "what was to be done with so many captured civilians? Am I supposed to keep them in good shape?" al-Majid asks. "What am I supposed to do with them, these goats?... [T]ake good care of them? No, I will bury them with bulldozers." And that is what he did. (Middle East Watch,1993, 345)

The Anfal campaign also forced a large number of Kurds to flee their homes, becoming refugees. By the end of August 1988, the Anfal campaign had forced over 60,000 Kurds to seek refuge in Turkey. By 1990, approximately 700,000 Fayli Kurds sought safety in Baghdad, 250,000 Barzani Kurds fled to Iran, and another 200,000 joined Kurdish diaspora communities primarily in Europe. Iran had already provided refuge to at least 50,000 Fayli Kurds expelled in the late 1970s. Additionally, around 300,000 Kurds were

internally displaced within Iraq, relocated from Kirkuk to other parts of the country, including central and southern Iraq as well as urban centers like Arbil and Sulaymaniyah (McDowall 2021, 989; Natal, 2010, 24). Returning Kurdish refugees were relocated to government-designated housing settlements. However, members of the Christian and Yezidi communities were segregated from the Muslim Kurdish population and taken to undisclosed locations. Their fate remains unknown (Van Bruinessen 1994, 175).

The discovery of numerous mass graves across Iraq in the years following the 2003 US invasion has revealed the full extent of the atrocities committed during the Anfal campaign and beyond. In 2011, multiple mass graves containing the remains of predominantly Kurdish men were discovered in southern Iraq. The Iraqi government has exhumed several of these sites, finding thousands of Kurdish victims. Officials estimate that at least 400 mass graves linked to the Anfal campaign may exist nationwide. The overwhelming number of unidentified bodies recovered by the Medico-Legal Institute in Baghdad since 2003, an average of 800 bodies per month, highlights the ongoing challenge of accounting for the missing (EU report, no date, 3).

4.2.2. The Syrian Racial Order

During the French mandate in Syria, although political and cultural recognition of Kurds as a distinct nation or ethnicity were rejected by both French authorities and the Arab majority, racist exclusion of Kurds was also opposed, particularly by the French. In fact, the French mandate sought to balance the influence of the Arab majority by granting the Kurds representation within the higher echelons of the military. The political implications of this colonial policy were evident even after the French mandate ended and Syria gained independence. A little-known fact is that the commander of Syrian forces in the 1948 Arab-

Israeli war was Hosni al-Zaim who was a Kurd, and who later became the president of Syria in 1949. The most powerful person in Syria from 1950 to 1954 and the president of Syria in 1953 was general Adib al-Shishakli whose mother was Kurdish. However, al-Shishakli was a staunch Arab nationalist who aimed at forcibly assimilating minorities into mainstream Arab Syrian society while simultaneously demonizing them politically. The Kurds became a primary target of this nationalist rhetoric, labeled as "*shu'ubiyyun*" or opponents of Arabization and accused of being agents of foreign powers hostile to Arab interests (Tejel 2009). Following the overthrow of al-Shishakli in 1954, anti-Kurdish sentiment further intensified. Kurdish officers at various levels were removed from the military, and Kurdish cultural materials, such as music recordings and publications, were confiscated and destroyed. Those found possessing these materials faced imprisonment. By and large, the Kurdish population was identified as "the internal enemy" (McDowall 2021, 1273; Tejel 2009, 61). This set the stage for state-sanctioned systematic erasure of Kurdish cultural expressions within Syrian society. At the heart of this policy was the suppression of Kurdish language.

Although Kurdish along with Arabic and Syriac has become an official language in the region ruled by the du facto Autonomous Administration of North and North-East Syria since 2012, it has never been recognized as an official language by the Syrian state. While Armenian and Assyrian communities were allowed to maintain private schools, clubs, and cultural associations for language education, the Kurdish language remained banned from formal instruction in both public and private schools (Tejel 2009). Restrictions on Kurdish publications began during the presidency of Adib al-Shishakli, but the complete ban on Kurdish publications was formally implemented in 1958 (McDowall 2021; Tejel 2009).

More severe measures that often involved physical violence were also deployed to cement the forced assimilation of the Kurds. In November 1960, the Syrian authorities were blamed for a fire in a cinema in Amuda on the 13th of that month that resulted in the tragic deaths of 283 Kurdish children. Many believed this incident was motivated by anti-Kurdish sentiments, fueled by official propaganda that linked Kurdish nationalism to Zionism and American imperialism (Tejel 2009). It is important to note that the Amuda massacre took place in the context of pan-Arab nationalist fervour that was prevalent during the United Arab Republic (1958-1961).

Another major event with decades-long consequences in the history of the Kurds of Rojava transpired in early 1960s that exemplifies racist exclusion of citizenship. In August 1962, the Syrian government issued the decree no. 93, authorizing a special census of the population in the Jazira region. The official justification for this census was that only 60 percent of the Kurds in Syria were considered "true" Syrians. The remaining 40 percent, according to the government, were alleged to have illegally infiltrated Syria from Turkey or Iraq with the backing of American imperialism, aiming to undermine the Arab identity of Jazira and establish a Kurdish state (Tejel 2009, 50-51). The census was conducted in a single day, October 5 1962. All non-Arab residents, meaning Kurds, were required to provide documentation proving their residency in Syria before 1940 (later adjusted to 1945). Many Kurds struggled to produce this evidence due to the largely undocumented and illiterate nature of the peasant society of the time. Even those who believed the government possessed their records faced obstacles in accessing them, proving that the true purpose of the census was not to verify the identity and number of legitimate residents but to minimize the number of Kurds recognized as Syrian

citizens. While the Syrian government later acknowledged errors in the process, no corrective measures were taken (McDowall 2021).

Those Kurds who took part in the census but failed to provide the required documents lost their Syrian citizenship and were registered as "alien" (*ajnabi)*. The "aliens" (*ajanib*) were issued red identity cards, restricting their legal rights within Syria. They were unable to travel domestically or internationally, own property, businesses and motorized vehicles, or work in the public sector. While they could obtain a driver's license and cash checks, they were prohibited from having bank accounts or obtaining commercial driving licenses. Around 120, 000 Kurds were designated *ajanib*, and their number by 2010s increased to over 300,000 due to the hereditary nature of their status. The latter number constitutes nearly 10 percent of the entire Kurdish population of Syria (Gunter 2014; McDowall 2021; Schmidinger 2018). Kurds who did not participate in the census were classified as "*maktumin*", meaning unregistered or literally "hidden". Without official identity documents, these stateless Kurds were effectively non-existent to the government and lacked basic civil rights. Their situation was even worse than that of the *ajanib*. Some were able to obtain unofficial identity certificates (white papers) from local authorities, a temporary practice that was later discontinued. An estimated 75,000 additional Kurds of Rojava were classified as *maktumin* (Gunter 2014; Tejel 2009). Due to the inconsistent and arbitrary nature of the Syrian government's categorization process, siblings born in the same Syrian village could be classified differently. Some family members might be designated as *ajanib* (non-citizens), while others retained their citizenship status. Many individuals who lost their citizenship also faced the confiscation of their property, which was subsequently used to resettle displaced Arab populations. Kurdish landowners whose land was seized were not compensated for their losses. As these Kurds lacked citizenship in any other country, they were

considered stateless under international law. These measures not only impacted Kurdish peasants but also extended to family members of prominent figures, including General Tawfiq Nizam al-Din, a former chief of staff of the Syrian army (Gunter, 2014, 22; Tejel, 2009, 51).

Anti- Kurdish Racism in Syria During the Reign of the Ba'ath Party

The rise of the Ba'ath Party to power in Syria in 1963 marked a period of intensified efforts to homogenize the population and increased anti-Kurdish racist measures. The party's official ideology, as outlined in the Sixth National Party Congress, ignored the existence of minorities and defined Syria as an exclusively Arab nation. After 1963, Ba'ath Party leaders characterized the Kurds as a "foreign" element threatening the nation's unity. The party's constitution continued to pose a threat to all ethnic and religious groups in Syria who challenged the concept of Arab unity (Tejel, 2009, 57). In fact, the Ba'ath party went on to adopt the slogan "save the Jazira from becoming a second Israel" (McDowall 2021, 1277). In such a context, Lieutenant Muhammad Talab al-Hilal, the head of the Syrian security police in Hasaka province (Jazira), issued a confidential report in November 1963. The report was saliently racist towards the Kurds in its nature and its wording. In its beginning, the report describes the presence of the Kurds in Jazira as alarming and threatening:

> [T]he bells of the Jazira sound the alarm and call on the Arab conscience to save this region, to purify it of all this scum, the dregs of history until, as befits its geographical situation, it can offer up its revenues and riches, along with those of the other provinces of this Arab territory … The Kurdish question, now that the Kurds are organizing themselves, is simply a malignant tumour which has developed and been developed in a part of the body of the Arab nation. The only

> remedy which we can properly apply thereto is excision. (cited in McDowall 2021, 1287-88)

Al-Hilal argued in a typical colonial tone that "people such as the Kurds—who have no history, civilisation, language, or ethnic origin—are prone to committing violence and destruction as are all mountain people" (cited in Gunter 2014, 23). The author also explains the Kurdish question, mirroring the common understanding of Syrian Arab nationalists:

> The Kurdish question is the most dangerous threat to the Arab nation, especially Jazira and northern Iraq. It is evolving as the Zionist movement did before Israel was established. The Jazira Kurds tried to prevent the Syrian army from intervening on behalf of the Arab state of Iraq against [Mulla Mustafa] Barzani. (cited in Gunter, 2014, 23)

Therefore, al-Hilal goes on, "there is no difference between them and Israelis, for Judistan and Kurdistan, so to speak, are of the same species" (cited in Tejel 2009, 60). The report proposed a 12-point plan to address what it perceived as the "Kurdish danger":

> (1) the displacement of Kurds from their lands to the interior; (2) the denial of education; (3) the handing over of "wanted" Kurds to Turkey; (4) the denial of employment possibilities; (5) an anti-Kurdish propaganda campaign; (6) deportation of Kurdish religious 'ulama (clerics) who would be replaced by Arabs; (7) the implementation of a "divide-and-rule" policy against the Kurds; (8) *the colonization of Kurdish lands by Arabs*; (9) the militarization of the "northern Arab belt" and the deportation of Kurds from this area; (10) the creation of "collective farms" for the new Arab settlers; (11) the denial of the right to vote or

> hold office to anyone lacking knowledge of Arabic; and (12) the denial of citizenship to any non-Arab wishing to live in the area(cited in Tejel 2009, 61. Emphasis is mine).

Among the various recommendations made by lieutenant al-Hilal, the Ba'ath government was particularly interested in establishing an Arab belt (*al-Hizam al-Arabi*). It should be noted that since before the independence of Syria in 1945, Syrian Arab nationalists were unhappy with the fact that the fertile lands of Jazira region in north were largely inhabited by Kurds and Christians who were either non-Arab or non-Muslim. In the 1950s, the Syrian government implemented a policy to alter the demographic composition of the Jazira region by relocating Bedouin tribes there. This initiative was successfully completed by 1960 (McDowall 2021, 1285). The discovery of oil in the Qarachok and Remilan regions in September 1956 likely provided additional motivation for the Syrian government's demographic policies (Gunter 2014). Due to some technical issues, the implementation of al-Hilal's suggestion was delayed until 1973 when, just like their counterparts in Iraq, the Arab nationalists of the ruling Ba'ath party in Syria embarked on a settler colonial policy to change the ethnic balance of the Jazira region by dispossessing "non-national" subjects, that is, the Kurdish inhabitants and transferring their land to "national" elements i.e., Arabs (Tejel 2009, 65). The plan was to create an Arab belt by replacing 140,000 Kurds, living in 332 villages, with Arab settlers in a well-cultivated land that was as wide as 10 to 15 km and extended 280 km along the border with Turkey. Following the filling of Tabqa dam in 1975, about 4000 Arab families were armed and settled in 41 "model farms" at the heart of the Kurdish region in Hasaka and additional 15 farms in the northern countryside of Raqqa. Although the Arabization of Jazira region was halted by the central government in 1976, the deported Kurds were not allowed to return (Schmidinger 2018; Tejel

2009). In total, 25000 Arab families were settled in Hasaka province between 1973 and 1976 (Schmidinger 2018, 65).

The Ba'ath regime also imposed stricter legal controls, forcing Kurdish authors and editors to print their works in Lebanon and smuggle them back into Syria illegally. In 1989, two decrees were issued that prohibited the use of the Kurdish language in workplaces and during marriage ceremonies and celebrations (Gunter 2014). In May 2000, Resolution 768 mandated the closure of all businesses selling Kurdish language cassettes, videos, and discs. Additionally, the resolution reaffirmed the ban on using the Kurdish language in meetings and celebrations (Tejel 2009). In September 2001, Syria enacted Decree No. 50, which imposed stricter regulations on printed materials, including Kurdish language publications. This decree expanded government control over the media and included provisions that could be interpreted as targeting Kurdish publications due to their potential association with Kurdish demands for recognition and autonomy. In 2002, several Kurdish individuals, including authors Ibrahim Nasan and Habib Ibrahim, were arrested and sentenced to prison terms of up to five years for possessing and distributing Kurdish language publications and teaching in clandestine Kurdish schools (Tejel 2009, 110).

Elimination of Kurdish names has been another aspect of cultural racism against the Kurds during the Ba’ath party’s Syria. In the 1960s, Kurdish parents faced increasing pressure from government officials to avoid using Kurdish names when registering their children. A formal decree, issued in September 1992, officially prohibited the registration of Kurdish first names, a policy that had been informally enforced for years (Gunter 2014; Tejel 2009). The 1977 decree mandating the Arabization of place names was a blatant attempt by the Syrian regime to expunge all non-Arab cultural and historical traces from the country. In Kurdish areas, the

specific aim was to erase Kurdish and Aramaic names. Therefore, for example, Kobani was renamed Ras al-Arab, Derik became al-Malikiyya and Amuda was made Adnaniyya. In the Kurd Dagh region, the names of all Kurdish villages were forcibly changed from Kurdish to Arabic (McDowall 2021; Tejel 2009).

Further measures have been employed to eliminate or appropriate the manifestations of Kurdish culture and identity in Syria. In 1967, all references to the Kurdish population of Syria were removed from school textbooks. In 1975, the Syrian Ba'ath Party initiated a project to revise Arab history. This initiative emphasized the importance of presenting a unified Arab narrative, downplaying regional and ethnic differences. As a result, historical figures like Salah al-Din Ayyubi became national symbols without any specific mention of their Kurdish heritage (Tejel 2009). Kurdish cultural traditions have been subject to state suppression, too. The case of Kurdish collective celebrations of Newroz or New Year's Day on March 21st is a case in point. Newroz celebrations in Rojava after the 1960s evolved into a symbolic expression of Kurdish nationalism, particularly through traditional songs and dances. Following the crackdown on Newroz celebrations by the Syrian police in Damascus and Afrin in 1986, during which several Kurds were killed, the Syrian government imposed an official ban on the festival. To counter the Kurdish significance of Newroz, President Hafiz al-Assad declared March 21 as Mothers' Day, transforming it into an Arab national holiday (Tejel 2009; Yildiz 2005a).

Another racially motivated anti-Kurdish mass murder occurred in 2004. On March 12, 2004, a soccer match between the Qamishlo local team and a team from Arab province of Dayr al-Zur turned to violence among the fans. Encouraged by the events in neighboring Iraq, including the capture of Saddam Hussein and the formalization of Kurdish autonomy in Iraq's Transitional Administrative Law, the fans from Dayr al-Zur, a region known for the pro-Saddam

stance of their population, chanted anti-Kurdish insults and the Kurds replied. The security forces intervened and shot seven Kurds dead. In the following days, Kurds of north and north-east Syria as well as Kurds in big Arab cities such as Damascus and Aleppo took to the streets. The uprising lasted until March 25 with 43 protesters, including seven Arabs, killed (McDowall 2021, 1359-1360).

On April 7**,** 2011, amidst nationwide protests in Syria, the Ba'ath government of president Bashar al-Assad issued decree No. 49, granting citizenship to the *ajanib*, but excluding the *maktumin*. This decision was a strategic move to prevent the Kurds from joining the opposition's uprising (Schmidinger 2018, 62). When Syrian National Council, the coalition of Syrian opposition forces, refused to guarantee political and cultural recognition of Kurdish people of Rojava, it proved the persistence of the long-standing misgivings of Arab Syria about its Kurdish minority:

> that the Kurds were a people apart and, since 1920, also separatist in their instincts; that the Kurds were historically immigrant; that they had acquired Syria's most fertile lands; and the belief that the Kurds were agents for any of their enemies. (McDowall 2021, 1377-8)

In other words, a significant segment, or perhaps the majority, of Syrian Arab population continues to hold onto the Syrian state's racialization of the Kurds and its racist attitude towards the Kurds.

Chapter 5

Democratic Confederalism: A Political Formation for Democratic Decolonization

After analyzing the theoretical and empirical dimensions of the colonization of Kurdistan, it is only fair to delve into decolonizing imaginaries or projects in the Kurdish context. Recent years have seen an increasing interest in discussions of decolonization in the form of academic workshops and panels within the field of Kurdish studies. These discussions are surprisingly often marked by little to no efforts in explaining the contours and characteristics of the colonial situation in Kurdistan. This raises the question of how one can even begin to imagine decolonization without grasping the colonial reality. Here, I echo Ozlem Goner's position where she argues that "a rightful de-colonization of knowledge production about Kurdistan requires first the recognition of ongoing material colonization of the region, and second an organic engagement with movement theories and practices" (2023, 168). The idea of a decolonizing program or decolonizing knowledge for and about Kurdistan by building on an analysis of colonization of Kurdistan is the very methodology that we also find in the works of those who have thus far discussed colonialism and anticolonialism in Kurdistan. However, these works often offer a simple prescription to tackle colonization of Kurdistan, that is to say, autonomy or the formation of a Kurdish state (PKK 1978; Ghassemlou 1996; Beşikçi 2015).

In this chapter, I will focus on Abdullah Ocalan's theory and doctrine of democratic confederalism and argue that democratic confederalism can and should be viewed and interpreted as a decolonizing project as it explains liberation i.e., decolonization of the Kurds and other oppressed nations in terms of gradual disappearance of capitalist modernity and the nation-state as well as decolonizing the concept of the nation. Ocalan's new conception of liberation is built upon the understanding that hierarchy and domination are the root causes of oppression and

inequality; therefore, liberation is realized through establishing non-hierarchical and democratic structures and relations in human societies.

While decolonization was defined as forming a national and independent Kurdish state in the thoughts of the PKK leadership and Ocalan before the 2000s, democratic confederalism marks a departure from classical understandings of decolonization prevalent among the national liberation movements of the twentieth century. The latter found decolonization primarily in political independence from colonizers whereas democratic confederalism defines true decolonization as challenging and ending various forms of hierarchy and domination embodied in capitalism, nationalism, patriarchy and the destruction of nature. In what follows, I will first present an extensive discussion of Ocalan's earlier and recent conceptions of decolonization, and the reasons for the changes in Ocalan's thoughts on liberation and decolonization. Then, I will contextualize the idea of democratic confederalism in the recent debates around the nation-state and its relationship with colonization and decolonization as well as the possible contributions of democratic confederalism to these debates, which also encompasses a critical assessment of democratic confederalism's theoretical and practical limitations. The chapter will be concluded with a short discussion of democratic confederalism's significance for anti-colonial struggles around the world.

5.1. Decolonization in Young Ocalan's Thought

The final section of the founding *PKK Manifesto* discusses the party's vision and plan for the liberation of Kurdistan. Given the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the PKK at the time, Ocalan's and the PKK's solution for ending the colonization of Kurdistan was informed with Lenin's understanding of the right of nations to self-determination. Lenin believed and acted on a general principle that the working class must be freed from both class and national oppression

(Davis 1978), hence arguing that, "Victorious socialism must achieve complete democracy and, consequently, not only bring about the complete equality of nations, but also give effect to the right of oppressed nations to self-determination, i.e., the right to free political secession." (Lenin 1916, 19). In that vein, working class unity and international solidarity of workers entailed the recognition of the right of colonies and oppressed nations to be free from colonization and the yoke of oppressing nations.

In a separate party document, Ocalan states that

> We recognized the reality of our country as a colony and left the rest to Marxism-Leninism . . . We kept our independence and reached the stage for a written formulation of our theory. These are our own products, not copied. (cited in Akkaya 2012, 5)

This is perhaps the best description of the way in which Ocalan and the rest of PKK founders explained the nuances of the political reality of Kurdistan as a colony and articulated their plan to address the plights of the Kurds while making use of Marxist-Leninist analysis throughout.

In the *PKK Manifesto*, Ocalan defines national-democratic revolution aimed at creating an independent and democratic Kurdistan as the PKK's agenda for decolonization and liberation of the Kurds and Kurdistan. Since national oppression is the main reason for stalling the development of productive forces and cultural capacities and resources of the Kurds, according to Ocalan, the main contradiction in Kurdistan is national oppression whose resolution is a precondition for settling all other contradictions and issues. Therefore,

> Creating an independent Kurdistan is possible by eliminating the economic colonialism over Kurdistan's underground and surface resources, labor,

> agriculture, trade, finance and industry, [as well as] cultural and political colonialism that hinder development of language, history, culture, and social and political areas. (PKK 1978, 46)

Many Kurdish nationalist forces would be content with an independent Kurdistan alone, but since for Ocalan national and class or national and feudal contradictions are intertwined, the independence phase of the revolution must be accompanied by a democratic phase, that is, "the elimination of heavy feudal-comprador pressures on the social structure of Kurdistan" (PKK 1978, 46). In fact, by offering national-democratic revolution as a decolonizing project, Ocalan kills two birds with one stone; He rejects both orthodox Turkish Marxist and Kurdish nationalist politics that are oblivious to the particularities of the colonial situation in Kurdistan, including the intersection of class and national/racial oppressions, and their implications for emancipation and political struggles of the Kurds. He also rules out alternatives to national independence such as "regional autonomy", "federal unity", "language and cultural autonomy" (PKK 1978, 45-7) due to their reformist and reactionary nature and instead advocates an independent state as the only legitimate substantiation of the right of nations to self-determination.

The strategy and mechanics of carrying out the national-democratic revolution are shaped by a combination of Marxist-Leninist tenets and the specificities of the colonial situation as perceived by young Ocalan. In independent and advanced capitalist contexts, Ocalan argues, there are legal mechanisms put in place for the long process of organizing the masses. However,

> Since there is no possibility of legal work and organization in the colonies, it is imperative that the revolutionaries use ideological, political and military forms of struggle together in order to protect themselves, organize the people and render the colonial institutions inoperative. (PKK 1978, 45)

It then, much expectedly for a Marxist-Leninist politics, comes down to the vanguard party to bring these forms of struggle together and command the movement. Armed with a revolutionary ideology informed by "scientific socialism", Ocalan maintains that the political party leads a "national liberation front" and a "people's army" to the ultimate goal of decolonizing the Kurdish land and nation. This, Ocalan adds, does not obviate the need for the establishment of "mass organizations" of various segments of society such as workers, peasants, women and the youth so as to assure the survival and expansion of the entirety of the movement i.e. party, national front and its military wing (PKK 1978, 47). Young Ocalan is unequivocal about the class character of the national, democratic revolution, and knowing that Kurdish feudal chiefs were integrated into Turkish colonialism and in "the absence of a national bourgeois class", he defines a workers-peasants alliance as "the fundamental force" of this movement (PKK 1978, 48).

"The youth-intellectual stratum" and "urban petit bourgeois" constitute the primary allies of the Kurdistan Revolution, followed by "patriotic movements" across Kurdistan as well as "the revolutionary movements" of countries colonizing Kurdistan. But given the internationalist nature of the PKK's agenda, alliances potentially extend to nearly anyone with a progressive mind including "socialist countries, national liberation movements, the working-class movement in developed capitalist countries and all progressive humanity" (PKK 1978, 48). A political party with clear theory, goals and strategy is an indication of ripe subjective conditions to launch a national-democratic revolution, but Ocalan insists that this party must be ready to use violence as the use of force in anti-colonial struggles is unavoidable. Making distinction between progressive and reactionary violence, Ocalan argues that the violence against "foreign oppression and exploitation" is an all-time progressive form of violence (PKK 1978, 47). Therefore, the latter

form is what an anti-colonial revolutionary party uses because “the way for the development of colonial revolutions passes through hot war. If an organization with minimal organization in the colonies does not dare to develop a hot war, it will either dissolve or become an ‘intellectual chatter club’” (PKK 1978, 45). This hot war is not merely waged against direct colonizers of Kurdistan but it is simultaneously a war on both imperialism as well as Kurdish collaborators with colonizers since these two entities support colonialism.

The anti-imperialist element is also implicated in the fight against “Zionism, Kemalism and monarchism”, as Ocalan put it, for imperialism draws part of its influence in the Middle East through these political authorities (PKK 1978, 50). Ocalan envisions a socialist transition after the anti-colonial national-democratic revolution in Kurdistan accomplishes its mission, but as young Ocalan ambitiously holds, the Kurdistan Revolution itself, due to its geo-political position and its influence over neighboring countries, will be decisive in driving out imperialism from the region just as the Vietnamese Revolution did in Indochina (PKK 1978, 51). Fierce opposition and massive reactions from regional powers and imperialist forces to radical, political developments in any part of Kurdistan in later years proved Ocalan’s insight about the political significance of Kurdistan in the Middle East. The starkest example in recent years is the firm opposition of the United States, Iraq, Iran and Turkey to the independence referendum in Başur in 2017 when Kurds voted overwhelmingly— over 93%— in favor of secession from Iraq (Degli Esposti 2021).

Young Ocalan’s statist and revolutionary approach to decolonization overlapped in many ways with the decolonizing thought and practice of many leftist anti-colonial thinkers and movements of the twentieth century, though perhaps with stronger, accentuated Leninist overtones. One could see, for example, striking similarities to Fanon’s ideas in Ocalan’s model of

decolonization reflected in the 1978 *PKK's Manifesto* where he discusses entwined class and national oppressions embodied in colonial contexts whose decolonization requires a political and social revolution. Both figures' relentless critique of the devastating role of the comprador classes among the colonized and their complicity with the colonizers is hard to dismiss (Fanon 1963; PKK 1978). However, the anti-democratic nature of the state was hardly an issue for many anti-colonial revolutionaries of the twentieth century.

It is understandable that forming an independent state in a historical context where colonial ideologies framed the colonized people as incapable of ruling themselves and being sovereign was a political achievement. But this does not obviate the need for a critical stance on the role that the state plays in cementing and perpetuating hierarchies of power and status in society. It is more important to do so in post-independence contexts where states take an even greater role in addressing the damages inflicted on society by the former colonizers. The later Ocalan's version of decolonization deals specifically with the categories of nation and the state. For the young Ocalan, like many other anti-colonial thinkers and revolutionaries of the twentieth century, it was not the nation-state itself but the class or social group in charge that was a major concern. Therefore, doing away with the rule of propertied classes by a post-colonial state led by peasants and workers was seen as indicative of democracy and liberation. In that vein, Ocalan writes in the *PKK'S Manifesto*: "The elimination of oppression and exploitation by the feudal-comprador class ensures the emancipation of women, peasants, minorities, and the entire social structure" (PKK 1978, 46). This class-reductionist conception of national oppression, patriarchy and democracy was a prime obstacle in the way of developing a critical stance toward the nation-state model.

5.2. Democratic Confederalism: Decolonization in Later Ocalan's Thought

More than two decades after the release of the *PKK Manifesto*, Ocalan offers an alternative program of decolonization which, I shall argue, builds upon a new conception of liberation and a rejection of his earlier statist version of decolonization. However, this new project of decolonization or the paradigm shift did not come about overnight. It was the result of a historical process of leading a national liberation movement for over two decades. Contrary to the popular belief, especially among international sympathizers of the Kurdish movement, the shift in Ocalan's thinking did not occur during his imprisonment, nor was it merely shaped by his acquaintance with Murray Bookchin's ideas. The first signs of this shift appeared in the 1980s, particularly at the PKK's Third Congress, where Ocalan openly criticized the Soviet Union and its state-centred socialism for the first time (Akkaya 2020, 9). However, it was at the PKK's Fifth Congress that Ocalan made it clear that "real existing socialism", which in his view was a nineteenth-century socialism, with its focus exclusively on class struggle and national oppression was inadequate and insisted that socialism should be "democratic", "pluralistic", and "ecological" (Yegen 2016, 11-2). Therefore, he expressed a need for articulating a new conception of socialism. Moreover, Ocalan criticized "the fetishization of the state" in socialism and the fact that the establishment of a state had become an end in itself for socialists. (Akkaya 2020, 10). Already in the late 1990s and before his abduction in 1999, Ocalan was frustrated with how even socialist states turn against the interests of their people.

> No one can say that in the Soviet experience so many army and bureaucratic apparatuses were built up solely to protect them from US imperialism. No, ninety percent of it was developed against their own society. All these developments

were hidden from the Soviet society…And the result: corruption and decay.

(Ocalan 1999, 26)

Ironically enough, it was in prison and solitary confinement that Ocalan's critiques of real existing socialism and the state evolved to a systematic account of liberation and decolonization. In his prison writings, Ocalan proposes a roadmap for decolonization that while maintaining certain elements of his earlier anti-colonial stance, e.g. opposition to class and national oppression, radically problematizes the nation-state and underlines the incompatibility of liberation and the state. It also addresses two major issues often overlooked in anti-colonial struggles, that is, women's liberation and eco-friendly politics. There is no doubt that Bookchin's ideas had a direct impact on how Ocalan articulated his critique of the state, but Ocalan's creative encounter with Bookchin's insights must not be downplayed, particularly the ways in which he builds on Bookchin's thoughts to develop theoretical and political frameworks for the specific contexts he addresses in his writings. Therefore, a brief discussion of how Bookchin's thoughts impacted Ocalan's reformulation of decolonization is in order.

Bookchin's influence on Ocalan is most noticeable in his civilization narrative (Biehl 2012), tracing the historical trajectory of hierarchy and domination as the historical root-causes of the misery of human societies. Bookchin was specifically irritated by the lack of due attention to the importance of hierarchy in both Marxist and anarchist schools of thought.

> Just as the emergence of private property became society's 'original sin' in Marxian orthodoxy, so the emergence of the State became society's 'original sin' in anarchist orthodoxy. Even the early counterculture of the sixties eschewed the use of the term hierarchy and preferred to 'Question Authority' without exploring

> the genesis of authority, its relationship to nature, and its meaning for the creation of a new society. (Bookchin 1982, 2)

Bookchin was disillusioned with Marxism and anarchism but still maintained an anti-capitalist libertarian stance. He viewed domination of the natural environment by human beings as highly decisive in the creation of major social and political crises and since, in his view, the way in which every society treated nature was a reflection of the social structures and value systems of that society, it was the emergence of hierarchy in human societies that made nature an object of exploitation by humankind. This line of reasoning presupposes the existence of non-hierarchical societies in history; societies in Paleolithic and early Neolithic eras that Bookchin calls preliterate or organic societies.

It was out of the organic societies that, over time and in a dialectical process, the hierarchical societies came into being. Rooted in organic societies' divisions of labor, this process involved an alliance forged among male warriors, the elderly and the shamans. The warriors relied on their physical strength flourished by their hunting and fighting skills, and the old were motivated by their desire for security through offsetting their declining physical power with superior social positions while shamans used their religious authority to justify the domination of men over the rest of society (Bookchin 1982, 6). Although changing property relations and technical progress played a significant role in the emergence of hierarchy, it is clear that factors such as gerontology, communal representation and religious status weigh greatly in Bookchin's analysis.

> Rulership rested less on proprietorship, personal possessions, wealth, and acquisition—in short, the objects that confer power—than it did on the symbolic weight of status, communal representation, religious authority, and the

> disaccumulation of goods that the Neolithic village had hallowed. (Bookchin 1982, 73)

Hierarchy has evolved to tremendously sophisticated forms throughout the history of civilization and, in Bookchin's view, capital and the modern bureaucratic state are the most complex forms of evolution of hierarchy in history, and they are the biggest contributors to the destruction of both human societies and the natural environment. Ocalan adopts Bookchin's historical and theoretical account of the emergence and perpetuation of hierarchy and agrees with his idea that the true emancipation lies in putting an end to hierarchy and domination, which involves elimination of state and capitalism**,** as well as restoration of ecological and cooperative principles of organic societies. As Matin (2019) points out, while acknowledging the role of the alliance of male figures in the creation of hierarchical structures, Ocalan still remains faithful to an orthodox Marxist analysis of the rise of the state in history.

> While the neolithic age was based on an agrarian, sedentary revolution, civilised society is chiefly defined by reference to urbanisation and the creation of a state, the latter being based on the former. The reorganisation of human communities on unprecedented scale was made possible by the rise of formalised and hierarchical institutions in the economic basis of society and its conceptual superstructure – the centralised state. (Ocalan 2007, 14)

Furthermore, Ocalan deals strategically with Bookchin's theory in order to articulate a political program best suited for not only the liberation of the Kurds but also the realization of a free and egalitarian social and political system in the Middle East. Notable among his efforts to tailor Bookchin's theory to his political agenda was to foreground the social and political role of

women in forming a free and ecological society. In fact, Ocalan insists, without free women there can be no truly free and democratic society. But just like his mode of analysis regarding the Kurdish nation, Ocalan's essentialist conceptualization of identities is also at play in his theorization of women's subjugation or liberation. Ocalan maintains that women were controlling and distributing the limited surplus product of organic societies, or as he calls them the natural societies or "primordial socialism" of the Neolithic era, before the rise of statist civilization. This status of women stemmed from their natural power of giving birth and nurturing other members of society, and for this reason they were closer than men to nature. The woman-mother figures' administration of natural societies, according to Ocalan, was based on the principles of sharing and solidarity as opposed to ownership and force (Ocalan 2013, 61). Therefore, it was key for the establishment of hierarchical societies to subjugate and exploit women. This makes liberation of women so central to any emancipatory politics to the point that Ocalan believes that without free women there can be no truly free and democratic society.

> Freedom and equality cannot be realised without the achievement of gender equality. The most permanent and comprehensive component of democratisation is woman's freedom. The societal system is most vulnerable because of the unresolved question of woman; woman who was first turned into property and who today is a commodity; completely, body and soul. The role the working class have once played, must now be taken over by the sisterhood of women. So, before we can analyse class, we must be able to analyse the sisterhood of women – this will enable us to form a much clearer understanding of the issues of class and nationality. (Ocalan 2013, 52)

On its face, Ocalan's account suggests the primacy of gender over class in analyzing social relations of domination, but his overall approach advocates the co-constitutive relationship between the two as he contends that "class and sexual oppression develop together" (Ocalan 2013, 51), or "the ruling class character is formed concurrently with the dominant male character" (Ocalan 2013, 49). To dismantle patriarchy, or to kill the dominant male as Ocalan puts it, a new approach to women is required. While acknowledging the progressive role of feminism and its achievements for women, Ocalan maintains that feminism has not accomplished its mission due to lack of "a strong organizational base; inability to develop its philosophy to the full; and difficulties relating to a militant women's movement" (Ocalan 2013, 55).

Jineology— jin in Kurdish means woman— is what Ocalan offers as a new discourse of women's freedom; a social science whose fundamental assumptions are shaped by Ocalan's thoughts on women, and produces knowledge about women for the purpose of their liberation. Just as women are treated as a monolithic social group with no class, racial and national divides, Ocalan also deals with feminism as a singular body bereft of philosophical, ideological and political plurality. There is little evidence of engagement with feminist schools of thought in Ocalan's prison writings and this reality stems partly from the fact that these writings were penned under strict state surveillance with very limited access to sources. Its essentializing features notwithstanding, Jineology was instrumental in providing Kurdish women activists with "ideological and political tools" to fight the dominant masculine power relations within the Kurdish movement (Al-Ali & Kaser 2020, 4). Moreover, it should be emphasized that the Kurdish women's movement played a key role in challenging male dominance within the PKK both discursively and politically, and in fact Jineology grew out of "continuous discussions

among women cadres in the political and armed structures of the Kurdish Freedom Movement" (Al-Ali & Kaser 2020, 8). One can hardly deny the role of Jineology in fostering and promoting women's participation in politics and society in all PKK-affiliated movements and organizations. For instance, Kurdish women worked and fought tirelessly to establish a 40 percent women's quota in the leadership of all organizations within the Kurdish Freedom Movement. Besides, all executive positions must be shared by a man and a woman (Cagglayan 2020).

In Ocalan's civilization narrative, emergence of male domination accompanied by "housewifization of women" — a concept that Ocalan seems to have drawn from Maria Mies (2014) —signaled the introduction of the state in history and the institutionalization of hierarchical relations of political power. Identifying Mesopotamia as the birthplace of civilization, Ocalan calls Sumer the first state in history, which was formed following the agricultural revolution, creation of class society and the establishment of gender hierarchies (Ocalan 2007, 8). Ocalan is of the opinion that all states, despite real differences in the forms of governance, consolidate and perpetuate domination and inequality thanks to the monopoly of violence and concentration of political power in their hands. With the arrival of capitalism and industrialization in history, these repressive characteristics are even further aggravated in the modern state. "It is a fundamental aspiration of capitalist modernity to become a strong nation, in as much as a strong nation produces capital privilege, a comprehensive market, colonial opportunities and imperialism" (Ocalan 2016, 12). The nation-state is the specific political form of capitalist modernity which, according to Ocalan, "is the most developed unity of monopolies such as trade, industry, finance and power. One should also think of ideological monopoly as an indivisible part of the power monopoly" (Ocalan 2011, 10). Moreover, the nation-state is "the most developed organization of violence in social history" and the main reason, Ocalan argues,

for the unbridled and systematic violence in the modern nation-state is “the capitalist system’s tendency” for uninterrupted accumulation of capital and maximization of profit (Ocalan 2011, 15).

In his conceptual framework for true decolonization and liberation, Ocalan envisions the transition from capitalist modernity represented politically with the nation-state to democratic modernity whose political form is democratic confederalism. Ocalan defines democracy “as the self-governance of a non-state society. Democracy is governance that is not state; it is the power of communities to govern themselves without the state” (Ocalan 2017, 62). Democratic confederalism as an interrelated network of communes, people’s councils and grassroots organizations is that system of non-state self-governance that replaces the state. However, this replacement is not realized through toppling the state, but rather it is a process through which the extent and scope of state’s power and functions are restricted to the point where state becomes redundant (Ocalan 2017, 63). Therefore, “Neither total rejection nor complete recognition of the state is useful for the democratic efforts of the civil society. The overcoming of the state, particularly the nation-state, is a long-term process” (Ocalan 2011, 32). Democratic confederalism represents a society-oriented approach, as opposed to the state-oriented approach of nationalism and the nation-state, aiming at strengthening the society and people. The state will become irrelevant and will be disappearing “when democratic confederalism has proved its problem-solving capacities with a view to social issues” (Ocalan 2011, 32).

A democratic nation, in turn, represents a society deliberately organized in accordance with democratic confederalism. Unlike nations formed and created by modern states and nationalist doctrines, a democratic nation as Ocalan understands it is built by the will of free and equal individuals and communities that are unified through autonomous institutions run by the

people (Ocalan 2017, 21). It is not predicated on the kind of homogenization that rigid borders or a single culture and language imply. “It is a new type of nation that encompasses all cultural entities, from ethnicity to religion, from urban, local and regional to national communities formed through democratic autonomous political formations and its main political form: democratic confederalist implementations” (Ocalan 2017, 64). What sets apart a democratic nation from current nation-states is the principle of democratic autonomy which guarantees the self-governance of communities and institutions (Ocalan 2017, 30). While it is understood that all segments of society need to coordinate with one another, this coordination is not used as an excuse to remove people’s ability to manage the specifics of their own affairs. Individuals in a democratic nation, Ocalan argues, see their freedom in “the communality of society” and “the more functional life of small communities”, whereas in capitalist societies individuals are “bound to the sovereignty of money” and manipulated by “the wage system”, even though liberal individualism boasts of free individuals and denies the existence of society (Ocalan 2017, 33-4). Although Ocalan does not specifically discuss the question of sovereignty, drawing on the contrast he establishes here between the “the sovereignty of money” in capitalist political formations and the communal form of political life in democratic confederalism, one may deduce that in the latter society sovereignty lies in people or, more specifically, in people’s communes.

Ocalan also points out that democratic confederalism can be seen as “a system of the self defence of society” (Ocalan 2011, 28). For Ocalan, not only are nation-states born out of militarism and warfare, but they are also perpetuating the militarization of society; a process that in liberal democracies is only painted in “democratic and liberal colours” (Ocalan 2011, 28). However, self-defence of a society cannot be reduced to military apparatuses, Ocalan continues, and it is democratization in the form of “confederate networks” and “political awareness” of

society that provides a basis "to oppose the global domination of the monopolies and the nation-state militarism" (Ocalan 2011, 28). The spread of confederal networks beyond the recognized borders of the nation-states and forming "cross-border confederations" is also helpful provided that democratic confederalism is desired in the societies concerned (Ocalan 2011, 32). Nevertheless, while it is rather obvious and predictable that a radical project of decolonization provokes adversity on the side of colonizing states, not to mention global superpowers, Ocalan's democratic confederalism offers very little to tackle such adversities except for general recommendations on the necessity of preparing self-defence whether militarily or by extending confederate structures. Put simply, democratic confederalism lacks "a practicable concept of state building in periods of violent antagonism" (Oveisy 2019). Perhaps this problem was most conspicuous in the war situation of recent years in Rojava where "the territorial logic of war on ISIS" and "the battlefield of counterrevolution" intensified the centralization of decision-making and hierarchies of power (Oveisy 2019). It is fair to say that so far practical applications of democratic confederalism have been only possible where the authority of the central state has been significantly weakened (Rojava/Syria) or the political survival of a government has depended on the support of the political forces championing democratic confederal structures (Bakur/Turkey during the 2000s). Otherwise, it is highly unlikely that a nation-state would allow within itself the formation of a social-political system that challenges its very existence. Therefore, a weak or crisis-ridden state is required to open up space for the formation of a democratic-confederal system. Democratic confederalism, democratic autonomy and democratic nation constitute the political pillars of democratic modernity that comprise a free and egalitarian type of modernity. Ocalan describes this type of modernity, which he proposes to replace capitalist modernity, in the following terms:

> An economy free of monopolism, an ecology that signifies harmony with the environment, and a technology that is friendly to nature and humanity are the institutional bases of democratic modernity and thus the democratic nation. I have neither discovered nor invented democratic modernity. Democratic modernity, since the formation of official civilisation, has always existed as its counterpart in a dichotomy. (Ocalan 2017, 17)

Ocalan is acutely aware that nationalism and national liberation movements have been historically seen as avenues, or necessary steps, for decolonization of colonial subjects. For the most part in the twentieth century, anti-colonial struggles of colonized nations adopted nationalist ideologies to put an end to colonial rule inflicted on them by foreign entities. Therefore, nationalism was viewed as a liberating doctrine and an antidote to colonialism per se. However, as the term neo-colonialism suggests, even successful national liberation movements that led to the establishment of sovereign, national states did not succeed in abolishing the colonial relations. Although neo-colonial and exploitative economic relations between newly established nation-states in the Global South and their former colonizers meant that the economic system and policies of the former were "directed from outside" (Nkrumah 1965, 4), nationalist ideas and establishments did not necessarily prevent the reproduction of colonial relations as well as class, political, racial and gender oppression within the newly formed nation-states.

Against this backdrop, in his prison writings, Ocalan argues that forming a Kurdish state as a solution for the national oppression of the Kurds, a political agenda that Ocalan and the P.K.K fought for over two decades, is neither viable nor desired as it elicits enormous opposition

from multiple state colonizers, and it reproduces the repressive qualities of the nation-state such as hierarchy of nationalities/ethnicities, patriarchy and class society. Therefore, he states that

> Without opposition against the capitalist modernity there will be no place for the liberation of the peoples. This is why the founding of a Kurdish nation-state is not an option for me. The call for a separate nation-state results from the interests of the ruling class or the interests of the bourgeoisie but does not reflect the interests of the people since another state would only be the creation of additional injustice and would curtail the right to freedom even more. The solution to the Kurdish question, therefore, needs to be found in an approach that weakens the capitalist modernity or pushes it back. (Ocalan 2011, 19)

The effects of such an approach, in Ocalan's eyes, go beyond the Kurdish society. Given "the geostrategic situation of the Kurdish settlement area", accomplished democratic projects in Kurdistan "promise to advance the democratization of the Middle East in general" (Ocalan 2011, 20). Taking account of the striking diversity of nations and ethnicities in the Middle East in general and in the countries where the Kurds are located in particular, Ocalan foregrounds the recognition and equal status of all ethnicities as a necessary democratic component in his proposed framework for liberation. In fact, Ocalan does not view the liberation of the Kurds separately from the rest of the Middle East. Thus, he maintains that

> Middle East suffers from a democracy deficit. Thanks to the geostrategic situation of the Kurdish settlement area successful Kurdish democratic projects promise to advance the democratization of the Middle East in general. Let us call this democratic project democratic confederalism. (Ocalan 2011, 20)

5.3. Decolonization and the Nation State: Ocalan's Contributions

It is fair to say that the young Ocalan, the author of the *PKK Manifesto* in the late 1970s, represents the mentality of national liberation movements of the twentieth century, whereas the Ocalan of the 2000s who came up with the notion of democratic confederalism personifies a new conception of decolonization for the 21st century. While the former defined decolonization primarily in terms of forming an independent nation-state, for the latter it was a democratic alternative i.e., the very rejection of the nation-state that informed true decolonization. In addition to his criticisms of the state as a fundamentally anti-democratic entity and his insistence on redefining the nation, Ocalan puts forth democratic confederalism as an alternative political formation that eventually replaces the nation-state. "The democratic autonomous way of governance is the foremost condition of becoming a democratic nation. In this regard, it is the alternative to the nation-state" (Ocalan 2017, 22). Moreover, now the question of gender oppression and the necessity of women's liberation has become indispensable to his anti-colonial thought. Ocalan stresses that "It should not be forgotten that the most comprehensive and permanent component of democratisation is women's freedom" (Ocalan 2016, 65).

The fundamental shift in Ocalan's thought regarding decolonization and liberation; however, does not rule out continuities in his analytical and normative ideas in relation to colonialism and anti-colonial thought and practice. The later Ocalan remains consistent in his thoughts on the contours of colonization of Kurdistan and the structural class and national oppression involved (Ocalan 2012, 18). Even more striking is the persisting emphasis on political solidarity and alliances in bringing about a free and egalitarian society. This was certainly the case with the young Ocalan in the heyday of the PKK as a classical national liberation movement when he underscored alliances and even joint struggles of the oppressed

classes and nations (PKK 1978, 48-50). That line of thought is still strongly present in Ocalan's thought and, in fact, has mutated to a constitutive element of his proposed political formation for a truly post-colonial society i.e. the idea of a democratic nation characterized by the diversity of cultures and identities. This latter point concerns the decolonization of the nation which deserves further explication.

Along with the rejection of the state, decolonizing the nation reflected in the concept of the democratic nation is a key defining aspect of Ocalan's new decolonization. The idea of decolonizing the nation is not unique to Ocalan as interrogating the concept of the nation or introducing alternative conceptions of the nation (Ashcroft 2009) are very contemporary to Ocalan. Yet, the novelty of Ocalan's contribution lies in the fact that in his capacity as a political leader, he comes up with a new conception of the nation as an integral component of the whole process of a true decolonization. For, colonization is not merely a matter of establishing exploitative relations and apparatuses, but it also involves defining the colonized and ruling them (Mamdani 2012). Therefore, a decolonizing project must include concepts and definitions that problematize and replace the colonial discursive constructions of the colonized. Regarding the nation, Ocalan (2016) states that

> the understanding that binds the nation to a common language, culture, market or history is descriptive of [unique to] nation-states and cannot be generalized, that is, it cannot be reduced to a single understanding of the nation. This understanding of nation, which was also acknowledged by real socialism, is the opposite of the democratic nation. (22)

Thus, he puts forth an alternative conception of the nation in contrast to what the nation-state stands for: "While the state's nation pursues homogenised society, the democratic

nation mainly consists of different collectivities. It sees diversity as richness. Life itself is only possible through diversity" (Ocalan 2016, 25). It is a known fact now that in their colonial enterprises, European colonizers defined and created nations in their colonies through politicizing ethnicities and even tribes (Mamdani 2020). However, Ocalan's democratic nation is in fact framed through reversing and undoing the colonial conceptualization of the nation, hence decoupling the nation from the nation-state. A democratic nation is not identified with a single ethnicity or cultural entity but the free coalescing of different collectivities which are bound together by autonomously formed political and social institutions. Therefore, while both the nation of the nation-state and the democratic nation are politically constructed entities, the former is woven together by cultural elements such as ethnicity, language or religion whereas the latter is threaded by a political mechanism. As Ocalan puts it, "the democratic nation is not content with a common mindset and culture – it is a nation that unifies and governs all its members in democratic autonomous institutions. This is its defining quality" (Ocalan 2017, 22).

It is unclear how Ocalan theoretically defines diversity and differences, and he seems to be accepting identities as expressed by individuals without questioning the colonial construction of some national or ethnic identities. However, given his notion of democratic nation, belonging or citizenship in this nation is not based on cultural, ethnic, gender or sexual identities but rather membership in an autonomously and democratically formed communal structure. Participation of people in these communal structures and processes of decision-making consolidates direct democracy as opposed to hierarchical levels of decision-making in representative and liberal democracies, even if the more radical variants of them such as civic nationalism and constitutional patriotism are concerned. In fact, although for

these liberal perspectives the nation is also inclusive and membership in it is rights-based and centered on political allegiance (Brubaker 1992; Ignatieff 1993) as well as loyalty to universal norms and democratic principles (Habermas 1996) rather than ethnicity or descent, it is the emphasis on an ongoing process of participatory democracy as constitutive of democratic nation that distinguishes the concept of democratic nation from them. "The stronger the participation the more powerful is this kind of democracy. While the nation-state is in contrast to democracy, and even denies it, democratic confederalism constitutes a continuous democratic process" (Ocalan 2011, 26-27).

What remains unclear about Ocalan's thoughts on the concept of nation is that while the inclusive character of the democratic nation suggests an alternative to, or a negation of, the exclusive understanding of the nation centered on common culture and ethnicity- he still sticks with a primordial conception of the nation when he refers to the Kurds and their supposedly centuries-old history as a nation. This paradox in Ocalan's thoughts is further aggravated by the imprecise contours of the democratic nation. In other words, how can an exclusive entity like nation become so inclusive all the while that it maintains its nationness? For this reason, a term such as democratic society seems more appropriate as the alternative that Ocalan has in mind for the nation of the nation-state. Further, Ocalan's account is silent on the fate of national entities, including the Kurdish nation, within the frameworks of the democratic nation and democratic confederalism and whether they wither away eventually.

It is important to note that, in Ocalan's formulation, decolonizing the nation must be accompanied by gradual weakening and disappearance of the state (Ocalan 2020). Unlike anti-colonial positions that are critical of the nation-state but are content with a state without a nation (Mamdani 2020), for Ocalan, a truly emancipatory and democratic solution requires fizzling out

the state. Mamdani's analysis sheds light on the role of the nation-state in creating colonial relations by building a nation or a majority and "the making of permanent minorities and their maintenance through the politicization of identity" (Mamdani 2020, 18). However, his suggested alternative of "replacing the nation-state with the mere state" (Mamdani 2020, 330) or decoupling the state from the nation limits the gruesome reality of colonialism to mere politicization of identities and overlooks the role of the state in bolstering and perpetuating hierarchical relations as well as facilitating economic exploitation and the rule of capital. By facilitating the free movement of capital while establishing strict regimes of border and immigration controls, the nation-states of post WWII, in particular, have produced enormous violence including forced displacements, land grabs, massacres and genocides (Sharma 2020).

Arguing from a similar position, Ocalan tends to see the relationship between capital and the nation-state as more structural. "Without an organisation of violence like the nation-state, the laws of capitalist accumulation could not operate and industrialism could not be maintained" (Ocalan 2011, 15). As a result, Ocalan's plan to counter the nation-state from a decolonizing perspective is to question both categories of the state and the nation, and offer alternative political formations, that is, democratic confederalism and democratic nation. Instead of statism and committing to take over the state institutions, as did many national liberation movements as well as real existing socialism and social democracy, "seeking institutional political power instead of putting their focus on the democratization of the society" (Ocalan 2012, 29), Ocalan puts forward a society-oriented approach.

It is fair to argue that in the later Ocalan, decolonization or liberation becomes inseparable from democracy, hence his insistence on the democratic qualifier in categories and concepts such as democratic modernity, democratic confederalism, democratic nation

and democratic autonomy, signifying non-hierarchical social formations and relations. Viewed as a decolonizing framework, democratic confederalism could be framed as democratic decolonization as well. It is a type of decolonization that liberates the colonized (women, colonial society, nature) by building an infrastructure that guarantees the rule of people through free, voluntary, and non-hierarchical participation and self-organization of people. This implies that democratic decolonization, or any democratic movement for that matter, must embody and practice their democratic principles from the very beginning. This is essential to prevent them from inadvertently perpetuating the very forms of domination they aim to dismantle. It is a process that seeks to consolidate the rule by the people or demos just as the word democracy in its Greek origin meant. In doing so, it is not going to replace the colonial state with another state in any shape and form but to eventually, though gradually, replace the state per se. Therefore, it is always, to borrow from Miguel Abensour (2011), "against the state". The society-oriented approach of democratic decolonization hence entails expansion and penetration of democratic ethos and practice into every aspect of societal relations and structures so that all forms of domination and hierarchy, above all capitalism and patriarchy, are dealt with the same way as the state.

The idea of decolonization as putting an end to domination and hierarchies is reminiscent of how decolonization from coloniality of power is envisioned after all as "the process of social liberation from all power organized as inequality, discrimination, exploitation, and as domination" (Quijano 2010, 32). In fact, coloniality of power in the sense of power creating social discriminations and hierarchies is also implied in Ocalan's civilizational narrative. However, whereas coloniality of power in the decoloniality school is an exclusively modern phenomenon emerging since 1492, for Ocalan that power has a much

longer history, dating back to the emergence of statist civilization in Mesopotamia and becoming only more developed and complex with the arrival of capitalist modernity.

Ocalan's project of decolonization and his critique of the nation-state would be much richer if he had included a detailed discussion of the relationship between race, class and nationalism, given the central role of racialization in the construction of Kurds as colonized people. Ocalan's project of decolonization, and this is also the case with his earlier version expressed in the *PKK Manifesto*, suffers from the absence of an account of deep-seated and institutional anti-Kurdish racism, and how specifically decolonization intends to address it. Furthermore, for an explicitly anti-capitalist social and political formation, Ocalan offers little outline of what the political economy of democratic confederalism looks like. In fact, he seems increasingly uninterested in discussing alternative economic structures and doubts that such discussions are even meaningful (De Jong 2016). Ocalan prescribes a cooperative economy but it is unclear how this economy manages to survive within a global capitalist system in an age of hegemonic neoliberalism. Without a clear outline of an economy alternative to capitalism, which is a challenge for the entire global Left and not just Ocalan or democratic confederalism, the exploitative nature of capitalism can be readily reproduced. Yet, until such an alternative is designed and implemented, the democratic structures of decision-making in democratic confederalism, as a way of affirming people's self-determination, could at least curtail the destructive functions of the state in maintaining the permanent instrumentalization of the economy and resources of certain territories and populations for the benefit of others. The failure of Ocalan's project to provide compelling answers smacks of a wider theoretical blindness to the effects of "the international" on the actual workings of democratic confederalism. Put differently,

Ocalan fails to address the ways in which "international and geopolitical factors" impact the character and practice of the political and social formations that he discusses (Matin 2019).

Ocalan's thorough critique of the nation-state, which argues for fizzling out the state, redefining the nation and replacing the nation-state with democratic confederalism, contributes significantly to the growing literature on the colonial features of the nation-state. And politically, Ocalan's decolonizing project of democratic confederalism could offer new insights and political horizons for decolonization particularly in the context of national colonialism where minoritized nations and populations struggle for freedom and equality. As a way of concluding this chapter, a brief discussion of the implications of democratic confederalism for decolonizing projects and anti-colonial struggles of our time is in order.

As democratic confederalism aims at preventing hierarchical relations and structures, democratic autonomy coupled with the practice of self-organizing provides some maneuvering space for social and political subjects belonging to various groupings (national/ethnic, gender-based, sexual, religious). In that vein, they could have a minimum democratic power and organizational means to not only protect themselves from deep-seated oppressive discourses and practices, which in many so-called post-colonial states continue to persist, but also mobilize and advance their own agenda in pursuing equality and freedom. Further, democratic autonomy will help to forge a platform for these marginalized and minoritized groups so that their concerns would not become relegated in the face of other issues such as national unity, political independence and the fight against imperialism that historically in anti-colonial struggles have been deemed primary and used opportunistically to clamp down on revolutionary and radical aspirations of the oppressed social groups. More importantly, democratic confederalism is strategically promising for decolonization in cases of national colonialism. The colonized

community in the contexts of national colonialism is minoritized and must take up a state and the majority of the population, which often have identical ethnicity and vehemently outweigh the colonized in numbers and resources. Against this backdrop, pursuing an independent state is often synonymous with political suicide as it unites the majority against a perceived threat of separatism and territorial disintegration, whereas a politics of liberation centered on the solidarity and equality of nations is capable of rallying the support of oppressed classes and social groups of other nations, including the dominant nation. All in all, despite its shortcomings, Ocalan's project of decolonization not only can be appealing to many colonized and oppressed people for its democratizing character but it can also offer them a political vision and platform to institutionalize and consolidate their emancipatory achievements.

Conclusion

This PhD dissertation has introduced the concept of national colonialism to analyze colonialism in the nation-state form. Given the theoretical limitations of the concept of internal colonialism, falling short of delineating the role of nationalism and nation-building in shaping colonial relations, national colonialism foregrounds the ways in which the formation and maintenance of nations contribute to the colonization of national minorities in the nation-states. Defining colonial relations as racially informed political subjugation and economic exploitation, I argue that the nation-state and nationalist politics universally lead to the colonization of the periphery by the core provided that the state is strong enough and capable of overcoming possible internal or external opposition to its colonial domination. This conceptualization also interrogates the dichotomy of internal and external colonialisms by identifying colonial relations as a set of specific social and political relations of domination that can be formed by colonizers inside or outside of their territory. Therefore, national colonialism as a new concept is an addition to the studies of colonialism and the field of post-colonial studies.

More specifically on nationalism, the studies of nationalism and ethnicity could benefit from using the concept of national colonialism for further theoretical and empirical exploration of interactions between colonialism and nationalist politics. Although nation-building and nationalist ideology of states have already been identified in the literature on nationalism as contributing to the establishment and perpetuation of colonial relations, national colonialism offers an analytical tool to comprehend and analyze the specific structural processes and arrangements in the nation-state that lay the ground for colonial formations.

Conceptualizing national colonialism transpired as it seemed startling to many to specifically call the oppression of the Kurds colonial, or to describe as such any contemporary and ongoing instances of colonization where the colonizer is a non-western entity. This was often the case when I would discuss this research project with people belonging to nations colonizing the Kurds. And it was disheartening as some of them were well-read individuals, yet they had hardly even heard of the recent literature on colonialism, let alone the concept of internal colonialism. It was not difficult to detect a strong temporal quality ingrained to their understanding of colonialism, limiting colonialism to pre-world war-II era. The uneasiness they displayed at the association between their nationality and colonialism was also usually impossible to ignore. It is likely that the concept of national colonialism is received similarly by that type of audience. This anticipation was among the reasons to provide empirical evidence about the colonization of Kurdistan, although these empirical details about Kurdistan are primarily intended to substantiate the theoretical claims of the concept of national colonialism. They also showcase the shortcomings of existing concepts in explaining colonialism within the nation-state form and demonstrate the advantages of using the concept of national colonialism to explicate colonial relations of the core and periphery within national borders. The example of Kurdistan displays a wide range of colonial methods involved in national colonialism in all four parts of divided Kurdistan, and how nation-building, nationalism and uneven capitalist development pave the way for colonization. While a notable body of work has been produced analyzing the oppression of the Kurds as a case of colonization, the concept of national colonialism can further broaden the scope of Kurdish studies by providing conceptual tools that can help with explaining the Kurdish question more rigorously.

Every case study of colonization, I argue, must be accompanied by a discussion of decolonization and anti-colonial thought and practice in that context lest the colonized be portrayed as merely passive recipient of colonial oppression. Thus, how decolonization has been historically imagined by the Kurds has formed a major theme of this dissertation, although Abdullah Ocalan's theory and program of democratic confederalism was foregrounded as it offers the most theoretically sophisticated decolonizing perspective in the Kurdish context. Notwithstanding its limitations, if viewed as democratic decolonization, Ocalan's democratic confederalism is a significant contribution to studies of decolonization.

Writing this PhD dissertation also opened up new avenues in my mind for further research. While investigating the theoretical relationship between nationalism and colonial relations, I was tempted to delve deeper into the causal- historical and ideological- links between nation-building and modern colonialism proper. Given the theoretical focus of my work, doing so risked constituting a significant digression. The question of whether modern colonialism was historically and ideologically a product of nation-building or vice versa, although it has already been addressed (Bhambra 2007; Mamdani 2020) to some extent, still deserves further research.

From the outset, I approached this research as a theoretical investigation. In the end, the evidence I have presented strikes me as both convincing and reasonably sufficient, and I hope readers will find it equally compelling. Building on the theoretical premises of this dissertation, more empirical research still can, and perhaps should, be carried out, adding to the findings of this research and, in some regards, further substantiating its claims. Throughout carrying out this research project, I faced hurdles in accessing state policies and statistical data in certain areas of the research. Whereas a large volume of secondary sources on Turkey was helpful, data on governmental cultural policies and economic indexes regarding the Kurdish regions of Iran, Iraq

and Syria were less accessible. In the case of Iraq, online official statistical data were also nearly non-existent. Therefore, there is still space for more statistical data and archival research on Başûr, Rojava and Rojhelat. As a political refugee from Iran, I am unable to travel there and there are still security concerns regarding the politically volatile Iraq and Syria. My hope is that if conditions allowed, this part of research will be done by myself or any interested researcher.

Building on the analysis of Iranian racial hierarchy in this dissertation, for a variety of reasons, a separate and comprehensive study of racial order in Iran is overdue. Denial of discursive and institutional racism against national minorities and ethnicities in Iran is still pervasive even among Iranian intellectuals and academics (e.g. Ansari 2017; Katouzian 2009; Milani 2010). This leaves a wide gap in the studies of modern Iran as well as racial orders in the Global South. All this is unlike Turkey where a growing critical scholarship (Ergin 2008a, 2008b, 2014; Gokay & Hamourtziadou 2016; Saracoglu 2009; Xypolia 2016) on Turkish racism and racial order has been produced in recent years. Besides, given the complex set of strategies deployed on both the state and societal levels for racist exclusion of highly diverse non-Persian minoritized national and ethnic groups in Iran, extensive research of policies and popular culture is necessary. Equally important research projects are expected on Arab racism as well.

Last but not least, the universal character of national colonialism as argued in this PhD dissertation indicates that similar colonial dynamics across the world can be explained using this concept. Prominent examples include, but are not limited to, Baluchistan, Western Sahara, Basque, Tibet and Eelam Tamils. Further research is necessary to determine the applicability of national colonialism in these contexts. Studying these cases comparatively is another way of conducting research which could also reveal how different histories and geopolitical factors would impact the applicability or the actual dynamics of national colonialism in these cases. In

addition, although I was initially inclined to separate settler colonialism and national colonialism as distinct types of colonialism, I no longer have any reasons to see them strictly as mutually exclusive. In other words, while the formation of settler-colonial societies in the age of empires, for example in the Americas, may not be considered as national colonialism, it is quite possible to explain later examples such as Palestine in terms of national colonialism, too. That is another avenue for research which deserves exploring.

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