Kurds in Dark Times

New Perspectives on Violence and Resistance in Turkey

Edited by

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The Making of Coloniality in Turkey

Racialization of Kurds in a Working-Class District in Istanbul between 1950 and 1980

Güllistan Yarkın

This chapter focuses on the "racialization of Kurds" in the working-class district Zeytinburnu in Istanbul between 1950 and 1980. It examines the subordination and racialization of Kurdish migrant workers as an effect of the colonial relationship that the Turkish state formed with Northern Kurdistan[1] despite the lack of such official status (Beşikci 1990; Duruiz 2020; Yarkın 2019). Workers' experiences of the unequal division of labor informed by racialized ideologies and practices help us trace the effects in Zeytinburnu of Turkish colonial domination in Northern Kurdistan. Based on workers' testimonies, the chapter analyzes how racism and coloniality are reproduced outside Kurdistan—in particular how the Turkish colonial imaginary negates, oversimplifies, essentializes, insults, subordinates, and dehumanizes Kurdish workers.

My analysis draws on the literature that explains racism in connection with the historical processes of colonization—conquest, enslavement, peonage, indentured servitude, and colonial or neocolonial labor immigration

1. I use "Northern Kurdistan" (Bakurê Kurdistanê) in reference to the contemporary Kurdish regions. These regions were historically also the land of Armenian and Assyrian people, who were erased from the region by the Turkish state forces. Many Turkish, Kurdish, Circassian, and other non-Turkish Muslim civilians also participated in the genocide.

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(Bonilla-Silva 1997, 471; Cox 2000, 72; Fanon 1963; Jordan 2000; Omi and Winant 1994, 55–56; Quijano and Wallerstein 1992; Wallerstein 1991). Racism emerged to legitimize the conquest and exploitation of colonized people and to serve the needs of capitalist modes of production and different forms of labor domination (Bonacich 1972; Cox 2000; Hall 2019; Quijano and Wallerstein 1992; Rex 1986; Wallerstein 1991; Wolpe 1986). Colonial subjects are dehumanized and portrayed as biologically and culturally inferior (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Grosfoguel 1999; Miles and Brown 2003; Solomos 2003). Colonization oversimplified the culture of the conquered people and negated their national existence by expropriation, enslavement, and abolishment of natives' customs (Fanon 1959, 1963). Although the term *colonialism* generally refers to the oppressive relationship in history, the term *coloniality* indicates its continuing forms today. As the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano (2000) argues, social discrimination as well as racial, political, and economic hierarchical relations persist in contemporary societies as living legacies of colonialism. This chapter traces how persisting Turkish colonialism in Northern Kurdistan emerges as coloniality in an Istanbul district and informs the racialization of Kurdish workers.

Given that the Turkish state constitutionally denies the existence of non-Turks living within the borders of Turkey, there are no official statistics about the housing, education, or employment conditions of Kurds, nor do periodic population surveys collect information on ethnicity. Notwithstanding the challenges of conducting research in the context of a lack of comprehensive data, the analysis here is built on a mixed-methods approach, including archival records, oral histories, in-depth interviews, focus-group discussions, and ethnographic observations.

During fieldwork from June 2014 to March 2017, I conducted open-ended, in-depth interviews with ninety Kurds, eighty Turks, and ten Albanians—workers, retired workers, housewives, wholesalers, retailers, and students in Zeytinburnu. Only half of the interviewees have direct experience of the period from 1950 to 1980 that this chapter focuses on, but the narratives of even the younger interviewees provided valuable insight into the memory of the district's past.

This chapter contains five sections. The first lays out the colonial background of Kurds and Kurdistan, connecting Ottoman rule and then

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the modern Turkish Republic's rule in colonial domination of Northern Kurdistan. The second section focuses on Zeytinburnu to examine the urban development and ethnic formation of the district. The third reflects on the biological and cultural aspects of the racialization of Kurds in Zeytinburnu. The fourth focuses specifically on Alevi Kurds and examines how their religious difference from the dominant Sunni Muslim majority intensifies stigmatization and exclusion. The fifth section displays how the subordinate position of Alevi and Sunni Kurdish workers is produced and reproduced in the labor market in Zeytinburnu.

The Colonial Background of Kurds and Kurdistan in Turkey

Since the fifteenth-century conquest of the capital city of the Roman Empire by the Ottoman Turks, Istanbul (Constantinople) has become one of the most important Muslim Turkish–dominated cities of the world. Under the Ottomans, Muslim, non-Muslim, Turkish, and non-Turkish communities lived together in the religiously and ethnically hierarchical social millet system. Sunni Muslim Kurdish settlement in Istanbul started in the fifteenth century along with the Turkish Muslim occupations of Christian lands (Çelik 2005, 142), and the Sunni Muslims' movement to Istanbul later increased in the nineteenth century in conjunction with the Ottoman state's modern colonial policies in the Kurdish regions that led to out-migration.

Until the nineteenth century, the Kurdish region had a semiautonomous status in the empire and was governed by local Kurdish tribal leaders. Sometime in the nineteenth century, the Ottoman elites adopted the European colonial approach toward the empire's periphery (Deringil 2003, 311–28; Klein 2011, 15–16; Powell 2003). In what Selim Deringil calls "borrowed colonialism," the Ottoman elites began to view the nomads and tribes as "savage." They recommended that these "savage" people needed to be civilized through political and economic intervention, which would be facilitated by means of local tribal leaders' loyalty to and cooperation with the state. For this intervention, it was crucial to build state buildings, courts of law, military outposts, and roads in these regions (2003, 311–28). According to Edhem Eldem, the Ottoman state consolidated the

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homogeneity of the "core regions of the empire"—namely, the Anatolian Peninsula and the eastern regions of Thrace—within a proto-nationalist vision, pushing the Arab provinces to become the "peripheral regions" of the empire (2000, 223). Experiencing the impact of the change in the Ottoman state, Kurdish provinces were also transformed into colonial regions of the empire. Hence, the historically semiautonomous status of Kurds was eliminated entirely, and their right to self-determination was eradicated through Ottoman policies (Alakom 2011, 25–26; Özoğlu 2004)

Kurds were predominantly an agrarian population and thus adversely affected by the political, economic, and cultural destruction visited upon their regions through colonialism. Many were forced to become colonial migrants in Istanbul. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these migrants became part of Istanbul's labor force, doing low-skill, low-wage, and less desired jobs. They worked mostly as porters, living in poverty and working in harsh conditions (Alakom 2011, 70–174; Serfiraz 2016). At the time, the Ottoman state recognized Kurds as part of the millet system and constructed Kurdish migrants as a colonial-racialized minority in the dominant Turkish imaginary. Many idioms and proverbs pertaining to Kurds in the Turkish language and in Turkish literature testify to this colonial-racialized image of them: for instance, "You cannot make a fur from a bear, a friend from a Kurd" (Ayıdan post Kürtten dost olmaz); "the God of a Kurd and a dog is the same" (Kürt ile itin Allahı birdir); and "a donkey called Kurdish did not eat food for forty years" (Eşeğe Kürt demişler eşek kırk yıl yem yememiş) (Alakom 2010).

After the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, the colonial imaginary about Kurdistan and its people continued, this time to assimilate them into the Turkish nation in the making. Official top-secret reports recommended that the name "Kurdistan" and "Kurds" be replaced with the geographical markers "the East" and "easterners." Through boarding schools, forced-settlement policies, and national disciplining in the military service, the state sought to eliminate Kurdish nationalism and Kurdish nationalists and to assimilate Kurds into Turkish society (Bayrak 1994; Yayman 2011).

In 1925, for instance, Prime Minister İsmet İnönü's Eastern Reform Plan proposed that a public inspector should rule Kurdistan in a "colonial

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way," and the plan went into effect that year (Bozarslan 2004, 64). Similarly, another state official, the Turkish general inspector Avni Doğan, suggested in a report in 1943 that "the settlement of the republic in the East" was akin to "the settlement of civilized nations in Africa." He urged his fellow statesmen to consider: "Who dares to argue that we lack something in us that [is possessed by] the civilized nations settling in Africa[,] where the weather conditions are worse than Diyarbakir?" (quoted in Yayman 2011, 155).

In contemporary Turkey, the Kurds are equal citizens on paper. However, in reality they are denied their most basic human and citizenship rights, such as access to public education in their mother tongue, equality before the law, and equal political participation. One of the freedoms they possess has been labor mobility within Turkey. This mobility is important to the state not only because it provides a reserve army of labor for Turkish agriculture and industries but also because migration has been beneficial for the Turkish state's assimilationist policies. Since the 1980s, the Turkish state has forcefully displaced around 3 million Kurds (Barut 2002), with many of them migrating to Turkish cities in the West or South, mostly Istanbul. Such migration has significantly increased since the 1990s due to forced Kurdish village evacuations by the military with the auspicious intent to eliminate the Kurdish guerrilla movement known as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê, PKK).

Urban Development and Ethnic Formation of Zeytinburnu

As one of the oldest working-class districts of Istanbul, Zeytinburnu—its name meaning "Cape of Olive"—is located in the European part of the city, at the seaside on the northern Marmara coast. Throughout Ottoman history, it served as the site of tanneries, an industry often located on the urban margins owing to the foul smell it produces, and was populated by the poorest sections of the immigrant population to the city. In the late nineteenth century, in addition to tanneries, other industrial sites producing iron, gunpowder, and weaponry were also constructed in Zeytinburnu (Özvar 2006, 70–72). Zeytinburnu continued to be the most crucial leather-production site in republican Turkey. At the same time, it

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also became more industrialized, especially with the expansion of manufacturing between the 1950s and the 1980s, when 325 new factories producing textiles, food, metal, paper, rubber, plastic, chemicals, electrical motors, and medicine were constructed (Akbulut 2006, 383–84; Akçay 1974, 304–27).

Despite the development of industrial areas, until the 1950s Zeytinburnu by and large remained an agricultural site in which nearly all the land belonged to the state (Kaya 2004, 90). Starting from the 1950s, Istanbul received massive rural-to-urban migration from different parts of the Balkans, Anatolia, and Northern Kurdistan. Because the state did not regulate the urban infrastructure processes and did not meet the housing needs of the rural migrants, the housing shortage became one of the most severe urban problems in Istanbul and other major cities (Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2013, 111). Under these conditions, most of the rural migrants illegally occupied the unused public lands by building makeshift single-story houses called *gecekondu* (literally "built at night") near the factories (Keleş 1972). Zeytinburnu experienced the same transformation. The first *gecekondu*s were made of wood, package box, tin, mud brick, and linoleum (Kaya 2004, 93), and they had no water, no electricity, no roads, no sewers (Zürcher 2012, 327–30). Later, stone, brick, glass, cement, and building tile were used (Kaya 2004, 93). By 1963, more than 40 percent of the district's population were factory workers, 17 percent were self-employed, and 13 percent were state officials (Hart 1969, 67).

From 1945 to 1965, the population of the district rose from 8,970 to 102,874, and in 1980 its population reached 124,543 (İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi 2005; Kaya 2004). The district's new residents were from diverse ethnic backgrounds, including Turks, Albanians, Kurds, Bosniaks, and Pomaks (Kaya 2004, 90), but, according to a survey in 1963, more than 50 percent of the population were Turkish migrants from the Balkans, and a small group was from Central Asia (Çakırer 2012, 90–122). The rest of the population originated from within the borders of modern Turkey.[2]

2. Accordingly, the percentages of migrants' place of origin were the following: Black Sea region (23.7 percent), eastern Anatolia region (6.2 percent), central Anatolia region (5.6 percent), Thrace (4.5 percent), Marmara region (3 percent), Aegean region (1.7

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Kurdish migrants from Northern Kurdistan—whom the state officially referred to euphemistically as "migrants from eastern and southeastern Anatolia"[3]—composed a small minority (7.4 percent). In the district's Sunni Muslim Turkish-majority population, the Kurds and the Albanians constituted the two significant non-Turkish Sunni and Alevi minority groups. Although a small number of Greeks and Armenians also lived in the district, most of them left it following the Istanbul pogrom in 1955.

Turkish and Albanian migrants from the Balkans were identified as *muhajir*s (Tanc 2001, 49). The term *muhajir*, meaning "refugee," has Islamic connotations deriving from Arabic roots and can be translated as "those who leave their homes in the cause of Allah after suffering oppression."[4] With the emergence of the national independence wars in

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percent), southeastern Anatolia region (1.2 percent), and Mediterranean Sea region (0.9 percent) (Hart 1969, 133–40; Kaya 2004, 98).

3. Until the founding of the Republic of Turkey, Kurdistan was not called "Anatolia." During the Ottoman Empire, Armenia and Kurdistan were referred to as geographical entities. For instance, in the nineteenth century the region between Arapkir, Musul, and Van used to be called "Kurdistan," and the region at the northern border of Kurdistan, Erzincan, Van, and Kars used to be called "Armenia." However, many Armenians and other Christians lived in Kurdistan, and numerous Kurds also lived in Armenia (Kiesser 2005, 63). These regions were the common lands of Armenians and Kurds as well as of other Christian and non-Muslim communities, such as the Yezidis.

4. A *muhajir* is not just a refugee but specifically a Muslim refugee (Tanc 2001, 10). During the Ottoman Empire, before becoming *muhajir*s, not all but most of these people were the Muslim settlers or their grandchildren who were previously used by the Ottoman state for its imperial expansionist purposes into Christian territories. In its classical era, the empire produced settlement policies to direct the inflow of Muslims to newly acquired territories (Karpat 2015, xxvii). It used various methods to encourage the Muslim Turkish subjects to settle in designated places. The Ottoman state provided Anatolian Turkish-speaking Muslims with incitements such as free land, exemption from tax, and military service to encourage their settlement in the region. When these incitements did not work to make them settle in designated areas, the state applied deportation methods (Dündar 2008, 41–42). In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the number of Turkish Muslims who settled in the Balkans (especially in Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Dobruja) was estimated at around 400,000 to 500,000. Later, following the conversion of Albanians and Bosnians to Islam, the number of Muslims in the Balkans significantly increased (Karpat 2015, xxvii).

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the Balkans against the Ottoman Empire, thousands of Muslims settlers and autochthonous Muslim groups were forced to migrate to the mainland, and this migration continued after the foundation of the Turkish Republic (Tanc 2001, 49). According to my respondents, *muhajir* inhabitants of Zeytinburnu, who constituted the majority of the district's population during the *gecekondu* period, either came to Turkey before the 1950s, settling in other places before moving to Istanbul, or came to Zeytinburnu directly from Yugoslavia in the 1950s.

Although colonial oppression was the primary motivation for Kurdish migration, Kurdish migrants to Istanbul were never referred to as *muhajir*s. In my fieldwork, I found that before the 1980s the Kurdish migrants came mainly from Malatya (Meletî in Kurdish), Erzincan (Erzingan), Bingöl (Çewlîg), and Tunceli (Dêrsim).[5] Although most of the migrants from the historical Dêrsim region, including parts of Erzincan, Bingöl, and Tunceli, were Alevi (Qizilbash) Kurds, some from Malatya and other Kurdish regions were Sunni Kurds. Some of these Alevi Kurds spoke the Kurmanckî (Zazakî) dialect of Kurdish, but others spoke the Kurmancî dialect.[6] According to the 1965 census data analyzed by Faik Akçay (1974), 2,052 Zeytinburnu residents were born in Erzincan, 1,419 in Malatya, 464 in Tunceli, and 254 in Bingöl.[7] Although not all migrants from these

5. In 1935 parts of Dêrsim were named "Tunceli," a Turkish word that means "hand of bronze."

6. The population censuses of 1960 and 1965 contained a question on the language spoken at home among family members. According to the census of 1965, the total population of Zeytinburnu was 102,874, and 100,004 (97.2 percent) of them reported to the state officials that the language spoken in their home was Turkish. The following languages were reported as languages spoken at home: Albanian (1,056), Greek (631), Armenian (513), Serbian (200), Kurdish (125), Bulgarian (68), Arabic (31), Bosnian (26), Circassian (20), Lazish (3), Pomak (32), Hebrew (7), German (7), English (3), French (1), Italian (18), Romanian (4), Russian (7) (Akçay 1974, 243–44). However, Akçay, a teacher from Zeytinburnu, notes that even though many people from the eastern regions spoke Kurdish, the Kurds, unlike other groups, did not report their language to state officials (1974, 244).

7. According to the same data, the number of those born in Kurdish regions were recorded as follows : Adıyaman, 31; Ağrı, 51; Bitlis, 47; Diyarbakir, 127; Elazığ, 302; Hakkari, 6; Mardin, 217; Muş, 57; Siirt, 72; Urfa, 200; Van, 53 (Akçay 1974, 231–33).

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regions were ethnically Kurdish, one can claim that until the 1990s the Kurds living in Zeytinburnu came predominantly from these regions. Yet it is also likely that these figures underestimate the actual number of Kurdish inhabitants owing to the illegal nature of *gecekondu* dwellings and the fact that many Kurds at the time lived in workers' lodges.

Racialization of Kurds

Turkish *muhajir*s from the Balkans came to Zeytinburnu with the decolonization of the Balkans, whereas the Kurds arrived there as a result of the Turkish state's colonial policies. Although *gecekondu* studies in Turkey have chosen not to account for non-Turkish ethnic identities of people (e.g., Erman 2001), during my fieldwork I found that the inhabitants not only recognized these ethnic identities but also commonly used them. For instance, referring to someone by the nickname "Kurd" or "Laz" or "Albanian" was a common practice in the district.

Today, the Turkish respondents I interviewed tend to romanticize their relations with their Kurdish neighbors when they all were living in *gecekondu* neighborhoods. They indicate a feeling of loss of "traditional" Zeytinburnu to urban renewal and the advent of "apartmentalization." This sense of nostalgia is also connected to the emergence of the national Kurdish armed movement since the 1980s and the political transformation of the district's Kurds. They identify Kurds living in the district during the *gecekondu* period as "old Kurds" and those moving to Zeytinburnu after the 1990s as "new Kurds." Whereas they idealize "old Kurds" as "loyal" and "obedient" citizens who do not create problems for the state, the Turkish nation, or the Turkish inhabitants of the district, they see the "new Kurds" as "bigoted," "violent," "quarrelsome," and "suspect" "traitors" and as natural supporters of the "terrorist PKK." The following remarks by a Turkish man in his late forties who runs a convenience store evince how some Turks categorize the Kurds:

M: There are big differences between the Kurds of the 1970s and those coming here since 2000, 1995.

G: Could you explain it more?

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M: Old Kurds are more temperate. They have adapted better here. Because, I think, there was not a sentiment of Turkishness–Kurdishness in the past. This is a significant factor; look, now even a ten-year-old kid is inclined toward violence. Kurds see us as an enemy. . . . However, this did not exist in the past because we could sit on the same side and could become neighbors.

G: Why?

M: Because [they say], "We are oppressed people." By saying "we have been oppressed like that," "our rights have been taken away like that," by saying stuff like that, they [Kurdish youth] are imitating things they see from their parents. They are multiplying like that at the moment. (ellipses indicate omission)

When colonial migrants arrive in metropols, they enter spaces that are already "polluted" by racial power relations informed by a long colonial history, colonial imaginary, colonial knowledge, and racial/ethnic hierarchies (Grosfoguel, Oso, and Christou 2015). The particular encounter between the Turks and the Kurds took place in Zeytinburnu within a space that was already "polluted" by racial-national-ethnic power relations with a long colonial history. Establishing "loyalty" to the Turkish state and nation, to the flag, to the culture has been one of the main goals of Turkish nationalism (Beşikci 1991; Ülker 2007), which informed the construction of Kurds. For instance, in the 1930s when the Alevi Kurdish Genocide in Dêrsim and the other massacres against Kurds occurred, the Turkish state and especially the Turkish military referred to all the Kurdish rebels and Kurdish victims as "feudal," "savage," "backward," and "ignorant" "bandits" and "brigands" (Genelkurmay Belgelerinde Kürt İsyanları 2011). The official stigmatization pattern of the 1930s was reproduced after the 1980s when the state and the Turkish media portrayed the Kurdish national movement and its supporters as "terrorists" and "traitors" (Erdem 2014). Hence, the local distinction between "old Kurds" as "good Kurds" and the "new Kurds" as "bad Kurds" emerges as an important form of the articulation of coloniality in Zeytinburnu. The "old Kurds" are good, unlike the "new" ones, because they did not establish Kurdish political organizations challenging the principles of Turkish nationalism, the state, and Turkish

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supremacy. When Kurds came to the city before the 1980s, the PKK had not yet emerged. The construction of "old Kurds" as "desirable" and of "new Kurds" as "undesirable" in the Turkish imaginary reveals how Turkish nationalism has affected the racialization of Kurds differently at different historical junctures.

Yet even though the Turks romanticized the "old Kurds" as desirable citizens, they also stigmatized them as unskillful, uncivilized, illiterate, and dirty. My Turkish and Kurdish respondents stated that the dehumanizing stereotypes such as "Kurd with a tail" still existed in Zeytinburnu, persisting from the Ottoman Empire (Serfiraz 2016, 27). For instance, a sixty-seven-year-old Kurdish man whose father was a porter from Malatya and who lived among Turks stated:

> G: Has anybody called you a Kurd with a tail?
>
> A: Yes, they used to when I was a kid. At school, my friends used to tell me jokingly that Kurds had tails. Once, I showed to my male friends that I do not have a tail.

As Frantz Fanon notes how "a normal negro child, having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world" (1986, 111). Similarly, a normal Kurdish child will lose his sense of normality when he has to prove that he has no tail, that he is not an animal, that he is a human. The dehumanization of Kurds has a long colonial history that can be traced back to the Turkish soldiers in Northern Kurdistan. For instance, after the Dêrsim Genocide of 1938, many female children of the remaining Alevi Kurdish families in Dêrsim were kidnapped by Turkish soldiers and taken to the Elazığ Girls' Institute. When these Kurdish youth arrived there, they were humiliated by soldiers calling them "mountain bears" and "Kurds with tails." This dehumanization presumably legitimated their subsequent treatment as war captives in which their hair was scraped off and their traditional clothes burned (Türkyılmaz 2015). Likewise, Kurdish memoirs of the 1920s and the 1930s frequently refer to "the tail issue" as part of Turks' portrayal of Kurds (Diken 2010). This racist remark reproduced across time and space

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indicates how the colonial domination established in Kurdistan was rearticulated in a Turkish-dominated district in Istanbul.

The Turkish military plays a crucial role in feeding the racist Turkish imaginary about the Kurds. Many of my respondents mentioned that it was during their military service that they encountered for the first time the Kurds who could not speak Turkish. They also became accustomed to the rank-and-file soldiers' racist attitudes and behavior toward Kurdish soldiers and Kurdish civilians. The number of Kurds living in the *gecekondu* settlements between the 1950s and the 1980s was quite low, and the Kurds in Zeytinburnu were mostly single men who were living in workers' lodgings. Many Zeytinburnu Turkish inhabitants' perceptions of Kurds were formed during their military service.

In accounting for his time in the military, one of my Turkish respondents said that the Kurdish men carried out the worst jobs in the military. A well-known Turkish idiom, "Dirty tricks make Kurdish Memet go to sentry duty" (Alavere dalavere Kürt Memet nöbete), testifies that the understanding that Kurds are suited to the most onerous and unwanted tasks is ingrained in the general culture. Furthermore, historical archives indicate that this understanding indeed informed a long-term Turkish state policy. For instance, in 1924 the Azadî Kurdish national organization submitted a letter to the British forces in Iraq, noting that "Kurds in the army were pressured, badly treated, [and] generally assigned the most difficult and unwanted tasks" (quoted in van Bruinessen 2005, 153–54).

Racialization of Alevi Kurds

Although all Kurds are subjected to racialization, Alevi Kurdish residents in Zeytinburnu carried a double burden of diverging from the dominant Sunni Muslim Turkish identity not only by ethnicity but also by religion. In contrast to Sunni Kurds, who built *gecekondus* near Sunni Turk neighborhoods—thanks to the Sunni brotherhood—the Alevi Kurdish workers predominantly resided in workers' lodgings or in crowded and smelly dwellings in the tanneries, which were very cold in the winter and humid in the summer. It was only in the late 1970s and early 1980s that

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they were able to move into *gecekondu* neighborhoods because of changing housing laws.

Even though the Alevi Kurds composed the majority of the Kurdish population in the district, their numbers did not help them express their identity freely in public amid the historically established religious and ethnic hierarchies in Turkey. The Ottoman millet system defined Alevis as "heretics," while explicitly identifying Muslims as the dominant community (*millet-i hakime*) and non-Muslims as the subordinate community (*millet-i mahkume*) (Türköne 1991, 63). Among the dominated groups, Christians and Jews were communally protected as "people of the Book" but nevertheless lived as secondary subjects and were required to pay a special poll tax called the *jizya* to the state (Zürcher 2012, 26–28). The remaining dominated groups were categorized as "heretics," such as the Alevis, and did not have the same legal rights as the "people of the Book" (Ateş 2011; Makdisi 2002, 774). Hence, the "uncivilized" Alevi "heretics" of the Kurdish Dêrsim region suffered from severe state discrimination and were constantly subjected to massacres and forced displacements (Bayrak 1997, 169).

In comparison to Alevi Turks, Alevi Kurds experienced oppression in the Ottoman Empire and then in the republic. The official Ottoman documents of the nineteenth century classified the people of the historical Dêrsim region, which also included the Alevi populations in Bingöl and Erzincan, as "disobedient people" who needed to be "civilized," whose "wildness" should be eliminated, and whose religious beliefs should be "corrected." In 1912 an Ottoman bureaucrat confessed that since the Tanzimat period of 1839–76, the state had targeted the Alevi Kurds many times, massacring them, seizing their properties, and burning their homes, yet it had still failed to "eliminate the savagery and ignorance of the people of this place" (quoted in Gündoğdu and Genç 2013, 13–43).

The modern Turkish Republic, which spurned the Ottoman past as "backward," had no qualms in employing the same violent measures in Dêrsim. In 1931, Fevzi Çakmak, the first chief of the General Staff, stated: "People of Dêrsim cannot be acquired through caresses. An armed intervention would have more impact. Dêrsim's governance should be perceived as the administration of a colony, and a colonial government should

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be established here" (quoted in Yayman 2011, 106). It was no accident that in 1938 the Turkish state responded to the Dêrsim rebellion by brutally killing thousands of Alevi Kurds (Akyürekli 2011, 78–130; Beşikci 1990). These colonizing and racializing policies have continued in different forms throughout the history of modern Turkey up to the present.

Alevi Kurds who migrated to Zeytinburnu were not expressive about their identity, nor did they openly practice their religion. For instance, they only secretly fasted during the month of Muharrem. And although they did not fast during Ramadan, they pretended to do so. They prayed secretly and organized their funerals in mosques according to Sunni traditions. Even today, older people avoid talking about their Alevi identity in public. The first public appearance of the Alevi identity and claim to the public space in Zeytinburnu was the opening of a place of worship, Erikli Baba Cemevi, in 1993.

Sunni and Alevi Kurdish Workers in the Turkish Labor Market

When rural migrants arrive in cities, the help provided by previous migrants from their home villages and towns has vital importance. Various problems, such as finding a job, finding accommodation, and building a home, are solved within these solidarity groups (Kaya 2004, 98). The labor market is structured in connection with people's geographic and ethnic origins. For instance, my interviews indicate that before the 1980s most of the textile workers in Zeytinburnu were Turks, and they came either from the Balkan regions as *muhajir*s or from the Black Sea region. Turkish workers also worked in all manufacturing industries in the district.

Most Kurdish workers occupied subordinate positions in the labor market, as they had done during the Ottoman period. They were incorporated into the Zeytinburnu labor market as porters, leather-tanning workers, and hippodrome workers. Whereas the Alevi Kurdish workers toiled at the tanneries in the Kazlıçeşme neighborhood, Sunni Kurdish workers were by and large porters; a minority of Sunni Kurds also worked at the hippodrome as horse groomers. Both the working conditions and wages for the latter jobs were worse than those for manufacturing jobs.

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Among the three sectors, the tanning industry located in the Kazlıçeşme neighborhood, which involves converting animal skins and hides into leather, was one of the most hazardous industries because of the use of various toxic chemicals.[8] According to the accounts by retired Alevi Kurdish leather workers, they were surrounded by worms while working. They often fainted from the effect of the arsenic and lime used to remove the hair from the animal skins. Workers used very primitive machines for emerying and liming and powerful chemicals for painting. Owing to the primitiveness of the machines, some leather workers lost their arms. The streets surrounding the tanneries were full of animal pelts. Some residents mentioned that the smell was so strong that they would almost faint when they walked by the area. One Alevi Kurdish respondent who worked as a leather worker said that no matter how frequently they washed, they could not remove the bad smell from their bodies and their clothes. This probably affected their interactions with others in the district, further contributing to their stigmatization.[9]

In many parts of the world, racialized groups work in the tanning industry—for instance, Chamars (a group of "untouchables," or Dalits, located at the bottom of the caste system) in India (Rawat 2011, 93) and Blacks and immigrants in the United States (Schereuder 1990, 406–10). Different modes of labor domination occurred in the modern colonial-capitalist world system, and racism was a central mechanism for the maintenance of different forms of labor control (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992, 549–51; Wallerstein 2011, 94–127). In sum, the bottom layer of the labor

8. In 1976 the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health in the United States reported that the accident and illness rate in tanneries was five times higher than the average for all other industries (Nihila 1999, WS-24).

9. In 1987 the movie *Çark* (The Cog) by Muzaffer Hiçdurmaz portrayed the bad working conditions in tanneries. In the movie, Turkish glass workers living and working in Zeytinburnu have to start working in a tannery after losing their jobs due to the neoliberal policies applied to the glass factories in the 1980s. Depicting all leather workers as Turkish, this movie was blind to the real ethnic composition of tannery workers, although it illustrated well the working conditions by showing how the workers would vomit as soon as they arrived at work or faint due to the horrible smell or die in work accidents.

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and housing markets that Kurdish workers were obliged to inhabit indicate to us how racial and ethnic hierarchies and coloniality informed their experiences in Zeytinburnu.

Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed how coloniality and racism were articulated and reproduced in the Turkish-dominated working-class district of Zeytinburnu in Istanbul. It has demonstrated that racism functioned to keep the Kurdish workers at the bottom layer of the labor market and that the origins of this racism were deeply connected to the Turkish colonial domination in Northern Kurdistan. In comparison to Sunni Kurdish workers, Alevi Kurdish workers experienced further subordination due to their doubly subordinate position according to the two hierarchies of religion and ethnicity in colonial Northern Kurdistan. Nevertheless, even though Sunni Kurds were in a relatively advantageous position within the hegemonic Sunni structure, they, too, were subject to racism along with the Alevi Kurds, although to different degrees, and Kurdish ethnicity was racialized regardless of the Sunni–Alevi divide. The origins of this racialization can be traced back to the Ottoman period, when Kurds as a whole were stigmatized as uncivilized, illiterate, unskillful, and dirty people who had tails. The Turkish state and society mobilized existing racialized biological and cultural discourses and stereotypes concomitantly. They distinguished between "old Kurds" and "new Kurds" as another form of coloniality and racism. Turkish male workers in particular drew upon their experiences during military service, where the military displayed the most racist attitudes and practices against the Kurds. In all, then, the formation and evolution of the racist imaginary across time and place affected Turkish–Kurdish relations in the working-class district of Zeytinburnu as well.

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