



# **The Shiny Light in Smoky Sky:**

## **The experiment of Rojava with democracy**

**Ayyoub Jamali**

Main field of study: Human Rights

Level: Bachelor

Number of credits: 12 credits

Submission date: Spring semester, 2018

Supervisor: Dimosthenis Chatzoglakis

## **ABSTRACT**

With a population of around 40 million people, Kurds are considered the largest nation without an independent state. Indeed, since the geographical division of Kurdistan in 1923, Kurds have been the victims of various forms of discrimination and oppression by the nation states of Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. They deprived Kurds of their legitimate political, social and cultural rights and they oppressed their demands for political and cultural freedom through violent means. With the eruption of civil war in Syria, the regime decided to withdraw its army from the Kurdish region of Rojava. The Kurds seized the opportunity and used the power vacuum to establish their interests and agenda through establishing a democratic structure in northern parts of the country. However, instead of building a Kurdish nation-state, the people of Rojava developed a hybrid political structure known as Democratic Confederalism. Today, this system functions through hundreds of councils and assemblies in northern Syria. In the course of my study, I conducted a content analysis to see whether the structure of Rojava's political structure corresponds to a democratic model that can facilitate the development of human rights in general and the empowerment of women in particular.

**Key words:** Democratic Confederalism, Rojava, gender equality, human rights, women's empowerment, Kurds, PKK, YPG, YPJ, SDG, Syria

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

art	Article
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DAAS	The Democratic Autonomous Administration
DFNS	Democratic Federation of Northern Syria
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ISIS	The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham
KCK	The organization of Kurdistan Communities Union
MDS	Syrian Democratic Council
MGRK	Meclîsa Gela Rojavayê Kurdistan, Peoples Council of Western Kurdistan
PYD	Democratic Union Party
PKK	Kurdistan Worker's Party
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
UN	United Nation
US	United States
YPG	People's Protection Units
YPJ	Women's Protection Units

# CONTENTS

Abstract .....	II
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms .....	III
Contents.....	1
1. Introduction .....	3
1.1 Introduction to the topic .....	3
1.2 Aim and research problem.....	3
1.3 Research questions .....	4
1.4 Relevance for Human Rights.....	4
1.5 Previous research.....	4
1.6 Material .....	5
1.7 Delimitations .....	6
1.8 Chapters outline.....	6
2. Methodological framework .....	7
2.1 Content Analysis .....	7
2.2 Source criticism.....	8
3. Ideological Development of the PKK and Theoretical Influences .....	10
3.1 Origin.....	10
3.2 From PKK's formation to its ideological Transformation .....	11
3.3 Bookchin and Mies.....	12
3.4 Democratic Confederalism.....	13
3.5 Gender .....	14
3.6 Women's autonomous organizing/separatism.....	14
3.7 Empowerment and gender justice .....	15
3.8 Social Contract Theory.....	16
4. Introduction to Syria.....	19
4.1 The Disintegration of the Ottoman Empire .....	19
4.2 An overview of the Syrian pre-war history .....	20
4.3 The treatment of the Kurds in Syria .....	21
4.4 Arabization initiatives in Northeastern Syria .....	22
4.1 The Constitution of Syria (2012).....	24
4.2 The civil war in Syria .....	25
5. Introduction to Rojava.....	28
5.1 Territory and resources.....	28
5.2 Territorial Loss and Expansion .....	30
5.2.1 Territorial Expansion.....	30

5.2.2	Territorial loss .....	33
5.3	The Social Charter of Rojava .....	34
6.	Democratic Confederalism in Action.....	38
6.1	Democratic Union Party (PYD) .....	38
6.2	The People’s Council of West Kurdistan (MGRK).....	38
6.3	The MGRK System .....	39
6.4	Area of activity .....	40
6.5	The Democratic Autonomous Administration (DAAs).....	42
6.6	The Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS) .....	42
6.7	The Relation between MGRK and DAAs and DFNS .....	43
7.	Women in Rojava.....	45
7.1	The organization of Kurdish female freedom fighters .....	45
7.11	Women’s presence in Politics .....	48
8.	Conclusion.....	51
9.	List of Reference .....	52

# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction to the topic**

Since the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the Kurds continue to be exposed to systematic discrimination by the nation states of Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. These states have deprived Kurds of their social, cultural and political rights in an attempt to assimilate their culture and destroy their distinctive identity in the region.

With the start of the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ in Syria in 2011, the country has smoothly descended into a bloody civil war that witnesses the highest number of refugees and displaced persons since the end of the Second World War. However, it seems like the world media coverage has failed to inform the international community about some other developments in the country. Indeed, the Kurds managed to establish a new autonomous political administration in Northern parts of Syria, known as Rojava, meaning ‘West’ in Kurdish language, an area whose residents were denied of their basic rights for hundreds of years. Indeed, instead of building a Kurdish nation-state, the Kurdish movement decided to establish a new political model, known as Democratic Confederalism, which is based on stateless democracy.<sup>1</sup>

The Kurds claim that their political model respects the notions of pluralism, gender equality and direct democracy. Therefore, the research area of my thesis project aims to explore the political structure of Rojava’s administration in order to see whether such system corresponds with a democratic model that can ensure and guarantee the fundamental human rights of its subjects.

## **1.2 Aim and research problem**

This thesis project studies the establishment of the Democratic Confederalism in Rojava. It aims to analyze the achievements of this political model considering all of its aspects, focusing on its importance for potential development of women’s right in Syria. The research problem that I want to investigate concerns the question how the Kurdish movement managed to implement

---

<sup>1</sup> Strangers in a Tangled Wilderness, A Small Key Can Open A Large Door: The Rojava Revolution. US: Combustion Books, 2015, P. 7-9

a new radical system in northern Syria at the time when the other parts of the country were engaged in a very bloody and brutal civil war that claimed hundreds of thousands lives.

### **1.3 Research questions**

The research questions of the thesis have been defined as follows:

1. What is the structure of the Democratic Confederalism and how is it achieved in Rojava?
2. How does the structure of Rojava's political system contribute to the empowerments of women in Rojava?

### **1.4 Relevance for Human Rights**

The topic of this thesis is highly relevant for the field of human rights since it investigates the empowerment of women in Rojava. Additionally, this thesis examines the structure of the Democratic Confederalism form of government in order to evaluate how this system operates and functions in Northern Syria – one of the most troubling and complicated regions in the contemporary world. Creating a system that is claiming to aim pluralism, direct democracy and gender equality in this particular area, is a question of global significance, because it gives weight to a potential improvement in the implementation of fundamental human rights. The study of Rojava is undoubtedly giving essential insights on the matter of the spread of human rights, and thus is definitely well-situated within the academic sphere of Human Rights.

### **1.5 Previous research**

A multitude of scientific articles, academic books, documentaries, reports from NGOs such as Human rights Watch, Amnesty International, Syrian Observatory for Human Rights or even Social Networks and newspapers can be found in relation to the development in Rojava which is still in process. Consequently, these sources provide crucial information when documenting and monitoring the development of human rights in general, and also specifically in terms of women's rights in the region of Rojava.

The previous researches are mostly dedicated to the ongoing development that has started since the eruption of the civil war in 2011. Considering the continuity of the chaos in the country and the involvement of many ideological actors to the conflict, there is a sufficient space to track and investigate the more up-dated developments in the region. Therefore, the central starting-point for the previous research in this area will be relatively up-to-date

academic articles, reports and analyses relating to the current advancements that are occurring in Rojava. For example, in the book titled “*Revolution in Rojava : democratic autonomy and women's liberation in Syrian Kurdistan*”, there has been a deep analysis into the current development in Rojava. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International are also tracking and monitoring the possible human rights abuses in the region annually. Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a network of local sources, documenting and monitoring the updated military and political developments in the region. Indeed, there have been various dissertations written by Master students analysing different dimensions to the Rojava’s revolution. For instance, in a dissertation titled “Behind the Smoke Screen: The Rise of Kurdish Rojava from the Syrian Ruins”, the author tried to discuss the political development in Rojava in detail. In another thesis titled “The Rojava Revolution: Kurdish women’s reclaim of citizenship in a stateless context”, the author based the findings of her research, regarding Rojava’s Kurdish feminism, on the interview with 7 people who are, to some extent, involved in Rojava’s revolution.

It should be mentioned that there are numerous articles and reports written by independent researchers analyzing different dimensions to Rojava’s revolution. From all of the previous research, I understood that there has been not a sufficient analysis considering the origins of the Rojava’s revolution which I believe started even before the Syrian civil war. I also felt that the text of Rojava’s Social Charter has been not scrutinized sufficiently to see how the Kurdish movement is trying to seek a social transformation in the Kurdish society. Thereby, based on the previous research and considering more up-dated developments, I decided to dedicate this paper to an in-depth analysis of the emergence of Rojava and its contribution to the development of human rights in the region.

## **1.6 Material**

In conformity with the previous research conducted in the area and the aim of this project, the material for the thesis will include primary, secondary and internet sources. The primary sources will consist of the Social Charter of Rojava, the Syrian Constitution, various international human rights treaties and documents. As regards the secondary and internet sources, academic articles, documentaries, PKK’s publications, interviews, reports from international magazines, media, independent groups and NGOs will be used to explore the research problem of this study.

## **1.7 Delimitations**

Regarding the delimitations of this study, the Democratic Confederalism is advocated by various Kurdish movements in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria, while the scope of the thesis does not allow investigating the actual level of implementation of this political model in the aforesaid states with Kurdish population. Consequently, this study will be limited to Rojava where the Kurdish movements seized the opportunity of the civil war in Syria to implement their project of democratic autonomy in northern parts of the country.

## **1.8 Chapters outline**

The first chapter of this study contains an introductory part to the research area of the thesis project. The second chapter of the thesis specifies the method which has been used to collect the necessary data for the study. Then the chapter three elaborates on those theories which will be applied to explore the research question of the paper. 4<sup>th</sup> chapter provides an overall history of the Syrian state from its formation until the eruption of the civil war in the country. I will also investigate the policy of the Syrian regime regarding its Kurdish population. Chapter 5 will describe the territorial dimension of Rojava, and it will further provide a comprehensive analysis of the text of Rojava's Social Charter to see its compatibility with the norms of liberalism and gender justice. This will help shedding light upon the research questions which are posed in this paper. Then Chapters 6 and 7 provide a deep analysis of the research questions considering all aspects of the Rojava's revolution including its establishment, structure and its implications on the development of women's rights in the region. The final chapter includes a conclusion summarizing the results which have been found in this study.

## 2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Research methodology is defined as a scientific tool that can be applied and used to solve the research problem. “Essentially, the procedures by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena are called research methodology.”<sup>2</sup> The methods vary; they can be qualitative or quantitative, and they may feature interviews, discourse and content analysis or case studies. In relation to this research project, content analysis will be applied to investigate the research question and solve the research problem.

### 2.1 Content Analysis

The recent developments of Rojava are very well tracked by various scholars, academics, international media, independent groups, and international organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the United Nation agencies and their monitoring bodies, which implies that there are numerous sources that can be used to gather data for the current Rojava’s administration development.

Correspondingly, the content analysis is a proper method that can help in shedding light upon the background, structure and the functioning of Rojava’s political system. This, in turn, will illustrate how the structure of Rojava’s political system corresponds to a democratic system in which women can reach self-empowerment.

Indeed, Krippendorff defines content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use. As a technique, content analysis involves specialized procedures. It is learnable and divorceable from the personal authority of the researcher. As a research technique, content analysis provides new insights, increases a researcher's understanding of particular phenomena, or informs practical actions.”<sup>3</sup>

As we can see, Krippendorff’s use of specific terms such as ‘technique’, ‘replicable’, and ‘valid’ are very significant to his perception of content analysis. Moreover, the term ‘text’ does

---

2 P. Achari, *Research Methodology, a Guide to Ongoing Research Scholars in Management*, Horizon Books, 2014, P. 240.

3K. Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, Sage Publication, 3rd ed, 2013, P. 24

not only refer to the written material, it also includes specific data that can be gathered from various sources such as texts, speeches, images, observations and so on. Consequently, content analysis is a suitable method for this thesis project as it can offer a systematic analysis of various pieces of textual information that can help explore the research problem of this study. Considering the nature and the volume of textual information, this method appears particularly relevant for the purpose of the current research project.

## **2.2 Source criticism**

Source criticism can be defined as the process of analysis and evaluation of information that are obtained through different sources such as documents, media, magazines and speeches.

In this study, I strived to check the reliability of the result through obtaining information from various sources which are under influence of different ideological actors. In order to investigate whether Rojava's administration, theoretically, corresponds to a democratic model, I analyzed the text of Rojava's Social Charter through international human rights documents and treaties. These are relevant sources to help us understand whether Rojava's political system, in theory, possess the criteria of a democratic model. Moreover, the documentaries, reports and other material produced by various international media and magazines such as BBC News, CNN, the Economist, Marie Claire, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Independent, The Guardian, The Aljazeera and Deutsche Welle are used to produce an understanding of Rojava's political model in reality.

Due to the ideological thoughts, one might say that the reliability of some parts of the material can be less valid than others. Despite this fact, this approach can be a good strategy to check the actual situation of Rojava's political administration as the aforesaid sources reflect the ideological interests of various parties from right-wing to left-wing parties, conservatives to liberals, feminists to socialists and so on.

This thesis further checks the reliability of the material through using the documents and reports that have been produced by international organizations such as Human rights Watch, Amnesty international and United Nation inquiry. I also applied the material that has been obtained through well-conducted interviews with the high-ranking politicians in Rojava. Local sources including news agencies and monitoring bodies are used too in order to analyze the different dimensions of Rojava's political development.

It should be mentioned that among sources, I used a textual message, received through Facebook, written by the head of women's council in Manbij explaining the situation of women before and after Rojava's revolution. The reliability of its content can be checked through the existing legal documents, Social Charter of Rojava and the Constitution of Syria, that have been analyzed in this paper.

### **3. IDEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PKK AND THEORETICAL INFLUENCES**

The theoretical framework of the research explains the perspectives by which the author seeks to explore the research problem and answer the research question. Therefore, theories are used as means through which the problem is uncovered, and the conclusions and results are reached. Indeed, the people of Rojava have established a democratic structure based on a well-defined ideology which has evolved and has been influenced by broader theoretical frameworks. In this chapter, I will analyze the development of this ideology. In doing so, I will, firstly, analyze the ideological standing of PKK that has undergone fundamental changes over the recent decades, especially when the PKK movement started to look for a political alternative and studied the writings of the American social ecologist Murray Bookchin. I will further look at other theoretical frameworks that could help us explain the logic and motivation behind the emergence of separate women organizations in Rojava and their influences in the empowerment of women.

#### **3.1 Origin**

At the onset, the PKK was formed based on the principles of Marxist-Leninist revolutionary thought. Marxism has had a great support among oppressed communities since it is against capitalism, exploitation and individualism. According to Marxism, the course of history is determined through the means of production. Marx argued that capitalism is the reason for alienation between workers and their produced goods. This will, eventually, result in emerging class consciousness in society. Marx believed that it is this class consciousness that causes revolutions which would replace the system of commodity production with 'production for use'. However, Lenin argued that the proletariat are not able to develop a class consciousness independently. They need a vanguard party to lead them in developing a revolutionary thought that results in class consciousness and ending capitalism and its oppressions<sup>4</sup>.

Marxist-Leninist thought inspired PKK to initiate its struggle for resolving the Kurdish issue in Turkey. Indeed, the PKK proclaimed that the liberation of the Kurdish society can be achieved when class struggle goes in parallel with the other revolutions related to gender, culture and

---

4 A. Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, P. 51-142.

geography. PKK analyzed various political models to see how they can function in a particular situation, and it tried to develop an ideological thought that can lead to the emancipation of oppressed Kurds in Turkey.<sup>5</sup>

### **3.2 From PKK's formation to its ideological Transformation**

The origins of PKK date back to 1974 when Ocalan and six members of Dev-Genç or "Revolutionary Youth", a radical left organization which can be traced back to 1960s, gathered in Tuzluca, a district of Ankara, and decided to develop a Kurdish-based left wing organization. Then during a meeting in 1976, a group of around 25 people decided to choose Ocalan as the leader of the group and they adopted a resolution in which the group was supposed to go back to Southern East of Turkey, Kurdistan, where they saw a better opportunity for the organization's development. Indeed, in November 1978, the party decided to hold its first official congress in a village called Fis, in the district of Lice, north of Diyarbakir. During the congress, the Kurdistan Worker's party, PKK, was formally established with the General Secretary Abdullah Öcalan.

In its 1978 manifesto, the political objective of PKK was the formation of an independent and united Kurdistan.<sup>6</sup> In 1982, the organization held its second congress at a Palestinian refugee camp in Syria in which it decided to initiate an armed struggle against the Turkish state. Eventually, the PKK started its guerilla warfare against the Turkish government on August 15, 1984.<sup>7</sup> However, during 1990s, the PKK's strategy to form a Kurdish nation state started to change and this transformation became more evident after the Ocalan's arrest in 1999. PKK started to analyze the desire and aims of Kurds to form a Kurdish nation-state in response to the Turkish nationalism. At that time, there were many social and freedom movements, operating against the nation-state which they were living in, whose objective was to ensure their interests through forming a nation-state of their own. However, PKK realized that the concept of nation-state does not entail a genuine solution for the Kurdish problem in Turkey. Indeed, PKK believed that a Kurdish nation-state would entail the same authoritarian, oppressive and

---

5 A. Öcalan, *Prison Writings: The PKK and the Kurdish Question in the 21st Century*, London: Transmedia Publishing Ltd, 2011, P. 44-52

6 A. Özcan, *Turkey's Kurds : A Theoretical Analysis of the PKK and Abdullah Ocalan*, London: Routledge, 2006, P.81-90

7 M. Yegen, *Armed Struggle to Peace Negotiations: Independent Kurdistan to Democratic Autonomy, or The PKK in Context*. *Middle East Critique*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2016, P. 373

bureaucratic characteristics as the nation-states the Kurds wanted to liberate themselves from. Thus, the PKK established that a Kurdish nation state would result in the oppression of minorities residing in Kurdistan. Since then, the Kurdish movement adopted a new political model called “Democratic Confederalism”, as its new and main strategy for solving the Kurdish question in the Middle East.<sup>8</sup>

### **3.3 Bookchin and Mies**

Since Ocalan’s imprisonment in 1999, the PKK started to look for alternatives that could end violence and resolve the Kurdish question through peaceful means in the Middle East. Correspondingly, the Kurdish movement has done various analyses and studies to determine what kinds of models and ideologies can solve this question. Among the new theorists include Murray Bookchin and Maria Mies whose writings were very influential on the PKK’s ideological transformation<sup>9</sup>.

Bookchin considered himself adhering to libertarian socialism, a branch of socialism that refuses a centralized socialist state that is in control of the economy. According to socialist libertarianism, the state should have minimal influence in society and it should avoid interfering in the private lives of people. It sees the state interference as a barrier and obstacle for the organization of society, while it holds that a strong self-organization by people is needed to achieve a free and equal society. After decades of studies and research, Bookchin concluded that capitalism undermines the very basic values of human beings and nature. Bookchin argued that the structure of capitalist societies destroys the balance of nature through industrialization of agriculture and by turning villages and towns into big cities. He further argued that capitalist societies undermine the capability of people to make independent choices and decisions, and it paves the way for their alienation from nature and society. Therefore, he proposed the system of libertarian municipalism as an alternative to capitalism for the organization of society. Libertarian municipalism advocates for the organization of society through a decentralized system that functions through trade unions, assemblies and local councils. In this system, the

---

8 P. White, *The PKK : Coming Down From The Mountains* [e-book], London : Zed Books, 2015.; 2015, pp. 126, 127, Available from: Malmö University Library Catalogue, Ipswich, MA. Accessed May 18, 2018

9 Öcalan, *Prison Writings*, P. 45-91; W. Enzina, *A Dream of Secular Utopia in ISIS’s Backyard*, *The New York Times*, November 24, 2015

organization of cities and towns will be divided among small communities in which people can make direct decisions over issues related to their daily life. In this system, all these small communities will be connected to each other and they will form a confederal system. Indeed, Bookchin defined Confederalism as a system that is made of various councils whose members and representatives are elected through direct democracy.<sup>10</sup>

### **3.4 Democratic Confederalism**

Inspired by the writings of the American sociologist Murray Bookchin, the PKK started to develop and adopt a new political model, called ‘Democratic Confederalism’, which endorses the organization of society by local communities through a bottom-up council system of administration.<sup>11</sup> The movement consequently set its aim to strive for its implementation in all parts of Kurdistan. Correspondingly, in the mid-2000s, the organization of Kurdistan Communities Union, known as Koma Ciwakên Kürdistan or KCK, was established to implement the project of Democratic Confederalism in the countries with Kurdish population. The KCK consists of all political parties, trade unions and organizations that adhere to the notion of Democratic Confederalism in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria<sup>12</sup>.

Indeed, the Democratic Confederalism supports the idea of radical democracy, and it rejects the centralized administration of society. The PKK refers to the system as a political model “in which all societal groups and cultural identities can express themselves in local meetings, general conventions and councils.”<sup>13</sup> Another core aspect of the Democratic Confederalism is gender equality which is considered as the precondition for exercising radical democracy. PKK considers the elimination of patriarchal norms as the essential step for the establishment of a stateless society. Indeed, Ocalan explains: “the reality of the woman determines social reality

---

10 M. Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, California: Cheshire Books, 1982, P. 344-347, 67-1; W. Enzina, *A Dream of Secular Utopia in ISIS’s Backyard*, *The New York Times*, November 24, 2015; M. Bookchin, *Libertarian Municipalism: An Overview*, *The Anarchist Library*, 1991, p. 3-9

11 K. Michael and J. Jongerden, ‘Communal Democracy: The Social Contract and Confederalism in Rojava’, *Comparative Islamic Studies*, Vol. 10 Issue 1, 2014, P. 90; P. White, *The pkk, coming down from the mountain*, P. 127, 128

12 White, P. 129-131

13 A. Ocalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, International Initiative Edition, fourth, completely revised edition 2017, P. 24

to a large extent ... Therefore, no movement has a chance of creating a real and lasting, free society unless women's liberation is an essential part of its practice."<sup>14</sup>

### **3.5 Gender**

Gender equality is one of the main pillars of the Democratic Confederalism. The writings of Maria Mies are particularly important for the PKK's feminist ideology. Mies argues that a radical transformation of society is needed to eradicate the patriarchal norms that exist in capitalist societies. She considers autonomy an important phenomenon that should preserve the unique characteristics and features of women. Although Mies points out to the necessity of women's participation in mixed gender organizations, she argues that women should create and found separate and autonomous organizations in which they can develop their feminist skills. This would help the male members of the society to understand the existence of specific features and qualities of women. Mies argues that this understanding would, eventually, change the male-female relationship in the society. Mies's theoretical perception is being adopted by the PKK movement to implement the project of gender equality in Kurdish society.<sup>15</sup>

### **3.6 Women's autonomous organizing/separatism**

The theory of separatism by Marilyn Frye is used to explain the motives and logic behind the foundation of separate women organizations in Rojava.

Indeed, Frye defines feminist separation as the "separation of various sorts or modes from men and from institutions, relationships, roles and activities which are male-defined, male-dominated and operating for the benefit of males and the maintenance of male privilege-this separation being initiated or maintained, at will, by women"<sup>16</sup>.

According to Frye, men are hesitant towards the notion of separatism as they think separatism denies them getting benefits from women. Therefore, men consider separatism as a mean that restricts their privileges. However, there are many women who are afraid to be excluded from men, because they fear separation can led to their punishment for opposing the norms and traditions of a society that favors male parasitism. Frye defines the desire and needs of men to

---

14 Rojava Democratic Revolution, the Responsible Consumer

15 M. Mies, Patriarchy And Accumulation On A World Scale : Women In The International Division Of Labour, London : Zed Books Ltd, 2014, P. 37-41; Rojava, Capitalism Nature Socialism, 2015, 26:1, p. 4

16 J. VanEvery, Heterosexual Women Changing the Family: Refusing to be a 'wife'! Taylor & Francis, 1995, P. 128

have access to women as ‘male parasitism’ as they seize the power, benefits, and resources out of women. Despite this, Frye believes that feminist separation is required to shift the power in favor of women that would make them free from men’s domination<sup>17</sup>. Frye explains that separation can take various forms and it can be found in different places:

“The theme of separation, in its multitude variations, is there in everything from divorce to exclusive lesbian separatist communities, from shelters for battered women to witch covens, from women’s studies programs to women’s bars, from expansion of daycare to abortion on demand.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, through the establishment of separate women organizations women can challenge the structure of male parasitism, and consequently can lead their lives according to their desires and needs.<sup>19</sup>

### **3.7 Empowerment and gender justice**

The theory of empowerment and gender justice by Naila Kabeer has been used to analyze the ways that women are struggling to achieve gender justice in Rojava. Kabeer defines empowerment as a process of change, from being disempowered to be empowered, that would help us make independent choices: “to be disempowered means to be denied choice, while empowerment refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability. In other words, empowerment entails change.”<sup>20</sup> Therefore, Kabeer distinguishes between having power and being empowered in the sense that those people who had power and were able to make choices have never been through the process of empowerment:

“People who exercise a great deal of choice in their lives may be very powerful, but they are not empowered, in the sense in which I use the term, because they were never disempowered in the first place.”<sup>21</sup>

---

17M. Frye, Chapter 22: Some reflections on separatism and power. In Meyers, T, D(Ed).  
Feminist Social Thought – A reader, London: Routledge, 1997, p. 414.

18 Ibid, p. 408

19 Ibid, p. 406-414

20 N. Kabeer, Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal 1, Gender & Development, 2005, P. 13, 14

21 Ibid, P. 14

Kabeer argues that certain criteria must be fulfilled in order to define a choice that can correspond to empowerment. Firstly, there must be an alternative to allow people adopting different decisions. And secondly, the alternative must be visible by the chooser and it should not be obscured by the power relation, as the disempowered person would often justify his subordination. She further argues that a choice must be related and be important to our daily life such as whom we should marry, whether to have children or not.<sup>22</sup>

Kabeer points out to the three important dimensions that determine and define the notion of empowerment. These include agency, resources and achievement. Agency “implies not only actively exercising choice, but also doing this in ways that challenge power relations.”<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, Kabeer explains the importance of resources through which the agency can be exercised. She argues that it is important that women should have access to the resources without being dependent on others, otherwise their capacity to make true choices will be undermined. According to Kabeer the achievement would be the determinative factor in defining women’s capacity in making true and strategic choices when it targets “women’s sense of independence.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Kabeer considers the ‘sense of self-worth’ as an essential factor in reaching empowerment: “Empowerment is rooted in how people see themselves – their sense of self-worth. This in turn is critically bound up with how they are seen by those around them and by their society.”<sup>25</sup> She argues that the “institutional transformation requires movement along a number of fronts: from individual to collective agency, from private negotiations to public action, and from the informal sphere to the formal arenas of struggle where power is legitimately exercised.”<sup>26</sup>

### **3.8 Social Contract Theory**

Social contract is defined as a theory that intends to establish a society in which people’s moral and political obligations will be regulated through a contract or an agreement.<sup>27</sup> The idea and notion of Social contract is associated with the contemporary moral and political theories. Indeed, the theory of social contract was discussed and received its full defense by Thomas

---

22 Ibid, p. 14

23 Ibid

24 Ibid, p. 15

25 Ibid

26 Ibid, P. 16

27 Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, social Contract theory, a Peer- Reviewed Academic Resource

Hobbes in 17th centuries. Following Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau are the most prominent theorists who defended and defined the social contract theory. Hobbes perceived men as the social creatures who are not able to live peacefully in social groups. He argued that the state of nature is unbearably brutal with men being completely self-interested, so when two men desire the same thing, a conflict immediately arises between them. Hobbes explains in his famous book *Leviathan* that “during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre.”<sup>28</sup> Because men want to protect themselves, they voluntarily accept to recognize a common law in order to avoid the condition of perpetual war and create a civil society. They will become united in one group which Hobbes referred to as the ‘Common-wealth’ where all people are equal.

Hobbes believed that the political authority should consider the interests of the citizens in the society, and it should consider the citizens on equal basis. At the same time, he argued that the monarch should be granted with absolute authority and power to govern the society.<sup>29</sup> However, John Locke perceived the social contract and the relation between citizen and authority in a different way. Indeed, there are five important elements in the interpretation of Locke concerning the notion of liberalism that were identified by Richardson. These are ‘individualism’, consensual bases, the notions of ‘rule of law’ and ‘state as trustee’, the toleration of religion and the importance of property.<sup>30</sup>

Locke’s understanding of social contract theory was inspiring and influential for the struggle of many democratic movements as he defined social contract as an agreement upon which people can revolt against their king. Locke believed that the government, as trustee, exist to protect the natural rights of citizens. He argued that as long as the government fulfills this duty, its law and rules are legitimate and valid. Therefore, when the government fails to fulfil its duty to protect and ensure the natural rights of men, its law will become invalid, thereby, it can be thrown out of power.<sup>31</sup>

Locke’s perception regarding his interpretation of natural law based on moral values of freedom and equality are very important in his political philosophy. Locke perceived the State of Nature as a perfect state where one can follow his life as how he sees the best. For him, this

---

28 T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1651, P. 185.

29 *Ibid*, P. 183-185, 227.

30 J. Richardson, *Contending Liberalisms in World Politics*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001, p. 23

31 *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Locke’s Political Philosophy, January 11, 2016

does not mean that citizens have the right to do what they want without considering moral obligation,<sup>32</sup> “freedom is not, as we are told, a liberty for every man to do what he lists.”<sup>33</sup>

This has been clearly explained by Locke as he wrote:

“To understand political power right, and derive it from its original, we must consider, what state all men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man.”<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, even though we can see that Locke perceived human beings as naturally free creatures, their freedom is restricted by the rule of natural law. Nowadays, the people of Rojava have used the theory of social contract and developed an advanced version of it to implement their project of Democratic Confederalism. Indeed, the Social charter of Rojava goes in line with Locke’s understanding of liberalism in terms of establishment of the government based on people’s consent, to protect the interests of people through the rule of law that is established by citizens. However, the social charter of Rojava includes more feminist and ecological thoughts that are absent in Lock’s understanding of social contract theory, and it defines the power relations in the society in terms of a bottom-up approach which sees people as the main decision makers in all political, cultural and social aspects of society.

---

32 M. Verschoor, The democratic boundary problem and social contract theory, *European Journal of Political Theory* 2018, Vol. 17, no. 1, 2018, P.5

33 J. Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government: Of the State of Nature*, Sec 57, 1689

34 *Ibid*, Sec. 4

## 4. INTRODUCTION TO SYRIA

In this chapter I will analyze the background to the establishment of the Syrian state by examining the disintegration of Ottoman Empire and the subsequent events that have happened in the country. I will further analyze the policy of Syrian regime towards its Kurdish population. Lastly, I will analyze the Syrian civil war which paved the way for the Kurds to start implementing their project of Democratic Confederalism.

### 4.1 The Disintegration of the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire is seen as the greatest Muslim power that has emerged in the late Medieval Period. The Empire went through a long period of conquest and expansion, and it finally came to the end of its long existence in 1922 when its territory was reclaimed by the emergence of new states throughout southern Europe and the Middle East.<sup>35</sup> The Ottoman Empire used the concept of millet, in which it defined and classified the communities according to their religion to regulate its internal matters. Each religious minority group was granted with certain limited power and rights to regulate their internal affairs and to maintain their religious, cultural and ethnic differences.<sup>36</sup>

The Kurds successfully established some sorts of regional autonomies in their homeland which later become known as Kurdistan. However, similarly to other ethnic minorities, Kurds were not officially recognized as a minority group and therefore belonged to the Muslim majority millet.<sup>37</sup> The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire during nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was followed by political tensions among European powers fearing that one of the other European powers might take advantage of the power vacuum to enhance its own influence and position in the region. These diplomatic tensions have become known as the ‘Eastern Question’.<sup>38</sup>

---

35 SA. SOMEL, *Historical Dictionary of the Ottoman Empire*. Lanham, Md : Scarecrow Press, 2003, P. lxxix

36 N. Seker, *Identity formation and the political power in the late Ottoman Empire and early Turkish Republic*, *Historia Actual Online*, Vol 0, Iss 8, 2009, P. 59, 60

37 A. Vali, *The Kurds and Their “Others”: Fragmented Identity and Fragmented Politics*. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 18 (2), 1998, p. 83-94

38 LR. Schumacher, *The Eastern Question as a Europe question: Viewing the ascent of ‘Europe’ through the lens of Ottoman decline*, *Journal of European Studies*, 2014, Vol 44, Issue 1, P. 65-66

In 1920, the treaty of Sèvres was signed by the European powers to divide the territories of the Ottoman Empire. The treaty of Sèvres granted the Kurds the right to self-autonomy and establishment of an independent state following a referendum in the Kurdish regions. However, the Sèvres treaty was rejected by the Turkish nationalist movement who considered the treaty as a significant loss for the Turks. Eventually, the treaty of Lausanne was adopted in 1923 and it annulled and replaced the former one. The Lausanne Treaty specified the current border of the Republic of Turkey which was established in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

According to the Lausanne Treaty, France and Britain received the mandates of Syria and Iraq respectively. Both Iraq and Syria got their independence in 1932 and 1946. Therefore, the Lausanne treaty did not recognize the Kurdish regions as an independent state and instead divided the Kurdish regions among the current borders of Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria.<sup>39</sup>

## **4.2 An overview of the Syrian pre-war history**

After the First World War and the end of the Ottoman Empire, the European powers decided to seize control over the former territories of the Empire. In 1916, Britain and France signed a secret agreement called 'Sykes-Picot Agreement' to divide the former territories of Ottoman Empire under their control. In accordance with the agreement, Britain occupied Iraq and Palestine and France dominated Syria and Lebanon. The French mandate of Syria was formally recognized in 1920 following the foundation of the League of Nations in 1920 and its decision to recognize the French rule in Syria and Lebanon. The French mandate over Syria was supposed to be ended at the time when the people could handle the administration of their country effectively. France followed different policies to administrate the regions under its mandate. It tried to extend its control and power in Syria by curbing any Arabic rhetoric nationalism through establishing a decentralized administration that could give power to the minority groups.<sup>40</sup> In doing so, it decided to establish a Christian state around Mount Lebanon area and administer the rest of territories through establishing five semi-autonomous regions.<sup>41</sup>

Following the escalation of the German Nazi Party's totalitarian movement across Europe in 1940, the French control in the region weakened, providing an opportunity for the Syrian nationalist movement to better influence the administration of their country and become more

---

39 D. McDowall, *A modern history of the Kurds*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2000, P. 115-150

40 Ibid, P.468

41 J. Hendriques, (ed.), *Syria: Issues and Historical Background*, New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2003, P. 73

independent.<sup>42</sup> As a consequence, Syria decided to ratify the UN Charter in 1945 which establishes that “the Organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members.”<sup>43</sup> Therefore, according to the UN Charter, all member states are equal, and have the power and jurisdiction over their territory. Correspondingly, Syria was recognized as an independent country in 1946 and its influence in the Middle East become more evident through its presence in local wars.

A significant change in the political structure of Syria arose when Hafez al-Assad took power of the country following a coup-d'état, becoming president in 1971. The regime he put in place regularly resorted to violence in response to any form of disagreement.<sup>44</sup> When Hafez died in June 2000, his son, Bashar al-Assad, became the 19<sup>th</sup> president of the country, elected as the ‘commander-in-chief of the Syrian Armed Forces’. Despite the fact that there were some reforms at the onset of his presidency, the oppressive characteristics of his father’s rule were still evident in his government.<sup>45</sup> The so-called ‘Arab Spring’ reached the country in 2011 which eventually turned into a civil war which, so far, has claimed about 400000 lives.<sup>46</sup>

### **4.3 The treatment of the Kurds in Syria**

Since the foundation of Syria, the Kurds were being systematically discriminated by the central government. Indeed, in 1998, the Syrian state submitted its periodic report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in which it denied the status of Kurds as a minority. The report explained that “We wish to point out that there is no so-called Kurdish problem in the Syrian Arab Republic.”<sup>47</sup> It further argued that “The Kurds do not constitute a grouping, since they are found throughout the country and form part of the fabric of Syrian society.”<sup>48</sup>

---

42 Z. Rivenbark, Introduction to the Syrian Civil War, Jurist, 2018

43 Charter of the United Nations, 1948, art. 2

44 Rivenbark, Jurist; Kerim, P.36

45 Profile: Bashar al-Assad, Aljazeera, April 17, 2018

46 E. Zisser, Syria – from the six day war to the Syrian civil war, British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, 2017, 44:4, P.555; Syria death toll: UN Envoy Estimates 400,000 Killed, Aljazeera, April 23, 2016

47 United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (26 October 1998), Fifteenth Periodic Report of States Parties due in 1998: Syrian Arab Republic (CERD/C/338/Add.1/Rev.1.), page 4 at para. 10

48 Ibid

Consequently, the Syrian state sees its Kurdish population as the dispersed people who migrated from Turkey and Iraq and it denies the claims of the Kurds for their very old habitual residence in Syria - it has tried to assimilate them to the mainstream culture of the Arab society. The Syrian state has followed many strategies to promote the Arabization of the Kurdish regions; the state has tried to destroy the historical evidence that show the presence of the Kurds in their homeland. The names of many Kurdish villages and cities have been changed to the Arabic language and the demography of the Kurdish region was manipulated by settling the Arab families in the Kurdish cities and villages.

The state considers the Kurds a threat to its domestic stability that can threaten the integrity of the country. The Syrian state has been largely dependent on the support of its nationalist Arab population to legitimate its rule since its foundation. Therefore, the state has followed and implemented various policies and plans to assimilate its Kurdish population and redefine their identity in line with Arab nationalism.<sup>49</sup>

#### **4.4 Arabization initiatives in Northeastern Syria**

The Arabization of Syria emerged in 1962 when 150000 of Syrian Kurds were stripped of their citizenship rights in Syria. In fact, the state decided to implement a controversial plan to redefine the concept of citizenship for its Kurdish population. The state argued that most of the Kurds in Hasakeh province are foreigners who immigrated from Turkey and Iraq to Syria illegally in 1945 and the state required the Kurds to submit several documents that confirm their Syrian origins. However, many Kurds were not able to submit the requested documents at the census meeting. Consequently, they lost their citizenship rights, and they were considered foreigners in Syria.<sup>50</sup>

The number of stateless Kurds has grown since 1962 as the legal status of children depends solely on the status of the father. Although the Syrian regime tried to justify the aim of census as to identify the illegal Kurds who entered Syria after 1945, the Human Rights Watch published a report in 1996 in which it explains how the census was carried out arbitrary. The report explains “By many accounts, the special census was carried out in an arbitrary manner. Brothers from the same family, born in the same Syrian village, were classified differently. Fathers became foreigners while their sons remained citizens. Kurds who had served in the

---

49 Kerim, P.91-93

50 Ibid, P. 34

Syrian army lost citizenship while families who bribed officials kept theirs.”<sup>51</sup> The report estimated there can be around 200000 stateless Kurds in Syria.<sup>52</sup>

Article 4 of the Syrian Nationality Act No. 276 (1969) stipulates the conditions that need to be fulfilled by foreigners to acquire Syrian citizenship. To acquire citizenship the foreigner, among others, must be over 18 years old and have resided in Syria for the last 5 years.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, Article 1 (h) of this Legislative Decree defines foreigners as “any person not holding the nationality of Syrian Arab Republic and that of any other Arab country.”<sup>54</sup> In light of this Legislative Decree, the stateless Kurds do not qualify to acquire Syrian citizenship as they do not hold any other nationality. Therefore, it is easier for a foreigner, who never live in Syria, to obtain Syrian citizenship than a stateless Kurd who has spent all his life living in Syria.

Syrian citizens are registered within population registry officially and they are granted with an identity card that is essential for their daily life. While the stateless Kurds are divided into two groups of foreigners and unregistered population, the foreigners are registered within a population registry and they acquire a special card that stipulates their status as foreigners. However, the unregistered Kurds are not registered within a population registry and, therefore, they do not possess any identification card to prove their identity and status.

The denial of nationality to the stateless Kurds led to a significant reduction of their rights in Syria. the stateless Kurds do not possess any valid identification card to travel with. Furthermore, the stateless Kurds do not have any legal capacity to own private property. As the result, the inheritance right does not apply to the children of stateless Kurds in Syria. Moreover, the stateless Kurds have faced many difficulty and barriers in having access to the education. They are often being intimidated and discriminated and they do not possess any legal capacity to be employed in the governmental offices.<sup>55</sup>

Under the rule of the Syrian regime, the political rights of the Kurds are very limited. The government has been very skeptical of the Kurds as it often associates their political activities as threat to its integrity and stability. Therefore, the Kurds were denied enjoying the rights to

---

51 Human Rights Watch, Syria: The Silenced Kurds, October 1996, P. 3

52 Ibid, p. 18

53 Syrian Nationality Act, Legislative Decree No. 276 (1969) , art. 4 (b), accessed on 20 April, 2018  
<http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/83625/92467/F153006838/SYR83625.pdf>,

54 Ibid, art. 1(h)

55 Kerim, P. 99-103

freedom of expression and association in Syria. moreover, the Arabization policy of Syrian state further led to the limitation of the cultural rights of the Kurds. Since its independence, the state has followed the policy of assimilation of the Kurds in Syria and since then it has changed the name of many Kurdish towns and villages. The Kurds were only had education in Arabic language, and after 1992 the Kurds were denied the right to choose Kurdish names for their children. state required the Kurds to change the name of their businesses and shops to Arabic language.<sup>56</sup>

#### **4.1 The Constitution of Syria (2012)**

In response to the civil war, the Syrian government decided to hold a referendum in 2012 to adopt a new Constitution aimed at satisfying the public through some new reforms in the constitution. The opposition groups did not participate in the referendum and they argued that such referendum does not correspond to the demands of people to change the government. The new constitution of Syria explains the basic function and the characteristic of the state: it defines Syria as an Arab Republic that aims to achieve the unity of Arab nation. Indeed, the preamble states that “the Syrian Arab Republic is proud of its Arab identity and the fact that its people are an integral part of the Arab nation. The Syrian Arab Republic embodies this belonging in its national and pan-Arab project and the work to support Arab cooperation in order to promote integration and achieve the unity of the Arab nation.”<sup>57</sup>

In light of the preamble, we can see that Syria does not accept the notion of pluralism and cultural diversity in the country. Indeed, the Syrian constitution respects the notion of popular sovereignty. Art. 2 of the constitution stipulates “sovereignty shall be based on the principle of the rule of the people by the people and for the people.”<sup>58</sup> it should be mentioned that the Syrian constitution undermines the notion of liberalism as in art 3 it provides “Islamic jurisprudence shall be a major source of legislation.”<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the new constitution does not mention the existence of minority groups in Syria, and it considers Arabic language as the only official language in Syria<sup>60</sup>. However, the new constitution embraces the notion of political pluralism in the structure of the government. Article 8 (1) of the current Constitution states that “the

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 107-124

<sup>57</sup> The Constitution of Syria, 2012, preamble

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, art. 2

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, art. 3

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, art. 4

political system of the state shall be based on the principle of political pluralism and exercising power democratically through the ballot box.”<sup>61</sup>

Even though the new constitution seeks to provide women with opportunities to participate in the development of the society, there has been no law that could protect women from gender-based discrimination. Indeed, Article 23 of the constitution establishes “the state shall provide women with all opportunities enabling them to effectively and fully contribute to the political, economic, social and cultural life, and the state shall work on removing the restrictions that prevent their development and participation in building society.”<sup>62</sup>

However, the reservations of the state over several important articles of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) undermines the state intention to promote the notion of gender equality in the country. Indeed, the state has made reservation for the articles 9(2), concerning the right of women to pass her nationality to her children; article 15(4), concerning the freedom of movement and domicile , article 16 (1), (c) (d) (f) (g), concerning the same rights and duties regarding marriage and at its dissolution, guardianship, adoption, maintenance and the ‘right to choose a family name’; and article 16 (2), concerning the legal effect of the betrothal and the marriage of a child.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, the state’s reservation for the article 2 of the convention undermines the state intention to act to eliminate discrimination against women as this article stipulates “States Parties condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women.”<sup>64</sup>

## 4.2 The civil war in Syria

The peaceful protests against the despotic Assad’s regime quickly turned into a full scale civil war that caused the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives in the country. Indeed, the Syrian civil war further caused half of its all population to become either displaced within the county or cross the border to become international refugees.<sup>65</sup>

---

61 Ibid, art. 8 (1)

62 Ibid, art. 23

63 Syria, MENA Gender Equality Profile, Status of girls and women in the Middle East and North Africa, UNICEF, p. 1-3

64 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against women, 1981, art. 2

65 Aljazeera, Syrian Civil War Map: Who's in Control Where, May 10, 2018; Syria Emergency, The UN Refugee Agency

The civil war in Syria originated from demands for basic democratic reforms through an election upon which the presidency of Assad could come to its end after almost five decades of Assad's family presidency. However, the regime's response to people's democratic wishes was followed by a violent suppression. This consequently led to the emergence of various military groups in the country who controlled different parts of the territory.<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, the Syrian conflict is very difficult to understand because there are many different parties involved directly and indirectly throughout all the country. Assad's army, Syrian opposition forces, Islamic radical groups and the Kurdish democratic forces are the predominant internal forces who cooperate with different external actors to establish their agenda in the country.<sup>67</sup> Correspondingly, the alliance of Russia, Iran and Hezbollah provide direct military support for the Assad's army. Initially, the opposition forces were receiving military training and equipment from the US and its allies. As the time went on, the US and its allies started to decline its military support for the opposition forces, and instead they relied on the coalition of the Kurdish-led forces of SDF who are considered the most trustable and powerful military group in fight against the Islamic state in Syria.<sup>68</sup> The alliance of Kurds with the US led-coalition was opposed by Turkey as it considers SDF forces as the expansion of PKK in Syria.<sup>69</sup> Various independent monitoring groups have accused Turkey for supporting several Islamic radical groups to fight against the Kurdish forces.<sup>70</sup> Such allegations have been denied by Turkey. In fact, the country has been directly involved to the conflict when it started to occupy a large part of Syrian territory in 2016. Indeed, the Human Rights Watch in its 2018 world report explains a wide range of severe human rights violation by Syrian regime and its allies:

“With Russia and Iran's support, the Syrian government has conducted deliberate and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, withheld humanitarian aid, employed starvation as war tactic, and forcibly displaced Syrians in contravention of

---

<sup>67</sup>War and Conflict: Syria's Civil War Explained From the Beginning, Aljazeera, April 14, 2018; Syria: the Story of the Conflict, BBC News, March 11, 2016; CNN, How Seven Years of War Turned Syria's Cities into Hell on Earth, March 15, 2018

<sup>68</sup> Syrian Civil War Map: Who's in Control Where, Aljazeera 2018

<sup>69</sup> Turkey threatens military action against U.S.-allied Syrian Kurdish fighters, May 2017, The Washington Post

<sup>70</sup> SOHR: Turkey supports anything that harms the Kurds, Deutsche Welle, 2018

international law. The Syrian government's practices of torture and ill-treatment in detention and enforced disappearances continue."<sup>71</sup>

The Human Rights Watch further accuse the non-state actors for similar brutal practices:

"Non-state armed groups have also committed a host of violations. The groups have launched deliberate and indiscriminate attacks against civilians, abducted, and arbitrarily detained activists, used excessive force to stifle protests and interfered with humanitarian aid delivery."<sup>72</sup>

In addition, the Kurdish forces were also accused of a wide range of human rights violations. Indeed, the Amnesty International in one of its reports accused the Kurdish YPG for committing war crimes through forced displacement of Arab people and demolishing their homes.<sup>73</sup> The YPG responded quickly to this allegation and it accused the Amnesty international for making false reports on the demands of Turkey. In this regard, the YPG invited the relevant organization to conduct independent investigation for the alleged war crimes in the territory which they control. Indeed, the U.N. Independent International Commission of Inquiry rejected the Amnesty's claim for its accusation relating to the Kurdish forces committing war crime. The report explains:

"Though allegations of 'ethnic cleansing' continued to be received during the period under review, the Commission found no evidence to substantiate claims that the YPG or the SDF [Syrian Democratic Forces] ever targeted Arab communities on the basis of ethnicity, nor that YPG cantonal authorities systematically sought to change the demographic composition of territories under their control through the commission of violations directed against any particular ethnic group."<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> World Report 2018: Rights Trends in Syria, Human Rights Watch

<sup>72</sup> Ibid

<sup>73</sup> Syria: US Ally's Razing of Villages Amounts to War Crime, Amnesty International, October 13, 2015

<sup>74</sup> Human rights abuses and international humanitarian law violations in the Syrian Arab Republic, Human Rights Council, 21 July 2016- 28 February 2017, Thirty-fourth session, 27 February-24 March 2017, Para. 93

## 5. INTRODUCTION TO ROJAVA

In this chapter the territorial aspects of Rojava including its expansion and shrink will be explored. I will further analyze the text of Rojava's Social Charter to see its compatibility with the norm of liberalism and gender justice. Correspondingly, this would help us start shedding light upon the research questions which are posed in this paper.

### 5.1 Territory and resources

During the Ottoman Empire (1299–1922), nomadic Arabs started to move to the current northern part of Syria where the local Kurds were residing. And it was during the two world wars that various religious and ethnic groups including Kurds and Christians, who suffered from prosecution by the Turks, started to immigrate to northern Syria. Therefore, the population of northern Syria or Rojava consists of various religious and ethnic groups. Indeed, after the First World War that world powers decided to divide Turkey and Syria with an arbitrary border of 822 kilometers that was drawn between Jarabulus and Nusaybin along the Berlin-Baghdad Railway.<sup>75</sup> Because of the partial stability in the Kurdish region, the population of each canton has grown significantly. In fact, the region of Rojava is considered as the most fertile part of Syria and it constitutes as the richest region in terms of raw materials.

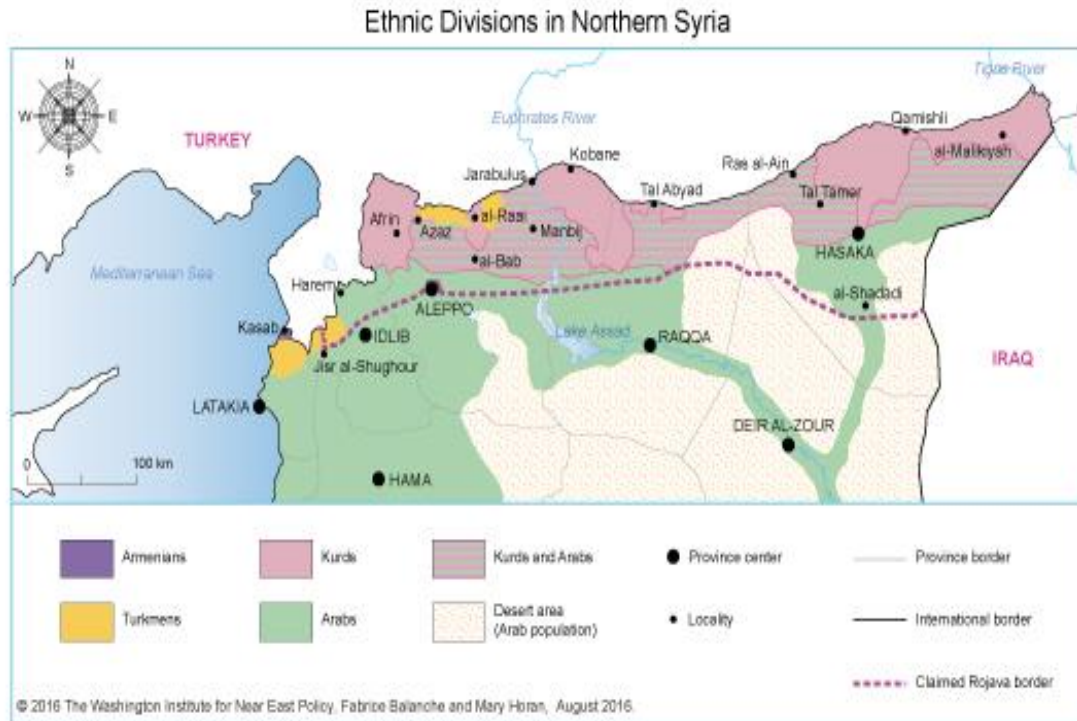
In order to undermine the political development of Kurdish society, the Syrian regime kept Rojava economically undeveloped until the start of Arab Spring in 2011. The establishment of Democratic Confederalism in Rojava has provided the Kurds with opportunity to develop its economic infrastructure in Syria. In an interview the Afrin's Minister of Economy, Amaad Yousef, explains: "We are working on developing commerce around dairy products, fruit and other foodstuffs. We are doing all of this in the villages so that the people return to their villages. Once more a dam was built to provide drinking water. We created a 'made in Efrîn' brand. We forbid the founding of any more olive factories from an environmental perspective. We also forbid workshops melting lead to protect human health".<sup>76</sup>

---

75 M. Knapp, *Revolution In Rojava : Democratic Autonomy And Women's Liberation In Syrian Kurdistan*, Pluto Press, eBook, 2016, P. 2

76 Efrin economy Minister: *Rojava Challenging Norms of class, Gender and Power*, The Rojava report, 2014

The areas with predominant Kurdish population are located in three separate regions in the south of that border. Jazira, Kobani and Afrin are the three regions that have formed the Democratic Administration of Rojava.



The canton of Afrin is inhabited mostly by the Kurds. It is located along the Turkish border to the north and west and it covers a territory of 2070 square kilometers. At the beginning of Syrian civil war, the population of the canton was estimated to be around 400000 inhabitants. The Syrian civil war resulted in the immigration of many people to the canton, and the number since then has grown to around 1.2 million residents. However, after the recent Turkish occupation of Afrin many people fled the city and villages around. Due to this reason, it is quite difficult to estimate the current population of Afrin. While, the local sources claim that the Turkish aggression has resulted in the displacement of around 300000 inhabitants, independent monitoring bodies estimate the number at around 200000 residents.

The region of Afrin is mostly made up of hills and upland. However, in the lowlands the region is very progressive in agriculture and it produces cotton, wheat, olive and various types of fruits. Jazira is the largest canton of Rojava which covers around 23000 square kilometers.

The Jazira canton is located alongside Turkish border to the north and the Iraqi border to its eastern side. The climate of Jazira is very suitable for agriculture. Indeed, wheat is considered

as the main production in this region. The canton of Jazira is home for many ethnic and cultural groups. As the result, Kurdish, Arabic and Syriani are recognized as the official language in the canton. Moreover, Kobani's specific border location makes the canton as an important strategic value for various players in the region. The canton of Kobani is located at the eastern side of Afrin and it sees the Euphrates river on its western boundary. Indeed, the population of Kobani city in 2015 doubled to almost 100000 residents after the immigration of thousands of people to the city.<sup>77</sup>

## 5.2 Territorial Loss and Expansion

After the start of civil war in Syria, the territory of Rojava has gone through a period of loss and expansion. Indeed, the Rojava administration has tried to expand its administration to other parts of Syria as it is clearly enshrined in the article 7 of Rojava's Social Charter.

### 5.2.1 Territorial Expansion

One of the first attack launched by the Islamic radical groups was aimed to capture the city of Serekaniye (Ras al-Ain) which is located on the western side of Jazira canton. Serekaniye is mostly inhabited by the Kurds. However, the city is home to other ethnic and religious groups too including Arab, Syriacs, Armenian, and Chechens. In November 2012, Islamic radical groups launched an attack from the Turkish border to occupy the city and they faced a weak resistance from the Syrian army.

Soon, the radical groups started to terrorize people and oppress them through their abuses and strict rules. The local people demanded the Rojava administration to help them liberate their city. In response, YPG launched an attack against the radical groups, and after few months of heavy fighting Serekaniye become the first city to be liberated by the Kurdish forces. The liberation of the city was a symbolic victory for the YPG as it received a signal of support from the non-Kurdish population of the city.<sup>78</sup> In March 2013, Til Koçer, a predominant Arab city in

---

<sup>77</sup> what the Syrian Kurds have Wrought, October 25, 2016, The Atlantic; M. Kabalan, "The illusion of a Kurdish state in Syria," Gulf News, April 7, 2016; Knapp, *Revolution In Rojava*, P. 1-60; SN. Abboud, *Syria*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016, p. 164-171; Reports of WHO: Current situation of civilians in Afrin, The region; More than 200000 people fled Syria's Afrin, have no shelter: Kurdish official, Reuters, March 19, 2018

<sup>78</sup> M. Gunter *Out of Nowhere: The Kurds of Syria in Peace and War*, London: Hurst Publishers, 2014, P. 103-128; Knapp, *Revolution In Rojava*, p. 133-163

Jazira canton, became the next occupied city by the radical groups. The occupation of the city resulted in the forced displacement of its local Arab population. The local tribe expressed their support for the liberation of the city through cooperation with YPG. The city soon become liberated and the local population supported the expansion of Democratic Confederalism to their city.<sup>79</sup>

During this period, the Rojava administration was not able to get international attention for its struggle and achievement regarding the project of Democratic Confederalism. Indeed, it was in January 2015 when the international media started to cover the ongoing developments in Rojava when Islamic state launched an attack to capture the strategic city of Kobani<sup>80</sup>. Kobani was a very valuable and strategic target for the Islamic state and other jihadi groups as the city is the gateway between Turkey and Syria. The city experienced a historical resistance against the jihadi groups, and after six months of heavy fighting the US and Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga intervened and provided YPG with military support. Consequently, ISIS and other jihadi groups were expelled from Kobani. The US intervention was followed with more direct support for Rojava. Indeed, the US started to consider the YPG as its ally in Syria and it supplied Kurdish forces with military equipment.<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, Tal Abyad or Girê Spî was another strategic city that was occupied by Islamic state in 2012. The city is located between the border of Turkey and Syria which connects the Isis capital city of Raqqa to Turkey. And for the Kurds liberation of this city could help them connecting the isolated cantons of Kobani and Jazira. In 2015, the Kurdish forces launched a military campaign against the jihadis and consequently liberated the city. Later in October 2015, the project of democratic autonomy expanded to Tal Abyad, and the city was officially recognized within the administration of Kobani's canton.<sup>82</sup>

---

79 Knapp, *Revolution In Rojava*, p. 133-163; "YPG takes control of Til Koçer", ANF News, October 27, 2013

80 V. Federici, "The Rise of Rojava: Kurdish Autonomy in the Syrian Conflict." *Sais Review of International Affairs*, vol:35 iss:2, 2015, p. 81-88.

81 "Why Kobane Matters", the Time, October 23, 2014; "US providing light arms to Kurdish-led coalition in Syria, officials confirm", the Guardian, September 29, 2016; B. Barfi, "Kurds Now Our Best Ally Against ISIS in Syria," The Washington Institute, 2015

82 S. Cagaptay and A. Tabler, "The U.S.-PYD-Turkey Puzzle," The Washington Institute, October 23, 2015; "Kurdish forces seize border town of Tal Abyad, cutting off key Isis supply line," The Guardian, June 16, 2015; W. Wilgenburg, "Kurdish militia aims to connect Kurdish enclaves in Syria," Al-Monitor, November 24, 2013

The Kurds further tried to pursue their aim in uniting and connecting all the three cantons of Rojava. In doing so, in 2015 the Kurdish led forces of SDF started to launch a military attack on Manbij, a predominant Arab city in the west of Euphrates. The city was a very strategic base for the Isis and jihadi groups as it was their last Route supply from turkey. Eventually, the SDF forces, with the air support of US-led coalition, captured the city from the jihadi groups.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, the SDF forces successfully expelled ISIS fighters from its capital city of Raqqa. Indeed, the liberation of Raqqa was seen as the end of the terror group in the region. the Raqqa's military campaign caused a lot of casualties and destruction in the city.<sup>84</sup> Despite all the devastation and casualties, the citizens of Raqqa celebrated the liberation of their city from strict rules of ISIS.<sup>85</sup>

These developments angered Turkey as it considered the unification of the cantons of Rojava as a direct threat for its national sovereignty. Correspondingly, the Turkey launched a military attack, known as Operation Euphrates Shield., in Syria aimed at preventing Kurds from further advances towards connecting Afrin and Kobani. In this operation, Turkey cooperated with some jihadi groups and they successfully captured some areas in the region that made it difficult for the Kurds to complete their project of connecting all the three cantons of Rojava.<sup>86</sup>

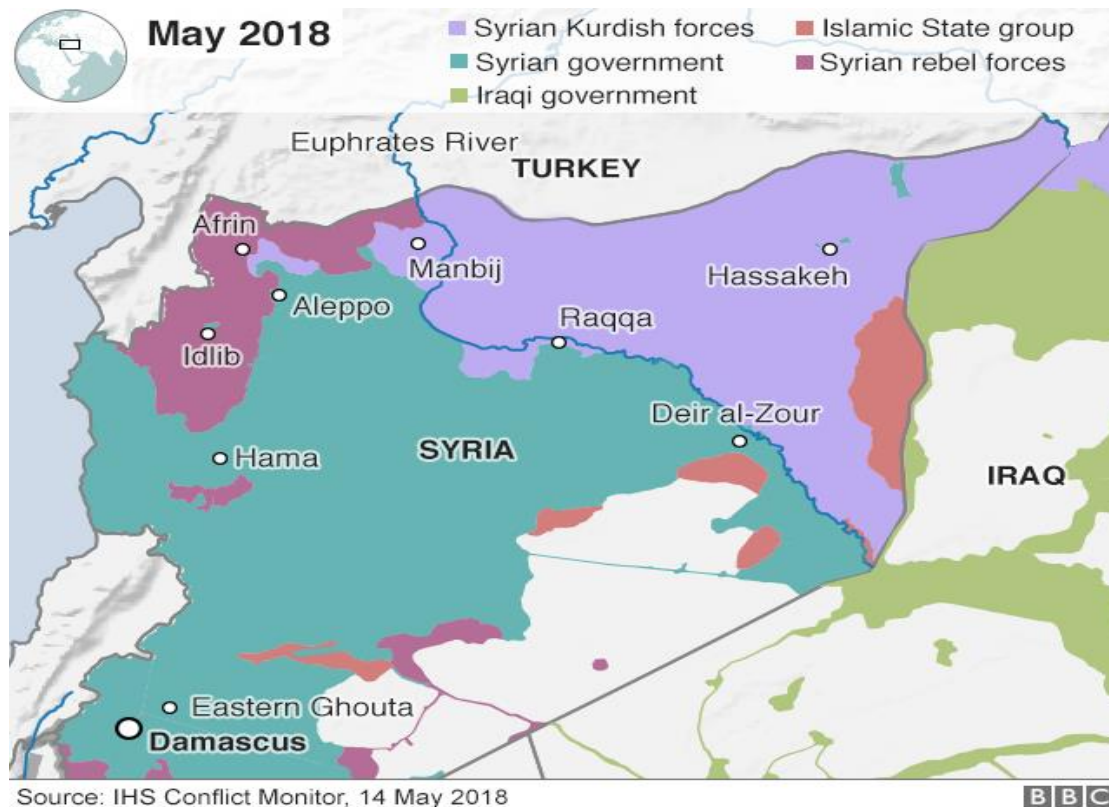
---

83 Senior Kurdish military official: We will defeat ISIS and link all Rojava's cantons, Ara News, June 3, 2016; U.S.-backed forces drive into Islamic State-held city, Reuters, July 7, 2016

84 A. Kumar Syrian City's Devastation Forgotten: UN Security Council Meeting Should Address Plight of Raqqa's Residents, Human Rights Watch, 17 April, 2018

85 G. Wilford, Women burn burqas and men shave beards to celebrate liberation from Isis in Syria, The Independent, July 22, 2017

86 Turkey ends 'Euphrates Shield' operation in Syria, Aljazeera, 30 March 2017; Turkey 'ends' Euphrates Shield campaign in Syria, BBC NEWS, 30 March, 2017



### 5.2.2 Territorial loss

The project of Democratic Confederalism is strongly opposed by Turkey as it considers the YPG forces as the extension of PKK. Therefore, the Turkish government followed various policies to stop Kurds from implementing their project of democratic autonomy in northern Syria. To achieve its aim, Turkey demanded the US to stop its support for the YPG. It further provided direct military support for the radical and jihadi groups in Syria to fight against the Kurds and occupy their cantons. However, the Kurdish development in northern Syria led to the failure of Turkish foreign policy in Syria. It further deteriorated its diplomatic relation with the western country. The alliance of Rojava and US became stronger with the presidency of Trump as he ordered supplying heavy military equipment for the SDF forces. Against all these developments in northern Syria, Turkey started to launch an extensive military attack, with the cooperation of Syrian opposition and some other jihadi groups, against the canton of Afrin. Although, the US-led coalition opposed the Turkish aggression in Afrin, it did not provide military support for the YPG forces during the campaign. Eventually, the YPG forces after 50 days of resistance decided to withdraw from the city in order to avoid further destruction of the city from the Turkish bombardment. The occupation of Afrin led to the displacement of more than 200,000 people in the city. Turkey further demanded the US to convince the YPG to

withdraw from Manbij. However, so far, the US rejected the Turkish request and it provided that it will defend Manbij from any military attack that could be launched by any side of the conflict.<sup>87</sup>

### 5.3 The Social Charter of Rojava

The people of Rojava used the theory of Social Contract to organize themselves in a civil society that is based on canton and commune system. Indeed, Locke argued that citizens can give up their natural freedom only when they deliberately and voluntarily decide to form a contract and to be bound by its provision. According to Locke, “Our political bonds are special obligations; they are acquired through the deliberate and voluntary performance of consensual transactions by individuals.”<sup>88</sup> Locke’s understanding in this regard has been enshrined in the preamble of Rojava’s social charter as it states “We, the people of the Democratic Autonomous Regions of Afrin, Jazira and Kobane, a confederation of Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Arameans, Turkmen, Armenians and Chechens, freely and solemnly declare and establish this Charter, which has been drafted according to the principles of Democratic Autonomy.”<sup>89</sup>

Indeed, the Social Charter of Rojava goes beyond the notion of liberalism. It committed to protect and ensure a long list of rights. Among them are related rights to women empowerment and democratic rights that have dominated the attention and coverage of international medias regarding the current development in Rojava.<sup>90</sup>

Unlike the Syrian constitution, the social Contract of Rojava aimed at establishing a society in which the principles of direct democracy, pluralism, gender equality, and ecology are respected.<sup>91</sup> In doing so, the Charter has enshrined human rights in two different ways. Firstly,

---

87 D. Najim and K. Mustafa, Turkey and Rojava: The Clash of Two Projects, The Jerusalem Post, June 28 April, 2018; Turkish forces and Free Syrian Army capture Afrin city, Aljazeera, 18 March, 2018; R. Nordland, On Northern Syria Front Line, U.S. and Turkey Head Into Tense Face-off, The New York Times, February 7, 2018

88 Verschoor, P. 5

89 Charter of the Social Contract of Rojava, 2014, preamble

90 “Interview with Mr. Salih Muslim, co-chair of Democratic Union Party (PYD).” Washington Kurdish Institute. September 2, 2015

91 M. Knaap and J. Jongerden, Communal Democracy: The Social Contract and Confederalism in Rojava’, Comparative Islamic Studies, vol. 10, no. 1, 2014, P. 96

it listed a wide range of rights explicitly. And it incorporated the provision of various recognized international human rights treaties and documents.<sup>92</sup>

The preamble of the Charter explains its aims at ensuring “equality without discrimination on the basis of race, religion, creed, doctrine or gender”<sup>93</sup> and to “ensure the rights of women and children.”<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, art. 27 of the Charter states that “women have the inviolable right to participate in political, social, economic and cultural life.”<sup>95</sup> And in art. 87 it grants the quota of 40 percent for the participation of either sex in all governmental and institution bodies<sup>96</sup>. In addition, the Charter explicitly states its aim in combating gender-based discrimination. Art. 28 of the Charter stipulates “men and women are equal in the eyes of the law. The Charter guarantees the effective realization of equality of women and mandates public institutions to work towards the elimination of gender discrimination.”<sup>97</sup>

These legal provisions imply the necessity of different methods for developing and achieving women’s empowerment in Rojava. Firstly, it reflects the necessity of combating gender-based discrimination, and secondly, it emphasizes on the importance of women’s participation in politics. While the former one reflects the Western perception of human rights, which emphasize on the individual freedom of citizens against the power of the government, the latter one seems more radical as it links the empowerment of women to their participation in decision makings. Therefore, we can see that the Social Charter of Rojava redefines the concept of human rights in line to the notion of gender justice.

In addition to these explicit rights, the Social Charter of Rojava incorporated various international human rights treaties and documents. The art. 20 of the Social Charter stipulates “The Charter holds as inviolable the fundamental rights and freedoms set out in international human rights treaties, conventions and declarations.”<sup>98</sup> And in art. 21, it gives explicit reference to several important international human rights treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Correspondingly, the provision of these

---

92 Charter of social contract, art. 21

93 Ibid, preamble

94 Ibid

95 Ibid, art. 27

96 Ibid, art. 87

97 Ibid, art. 28

98 Ibid, art. 20

human rights treaties must be considered as an integral component of the Social charter of Rojava. Indeed, the preamble of UDHR stipulates that “the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women.”<sup>99</sup> In principle, this reflects the preamble of the Social Contract of Rojava. Furthermore, art. 3 of both ICCPR and ICESCR which stipulates the responsibility of member states to “ensure the equal right of men and women” in the matters of economy, politics, social and cultural life, are very similar to the provision of art. 27 of the Social charter of Rojava which enshrines that women must have full access to their political, economic, social and cultural aspects of their life.<sup>100</sup>

Although one can argue that the authors of the Social Contract of Rojava were influenced by the existence of these international human rights documents when they designed the Charter of Rojava, this does not clearly explain the reason and logic behind the direct incorporation of the provision of these original treaties into the Social Charter of Rojava. It further explains that the Rojava administration tries to show itself as a democratic structure in order to get international legitimacy. However, it should be mentioned that such explanation does not undermine the authenticity of Rojava administration for its commitment and pledge in promoting gender equality and women’s self-empowerment. It rather implies to the special status of gender equality and women’s empowerment in the ideological foundation of Kurdish movement which want to create an equal and free society.<sup>101</sup>

Moreover, the Social Charter of Rojava respects the territorial integrity of Syrian State and it defines Syria as “a free, sovereign and democratic state, governed by a parliamentary system based on principles of decentralization and pluralism.”<sup>102</sup> It also recognizes the Syrian criminal and civil law to the extent that they are compatible with the provision of the Social Charter.<sup>103</sup> The Charter clarifies its aim for the expansion of Democratic Autonomy in all parts of Syria. The article 7 of the Charter explains that “all cities, towns and villages in Syria which accede to this Charter may form Cantons falling within Autonomous Regions”.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, in an

---

99 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Preamble

100 The Social charter of Rojava, art. 27

101 R. Gupta, “the world's most progressive democracy is being born. Don't let it get strangled, CNN, February 12, 2018

102 The Social Charter of Rojava, art. 3

103 Ibid, art. 88

104 Ibid, art. 7

interview Saleh Muslim, the Syrian Kurdish leader, explains that “With the participation of the other components who share Rojava with the Kurds, democratic self-management was established. We have developed a social contract among the people equivalent to a constitution, which determines how the relationships should be managed between various components. We want to apply this experience across Syria.”<sup>105</sup>

Indeed, the Social Charter of Rojava defines the basic principle of popular sovereignty in art. 2 which stipulates that “authority resides with and emanates from the people of the Autonomous Regions. It is exercised by governing councils and public institutions elected by popular vote.”<sup>106</sup> It further explains in article 2(b) that “the people constitute the sole source of legitimacy all governing councils and public institutions, which are founded on democratic principles essential to a free society.”<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, the preamble of the Social Charter explains that Rojava administration will be built upon a political structure that would recognize and respect the notion of direct democracy, pluralism, gender equality, and ecology.<sup>108</sup> These provisions are followed with more explicit articles that are aimed at explaining the foundation and the functioning of other independent governmental bodies such as legislative body, executive body, judicial body, electoral commission, and the Supreme Constitutional Court.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, having in mind the discussed provision of the Social Charter, the Rojava administration are committed to uphold the principles of democracy and gender justice.

The discussed content in the paper, so far, provided us with an understanding that Rojava’s political structure seems to have the criteria of a democratic system which can help women reaching self-empowerment. In the following chapters, I will try to further explore the research questions through a deep analysis of the actual implementation of Democratic Confederalism and its contribution to the empowerment of women in Rojava.

---

105 Interview with Mr. Salih Muslim, co-chair of Democratic Union Party (PYD).” Washington Kurdish Institute. September 2, 2015

106 The social charter of Rojava, art. 2

107 Ibid, art. 2(b)

108 Ibid, preamble

109 Ibid, art. 45-80

## **6. DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALISM IN ACTION**

In this chapter, I will investigate the emergence of Rojava's political system. In doing so, I will explain how Kurdish movement started to organize people through local communes and councils which, eventually, evolved into a political structure. Correspondingly, this would help us shedding light upon the first question of this thesis project.

### **6.1 Democratic Union Party (PYD)**

Before the establishment of the major political party in Rojava, Democratic Union Party (PYD) which is considered as the sister organization of PKK in Syria, in 2003, the Kurds were organizing themselves within committees clandestinely.<sup>110</sup> During PKK's presence in Rojava, in 1980s and 1990s, numerous committees were established in which activists were discussing the development of politics, women's right, and environmental issues. Therefore, since then PKK made a strong relation with Syrian Kurdish population.

Indeed, it was after starting Civil War in Syria that PYD started to gradually develop the system of Democratic Confederalism, by setting up independent councils and assemblies, in northern parts of Syria where it has strong supportive Kurdish element. For the actual implementation of Democratic Confederalism, PYD started to look at the experience of Kurdish movement in Turkey where their ambitious for the establishment of such system was hampered by the Turkish state. Within a period of six months, the PYD established several independent people's councils that were operating in Kurdish populated area. From the beginning of the war in Syria, Kurds decided neither support Syrian state nor Islamic oppositions. Indeed, they choose the 'third way' in which they could defend Kurdish regions from any side.<sup>111</sup>

### **6.2 The People's Council of West Kurdistan (MGRK).**

With the eruption of Civil War in Syria, thousands of people, in Rojava, started to organize themselves in people's councils. In August 2011, the representative of various political parties and social groups in Rojava decided to set up a body, named 'the People's Council of West Kurdistan (MGRK)', to further advance and develop the organization of people within people's council, assemblies, commissions and coordinating bodies. The MGRK respects the principles

---

110 W. Enzina, A Dream of a Secular Utopia in ISIS' Backyard, November 24, 2015

111 Knapp, Revolution in Rojava, P. 84, 85

of pluralism and diversity. indeed, it is open to all social, political and religious groups in Syria. In 2011, the structure of the state was poorly functioning in Rojava, and it was offering limited public and social services. The MGRK started to fill the gaps by taking responsibility for providing security, justice in society. Therefore, its functioning was developed gradually and soon it becomes a real alternative to the structure of the state in Rojava. By the end of 2011, the support for the MGRK grow rapidly as thousands of people were participating in its meeting in Rojava. In order to further develop the organization of people, the MGRK decided to set up a new level of council, known as 'commune', at the level of residential streets in the cities. Commune was aimed at organizing people in a smaller scale of population that they could be better represented in the MGRK. After one year, the commune system soon become emerged in rural areas of Rojava. On the 19<sup>th</sup> July 2012, Kurdish people started to liberate Kobani by taking over the control of governmental offices and buildings. Indeed, the regime withdraw its forces without any resistance. With the liberation of more cities in Rojava, the role of MGRK increased rapidly and it was become the only political entity to administrate all the relevant issues in Rojava. Over time, the structure of MGRK system developed and today its functioning through several sub-councils.<sup>112</sup>

### **6.3 The MGRK System**

The structure of MGRK can be analyzed at four levels of councils which represent a bottom-up approach for the organization of society. The first level of council is commune and it is seen as the basis of Democratic Confederalism in Rojava. The commune usually consists of a dozen of households in one residential street in the cities, and the whole population of a village. Each commune has a coordination board that is chaired by one man and one woman. The number of communes differs in different parts of Rojava as the organization of people is hampered by the ongoing militarily attack on Rojava. The commune is open to all individuals and families regardless of political, ethnic or religious differences. The commune aims at organizing people in small scale and address their needs directly and more effectively. The commune is further tasked with resolving all social issues and problems that could arise in family level.<sup>113</sup>

---

112 Knapp, *Revolution In Rojava*, P. 84, 87; An interview with Ercan Ayboga: *Journey to Rojava, The Cooperative Economy*, May 2014

113 Michael and Jongerden, *Communal Democracy*, P. 98, 99; Knapp, *Revolution In Rojava*, P. 87-89; R. Burc, *Confederal Kurdistan: the 'commune of communes*, *Open Democracy*, 8 June 2016

The second level of people's organization is called 'neighborhood council'. The neighborhood council usually consists of dozens of communes who are represented by the coordination board. The neighborhood council try to redress the social issues that could not be resolved in the commune level. The neighborhood council also consists of a coordination board that is chaired by one man and one women.

The third level of council system exist in the district level. The district council usually consists of a city and several surrounding villages around that city. The people from commune and the neighborhood council system are being represented by the coordination board of their respective councils. Like the lower councils, the district council composed of a coordination board that is co-chaired by a man and a woman. The district council is the level which more political parties and social groups are eager to be involved in its activities. Indeed, the highest level of council is the People's Council of West Kurdistan (MGRK), made up of all the district councils. All this level of council, all the social issues which could not be solved in the lower levels of council will be dealt with.<sup>114</sup>

## **6.4 Area of activity**

Each level of councils consists of eight different commissions that are dealing with eight specific areas of activities. Women, Defense, Economics, Politics, Civil Society, Free Society, Justice, and Ideology are the eight areas that commissions from each level of councils are dealing with.

The women's commissions are seen as the most important commissions within the structure of MGRK as they are organized within councils. The women's council in the commune level aims at engaging women in all levels of social and political lives. They usually visit women regularly and try to engage them by discussing the political and social aspects of Democratic Autonomy. The members of women's council consist of only female activist. In other seven areas of commissions the quota of 40 percent is allocated to the participation of women. Importantly, the women's council tries to resolve all social issues that women may face in their life. In doing so, it founded women's houses which are tasked with resolving family problems at the first place. Women houses are often visiting families and try to discuss and explain their plans to create a society that sees men and women on equal basis. However, this is often being

---

114 Knapp, Revolution In Rojava, P. 89-91

confronted by men as the patriarchal norms are still present in Rojava Society. From the beginning of the revolution, Kurdish movement was aware that the accommodation of gender equality can be confronted by the male members of society, but they argued that women's liberation is the integral part of Kurdish liberation.<sup>115</sup> Indeed, in an interview, a member of the Manbij Women's Council explains "most men don't accept it, but we speak to women and try to make society understand why it is not good, for instance, to have more than one wife."<sup>116</sup> Another member of the council explains how they, step by step, try to go to the houses and speak with families over the social issues: "many men don't let us in at first, we just go back two or three times. Little by little, it is working."<sup>117</sup>

Moreover, the defense commission exists in all four levels of councils that aims to ensure peace and security in Rojava. They often organize people voluntarily in small units to defend their district and neighborhood from any unexpected attack from Islamic state or other armed groups. Similarly, the economic commissions are established in all levels of councils where the economic aspects of society are being organized. The economic commission aimed at developing the infrastructure of society through establishment of a communal economy in which everyone plays role in the production of materials. Like the other commissions, the politics commissions are operating in all level of councils. The politics commissions are consisting of those political parties who have recognized the MGRK system as the legitimate entity for the organization of society. The politics commissions are aimed at creating a closer link between people and MGRK. The commissions of Free society and Civil society exist in all levels of council. They are established in order to address the needs of all groups of society. They are also collaborating with international NGOs to monitor the ongoing development regarding politics, culture and health in Rojava.<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup>A. Ocalan, *Liberating Life: Woman's Revolution*, International Initiative Edition in cooperation with Mesopotamian Publishers, Neuss, 2013, P. 58, 59

<sup>116</sup>R. Nordland, *Women Are Free, and Armed*, in *Kurdish-Controlled Northern Syria*, the New York Times, February 24, 2018

<sup>117</sup>Ibid

<sup>118</sup>Knapp, *Revolution In Rojava*, p. 91-95; E. Ayboğa *Consensus is Key: New Justice System in Rojava*, New Compass, October 13, 2014

## **6.5 The Democratic Autonomous Administration (DAAs)**

In January 2014, the world powers decided to invite the relevant parties to the Syrian Civil War and organize a peace conference called ‘Geneva II’ to end the war in the Syria. However, because of the political pressure from Turkey and the opposition groups, the Kurdish movement were not invited to the conference.<sup>119</sup> In response, the Kurdish movement decided to declare the three cantons of Jazira, Afrin and Kobani as the democratic Autonomy of Rojava on January 2014. All the three cantons recognized the Social Contract as the sole legal document for their foundation<sup>120</sup>. In accordance to the terms of Social Charter, each canton decided to form a ‘transitional administration’ known as the ‘Democratic Autonomous administration’ that could operate under a legislative body, in forms of local or regional parliament, which their members could be elected for a term of 4 years.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, as it is enshrined in the Social charter, each legislative council was responsible to form an executive council and elect two persons of different sex for its leadership. Therefore, the administration of each canton consists of these organs and a Supreme Constitutional Court whose seven members are appointed by the legislative assembly.<sup>122</sup> To some extent, the administration of Rojava has successfully established the structure of a democratic model. There have been several elections in which people elected the local neighborhood leaders and also the members of town, city and regional councils. However, due to the ongoing Civil War in Syria and the military attack on Rojava, there has been no election for appointing the members of the highest region body which is known as ‘People’s Democratic Council or parliament’.<sup>123</sup>

## **6.6 The Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS)**

The Democratic administration of Rojava has tried to get international recognition for the establishment of the Democratic Autonomy in Syria. It further tried to expand Democratic autonomy to other parts of Syria through negotiation with different religious and ethnic groups who live in Northern parts of Syria. In doing so, they established the Syrian Democratic Forces

---

119 AFP, Syrian Kurds protest ‘exclusion’ from Geneva II talks, the Jordan Times, January 23, 2014; K. Zraick, Syria Talks Are Complicated by Competing Opposition Groups, New York Times, January 29, 2016

120 E. Solomon, Special Report: Amid Syria’s violence, Kurds carve out autonomy, Reuters, January 22, 2014

121 Knapp, Revolution in Rojava, P. 114

122 The social charter of Rojava, art. 45-80

123 “Elections in Kurdish-held northern Syria postponed with no date set”, Syria: Direct, January 8, 2018

(SDF) that is composed of various military groups including YPG, YPJ, and several Arab, Turkmen and Christians military groups.<sup>124</sup>

Indeed, in December 2015 on the initiative of the Democratic administration of Rojava, the political wing of SDF called 'Syrian Democratic Council' (MDS) was formed to implement the idea of Democratic Confederalism in those areas that were liberated by SDF.<sup>125</sup> In 2016, SDF started to liberate more territories in northern part of Syria. As result, DAAs and MDS thought of a better coordination in order to make the democratic autonomy more effective in the liberated areas. Correspondingly, on March 2016, the representatives of various political, ethnic and religious groups met in Rimelan to discuss the foundation of a new system that could coordinate the three cantons and the newly liberated territories in northern parts of Syria. The meeting was ended up with the adoption of a declaration for the establishment of Democratic Federation of Northern Syria that consists all the three cantons of Rojava and newly liberated territories.<sup>126</sup>

## **6.7 The Relation between MGRK and DAAs and DFNS**

The existences of the three cantons of Rojava and DFNS are highly attributable to the existence of MGRK's council system. Indeed, the vast majority of people in Rojava take part in the institutions and assemblies that are developed by MGRK. Therefore, the structure of MGRK is still very influential in the organization of the society. Yet after the ratification of the Social Contract in 2014 in which the establishment of DAAs and then DFNS declared, questions arise regarding the dual structure within the administration of Rojava. We may question the roles of the council system and its commissions in the administration of society compared to the legislative and executive bodies of DAAs and DFNS. In fact, after the establishment of DAAs in 2014, the MGRK continued to function in the parallel with DAAs. It was tasked with a lot of responsibilities during the period of transitional administration. However, after the establishment of DFNS and its legislative and executive councils, the MGRK started to decline its activities in the areas of decision making. Therefore, now the legislative and executive bodies of DFNS are making decision in Rojava. The effort is going on to legally formulate the relation

---

124 Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Syrian Civil War Map

125 Knapp, Revolution in Rojava, P. 116

126 "Syria conflict: Kurds declare federal system", BBC NEWS, March 17, 2016; L. Sly, Syrian Kurds declare their own region, raising tensions, Washington Post, March 17; Knapp, Revolution in Rojava, P. 117

between MGRK and DFNS. Yet, by now there is no law that can be in force to legalize and formulize the role of MGRK within administration of Rojava.<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>127</sup> Knapp, Revolution in Rojava, P. 118-121

## **7. WOMEN IN ROJAVA**

In this Chapter, I will further explore my second research question regarding the empowerment of women in Rojava. I will apply the discussed theories of separatism, gender and empowerment to explain the logic and motivation behind the emergence of female separate organizations in Kurdish society and understand their contribution to the development of gender justice in Rojava.

### **7.1 The organization of Kurdish female freedom fighters**

The logic behind the establishment of Kurdish female military units can be explained through Frye's theoretical framework in which she argues that the foundation of separate women organization would help challenging the structure of male parasitism that exist in patriarchal societies.<sup>128</sup> Indeed, this explains the situation of Kurdish movement, PKK, in 1980s when a lot of its new members were resistant to the idea of gender equality as they thought women are not capable to be active in military. They were thinking that women should stay away from the front line and instead make food for the male fighters. Moreover, during that time, the PKK's policy to implement the notion of gender equality was hampered as the movement struggled hardly to survive in its conflict with Turkish army. Correspondingly, these patriarchal norms made a difficult situation for the female combatants of PKK to develop their military skills within the movement. They needed to show a masculine image of themselves and resemble themselves to the male fighters in order to escape from such male-mindset.<sup>129</sup>

Indeed, these inequalities and injustices encouraged female fighters of PKK to think about establishing a separate organization in which they can be organized and initiate struggle to challenge the patriarchal norms of Kurdish society and promote the notion of gender equality within Kurdish movement. Consequently, the first women military unit of PKK was established in 1993, and it was followed by the foundation of first women's political party in 1999. Indeed, Yuval Davis argues that the establishment of all-female military unit would make a safe environment for women in which they can protect themselves from sexual harassment. She

---

128 Frye, p. 406-414

129 D. Dirik and J. Staal, Living without approval, In In der Maur, R. & Staal, J(ed.).  
Stateless democracy. The New World Academy Reader, vol. 5, 2015, p. 39

further argues that in such military groups women can build up their confidence to perform the same tasks as men.<sup>130</sup>

Moreover, when the YPG was established in 2011 its members were consisting of both men and women in which the male combatants were the majority. At the beginning, it was difficult for many people in Rojava to understand the logic behind the motivation of women in joining military, and they were often hesitant to accept the idea of including women in army. Indeed, Knapp explains this issue through an interview that was conducted with a YPJ female commander in Rojava: “By 2011 there were still only a few women. Much trust was needed for the families to let their daughters join. Sometimes they demanded that their daughters stay with a certain female commander. That was a very long discussion, but finally it was understood that a liberation of the society could be achieved only through the liberation of women.”<sup>131</sup> Then the idea of ‘female combatant’ got more acceptance as the YPJ commander recalls “we had to teach the young people how to handle a weapon. Men took to the weapons quickly, but for women it was harder and more alien, so we placed special emphasis on it. Then came theoretical discussions about what defense is, and how people can protect themselves. This process gave the families trust, and so more women came to us”.<sup>132</sup> As the revolution started in Rojava and the regime withdrew its army in 2012, thousands of women started to join the YPG. From the beginning of the revolution, the Kurdish movement was emphasizing on the role of women in the liberation of society.

Indeed, the Kurdish movement established that pursuing women’s revolution alongside democratic revolution is the necessary condition in achieving a democratic society in Rojava. The co-chair of PYD, Asieh Abdullah, explains in an interview: “we are pursuing women’s revolution alongside democratic revolution. These two revolutions are not going to be replaced by each other, rather they complete each other. Therefore, no of them are being prioritized in Rojava. We, the women, want to lead our life and make decisions for ourselves. We want to participate in all levels of politics, economy and military. We, as women, made a great contribution in the development of Democratic Confederalism. we do not say that we should first resolve Kurdish question then we address women’s issues. On the contrary, we believe that the struggle to address Kurdish question and pursuing women’s right should go in parallel to

---

130 Y. Davis, *Gender and nation*. London: SAGE publications, 1997, p. 1404

131 Knapp, *Revolution in Rojava*, P. 135

132 *Ibid*, P. 136

each other. The struggle to achieve women's right is not a demand, rather it is the precondition for the progress and freedom of all society."<sup>133</sup> Subsequently, YPJ was established in 2013, and all the female members of YPG joined the group. Moreover, By the time, hundreds of female fighters of PKK, who joined the guerilla army since 1990s, returned to their homeland and joined YPJ. Indeed, the YPJ commander, Nasrin Abdullah, explained in an interview how YPJ strives to change men's masculinity through pursuing women's revolution in Rojava:

“We also have to fight to change the man's military. It's not easy to get your rights from the man because he already has the power and he will not let you get the power easily. We can see in work, the man gets everything; like president, like culture, like everything about the country, like representation – everything the man takes it for himself. Men have their own society and they will not easily let the women get their rights in this society and world. That's why we are making two revolutions: one for the women, and one for the man to also be more free.”<sup>134</sup>

In fact, the emergence of YPJ reflects the discussed Maie's theoretical perception of separatism in which she argued that the establishment of women separate organization would led to the progressive changes in the perception of men in sense that they will see women as equal to themselves.<sup>135</sup> Correspondingly, a YPJ fighter recalls the condition of women before the start of revolution in Rojava, and she explains how the establishment of separate female organization has helped women to overcome the patriarchal norms in Rojava. In an interview, published on the famous international magazine, Marie Claire, the YPJ member explains: “we can do all the same things that men can do; that women can do everything; that there's nothing impossible for us. When I was at home, all the men just thought that the women are just cleaning the house and not going outside. But when I joined the YPJ everything changed. I showed all of them that I can hold a weapon, that I can fight in the clashes, that I can do everything that they thought was impossible for women. Now, the men back home changed their opinions about me and other women. Now they see that we are their equals, and that we have the same abilities, maybe

---

133 Translated from Zanyar Omrani's interview with co-chair of PYD, Asieh Abdullah, 'We chose a third way from the beginning of the civil war', Akhbar rooz, November2014,

134 “We do not fight for death...we fight for Life.” An interview with YPJ commander Nasrin Abdullah, WEAREPLANC, May 17, 2016

135 Mies, p. 37-41

sometimes more than them. They understand we are strong and that we can do everything they can."<sup>136</sup>

Although there is no clear statistic about the numbers of YPJ fighters, it is estimated that the group is consisting of around 25000 female combatants who have joined the group on voluntary basis.<sup>137</sup>

## **7.11 Women's presence in Politics**

From the beginning of Rojava's revolution, the Kurdish movement has established that the liberation of women is the only way for the liberation of Kurdistan. Therefore, the women are granted the constitutional rights to be actively involved in all levels of politics. The principle of dual leadership exists in all social, political and cultural institutions of Rojava. Moreover, all the mixed-gender institutions consist of at least 40 percent of either sexes.<sup>138</sup> Indeed, these principles reflect the ongoing social transformation in Rojava. These developments reflect Kabeer's theoretical understanding of the notion of empowerment. We see that those women who before the Rojava revolution were housewife now become the leaders and the decision makers of society. Indeed, the head of women's council in Manbij explained to me in a textual message on Facebook how the Syrian law undermined the capability of women before Rojava revolution:

“Before the Rojava revolution we, women, were suffering from the enacted law which were legitimizing the patriarchal norms and oppression of women in Syria. the Syrian law was a disaster for women. it granted men absolute power over family life, custody rights, marriage and its dissolution, inheritance rights. The Syrian law provided that the testimony of two women in the court is equal with one man. This all helped men feel strong and see women as creatures

---

<sup>136</sup> E. Griffin, These Remarkable Women Are Fighting ISIS. It's Time You Know Who They Are, Marie Claire, October 1st, 2014,

<sup>137</sup> T. Perry, Exclusive: Syrian Kurdish YPG aims to expand force to over 100,000, Reuters, March 20, 2017

<sup>138</sup> Knapp, Revolution in Rojava, p. 69, 70

for their desire.”<sup>139</sup> Indeed, all these issues can be found in Syrian law as the aforesaid issues are regulated according to the Islamic regulation.<sup>140</sup>

She further continued explaining how Rojava’s revolution brought legal reforms by which the society goes through social transformation: “Since revolution started new changes are more evident every day. Now, men and women are equal before the law. We have the power to decide freely whether we want to get merry or dissolve the marriage. We have the same rights for custody and guardianship. Rojava’s Social Charter provided us with a lot of opportunities. Now, women are leading social, political, cultural and military groups in Rojava. before, women were only housewives but now women are the leaders. Rojava is a secular society. Religion is separate from politics. We do not need religious ceremony to get married, instead you can register your marriage in the commune where you live. However, there are still a lot of problem in our society. There are a lot of men who are resistant to these legal reforms. but, it is different from before; men are started to change, and it takes a long time till we achieve a free and equal society. Our revolution just started, and it will bring new changes every day.”<sup>141</sup>

In fact, the above statement contains several elements which correspond to the process of change that goes from being disempowered to be empowered. It reflects the transformation from being denied the right to decide over family life, marriage, guardianship to the equal rights over the previously denied rights. Correspondingly, Kabeer’s theory of empowerment and gender justice reflect the above changes in law before and after Rojava revolution. Kabeer argued that the individual capabilities of women pave the way towards the empowerment of all women which, eventually, would result in the promotion of gender justice and institutional changes in society.<sup>142</sup> Moreover, the above sentence shows us that achieving gender justice

---

<sup>139</sup> Personal translation, Written text by the head of women’s council in Manbij, received through Facebook, April 25, 2018

<sup>140</sup> Syria, MENA Gender Equality Profile, Status of girls and women in the Middle East and North Africa, UNICEF, p. 1; The Constitution of Syria, art. 3

<sup>141</sup> Personal translation, Written text by the head of women’s council in Manbij; This information can be found in other sources such as: B. McKernan, The Kurdish woman building a feminist democracy and fighting Isis at the same time, the Independent, January 5, 2017

<sup>142</sup> Kabeer. N, Empowerment, Citizenship and Gender Justice: A Contribution to Locally Grounded Theories of Change in Women's Lives. Ethics and Social Welfare, 2012, 6:3, p. 220, 227

would not be fulfilled only through legal changes, it also need time and struggle to change the patriarchal norms of society.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Through the mean of a content analysis of different material, the thesis outlined how the Kurdish movement managed to implement the project of Democratic Confederalism in the northern parts of Syria. To supplement these findings, the textual analysis of the Social Charter of Rojava illustrated the intention of the Kurdish movement to bring a social transformation in Rojava through implementing a democratic political system as a mean of organization of the society.

Consequently, the thesis demonstrated that the existing political structure in Rojava truly seems to share the common criteria of a democratic system. However, the analysis of the actual implementation of the Democratic Confederalism into practice pointed to certain issues. For instance, the existence and the roles of the MGRK system implies that there should be a law defining its duties and responsibilities, which is currently inexistent. Furthermore, the issue of legitimacy arises as the Rojava administration was unable not hold an election in order to choose the members of the parliament. This reality has been justified on the grounds of the ongoing civil war in the region which practically makes it impossible for Rojava's administration to hold a democratic and fair election.

Moreover, the paper elaborated on the development of gender equality in Rojava. It illustrated how Rojava's revolution has contributed to the development of gender justice in the region, stressing the logic behind the emergence of the separate female organization in the Kurdish society. As a consequence, it stipulated how the existing separate female-units help women in combating patriarchal norms of the Kurdish society and in accelerating their empowerment.

## 9. LIST OF REFERENCE

### *Primary sources:*

Charter of the United Nations, 1948.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1981.

Syria, MENA Gender Equality Profile, Status of girls and women in the Middle East and North Africa, UNICEF.

Human Rights Council, Human rights abuses and international humanitarian law violations in the Syrian Arab Republic, 21 July 2016- 28 February 2017, Thirty-fourth session, 27 February-24 March 2017.

The Charter of the Social Contract of Rojava, 2014.

The Constitution of the Syria Arab Republic, 2012.

Syrian Nationality Act, Legislative Decree No. 276 (1969).

United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (26 October 1998), Fifteenth Periodic Report of States Parties due in 1998: Syrian Arab Republic (CERD/C/338/Add.1/Rev.1.).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

### *Secondary Sources:*

Abboud. S, Syria, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016.

Achari. P, Research Methodology, a Guide to Ongoing Research Scholars in Management, Horizon Books, 2014.

Bookchin. M, Libertarian Municipalism: An Overview, The Anarchist Library, 1991, accessed February 15, 2018.

Bookchin. M, The Ecology of Freedom, California: Cheshire Books, 1982.

Davis. Y, *Gender and nation*, London: SAGE publications, 1997.

Dirik. D. and Staal. J, *Living without approval*, In In der Maur, R. & Staal, J(ed.), *Stateless democracy. The New World Academy Reader*, vol. 5, 2015, pp.27-57.

Federici. V, "The Rise of Rojava: Kurdish Autonomy in the Syrian Conflict." *Sais Review of International Affairs*, vol:35 iss:2, 2015, pp. 81-88.

Frye. M, Chapter 22: *Some reflections on separatism and power*. In Meyers, T, D(Ed). *Feminist Social Thought – A reader*, London: Routledge, 1997, pp.406-414.

Gunter. M, *Out of Nowhere: The Kurds of Syria in Peace and War*, London: Hurst Publishers, 2014.

Hendriques. J, (ed.), *Syria: Issues and Historical Background*, New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2003.

Heywood. A, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Hobbes. T, *Leviathan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1651.

Human Rights Watch, *Syria: The Silenced Kurds*, October 1996.

Kabeer. N, *Empowerment, Citizenship and Gender Justice: A Contribution to Locally Grounded Theories of Change in Women's Lives*. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 2012, 6:3, pp. 216-232.

Kabeer. N, *Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal 1*, *Gender & Deve. opment*, 2005, 13:1, pp. 13-24.

Kerim. Y, *The Kurds In Syria: The Forgotten People* [e-book]. London: Pluto Press, 2005, Available from: Malmö University Library Catalogue, Ipswich, MA. Accessed May 10, 2018.

Knapp. M, *Revolution In Rojava : Democratic Autonomy And Women's Liberation In Syrian Kurdistan*, Pluto Press, eBook, 2016, Available from: eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), Ipswich, MA. Accessed May 21, 2018.

Knaap. M. and Jongerden. J, *Communal Democracy: The Social Contract and Confederalism in Rojava'*, *Comparative Islamic Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2014, pp. 87-109.

Krippendorff. K, Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology, Sage Publication, 3rd ed, 2013.

Locke, J., Second Treatise of Civil Government: Of the State of Nature, Chapter 2, Sec 4. T, 1651.

Marx. K, Civil War in France. Gloucester: Dodo Press, 2009.

McDowall. D, A modern history of the Kurds. London : I. B. Tauris, 2000.

Michael. K, Jongerden. J, 'Communal Democracy: The Social Contract and Confederalism in Rojava', Comparative Islamic Studies, Vol. 10 Issue 1, 2014, pp. 87-109.

Mies. M, Patriarchy and Accumulation On A World Scale : Women In The International Division Of Labour [e-book], London : Zed Books Ltd, 2014, Available from: eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), Ipswich, MA. Accessed May 21, 2018.

Özcan. A, Turkey's Kurds : A Theoretical Analysis of the PKK and Abdullah Ocalan, London: Routledge, 2006, Available from: eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), Ipswich, MA. Accessed May 21, 2018.

A. Öcalan, Liberating Life: Woman's Revolution, International Initiative Edition in cooperation with Mesopotamian Publishers, Neuss, 2013, P. 58, 59

Öcalan. A, Prison Writings: The PKK and the Kurdish Question in the 21st Century (London: Transmedia Publishing Ltd, 2011.

Personal translation, Written text by the head of women's council in Manbij, received through Facebook, April 25, 2018.

Richardson. J, Contending Liberalisms in World Politics, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001.

Rojava, Capitalism Nature Socialism, 2015, 26:1, pp. 1-15,

Schumacher. L.R, The Eastern Question as a Europe question: Viewing the ascent of 'Europe' through the lens of Ottoman decline, Journal of European Studies, 2014, Vol 44, Issue 1, pp. 64 – 80.

Seker. N, Identity formation and the political power in the late Ottoman Empire and early Turkish Republic, *Historia Actual Online*, Vol 0, Iss 8, 2009, pp. 59-67.

Somel. S, *Historical Dictionary of the Ottoman Empire*. Lanham, Md : Scarecrow Press, 2003, Available from: eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), Ipswich, MA. Accessed May 21, 2018.

Stateless democracy. *The New World Academy Reader*, vol. 5, 2015, pp. 27-57.

*Strangers in a Tangled Wilderness, A Small Key Can Open A Large Door: The Rojava Revolution*. US: Combustion Books, 2015.

VanEvery. J, *Heterosexual Women Changing the Family: Refusing to be a 'wife'!* Taylor & Francis, 1995.

Vali. A, The Kurds and Their “Others”: Fragmented Identity and Fragmented Politics. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 18 (2), 1998, pp. 82–95.

Verschoor, M., The democratic boundary problem and social contract theory, *European journal of political theory*, vol:17 iss:1, 2018, pp:3 -22.

Yegen. M, *Armed Struggle to Peace Negotiations: Independent Kurdistan to Democratic Autonomy, or The PKK in Context*. *Middle East Critique*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2016, pp. 365-383.

White. P, *The PKK : Coming Down From The Mountains* [e-book], London : Zed Books, 2015, Available from: Malmö University Library Catalogue, Ipswich, MA. Accessed May 18, 2018.

Zisser. E, Syria – from the six day war to the Syrian civil war, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 2017, 44:4, pp. 545-558.

***Internet sources:***

AFP, Syrian Kurds protest ‘exclusion’ from Geneva II talks, the Jordan Times, January 23, 2014, accessed 15 April, 2018, <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/region/syrian-kurds-protest-exclusion'-geneva-ii-talks>.

An interview with Ercan Ayboga: Journey to Rojava, *The Cooperative Economy*, May 2014, accessed February 10, 2018, <https://cooperativeeconomy.info/journey-to-rojava-may-2014/>.

Ayboğa. E, Consensus is Key: New Justice System in Rojava, *New Compass*, October 13, 2014, accessed April 25, 2018, <http://new-compass.net/articles/consensus-key-new-justice-system-rojava>.

Barfi. B, “Kurds Now Our Best Ally Against ISIS in Syria,” *The Washington Institute*, 2015, accessed May 13, 2018, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/kurds-now-our-best-ally-against-isis-in-syria>.

Burc. R, Confederal Kurdistan: the 'commune of communes, *Open Democracy*, 8 June 2016, accessed 15 April, 2018, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/north-africa-west-asia/rosa-burc/confederal-kurdistan-commune-of-communes>.

Cagaptay. S and Tabler, A, “The U.S.-PYD-Turkey Puzzle,” *The Washington Institute*, October 23, 2015, accessed May 14, 2018, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-u.s.-pyd-turkey-puzzle>.

Enzinna. W, A Dream of Secular Utopia in ISIS’s Backyard, *The New York Times*, November 24, 201, accessed 15 April, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/29/magazine/a-dream-of-utopia-in-hell.html>.

Griffin. E, These Remarkable Women Are Fighting ISIS. It's Time You Know Who They Are, *Marie Claire*, October 111st, 2014, accessed 15 April, 2018, <https://www.marieclaire.com/culture/news/a6643/these-are-the-women-battling-isis/>.

Gupta. R, “The world's most progressive democracy is being born. Don't let it get strangled, *CNN*, February 12, 2018, accessed 15 May, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/12/opinions/worlds-most-progressive-democracy-born-dont-let-turkey-strange-it-opinion-gupta/index.html>.

How Seven Years of War Turned Syria’s Cities into Hell on Earth, *CNN*, accessed April 22, 2018.

Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2018: Rights Trends in Syria*, accessed April 22, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/syria>.

Interview with Mr. Salih Muslim, co-chair of Democratic Union Party (PYD).” *Washington Kurdish Institute*. September 2, 2015, accessed April 24, 2018,

<http://dckurd.org/2015/09/02/interview-with-mr-salih-muslim-chairman-of-democratic-union-party-pyd/>.

Kabalan. M, “The illusion of a Kurdish state in Syria,” Gulf News, April 7, 2016, accessed April 12, 2018, <http://gulfnews.com/opinion/thinkers/the-illusion-of-a-kurdish-state-in-syria-1.1706169>.

Kumar. A, Syrian City’s Devastation Forgotten: UN Security Council Meeting Should Address Plight of Raqqa’s Residents, Human Rights Watch, April 17, 2018, accessed 25 April, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/17/syrian-citys-devastation-forgotten>.

“Kurdish forces seize border town of Tal Abyad, cutting off key Isis supply line,” The Guardian, June 16, 2015, accessed May 14, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/16/kurdish-fighters-cut-key-supply-line-to-islamic-state-capital-raqqa>.

McKernan. B, The Kurdish woman building a feminist democracy and fighting Isis at the same time, the Independent, January 5, 2017, accessed May 10, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/kurdish-woman-building-feminist-democrac-fighting-isis-at-the-same-time-syria-kurdistan-rojava-new-a7487151.html>.

Najim. D, and Mustafa. F, Turkey and Rojava: The Clash of Two Projects, The Jerusalem Post, June 28 April, 2018, accessed 10 May, 2018 <https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Turkey-and-Rojava-The-clash-of-two-projects-552965>.

Nordland. R, On Northern Syria Front Line, U.S. and Turkey Head Into Tense Face-off, The New York Times, February 7, 2018, accessed 15 April, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/07/world/middleeast/us-turkey-manbij-kurds.html>

Nordland. R, Women Are Free, and Armed, in Kurdish-Controlled Northern Syria, the New York Times, February 24, 2018, accessed 15 April, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/24/world/middleeast/syria-kurds-womens-rights-gender-equality.html?module=ArrowsNav&contentCollection=Middle%20East&action=keypress&region=FixedLeft&pgtype=article>.

Perry, T., Exclusive: Syrian Kurdish YPG aims to expand force to over 100,000, Reuters, March 20, 2017, accessed 22 April, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-ypg-exclusive-idUSKBN16R1QS>.

Profile: Bashar al-Assad, President Assad has ruled Syria with an iron fist for nearly two decades. We take a look at his life and legacy, April 2018, Aljazeera, accessed on April 20, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2007/07/200852518514154964.html>.

Reuters, More than 200000 people fled Syria's Afrin, have no shelter: Kurdish official, accessed March 19, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-afrin-official/more-than-200000-people-fled-syrias-afrin-have-no-shelter-kurdish-official-idUSKBN1GV177>.

Reuters, U.S.-backed forces drive into Islamic State-held city, July 7, 2016, accessed 14 May, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-islamic-state/u-s-backed-forces-drive-into-islamic-state-held-city-monitors-say-idUSKCN0ZN1ZZ>.

Rivenbark, Z., Introduction to the Syrian Civil War, Jurist, 2018, accessed on 18 April, 2018, <http://www.jurist.org/feature/2013/07/an-introduction-to-the-syrian-civil-war.php>.

Rojava Democratic Revolution, The Responsible Consumer, accessed May 10, 2018, <https://theresponsibleconsumer.wordpress.com/about-2/>.

Senior Kurdish military official: We will defeat ISIS and link all Rojava's cantons, Ara News, June 3, 2016, accessed 15 May, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160606152215/http://aranews.net/2016/06/senior-kurdish-military-official-will-defeat-isis-link-rojavas-cantons/>.

Sly, L, Syrian Kurds declare their own region, raising tensions, Washington Post, March 17, 2016, accessed 18 April, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/syrian-kurds-declare-their-own-region-raising-tensions/2016/03/17/db762950-ec4c-11e5-a9ce-681055c7a05f\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.4d53e31b22c0](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/syrian-kurds-declare-their-own-region-raising-tensions/2016/03/17/db762950-ec4c-11e5-a9ce-681055c7a05f_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4d53e31b22c0).

Social Contract Theory, a Peer- Reviewed academic Resource, Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, accessed April 27, 2018, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/soc-cont/>.

Solomon. E, Special Report: Amid Syria's violence, Kurds carve out autonomy, Reuters, January 22, 2014, accessed 15 April, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-kurdistan-specialreport/special-report-amid-syrias-violence-kurds-carve-out-autonomy-idUSBREA0L17320140122>.

Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Locke's Political Philosophy, First published Wed Nov 9, 2005; substantive revision Mon Jan 11, 2016, accessed on April 12, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke-political/>.

Steyerl. H and Rojava Film Commune, The colour of women: an interview with YPJ commanders Dilovan Kobani, Nirvana, Ruken, and Zerin, July, 31st, 2017, accessed 25 April, 2018, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/86/160968/the-color-of-women-an-interview-with-ypj-commanders-dilovan-kobani-nirvana-ruken-and-zerin/>.

Syrian Civil War Map: Who's in Control Where, 2018, Aljazeera, accessed on 14 May, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2015/05/syria-country-divided-150529144229467.html>.

“Syria conflict: Kurds declare federal system”, BBC NEWS, March 17, 2016, accessed April 15, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35830375>.

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Syrian Civil War Map, accessed April 20, 2018, <https://syriancivilwarmap.com/syrian-democratic-forces/>.

Syria Emergency, The UN Refugee Agency, accessed April 22, 2018, <http://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>.

Syria: the Story of the Conflict, BBC News, accessed on April 25, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868>.

Syria: US Ally's Razing of Villages Amounts to War Crime, Amnesty International, 2015, accessed 10 May 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2015/10/syria-us-allys-razing-of-villages-amounts-to-war-crimes/>.

Turkey ends 'Euphrates Shield' operation in Syria, 30 March 2017, Aljazeera, accessed 15 May, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/03/turkey-ends-euphrates-shield-operation-syria-170329211428970.html>.

Turkish forces and Free Syrian Army capture Afrin city, 18 March, 2018, Aljazeera, accessed 15 May, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/free-syrian-army-group-captures-afrin-city-180318081430817.html>.

Turkey 'ends' Euphrates Shield campaign in Syria, BBC NEWS, March 30, 2017, accessed May 14, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-39439593>.

Turkey supports anything that harms the Kurds, Deutsche Welle, 2018, accessed on 05 May 2018, <http://www.dw.com/en/sohr-turkey-supports-anything-that-harms-the-kurds/a-42334921>.

What the Syrian Kurds have Wrought, The Atlantic, October 25, 2016, accessed 15 May, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/10/kurds-rojava-syria-isis-iraq-assad/505037/>.

The region, current situation of civilians in Afrin, reports of WHO, UN, accessed 24 March, 2018, <http://theregion.org/article/13104-current-situation-of-civilians-of-afrin-reports-of-who-un>.

Turkey threatens military action against U.S.-allied Syrian Kurdish fighters, Washington Post, May 2017, accessed May 10, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/turkey-threatens-military-action-against-us-allied-syrian-kurdish-fighters/2017/05/10/3936260c-3595-11e7-ab03-aa29f656f13e\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.e9c713b2dd4c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/turkey-threatens-military-action-against-us-allied-syrian-kurdish-fighters/2017/05/10/3936260c-3595-11e7-ab03-aa29f656f13e_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.e9c713b2dd4c).

“Why Kobane Matters“, Time, October 23, 2014, accessed May 10, 2018, <http://subs.time.com/current-articles/why-Kobane-matters>; the Guardian, “US providing light arms to Kurdish-led coalition in Syria, officials confirm”, September 29, 2016, accessed May 12, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/29/syria-us-arms-supply-kurds-turkey>.

Wilgenburg. W, “Kurdish militia aims to connect Kurdish enclaves in Syria,” Al-Monitor, November 24, 2013, accessed May 13, 2018, <http://www.almonitor.com/pulse/tr/originals/2013/11/kurdistan-syria-militias-turkey.html>.

War and Conflict: Syria's Civil War Explained From the Beginning. 2018, Aljazeera, accessed 10 May 2018.

Wilford. G, Women burn burqas and men shave beards to celebrate liberation from Isis in Syria, Independent, July 22, 2017, accessed April 17, 2018,  
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-syria-raqqa-women-civilians-burning-burqas-freed-liberated-shaving-beards-terrorism-terrorist-a7854431.html>.

“We do not fight for death...we fight for Life.” An interview with YPJ commander Nasrin Abdullah, WEAREPLANC, May 17, 2016, accessed April 20, 2018,  
<https://www.weareplanc.org/blog/we-dont-fight-for-death-we-fight-for-life-an-interview-with-ypj-commander-nisrin-abdullah/>.

Zraick, K., Syria Talks Are Complicated by Competing Opposition Groups, New York Times, January 29, 2016, accessed April 15, 2018,  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/30/world/middleeast/syria-talks-geneva-opposition.htm>.