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Abstract

Nel 2014, l'assedio di Kobane da parte dello Stato Islamico ha riportato la Questione Curda all'attenzione del pubblico occidentale. La battaglia, entrate nell'immaginario Curdo come una nuova Stalingrado, ha rappresentato la prima sconfitta per Daesh in un momento in cui avanzava incontrastato sia in Iraq che in Siria. La campagna di supporto aereo della Coalizione americana, le proteste della diaspora Curda in occidente e, soprattutto, l'insolita visione di donne combattenti mediorientali che si contrapponevano ai miliziani in nero dell'ISIS, sono stati tutti elementi che hanno attratto l'attenzione dei media per gli eventi in Siria Settentrionale, in Curdo Rojava. Fino a quel momento, questi eventi erano d'interesse solo per pochi attivisti politici e studiosi. Sebbene la maggior parte dei reportage si è interessato soprattutto delle milizie femminili Curde, è stato anche approfondito il particolare esperimento politico effettuato dai Curdi Siriani basato sulle idee di Öcalan riguardanti democrazia e femminismo.

Il movimento Curdo era già conosciuto a chi faceva parte della 'sinistra'; sia la guerriglia del PKK contro lo stato Turco, che le grandi manifestazioni di protesta e l'arrivo di Öcalan in Italia alla fine degli anni '90, avevano fatto conoscere la questione Curda e creato un movimento di solidarietà. Ciononostante, in pochi avevano seguito gli sviluppi della questione Curda durante

gli anni 2000-2010, soprattutto per quanto riguarda l'evolversi dell'ideologia del movimento Curdo. Quello che negli anni '90 era un 'classico' movimento socialista di liberazione nazionale, è ora diventato un movimento che promuove una democrazia senza stato e pratiche femministe che non hanno paragoni nel contesto medio-orientale.

Lo scopo di questa tesi è di analizzare la nascita e l'evoluzione del movimento Curdo, ricostruendo le sue origini nella Turchia degli anni '60, la fondazione del PKK negli anni '80 e il conflitto con lo stato Turco. Successivamente esaminerò gli strumenti discorsivi usati dal PKK per auto-legittimarsi, e analizzerò come il PKK ha sviluppato la sua ideologia di liberazione delle donne negli anni '90, dimostrando che il PKK è stato spinto sia da motivazioni pratiche che ideologiche. Sosterrò anche che la crescente importanza delle donne nel PKK è risultato diretto del loro operato sul campo. Infine, valuterò la transizione del PKK dal nazionalismo e socialismo delle origini verso un'idea di democrazia senza stato; il ruolo svolto dalla creazione di una mitologia delle origini; le modalità di transizione da interessamento nella 'questione femminile' fino a una più ampia ideologia femminista basata sulla scienza delle donne (Gineologia) elaborata da Öcalan. In conclusione, studierò l'applicazione di questa ideologia sul campo in Turchia e i suoi limiti e problemi interni, prendendo ad esempio casi dalla Turchia e dal Rojava.

La mia analisi dell'ideologia di Öcalan sarà interna all'ideologia stessa. Per questo, non effettuerò comparazioni con il pensiero di altri filosofi, e non discuterò l'appartenenza dell'ideologia di Öcalan a specifiche scuole di pensiero o correnti politiche. Öcalan rappresenta la prima e indubitabile fonte per organizzazioni e militanti Curdi; i risultati della mia ricerca dimostrano che, generalizzando, i militanti Curdi seguono Öcalan e nessun altro. Per questo motivo, la tesi sarà focalizzata sulla genealogia delle idee di Öcalan, gli effetti sul movimento Curdo e gli effetti dell'applicazione sul campo delle organizzazioni Curde.

La tesi è divisa in tre parti: nella prima parte analizzerò la storia del movimento Curdo in Turchia dal 1961 al 1999, anno dell'arresto di Öcalan. Il secondo capitolo sarà incentrato sulle origini dell'ideologia femminista del PKK e su come l'ideologia si è sviluppata negli anni '90. Infine, l'ultimo capitolo analizzerò lo spostamento verso l'ideologia del confederalismo democratico e l'attuazione di questa ideologia da parte dei partiti politici Curdi e delle organizzazioni della società civile in Turchia.

Il primo capitolo della tesi ha lo scopo di presentare il background storico. Le prime rivolte Curde contro le politiche assimilazioniste dello stato Turco risalgono agli anni '20 e '30.

Sebbene queste rivolte non avessero connotati nazionalisti, negli anni ’60 influenzarono le nascenti élite nazionaliste Curde, che si identificarono come l’ultimo tassello di una storia di rivolte contro lo stato Turco. Questi intellettuali emersero da un ambiente socio-economico molto diverso dei leader feudali delle rivolte precedenti. Facente parte della nuova classe media, questi intellettuali si incontrarono nelle università della parte occidentale della Turchia, dove con la loro produzione letteraria ricrearono e ridefinirono la loro identità Curda. All’inizio posizionarono la questione Curda nell’ambito delle lotte della sinistra socialista e anti-imperialista Turca. Tuttavia, già dagli anni ’70 la maggior parte degli intellettuali considerava la questione Curda come una questione nazionale e definiva il Kurdistan una ‘colonia interna’ che doveva essere liberato da un movimento anti-coloniale. L’attività degli intellettuali Curdi favorì la nascita di un movimento di massa che chiedeva il riconoscimento dello condizione di sfruttamento del Kurdistan e denunciava la sua condizione di colonia interna. Il colpo di stato del 1970, però, interruppe la crescita del movimento. Gli anni ’70 furono caratterizzati da una generale radicalizzazione della sinistra e destra Turche, con un progressivo incremento della violenza politica. Durante questi anni le organizzazioni Curde si distaccarono dalla sinistra turca e si ricreò un movimento di massa che portò nel 1977 all’elezione a sindaco di Diyarbakir del primo candidato ‘Curdista’.

Tuttavia, il nuovo colpo di stato del 1980 bloccò ogni possibilità di sviluppo per i partiti politici curdi, con migliaia di arresti tra le file della sinistra, dei sindacati e dei Curdi. Dopo il ritorno di un governo politico, la Turchia intraprese una serie di riforme economiche neoliberali che favorirono l’ascesa di una nuova classe media, ma al prezzo di un deciso aumento delle disparità economiche tra l’Est e l’Ovest del Paese.

Il colpo di stato segnò anche l’istituzionalizzazione della ‘mentalità da stato di emergenza’, che divenne l’unica risposta a possibili crisi esistenziali dello Stato. La creazione del PKK rappresentò la più importante di queste crisi. Fondato da Abdullah Öcalan e altri studenti nel 1978, il PKK iniziò una campagna di guerriglia contro lo stato che ottenne rapidamente ampio supporto tra la massa di contadini impoveriti dalle riforme economiche Turche. Lo Stato rispose con crescenti misure repressive, estendendo i poteri speciali dell’esercito in Kurdistan e creando milizie paramilitari, in un crescendo di violenze che continuò fino alla fine degli anni ’90 e causò migliaia di morti e milioni di rifugiati.

La crescita del PKK può essere spiegata sia dalle condizioni socio-economiche del Kurdistan Turco, sia dall’abilità del partito di creare un discorso politico efficace. Il PKK riuscì con successo a creare una mitologia di resistenza basata sulle azioni eroiche dei suoi membri.

Questa mitologia divenne parte della cultura popolare Curda, grazie anche al contributo delle numerose organizzazioni culturali Curde legate al PKK. Sebbene a metà degli anni ’90 il PKK raggiunse l’apice della sua forza militare e di supporto popolare, non riuscì a mantenere i territori conquistati in Turchia. Inoltre, la Turchia riuscì a interrompere il supporto della Siria al PKK, che durava sin dalla fondazione del partito. Per questo motivo Öcalan dovette lasciare la Siria e fuggire in Europa, prima di essere catturato nel 1999. L’arresto di Öcalan e la vittoria elettorale del partito AKP alle elezioni politiche del 2002 aprirono un nuovo capitolo per la questione Curda. Durante i suoi anni in prigione, Öcalan pose le basi per la transizione del PKK verso il confederalismo democratico.

Nel secondo capitolo, dimostrerò che la svolta di Öcalan verso il l’ideologia femminista iniziò ben prima della sua incarcerazione. Dimostrerò invece che la transizione verso il femminismo è frutto di un processo iniziato nel PKK dei primi anni ’90. Durante gli anni ’90 il PKK ha abbandonato le iniziali prese di posizione nominali a favore delle donne, che erano influenzate da stereotipi di genere, a favore di un femminismo radicale attraverso due traiettorie. A partire dagli anni ’90, il PKK ha cercato di incrementare il reclutamento femminile tramite una maggiore attenzione per l’emancipazione femminile. Öcalan vide il bisogno di ‘trattare e organizzare le donne’ per espandere la lotta di liberazione nazionale. L’analisi delle riviste del PKK degli anni ’90 dimostra come la questione femminile era ancora influenzata da categorie di genere tradizionali come il ‘namus’ (onore). Inoltre, la narrativa di Öcalan era problematica perché esprimeva una concezione essenzialista e culturalista delle donne, viste come ‘portatrici di vita’ e capaci di una naturale ‘devozione verso la vita.’ Öcalan faceva rientrare l’emancipazione femminile nel suo programma per la creazione di ‘nuovi, liberi individui.’ Inoltre, politiche come il controllo del partito sulla sessualità dei propri militanti avevano lo scopo di sottrarre le donne dal controllo patriarcale della ‘vecchia Curdità’, mantenendo però il controllo sui corpi femminili.

La ridefinizione di un mito fondativo per la resistenza Curda con lo scopo di evidenziare il potere delle donne sembra suggerire un notevole cambiamento rispetto all’inclusione della questione femminile come un mero emancipare le donne da una condizione subordinata. Il nuovo mito basato sulla dea matriarcale Ishtar rimarca come il PKK considerasse come il superamento del patriarcato da parte dell’intera società Curda fosse precondizione per il raggiungimento della libertà.

Tuttavia, i cambiamenti nell’ideologia del PKK non si tradussero in immediati cambiamenti nelle relazioni di genere tra i militanti. Questi cambiamenti divennero gradualmente effettivi

solo dopo la creazione di organizzazioni autonome femminili come l'Esercito delle Donne YJAK. Lo YJAK permise l'esistenza di spazi sicuri, 'istituzioni segregate' che permettevano 'conversazioni e azioni altrimenti vietate.' Le donne acquistarono potere politiche entro questi spazi, e ciò permise loro di affrontare il patriarcato all'interno del PKK, creando lo spazio per la successiva ideologia femminista del partito. La legittimazione ideologica del potere delle donne fornita da Öcalan costituì una pre-condizione necessaria per la nascita dello YJAK e la crescita della sua influenza. Lo YJAK acquisì così una sua legittimità politica che permise lo sviluppo graduale dell'ideologia femminista del PKK.

Lo YJAK utilizzò la 'teoria della rottura' di Öcalan per formare sedi di potere femminile all'interno del PKK. Inoltre, la stretta aderenza delle donne all'ideologia di 'sviluppo individuale' formulata da Öcalan aumentò la loro legittimità all'interno del partito. Probabilmente, la lealtà dello YJAK verso l'ideologia e le politiche di Öcalan influenzarono quest'ultimo nel formulare una teoria femminista più radicale, il che si tradusse nell'ascesa delle donne nel PKK.

Nell'ultima sezione descriverò gli sviluppi dell'ideologia politica del movimento Curdo a partire dal 1999: dalla sua cella in Turchia, Öcalan ha prodotto da solo l'ideologia del confederalismo democratico. Per prima cosa, discuterò brevemente l'evoluzione dell'ideologia del PKK prima della svolta confederalista. In seguito, sarà analizzata la ricostruzione storica effettuata da Öcalan sulle origini dello stato e delle strutture gerarchiche nella società, dimostrando come questo sia stato effettuato con lo scopo di posizionare la lotta dei Curdi all'interno di una tradizione millenaria di lotte. Spiegherò inoltre cosa intende Öcalan per confederalismo democratico e come si posizionano altri concetti come autonomia democratica, repubblica democratica e modernità democratica, oltre a posizionare l'ideologia femminista in questo framework. In questo contesto, mi soffermerò sulla Gineologia, la scienza delle donne creata da Öcalan in sostituzione del femminismo occidentale. In conclusione, sarà discussa l'applicazione dell'ideologia di Öcalan in Turchia da parte delle organizzazioni federative KCK e DTK, le differenze tra ideologia e applicazione pratica e le problematiche insite nella nature di questa ideologia.

Introduction

The images of 2014 Syria's Kobane siege brought the Kurdish Question back to Western public's attention. The battle, which the Kurds compared to Stalingrad, constituted the first setback for the Islamic State. The US air support campaign, the protests of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe, and above all the unusual vision of women guerrilla opposing the black-robes DAESH army, all concurred to attract mass media's attention to the events in Northern Syria, which until then was only topic for few activists and academics. Although most of the media focused only on the glamorous women guerrilla, part of the public began to know about the peculiar political experiment carried on in Rojava[1] Kurdistan by the Syrian Kurds and their ideas on democracy and women.

The Kurdish movement is well familiar to those of leftist ideas; the struggle of the PKK against the Turkish state, the mass mobilizations of the 1990s and Abdullah Öcalan's permanence in Italy all contributed to create a solidarity movement with the Kurdish struggle. However, not many followed the development of the Kurdish struggle in the 2000s-2010s, and most of the people, the author included, did not know anything about the ideological shift of the Kurdish political movement. What until the 1990s was a 'normal' communist nationalist movement, now is a movement promoting grassroots stateless democracy, with feminist practices unheard of in other comparable contemporary organizations in the Middle East.

The purpose of this graduate thesis is to analyse the Kurdish movement's inception and evolution, reconstructing its origins in the 1960s in Turkey, the creation of the PKK in the 1980s and its war against the Turkish State. I will then investigate the discursive tools employed by the PKK for its legitimization, and the origin of its women's emancipation ideology in the 1990s, demonstrating PKK's focus on women was informed both by practical and ideological motives. Furthermore, I argue that the increasing importance of women within the PKK is direct result of women's agency on the ground. Finally, I will assess PKK's transition from socialism and nationalism to stateless grassroots democracy, the role played by the creation of origins' myths and the latest transition of the whole Kurdish movement from merely focusing on women's issues to a broader feminist ideology based on Jineology (science of women). To conclude, I will assess the application of this ideology on the ground in Turkey and the possible shortcomings and internal problems within the ideology, drawing from cases in Turkey and Syrian Rojava.

[1] Western Kurdistan

My analysis of the ideology of Öcalan will be internal. That is, I will not compare it with the work of other philosophers and I will not discuss whether Öcalan's ideology belongs to one or another school of thought or political current. Öcalan represents the primary and unquestionable ideological source for Kurdish organizations and militants. To generalize, Kurdish militant follow Öcalan and no one else. Therefore, I will focus on the genealogy of Öcalan's ideas, its effects on the Kurdish movement and its applications on the ground by Kurdish organizations, analysing incoherencies and problems within this ideology.

The thesis is divided in three chapters: the first chapter analyses the history of Kurdish movement in Turkey from 1961 to 1999, year of Öcalan's arrest. The second chapter centres on the origins of PKK's feminist ideology and its development during the 1990s. The last chapter assess Öcalan's shift to democratic confederalism and the ideology's implementation by Kurdish political parties and civil society organizations in Turkey.

The first chapter of the thesis serves as historical background. The Kurds revolted during the 1920s and the 1930s against the Turkish state's assimilationist attempts. Although these revolts did not have a nationalistic aspect, they influenced the emerging Kurdish nationalist elite of the 1960, who placed themselves as the latest link of a chain of revolts. These intellectuals emerged from a different socio-economic environment than the feudal leaders of the 1930s protests. As part of the new emerging middle class, they met in the universities of western Turkey, where they re-discovered and re-defined their Kurdish identity.

At first, they situated Kurdish issues within the broader socialist and anti-imperialist Turkish left. However, by 1970 most intellectuals defined Kurdish problem as a national problem and Kurdistan as an internal colony to be liberated by an anti-colonial national movement. The Kurdish intellectuals' activity led to the emergence of a mass protest movement that advocated for recognition of Kurdistan's underdevelopment and denounced its condition of internal colony. However, the 1971 coup d'état interrupted these developments. The 1970s saw a general radicalization of the Turkish leftist movement and of rightist' parties, with an increase of political violence throughout the decade. During these years, the Kurdish organizations separated from the Turkish left and increased mass participation, as demonstrated by the election of a nationalist Kurdish mayor in Diyarbakir in 1977.

However, the 1980 military intervention blocked every possibility for Kurdish political parties, as thousands of people from leftist or Kurdish movements and unions were jailed and tortured. After the return to a civilian government, Turkey undertook a series of neo-liberal reforms,

which created a new middle class loyal to the state, but deepened the economic inequality between West and East. Moreover, the coup marked the institutionalization of the Emergency State, which would become the only answer to perceived existential crisis. The creation of the PKK represented the most remarkable of these crises. Founded by Abdullah Öcalan in 1978, the party started guerrilla operations and rapidly gathered support as it could count on a large manpower pool of farmers impoverished by Turkey's economic reforms. The State responded to the PKK by increasing repressive measures, extending the army's powers on Eastern Turkey and creating paramilitary militias, in an escalation of violence that continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s and led to thousands of deaths and millions of refugees.

The PKK's growth can be explained not only by the effective socio-economic conditions of Turkey's Kurdistan, but also by the party's ability to create a comprehensive discourse. The PKK successfully created a mythology of resistance made of heroic actions that became part of Kurdish culture, whose revival was promoted by PKK-linked Kurdish cultural organizations. Whereas by mid-1990s the PKK reached the peak of its military strength and popular support, it failed at holding ground against the Turkish army. Moreover, Turkey managed to halt Syria's support to the PKK, so that Öcalan had to flee to Europe and he was eventually captured in 1999. Öcalan's arrest and the victory of the AKP party in 2002 elections opened a new chapter for Kurdish struggle. While in prison, Öcalan laid the basis for the PKK's shift towards democratic confederalism.

In the second chapter, I will challenge several observers' belief that Öcalan's turn to feminism began after extensive readings in his prison cell. I will argue instead that Kurdish movement's feminism is product of a process started in the early 1990s' PKK. I will argue that the PKK moved away from a tokenized emancipation discourse (influenced by traditional gender roles) towards a more radical feminism during the 1990s via two trajectories. Starting from the 1990s, the PKK increased its focus on women's recruitment through a political ideology that increasingly emphasized female emancipation. Öcalan saw the need to 'treat and organize women' to expand the National Liberation Struggle. PKK magazines demonstrate discourse on women in the 1990s was still influenced by traditional gender categories such as 'namus' (honour). Öcalan's discourse on women's emancipation was problematic because expressed an essentialist and culturalist view of women as 'bearers of life' and possessing a natural 'devotion to life.' Öcalan encompassed female emancipation within his project of creating 'new, free individuals.' Policies such as the control over militants' sexuality aimed at relinquishing the patriarchal control of 'old Kurdishness' while policing and surveilling bodies.

The redesign of the creation myth of Kurdish resistance to highlight female power suggests a significant break from the originary inclusion of women's issues as merely 'emancipating them [women]' from their servile condition. The matriarchal Ishtar myth emphasized the emancipation of broader Kurdish society from the 'patriarchy' and 'old Kurdishness' to achieve the freedom of all individuals.

However, developments in the PKK's ideology did not translate into actual changes in gender relations between militants. These changes gradually became consistent only after the creation of autonomous women's organizations such as the Women's Army YJAK. The YJAK allowed for the existence of safe spaces, 'segregated institutions' that permitted 'otherwise forbidden conversation and action.' Within these spaces, women acquired political power to confront the patriarchate in the PKK, creating the narrative space for PKK's later feminist discourse. However, Öcalan's ideological legitimization of female power constituted a necessary pre-condition for the birth of the Women's Army and its increased influence. The Women's Army acquired its political legitimacy within the context of the gradual development of the ideological trajectory towards feminism.

The Women's Army employed Öcalan's "theory of rupture" to establish independent bases of female power in the PKK. Furthermore, women's loyal adherence to Öcalan's humanist ideology of "self-development" increased their political legitimacy within the party. Öcalan's feminism may have become more radical in response to loyal political and ideological support from the Women's Army. The emergence of powerful women's autonomous organizations, and the organizations' ideological closeness to Öcalan resulted in women's rise within the PKK

In the final chapter, I will describe the developments on the Kurdish movement's ideology since 1999: from his prison in Imrali island, where is serving life sentence, Öcalan singlehandedly developed a new framework to which thousands of people adhered. Hence, firstly I will briefly discuss the evolution of PKK ideology. Secondly, it will be analysed Öcalan's overview on the origins of state and hierarchy, which places the Kurdish struggle within a millennia-old tradition of struggles. Thirdly, I will explain the key concepts of the democratic confederalism framework such as democratic autonomy, democratic republic and democratic modernity, and the role of feminism within this framework. Moreover, I will expand on Jineology, the science of women developed by Öcalan in substitution of western feminism. In conclusion, it will be discussed the application of Öcalan's ideology through the KCK and DTK umbrella organizations, the discrepancies between ideology and practice on the ground and the problematic consequences.

The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey from the 1960s to 1999

> *"What kind of state would be capable* of dissuading and annihilating all terrorism in the bud? It would have to arm itself with such terrorism and generalize terror on every level. If this is the price of security, is everybody deep down dreaming of this?
>
> **Jean Baudrillard, Fatal Strategies: Crystal Revenge**

Introduction

The birth of the modern Kurdish national movement can be set at 1961. In 1961, the Barzani guerilla struggle against the Iraqi Central government began and the Turkish Socialist workers party was established. As stated by Martin Van Bruinessen, "Unlike earlier Kurdish uprisings, the […] movement in Iraq and the Kurdish Left of Turkey did not dissipate after the first reverses, but kept growing and broadening their constituencies. There's a clear continuity from the 1960's to the present day" (Van Bruinessen 2006). Numerous interviews conducted on first and second generation of displaced Kurds, who formed their identity through "shared stories" of state violence (either experienced directly or recalled by family's accounts) support the presence of a historical continuity. Furthermore, Kılıçaslan cites a continued "experience and memory [that] influences a crucial part in shaping the identity of (displaced) Kurds" (Kilicaslan 2015). Indeed, according to M.M. Humphrey, "The memory of massacre creates history, identity and the focus for future mobilisations. The political significance of massacres is that they continue as a defining moment beyond the event, and become part of historical collective memory" (Bozarslan 2003, 36). Hence, although the research focuses on the contemporary Kurdish movement, I think it is important to conduct a genealogical overview of the movement's development since the 1960s. The overview will also be useful to make sense of the current state of relationship between the Turkish left and the Kurds.

Gurbuz defines "Symbolic localization" as a "discursive process of collective reputation in which social movement activists blend local cultural repertoires and their "we" identity in order to build recognition, legitimacy, and prestige in the eyes of local population." He identifies

three major mechanisms at work: moral authority building, public symbolism, and memory work. The third mechanism, memory work, refers to the discursive process of attributing particular meanings to the past in order to influence the present. Henceforth, in society, the fight over who, what and how people should be remembered, and how major events should be recollected is of particular importance. This process intertwines with the group's own mythology made of references "to a "people's past," to "traditions of revolution," and to the activists' "heroes and martyrs."" (Gurbuz 2015/85 N°1)

The political consciousness of most of the Kurdish activists is rooted in a collective memory made of eye-witness experiences of repression, displacements, mistreatments inflicted by the state. As argued by Gurbuz, Kurdish activists are involved in "mnemonic battles" with other actors over the interpretations of past events. Although Gurbuz' research focuses on broader historical memories, such as the approach to Islam or to Said Nursi, it can be argued that that similar battles are being constantly fought over the interpretations of many aspects of recent history. In the following historical analysis, I will recollect episodes of broader collective memory and of activists' personal memory while keeping Gurbuz's process in mind.

The historical legacy of state violence forms a continuum linking several generation of Kurds. In fact, most of the population has experienced, directly or through other people's accounts, the effects of the "special measures" undertaken by the Turkish government in the east since the foundation of the Republic. As underlined by Kılıçaslan, the effects of this stratification can be defined as a "socio-biographical memory mechanism through which people feel pride, pain or shame with regards to events that happened to their groups before they joined them" (Kilicaslan 2015, 162).

The preservation of this memory mechanism is facilitated by the presence of so-called "witness sites" such as Kılıçaslan's Diyarbakir prison, that are "architectural spaces that witnessed atrocities whose sociopolitical legacy has continued to this day" (Ozlem Biner 2015). Due to the recurrence of repressions, I argue that most of the towns and villages in the east have these witness sites, producing lasting effects on the shared memory of the local population. Kılıçaslan has further studied how this memory is not only linked to the physical spaces but is also preserved and transmitted to the cities where Kurdish people migrated to. (Kilicaslan 2015, 163)

I will describe the Kurds' own interpretation of major historical events that shaped their contemporary political movement and its shared memory. The focus will be on these events

from a Kurdish agency perspective and will not take into account the Turkish state's motivations or the interpretations given by other actors.

The Dersim Rebellion and the state mentality

The event that had profound political and nationalist connotations and long-lasting impact is the 1937 Dersim rebellion. The revolt occurred in a context of repeated state attempts to eradicate Kurdish identity. Ismet Inonu released statements such as, "Only the Turkish nation is entitled to claim ethnic and national rights in this country. No other element has any such right"[2]. Settlement Act Law No. 2510 of 1934 was one of the first major initiatives by the Turkish national government to conceptualize the East as an area in need of of special governmental policies due to the Kurdish minority's presence.

> "N°1 zones will include all those areas in which it is deemed desirable to increase the density of the culturally Turkish population. N°2 zones will include those areas in which it is deemed desirable to establish populations that must be assimilated into Turkish culture. The N°3 zones will be territories in which culturally Turkish immigrants will be allowed to establish themselves, freely but without the assistance of the authorities. N°4 zones will include all those territories which it has been decided should be evacuated and those which may be closed off for public health, material, cultural, political, strategic or security reasons." Moreover, deported people "should never be allowed to form more than 10% of the total population of a district". (Kendal 1980, 57)

Dersim, a mountainous area, part of N°4 zones, revolted in response to the deportations. The Turkish army managed to subdue the uprising only in late 1938. Subsequently, the repression brought several thousands of deaths[3], becoming deep-rooted in the collective memory. As Kendal Nezan highlighted "This war was like no other which had been fought on Kurdish territory" (Kendal 1980, 58).

After these rebellion, the State continued to pursue policies Ismail Besikci described as "colonial" and imposing "forced assimilation". The 1934 law was product of a State policy that designated the East as a special area and its inhabitants as different subjects. In the following pages, I will analyse how this choice affected the development of the Kurdish national movement. In this context, it is noticeable that it influenced the personal experiences of most of the 1960's activists, who recalled the mistreatments endured after the rebellion. Examples the memories of Kurdish activists include extra judiciary killings, like the so-called incident of

[2] Ismet Inonu, as quoted in (Entessar 1992, 81)
[3] 40000 according to pro-kurdish sources (in (Jwaideh 2006, 317)

33 bullets (when in 1943 33 villagers in Van region were executed without process by the army) and generic episodes of humiliation, like shaving the heads of army conscripts gathered in a stadium in the presence of their families. (Gundogan 2015, 35-36) The repression ensued after the Dersim revolt managed to silence protest for the following thirty years.

Impact of the Rebellion on the 1960s protests

After the revolts of the 1920s-1930s, new Kurdish protests erupted in the 1960s, alongside with the broader resurgence of the leftist movement in Turkey. The reactivation of forms of protest in the 1960s was deeply influenced by the memory of the revolt in 1937-38. As Bozarslan remarks "The new nationalist elite of the 1960s saw this sequence continuing into their own period, which thus perpetuated the chain […] But this chain was not only established in time; it existed also in space." (Bozarslan 2003, 37)

Cansiz's biography also expresses this link with the past. Her first "political" memory was of clashes ensued in Dersim in the 1960s after the police banned a play on Pir Sultan Abdal[4]. She recalled how the 1938 rebellion resonated with the present. She writes that the Dersim Revolt was reinterpreted from being a disaster to a representing something new.

> "For the people of Dersim, the State meant year 1938. […] In 1938 everything was lost, heroism as well as betrayal. It was the end of that story. A new Dersim? Someone said "For heaven's sake, Düzgün Baba forbid that those days will happen again!" […] What did Sheik Said achieve, and what the others could have achieved? No one ever succeeded. People like Aliser and Bese[5] were only folklore. The sufferings endured had not to be repeated again. […] The new clashes brought people 30 years back. What if the State decided for a new '38? […] The recent events […] had an impact on everyday life […], to a point that people would not attend their [those who took the state's side] weddings, births and other celebrations and would not visit them anymore. People took sides and came together."[6]

This time, the memories of the Revolt did not lead to fear and inaction; rather they resonated with the people in a different way. The memory triggered an increased sense of the need for taking a stance against the State and collective action rather than a paralysis.

Economic development and social changes in the East

The Turkish government aimed to integrate the East into the national market so the East could supply raw materials for industrial production in the West and be a market destination

[4] Pir Sultan Abdal (1480-1550), Alevi poet considered as a symbol of freedom
[5] Leaders of the kurdish uprising know as Koçgiri revolt (1920-1921)
[6] Cansiz, S. Tutta la mia vita è stata una lotta, pag. 52-54

(Gundogan 2015, 38). The new policies implemented during the 1950s by the Democratic Party won considerable support in Kurdistan. Fueled by the Marshall Plan, investments in the region increased with the building of new infrastructures such as highways, dams, and above all agriculture mechanization.

Mechanization also led to a modification in old Kurdistan's feudal structures. Tribal chiefs such as aghas, beys and gained the most from mechanization as it advantaged large landowners. Disadvantaged peasants had insufficient land to profit from using a tractor. Thus, traditional estates became "capitalist enterprises based on machinery" (Natali 2005, 101). Consequently, the aghas maintained their traditional influence structures and used them in order to create electoral clienteles. They invested the revenues of mechanized agriculture in economic activities in the cities and in the west, and thereby became the new entrepreneurial class (Kendal 1980, 64). As pointed out by Natali, this was part of the government's strategy in order to build loyalty in the region by integrating the traditional Kurdish dominant class into Turkish society. These integrated leaders managed to obtain high-level political positions by maintaining a double posture, as they were at the same time Kurdish aghas in their homeland and Turkish businesspersons in the West (Natali 2005, 101-102). Thus, the transformed landowner class was the only sector of society that managed to integrate both economically and culturally.

On the other hand, peasants who were suffering from the shift from labor-intensive to machine-intensive production had to migrate to the cities. However, the economies of the urban areas could not absorb such an influx of immigrants, who became mostly unemployed or casual labourers living in shanty-towns (Gundogan 2015, 38). "These laborers, along with the petty-bourgeoisie, were the most dynamic and responsive sectors of Kurdish society. Contact with the world of the proletarians and with progressive intellectuals politicized them very rapidly" (Kendal 1980, 39). Contrary to expectations, economic integration and migration did not further Kurdish integration in Turkish society. Instead, living as minorities in predominantly Turkish cities combined with the omnipresent State discourse (Easterners as backwards, ignorant, etc.) made Kurds more conscious of their ethnic identity. (Van Bruinessen 2000, 52) During the 1960s, this renewed political consciousness found expression in the emergent Turkish left.

The emergence of the Left and its analysis of the Kurdish Question

The roots of this resurgence lay in the dramatic social and economic change experienced by Turkish society in the previous years. Rapid urbanization caused by population growth, commodification and the mechanization of agriculture, and industrialization, led to a widening

of the Turkish and Kurdish urban working class (Zurcher 2004, 224-225). This class was allowed to organize itself thanks to the unprecedented freedoms of association and expression guaranteed by the 1961.

In the same period, the left started discussing the Kurdish question in its most important publication, the magazine Yön (The Way). Yön reached a circulation of 30000 copies and represented positions of a "social-democratic kemalism" with anti-colonial and progressive tones. According to the magazine, Turkey was underdeveloped, in the hands of a comprador bourgeoisie and feudal landowners. Hence, there was the need for a National Front coalition of all the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist forces. (Samim 1981/0, 68) In the same way, the Kurdish was question was viewed as a reflection of Turkey's economic underdevelopment. In later years, articles such the Şemdinli Röportajı[7] expanded their analysis of the Kurdish question to include historical, ethnic and social points of view. Furthermore, the magazine's founder Doğan Avcıoğlu admitted the failure of Turkey's policy of forced assimilation and the State's denial of a Kurdish Question (Yegen 2016, 163).

The Türkiye Işçi Partisi (Turkey Workers' Party, TIP) was the other influential socialist platform of that decade. Founded in 1961 by a group of trade unionists, it managed to win fifteen seats in 1965 parliamentary elections. It was the first non-Kemalist ideological party with a large base and the precursor for most leftist groups of the following decades. It aspired to become a mass workers party, by articulating "trade union demands with some programme for land reform as well as embracing the aspirations of radical sectors of the Kurdish minority" (Samim 1981/0, 68).

Although the TIP did not succeed in attracting the Turkish urban proletariat in the 1965 vote, most of its supporters were Kurds, Alevites and middle class leftists.. Indeed, it was the first political party that recognized the existence of a "Kurdish question" and thereby gave voice to the first wave of Kurdish nationalism. (Tax 2016, 68) The Kurds were the third constituency of the party together with intellectuals and trade unionists. This was the first political party to consider the Kurdish question as a problem of discrimination: the charter of 1964, approved by the first party's congress, declared that "those citizens who speak Kurdish and Arabic, as well those belonging to the Alevi sect, are subject to discrimination […] TIP will treat these groups as full citizens" (Yegen 2016). The attention of the party to the Eastern Question continued throughout the 1960s, when the TIP extended its support base by stressing issues of human

[7] Şemdinli is a district located in the Hakkari Province of southeastern Turkey

freedoms more than of class interests (Samim 1981/0, 71). Moreover, the TIP held its second congress in the Kurdish-Alevi town of Malatya, and subsequently the party took a leading part in the so-called "Eastern Meetings".

The slow development of the party's stance towards the Kurds culminated in a resolution issued in 1970 at the Fourth Congress of the party declaring:

> "that Kurdish people inhabit the East of Turkey; that the dominant classes and fascist governments have, from the very beginning, implemented policies of oppression, terror, and assimilation toward Kurds […]; that the main reason for the underdevelopment of the region inhabited by Kurds […] is, in addition to the law of unequal development of capitalism, the economic and social policies pursued by governments serving the dominant classes …; that, therefore, any consideration of the Eastern Question as a question of regional development is no more than an appendage of the chauvinist-nationalist perceptions and attitudes of dominant class governments; and that supporting the Kurdish people's struggle for their full constitutional rights of citizenship […] is an ordinary and obligatory task of our party" (Entessar 1992, 90).

Because of this declaration, the Supreme Court closed down the TIP in 1971. However, the party was already in a crisis and split between two different factions. Their approach to the Kurdish question was diverse. The majority viewed the issue as deriving from Turkey's condition of semi-colonized, semi-feudal, third world country, to be solved by national radical reforms. This was challenged by a minority faction who framed the Kurdish problem as a consequence of Turkish colonization: for them, the Kurdish question was a national question, to be addressed by separate Kurdish political organizations (Yegen 2016, 165). As explained by Kurdish activist Kemal Burkay[8] "At that time we didn't think of having a separate organization. The goal of making changes in Turkey, of winning democracy, of winning Kurdish rights was tied to the struggle of the two peoples working together. In time, we understood that the Turkish left did not have a real Kurdish program." (Marcus 2009, 20)

The emergence of Kurdish intellectuals

Several events influenced the emergence of a Kurdist discourse. Whereas the student movements and anti-colonial struggles of the 1960s influenced Turkey's left as a whole, the struggle of Mostafa Barzani in Iraq, and the diffusion of Kurdish books, newspapers, radio programs from Iraqi Kurdistan fostered a sense of Kurdish distinctiveness (Watts e Dorronsoro

[8] TIP member during the '60s, among the founders of the HEP party in 1990

2009/41:3, 457). This laid the basis for the redefinition of the Eastern Question from a Kurdish perspective.

This discourse became possible in the 1950s and 1960s thanks to the shared spaces created by a number of Kurdish intellectuals. They formed their political consciousness by attending universities in the west. Indeed, Kurdish students came together because of their shared condition: "The main factors of our search for one another were the backwardness of the East, unequal treatment towards it and incessant suspicious attitude against the Kurds". They coped by sticking together and creating their own safe spaces, "segregated institutions" which permitted "otherwise forbidden conversation and action". They lived together in their own dormitories such as the Dicle and the Firat Talebe Yurdu (Tigris and Euphrates Student Dormitories), founded for the "distressed students who came from Kurdistan". In these "safe spaces", they shared a sense of shared provenience developed by and expressed through compatriot associations, student's newspapers, cultural events and meeting with the Kurdish intellectuals exiled in the 1920s to the west. (Gunes 2012, 50) Gundogan claims that Kurdish students went back to their hometowns as professionals and recreated the same kinds of "safe spaces" in their offices and shops. This guaranteed physical spaces for political discussion and preparing the ground for the future demonstrations. According to Bruinessen, "It is largely due to the migration to the big cities outside Kurdistan, that Kurdish national awareness and ride in Kurdish culture have become mass phenomena".[9]

In addition, these intellectuals were challenging a Republican discourse on the East, built since the 1930s as counterpart of the range of State's policies designed against the Kurds as an ethnic group. Indeed, although the state's policies employed ethnic strategies of "recognition, assimilation, oppression or discrimination", it framed them as modernizing strategies employed against backwardness: "no longer an ethno-political question but a question of reactionary politics […] Not Kurds with an ethno-political cause, but simply tribes, bandits, sheiks-all the evils of Turkey's pre-modern past". (Gundogan 2015, 39) Indeed, the State considered integration to the national economy as the solution of the Eastern Question, but this was understood as the need to bring these areas to "contemporary levels of civilizations" (Yegen 2016, 131).

[9] Van Bruinessen, M. cit. in (Gundogan 2015, 43-44)

The Kurdish groups and the reframing of the Eastern Question

In response to the official state discourse, these students formed the core of the organic intellectuals who re-framed discourse around the Eastern problem from a Kurdish perspective.[10] Foremost, these Kurdish intellectuals managed to create a perception of Kurdishness based on an idea of continuous national sentiment demonstrated throughout the revolts of the previous decades. Arguably, Kurdish intellectuals reinterpreted them as largely national revolts. (Bozarslan 2003, 38) Newspapers such as Diyarbakir based Ileri Yurt (Advanced Country, published 1958-59) became a platform to share grievances on the economic situation in the East (Kendal 1980, 64). The work of Kurdish intellectuals continued throughout the 1960s: they published Kurdish magazines such as Dicle-Firat and Deng and translated Kurdish literary works in Turkish. Other kind of publications included dictionaries, history books, poems, etc. (Gunes 2012, 54) The publication of a poem in Kurdish in 1959 sparked the harshest reaction from the state and the Turkish public and led to a prosecution. Nevertheless, such use of mass media would have a mobilizing effect among the Kurdish population in the coming decades.

The first Kurdish political group Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocaklari (DDKO, Revolutionary Eastern Culture Hearths) (Yegen 2016, 174) was founded in 1970 by former TIP members. It had branches in the East and in major Turkish cities. The group maintained the Marxist ideology of the left, but focused on the Eastern problem and identified it a matter of colonial occupation, not as an underdevelopment problem. Hence, according to the DDKO, the problem in the East was an issue both of class and of national liberation struggle. (Bozarslan 1992, 78) Despite making only a cautious call for cultural rights in public, the group was closed down in October 1970, and its leaders were arrested charges of separatism. (Marcus 2009, 21) Although a short-lived experience, the importance of DDKO was paramount for two reasons. In tune with the evolution of the Turkish left, it progressively rejected parliamentary politics, believing that times would be soon ripe for a major uprising. Moreover, it acted independently from the Turkish leftist movement and paved the way for an autonomous Kurdish political movement (Bozarslan 1992, 78).

The trial of DDKO's leaders also became another defining moment for Kurdish nationalism. They based their defence on the production of a "historical framework" demonstrating the existence of a Kurdish nation and situated the rebellions of the 19th and early 20th century in a

[10] Declined as Easterners'

nationalistic context by recalling the promises of Ataturk and the State's repressions. (Bozarslan 2003, 36)

Another event that boosted Kurdish awareness was the 1973 trial against sociologist Ismail Beşikçi. Beşikçi argued that in order to understand the situation in Turkey it was needed to couple both Marxist class analysis of the economic and social divide and be aware of the ethnic factors: as such, the Eastern Problem was one of the main reason for the current crisis of the social order. There was an overlapping of feudal and capitalistic structures in Eastern Anatolia. This resulted in the persistence of landlords' despotic powers that was guaranteed by an alliance between the eastern and western elite classes (Houston 2008, 86) A Turk, he highlighted how Turkish historiography denied the Kurd's existence and that Kemalist's "cultural and ideological mechanisms" was used against Kurdish identity. (Bozarslan 2003, 36)

Radicalizing influence of Kurdish rebellion in Iraq

On the other hand, Turkey's Kurdish population was influenced by the events happening across the border: the rebellion of Mullah Mustafa Barzani in Iraq contributed to the emerging Kurdish nationalism in Turkey (Cornell 2001/45:1, 38). In 1964, Sait Elçi founded the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Turkey (TKDP) on the model of Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP). A conservative nationalist party, it was the first organization to claim for autonomy and independence, in a period when the leftist groups only argued for cultural rights and social changes. (Van Bruinessen 2000, 39) In addition, some members of the TKDP went to Iraq to plan an insurgency. Although it was the first Kurdish party founded in Turkey, it never managed to grow as others, due to divisions among its members (Cornell 2001/45:1, 39). Unknown killers assassinated the party's founders in Iraq[11], putting a halt to the parties' activities (Van Bruinessen 2000, 229). Even so, Aras' fieldwork shows that the pro-Barzanis revamped nationalist sentiments among the population laying ground for the growth of other groups. Moreover, several contemporary senior Kurdish activists began their militancy in the pro-Barzani movement (Aras 2014, 68-69).

The Eastern Meetings as product of the Kurdish revival

The new wave of Kurdish intellectuals and the political activity of groups such as the DDKO galvanized the rhetoric of renewed protest in the 1960s. The Eastern meetings were demonstrations organized in response to a series of revanchist articles published by the right-

[11] According to Bruinessen it seems that Elci was killed by Sivan, later executed by Barzani for this. According to Kurdish's version, they had been killed instead by MIT

wing Nationalist Action Party magazine. The articles, an answer to the emergent Kurdist discourse, were a threatening reminder of the limits of Kurdish action. The author claimed that the Kurds "do not have the faces of human beings", that President Sunay had declared, "those who are not Turks may go away from Turkey" and implied that the Kurds could face the same destiny as the Armenians. "Let the Kurds ask the Armenians about us! […] The day when you will rise up to cut Turkey into pieces, you will see to what a hell we shall send you" (White 2000, 132-133).

After initial demands by Kurdish activists for the author's punishment for violating the Constitution remained unanswered, activists organized protest demonstrations in several Eastern towns. Organized by a local committee (among them the tailor Mehdi Zana, who will later become major of Diyarbakir), the first protest in Silvan managed to mobilize about 20,000 people. The scope of the protest extended to issues such as the East's underdevelopment and repression. The success of the first protest triggered others in Dersim, Ağrı and Diyarbakir. Not only the TIP, but other parties took part in the protest. Said Elçi of the TKDP spoke in Diyarbakir and was arrested. Whole branches of the CHP (Republican People's Party) took the streets, censured by the center.

The slogans held during the eastern meetings reveal the impact of the Kurdish organizations and intellectuals on the people's rhetoric at protests. Slogan such as "Infrastructure for the west, abuse for the east", "stop for agha, sheik and comprador trio", "we want schools, not police stations", "They cut ribbons in the west while the close roads in the east" were indeed a reflection of the discourse elaborated by those groups (Gundogan 2015, 46-49). The people identified the local elites as comprador bourgeoisie, and acknowledged the disparity of treatment between East and West. This rhetoric clearly reflected the DDKOs Kurdist discourse emphasizing the eastern problem as an anti-colonial struggle.

Turkey's socio-economic situation of the 1970s

By the end of the decade, the level of political violence increased, due to clashes between far-right groups and leftists. In two years, (1969-1971) there were thirty-five political assassinations. Several leftist militants regarded the State as protecting the far right and saw the people's revolution as unlikely. They started armed struggle in groups like THKO[12] and THKC[13], led by Deniz Gezmis and Mahir Sayan. These groups employed the strategy of "armed

[12] Turkish Army of Popular Liberation
[13] Turkish Popular Liberation Front

propaganda" and conducted attacks on unpopular state targets to attract people's attention. By demonstrating the weakness of the state, they hoped that the masses would join the revolution (Gunther 1997, 24).

Concerned that the Barzani rebellion might spread to Eastern Turkey due to increased political unrest after the Eastern meetings, the government began sending commando units to crackdown on any separatist activity. These operations were conducted by rounding up a village's population, humiliating and beating men, and raping women. Moreover, with the memorandum of 12 March 1971 the army enacted military tutelage over the government. The purpose was to "end the anarchy and carry out reforms in a Kemalist spirit". The government declared martial law for two years, and rounded up about 5000 people with leftist sympathies under terrorism charges. The students, teachers' and youth's organization were shut down. The TIP was closed on the 20th July and all of its leading members were arrested. The same happened for the far right National Order Party of Necmettin Erbakan. However, Erbakan was left free to establish the new National Salvation Party. The terrorists of the right were allowed to operate freely, as the government's main preoccupation was to stop the advance of the radical left. The government amended the constitution by limiting the freedom of the press and autonomy of universities.

The army stepped down due to international pressures and the parties managed to regain progressively control after the free general elections of October 1973. In 1974, the new government led by Bulent Ecevit's CHP granted a general amnesty, freeing the thousands of political prisoners jailed during the previous years. The rightist Justice Party and the center-of-the-left Republican People's Party dominated the period 1973-1980. The two parties were polarized on opposite positions. Consequently, the coalition governments led by one or the other party were very weak. As a result, the parliament was often in a deadlock and the paralysis of the political system did not allow for effective measures against the growing political violence and the economic crisis (Zurcher 2004, 258-263). Political violence grew, as sixty people were killed in 1975/1976 (Kendal 1980, 81), 230 in 1977 and about 1400 in 1979 (Zurcher 2004, 263). Left and right were fighting for the control of streets and universities, but the rightist militants enjoyed protection from the security forces. Indeed, the police became closely affiliated with the Grey Wolves, the fascist group linked with the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) of Alparslan Türkeş (a junior partner in the 1974-1977 Demirel's governments),

and granted them protection. The main battle fields were universities and gecekondu[14] in Istanbul and Ankara, and the mixed areas of the East such as Erzurum, Erzincan and Malatya. Violence spread, as 100 people died in Kahramanmaraş in 1978. Attacks organized by Grey Wolves against Alevis developed into a general rampage of Turks against Kurds, Sunnis against Alevis and locals against migrants. This episode of Maras showed the degree of violence society had come to. In 1978, about 20 died daily in the East because of the political violence (McDowall 1996, 412-413). The government resorted to declaring martial law in 20 provinces, but the violence continued and public figures began to be targeted such as the killing in 1980 of the deputy chairperson of NAP (MHP?), of former PM Nihat Erim and of Kemal Türkler, ex-president of the leftist trade union DISK (Zurcher 2004, 263-264).

The Kurdish Question and the left in the 1970s

As remarked by Yegen, the 1971 coup "bulldozed the Turkish left". However, despite the arrests of thousands of militants, students, professors and episodes of tortures and assassinations (Aras 2014, 69), the left managed to reorganize and to increase its mass support. For example, by the end of the 1970s the moderate Türk-Iş union had about 1,2 million members, while the socialist DISK had 400,000 members (Zurcher 2004, 273).

During the 1970s the Turkish left developed its analysis of the Kurdish question, and most of the groups recognized a nation's right to self-determination, in line with Leninist orthodoxy. However, there were several disagreements on the approach to follow. Most groups (except for Kurtulus) held that the Kurdish struggle was not to be separated from the Turkish struggle for socialism, and disagreed with the Kurdish groups maintaining that Kurdistan was a colony. Hence, several groups ranged from opposing the "right to separation" to overtly accusing the Kurdish groups of failing to be anticapitalist and as agents of imperialism. Hence, during the 1970s the cleavage between Turkish and Kurdish left kept widening. By the end of the decade "the majority of Kurdish leftists affiliated exclusively with Kurdish parties" (Yegen 2016, 166-169).

There were other factors influencing the Kurdish movements' growth. Firstly, immigration to the west continued. Increasing numbers of students joined universities in Istanbul and Ankara, where most of the Kurdish organizations were established. Upon their return to their hometowns, they spread these groups to the East. Secondly, even though the Constitution had been changed in order to limit "separatist propaganda", the weak governments of 1974-1978

[14] Shanty towns

guaranteed another period of relative political freedom. As a result, main parties could not alienate even small parts of the electorate. Thirdly, another factor boosting autonomous Kurdish groups was the disillusionment with Bulent Ecevit who initially succeeded in gathering large support during his 1973 electoral campaign in the East. He promised to tackle the issues of the region but his government failed to keep its promises and harshly opposed Kurdish nationalists. This dragged even more people to Kurdish groups (Van Bruinessen 2000, 260-261).

The Kurdish political organizations in the 1970s

In 1974, there was an attempt to unify all Kurdish leftists under the Revolutionary Democratic Cultural Associations (DDKD), a successor of the old DDKO. By 1978, it had about 50000 members and 40 branches (Bishku 2007, 85). However, the group was never cohesive and split among political and personal differences. Many diverse organizations and parties took shape from its splinters. During those years, tens of groups and splinter groups were born and it is impossible to keep track of them. These groups had in common: an important following among students and intellectuals, published their own journals, adhered to socialism and considered Kurdistan as a colony to be liberated by following the example of other third world struggles (Van Bruinessen 2000, 232). However, the groups' public campaigns aimed at achieving cultural rights. Thus, an important part of their activities consisted of publishing articles on language, literature, culture, promoting Kurdish language classes and cultural happenings. This work should not be underestimated: indeed, according to Bozarslan "All this had a tremendous impact on Kurdish society, particularly the youth: […] written culture and history confirmed the evidence of territory, language and so forth, to give still more legitimacy to the claim to nationhood" (Bozarslan 2003, 36-37).

Among the several groups existing by the end of the 1970s, Gunes counts the Socialist Party of Turkish Kurdistan (TKSP), founded in 1974, Rizgarî (1976), the Kurdish National Liberationists (KUK, 1978), Kawa (1978), Ala Rizgarî (1979) and Tekoşin (1979) and the PKK (1978). Some of these groups had scarce support and only published journals, while others gathered larger support bases. Overall, all these groups were socialist and prepared for a popular uprising. In particular, the TKSP supported the same national democratic revolution idea developed by part of the Turkish left in the previous decade. The TKSP advocated for an alliance between Kurdish and Turkish parties against imperialism. However, the attempt did not succeed, due to the Turkish left's difficult ideological relation with the Kurdish specificity and TKSP's difficulties in successfully articulating Kurdish demands within the broader anti-imperialism framework (Gunes 2013/12:3, 256). An extract from Sakine's Cansiz biography

explains these difficulties. As a Dersim students' protest degenerated into clashes, "a group chanted the slogan "Army and youth hand in hand" The soldiers beat this group too"[15]. The hardliners PKK and KUK, instead, backed independence, armed struggle and rejected any compromise. Starting from the 1980s, the PKK gradually reached a position of hegemony over all the Kurdish movement (Gunes 2013/12:3, 252).

Towards the autonomization of Kurdish politics: Mehdi Zana Mayor of Diyarbakir

The election of the independent candidate Mehdi Zana as major of Diyarbakir in 1977 is a result of this process. This election demonstrates the growing influence of the Kurdish movement. Dorronsoro and Watts' analysis of the election highlights the movement's organization, their dynamics and the problems Zana's campaign addressed. During the 1970s, CHP and Justice Party had been taking the lion's share of the electoral votes, combining 83% of the total votes in the 1977 elections. However, even though independent candidates won only 6% of the votes countrywide, in the Eastern provinces this percentage rose to an average 25%. Clearly, the traditional parties failed to attract a large portion of the Eastern electorate. Although some of the independent candidates were local notables, several candidates were Kurdists and leftists.

The same factors that led to the rise of the left during the 1960's, also influenced the success of these independents. The processes of mobilization, urbanization, mechanization of agriculture were still shaping society in the East. For example, Diyarbakir population increased by 40% from 1965 to 1970. Unions became prominent in all the eastern cities, boosted by the return of politicized seasonal workers from Western Turkey. The leftist Kurdish organizations managed to grow in importance; their separation from Turkish left facilitated the emergence of an upfront Kurdist discourse and an increased focus on local issues. These factors played against the mainstream Turkish parties. Part of their control on the electorate was guaranteed by the traditional notable's power structure, which did not had ties with the newly urbanised workers and failed to mobilize enough voters. Moreover, the Kemalist framework of these parties did not allow them to give room to any Kurdist discourse.

By the 1970s, the Kurdist discourse was the East's established interpretative framework for the dire socio-political conditions. As remarked by Zürcher, Turkey experienced a political and economic crisis. Strictly dependant on foreign investments, Turkey was affected by the 1973-1979 oil crisis and the subsequent recession in Europe; inflation increased from 20% average of the early 1970s to 90% of 1979; unemployment, although lowered by mass migration, steeply

[15] S. Cansiz, La mia vita è stata una lotta, pag.105

increased in the late 1970s (Zurcher 2004, 267-268,272). The local public opinion was already uneased by the lack of State's response to the 1975 earthquake in Lice and by the frequent episodes of brutality of the gendarmerie. Consequently, the public progressively lost trust in the mainstream parties, unable to address the peculiarity of the region because of their nationalistic framework. As a result, the specific category of "Southeast" began to be used not only by leftist groups, but also by the mainstream local press of several Kurdish towns (Watts e Dorronsoro 2009/41:3) Nevertheless, this awareness did not translate yet to electoral votes: Mehdi Zana was one of the few independents who managed to win the elections. During the electoral campaign, the main leaders campaigned late and their meetings encountered several protests, as happened to Bulent Ecevit in Gaziantep and Urfa. Zana, one of the Eastern meetings' organizers, was well-known and respected among the population especially due to his willingness to confront the authorities. His political campaign was based on: the critic of the landowner class which was exploiting the population; language and cultural rights, that is the right to speak Kurdish and being defined as Kurds; a fierce stance against the central power. Indeed, his programme represented the results of previous years' developments: he promised to "support the struggle of our people against imperialism, fascism, colonialism, and feudal reactionaries" and to "expose the deceitful tricks being played on our labor, our culture, our homeland, in short, on our existence" (Watts e Dorronsoro 2009/41:3, 270-271). Despite this radical platform, Zana managed to assemble a broad coalition of leftist groups, students and activists and more traditional sectors of society.

As observed by Dorronsoro and Watts, Zana's election shows how processes of political autonomization develop. Furthermore, this election suggested that the East was within a process of regional and ethnical differentiation by the end of the 1970's. This process did not fully develop due to a lack of regional coordination, as the independents running in other Kurdish cities were not part of a network. The elected mayors did not coordinate with each other.[16] The ethnical differentiation of the East also remained elusive due to the 1981 military coup and the growing guerrilla struggle. Zana's election showed many tendencies and strategies towards autonomization where later adopted and developed by the Kurdish parties in the 1990s and 2000s. Dorronsoro and Watts write, "The diversity of forces supporting and opposing Zana in his bid for the mayor's office complicates common perceptions that left-wing Kurdist organizations "naturally" support a left-wing Kurdist candidate and, conversely, that "traditional" social forces "naturally" oppose him", a perception challenged again by the

[16] Independents won also in the Kurdish cities of Agri and Batman

Kurdish movement during the last years". The following years of violence interrupted the autonomization process, which gradually resumed in different forms only from the 1990s.

Turkey in the 1980s: consequences of 1981 coup and the reforms of Turgut Özal

Nationwide, the economic crisis kept worsening, as national debt quintuplicated between 1973 and 1980 (White 2000, 103). In 1978-1979, the government negotiated IMF aid in exchange of several reforms such as cutting subsidies, customs duties, raising prices and cutting welfare. This "Chilean solution" met with harsh resistance by unions that called for a series of general strikes and factory occupations throughout the 1980s. Moreover, the Iranian revolution boosted the Islamists of the growing Erbakan's National Salvation Party, which became more vocal and invoked return of the sharia with mass rallies. Along with Kurdish separatism, these economic and religious factors caused the third military intervention of 12 September 1980 (Zurcher 2004, 268-269).

This intervention was much more radical than previous ones. The junta dissolved the parliament and revoked MPs immunity. They closed down all the political parties, arrested their leaders, dismissed the city councils, declared the state of emergency and forbade citizens from leaving the country. The junta exercised its power through the creation of a military composed National Security Council (NSC) headed by General Kenan Evren who was designated head of state. Moreover, the NSC appointed regional and local commanders for the provinces' administration. In 1981 the NSC banned the public discussion of politics and in 1982 it forbade the old politicians to intervene publicly and dissolved all the old parties. The junta proceeded also with 122,000 arrests in the first two years and widespread torture (Amnesty International 1988). Universities were put under control of the government and hundreds of professors were dismissed.

The NSC appointed a consultative assembly to draft a new constitution, which reversed many of the freedoms granted by the previous one. The constitution institutionalised the NSC, limited the freedom of press, banned national strikes and made freedom of speech (and association) conditional to concerns of national interest, public order, national security. Moreover, in enforced laws against the Kurdish minorities: the Constitution declared Turkish the mother tongue of all the population and restricted the use of non-recognized languages (that is, Kurdish). As remarked by Watts, "In this atmosphere, general use of the word "Kurd," let alone "Kurdistan," might well be viewed as constituting treason" (N. F. Watts 1999/31, 635)

The new constitution was accepted with a referendum that confirmed Evren's presidency. Then, the generals promulgated a Law on Political Parties, banning all the old politicians for ten years and allowing the formation of new parties (upon NSC's approval) with several restrictions. Among the three parties allowed to take part to the 1983 elections, the voters viewed Turgut Özal's Motherland Party as least close to the generals, granting it the majority in the Assembly (Zurcher 2004, 278-284).

The economic reforms implemented by the new government constitutes a textbook case of rollback policies, namely "the active destruction or discreditation of Keynesian-welfarist and social-collectivist institutions (broadly defined)". This process involves the "retreat from previous government control of resources and state regulations, including public services, nationalized industries, and labor and social rights." (Brenner e Theodore 2002) These policies aims at the development of a free market and export-led economy. Özal (the economist behind the first package of reforms rejected in 1979) reached this goal by lowering wages, subsidizing exports and devaluing the currency. As a result, the incomes of the "economically marginal population" dropped from 35% in 1978 to 20% in 1983/1986 (in terms of share in the national income) (White 2000, 104). Moreover, Özal drastically cut social spending in crucial sectors like Public Health and Education (from 3.3% and 1,1% of GNP in 1980 to 2,4% and 0.6% in 1985). As summarized by Waterbury, "In sum, the trend lines should delineate a scenario of political disaster. How have center-right coalitions been able to survive while simultaneously reducing the relative incomes of cultivators and the wage of salary earners?" (Waterbury 1992/24:2, 140)

The government's economic restructuration led also to deep changes in society that resulted in the creation of a voters' block supporting these neoliberal policies. The environment favorable to exports allowed for a boom of the industrial sector in several Anatolian cities like Kayseri, Konya, Gaziantep, Denizli (to be known as the "Anatolian Tigers") and led to the growth of the middle class. However, only a number of areas benefitted from industrialization, as 90% of the total industrial production resided in only 19 cities (Yuksel 2016, 218). This emerging constituency, detached from the state apparatus and its Kemalist ideology, had a different set of ideological values, in tune with the new Turkish-Islamic Synthesis furthered by both Özal and Evren. The Türk Islam Sentezı, developed in the 1970s in order to tackle the leftists discourses, held that Turkey's society was built both on the Turkish and Islamic element, thus linking them in a nationalist and religious discourse which became the ideology of Özal's governments. The goal was to promote loyalty to the state as a religious duty, to mobilize the

conservative population. Hence, during the 1980s the influence of several Islamic currents and brotherhoods increased, a trend with long-lasting effects (Zurcher 2004, 288).

1980's Turkey as Emergency State

The 1980 coup marked the institutionalization of the Emergency State (as a concept and provision). Through the emergency state, the friend-foe dynamics managed to rally and unify Turks under the banner of nationalism and defense of States' integrity.

The 1981 constitution envisages the proclamation of "State of Emergency" in cases of "serious deterioration of public order because of acts of violence" as declared by "the Council of Ministers, after consultation with the National Security Council"[17]. Significantly, the NSC became the organ for overseeing the national security policies. It was also the institutional organ envisioned by the General Staff to intervene in civil politics. As Bezci and Öztan define: "the State of Emergency (was) the times and territories when military can intervene to solve existing or emergent crises"[18]. The State of Emergency replaced Martial Law (proclaimed with the 1981 coup) in 1984, and was found to be useful from the beginning of PKK's armed struggle of August 1984. The insurrection, which I will describe in the coming section, challenged the State's monopoly of violence and its control over Kurdish populations. Hence, the PKK constituted a formidable challenge to the army's raison d'etre of safeguarding their newly established order, and it justified the protraction of the State of Emergency until 2002. During this period, the state of emergency emerged "as not solely a legal and administrative implementation but also as a continuous reflection of the Turkish raison d'état when it faces a crisis." (Bezci e Oztan 2016/25:2) However, Agamben contends this situation of exceptionality, although defined by law's boundaries, creates per se a blurring between the norm and the exception, so that every act of the States becomes framed in the context of emergency (Agamben 1998, 165). Thus, violence and arbitrary acts became the state's only answer to the Kurdish problem and also spilled over in the supposed area of normal law, Turkey's East.

The conflict with the PKK demonstrated this assumption. Firstly, the state of emergency extended the local governors' powers and allowed them to seek assistance from the enlarged local army garrisons. Moreover, these governors were later appointed to high state's positions or joined centre-right parties, which suggests the emergency mentality was integral to the state.

[17] 1982 Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, art.120

[18] Egemen B. Bezci & Güven GürkanÖztan (2016) Anatomy of the Turkish Emergency State: A Continuous Reflection of Turkish Raison d'état between 1980 and 2002,Middle East Critique, 25:2, pag.164 DOI:10.1080/19436149.2016.1148858

Along with the forced displacements, the state of emergency led to widespread torture and arbitrary killings. Complementary to the police and army's activities, the State created the village guard system. Adhering to a binary friend-foe concept, the Village Guards were local Kurds armed by the State in order to confront the PKK. This system was established as Statutory Law and thus survived the end of the State of Emergency. This demonstrates the normalisation of the Emergency State outside the boundaries of a situation of crisis. The friend-foe dynamic also benefitted the PKK, allowing it to emerge as the only alternative to the State's violence. Moreover, it shaped the movement's actions incentivizing its use of violence, as the State did not present any alternative political solution until the early 1990s. Consequently, PKK's violence continuously justified the persistence of Emergency State.

To summarize, the Emergency State created the conditions for its own preservation through the reproduction of the crisis. As argued by Bezci and Öztan, it contributed shaping the Turkish State's identity: "the sovereign distinguishes itself by defining the emergency as well as what should be implemented in times of the defined emergency. In the Turkish case, the NSC designed and directed this process as the culminating mechanism of the *raison d'état*." (Bezci e Oztan 2016/25:2, 176)

The rise of the PKK

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) began its armed struggle against the State in 1984. Even so, it existed as a political organization from 1974, when Abdullah Öcalan and other university students in Ankara founded the group. Later defined by PKK's as the "ideological group's" stage, this phase was indeed characterised by propaganda, proselytization and ideological work. Cansiz describes the early ideas of the group, which started its propaganda in Dersim by the end of 1974. The apocular[19]traced the origin of Kurds back to the Indo-Arians and Mesopotamia. They maintained that Kurdistan was a colony in a semi-feudal condition and that the Kurds had the right to self-determination and the PKK would conduct the struggle in autonomy from the Turkish groups. They linked the Kurdish struggle with the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles of Vietnam, Angola and Cuba.[20] The party

[19] Followers of Apo (Abdullah Ocalan)
[20] S. Cansiz, La mia vita è stata una lotta pag.128-129

was officially founded in 1978. The 1978 program expand these core ideas, which according to Bruinessen defined the party's stance for the following decade: Kurdistan was a semi-feudal colony divided among 4 colonizer states. Turkey attempted to assimilate the Kurds and destroy their national identity through Parliamentary representation and the education system. Feudal landlords and the comprador bourgeoisie were agents of the colonizers and betrayers of their people. Thus, they were one of the enemies and their lands had to be expropriated, unless they supported the revolution. (Bruinessen 1988, 42)

In March 1975 the group organized its first public rally in Dersim. Cansiz's biased account recalls that the rally took place with wide popular participation despite being the PKKs first rally. However, it describes also the other groups' antagonism, which were accusing them of carrying out nationalist propaganda and of being "fake leftists worse then Turkeş' militants"[21]. According to PKK's version of events (White, The PKK. Coming down from the mountains 2015, 30), only the 1977 assassination of two group's members by rival leftist organizations led to the use of violence and to the decision of structuring the propaganda group into a party. However, Cansiz's biography reveals that the group was clashing with rivals and carrying weapons since its inception. The group progressively elaborated on the importance of violence for the national struggle and stressed the need to clash with the groups "enemies of the revolution". (Bruinessen 1988, 42)

The ascending PKK rapidly gathered broad support: according to McDowall, "This movement was borne by economic deprivation, social injustice and physical displacement as well as ideas of ethnic identity, all of which combined in the late 1970s to create the conditions for revolt." (McDowall 1996, 402) Indeed, in 1983, there was such exploitation in the countryside that sharecroppers earned only two dollars a day (1.5$ for women and 1$ for children), and child mortality was around 30% (McDowall 1996, 421). In fact, it must be noted that the steep growth of the socialist groups in Kurdish cities did not imply the power of the landowners completely disappeared. Still, in 1983 an agha alone controlled 9% of Hakkari province's votes. For this reason, the peasants were politically conscious but not willing to challenge the landlord's power. Hence, PKK's ruthless campaign against the feudal landowners played a major role in broadening its support in the countryside.

Although 1790 PKK members were arrested after the coup, most of the main cadres managed to flee to Syria. Öcalan set his Head Quarters in Syria until 1999. During the following years,

[21] S. Cansiz, La mia vita è stata una lotta, Pag, 132, 134,139

he secured the PKKs relationship with the Syrian government and signed an agreement with Barzani that allowed the PKK to set up camps in Northern Iraq's Qandil mountains. The 1982 second PKK congress outlined the Party's three-phased strategy: defense, balance and offense. The goal was to begin with hit and run guerilla attack, progressively gather support and territory's control and ultimately drive the army out of the region. After two years, the PKK began the first phase of the guerrilla in 1984.

The PKK's bases of power

Moreover, despite the increasing government's military response, the PKK maintained a constant influx of manpower from the countryside. In fact, Özal reforms worsened the already poor peasants' condition, as "subsistence farming shrank to almost nothing", and "farmers ran into increased and even extreme indebtedness" (White 2000, 106). In general, the economy restructuring caused unexpected changes in Kurdistan: the etatist model aiming at incorporating all groups and classes into the Kemalist project had offered economic and social opportunities (as long people did not claim their Kurdish identity). Özal reforms, however, not only worsened the economic conditions of the peasants, but also took away several welfare state "safety nets", so that in this decade Kurds "felt more left out, less like participants in the Turkish economy and society than ever before" (White 2000, 106).

The government responded to the PKK by furthering repressive measures. In 1983, it prohibited the use of Kurdish, re-enacted the ban on Kurdish folk songs, banned names contradicting the "national culture", and renamed thousands of villages. In 1987, the state appointed a governor-general over eight Kurdish provinces, with the task of coordinating all the security forces in the region. The governor general had extensive powers including the right to evacuate villages and deport the population. Moreover, as mentioned above, the State implemented the Village Guards system by arming and funding local villager to fight the PKK. As a result, certain aghas formed their militias, taking the opportunity to further their position with the state and extend their local power. In addition, villagers had to face the choice of either being harassed by the State, as not joining the Guards often meant State violence and forced displacement, or being attacked by the PKK. Indeed, the guerrilla ruthlessly attacked the Village Guards, seen as traitors, in an increasing spiral of violence that deteriorated throughout the 1990s. (McDowall 1996)

Furthermore, by the end of the 1980s, Prime Minister Özal reverted to government spending in a bid to broaden his electoral support. This move, however, had fatal effects on the economy:

it triggered a spiral of high inflation, budget deficit, currency crisis and rising interest rates. The governments which came to power through the 1990s did not succeed in addressing these economic structural problems. By 2001 the lira halved in value and GDP fell by 9% (Zurcher 2004, 315). The economic crisis worsened the problems in the East, exacerbating the conflict.

The political situation of the 1990s resembled the situation of the 1970s due to similar problems of weak coalition governments and increasing violence. The war against the PKK shaped the decade, as the Emergency State mentality progressively spiraled out of control. The military was still leading the course of action in the East, escalating violence against the entire Kurdish population. The military developed a clandestine network of Counter-Terrorism units (JITEM), Islamists militias, village guards, and mafia members that murdered thousands of local politicians, intellectuals, journalists and common people. As a result, about 3000 villages were destroyed, 35'000 people died and almost three million people fled to cities like Diyarbakir, to the west or abroad.

The chaos generated by security operations is summarized in Oktems words:

- "It became impossible to discern who was responsible for which atrocity: guerrillas attacked villages, whose elders had decided to side with the government, and they killed teachers, whom they saw as representatives of the Turkish state. […] Village guards soon became semi-tribal bands. […] As well as committing political murders, the anti-terrorism units expanded into drug trafficking. […] Hundreds of Kurdish intellectuals, activist and PKK sympathizers were tortured and killed. […] The army fought the PKK, but also burned villages and tortured their residents before forcing them to flee. […] The cities were ruled by fear, and by murderers. […] The violent islamists Kurdish Hizbullah, supported by counter-terrorism agencies, killed dozens of PKK sympathizers as well as "amoral" members of the public." (Oktem 2011, 89-90).

Actions of civil resistance and the role of "exemplar acts"

In the early 1980s the political environment did not create space for peaceful political activity. Hence, armed actions characterised the decade. Due to the hundreds of arrests, the main field of peaceful political activism was in the prisons (especially in the infamous Diyarbakir prison) and in courtrooms. A decade after the DDKO, the 1981 trials against several PKK cadres became again occasion to defend the existence of Kurdish people and the legitimacy of its political movement. The trials enhanced PKK's credibility in the eyes of the population, but what greatly furthered the PKK's cause was the Diyarbakir prisoners' resistance. Since the early

1980s, that prison became a "slaughterhouse", where torture and rapes were the norm and at least 40 prisoners died. Kerem Öktem explains this course of action as a deliberate attempt at directing Kurds into armed violence, even though other authors do not support the hypothesis (Oktem 2011, 85). However, the State's violence did lead many activist to believe there was no alternative to armed struggle. This pushed the movement towards a more radical position (Oktem 2011, 65). The state endorsed torture triggered the prisoners' resistance, an episode that became paramount for the Kurdish struggle.

The first prisoner to conduct a hunger strike was Ali Erek who died in 1981. Erek was followed by several others who joined the hunger strike, or committed suicide to protest the prison's conditions. The PKK built around them a new myth of resistance, describing them as "Contemporary Kawa" where actions became "the spirit of our struggle" leaving "an ineradicable effect that will pull our people into continuous action". In this way, the tradition of Newroz, the New Year's celebration of the hero Kawa who led the Medes' rebellion against Assyrian rule, was reshaped as a contemporary myth with effects on the present (Gunes 2012, 96). The prisoners became the first martyrs of the new movement, in continuation with a centuries long tradition of resistance that was renewed by martyrs of the guerrilla. Cengiz Guneş' research points out how the prisoners' acts of resistance were "exemplars acts" which became an example for the people left behind and constituted a powerful "call, a reminder of another way of doing things" (Gunes 2012, 117-118). In the same way, the PKK started celebrating the "week of national heroism" in 1987, commemorating the early members' resistance and inciting to pursue the same act of heroism (Gunes 2012, 201 n34). This discourse effectively shaped people's perception as the discourse was not confined to PKK magazines. Rather, it was conveyed into popular culture by songs and poems, which narrated other self-immolation acts and several "heroic" PKK battles during the 1980s and 1990s. The myth of resistance became the main theme of the Kurdish cultural revival as it managed to resonate with the whole Kurdish community.

The mobilisation of the masses was a clear objective of PKK since the creation of the National Liberation Front (ERNK) in 1985, which represented to the masses "the political orientation and organisation" (Gunes 2012, 109). ERNK activities developed throughout the decade with the task of organizing all the sectors of society including the diaspora. It succeeded particularly in Europe, where it attracted the growing Kurdish diaspora and it enjoyed extensive freedom of action in these circles. Therefore, numerous Kurdish community and cultural centres opened. These centres organized folklore festivals, cultural events, books, magazines, public rallies,

political meetings, protests and hunger strikes. These events became greatly popular, attracting tens of thousands people and played an important role in fostering a Kurdish socio-political awareness strictly linked with the PKK among the diaspora. These activities influenced also the population in Kurdistan, where Özal's partial openings allowed for the creation of language and cultural centers and (strictly controlled) Kurdish publications (Barkey e Fuller 1998, 64).

Reproduction of conflict through the trauma: The Serhildan protests

Other than through exemplary actions and cultural dissemination, conflicts is reproduced in other ways. As Siobhán McEvoy-Levy puts it: "conflict is reproduced through layers and memories of trauma, through stories and texts that transmit images of the other, perceptions of grievance and evaluation of peace processes, and through experiences and retellings of oppression, violence and lack of economic opportunity. (Baser e Celik 2014/48:3, 267)

The Serhildan (mass protest) of 1990-1993 are a product of the repetition of these traumas. The funerals of prominent figures and Newroz celebrations triggered this mechanism of transmission, and an increasing number of people attended them. The first Serhildan occurred in 1990 at Nusaybin, after the funeral of a guerrilla fighter. The army shot at protestors. Subsequently, PKK called for large popular participation to the next "week of national heroism", which coincided with Newroz. In the same way, during the 1991 serhildan in Diyarbakir, triggered by the funeral of human rights activist and member of HEP party Vedat Aydin, large crowds shouted PKK slogans. The army fired at these protestors. This escalation continued with the 1992 Newroz celebration, ended up in clashes between the protesters and the police, which opened fire in Cizre and Şırnak. Starting from this year, widespread Newroz celebrations became the occasion for celebrating Kurdish identity and showing support for the PKK (Gunes 2012, 110-111). Eventually, even a report prepared by Turkish MPs acknowledged that security operations and villages' destruction in the South-East was propelling Kurdish nationalism and leading people to join the PKK (Kirisci e Winrow 1997, 131).

Late 1990s: towards radical changes

Turgut Özal, during his term as President, tried to broker a political solution for the Kurdish Question. An end to violence seemed closer in 1993 when Öcalan responded by declaring a cease-fire and announcing to be ready to negotiate. However, Özal's sudden death led to the prevailing of the hard-liners. The war broke harsher than before (Marcus 2009, 212-214). There

are several claims that his (Financial Times 2013) and other deaths, along with several massacres of civilians carried out in 1993 (Hurriet Daily News 2011), were part of the deep state's operations aimed to scupper the peace process. However, the political option was definitely put off the table after a PKK attack on off-duty soldiers[22]. Consequently, the army continued with its scorched earth policy, which did succeed in limiting the PKK's initiative. This phase of the conflict ended abruptly with Öcalan's capture in 1999. Since after the 1981 coup, Assad had provided safe haven for the PKK. However, by 1998 Turkey threatened war with Syria[23] if it would had continued to do so. Forced to flee Syria, Öcalan was eventually captured in Kenya after having his political asylum requests rejected by several European countries.

The capture of Öcalan, along with AKP Recep Tayip Erdogans' victory in 2002 general elections and the renewed EU accession negotiate, opened a new chapter for the Kurdish struggle as its political movement became increasingly influential in Turkish politics. After the late 1970s experience, culminated with Mehdi Zana's 1977 election, the situation allowed for a new era of peaceful developments. Moreover, Öcalan started laying the basis for the radical development in the movement's ideology from his cell. He reformulated Murray Bookchin and other's ideas and developed them into a new notion of democratic confederalism.

[22] Apparently, it was a personal initiative of a local PKK commander
[23] Which had to confront with increased Turkish-Israeli cooperation

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE PKK: DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE

'You want women like slaves. You cannot take a woman who acts by her own conscience and who improves herself. You would rather prefer women who will serve you, who will satisfy you sexually. I will not, however, let this to happen. I will create an army, a Red Army, in which all women will be equal to men.'

PKK commander[24]

Introduction

Women participated in PKK activities since its inception. Figures such Sakine Cansiz and Necati Alcan were among the founders of the group. Women took part in great numbers to the Serhildan protests and became involved with the legal Kurdish parties. According to Gunes, women's participation was one of the most important developments brought by the PKK to Kurdish society, in concordance with PKK's ideology of equality and freedom.

However, women's participation to guerrilla warfare is not a novelty. Guerilla movements heavily employed women during World War II in Europe and during anticolonial resistance movements in Africa and Asia. Nevertheless, women's participation do not imply changes in gender relations. For example, one third of Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers were women but strikingly, this did not lead to any major changes to patriarchal structures (Malešević 2010, 300). In contrast, women within the PKK gained substantial equality with men, and PKK's ideology actively promoted women's emancipation. Hence, to understand the reasons for this

[24] Cit. in (Yilmaz 2014, 131)

divergence in ideology and practice in the PKK, it is important to analyse Öcalan's thought on women and politics.

I will argue that the PKK moved away from a tokenized emancipation discourse (influenced by traditional gender roles) towards a more radical feminism during the 1990s via two trajectories. In the first trajectory, the PKK's political ideology transitioned from a focus on women's emancipation (as discourse concerning only women) towards a feminist discourse aimed at transforming gender relations. However, this had little impact on power relations between male and female militants on the ground. In the second trajectory, power and agency transitioned from being the sole monopoly of male commanders in the mid-1990s to the Women's Army actively influencing PKK politics from the 2000s onwards.

The ideological trajectory (1992- 1999)

Starting from the 1990s, the PKK increased its focus on women's recruitment through a political ideology that increasingly emphasized female emancipation. Öcalan saw the need to 'treat and organize women' to expand the National Liberation Struggle. PKK magazines demonstrate discourse on women in the 1990s was still influenced by traditional gender categories such as 'namus' (honour). Öcalan's discourse on women's emancipation was problematic because expressed an essentialist and culturalist view of women as 'bearers of life' and possessing a natural 'devotion to life.' Öcalan encompassed female emancipation within his project of creating 'new, free individuals.' Policies such as the control over militants' sexuality aimed at relinquishing the patriarchal control of 'old Kurdishness' while policing and surveilling bodies.

The redesign of the creation myth of Kurdish resistance to highlight female power suggests a significant break from the secondary inclusion of women's issues as merely 'emancipating them [women]' from their servile condition. The matriarchal Ishtar myth emphasized the emancipation of broader Kurdish society from the 'patriarchy' and 'old Kurdishness' to achieve the freedom of all individuals.

The political trajectory (1996-2000s)

However, developments in the PKK's ideology did not translate into actual changes in gender relations between militants. These changes gradually became consistent only after the creation of autonomous women's organizations such as the Women's Army YJAK. The YJAK allowed for the existence of safe spaces, 'segregated institutions' which permitted 'otherwise forbidden

conversation and action[25].'(Gunes 2012, 50) Within these spaces, women acquired political power to confront the patriarchate within the PKK, creating the narrative space for PKK's later feminist discourse. However, Öcalan's ideological legitimization of female power constituted a necessary pre-condition for the birth of the Women's Army and its increased influence. The Women's Army acquired its political legitimacy within the context of the gradual development of the ideological trajectory towards feminism.

The intersection of the political and ideological trajectories (1999 onwards)

The ideological and political trajectories seemed to have followed their own independent path until they intersected during Öcalan's exile and arrest. The Women's Army employed Öcalan's "theory of rupture" to establish independent bases of female power in the PKK. Furthermore, women's loyal adherence to Öcalan's humanist ideology of "self-development" increased their political legitimacy within the party. Öcalan's feminism may have become more radical in response to loyal political and ideological support from the Women's Army. The emergence of powerful women's autonomous organizations, and the organizations' ideological closeness to Öcalan resulted in women's rise within the PKK.

Ideological Trajectory

Namus redefined to include the 'homeland' and thereby bypass patriarchal control over women

The practical need for female recruits in 1990s engendered the increased role of female emancipation ideology in the PKK. Even so, emancipation discourse cohabitated with strong ideas of traditional gender roles. This suggests that the move towards female emancipation discourse may have been caused by practical rather than ideological concerns. The redefinition of the concept of 'namus' or honour, demonstrates how patriarchal discourse was not tackled, but only bypassed.

In his 1992 book Woman and Family Question, Öcalan wrote 'millions of women […] are in a deadly situation, bound with innumerable bonds of servitude. Shatter those bonds, liberate women, let women become a flood and fall like a waterfall.' The book criticizes Kurdish society's traditional patriarchal structures of the 'old family' and 'old Kurdishness.' According to Öcalan, Kurdish elites perpetuate traditional societal hierarchy through traditional tribal relations to maintain control over Kurdish society. Thus, the national movement must break

[25] I discussed safe spaces in the context of Kurdish intellectuals of the 1950s/60s in the first section (Gunes 2012, 50)

these traditional societal structures. Öcalan recommends, 'the first thing for you to do is to find the bonds that bind women, and slash them.'

However, according to Çağlayan these efforts seemed, for the most part, instrumental at boosting women's participation to the national struggle. (Çağlayan 14/2012) Moreover, women's portrayal within the PKK was of heroic role models whose purpose was to bolster women's recruitment and to 'shame men into action when they realized that women were fighting.'[26]

Despite these opportunistic motives, the focus on women had immediate several long-lasting effects. The decision to bolster women's participation to the PKK altered gender balance within the organization. By the end of the 1990s, women composed about one third of guerrilla. However, according to PKK commander Roza Pinar women occupied a subaltern position within the party: 'we didn't have any decisional power. Meetings between us were infrequent. […] Men used to decide over everything. […] How to live, how to behave and what role to have' (Demir 2016)

The redefinition of the concept of 'namus' (honour) was central to PKK's efforts at increasing female participation to the struggle. Preservation of honour in Kurdish society is used as a tool for surveilling women's sexuality and behaviour. Çağlayan argues

'For a man, namus indicates the condition of being trustworthy and being able to establish control over both his own sexuality and the sexualities of the women under his responsibility; however, for a woman, namus is about her own sexuality' (Çağlayan 14/2012, 27).

In 1992 Öcalan defined namus as a 'certain understanding of morality' developed in Kurdish society around the problem of sexuality, so that 'men seek complete dominion in sexuality' and women use 'their sexuality as their greatest weapon for keeping hold of men.' Due to Namus, women behave 'like slaves' and are 'weak.' As a result, women use their 'own state of being-pulled-down in order to pull down the whole society.'

Öcalan used these themes of power relationships and sexuality to extend Namus' scope of meaning to 'the homeland.' The PKK became the protector of Kurdish society's honor in the same way that men were protectors of women's honor. Namus of the homeland was used to make people feel their honor violated by Kurdistan being 'under occupation' and 'raped

[26] A. Marcus, in (Gunes 2012, 120)

thousands of times.' The use of 'rape' to define Kurdish subjugation demonstrates PKK's effort to establish a parallel between the homeland and women as objects of protection. Protection of women's honor was the 'fundamental moral norm' for Kurdish men. Arguably, the PKK wanted Kurdish people consider the 'rape' of Kurdish homeland as a supreme violation of the same 'fundamental norm' of traditional namus.

Namus' redefinition did not change the patriarchal structure of society. However, as protection of the homeland became part of the 'fundamental moral norm', men could not stop women from joining the PKK. As summarized by Marcus, 'a Kurdish father could block his daughter from working, from walking to the store alone, from going to high school, or even from wearing pants, but it was not easy to criticize her decision to fight for Kurdish freedom.' (Marcus 2009, 174)

Çağlayan argues the redefinition of namus had two purposes. Firstly, it had the purpose of rallying men to 'fight for the homeland.' Secondly, it aimed at 'removing the barrier preventing women participating in the same fight.' According to Çağlayan, the effects of namus' redefinition 'must not be overlooked', because it successfully 'enabled women to leave the home.' However, it is important to highlight the traditional concept of namus was not eliminated. Therefore, the redefinition of namus did not mean the end of societal control over women, but it added guerrilla struggle to the activities sanctioned by society.

The redefinition of 'honor's protection' as 'homeland's protection' boosted women's participation to the guerrilla struggle. However, during the early 1990s women in the PKK underwent continued forms of control over every day's life and sexuality.

Controlling militant sexuality as a means of enforcing the party's patriarchy

The PKK maintained a strict control over sexuality and reproductive rights. It exercised control over sexuality by forbidding sexual relationships and making celibacy mandatory for its fighters. PKK control over relationships is part of the broader party ideology, which focuses on emancipation of men and women through the creation of a 'natural' Kurdish individual who breaks the traditional structures such as the patriarchate. On the other hand, strict control may be explained with practical reasons. Namely, the PKK attempted to hegemonize Kurdish society without alienating it.

Although the PKK was always anti-marriage, the ban on sexual relations is the outcome of developments in Öcalan's thought on revolution. During the 1980s, the party considered love

relationships as a hindrance to the struggle, and as 'something for the small bourgeois, unnecessary.' However, the PKK did not enforce ban on marriage as a rule, but as an 'idea, a way of thinking' such that several PKK founders were married[27] (Marcus 2009, 42). During the following years, Öcalan challenged gender relations within Kurdish society. Furthermore, as evident through his criticism of Namus, he believed traditional gender relations damaged society. In his book 'Kurdish Love' (1999), he further developed this criticism. He wrote centuries of subjugation had 'irremediably damaged' gender relations in society by 'the enemy [the colonial occupier].' According to Öcalan, sexual relationships were causing 'profound political perversions' on Kurdish men and women due to their nature of 'fundamental instincts.' Moreover, sexual 'instincts were more powerful in Kurdish society than in 'any other society in the world'[28] due to degradation of society caused by foreign occupation.

As mentioned, these ideas are part of the PKK's developments in their broader understanding of individuals and society. Across the late 1980s and early 1990s, the PKK programme focused less on 'historical materialism', 'class struggle', 'scientific socialism', and more on 'individual emancipation', 'self,' and 'liberated personality'[29]. As explained by Öcalan in his lectures, PKK's revolution 'increasingly became a social one'[30]. The main goal was 'to transform people's lives' and to destroy the old 'world of socialization, relations, feelings, and impulses developed by the enemy'[31]. Thus, as outlined by the 1999 Party Congress, a PKK member had to 'gradually attach himself to the party's will' by 'embracing the party's demeanour, tempo and style through undoing oneself'[32]. A new member was joining not only a national liberation struggle, but also embracing a new way of living and thinking.

Öcalan developed this activity of political education far earlier in 1986. Such a task was attained at the Party Central Schools (organized wherever the PKK had a stable presence). The education was based on Öcalan's Analysis (çözümlemeler), that is, transcriptions of Öcalan talks, discourses and interviews delivered since 1980. After his arrest in 1999, his prison writings had

[27] Öcalan himself was married with Kesire Yildirim, one of PKK's founders, until 1987
[28] Öcalan, Abdullah (1999), Kürt A*şkı*. Istanbul: Aram. Cit. in (Çağlayan 14/2012)
[29] Öcalan, Abdullah (1986) *Seçme Yazılar* [Selected writings], Vol. II, Cologne, Weşanen Serxwebûn, cit. in (Grojean 2014)
[30] Öcalan, Abdullah (1997a) 'Wie leben? (Teil V) Erobert das Leben! Aus dem Buch 'Wie leben' von Abdullah Öcalan' [excerpts from *Nasıl Yaşamalı?* (How is one to live?), Vol. I & II, Cologne, Weşanen Serxwebûn, 1995 and 1996], *Kurdistan Report*, 86, pp. 34-38, cit. in (Grojean 2014)
[31] Öcalan, Abdullah (1997a) 'Wie leben? (Teil V) Erobert das Leben! Aus dem Buch 'Wie leben' von Abdullah Öcalan' [excerpts from *Nasıl Yaşamalı?* (How is one to live?), Vol. I & II, Cologne, Weşanen Serxwebûn, 1995 and 1996], *Kurdistan Report*, 86, pp. 34-38, cit. in (Grojean 2014)
[32]

been added to the curricula. According to Ali Kemal Ozcan, who participated to these classes, party's education focused mainly on 'the personality and lifestyle of the militant, and the intrinsic treason of Kurdishness that is believed to stem from the underlying tribal structure and family.' However, education focused mostly on changing Kurdish individuals' personality, damaged by centuries of subjugation (Ozcan 2005). Thus, Öcalan considered the degeneration of gender relations as only a facet of the general deterioration of Kurdish society. In the same way, Öcalan's harsh criticism against the effects of love relations on such society are part of his broader criticism against Kurdish individuals' 'degeneration.'

According to Öcalan, foreign domination made Kurds a people 'whose ideology and morale has totally collapsed'[33], thus his goal was to 'develop a new type of Kurdish person' with a 'new identity'[34]. Ozcan summarizes this degeneration as consisting in: 'presenting themselves (the Kurds) as resembling others'; imitating other nations due to the impossibility of using the own language, names, etc.; exceptional tendency to act against themselves, as 'treason' corrupted the population 'to the extent that treason is appreciated in Kurdistan.' In this context, Öcalan explains that treason does not stand for direct collaboration with the enemy, but for being manipulated into fighting against each other. (A. K. Ozcan 2005, 392)

To sum up, the concept of namus/honour and the feuds it generates are part of the Kurdish treacherous personality. In the same way, Öcalan's views on gender relations are part of his idea of a degenerated Kurdish society. Thus, love and sexual relations are not indefinitely banned, but it will possible to have them when there will established 'a free country and a free society.' As explained by a former guerrilla, the PKK saw direct and simple connection between the colonial subjugation and the impossibility of sexuality: 'Your homeland is not free; there is no 'life' there. You don't even believe in it yourself; how can you add one more person to it?' (Yilmaz 2014, 129)

Despite Öcalan's call for female emancipation, the PKK's control over female sexuality had other practical interests such as maintaining the support of Kurdish families. As such, the situation on the ground did not reflect the PKK's calls for emancipation, which can be explained as merely nominal and opportunistic. The party did not tackle Kurdish traditional patriarchal values. On the contrary, the PKK became known for protecting women's virginity 'with the

[33] Öcalan, A. (1998) Sosyalizmde Israr *İnsan Olmakta Isrardır,* Weşanên Serxwebun, Köln. Cit. in (A. k. Ozcan 2006)
[34] Öcalan A. cit. in (White 2000, 185)

same zeal as their family', so that it guaranteed support from conservative families, who were concerned with their daughters' honour above everything (Marcus 2009, 174). Therefore, PKK's guarantee of 'family's honour' not only ensured 'parental approval' to female guerrillas, but it might be considered as means of preventing a 'cultural separation' of the PKK from 'the community it was fighting to liberate' (Tax 2016, 142).

Furthermore, the ban on love and sexual relations was part of PKK's attempt to hegemonize Kurdish society (Özcan 2007). The PKK needed to recruit from a population otherwise not interested in leaving the security of their tribes and families. By breaking traditional feudal and tribal structure, the PKK hoped to ensure absolute loyalty from the population rather than achieve a national revolution. Hence, female emancipation discourse was essential to break women's loyalties to family and to weaken the tribal structure. In order to break tribal and familiar loyalties, the PKK required its members to dedicate 'all day' to the party, and thus the members 'ought somehow not to have private time or a private life.' Moreover, families joining the PKK would be separated and the party would have taken care of their children. (A. K. Ozcan 2005) In this way, the PKK aimed to replace all traditional structures, the tribe and the family with the party, while 'Öcalan, as the leader of the party, replaced the tribal leaders' (Özcan 2007).

Indeed, in the early 1990s the PKK was reproducing the same Kurdish societal structure it was supposed to fight. Several PKK female commanders described both men and women as maintaining a 'feudal approach': they recalled women not having 'decisional power' and men deciding 'over every detail' such as '[selecting] women's clothes.' Male commanders tried to impose the headscarf to new recruits, and did not let women fight on the frontlines. According to these interviews, men were 'worried' of 'losing power' due to women's participation to the guerrilla struggle. (Demir 2016, 69,96-97) This view is confirmed by a 1997 analysis of the PKK, which states that male guerrilla were 'holding onto their position of power' and women 'could not get rid of their dependence.' Consequently, women were not only 'avoiding leadership positions', but also not accepting 'other women in those positions.'[35]

According to this view, the PKK developed a women's emancipation discourse to bolster women participation to the national struggle. In addition, the Party did not try to demolish Kurdish tribal structures, but it merely modified society's patriarchal discourse in order to make

[35] Andreas (Marburg), 'Zur Geschichte und Politik der Arbeiterpartei Kurdistans (PKK), 1997, cit. in (Tax 2016, 136)

female recruitment more acceptable. Moreover, the behaviour of PKK commanders shows patriarchal values were still strong in the Party. Nihat Ozcan's analysis explains the PKK's efforts to redefine societal values was a way to establish the Party's hegemony over Kurdish society. The party used emancipation discourse as a means of re-inventing patriarchy on Kurdish society and Öcalan himself became 'the tribal leader' for all Kurds.

Cohabitation of emancipation and patriarchy discourse within the PKK

The PKK's use of women's emancipation discourse bolstered women's participation in the struggle. However, during the early 1990s there was no actual women's emancipation or gender parity within PKK's ranks. During the same period, PKK-linked magazines developed a women emancipation discourse, but they reflected the same tension between nominal emancipation and practice. While arguing for the importance of women's freedom and participation, the magazines employed a discourse fixated on women's essentialized identities. As I will show in the following sections, changes in women's conditions within the PKK began due to the creation of autonomous women organizations in 1995. The language employed by these journals published between 1996 and 2000, demonstrates the shift was gradual and not immediate. The journals reflect the growth of women's organizations influence the gradual reception of the party's new stance among the militants.

The journals employed several different discursive categories. Kurdish women were first considered 'patriotic mothers, peace mothers, and transmitters and signifiers of the national culture and heritage' (Acık 2014). The construction of the mythical Mesopotamian golden age period, during which Kurds lived free in a matriarchal society, tied together Kurdish women's liberation and national liberation. Both the end of Kurdish independence and the matriarchy happened due to foreign invasions. As explained by a magazine, 'Our country lost its self-assurance, just as it happened to the women'[36]. For this reason, the PKK linked women's subjugation to the nation's subjugation, so that women had to join the national struggle not only for Kurdistan's liberation, but also to achieve their own liberation. The two concepts were deeply intertwined, because the PKK believed women's emancipation was fundamental for a successful national struggle: 'The awakening of the women means the people's awakening and taking control'[37].

[36] Yaşamda Özgür Kadın magazine, cit. in (Acık, The role of women in the Kurdish movement 2014)
[37] Parti Merkez Okulu Yayinlari, cit. in (Acık, The role of women in the Kurdish movement 2014)

However, Acık's analysis of PKK discourse shows that this focus on women's emancipation was not coherent as a discourse of 'weakness' remained. Kurdish women became the 'weakest link in society' and developed a particularly strong 'slave mentality' as they were subjugated subjects in a subjugated nation. PKK's publications used this language to suggest women were at risk of betraying the cause. For this reason, a particular dedication and loyalty was expected from women. This resulted in them carrying out the most radical action. Indeed, Acık argues the high numbers of female PKK suicide bombers that carried out attacks during the 1990s can be explained by women's need to demonstrate having achieved real emancipation and therefore true loyalty to the cause.

The first bomber was Zeynep Kilaci (guerrilla name 'Zilan'), who in 1996 blew herself up in a Turkish military base killing six soldiers. Early elaborations about Zilan's action were focused on her heroic sacrifice, in line with the martyrdom discourse of the PKK, which was used to create a 'sense of oneness' within the group's members by 'instilling an emotional intensity' (Yilmaz 2014). For example, former Ozgur Gundem[38] editor wrote 'Comrade Zeynep, my commander (…) I will be someone who lives up to your name[39].' (Marcus 2009, 243)

This narrative of heroic women did not negate the depiction of women as 'weakest link in society.' Women were expected to prove their strength by performing heroic acts. They had to show they undertook their 'revolutionary transformation' by becoming forefront of the liberation struggle.

Later on, PKK magazines compared these bombers to the ancient Mesopotamian Goddess Ishtar. Just as the Goddess sacrificed herself to defend matriarchal society, these female bombers self-sacrificed in the same way to create a new society. As reported in a journal, 'to be Zilan[40] meant to become a Goddess to all women.' However, this depiction maintained the assumption that female guerilla had to perform exceptional actions, not expected of men. Women had to demonstrate they were no longer 'weak' by becoming uber-human 'Goddesses.' Consequently, the 1990s PKK emancipation discourse recognized women's freedom in the language of sacrifice for the struggle, at the expense of her life. A higher standard of morality was expected of women as they were situated in a lower position of 'deterioration.' Within the Ishtar Goddess' narrative, women's sacrifice and being a 'Goddesses of freedom' was ultimate

[38] Pro-Kurdish newspaper
[39] She chose the guerrilla name 'Zeynep'
[40] The first PKK suicide bomber

proof of a female fighter having achieved a real revolutionary personality and overcome the old 'slave mentality.' (Acık 2014, 122-123)

On the other hand, the PKK also developed a discourse of women as 'peace mothers.' The magazines constructed women as 'a uniform, homogenous, defenceless group at the mercy of the war' (Acık 2014). Several articles claim women had specific attributes such as 'weak', 'emotional', and 'timid' that made them natural peace-seekers. In contrast, men's attributes made them inclined to 'war' and 'victory.' PKK appealed to women's 'biological nature' of mothers to fight for peace. Consequently, in 1996 activists founded the 'Mothers' Peace Assembly' to 'resolve the Kurdish issue through peaceful means' (Bulut 2016). The assembly's members defined themselves as 'protectors', 'sufferers and weepers', with a 'maternal role of bestowing life and protecting it' (Acık 2014).

The discourse of women as fighters and women as peace mothers is reflected in the PKK's approach to Kurdish family. In this regard, the magazines focus on Kurdish women as patriotic mothers, who have to preserve national values and to convey them to their children. As 'bearers of culture, language and identity', Kurdish mothers are also expected to transmit the national movement's new values such as honouring Öcalan, the martyrs, the national heroes. Thus, they are also supposed to encourage their children to join the national struggle. Women preventing their children from joining the struggle, or women not transmitting these values were considered 'unpatriotic' and 'betrayers of the national cause.'

There is a clear contradiction between these two PKK's discourses on women, the first seeks to incite radical struggle, and the second employs women as mere 'peace-seekers.' However, Acık notes the PKK addresses these discourses to two different audiences. The former seeks to motivate and incite young women to make them join the armed struggle. The latter discourse is a tool to mobilize older women to join the political movement as 'peace seekers.' Unlike young female radicals, older women would be inclined towards peace having experienced the death of family members in the war. The depiction of women as 'mothers' and 'protectors' demonstrates the PKK did not distance itself from the traditional representation of gender roles. Arguably, the PKK used this depiction to reach adult women, who were rooted within traditional Kurdish society and less receptive to a radical discourse.

However, both essentializing discourses expected higher degrees of morality from women who were idealized as sacrificial 'peace loving mothers' or 'exemplary fighters.' In addition, the discourse employed by PKK magazines emphasized that women needed special tutelage and

surveillance due to their 'slave mentality', their 'weak[ness] and lacking [in] moral fibre' despite their being 'potential Goddesses.'

However, women were not viewed as weak due to their nature or essence but rather due to external factors such as national subjugation. As a result, the PKK took on the responsibility of educating Kurdish women to ensure they became free individuals. Like men, women too needed to lose their 'old Kurdishness' and attachments to traditional values. The idea is consistent with and is based on the PKK's broader mission of reshaping Kurdish female and male individuals. However, PKK magazines' propaganda over the Zilan's suicide bombing demonstrates women were expected to undertake exceptional efforts not requested of male guerilla.

The development of a feminist Kurdish society through the invention of a new Kurdish foundation myth based on the Goddess Ishtar

The creation of Ishtar's myth as the main Kurdish struggle myth marks PKK's evolution from focus on women's issues as a struggle for their emancipation to a consistent feminist ideology, which was pre-condition for the new Kurdish society. The creation of Ishtar's myth marks the turning point at which feminism was defined as one of the cornerstones of Kurdish liberation discourse.

Öcalan re-invented the significance of Zilan's suicide bombing from the late 1990s to legitimize the PKK's gradual shift towards radical feminism, which paved the way for democratic confederalism.

While maintaining the older Kawa origin myth of the Kurdish struggle, Zilan's representation as the 'contemporary' Neolithic Goddess Ishtar created a new origins myth emphasizing matriarchal power. The Kawa myth, an ancient reference to the rebellion of the Kurds' historical ancestors against the Assyrians, was a nationalist myth to give the contemporary Kurdish struggle legitimacy and momentum. The myth represented the 'spirit of [Kurdish] struggle' (Gunes 2012, 96), but it did not offer a vision for a future Kurdish society.

Öcalan developed a new creation myth of Kurdish struggle based on the Goddess Ishtar and her modern descendent Zilan, the female suicide bomber. From the 1990s, Zilan was compared to Ishtar, the Mesopotamian matriarchal goddess. However, the myth defined female exemplary action to escape their 'weak' state. In contrast, Öcalan's 1999 book Kurdish Love expanded the significance of Ishtar's matriarchy to imagine a Kurdish ideal community based on feminism rather than highlight female weakness.

Öcalan traced Kurds' origins back to the Neolithic age when the Tigris-Euphrates societies developed the 'best known example of the realization of primitive [matriarchal] communal society' centred on the Goddess Ishtar. The language of this civilization was progenitor of modern Kurdish and thus 'the origins […] are Kurdish, from Mesopotamia.' Öcalan argued that the PKK are the 'followers' of these ancient women and they are in 'an amorous movement going back in history.' Like Ishtar's Neolithic civilization, the Kurds had to fight against foreign occupation and patriarchal society. Within this narrative, Zilan became the 'goddess' figure connecting the ancient matriarchal civilization with modern Kurds. Zilan also personifies the new individual moulded by Öcalan's educational efforts and thus encompasses all the ideal characteristics of a freedom fighter such as 'a personification of love', 'a search for a definite life', 'an enormous will to freedom' and 'a reaction against life under the existing order.' Thus, Zilan became the 'freedom Goddess of the modern age.'

Consequently, the myth of Ishtar was a turning point in the evolution of the PKK's political ideology from an essentialized discourse of female weakness towards a radical feminism aimed at destroying 'the classical relationship between women and men, women-men, marriage, sexuality, love and emotions.' To Öcalan, Zilan's action was almost prophetic such that 'when Zilan's identity was revealed, old manhood was entirely dead.' She also harkens the 'actualization' of 'the beautiful woman.'[41] Zilan's suicide and her personification of Ishtar was mythologized as a break in the history of patriarchy in Kurdish society. Her sacrifice represented the national liberation struggle, and symbolised the emergence of a new kind of 'manhood.' Significantly, Öcalan placed 'manhood' and gender relations as the principal values shattered by Zilan/Ishtar myth, rather than solely focusing on women's issues. Nevertheless, the myth failed to seriously undermine the PKK's problematic discourse and practices with regard to women on the ground.

Political trajectory

The Development of Autonomous Female Structures as growing power bases

I argue that the creation of a Women's Army was the principal cause for PKK's ideological development towards radical feminism. Due to the substantial power acquired by the Women's Army, women successfully challenged traditional gender relations of power within the PKK.

Even so, Öcalan's early interest in female recruitment was instrumental to women's participation to the struggle. The PKK saw women as 'ground' to be 'developed.' Women had

[41] Öcalan, Abdullah (1999), *Kürt Aşkı, cit. in* (Çağlayan 14/2012)

to be 'treated and organized' to 'make them into rebels using all kind of methods.'[42] Consequently, the 1995 PKK Congress created 'an independent Women's Army' and 'women's units and command structures' that would 'operate independently.' The PKK Congress too argued women's freedom had to be obtained by developing their 'full political-military strength' by achieving 'independence' and creating female 'militant leadership cadres.' The YJAK[43] (Free Women of Kurdistan Army) became the first of women's autonomous organizations and there were plans to replicate it 'in all sectors of the economy, all social institutions, and of culture.'[44]

However, the Party's emancipation rhetoric contrasted with women's real conditions in the PKK. Several guerrilla accounts recall how women had to struggle to have some agency within the organization. Women joined the PKK as a way to 'take control of their lives' and as a 'step to freedom.' (Marcus 2009, 174) They were deeply influenced by Öcalan's advocating for women's freedom and 'most of them believed in this' (Yilmaz 2014, 131). According to Tax, before the 1993 PKK congress, women tried to organize a Women Congress to officialise the establishment of a Women's Army. However, male commanders took control of the congress to focus solely on the problem of guerrilla's marriage and used the congress to advocate for the commanders agenda. [45] (Tax 2016, 128-129)

Although the PKK had a clear programme for women's emancipation and this encouraged women to join the party, there was no real gender-equality within the PKK because 'men's mentality did not change' (Demir 2016). As explained earlier, women were still subjected to patriarchal dominance, as female militants recalled how 'theory and practice did not match.' 'Life in practice was not lived like that' because 'men always tried to dominate [women] and act as superiors.' (Yilmaz 2014, 131) The PKK's discourse of female emancipation failed to challenge traditional gender structures on the ground. On the contrary, traditional men's power within the PKK began to be curbed only by the autonomous Women's Army.

Intersection of the Ideological and Political Trajectories

The PKK formalized the strengthening of women's organizations in 1997, when it formulated the 'theory of the rupture.' The party argued women needed to separate themselves from old

[42] Öcalan, Abdullah (1992a), *Kadın ve Aile Sorunu* (ed. S. Erdem). Istanbul: Melsa Yayınları. Cit. in (Çağlayan 14/2012, 14)
[43] I will use YJAK and 'Women's Army' interchangeably
[44] http://mailman.greennet.org.uk/pipermail/old-apc-conference.mideast.kurds/1995-August/000972.html
[45] However, Öcalan's intervention annulled the decisions taken by the 'anti-revolutionary' Congress.

patriarchal structures and create new forms of relations between women. Moreover, women had to create collective structures to determine and discuss their own identity without men's influence. This would give them the instruments to engage within patriarchal society from a position of greater strength. The goal was to have independent women's groups in every sector of society (army, workplace, politics, and so forth), subtracting every field of life from men's influence. (Demir 2016, 69,77) As summarized by Demir,

'The creation of women's organizations with independent decisional centers reduced men's influence and endowed women with an autonomous will. While women's will strengthened, every men had to accept the new situation (even men against it). They had to accept the new situation because of the mere existence of an army of women with its own consciousness. The Women's Army composed half of the whole PKK army.' (Demir 2016, 73)

In short, the PKK succeeded in endowing women with the political and military means to begin an effective process towards agency and 'self-development.' (A. k. Ozcan 2006)

Women's organizations achieved greater independent power by loyally supporting and following Öcalan during the PKK crisis

The growth of the influence of women's organizations within the PKK paralleled the increasing importance to feminism and to 'killing manhood' in Öcalan's ideology. Today, feminism, in its peculiar declination of jineoloji (science of women) is one of the pillars of the democratic confederalism paradigm Öcalan developed during the 2000s. Scholars contend Öcalan extended his ideology on women in the years after his imprisonment after extensive readings. However, Öcalan began placing feminism and women at the center of his ideology during PKK's politico-military crisis in the months leading up to his arrest in 1999.

During late 1990s, the Turkish Army weakened the party's support base through a policy of scorched earth and succeeded in containing the PKK. However, Öcalan's failure to change strategy caused several military setbacks. Although Öcalan struggled to retain his authority in the party during this crisis, women's organizations always supported him and remained 'directly tied' to him (Marcus 2009, 243). Öcalan organized a purge to get rid of the 'activities that are aimed at collaboration, liquidation of the party line, and the formation of groups inside the movement'[46] but did not involve the Women's Army. This highlights the strong relationship

[46] Kurdistan report, 1998 N°91. Cit. in (Reissner 1999)

between Öcalan and the Women's Army that was based on political loyalty and ideological affinity.

Moreover, Öcalan published several articles on PKK's journal Serxwebun to legitimize the purge and voice his criticism against the party. Öcalan criticized PKK commanders for not 'changing themselves.' Öcalan's writings from 1997 until his capture in 1999 accuse the leaders of exploiting his authority for their own goals and, above all, of not understanding the meaning and the importance of his 'educational efforts.' Öcalan considered this misbehaviour as the *

THE KURDISH MOVEMENT'S TURN TO DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALISM: IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICES ON THE GROUND

Interviewer: Can you tell us about the work of the Economic Commission?

Economic Commission: The spirit of our work is Mr Öcalan.[47]

Introduction

In this chapter, I will describe the developments on the Kurdish movement's ideology since 1999: from his prison in Imrali island, where is serving life sentence[48], Öcalan singlehandedly developed a new framework to which thousands of people adhered. Hence, firstly I will briefly discuss the evolution of PKK ideology before the democratic confederalism idea. Secondly, it will be analysed Öcalan's overview on the origins of state and hierarchy, which places the Kurdish struggle within a millennia-old tradition of struggles. Thirdly, I will explain the key concepts of the democratic confederalism framework such as democratic autonomy, democratic republic and democratic modernity, and the role of feminism within this framework. Moreover, I will expand on Jineology, the science of women developed by Öcalan in substitution of western feminism. In conclusion, it will be discussed the application of Öcalan's ideology through the KCK and DTK umbrella organizations, the discrepancies between ideology and practice on the ground and the implied consequences.

The PKK's slow departure from state and socialist paradigms in the 1990s

According to Gunes, the main causes for PKK transformation reside in the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989, the Turkish military victories of the 1990s and the increasing risk of a full-out civil war between Turks and Kurds. Thus, these factors weakened PKK's legitimacy and its role as representative of Kurds and Kurdish identity, as the national liberation discourse no longer resonated with the majority of population. Hence, the PKK had to redefine its discourse. (Gunes 2012, 125) This redefinition occurred throughout the 1992-1999 period, as the Kurdish

[47] Interview with the Van Economic Commission's president. Cit. in (Egret e Anderson 2016)
[48] Death penalty has been abolished in 2002 within the EU accession process

struggle experienced two developments. On one hand, there was the aforementioned Turkish army victories against the PKK; by employing to the scorched ground and deep pursuit strategies the army successfully emptied the countryside villages and neglected safe haven to guerrillas. On the other hand, there was the growing of civil society organizations, strong of a changed emphasis on democracy rather than on socialism (which couldn't be employed as the main discourse after 1989).

The fall of Soviet Union had an impact on PKK's practices and discourse, which was reformulated throughout the early 1990s. The party began to criticize the real socialism experience, detaching it from socialism ideology, which continued to be the main party's discourse. Excerpts from the Party Programme of 1995 show that the PKK considered itself as "vanguard of the global socialist movement", since "The PKK's approach to socialism is scientific and creative", in stark contrast with the soviet socialism, harshly criticized. (Radu 2001) Indeed, Öcalan himself declared in 1992

> "You should call our movement a humanitarian movement. Not a class movement, but a movement for the freedom of the human being. You can't understand the movement by looking at the PKK only through the spectacles of class struggle". (White 2000, 153)

Moreover, Gunes points out this distinction allowed the PKK to develop a socialist discourse of its own, heavily influenced by Öcalan's thought. (Gunes 2012, 127). As showed in the previous chapter, during the early 1990s there were initial attempts for a political solution, interrupted by Ozal's death. A development in PKK's nationalistic stance accompanied these attempts: Öcalan stated in several interviews that it was possible to achieve Kurdish people's freedom without seceding from Turkey.

The PKK's efforts for 'legal-rational legitimation' were carried out also through the aforementioned ERNK and the broader Kurdish cultural organizations. The PKK aimed at internationalizing the Kurdish issue and achieving a political solution with the intervention of European States and civil society. For this purpose, Kurdish personalities founded the Kurdish Parliament in Exile in 1995, which held sessions in several European countries. The Parliament had the goal of negotiating Turkish authorities, mostly with the purpose of securing international support for a political solution. The Parliament, dominated by PKK supporters, never started peace talks with Turkey, but managed to win international support and strengthened ties with international organizations and civil society. (White 2000, 178-179) However, the establishment in Europe of a network of Kurdish organizations focused on

cultural and political rights, made possible the dialogue with the European Left. Gunes argues that the relation with these organizations and parties fostered the developing of democratic practices, playing an "important role in the shift to the democratic discourse". (Gunes 2012, 128-129)

PKK's stance further developed after Syria expelled Öcalan. Öcalan claimed he landed to Europe "with a political aim" due to a "change in the strategy of the Kurdish national movement". Western media gave great coverage to his new peace plan, which included demands for "autonomy without harming Turkey's borders". Indeed, the 1999 sixth PKK congress formalised the shift, as the congress repudiated terrorism (but not the armed struggle), and officialised the demands for autonomy inside Turkey (White 2000, 183-185)

The capture of Öcalan opened a whole new chapter. The Kurdish movement deeply changed after 1999, due to Öcalan's own ideological trajectory and to developments in Turkey's politics. Indeed, the victory of AKP party in 2002 elections led to a temporary opening of Turkish society that affected the whole country. The clash between the old Kemalist guardian-state and the rising Islamic-calvinist elite led by Erdogan's APK, ultimately won by the latter, the bid for accession to European Union, which is being disrupted only recently, and continuous economic growth were all responsible for this opening. Moreover, new liberal legislations, a relaxation of security forces, and several PKK ceasefires (the first one 1999-2004) brought to a period defined "Kurdish spring" (2002-2006) (Oktem 2011, 142). Although interrupted in 2006 by renewed clashes, urban life in the East began to thrive, and political and civil organizations managed to have increased leeway. The peace negotiations that started in 2013 brought hope for a permanent solution of the Kurdish problem, and fostered legitimacy for the Kurdish political parties.

The creation of an historical role for the Kurdish movement

Öcalan wrote a history of Western and Middle-Eastern civilizations in form of submissions sent to the European Court of Human Rights between 2001 and 2004. This submission has been published under the name of 'Prison Writings: The roots of civilization' in 2007. The book lays down the theoretical foundations for the Kurdish struggle, situating it in a tradition of resistance

dating back to the Sumers. For this purpose, Öcalan uses the Foucaultian genealogical method[49] of writing a 'history of the present'. Foucault defined it as researching 'the historical establishment and formation of those systems that are still ours today, and within which we are trapped[50]'.The purpose of genealogy is to demonstrate contemporary apparatus are not 'a building solidly rooted in the past and confidently projected in the future'. On the contrary, their development followed an 'erratic and discontinuous process', suggesting the 'contingency of the present and the openness of the future' (Garland 2014/16 (4), 372). In the same way, Öcalan described the rise of contemporary state-based society and the resistance it faced throughout the centuries to demonstrate the very possibility of resistance. As such, his 'Prison Writings' represents the ideological foundation for his democratic confederalist project, which is described as part of a historical trajectory of resistance. In addition, this critique of the state serves Öcalan to demonstrate his renounce of a separate Kurdish state lays on legitimate ideological basis.

Öcalan's analysis of world history examines how 'the power of ideology, money and institutionalised force' shaped history and developed the statist structure. Öcalan's analysis considers human history as product of the struggle between forces supporting 'state-based, hierarchical civilizations' and the communities resisting it. According to Öcalan, the state apparatus was created for the first time by the Sumerian civilization. They created state society and its institutions, and every subsequent civilization only readapted the Sumer's creation. According to Öcalan, the Sumerian clergy consciously employed the 'power of the ideology' to create a discourse legitimizing the new State institution, which is fabricated and unnatural. He argues that every society maintained the same statist core originally ideated by the Sumerians, with only the forms and appearances changed throughout history. This core is composed by cities as base unity of the state, existence of social classes, gender inequality, and superstructure institutions.

These superstructure institutions constitutes the 'set of values and institutions', that are 'mythological fabrications' and 'rituals and practices', that allowed 'the machinery of social institutions' to function without major opposition. According to Öcalan, the 'administrative and

[49] The extent of Foucault and other philosophers' influence on Ocalan, and in which ways they influenced him, should be researched. I am not aware of any article on this topic other than analysis on Murray Bookchin's influence.

[50] Foucault, M. cit. in (Garland 2014/16 (4))

ruling elite' consciously created these sets of values, so that they 'devised means that coerced the population into internalising' these values. (Ocalan 2007, 15)

Indeed, Öcalan explains the transition from the Neolithic society to the Sumerian city-state coincided with the discrediting of the matriarchal 'mythological discourse' represented by the 'goddess cult'. In 'poems, epics and myths', once powerful goddesses were 'dethroned, humiliated and killed' until they disappeared completely from the Mesopotamian pantheon. This historical process continued with monotheism, whose texts describe women as 'always guilty and responsible of something'. As a result, women became 'deceitful creatures, socially enslaved by the will of God', 'secluded' into 'the slavery of the private and the public home'. In the following centuries, societies continued to sanction 'male [power] in every social field', legitimising these 'social power relations' by the same 'means of mythology and its derivate religions'. Hence, women progressively lost their social status in favour of 'the principle of masculinity' and the 'institutionalization of patriarchal and monarchic authority', which permanently informed all the successive 'social structures and state policies'. (Ocalan 2007, 26-27)

Öcalan argues the nature of this apparatus[51] legitimising statist class society has been so strong and effective that, to the present day, 'any male who can claim affiliation to a state, and indeed any nation with a state, are endowed by their creator with unlimited rights over others'. (Ocalan 2007, 21)

Öcalan's analysis of civilization is important because served two purposes. Firstly, it provided the Kurdish movement with new interpretative tools to analyse history, which is seen as a dialectic struggle between hierarchical state-based civilizations and the communities resisting it. Secondly, it provided depth to his Ishtar's mythology. Hence, the Kurdish struggle not only originated from an ancient Mesopotamian civilization, but also belonged to a millennia-old tradition of resistance. Öcalan's goal was to create a coherent alternative discourse, with its own mythology, history, purpose aimed at reshaping the Kurdish movement.

In this way, the new mythology provided a new purpose to the Kurdish struggle, that is to rediscover how history could have gone without a statist patriarchal society, when there could

[51] In Foucault's definition, apparatus is 'the system of relations' between 'the heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions', which is employed for a 'dominant strategic function' (Foucault 1980)

have been a different 'development of science, technology and philosophy under conditions of free systems of production' (Ocalan 2007, 25). In this sense, Öcalan's previous definition of the Kurdish movement as 'an amorous movement going back in history'[52] is definitively placed in its historical perspective.

Moreover, Öcalan employed this new ideological foundation to justify his choice of rejecting a national Kurdish state. Although PKK's congress had already officialised demands for 'autonomy' within Turkey, Öcalan's 1999 trial defence shocked PKK cadres. Öcalan's unexpected conciliatory and servile statements on 'protection of Turkey's integrity', grief for Turkish soldiers' deaths and his claims Turkey had been respecting Kurdish rights aggravated the party's crisis, so that a number of leading commanders left the party[53]. Therefore, Öcalan's historical analysis[54] represents the attempt of justifying and legitimising his new political stance. As explained by Hobsbawm, new traditions, new discourses on the origin of society replaces the old ones when 'old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible. […] In short, when there are sufficiently large and rapid changes on the demand or the supply side.' (Hobsbawm e Ranger 2012, 4-5)

The Kurdish movement was in a comparable situation, as changed circumstances such as the end of real socialism, PKK's military defeats, Öcalan's arrest, the growing of women's organizations all represented structural transformations requiring a new discourse.

The democratic confederalist project

The PKK endured a process of ideological and structural reorganization between 2000 and 2004, as it 'levelled down its demands, ceased military activities, withdrew the majority of its guerrilla forces from Turkey' (Jongerden e Akkaya 2012/14, 9). The party concluded its reorganization in 2005 with the institution of the KCK (Koma Civakên Kurdistan - Association of Communities in Kurdistan), an umbrella organization organized according the framework of democratic confederalism.

[52] Öcalan, Abdullah (1999), *Kürt Aşkı, cit. in* (Çağlayan 14/2012)
[53] Several commanders, included Ocalan's brother Osman tried to create a new party to continue the nationalist struggle. However, their new PWD (Partiya Welatpareza Demokratik - Patriotic Democratic Party) did never manage to gather adequate support and several of its members were killed by, presumably, the PKK.
[54] Turkey abolished death penalty in 2002. Ocalan's renewed ideological efforts may be related to knowing he was not risking death penalty anymore.

Democratic confederalism represents the official ideology promoted by Öcalan for the Kurdish movement. According to Öcalan, democratic confederalism is based on the work of several philosophers such as Marx, Nietzsche, Hegel, Weber, Gramsci, the Frankfurt School and Foucault. (Ocalan 2009) (Ocalan s.d.) Above all, he mentioned Immanuel Wallerstein and the anarchist Murray Bookchin as his main influences (Akbar 2015)

Öcalan explained his project for a 'democracy without a state', elaborating on the concepts of 'democratic republic', 'democratic society' and 'democratic autonomy', previously employed for his peace process' proposal.

> 'Democratic confederalism is the contrasting paradigm of the oppressed people. Democratic confederalism is a non-state social paradigm. It is not controlled by a state. At the same time, democratic confederalism is the cultural organisational blueprint of a democratic nation. Democratic confederalism is based on grassroots participation. Its decision making processes lie with the communities. Higher levels only serve the coordination and implementation of the will of the communities that send their delegates to the general assemblies.'[…] It is a natural right to express one's cultural, ethnic, or national identity with the help of political associations. However, this right needs an ethical and political society. Whether nation-state, republic, or democracy – democratic confederalism is open for compromises concerning state or governmental traditions. It allows for equal coexistence (Ocalan, Democratic Confederalism 2011)

Öcalan argues 'capitalism and nation-state are the monopolism of the despotic and exploitative male'. This condition is fundamental for the nation states' perpetuation, as 'patriarchate consolidated' the whole 'framework of hierarchies' via the imposition of women's exploitation. In this respect, 'sexism' is one of the 'ideological foundations' of the nation state'. Öcalan argues this form of exploitation makes women the first 'exploited nation', because 'the nation state turns its society into a colony' by employing women as 'reservoir of cheap labour' and as 'sexual object.' According to Öcalan 'all power relations and state ideologies are fuelled by sexist concepts and behaviour', because 'without woman's slavery none of the other types of slavery can exist and develop'. Hence, 'capitalism and nation-state are the monopolism of the despotic and exploitative male and women can, at most, 'advance to become an accessory of the patriarchal male society.' (Ocalan, Democratic Confederalism 2011, 16-17)

For these reasons, fighting the nation state means also fighting patriarchy and feminism must constitute the 'central pillar' of a democratic confederalism society. The other pillars underlying his conception of democracy are 'life compatible with nature' and 'society based on

communality', with an economy that 'increases the resources of the society instead of exploiting them' (Jongerden e Akkaya 2012/14, 7)

Öcalan described democratic confederalism as

> 'The creation of an operational level where all kinds of social and political groups, religious communities, or intellectual tendencies can express themselves directly in all local decision-making processes can also be called participatory democracy.'

On these basis, democratic confederalism is organized on four levels. At the first level, village and neighbourhood assemblies operates in relation with a network of similar assemblies representing towns, cities and regions. At the second level, there are the social groups, i.e. women and youth groups. At the third level, there are organizations for cultural, religious, ethnic identities. At the fourth level, there are civil society organization. Hence, Öcalan envisaged a network of sectorial organizations interacting with assemblies operating at the local and regional level. The decisional power begins from the bottom, from the 'self-government of local communities' and proceeds to the top if the smaller assembly can't solve the issue.

A 'democratic republic', a State having only minimal power, guarantees the system. The democratic republic's jurisdiction with its citizens is defined by the 'democratic autonomy' system. (Jongerden e Akkaya 2012/14, 7)

Jineology (science of women) as PKK holistic feminism

According to Öcalan, society experienced two major 'sexual ruptures'. The first rupture consisted in the establishment of patriarchy by the Sumers; the second rupture consisted in the 'intensification of patriarchy through the monotheistic religions.' (Ocalan 2013, 30) These ruptures produced the 'dominant culture' of 'masculinity' and the contemporary societies' structure, which is characterised by a 'ruling gender, ruling class, ruling state.' According to Öcalan 'class and sexual oppression develop together', hence 'it is clear that masculinity must be killed' by a third 'sexual rupture.' This goal should become 'the fundamental principle of socialism', because patriarchal power represents the primary source of' 'fascism, dictatorship and despotism.'

Therefore, the issues of class and nationality are product not of class struggle, but of women's role in society: 'the role the working class have once played must now be taken over by the sisterhood of women.'

Öcalan regards the constructed idea of 'manhood' as the main ideological tool maintaining female oppression. Therefore, the woman's revolution must change 'man's mentality and life'

by constructing a new kind of woman's identity. As the old identity made man 'so jealous, dominant and villainous where woman is concerned' and made him 'to play the rapist', there is the need for a new identity coming from women's perspective based on a different representation than women as 'wife, sister or lover.'

Öcalan aims at creating this new perspective through Jineology, the science of women. He argues western feminism, despite its merits, has been unable to produce an effective social change. The faults of feminism are both ideological and organizational: firstly, it does not recognize western democracy's limitations and the consequences of capitalist way of life; secondly, it has been unable to produce a strong women's militant movement structure. Moreover, feminism analyses only the oppression of women by men, without considering the 'economic, social, political dimensions which made women 'the oldest colonized nation.' For these reasons, Öcalan envisions Jineology, which has the purpose to bring 'woman themes, questions and movements' within all fields of social sciences. Thus, Jineology' purpose is to break with the western tradition of social sciences and to rewrite them from women's perspective. (Ocalan, Liberating Life: Woman's Revolution 2013)

The KCK and DTK: implementation of democratic autonomy in Turkey

After the publication of Öcalan's democratic confederalist project, all the Kurdish organization undertook a process of reorganization based on the new framework. The PKK reorganized itself within the KCK (Koma Civakên Kurdistan – Kurdistan Communities Union) in 2005, with a programme for

> 'The self-determination of Kurdistan, […] not to establish a nationalist state but to establish its own democracy that will be grounded on no political borders. All Kurds will come together for establishing their own federation and unite for confederation in case of the emergence of a Kurdish structure in Turkey, Iran, and Syria and even in Iraq.[55]'

The KCK produced the 'Declaration for a Democratic solution and peace' in 2010 to set its goals for a peace process with the Turkish government[56]. The Declaration advocates for 'Turkey to become a democratic country and for the development of a permanent solution in the Kurdish question, to strengthen mutual confidence and stability and to ensure a real social reconciliation' are as following:

[55] KCK contract, translated by (Kekevi 2015/10-2)

[56] In the context of renewed peace efforts between the AKP-led government and the PKK

> ‘A Democratic Nation where no identity is going to be dominating and privileged. Secondly, a Democratic Fatherland where no country in which a society is living is ignored and where all societies can live. Thirdly, a Democratic Republic, where the borders are not made a problem and where the societies' national and political rights are approved in democracy.’ (KCK 2010)

In short, the KCK advocates for full recognition of the Kurdish nation’s existence (called democratic fatherland), coexistence of Turks and Kurds within the national borders and on equal grounds (democratic nation), full political and national rights for Kurdish organizations (democratic republic).

Moreover, the KCK calls on a broad group ranging from democratic forces, left wing, socialist, liberal-democratic groups, Alevi unions to democratic Islamic groups to ‘organize an initiative of democracy movement in order to be a fundamental actor regarding to solution of main problems of Turkey.’ (KCK 2010)

Most of scholars (White 2015) (Tax 2016) (Jongerden e Akkaya 2012/14) agree the PKK renounced establishing a separate national state; however, there are elements in KCK contract such as citizenship, taxes, military service suggesting the existence of a project for a Kurdish state-like structure (Kekevi 2015/10-2).

Regarding the organizational structure, the KCK represents a drastic shift from the classic Leninist democratic centralism of 1990s PKK. Saeed employs the term ‘ideology of the PKK’ to explain the party’s new role within the KCK. This definition explains the transformation of the party from a unitary structure to a constellation of organizations. Today, the PKK constitutes the ideological wing and the main entity of the KCK movement, but it represent only part of the broader movement. (Saeed 2017, 58) The KCK is like an executive organ for all the organizations operating in the Kurdish region under the ‘ideology of the PKK.’ Kekevi uses a scheme to show the complexity of KCK organizations’ network:

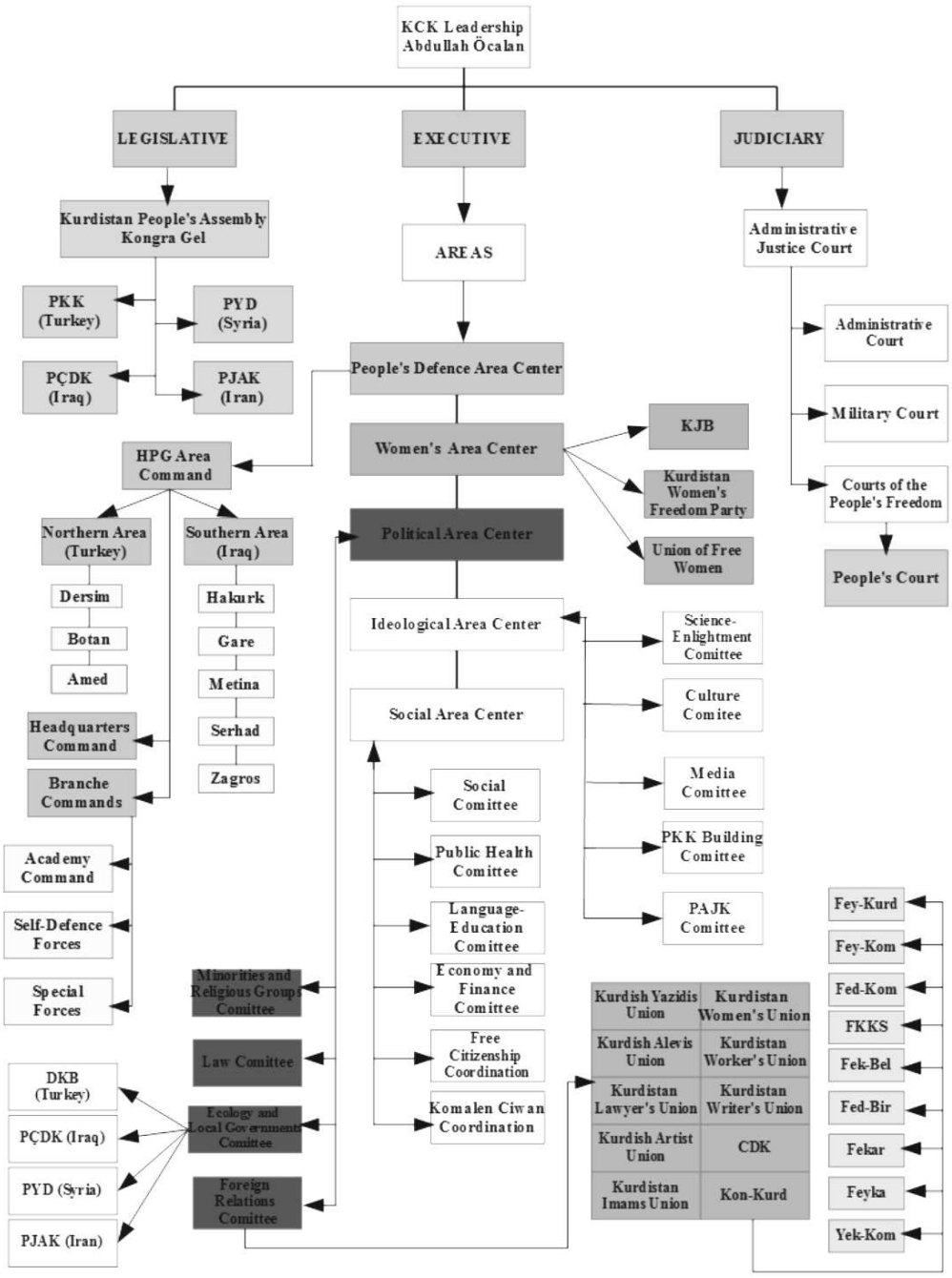

Figure 1: Organizational structure of the KCK (Kekevi 2015)

The number and variety of KCK organizations allows the PKK for a ‘more flexible approach’, so that people ‘can get involved and show support without having to risk their lives in armed struggle.’ (Tax 2016, 162)

The effects of this ‘flexible approach’ are visible through the analysis of Turkish-based DTK (Democratic Society Congress - Demokratik Toplum Kongresi), which constitutes the Turkish

branch of the KCK. The pro-Kurdish BDP and HPD political parties, civil society organizations, religious communities, and women's and youth organizations all composes the DTK.

DTK's goal is to create a network of grassroots organizations and assemblies to bypass Turkish Government's power by organizing 'democratic self management.' (TATORT KURDISTAN 2013, 1.1) The Congress proclaimed 'democratic autonomy' in 2011, declaring the 'solution' to the Kurdish issue was not within the central government, but through 'councils that give locals a voice in the administration' and encouraging locals 'to create their own democratic organization, [dealing with issues ranging] from health to education, culture to economy.' (Bozkurt 2011)

These councils are organized so that decisional power stems from the bottom-up, as showed in Figure 2.

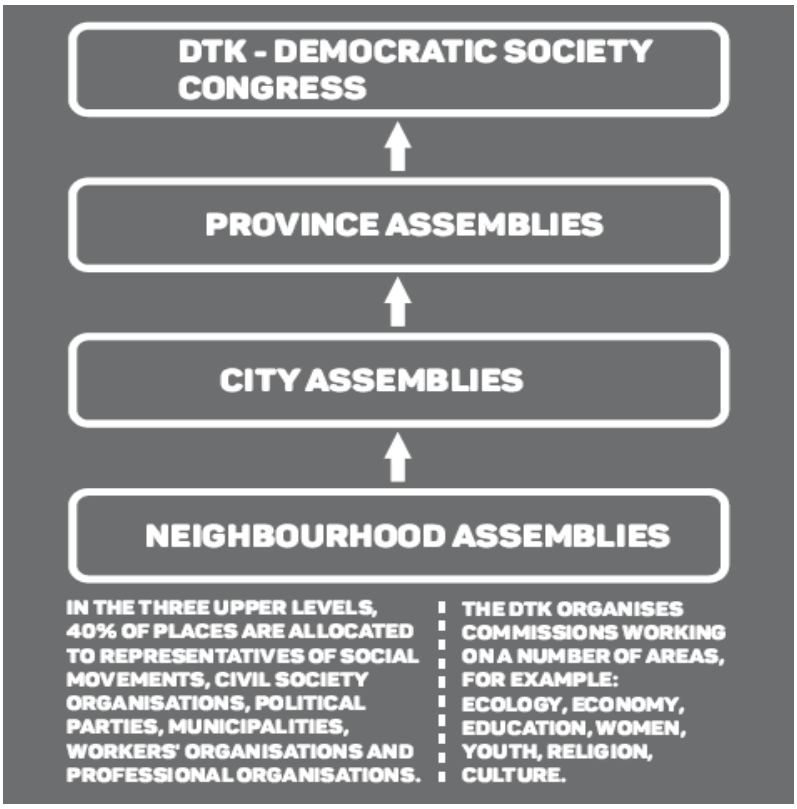

Figure 2 DTK structure, (Egret e Anderson 2016, 30)

Thus, locals from a countryside village or from a city neighbourhood meet in weekly assemblies to decide on local issues; elected village/neighbourhood speakers meet with other speakers in

monthly assemblies. Local speakers, along with 'members of the other councils as well as opinion leaders, workers, local management, women, youth and representatives of nongovernmental organizations' compose the Provincial General Assembly, which coordinates commissions in the areas of self-defence, religion, women, youth, culture, arts economy and justice. (Bozkurt 2011)

The drafting process for the democratic autonomy declaration involved several years of work and the participation of numerous political figures and intellectual. The DTK organized a number of drafting conferences attended by a diverse crowd. In example, attendees of a 2010 Diyarbakir conference included renowned Turkish academics and journalists, Kurdish politicians and even a former MIT[57] director. (Safak 2010) Nevertheless, reports on the ground from several different sources agree Öcalan is the ideologue of the democratic autonomy project and its legitimacy's source.

The relationship between activists on the ground and the KCK/PKK follows the same dynamics analysed in the second chapter between women and the PKK. Indeed, the DTK activists are autonomous in their councils' practices, but their ultimate ideological source, which enables the very existence of the councils, stems from the KCK (and thus from Öcalan). Saeed's 'ideology of the PKK' term best describes the situation on the ground, as the DTK does not receive orders from the guerrilla group, but it is situated in the same ideological framework and thus ultimately DTK's actions are based on Öcalan's thought.

In this sense, pro-Kurdish parties functions as 'transmission belt' between the DTK system and the State system, as they represents Kurdish people in both sites. Thus, the elected mayors and representatives are fundamental for the effectiveness of democratic autonomy at the operational level. A 2011 field research shows the DTK assembly's decisions were implemented in BDP-run[58] city administrations. The councils, 'made up of the mayor, the regular municipal government, and various organizations, societies, and NGOs' transmitted their decisions to the municipality. Thus, the local administrations pass a norm or negotiates with the state authorities under the council's mandate. (TATORT KURDISTAN 2013, 1.2)

[57] MIT is the Turkish National intelligence Organization
[58] BDP, Peace and Democracy Party was the main pro-Kurdish party between 2008 and 2014.

Kurdish organizations and feminism

The PKK established women's separate organizations during the 1990s. As feminism has become fundamental part of democratic confederalism, at the same time women gained prominence in every KCK-linked organization. According to Saeed, 'any position and decision within any organ of the KCK has to be regarded and taken by the power, presence and participation of women'. Male and female co-chairs share equally every high position in Kurdish organizations. Moreover, committees and councils boards have to be composed by one general representative, one women's representative and one youth's representative (Saeed 2017, 71-72).

The Kurdish movement set-up the KJA (Free Women's Congress – Kongreya Jinen Azad) as the umbrella organization for women's political parties, cooperatives, unions and organizations. It represents the continuation of the women's autonomous organizations envisioned in the 1990s and it is organized on the blueprint of DTK, with which shares the goals. (Egret e Anderson 2016, 56)

In Öcalan's thought, gender liberation's success is precondition for democratic confederalism success. Thus, not only the autonomous women's institutions, but also the other groups have to focus on women's issues as it intersects with all the aspects of 'liberation work'. Indeed, militants have to follow the perspective of Jineology, and thus considering every social aspect from a women's perspective. Consequently, militants started a number of projects within the DTK and KJA, aiming at changing women's position in society. The numerous projects discussed in TATORT report, for example, aimed to increase women's literature, teach them job-related skills to rely on independent income, teach women's rights, provide counselling assistance for violence victims, fight 'housewification' by organizing social and communal events. (TATORT KURDISTAN 2013, 4.) As in the DTK assemblies' case, these projects relied on funding and support from the municipal administrations and could not properly function without the support of friendly mayors.

A fundamental site within the KJA structure are the Women's academies, which can be regarded as ideological centres of the KJA. The Academies, set up in several cities, have the goal of 'changing women's consciousness […] to stop patriarchy.' There, education focuses on several topics such as 'alternative history of women; gender roles; the ideology of women's

freedom; the role of women in democratic autonomy and why women must be leaders in the struggle.'[59]

Whereas the classes are only for women, there are also academia activities for men, especially on gender roles and gender-sensitive allocation of family budget. However, academia members complain men cannot 'think beyond the patriarchal and capitalist system' yet. Moreover, they notice the difference between male members of the movement, who actively engage with Jineology and studies it, and outsiders who do not even allow women to participate to academia's activities.

Nevertheless, women did achieve equality within the DTK framework, as they have to represent at least half of an organization's members and they must be represented in every higher position. This statement stands true also for the pro-Kurdish political parties, which had always had comparatively more female MPs and mayors than the other parties, and adopted the fifty per cent gender quota in 2014.

The analysis of HDP and BDP parties demonstrates the influential role of women is due to the specific Kurdish ideology, 'along with mobilization strategies and the need of the movement'. Indeed, as Sahin-Mencutek's study shows, classical political science theories on women in parties could not explain Kurdish parties' exceptionality. (Sahin-Mencutek 2015) In fact, women's role could only be explained by the parties' relationship with the broader Kurdish movement and with the ideology of the PKK.

Results of feminist ideology on Kurdish society

Öcalan's feminist ideology and Jineology have the ambitious goal of changing millennia-old social structures by empowering women and 'killing manhood'. Since 2005, Kurdish organizations embraced Öcalan's ideology and worked on the ground to develop it, creating organizations for this goal. Moreover, since 2013 Kurds of Northern Syria started their own revolution, applying the democratic confederalist framework to the territories under their control.

The effects of Öcalan's version of feminism on the Kurdish movement are clear and evident. Whereas in the 1990s women had to struggle to reach equality within the PKK, and only few of them had high positions in the Kurdish organizations, todays every research and journalistic report highlights the large number of women involved within the movement. Furthermore, the

[59] Interview with Figen Aras from the Women's Academy in Diyarbakir. Cit. in (Egret e Anderson 2016, 56)

enforcement of the quota system brought women to every level of hierarchy, both in the administration posts held by the Kurdish parties and within the DTK organizations. Unquestionably, men and women share power, at least in term of representation numbers.

Although feminist discourse deeply affected men and women within the Kurdish movement, it is more difficult to have an accurate assessment of its effects on the entire Kurdish society. However, a comparison of Haceteppe University's research reveals a reduction in domestic violence and child marriage between 2008 and 2015. The 2008 study showed forty-seven per cent of women had experienced domestic violence in their life, and nineteen per cent of women experienced it in the previous year. The 2015 study suggests women's condition is rapidly improving, although the percentages are still high in comparison with western Turkey. The study shows thirty per cent of women in Turkey's southeast have experienced domestic violence in their life, and eight per cent of women experienced it in the previous year. The 2015 study showed also thirty per cent of women got married before eighteenth. While there is no comparative data, it is accepted knowledge that child marriage was a general custom in Kurdistan until one generation ago.

These numbers show a steep decline in domestic violence. Even though the study does not correlate the decrease of domestic violence and child marriage with Kurdish organizations' political activities[60], it is possible to compare data from the South-East with data from non-Kurdish regions with similar numbers of domestic violence. The comparison demonstrate that Kurdish region experienced a more rapid decrease in domestic violence than Turkish regions such as Central Anatolia. (Geerdink 2016)

Democratic confederalism as problematic ideology: authoritarianism and essentialism

PKK's alleged authoritarianism represent another element of concern. The early PKK assumed a hegemonic position within the Kurdish struggle by clashing with other Kurdish parties and killing several of their members. Moreover, the PKK used to have no tolerance for internal dissent: several militants recalled of summary executions of guerrillas daring challenge the group's decisions or trying to abandon the fight. (Yilmaz 2014, 125) The number of internal executions started to decline from mid-1990s, but 'they never stopped completely.' (Marcus

[60] This was not the purpose of the research, and political reasons would not allow the researchers to make this correlation.

2009, 139) Allegedly, as far as 2006 the PKK was involved in a car bomb attack that killed two cadres of the breakaway party PWD.[61] (Gunes 2012, 145)

From the 1990s, Öcalan held unquestionable grip over the party. Officially the PKK chairman, he began to be referred as 'the Party's Leadership', even if it the title referred only to one person. The Central Committee's deliberations became in fact Öcalan's deliberations. The party still applied its statutes and regulations, but Öcalan could circumvent the law at his will. (Marcus 2009, 144) Today, Öcalan is regarded as the 'Presidency' of KCK, and he represents the highest ideological and legitimizing source for Kurdish organizations' actions. As he is in solitary confinement, Öcalan cannot control the day-to-day life of the PKK anymore. In addition, the foundation of his democratic confederalist ideology resides in grassroots decisional power that does not tolerate hierarchical power.

However, the efforts to build grassroots democracy in Turkey, contrast with the fact that

'Few if any non-PKK-affiliated societal groups or political parties are known to have been included in these efforts. […] Representatives of non-PKK-affiliated cultural and social organizations and political parties in the southeast have repeatedly complained of being sidelined, and of having their initiatives thwarted by PKK activists.' (Leezenberg 2016|16-4, 680)

Similarly, in Syrian Rojava the PYD prevent the activities of rival parties, although the decision can be justified by the situation of war and the ongoing political struggle between the PYD and Barzani's KRG. However, organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International report 'harassment and arbitrary arrests of the PYD's Kurdish political rivals', cases of torture against other party's members and other detainees. Moreover, in at least one episode[62] YPG forces used excessive force against anti-PYD demonstrators, killing several men, arbitrarily detaining and beating anti-PYD party members. (Human Rights Watch 2014) (Amnesty International 2015)

Moreover, other authors claim democratic confederalism framework is only a façade to justify authoritarian power of the PYD[63]. (Leezenberg 2016|16-4) Supposedly, the PYD chooses the members of local councils, theoretically the bottom level of self-governance. Thus, 'the

[61] Kani Yilmaz and Sabri Tori were former PKK commanders. The party PWD was founded by Osman Ocalan and other former PKK cadres in 2004.
[62] In Amude, 27 June 2013
[63] PYD (Democratic Union Party - Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat), is the Syrian KCK-linked party.

movement maintains overall decision-making authority' consigning the councils symbolic role except for distribution of gas and humanitarian aid' (Daher 2017) According to Grasso, the PYD-controlled parliament retains control over all the issues local councils would decide against the spirit of the revolution. In example, local councils cannot decide on issues such as polygamy or child marriage. (Grasso 2016b) According to other reports from foreign volunteers, the basic level of grassroots democracy, such as village and neighbourhood assemblies, it is still being developed, and it is mainly the PYD that it is actively trying to expand this grassroots level. (Rojava Solidarity Cluster 2017)

Another problematic element regards the contradiction between the idea of bottom-up democracy and Öcalan's role. Öcalan's statements and books remain central for the Kurdish organizations. This is more evident in Rojava, where the PYD controls state institutions, than in Turkey, where the democratic autonomy experiment happens on a smaller scale. In Rojava, Öcalan is at the centre of schools and university curricula: philosophy, political science, law students all study Öcalan's thought and the philosopher who influenced him. Whereas other philosopher are analysed 'critically', Öcalan's thought is considered the 'best analysis middle-eastern society and culture.' (Grasso 2016) In the same way, in Turkey Öcalan influences every single aspect of the struggle, so that Kurdish militants interviewed by different researchers all stated to be following Öcalan's thought, which informs cooperatives, women's groups, assemblies. Even religious groups, as 'his ideas about Islam are the underpinnings for the teachings of the Alevi academy.' (TATORT KURDISTAN 2013) (Egret e Anderson 2016) To sum up,

> 'The continuation of ideological and political, if not anymore directly organizational, leadership by a single individual is at odds with the claims of self-emancipation of democratic autonomy. The PKK is an confounding case of a movement that supposedly has embraced a vision of 'bottom-up democracy' on instructions 'from above'.' (De Jong 2015)

Finally, the peculiar version of PKK's feminism employs essentialist definition of 'womanhood', although used to justify women's empowerment: Öcalan pushed men to 'think like women', because 'men only fight for power.' On the other hand, women are closer to nature and thus to be imitated. In Öcalan's words, 'women love nature, trees, the mountains' (Grojean 2014). Moreover, Öcalan maintains women's condition of 'motherhood' provides them with certain characteristics such as 'empathy, an abhorrence of violence and a closeness to nature'. Patriarchal society can be overcome only by teaching these 'natural' qualities to men. Although

Öcalan is aware these gender differences are determined by historical and social process, he maintains women have a natural 'emotional intelligence', and thus they have to lead the revolutionary struggle. Therefore, this form of essentialism forces a new set of pre-determined characteristics upon women, who are also vested with the task of teaching these traits to men.

Moreover, the PKK made celibacy of its members a 'red line'. As recalled, this decision is informed both by practical and ideological reason. However, Caglayan notes that in this way

> 'Women are asked to desexualize themselves when entering the public sphere' and 'substituting sexual love for the love for the homeland is enough reason to be excluded from the 'liberated' and 'trustworthy' female identity and being labelled as 'woman who pulls down.' (Çağlayan 14/2012, 22)

Thus, women become equal subjects only in the national liberation's framework. Female party members do not have the right to their own body, sexuality, and reproductive rights; in this sense, the party maintains a form of patriarchate, which exercise not only on women but on men too. Indeed, every party member can't have sexual or love relations, and thus both men and women have their body controlled by the party.

Moreover, the party defends conservative societal values for civilians as well. In example, the Rojava administration controls books' publishing based on compatibility with the law and 'its suitability to the morals of society', so that books promoting sexual relations before marriage are not published. (Tax 2016, 146) In the same way, school students cannot have any love relation, and sexual relations are banned within university dormitories. Sexual relations are permitted only within marriage institution so that students, if they want, 'can get married after graduating', and criticism of western costumes is widespread. (Grasso, Come si sente Dio in Rojava? 2016b) (Tax 2016, 145) This behaviour reflects the profound religious conservativism of the region. Indeed, the PKK's ideology does not criticize Islam as religion, but its institutionalization, so that female guerrillas can proudly declare 'do not think we are not Muslim only because we are Kurds or because we are revolutionaries: we do not drink, we do not smoke, we do not commit adultery and, thanks God, we do not eat pork.' (Grasso 2016b) Although atheism is common among PKK members, the organizations informed by the

ideology of the PKK promote a vision of religion compatible with revolutionary struggle to resonate with and respect the general religious sentiment of the population[64].

[64] For an extensive analysis of religion and Kurdish movement, (Omer 2010). For HDP party and Islam, see the interview with Nazmi Gur in the appendix.

Conclusion

This research tried to analyse the shortcomings of this ideology from an internal perspective, looking for contradictions that might lead to future problems. The findings highlighted the existence of several problems and contradictions between an ideology based on grassroots democracy and its application.

Firstly, Öcalan's feminist ideology is problematic for a number of reason. To begin with, his criticism of western feminism is questionable, as he criticize a caricature version of feminism in order to dismiss it and propose his Jineology. Moreover, Öcalan holds an essentialist and culturalist view of women. Women's behaviour is characterized by their superior 'emotional intelligence' that makes them closer to nature and life. However, patriarchate values made women the first 'colony' and, as colonized people, society imposed on them a 'slave mentality'. As historical purpose of the Kurdish movement is to destroy women's 'slave mentality' and men's 'manhood' that were created by patriarchal statist society, women are invested of this task, as they need to regain their ancient leading role in society. Therefore, this idea puts a substantial duty on women both on the personal and political fields. Although Öcalan considers the family institutions as the main patriarchal institutions, he also endows women with the task of educating their children to participate to the struggle. Moreover, women have to demonstrate they overcame their 'slave' condition by assuming the leading role Öcalan entrusted them, as women's liberation is seen as precondition for the new Kurdish society. In a sense, women are still expected to perform extraordinary tasks to be accepted by the movement, similarly to what described the second chapters' analysis of Zilan-Ishtar discourse.

Another source of concern is the PKK's history of authoritarianism and intolerance for dissent that, apparently, continued until today. Evidence shows the government in Syria Rojava, which is part of the KCK, do not allow political activity of other parties and holds much of the decisional power that is supposed to belong to the grassroots assemblies. Similarly, in Turkey the DTK does not allow the participation of parties with contrasting ideologies, although its democratic autonomy framework has the goal of developing an inclusive democracy for all people of Kurdistan.

Moreover, there is the problem of Öcalan's role. As showed, Öcalan represents the unquestionable ideological and political reference for the whole movement. Activists follow Öcalan's lead, his thought is studied in every school and university as the most accurate analysis of Kurdish situation, and he provides the correct version of feminism and even Islam. Moreover,

Öcalan's pictures are displayed wherever possible, especially in PYD controlled Rojava. How can bottom-up democracy coexist with this one-man quasi-cult? Some observer may see a similarity with the Stalinist cult of personality. However, the main difference is that authoritarian leaders such as Stalin or Mao were actual leader of the government, controlled every decision and had extensive decisional power. This stood true for Öcalan only until 1999: his condition of solitary confinement drastically reduced his power over the PKK and the Kurdish movement. Consequently, the decisional power lies in the KCK structure, in the assemblies and the activists, but clearly not in Öcalan. Todays, his figure is employed to personify the Kurdish struggle and its ideals. In this sense, he became an iconic figure, similar to the way Che Guevara's picture is employed in the West. Moreover, Kurdish militants' dedication to Öcalan's ideas must be contextualized. Kurdish guerrilla have been fighting for the last four years against the Islamic State sustaining severe casualties. As noted by a former western fighter in Rojava, 'these Kurdish guerrillas have one, maximum two year of life expectancy. They need something to believe in. What would happen if they begin questioning the foundations of their beliefs?'[65]

Democratic confederalism is incoherent with Öcalan's role as unquestionable 'presidency' of the Kurdish movement and with PKK's authoritarian behaviour. However, analysis of the organizations on the ground (in Turkey and Syria) show these problems are not jeopardizing the project for women's emancipation. An honest analysis cannot overlook all the shortcomings of Öcalan's ideology and its application on the ground. However, there's also the need to contextualize: although the KCK presents authoritarian tendencies, The Kurdish movement must be placed in a historic trajectory; it started as driven by socialism and anticolonialism, and today it promotes an ideology based on feminism and stateless democracy. Although the intentions of Öcalan or KCK commanders may have been different, Kurdish militants adhere to this ideology.

Similarly to PKK's women in the 1990s, their agency on the ground may have the power to pursue this ideology. However, recent events in Turkey show that the success of Kurdish democratic project depends, for the most part, on the other states policies. Turkey's legal proceedings against the KCK and DTK first, and against the HDP and BDP parties in these months, show that ideas of stateless democracy are unlikely to be successful without the existence of friendly state institutions.

[65] Private conversation with D. Grasso

This thesis, due to having to focus on a limited topic, did not discuss several relevant aspects of the Kurdish struggle that had influenced and shaped it, such as the international relations' background, Turkey's accession process to EU, the failed peace process of the 2010s and the role of pro-Kurdish parties since the 1990s. Kurdish parties played an important role in shaping the political landscape. Moreover, the Kurdish women's movement has been deeply influenced by personalities such as Leyla Zana, the first female Kurdish politician to enter Parliament in 1991, imprisoned for 'treason' for ten years. However, as showed in the study of KCK and DTK organizations, pro-Kurdish political parties such as HDP and BDP are not completely independent, but are situated within a broader network of organizations connected to Öcalan's ideology. Thus, the research focused on the development of Öcalan's ideas, in order to demonstrate how it shaped todays Kurdish feminism (and by reflex, how it shaped Kurdish parties) and how Kurdish women's organization influenced Öcalan.

To conclude, I suggest a potential research topic for a possible interpretative framework for Öcalan's position within the Kurdish movement. I suggest Öcalan's figure is being consciously constructed by the KCK as the 'lawgiver' defined by Rousseau and Machiavelli. According to Rousseau, the lawgiver is a mythological and revolutionary figure whose action produces a revolutionary change in society. He is the 'defining element of republican traditions' and 'most importantly, the lawgiver has no place in the republican order he seeks to found, and the requirement that he exile himself is quite literal.' (Thorup e Lauritsen 2011) In a similar way, Öcalan is being constructed as the detached lawgiver, which will not see the results of his project but will become the main figure of the Kurdish civil religion.

Appendix

Interview with Nazmi Gur, Vice Co-Chair of HDP in charge of Foreign Affairs (28/09/2016)

Q. What is the HDP party?

A. The HDP is the unification of all leftist groups. It's a project aimed at democracy, equality, justice, rule of law, radical democracy and to find a solution to the Kurdish question. There are many ideological groups, plus some traditional Kurdish groups with them. It is composed by different religions like Sunni, Alevi, Ezidi, Armenians, Assyrians and different ethnies such as Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians. People do believe that HDP respect and struggle for their rights. HDP is a women party, with 50% of women members in the party. Every level of the party is represented equally. That's why we have this copresidency system; now Selahattin Demirtas and Fiden Yuksedag are equally chair of the party since it was established. The party is a labour party, working for vulnerable groups, working class, for the right of unemployed people, those who really needs a support of a social state. HDP Is also very young, it's a youth party, the youth branch has a kind of autonomous branch of party, very strong and well organized. Evironmentalism is also very strong in the party because one of our supporters is the Turkish green party. The party supports also lgbt people, which in Turkey is still taboo.

HDP is a multicultural, multilinguistic, multidimensional, political party. That's why is a huge project for the political future of Turkey, to unite the people of Turkey, all oppressed classes of Turkey, to build up a democratic front to democratize the authoritarian nationalistic state, with the aim of being a full member of European Union.

Ideologically HDP defines itself as a left mass democratic party. Left because we do believe that in Turkey, since its foundation until now, the left movement including communist, socialist, social democrat had been under huge pressure of the right wing. Because the right wing had always ruled this country. We don't consider CHP or other parties as real social democratic leftist party, because they are very close to the establishment, to this nationalist state. Ideologically we are left wing, because many groups within HDP are from Marxist left, some groups are socialist, some are social democrat, others are environmentalist. Other groups represented in the party are Islamists, not radical sunni but a kind of new Islamic movement growing up in Kurdistan together with the Kurdish movement, we call it 'new Islam' or 'true Islam' or democratic 'Islam'.

We have an ideological political programme. In the first part there are the principles, which unite all the diverse groups in the party. We want to cover all the areas that right wing and radical Islamism cover. We don't want to leave those Islamist Kurds to the hand of AKP and radical groups, that's why this broad approach, flexible ideological approach, that collect all the people under the umbrella of HDP and make real changes in their minds and in their lives, and in this way to change society. Ninety per cent of the Kurds traditionally are Muslims, and there are Alevites, small percentages of Christians and Ezidi faith, but we don't want them at the hand of AKP. Everyone has the right to speak, everyone has the right to be represented, everyone has the right to struggle inside the HDP according to our principles.

The second part of programme is the socialist structure, because we aim to a new democratic decentralised Turkey. We have a proposal for the Middle Eastern people that we call democratic autonomy. Everyone, small or big, society or groups or people, have right to govern themselves like any other countries like Spain. Democratic autonomy is simply based on the will of people.

Q: How did you manage to improve women rights?

A. It is true that in Mesopotamia women have a special role from the beginning of history up to here, but it's true that up to now many things changed in the social structure. Islam is one of them. Conservatism really came from Islam, from the religion, which put pressure on women, and discriminates the women. Another factor is the social system, feudalism, which was structured also by religion and economic structure. On the other hand this capitalistic economic system always discriminate women. It is a system that keep women in houses and make them a sort of statue, material. They wait for the man, doing all the jobs at home while he is working somewhere else. This mentality is impossible to change. In Middle East and especially in Muslim society, Islamic conservativism is very much problematic. Therefore, for the Kurdish movement this was a challenge because if you really want to change radically your society and people, then you have to make some radical strategical decision. The people who you struggling for, may be out of your control by many instruments. For example the Turkish state used religion as an instrument to assimilate Kurdish society. That is why it always inject conservatism to the Kurdish population. Moreover, they keep the region economically underdeveloped; people has to be poor, i.e. the unemployment rate is 50%, and this cause many problems and it keep feudalism alive up to now. This makes society very conservative and oppressed. It was not very easy to destroy all this structure.

So, Women's issue is one of the many strategies and many radical decisions taken by the Kurdish movement, this not only provided to Kurdish women by the Kurdish struggle or whatever, but it was by women themselves, it was the Kurdish woman who made this revolution. It is a woman revolution. It started in the mountains, and then in the villages, and then in the cities, and now in Rojava Kurdistan. This revolution was made by women and that's why this women revolution is one of the key revolution in the Middle East to make really changes in society and in the state. The Turkish state is a heavily centralized nationalist state, and ignore women, all the minority groups, languages, diversities, and they just inject you or pull the people through education system, a kind of factory to create fabric people. The individual is educated as being a nationalist Islamic Turk. If you are out of this line, then the problem start. That is why women revolution in Kurdistan is one of the key revolution. It is not easy, but HDP and the previous political party of the Kurds in Kurdistan radically implemented it. Political area is one of the first area they implemented. All our municipalities, including majors, have comajorship system, we have now 50% of city councils must be women, and all political and local offices 50% must be women. We bring women into the arena of politics. If they came in that way, it is possible to change the society. Now all Kurdish, majority of them, are very much supportive of this new women revolution, they're proud of it.

Q: Lets' talk about Democratic Autonomy and Democratic Confederalism

A. This is the new ideology or new ideas or philosophy created by Mr. Ocalan. Democratic confederalism is a kind of proposal, a new project to the people of the Middle East, because in the region you have only national states, which are also governed by dictators or dictatorships, all the other peoples are oppressed by nationalism (also Israel and Lebanon). When you look at this area, it is the first cradle of civilization in the world, but unfortunately after 1000s of years this civilization disappeared and got destroyed. We believe that a new civilization can be reborn in this area, but not in the current nationalistic structure, so we aim at democratic confederalism, real democratic relations between all the peoples, all the religions, all the states, if you consider, to have a united confederal system. Within this way we may have peace and stability in the Middle East. This is the main idea behind this proposal of model. You can consider European union

as a kind of federalism or confederalism, but the difference between democratic confederalism and western confederalism is ideological. Mr. Ocalan proposed democratic ideology, alas "democratic civilization", which also includes socialism as well. The western style confederalism is based instead on capitalism modernity. This capitalist modernity shaped all the relations, economic relations, and production. We have this kind of confederations, we have always problems, now England left the EU, maybe in the future other countries can do that, because of conflict of interests between the member states. But here democratic confederalism is based on democratic civilization, which means sharing the same values and resources. In this solution we don't have conflicts, we don't have war, we have peace and solidarity between the people.

Democratic autonomy, instead, is considered smaller, is more local-based. In example, if there are 10 families in Diyarbakir from Italy, you can organize yourself according to democratic autonomy, you can say you want to be an autonomous group. Why? Because you're Italian, you want to keep your language and culture, you want to share this culture with the rest of society. You want to represent it in the city hall, and you can say that you want an education for your children in your mother tongue, of course you can. If you are only one person this system can work. It's really a democratic structure and grassroots society, and democratic confederalism is the unity of all this.

Q: So, basically democratic confederalism is the grand project, whereas democratic autonomy functions locally.

A. Democratic autonomous structure is a structure, small or big, doesn't matter, then democratic confederalism can subsume it. It can be a state, can be a federal state, can be a trade union, can be a church, or a mosque, or confraternity, anything. The main idea is that all this entities must work in a democratic way. There should not be a hierarchy but equality, democratic equality. It means no one can pressure you while you are staying in Diyarbakir as a society of ten italians. That's' the idea, We can call it classical Greek polis or city democracy, direct democracy, but it's much more strengthened in ours by ideology, philosophy, new political relations, new dimensions between women and men, and of course one of the most important things is ecology. Ecology is something important through this ideology of democratic autonomy. Proposes to people to have a kind of peace with the nature, not to destroy our

environment. Water, natural resources must be common used, not be a matter of private property, this kind of natural resources belong to community.

Q: And the Democratic Society Congress is the organization that aims to organize the democratic society?

A. You can govern yourself through local assemblies, a village, a neighbourhood must have an assembly. It could include all of them in an assembly of representatives, and when it is too big you can elect your representatives to a local assembly, which make bigger assembly, like the assembly of Diyarbakir city for example, or province, or a state, like we call it Bothan in northern Kurdistan or Serhad (Van and the region around). You have these local assemblies and you have of course national assemblies and you have international confederalism. When you look at it, it is a full staged system, and every election is important, representation is important, you cannot ignore anyone. If there's only one Armenian family in Diyarbakir, they have one representative elected.

   For example, in Mardin you have 400 votes of Syriac people, but there's one MP in parliament. A MP in Mardin needs 50000 votes, in that case they would never had a chance to voice themselves. That's why there's a quote for this kind of minority groups, to be represented in the political system. In Mardin, for example our co-chairs are one Kurdish and one Assyrian. In the city-centre the mayor is Arab and the co-chair is Kurdish. You see, we distribute the power, not to hand it to one nation or one ethnic group, but to share it equally between all of other groups and minorities.

   Rojava system works in that way. That's why is very big, that's why this revolution is very successful. It is a very important model for the future of the Middle East. That's why has been targeted by Turkey now. Because it's successful, it's leftist, its' for women, it's for people, it's for everyone.

Q: What is HDP opinion about Rojava and Turkey/Euphrates Shield operation

A. The Rojava project is a real revolution of the people. First it aimed at unity of the peoples of the middle east. They never discriminate any people. Never ever. It consists in not only Kurds, but also all the other groups that are in Syria. It is also an international movement; it is an international revolution, because there's a real international solidarity from USA to Canada to Australia to Latin America, to Europe etc. There are a lot of revolutionist that really support and take place in this historical war in Syria. You can say that we Kurds, the Kurdish movement are leader of this revolution, but it

is also a revolution of the oppressed peoples of Middle East. That is why is very successful. Moreover, in this revolution the second important thing is women's revolution. From Kobane up to now, you can see that women, Kurdish women took place equally to this struggle in revolution. Everywhere in the village, in the first frontline of the war with the Daesh, with the regime, of course women took place an important role in that. That is the second revolution you have to consider in northern Syria. They established three cantons first. Why? Because five years ago they had only that piece of land they could protect. But when Daesh attacked and destroyed completely Kobani everything has changed. The Kurds have coalitioned with the Syrian progressive democratic forces and established the Syrian democratic forces movement. They included all the progressive political groups and now together they defend all Rojava. Now they want to unite those three cantons under the name of northern Syrian federation. This means this federation will be part of confederal Syria maybe. Syria must be a federal state. In Northern part, there will be Kurds, Arabs, Armenians, Syriacs, Ezidis, etc. That's why they changed the name, they named it northern Syria federation. We have this democratization project, I do not think the Russians or the Americans or the Iranians have a project, only the Kurds have that. And now Rojava it became the most stable part of Syria.

I think the international platforms and Geneva process is not working. Americans and Russians talk for a solution in Syiria, but what kind of solution, for whom? It is not clear, because both sides have international interest in Syria that not let to have a real democratic agreement for Syrian people. Both sides think about their interest, and there are not real solutions. But the Kurds have a third way, they have a project, democratic autonomy project, and democratic confederalism, a true proposal already implemented also in the cities and villages. And of course diplomatically those forces have relations with Russia and the United States, of course they got support, this is quite understandable, because they're standing against daesh, which is very dangerous. Of course, they also stand against any kind of aggressions and operations by neighbouring country. Jarablus operation, and the existence of Turkey in Syria, is completely illegal, against international law, it's an intervention in Syria, we know that Turkish foreign policy collapsed completely, now their only aim is to destroy Rojava Kurdistan. That's why international platform should stop Turkey, Turkey must withdraw immediately to their borders and all this line, including north of Al-Bab must be controlled by Syria democratic forces, which of course forced the regime to bring to a real solution.

Bringing Kurds to the peace process of Geneva can be really successful, and I believe Kurds will play a really important role in the new Syria. They can have a neutral role between Sunni and Shia, to have one democratic party, democratic Syria. If not there will other projects of imperialistic countries, maybe division of the country. This could be another option of course, we must think about that, In that case Kurds have of course immediate democratic structure within their lands. The Syrian Kurds are standing now for a united democratic federal Syria.

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