

Ethnic Incorporation Policies and Peripheral Reactions: How Turkey's Kurds are Treated by the State and How They Perceive Their Treatment

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Abstract

This paper examines the policies adopted by the consecutive Justice and Development Party governments toward the Kurdish population in Turkey since 2002. These policies are called ethnic incorporation policies in the paper and take inclusive or exclusive forms. The paper distinguishes between the ethnic incorporation policies adopted and implemented by the political center and their perception in the Kurdish periphery. The paper investigates these policies in four overlapping and intersecting, but conceptually distinct domains: security, socio-culture, economy, and politics. It concludes that while ethnic incorporation policies take increasingly inclusive forms in the socio-cultural and economic domains, the increasing exclusiveness in the security domain infringes the political domain and invalidates the moves toward further inclusion in this domain which have been gained as a result of a slow and painstaking process.

Key words: *Ethnic conflict, ethnic incorporation, ethnic politics, Kurds, Turkey*

Introduction

The Kurdish question is often referred to as the most important social and political issue in Turkey. The state, or the ruling governments to be accurate, has long been well aware of the severity of the problem at hand. Nevertheless, the approaches to the solution of this problem have varied over time according to the attitudes of different governments, at times, even under the rule of the same government. This study analyzes the policies

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whereby the AKP (Justice and Development Party/*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) government(s) approached the Kurdish question. In other words, the study analyzes the ethnic incorporation¹ policies in Turkey toward the Kurdish population and their perception in the peripheral Kurdish circles.

The study makes a conceptual distinction regarding central and peripheral Kurdish politics in Turkey. While ‘central Kurdish politics’ is the sphere in which certain policies are adopted and put into force via state-administered ‘tools’, ‘peripheral Kurdish politics’ is the sphere in which certain political rights are claimed and demands are made.² While the government constitutes the main actor of Kurdish politics when scrutinized from the center, the peripheral Kurdish political sphere encompasses a variety of actors, both legal and illegal. While civil society organizations and political parties such as the BDP (Peace and Democracy Party/*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*), KADEP (Participatory Democracy Party/*Katılımcı Demokrasi Partisi*), and Hak-Par (Rights and Liberties Party/*Hak ve Özgürlükler Partisi*) are considered the main legal actors,³ the PKK/KCK⁴ represents the main illegal actor of this sphere. The PKK is not only an actor in peripheral Kurdish politics, but also occupies an important role at the heart of the wider Kurdish issue. After all, the Kurdish question in Turkey has two dimensions both of which are directly related to the PKK: firstly, secession as a political aim and secondly, ethnic violence as a method of ethnic mobilization. While the PKK announced that it had dropped its aim of achieving independent Kurdish statehood in 1999, ongoing fears of secessionism are still worrying Turkish policy makers. A more immediate problem within the wider framework of the Kurdish question is long-sustained violence. The PKK uses violence as its primary method of struggle against the Turkish state. Hence, even though the emergence of the Kurdish question precedes the PKK, the solution of the problem is directly tied to the future of the PKK.

Ethnic incorporation policies are adopted and implemented by central political actors who have direct access to and control over state power. An equally, if not more important, aspect of ethnic incorporation is its perception and interpretation by the target community in the peripheral Kurdish political sphere where actors have no direct control over state power. The study presents an overview of how ethnic incorporation policies are seen by opinion makers, civil society activists, and politicians in the Kurdish periphery. The findings from 35 semi-structured interviews (conducted in Batman, Diyarbakir, and Ankara from September 2011 to February 2012) with Kurdish politicians and opinion makers are discussed in this study to present an overview of the perception of ethnic incorporation policies toward Kurds by the target community.

Ethnic incorporation can be seen as a latent concept with various dimensions. We might see different degrees of inclusion or exclusion in each of these dimensions. These dimensions are listed as security, socio-cultural, political, and economic domains and discussed respectively in this paper with a focus on security and socio-cultural domains. These domains are derived from Mann's (1986) four sources of social power: the state, culture, economy, and military. While deciding to follow Mann's four-fold distinction, I do not take his analyses at face-value to the extent of rejecting the totality of the society. In contrast to Mann's approach, I also replace the term 'state' with that of 'political domain', and examine the state's influence in the following four domains: political (representation), socio-cultural, economic, and security. These four domains, according to Mann, are "overlapping and intersecting." Different and even conflicting ethnic incorporation policies could be adopted in different domains. In short, this paper examines the ethnic incorporation policies of the center and their perception by the peripheral Kurdish actors in four societal domains.

Ethnic incorporation policies toward Kurds in Turkey

A predominant idea in the literature focused on Turkey's treatment of Kurds up to the 1990's arrives at agreement on two fundamental points. Accordingly, it was repeatedly declared by political elites that Kurds do not exist as a separate ethnic group; and the state acted in accordance with a principle that Kurds should not exist as a separate ethnic group. While the state adopted the former ideological viewpoint in its discourse,⁵ it acted in allegiance with the latter attitude in its tangible execution of policies for long decades. Furthermore, a discourse based on the former statement was used to justify policies pertaining to the latter. This twofold policy is often described as the politics of denial and destruction (*inkar ve imha siyaseti*)⁶ within peripheral Kurdish circles. There is widespread agreement, if not consensus, in academic works on Turkey's policies toward Kurds in the pre-1990s with respect to the ideological viewpoints and policies outlined above. Accordingly, these policies could be labeled 'assimilationist'. For Smith (2009, p.5), "newly independent Turkey embarked on an ethnically homogenizing state project". Karpat (1988) also underlines the early efforts to transmute a homogeneous Turkish nation. Yuksel (1998) calls this process 'cultural assimilation'. Imset (1996) claims that the Kurds were seen as a 'high-risk group' and were considered to be an agent 'resisting' Turkish assimilation. McDowall (2004) also gives numerous historical examples of the assimilationist policies of Turkey vis a vis the Kurds, particularly, in the early decades of the republic during the construction

phase of the new Turkish nation state. As Yayman lists, numerous official reports proposed assimilation for the solution of the Kurdish question during the period of single party rule (CHP, Republican People’s Party/ *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*). Two of these reports (Özmen and Kaya reports) even employed the term ‘assimilation’ (Yayman, 2011, 14). It is quite clear that the set of policies that banned cultural expressions of identity such as speaking, printing, and performing songs in Kurdish were applied in expectation that the Kurdish language and accompanying ethnic identity would simply fade away. Nevertheless, the situation has become more complicated in recent times as Turkey proceeded in its accession process to the European Union and the AKP consolidated its rule in the country. In the meantime, changing domestic and international parameters have created certain changes in ethnic incorporation policies toward Kurds.

Ethnic Incorporation Policies in Four Societal Domains

As shown in Table 1, the incorporation policies implemented by the AKP government have been quite innovative in many respects. Nevertheless, they seem far from satisfactory in the peripheral Kurdish circles.

Table 1. Ethnic incorporation policies and peripheral demands.

Societal domains	Direction of change	Ethnic incorporation policy	Peripheral demands	Intensity of demands and extent of the support base
Security	Exclusive	Recent shift from negotiation to military encounter, intense intelligence-based operations targeting logistical linkages as well as the PKK’s armed forces, pre-emptive arrests	Ending political arrests, military operations, and disproportionate use of force	Widespread agreement
Socio-culture	Inclusive	More effective usage of religion as a cross-cutting social cleavage and transition process toward the recognition of the Kurdish language(s)	Not only de facto, but also de jure recognition of the language; official bilingualism in the region; education in Kurdish in the schools	Preservation of the Kurdish language is the least common denominator whereas demands for specific language policies vary among peripheral actors
Economy	Inclusive	Investments in regional economic development and service-provision, and compensation for prior terror-related losses	Comprehensive compensation for the under-development of the region	Least stressed among the four domains
Politics	Oscillating	Lost impact of slightly inclusive legal changes with the infringement from the security domain	Political autonomy as well as more modest demands such as the removal of 10% electoral threshold	The extent and substance of autonomy is still not agreed upon even among its advocates whereas removing electoral threshold is a clearer demand with a broader support base in the periphery

The security domain: tactical changes in security provision and path-dependent violence

Turkish military forces have been involved in a long-standing military engagement against the PKK since the organization's first attack on state security forces in Eruh, Siirt and Şemdinli, Hakkari on August 15th, 1984. The military conducted operations against the PKK not only in Turkey, but also in Iraq within the process of confrontation with these hostile forces. The first cross-border operation occurred on April 25th 1983, a date that precedes the PKK's attack in Eruh. The most comprehensive military operation, *Balyoz* (sledgehammer) operation, occurred in 1995 and involved the participation of 45.000 soldiers.⁷ As the PKK announced its longest ceasefire in 1999 that lasted until 2004, losses from both sides dropped tremendously.⁸ Nevertheless, a new wave of PKK attacks since June, 2004 has led the state to reconsider its existing security policies. Even though the PKK has announced three more ceasefires since 2004, none of them endured long enough to provide a satisfactory period of stable peace.

The state has renovated its security policy in the late 2000s. This change can be grouped under two general titles: intense intelligence-reliance before, during, and in the aftermath of military operations, and pre-emptive arrests. A more effective military engagement has been aimed for and put into action with overall strategy transformed by replacing full-scale operations in broad areas with focused operations in smaller areas. For sure, speedy intelligence transfer from remote piloted air vehicles has played a significant role in the increased effectiveness of this new strategy. The Kazan Valley operation in Hakkari in October, 2011 has so far been the most prominent example of such a tactical change.

As these new intelligence-intense operations targeted PKK members, a second policy aimed at disconnecting the PKK from 'would-be members', in other words, by isolating and severing the 'mobilization base'. While the agent of the first strategy mentioned has been largely the military, the police and special authority prosecutors have been the agents of this latter strategy. Police operations against KCK have been focused on breaking the linkages between the PKK and its mobilization base in Turkey. The operations attempt to prevent the PKK from reaching, recruiting, mobilizing, and hence, broadening its potential mass support by arresting key figures that constitute a link between the organization and its mass support at ground level. Another aim of the operations is to stop logistical support to the PKK from Turkey.

While the two tactical (perhaps strategic, but not paradigmatic) changes in the struggle with the PKK seem to undermine the PKK activities as of February 2012, there are reasons to doubt the definite and lasting success of such actions. Such conclusions seem to be widely arrived at in the mainstream Turkish media given the decreasing volume of PKK activities (in terms of attacks against military posts and the decrease in low-profile violent protests in the streets). Given that the Arab Spring was sparked when a 26 year old man, Muhammed Buazizi, set himself on fire, it might seem quite surprising that a similar act by 15-year old Firat İzgin was barely heard in the Turkish media.⁹ “I am setting my body on fire for my people” wrote Firat in his letter. Nevertheless, even this act could not set in motion a significant move toward a ‘Kurdish Spring’ that had been called for by the PKK leadership. Does this relative stillness mean that peripheral Kurdish politics has lost its mobilizing ability? Does it mean that mass mobilization in the form of public protests and violent mobilization in the form of PKK attacks have been terminated permanently? While the answer is ‘yes’ for the initial question, it is hardly the case for the latter one. It is probably true that many intermediary figures between the PKK and its grassroots support have been arrested during police operations over the last couple of years since the operations started in 2009. It is also true that PKK’s logistical support (in terms of money and supplies) has been targeted by state authorities successfully. Nevertheless, the PKK might require much less effort to recruit and mobilize the mass after the change in the security policies of the state. There are three reasons to question the perceived successes achieved in the struggle against the PKK: grievances emanating from disproportionate use of force, extraordinary tension and feeling of insecurity as a result of ongoing conflicts and increasing number of casualties, and the legitimization of the use of violence in response to ever narrowing legal paths.

First, the use of disproportionate force in military and police operations seems to escalate feelings of grievance toward the state and foster an increasing sympathy toward the PKK. Many people in Southeastern Anatolia believe that some form of illegal chemical weapons have been used in military operations such as the one conducted in Kazan Valley in October, 2011. The Diyarbakır Branch of the Human Rights Association (*İnsan Hakları Derneği, IHD*) also reported the use of such chemical weapons in its reports (IHD, 2011a). Many people interviewed for this article from both civil society organizations and the BDP repeated such claims of chemical weapon employment by the military. What matters

here, perhaps, is what is believed to happen rather than what happened for real. It seems that the state could not convince the public, particularly in the Kurdish periphery, that it had not exceeded prescribed legal boundaries in its military endeavors against the PKK. The ‘accidental’ killing of 34 civilians¹⁰ from Uludere, Şırnak in the border area also has led many people to question the effectiveness of so-called intense intelligence-based military operations. The Uludere event was labeled by peripheral Kurdish activists and politicians as the ‘Roboski Massacre’ after the name of the village where all the casualties were from.

A second indicator of the use of disproportionate force is the increasing number of civilian casualties involved in the protests. Another IHD (2011b) report published the names and ages of children that were killed by state security forces from 1988 to 2011. The numbers increase significantly after 2005 according to this report. While some of the killings of the older children might well be as a result of conflicts between the PKK and the state security forces, a significant part of the casualties were resulted from children and juveniles’ stepping on mines, being shot by the police in protests, or being hit by gas bombs.¹¹

Second, the ongoing conflicts and accompanying news and stories about lives lost from both sides have revitalized an old trauma in Turkey. This trauma is felt much greater in the Southeastern Anatolia where the actual conflicts occur and thousands of families are split in terms of loyalty between the military and the PKK.¹² Some families have lost numerous members in the conflicts. Seven members of the *Barış Anneleri* (Mothers for Peace) – a civilian initiative that was formed by mothers whose children either lost their lives in the conflicts or are still massed in PKK camps in Northern Iraq- that the author talked to in Diyarbakır have been deprived of multiple members of their family prior to their children’s decision to join the PKK. The ongoing conflicts and increasing number of casualties have created a path-dependent situation.¹³ Horowitz (1985, p.684) also makes a similar point in his discussion of ‘circularity’. Accordingly, the measures to stop ethnic violence are usually adopted late in the process when they “are more likely to be deflected or ineffective.” The outcome in such a case might be a ‘locked-in situation’ in which violence can be a self-reinforcing process and peace may not be realized even though both parties are exhausted and unwilling to engage in further violence.

Third, the increasing volume of arrests might disconnect the linkage between the PKK and its natural support base in Turkey. Nevertheless, it

is a common perception in peripheral Kurdish circles that the arrests of activists, journalists, and politicians are largely arbitrary in nature and many of the arrested people have no ties with the PKK/KCK. This perception has also spread into broader Turkish society especially after the detentions of academic Büşra Ersanlı and human-rights activist and publisher Ragıp Zarakolu in October, 2011. The perception growing from these arrests is the narrowing of the legal and democratic methods employed in the struggle for the realization of numerous peripheral Kurdish demands.

According to Mehmet Emin Aktar, the president of Diyarbakır Bar, the police operations against the KCK and resulting arrests have narrowed the legal-civilian ground and have opened legitimate space for the advocates of violence in Kurdish circles.¹⁴ Another respondent¹⁵ -who is ethnically Kurdish, voted for the AKP in the 2011 parliamentary elections, and is vehemently critical not only of the PKK, but also the BDP for not criticizing terror- has similar opinions on KCK operations. He stated that KCK operations are hurting his conscience for the fact that he knows some of the arrested people in person and believes in their innocence. Another political activist¹⁶ in Diyarbakır stated that the KCK was involved in a sincere transition process from violent to peaceful methods, therefore, no single bullet has been found in the searches of the homes and workplaces of the arrested suspects. For the same person, this transition process has been unduly interrupted as a consequence of the arrests. Mülkiye Birtane, the Kars Deputy representing the BDP, also notes that Kurds are not left with much opportunity to engage in politics in the plains.¹⁷ In short, the police operations against the KCK ended the process of 'democratic opening' for many activists in peripheral Kurdish circles. A major weakness of Turkey in its policies toward Kurds, as Somer (2005, p.120) rightly notes, is not to create opportunities for the emergence of moderate Kurdish political movements.

The socio-cultural domain: credible embrace of religion and linguistic recognition

Ethnic identity is made up of two composites in the Middle East in general, and in Turkey in particular: religious and linguistic cleavages.¹⁸ In other words, these two factors function as proxy variables to indicate a sense of common descent that takes place at the core of an ethnic identity.¹⁹ Turkey's policies toward Kurds in the socio-cultural domain

could be categorized into these two areas; both of which affect the ethnic consciousness and mobilization of the Kurds.

Religion as a conflict zone

The religious sphere has been a significant zone of control for the state, a tradition that goes back to the Ottoman era. While Mahmut II (1808-1839) established significant control over the religious bureaucracy (Heper, 2006, p.86), the early republican elites implemented a full-scale transformation of the religious sphere. As the religious brotherhoods/*tariqahs* were banned in 1925 following the abolition of the caliphate in 1924, the Directorate of Religious Affairs –an institution that is tied to the prime ministry- has been the only legitimate and, to a great extent, the only available institution that can teach, preach, and manage the conduct of religion. Weber defines the state as “a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (Weber, 2004, p.33). In the Turkish context, the state has also claimed the monopoly of the legitimate use of religion within its territory. Religion has been also a significant tool of state policy with regard to the Kurdish question. As the state *imams* had preached the religious integrity of the entire Turkish society (99 percent to be precise, a controversial phrase that is often stated to describe the Muslim dominance of the country’s population) for decades, the ongoing discourse has been transformed to emphasize much more the religious ties of brotherhood between the Turks and Kurds of Turkey during the AKP era. Known as a conservative political party, AKP has a greater credibility in its discourse with regard to the religious ties that connect Kurds to the rest of the national population.

The peripheral Kurdish politics as produced and led by the PKK in the illegal sphere and the HEP (People’s Labor Party/*Halkın Emek Partisi*) and its successors on a legal foundation set out a clear distance from any reference to Islam. Islam was seen as part of the traditional social structures that had distorted and retarded the development of ethnic consciousness among Kurds. Also, the PKK as a Marxist-Leninist organization had ideological reasons to oppose the established religion. Nevertheless, the PKK’s appeal to non-Islamic beliefs such as Zoroastrianism has not hitherto received discernible support among the Kurds.²⁰ The increasing credibility of the religious discourse under the AKP government soon led to a transformation in the approach to Islam in legal and illegal

Kurdish peripheral circles. Hasip Kaplan's calls for changing the status of the Directorate of Religious Affairs to an autonomous institution and his calling for a Kurdish translation of the Qur'an on October 10th, 2010 could be seen as an attempt to decrease the influence of state control in the religious sphere.²¹

Peripheral Kurdish activists and decision-makers have abandoned the strategy of simply ignoring or actively struggling against Islam and developed a re-interpretation of it. This re-interpretation has aimed at forming a religious sphere that is parallel to and independent from that of the state. Given that the first full-scale Kurdish rebellion,²² the *Sheik Said rebellion* (1925), in Eastern Anatolia had a mixture of ethno-nationalist and religious motives, this re-positioning of peripheral Kurdish politicians and decision-makers has a potential to construct a tradition of Kurdish nationalism that can consciously embrace the entire republican period. This re-interpretation has invented 'civilian Friday prayers' (*sivil cumalar*) as a new mobilization form and propaganda tool of the peripheral Kurdish politics. A second indicator of this re-positioning is the embrace of religious figures by the peripheral Kurdish political organizations. A prominent Kurdish figure, Altan Tan who is known for his statements against State laicism,²³ ran for the Labor, Democracy, and Freedom Bloc (*Emek, Demokrasi ve Özgürlük Bloku*) in the 2011 parliamentary elections and joined the BDP with the most of other elected Bloc members soon after the elections. Tan demonstrated his individuality in his first speech in the parliament by starting his speech with a religious greeting, '*Esselamu Aleykum*'. Tan notes that parliamentarians have never been greeted in this way after the foundation of the first parliament of 1920.²⁴

Another religious event that is customarily organized by the BDP is *mevlids*²⁵ (mawlid) in 34 cities on the 40th day of remembrance of 34 civilian people's death in a military 'operation accident' on December 28th, 2011. These examples could be multiplied, but the underlying point to be emphasized is that peripheral Kurdish politics in recent years has embraced Islam in a much greater extent than before. It should be noted that BDP's 'religious opening' does not mean that BDP is presenting itself as an option exclusively to religious Muslim Kurds. In fact, the BDP also provided for the representation of Assyrians/*Süryanis* by a *Süryani* representative, Erol Dora, for the first time in the republican period. The BDP also has numerous Alevite –for many, an unorthodox sect of Islam– deputies in the parliament. Rather, BDP's new approach to Islam is intended to deliver

a message to the religious Muslim Kurds and change the well-spread perception of BDP's ignorant, if not hostile, image in its attitude toward Islam.

The AKP government seems to have noticed the 'religious opening' of the BDP. PM Erdoğan and many other AKP members, most likely for this reason, often remind the general public of the earlier emphasis of the PKK on Marxism and Zoroastrianism. In other words, AKP leader cadre who is accused of hypocrisy (or *taqiyya*) by some Kemalists for having a secret Islamist agenda behind their 'democratic' appearance now accuses BDP's religious opening as containing 'hypocrisy' and views it as no more than a tactical maneuver. The AKP government not only developed a negative discourse with regard to the BDP's repositioning itself in terms of religion, but also took steps to prevent the policy leading to a positive rise for the BDP's standing among religious Kurdish circles. Vice-Premier Bekir Bozdağ recently announced the decision for the recruitment of 1000 *meles*²⁶ (mullahs) by the Directorate of Religious Affairs. In his statement to justify this decision, Bozdağ said that "[W]e analyzed these people. They are the people whose words are followed, who have credibility, and whose words can stop and mobilize people".²⁷

It is not possible to know clearly whether both sides (the state and the peripheral Kurdish circles) approach religion in purely instrumental ways, or if they have indeed experienced a genuine ideological transformation. Nevertheless, it could be stated that actors in both the central and peripheral Kurdish political scene have played their cards right in their conflict in the religious zone of discourse. While the state could more effectively utilize religion as a cross-cutting socio-cultural cleavage, peripheral Kurdish politics has realized a chance, perhaps for the first time, to gain access to a broader base support.

From denial to recognition of Kurdish language

The Kurdish language in Turkey was neglected and even banned for long decades. "The imposition of the Turkish language became the most significant instrument of the state for creating a Turkish national identity" (Ucarlar: 2009, p.120). Turgut Özal's decree to allow publications in Kurdish in 1991 was a cornerstone in the recognition of the Kurdish language.²⁸ The rule of the AKP has brought the most comprehensive

‘opening’ toward toleration of the Kurdish language throughout the entire republican period. The first stage of this opening was the permission for private enterprises to open Kurdish language institutes. The opening of the first of these, the Özel Urfa Kürtçe Kursu, was permitted in accordance with the decree of the Ministry of National Education, Private Education Directorate on December 4th, 2003.²⁹ The openings of Kurdish language institutes and departments of Kurdish language and literature in a number of universities followed as the next stage of the process.³⁰ A third major step was recorded with the opening of TRT Şeş in 2009, a state-sponsored TV channel that broadcasts in Kurdish. Even though TRT had previously started part-time broadcasting in Kurdish (in Kirmanchi and Zaza dialects) as well as in other local languages in 2004, the foundation of TRT Şeş was a turning point in this respect.

Preservation of the Kurdish language seems to be the least common denominator, not only for peripheral Kurdish movements, but also for the Kurds who support the policies developed in the center. When asked about their reasons for supporting the AKP government, the interviewed people who voted for and/or are members of the AKP, all make mention of the AKP’s recognition of and positive policies toward the preservation of the Kurdish language in addition to other personal and ideological reasons. Halit Advan, the chairperson of the Diyarbakir branch of the AKP, and Mehmet Ali Dindar, Şırnak deputy from the AKP, both have underlined the shift in the state’s policies over Kurdish language by contrasting it with the situation in the 1980’s when people could not even speak in Kurdish to their family members in some occasions whereas they were able to speak in Kurdish at public rallies before the 2011 parliamentary elections.³¹

As Necdet İpekyüz, chair of the Diyarbakir Branch of the Turkey Human Rights Foundation (*Türkiye İnsan Hakları Vakfı*) notes, the ‘red line’ of Kurds is their language.³² Bayram Bozyel, the leader of Hak-Par also claims that every single Kurd, whether liberal or religious, supports the right of using their mother tongue.³³ Metin Kılavuz, former deputy mayor of Diyarbakir calls the repression of their mother tongue ‘white genocide’.³⁴ While some other peripheral Kurdish demands such as democratic autonomy are controversial and debated even in peripheral Kurdish circles, the preservation and teaching of the Kurdish language seems to be the least common denominator among Turkey’s Kurds.

Nevertheless, this transition from denial to recognition seems far from satisfying all peripheral Kurdish demands. Article 42 of the Turkish constitution does not allow education in Kurdish in Turkey.

No language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institutions of training or education. Foreign languages to be taught in institutions of training and education and the rules to be followed by schools conducting training and education in a foreign language shall be determined by law. The provisions of international treaties are reserved.³⁵

The recognition of the Kurdish language is perceived as insincere and insufficient by some in peripheral Kurdish circles. Arif Arslan, the editor in chief of local newspaper *Çağdaş*, and Raci Bilici, the current (deputy) head of Human Rights Association Diyarbakır Branch, both state that even a simple inclusive step such as allowing private Kurdish language institutes was not unproblematic. Accordingly, some language institutes were closed down for not complying with certain regulations such as a lack of fire exits and failure to satisfy regulations pertaining to proper door and window sizes. According to Arslan and Bilici,³⁶ even public schools in the region do not satisfy these regulations, but solely Kurdish language institutes are inspected strictly and punished. The respondents claimed that some Kurdish institutes were closed down by owners not because there was not sufficient demand as commonly argued in the mainstream media, but because of systematic bureaucratic pressures. Arslan notes that sixty thousand people met to celebrate the opening of a language institute in Batman, but the institute was closed down within six months following its opening. It would be absurd, for Arslan, to expect this institute to be closed down because of insufficient popular demand and support.

Murat Çiçek, the chair of the Batman Branch of *Mazlumder* (The Association of Human Rights and Solidarity for Oppressed People/*İnsan Hakları Ve Mazlumlar İçin Dayanışma Derneği*), claims that it is insincere for the state to broadcast in Kurdish on a state-sponsored TV channel, TRT Şeş, but to label the same language as an 'unknown language' in trials when people defend themselves in Kurdish.³⁷ Demir Çelik, the BDP Muş Deputy, sees a similar inconsistency regarding central policies toward the Kurdish language. In this respect, the state presents TRT Şeş as proof of its recognition of the Kurdish language, but denies the right of using Kurdish

language in the government offices, even in regions where the majority of the public speaks Kurdish as their mother tongue. Another complaint heard in the interviews is the existence of ‘banned words’ on TRT Şeş. Accordingly, some interviewees claim that some Kurdish words are banned and not used in TRT Şeş just because they are used in Roj TV, a satellite TV channel stationed in Denmark and accused of being the PKK’s media channel by the Turkish government. Some of these words, for Mehmet Emin Aktar, have no affiliation with terror-provocation, but simple phrases such as ‘weather forecast’ that is coined in a particular way as ‘havaname’ on TRT Şeş rather than a more generally recognized popular phrase. Overall, as the AKP could perform a credible religious embrace of the Kurdish populace, its progressive steps in the use and learning of Kurdish language are not seen satisfactory in the peripheral Kurdish circles.

Economic incorporation: Regional economic development and service provision

Providing high standards in its service-provision could easily be seen as the key reason for the AKP’s success in three consecutive parliamentary elections as well as municipal elections during the same period. The AKP governments have made serious economic investments in the Eastern cities. In addition to these investments, particularly focused on the areas of schooling, transportation, and health; the AKP government also aimed at eradicating the deprivation and underdevelopment of the Eastern and Southeastern regions.

As Icduygu, Romano and Sirkeci (2010, p.1006) note, “Kurds in Turkey are materially much worse off than the rest of the Turkish population”. Figures provided by Besikci (1967/1992) regarding the comparison of health services and schooling provision in the Eastern and Western parts of Turkey show that the gap between the region under discussion and the rest of Turkey has remained an enduring socio-economic problem. This situation might easily lead to a sense of relative deprivation. As Gurr (1970; 2000) notes, relative deprivation of an ethnic group can easily be translated into ethnic grievance and can lead to protests and violence. Given that Kurds in Turkey do not only experience relative deprivation (expectation-achievement gap/expecting more than you have), but also absolute deprivation (absolute poverty/having little), the situation

is quite severe. Nimet Ataş's story is particularly important in this context. Ataş, a 17 year old boy from Muş, walked from Muş to Ankara in 40 days to divert the state's attention toward the plight of homeless children living in the Eastern cities.³⁸ A significant number of children make a living out of collecting garbage in Hakkari or selling tissues on the streets of Diyarbakır.

The AKP governments pursued certain policies to compensate previous deprivations caused by village evacuations and the similar negative effects of the Extraordinary Rule of Law that was announced on July 19th, 1987 and remained in force until being abandoned by the AKP rule. Law 5233 on Compensation for Damage Arising from Terror and the Struggle with Terror was implemented to compensate for losses such as lost animals, lost property, injuries, and deaths. According to the data provided by Halit Advan, the AKP's provincial head in Diyarbakir, 52.000 families applied to receive compensation in Diyarbakir alone. 650 million TL was paid to these families in the period from 2004 to 2011. The total amount of compensation in the same period paid to applicants in Turkey amounts to 2.5 billion TL. While such initiatives were mostly welcomed in the peripheral Kurdish circles, this law is still criticized by some for making an arbitrary assessment of the losses and ignoring those losses that occurred before 1987.

Political incorporation: What is changing, what is the same old story?

At the end of the day, the Kurdish question remains a political problem. As Altan Tan rightly puts it, all unresolved social problems are political problems.³⁹ Hence, all preceding incorporation domains are also tied to the political domain. What distinguishes the political domain from the other three domains, though, is the question of political representation at its center. As Cornell (2001, 32) notes, it is startling for foreigners to discover that "Kurds' representation in the country's parliament is larger than their proportion of the population". Assuming that this information is correct (because some Kurds disagree with such statements), it still does not stop some peripheral Kurdish figures from claiming that "Kurds could be anyone, but Kurdish". As Muhsin Kızılkaya once wrote, "Kurds could not be just one thing so far: a Kurd. And, when they become a Kurd, they could not be anything else".⁴⁰

The AKP has made serious legal changes in facilitating political activism such as the changes in laws 5253 (Associations Law) and 2911

(The Law on Demonstrations and Meetings). The abolition of the State Security Courts on May 7th, 2004 represented happy news for many Kurdish political activists in the periphery. The constitutional changes concerning political parties and deputies (articles 69 and 84) and the judiciary system (articles 144-149, 156-157, and 159) together with policies such as ‘zero tolerance’ of ill-treatment and torture were thought to broaden the political space against judicial and political constraints. Perhaps due to such changes, some peripheral Kurdish figures joined the ranks of the AKP whereas some prominent figures such as Kemal Burkey and Anter Anter returned to Turkey after long years of exile. Mahmut Şimşek whose name featured on the death lists of supposedly state-backed paramilitary groups in 1990’s, states that “Kurds see the AKP as their biggest partner in the struggle for democracy”.⁴¹

Nevertheless, the AKP’s insistence on sustaining the 10% electoral threshold for the parliamentary elections hurts its credibility as regards its ‘political opening’. The AKP government also has refused the ‘democratic autonomy’ demands that were announced by the Democratic Society Congress (*Demokratik Toplum Kongresi*) in July, 2011. While democratic autonomy is clearly demanded by the BDP, other peripheral Kurdish parties such as KADEP and Hak-Par also demand political autonomy, whether it is limited local autonomy or an ethnic federation. For Hak-Par leader, Bayram Bozyel, what distinguishes federalism from democratic autonomy is the former’s refusal of a superior-subordinate relationship between the center and the periphery. Federation, says Bozyel, should be founded on an equal basis.⁴² Nevertheless, peripheral demands for a ‘political status’ to be granted to Kurds is not embraced by an overall majority of Kurds and not in the repertoire of the AKP’s ethnic incorporation of Kurds.

Conclusion

Turkey under the AKP years has passed through a serious transformation process in its ethnic incorporation policies toward Kurds. While changes in the security domain have been limited to tactical changes rather than a paradigm shift, the socio-cultural domain has witnessed a more credible religious embrace of Kurds and a significant liberation for the use of the Kurdish language. The economic domain has seen serious steps taken toward compensating previous terror-related losses and the policies in this domain have aimed at eradicating the sense of relative deprivation

in predominantly Kurdish-populated areas. The AKP's opening in the political domain, particularly with regard to matters related to the political representation of Kurds and their demands, still suffers in perception from the party's reluctance to address the issue of the 10% electoral threshold. The threshold is seen as an indicator of political exclusion, if not repression, of peripheral Kurdish circles. The overall depiction of the ethnic incorporation policies in Turkey could well be described as a transition process from socio-cultural denial to socio-cultural recognition. In other words, Kurds are, to a greater extent, included in the socio-cultural and economic domains whereas the slight improvements in the political domain have been reversed by the changes in policies in the security domain since 2009. In sum, Turkey in 2012 is no longer a hard-core assimilationist⁴³ state, but neither a liberal multicultural one. Nor is it an oxymoron to observe the opening of the Kurdish literature and language departments as some Kurdish literary figures have been arrested in the context of KCK operations. Turkey, simply, adopts more inclusive policies in certain domains (socio-cultural and economic) whereas it continues exclusive policies in the security domain and oscillates in the political domain.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Ethnic incorporation is often used to refer the processes whereby ethnicity becomes increasingly central for group mobilization in anthropological studies (Handelman, 1977; Eriksen, 1993). This paper uses the concept in a different context as the set of policies adopted and implemented by the state toward an ethnic group residing in the country. For a similar use of the concept, see: Kopstein and Wittenberg, 2010.
- 2 Hence, the center-periphery dichotomy developed in this article does not follow the center-periphery dichotomy developed by the dependency school following the studies of Gunter Frank and Immanuel Wallerstein, nor does it follow identically the classical center-periphery dichotomy that has been developed by Serif Mardin and later by Metin Heper to describe the Turkish political scene. While the former dichotomy posits an imperial relationship between a capitalist center and an 'underdeveloped' periphery, the latter emphasizes autonomy and alienation of the political center with regard to the peripheral societal forces. Both kinds of dichotomies predispose an inherent conflict relationship between the center and the periphery. Although the center-periphery dichotomy developed in this paper borrows the emphasis on 'power imbalance' from these two center-periphery dichotomies, it does not make any reference to alienation or an imperial relationship between the center and the periphery, nor to an inherent conflict relationship between the two spheres
- 3 It should also be noted that, the Kurdish electorate in Turkey is also split between central and peripheral political actors. According to the 2011 electoral results, the

AKP seems to receive more electoral support in terms of votes received from the Kurdish electorate than independent candidates of the Bloc that is supported and led by the BDP. The AKP's electoral superiority could be seen both in the Southeastern and Eastern geographical regions of Turkey. Although some cities in these regions include significant portions of (ethnically) Turkish residents and BDP-backed Bloc did not nominate candidates in three cities out of 23 in these two regions, the great majority of both regions is claimed to be Kurdish in the peripheral Kurdish circles. The independent candidates running for the Bloc received 34% and 26% of all the valid votes in the Southeastern and Eastern regions respectively in the elections if each city is weighted equally. When each city is weighted based on the number of their electorate, these numbers go down to 29% and 23% respectively. The great majority of the rest of the electorate voted for the AKP in both regions. Nevertheless, the regions are quite heterogeneous in respect to electoral choices. For instance, the AKP received 10 times more votes than the Bloc in Adiyaman (67.4% vs. 6.5%), a Southeastern city with a significant Kurdish populace (the 1965 census was the most recent census that asked about people's mother tongues. If mother tongue is taken as a proxy for ethnicity, Turks slightly outnumbered Kurds in Adiyaman (53.5% vs. 43.9%) in 1965, but these official results were seen as biased to underestimate the Kurdish population by the Kurdish peripheral figures). On the other hand, the Bloc candidates received about 5 times more votes than the AKP votes in another Eastern city, Hakkari (79.8% vs. 16.5%). According to BDP Hakkari deputy Adil Kurt, if the officers coming from the West are excluded, almost the entire city voted for the BDP (interview with Adil Kurt on 14.2.2012). (The election data are calculated based on the election results at <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/secim2011/default.html>, last access on 12.2.2012).

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- 5 For an insightful discussion of the evolution of the state discourse on Kurds, see Yegen (2007).
 - 6 Among the interviewees, Ahmet Türk, Altan Tan, Adil Kurt, Bayram Bozyel, Demir Celik, Mehmet Doymaz, Metin Kilavuz, Mülkiye Birtane, Özcan Erdem, and Zübeyde Zümrüt who are current or former peripheral politicians as well as Arif Arslan, Faruk Balıkçı, Murat Cicek, Necdet İpekyüz, Raci Bilici, and Şahismail Bedirhanoglu from civil society organizations stressed the denial policies that continued for decades during the republican period. For some interviewees, these policies still continue.
 - 7 The operation started with 35.000 soldiers and 10.000 more were added during the operation.
 - 8 According to the General Command of Gendarmerie data, 87 military personnel lost their lives as a result of terror activities in the 4 year-period from 2000 to 2003 whereas the number reached 236 in 1999 and rose even higher in the preceding years (source: <<http://www.aktifhaber.com/iste-yillara-gore-verilen-sehit-sayilari-482627h.htm>>, last access on 11.2.2012).
 - 9 Cevdet Aşkın's column in daily Radikal on December 14th, 2011 is an exception in the mainstream Turkish media in this respect (available at: <<http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalYazar&ArticleID=1072404&Yazar=CEVDET%20A%DEKIN&Date=14.12.2011&CategoryID=98>>, last access on 11.2.2012).
 - 10 34 people from Roboski Village were confused with PKK militia and died in an airstrike on December 28th, 2011 when they were returning with smuggled products from across the Iraqi border. Smuggling products such as tea, tobacco, and fuel oil is a common source of income in the region, and is called 'cross-border trade' by many local residents.
 - 11 According to the report, 117 children lost their lives in 1992, the highest number of casualties in a year in this respect. The numbers significantly dropped after 1995 and started to increase in 2006. 18 children were killed in 2006, 3 in 2007, 1 in 2008, 12 in 2009, 13 in 2010, and 11 until September, 2011 (the 2011 numbers do not include the losses from the Roboski Village in December). The report claims that the list is not exhaustive and is updated regularly. The list also includes the names of children killed by Iranian security forces. 3 children were killed by the Iranian security forces in 2011 according to the report.
 - 12 The Güngen family is one of the many examples. Heybet Güngen joined the PKK at the age of 13 and died at the age of 15 in a conflict with the state security forces in 2011. Heybet's brother Salih was serving in the Turkish army when he heard of his sister's death (source: <<http://urfostar.com/Yasam-kizi-dagda,-oglu-askerde-1245.html>> last access on 12.2.2012).
 - 13 Pierson (2000, p.252) defines path-dependency as a situation "in which preceding steps in a particular direction induce further movement in the same direction" with a particular reference to historical institutionalism.

- 14 Author's interview in Diyarbakır on 21.12.2011
- 15 The respondent names are kept confidential in cases when it is asked for by the respondent.
- 16 The respondent requested his name to be kept confidential. Given that the respondent has not made any statement that could be criminalized, even this request is an evidence of fears in peripheral Kurdish circles.
- 17 Author's interview in Ankara on 8.2.2012. Doing 'politics on plains' rather than going up to the (Kandil) Mountain was a phrase first used by Mehmet Ağar, former Minister of Interior Affairs and former leader of True Path Party.
- 18 Alesina et.al. (2003) see religious, linguistic, and ethnic groups as the three principal sub-groups of ethnicity. This paper focuses on the first two categories. While the term 'ethnic group' as a separate category from the first two categories seems to be vague, some other factors such as race (in terms of morphological features), socio-economic class/caste are not primary indicators of ethnic identity in the region.
- 19 Chandra (2006, p.398) defines ethnic identities as "a subset of identity categories in which eligibility for membership is determined by attributes associated with, or believed to be associated with, descent", or simply as 'descent-based attributes'. This definition seems to capture the idea of ethnicity better than purely objectivist or subjectivist definitions of the term.
- 20 The KCK leader, Karayılan states in his book, *The Anatomy of a War*, that "Islam has been a cause of segmentation, fragmentation, dependence on others, and weakening for the Kurdistan society while it has been a source of enlightenment, progress, and empowerment for other peoples" (Author's translation from the original text). PM Erdoğan is well aware of this early tendency in PKK lines and uses this tendency in his statements against peripheral Kurdish circles. Erdoğan, in a recent statement, questioned the sincerity of BDP Istanbul Deputy Sırrı Süreyya Önder's draft law proposal to allow scarf-wearing in the parliament. In his response to the proposal, "They do not care about this" said Erdoğan and continued: "Can anyone who is a Zoroastrian care about this subject [headscarf]?" (Translated from the original statement that is available at <<http://siyaset.milliyet.com.tr/-dini-zerdustluk-olanin-boyle-bir-derdi-olabilir-mi-/siyaset/siyasetdetay/15.10.2011/1451167/default.htm>>, last access on 12.2.2012).
- 21 <<http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/ShowNew.aspx?id=16264251>> (last access on 11.2.2012).
- 22 The term 'Kurdish rebellion' does not imply that the rebellion was welcomed by the entire Kurdish community in Turkey. In fact, none of the uprisings and rebellions could have collected the approval of the entire, and probably even the majority of, Kurdish community up to this day. Nevertheless, Sheikh Said rebellion was initiated and implemented with references to Kurdish nationalism. As Uçarlar (2009, p.113) notes, the leaders of the rebellion were accused of striving for the establishment of Kurdistan in the trials following the repression of the rebellion. While the Sheikh Said rebellion was not the first rebellion with an ethnic character during the republican period, it was the first full-scale uprising in terms of its spread and effect.
- 23 Tan distinguishes 'laicism' as "a strict implementation of French Jacobinism" from secularism (author's interview in Ankara on 7.2.2012).
- 24 Author's interview in Ankara on 7.2.2012.
- 25 It is a well-spread tradition in Turkey to read mevlids (the word means birth in Arabic and refers to the birth of the prophet) on the 40th day after someone's death.

- The mevlid that is most commonly read in Turkey is written by Suleyman Celebi in 1409 to celebrate the birth of the prophet Muhammed.
- 26 Meles are opinion leaders in terms of religious affairs particularly in Southeastern Turkey. They play an important role in the teaching of Islamic principles and practices even though they have no formal training in Islam. They are rather trained by older Meles in unofficial institutions such as madrasas. Meles have played a very significant role in the religious training of Kurdish children who cannot speak Turkish
 - 27 Translated by the author from the original statement in Turkish. For the original statement, see: <<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/19443417.asp>> (accessed on 11.2.2012). It should also be noted that the President of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, Mehmet Görmez, rejected the claims that present 'mele opening' is a political and security project (for Görmez's statement, see: <<http://www.stargazete.com/politika/-mele-acilimi-bir-diyagnet-projesi-haber-407067.htm>>, accessed on 11.2.2012).
 - 28 Özal probably was the first reformist political leader in respect to the Kurdish question. He launched a new approach to the Kurdish question. As Brown (1995, p.120) lists, in the context of this new rapprochement, Özal "presented the language bill permitting Kurdish to be used in everyday conversation and folklore music recordings; met with representatives of the Iraqi Kurds; and granted an amnesty that applied to many Turkish Kurds, such as the former mayor of Diyarbakir, Mehdi Zana."
 - 29 Source: <<http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=98204>>, last access on 12.2.2012.
 - 30 The examples include Kurdish language institutes and Kurdish language and literature departments that are opened or approved to be opened at universities such as Mardin Artuklu University, Muş Alparslan University, Bingöl University, and Tunceli University. Many other universities in the Eastern and Southeastern Turkey applied for permission to open departments respectively and are waiting for approval.
 - 31 Author's interviews, respectively, in Diyarbakır on 21.12.2011 and in Ankara on 2.12.2012.
 - 32 Author's interview in Diyarbakır on 19.12.2011.
 - 33 Author's interview in Diyarbakır on 19.12.2011.
 - 34 Author's interview in Diyarbakır on 20.12.2011.
 - 35 The full text of the constitution is available at (last access on 12.2.2012): <http://www.anayasa.gov.tr/images/loaded/pdf_dosyalari/THE_CONSTITUTION_OF_THE_REPUBLIC_OF_TURKEY.pdf>
 - 36 Author's interviews in Batman and Diyarbakir, respectively, on 15.12.2011 and 22.12.2011.
 - 37 Author's interview in Batman on 14.12.2011.
 - 38 Author's interview in Ankara on 9.2.2012.
 - 39 Author's interview in Ankara on 7.2.2012.
 - 40 Author's translation from the original text. The full text is available in Turkish at <<http://www.stargazete.com/acikgorus/bir-tek-kurt-olamadilar-haber-210343.htm>>, last access on 2.12.2012.
 - 41 Author's interview in Diyarbakır on 16.12.2011.
 - 42 Author's interview in Diyarbakır on 19.12.2011.
 - 43 For discussions of assimilationism as an 'ethnic incorporation model' or 'ethnicity regime', see Alptekin, 2010 and 2011; and Akturk, 2011.

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