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Gender, Nationalism and Revolution:
The case of Kurdish Women in Rojava

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Master in international studies

Supervisor:
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CEI_ISCTE-University Institute of Lisbon

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SOCIOLOGIA
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Department of History

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Resumo:

Esta tese explora o conflito de Rojava, conhecida como a revolução de Rojava.

Esta descreve o contexto histórico e político desta batalha e enfoca o papel da mulher curda como tornaram, Rojava, um estado seguro com as suas próprias regras, éticas tradições e cultura.

Apesar desses pontos de referência verificáveis, algumas estudiosas feministas apontaram para os pontos de vista positivos dos desenvolvimentos patriotas, que frequentemente abrem espaços para debates baseados em gênero.

As mulheres pertencentes ao PKK e sua organização prima, o Partido da União do Governo da Maioria (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, PYD), falam sobre a exemplificação da filosofia moderna do PKK, a fim de estabelecer uma administração independente, no nordeste da Síria.

As mulheres curdas, situadas em Rojava, mudaram a imagem que criaram de si mesmas: tornaram-se "combatentes femininas". Elas contribuíram para a criação de um estado autônomo pleno, principalmente representando o seu poder. Ao longo da minha pesquisa, cheguei à conclusão de que o envolvimento político das mulheres em Rojava tentou alterar as estruturas de gênero, em particular para criar uma cidadania feminista.

Este trabalho contribui para compreender a construção de Rojava com sua ligação com a história curda, e a relação entre gênero e a ideia de nação, a partir do conceito de identificação de gênero do nacionalismo (Şimşek e Jongerden, 2018).

Palavras-chave:

Curdistão

Rojava

Feminismo

Revolução

Síria

YPJ (Yekîneyên Parastine Jin)

PKK (Partiya Karkeren Curdistão)

Abstract:

“The freedom of the Kurdish people can be viewed as inseparably bound to women’s freedom.”

(Abdullah Öcalan, 2010)

This thesis explores the Rojava conflict, also known as the Rojava revolution. It outlines the historical and political background of this battle and focuses on the role of Kurdish women in making Rojava a safe state with its own rules, ethics, traditions, and culture.

Notwithstanding of these verifiable points of reference, a few feminist scholars have pointed to the positive viewpoints of patriot developments, which frequently open spaces for gender-based debates. The women belonging to the PKK and its cousin organization, the Majority rule Union Party (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, PYD), speak to the exemplification of the PKK’s modern philosophy, to set up an independent administration in northeast Syria. Kurdish women situated in Rojava made a change in the image they created about themselves: they became ‘female combatants. They contributed to the creation of a full autonomous state, mainly representing their power. Throughout my research, I concluded that women’s political involvement in Rojava has tried to alter gendered structures, to create a feminist citizenship. This work contributes to understand the making of Rojava with its link with Kurdish history, and the relationship between gender and the idea of nation, based on the concept of gender identification of nationalism (Şimşek and Jongerden, 2018).

Key Words:

Kurdistan

Rojava

Feminism

Revolution

Syria

YPJ (Yekîneyên Parastine Jin)

PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan)

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Important acronyms:

BDP	Partiya Aştî û Demokrasîyê, The Peace and Democracy Party
Daesh	ISIS, The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
EZLN	Zapatista Army of National Liberation
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, Kurdistan Worker's Party
PYD	Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, Democratic Union Party
YPJ	Yekîneyên Parastina Jin, Women's defence uni
PJKK	Partiya Jinên Kerbaran Kurdistan, the Workers' Party of Kurdistan
PAJK Kurdistan	Partiya Azadiya Jinên Kurdistanê, the Women's Freedom Party of Kurdistan
YAJK Kurdistan	Yekitiya Azadiya Jinên Kurdistan, the Union of Free Women of Kurdistan

Introduction:

Many people knew the struggles of the Kurdish women of Rojava in Kurdistan (northern Syria) during the brutal attacks by Daesh (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) against the city of Kobane, in northern Syria, on 15 September 2014. This warlike picture does not consider the complexity of the life of Kurdish women, or it does not take under consideration the troubles they experience as individuals of an ethnic minority within the four nations, which share Kurdistan. Nevertheless, it could be a chronicled truth. The long history of their people, stamped by outfitted battle and mobilization for the national cause, has driven Kurdish women to lock in legislative issues and military operations. These commitments were various; but taking up arms and battling nearby their male partners was the way to begin with such commitment.

Borrowing Widad Akreyi's bibliographical words (2019) "I am afraid, my friends, that the ugly chapters of genocides and the deep-rooted history of persecution in the Middle East will last longer if we ignore the facts. If we keep silent, we will probably witness another genocide at a future date, and the price we may pay for neglecting our duty to act may prove to be too high." (p.88). Following the Arab Spring that started in late 2010 and made its big entrance in Syria on March 15th of 2011, although women have been dynamic and involved in the demonstrations, they did not see their requests for freedom satisfied. To the opposite, the strengthening of traditionalist devout voices, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the National Transitional Council in Libya, raised questions with respect to women's rights and openings for cooperation within the open circle (Galip, 2020, p. 98). Nevertheless, Kurdish women took the opportunity to create their own state, which made a contrast on the gender image of Arab women fighter. Women were quickly involved in the process of liberation and found themselves holding a big role in the road to emancipation. They took care of the injured, cooked and made dress for the Peshmerga, as was the case in Iraqi Kurdistan. In Syria, in the autonomous region of Rojava, despite the American "betrayal" which abandoned the Kurdish forces to their fate in October 2019 (Cemgil and Hoffmann, 2016, p. 65), the combatants have continued to face both the jihadist forces but also the Turkish army. In these multiple wars, women have access to important positions as required by an egalitarian tradition of the left wing well anchored in Rojava. In Iran, the Komala party, of Marxist tendency, also welcomed many

women activists and combatants. Today, in a context of significant repression, they are also mobilized in humanitarian and cultural associations. In Turkish Kurdistan, the struggle of Kurdish women has taken on an unprecedented scale. From its inception, and because of its Marxist-Leninist ideology, PKK adopted an egalitarian gender policy, with women occupying important positions within this formation (Bengio, 2020). The experience of Kurdish combatants calls into question certain feminist theories, which preach against the participation of women in war on the pretext that the latter is first a male enterprise, while women are peaceful by nature, and that, by association of ideas, they should stay at home. The case of Yazidi women, a Kurdish-speaking religious minority used as an objective and spoils of war by ISIS and who have suffered multiple forms of violence - including sexual slavery - shows that standing back from the fighting does not protect against the devastating consequences of armed conflict (Stansfield, 2013). Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 2018, Mrs. Nadia Murad Basee Taha, Iraqi Kurd and member of the Yazidi community, demonstrates the importance of being an actor in a context of war (Galip, 2020).

In their multiple experiences, Kurdish women have found themselves facing many challenges, often rooted in the patriarchal system. Fighting against unequal traditionalist practices and, at the same time, against state violence has been an immense fight, which has required a lot of self-sacrifice and a certain vigilance (Laizer, 1996). Kurdish women remain convinced that true emancipation requires a progressive political project based on equal rights and social justice (Dean, 2019). Nevertheless, it was not until the attack of Kobane in September 2014 that worldwide media started announcing on Kurdish female warriors locked within the fight against Daesh (Cemgil and Hoffmann, 2016).

My research started firstly by having the opportunity to conduct an internship in one of the most important immigrant associations in Lisbon, called the "Lisbon Project". During my three months there, I learned how to make legal interviews and ask specific questions. I met two elder couples from Kurdish Syria, and my road to the fascinating Rojava started. They introduced me to the city where I always see women wearing military uniform and holding guns and explained to me how history influenced the creation of this region. They introduced me to three young women who lived the Rojava revolution experience. I concluded that throughout the thesis I'd try to answer two major research questions:

- 1) How did the Kurdish feminist movement help improve the political situation of the territory? Rojava started firstly by the Kurdish women's movements, more specifically FPJ. These women with different backgrounds, different political countries such as Syria, Iraq, Iran, and

Turkey, have joined with their historical Kurdish background to achieve the sustainability in a new region created by a group of fighters. In this way, they reached out to the women of the neighboring regions, especially those who were under the rule of the mercenaries, making the model of their struggle a dream for every woman in Rojava and the Arab region.

2) How have Kurdish women maintained Rojava during the Syrian crisis and contributed to build a future independent Kurdistan?

The role of women in combating ISIS was remarkable, in addition to directing military operations and campaigns, until they became spokesperson and leaders of military councils. Throughout the thesis, I will come across all the roads that led to the creation of Rojava, passing through ISIS, several fights that occurred in that timeline, including Kobane as a main case study, to then the creation of Rojava. I will analyze how women switched their own image and placement in the society, from the classical women founded on motherhood figures to the fighter ones, and how this movement influenced women from all over the world to join.

This thesis will firstly present the historical background of Kurdistan and Kurdish in Syria, focusing on their struggle during the Arab Spring. Indeed, as the journalist Davan Yahya Khalil stated in 2016, “the history of Kurdistan doesn’t just tell us why it hasn’t become independent so far. It also helps to make the case for Kurdistan’s independence. It is a desire founded, not just on some passing modern whim in that direction, or on spurious claims to natural and obvious borders, but on a sustained historical focus and desire by its people, on pre-existing promises, on the need for protection from the kind of atrocities that have historically been perpetrated against the Kurds, and on the rather artificial way in which Kurdistan has been denied its existence in the past.” Indeed, every event needs a historical background to occur. It is essential to follow the road of the Kurds and their struggle to understand their urge for change. In the second chapter, I will analyze the major event that led to the creation of Rojava, going through the Arab Springs and how it affected Syria, also by introducing the biggest terrorist group for the 21st century, Daech, with further details, to then finish the chapter analyzing the different aspects of Rojava as a region to help us picture how the revolution occurred.

In the third chapter, I will explore more the concept of feminism, gender, and sex. However, it goes beyond these concepts as it explains the struggle of militant is women in the Middle East, by taking several examples from all over the region. In this way, I explore the background of Middle Eastern women and their narratives of resistance. It is concluded by a case study of Yezidi women, as they were a big part in the revolution of Kurdish women in Rojava in term of feminist support.

Finally, on the last chapter, after understanding the historical background of the Kurdish community and the history of Feminism, following the characteristics of the creation of Rojava, I will end this thesis by exploring gender revolution in Rojava. I will analyze the role of Kurdish women in all their aspects, and how armed struggle helped women to gain their place in Kurdistan and how they managed to maintain Rojava under protection, and finally how nationalism is linked to Kurdish women feminist movement. This analysis includes also other significant events in the chosen period (such as the seizure of Kobane) as well as relating to Kurdish women, such as Yazidi women trained by Kurdish fighters or training camps for Kurdish women.

Methodology:

This research used a qualitative method supported with information and a few quantitative data. More explicitly, I center my research on the examination of archives and texts, published by field academic specialists or by international associations, government bodies, research organizations and public arrangement associations and public and global non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the field. To understand what is happening in Rojava, academic and journalist articles play a crucial role. I chose to work on a qualitative method as it is the most precise and rich manner to go in details and discover many aspects of Rojava, such as the structure, the lifestyle, but also the changes in the role of Kurdish women before the Syrian revolution and after. Moreover, I gathered data to help me understand the reality of the region in term of numbers, especially in important Kurdish community websites and in European/international conferences organized by UN and by UNESCO.

Throughout the thesis, I made sure to cover all-important historical and political events that led to the making of Rojava and the change of the role of Kurdish women by focusing on both the history of the Kurdish community and the history of feminism. In addition to this, to understand more Kurdish women and Rojava, I met with three young Kurdish women that witnessed the revolution of Syria and the creation of Rojava. These young women are aged between 26 and 32, with different backgrounds, as two of them are Syrians and one of them is Persian. I chose to make these interviews with different backgrounds to understand more the different perspectives about Rojava. The discussions took place online, as the young Kurdish women live in Germany, and Turkey. I started by introducing the thesis and its goals and followed by few questions regarding very specific topics, such as Yezidi Women, Kobane fight and the making of Rojava. I gave a free space to the three interviewees to enlighten me with new

knowledge. As I gained knowledge through the articles I read about the history of Kurdish women before the revolution and after, the making of Rojava and about the history of Kurdistan and the Syrian revolution, these three interviews opened my eyes about the reality of the region, with clear images and examples that help me build my thesis and backup my ideas and structure.

Chapter 1: Historical Background:

1. Kurdistan history and sense of belonging:

“Kurdistan can be defined most easily by what it is not. It is not, and never has been, a Recognized state. It is not entirely linguistically, ethnically, or religiously unified as a Region.” (O’Shea, 2004, p. 2).

To begin the thesis, the first chapter will go through the Kurdistan history and struggle.

It is essential to understand the life the Kurds had within their own homeland that made them strive to achieve equality, especially when it comes to women. In this part, I mainly inspired myself from articles and interviews, understanding the historical background and the challenges they experienced.

Kurdistan entered the global scene after the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire¹, with the Deal of Sèvres², endorsed in 1920 by the belligerents (Dean, 2019). The Kurdistan supported in the agreement did exclude every one of the locales possessed by the Kurds of the Ottoman Empire and disregarded those of Persia, yet it made the "savages" depicted by European voyagers of the nineteenth century a perceived public element (McDowall, 1985). Indeed, this region was mostly occupied by a small number of people with a different language, different culture and slowly dropping out of the country they were born in. The recuperation of Turkey and the ravenousness of unfamiliar forces (France and England specifically) for oil from southern Kurdistan were significant deterrents to the establishment of a Kurdish state (Galip, 2015). Additionally, with the boundary of present-day states in the Center East, the Kurds, who were partitioned until the beginning of the XX century between two realms, wound up scattered chiefly between three states: Iran, Turkey, and Iraq, with a little minority in Syria. In addition, a few components also in Soviet Transcaucasia. Kurdish patriotism then, at that point created, notwithstanding the exacerbated enthusiasm of Ataturk's Jacobin Turkey, the overcoming philosophy of the "Incomparable Middle Easterner Country" and the incorporating government

¹ Ottoman Empire state that controlled much of Southeastern Europe, Western Asia, and Northern Africa between the 14th and early 20th centuries

² Surrendered Ottoman empire Lands to France, the UK, Greece, and Italy, just as making huge occupation zones inside the Ottoman Empire

of the Shah of Iran³ (Çeliker, 2014). At whatever point the Kurds revolted for their public rights, their legislatures reacted with extreme suppression.

Overall, Kurdistan is considered a country without borders, as we can see on the map below.



Figure1: Map of Kurdistan
Source: The Kurdish Project

As we notice on the map, the territory is in the center of Asia Minor and is mainly inhabited by Kurds and shared by several countries. The crescent shape extends from the Mediterranean Sea to more than 530,000 squares kilometers. From the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf, it starts in eastern Turkey, cuts slightly into northern Syria, covers northern Iraq, enters Iran, and follows the downward curve of most of the border into the Gulf coast (O'Shea, 2004).

Without exact insights, it is assessed - relying upon the source Wadie Jwaideh in his book "The Kurdish national movement its origins and development" (2006, p. 10) - somewhere in the range of 20 and 22 million of Kurds, half of whom live in Turkey (A Modern History of the Kurds, McDowall, 2003, 201). Their language - of Indo-European beginning - is identified with present day Persian. By far most of Kurds are Muslims, from the Sunni faction. Of these four nations, just two have a locale under the strict group of "Kurdistan": Iran with its "region of Kordestan" - without space for move by and by - and Iraq with its "self-governing area of Kurdistan". Those two countries are the only ones from the four in which Kurdistan share its border that give an official name and promote Kurdistan as a region, they fully recognize

³ Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1919, 1980), Shah of Iran from 1941 to 1979, who held a pro-Western foreign policy and fostered economic development in Iran.

Kurdish people and Kurdish language in the government. Because of the numerous conflicts that have seethed for quite a long time and the overall unsteadiness, the Kurds - more than 40 million individuals - are today spread all throughout the planet (Dean, 2019). Yet the "heart" stays inside the historical Kurdistan. As Ava Homa (2020) states, "How long could I continue like this, crushed as I was beneath the daily cruelties faced by my people? Denied our language and history, policed and imprisoned, tortured and executed – when combined with my personal failures it was too much to bear." (p. 56) Indeed, prohibited from rehearsing their faction or religion, or even "gagged" to the purpose of forbidding communicating in their own language, the Kurds have gone through hundreds of years among restraint and revolts focused on autonomy, and the making of a State following their way of life and their own set of experiences (GALIP, 2015). All Kurdish regions have suffered many persecutions throughout the years. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein's Baath regime did not spare the Kurds, as the ex-dictator bombarded Kurdish areas with chemical gases, killing nearly 180,000 civilians in 1988. In Iran, the Kurds confront devout segregation since they do not have a place to the Shiite larger part (O'Shea, 2004). As Shiism is the state religion, enrolment is essential to get to any high-ranking position. The Kurdish repression in Iran is additionally carried out through executions and focused on arrests. For its part, Turkey controls most of notable Kurdistan, where about 17 million Kurds live (Galip, 2015). In Turkey, the point is to absorb the diverse ethnicities and coordinated them into a centralizing and common nation-state. The specificity of the Kurdish individuals is denied there, and, financially, the Kurdish ranges are especially immature compared to the rest of the nation. The PKK, the most far-left Kurdish political-military side, is pursuing a war in Ankara, which has persuaded Europe to consider it as a terrorist organization (Bengio, 2016).

2. Kurdish community in Syria:

By starting this part, it is essential to understand the extension of Kurdish people in Syria and other forces sharing the region after 2011, as shown in the map below.

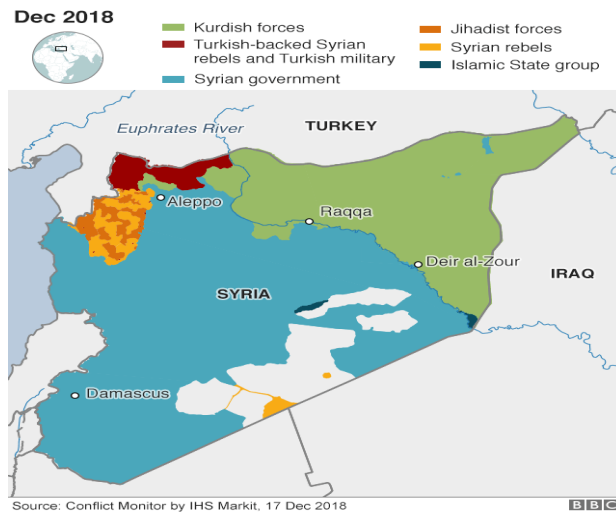


Figure 2: Maps of Kurdish forces around Kurdistan

Source: BBC news - Guney Yildiz, 2018

This map represents the result of a tight history of violence and of denigration. Indeed, after the nation's freedom, the Syrian government kept on denying Kurds equivalent rights to those delighted in by others in the country. For instance, Kurdish dialect is not perceived among the dialects of the Syrian state, not at all like different dialects and tongues spoken in the country, which were more viable with skillet Arabism than stylish. Kurdish language is a language that is not derived from any other. It is a mixture of many languages in one, making it specific for that region. Arab, Persian, and Turkish cannot understand the language, and Kurdish people are very attached to their heritage. As mentioned by Davan Yahya Khalil (2016, p. 9), “Our children won't learn Kurdish language fluently if we don't teach them”. In 1958, for instance, the Syrian government proclaimed a prohibition on all distributions spread in the Kurdish language; simple ownership of a distribution written in Kurdish could be adequate to be detained. Simultaneously, while the state funded school it offered no chances for Kurds to learn or rehearse their language, the public authority likewise prohibited non-public schools from instructing Kurdish (Khalil, 2016). During the 1960s, the Syrian government renamed a few Kurdish towns with Arabic names: the city of Kobanê subsequently became Ayn al-Arab, while that of Serê Kaniyê became Ras al-Ayn, for instance.

The situation kept on going with several terrific events for the Kurdish community in Syria. On April 1, 2011, a couple of weeks after the start of demonstrations against Bashar al-Assad's system somewhere else in Syria, a few hundred individuals walked in Qamichli, Amouda and Hassaké, in the overwhelmingly Kurdish upper east. Indeed, agitation and conflict began in March 2011, when Assad confronted a huge test to his standard when antigovernment fights broke out in Syria, roused by an influx of supportive of uprisings in the Middle East and North

Africa (Allsopp, 2013). These revolutions, that touched mostly the Arab speaking countries, aimed to have an end to dictatorship and build a better future of democracy in the region.

While Kurdish local area has experienced many years of underestimation and mistreatment from the system, they fight for more opportunities, since 20% of Syrian Kurds had been denied of their citizenship in 1962 because of 'a questionable registration' (Allsopp, 2013). As a result, the Kurds who were awarded citizenship were called to as "registered stateless Kurds" (in Arabic, "foreigners," ajnabi). This meant that they were essentially second-class citizens. With citizenship, they go from third-class residents to second-class citizens. On the other hand, citizenship as a "Syrian Arab" is granted by the Syrian Arab Republic, following the Syrian Ba'athist philosophy of "Arab unity"(KURDISH COMMENTARY, Kurdish TV Survey, 2011). Kurdish community in Syria will, however, be able to vote, own property, and apply for jobs. When, in mid-2012, Bashar el-Assad's soldiers chose to clear practically the entirety of the northern and northeastern territories of Syria.

Bashar el-Assad and, before him, his father, Hafez el-Assad, never gave a gift to the 1.5 million Kurds of Syria, shamelessly repressing any hint of autonomy or even only freedom of use of their language. On the other hand, they supported, financed, armed, and trained the Kurdish rebels of Turkey, those of the PKK since 1981 and until 1998 (McDowall, 2021, p. 201) It is from the Syrian territory that armed PKK militants launched their first attacks in Turkey in 1984. Until autumn 1998, the leader of the PKK himself, Abdullah Öcalan, had his permanent residence in Damascus. As for its executives, they live regularly in the few large hotels in the Syrian capital where they have boarded, very likely at the expense of the regime (Ahmadzadeh and Stansfield, 2010).

However, the main Kurdish gathering in northern Syria in 2012, the one to which the system leaves the keys of the area, is the PYD or Party of the Democratic Union. Syrian Kurdish gathering however most importantly "sibling party" of the PKK, worked in the country by PKK frameworks on a similar model, with a similar philosophy. Like the PKK, a furnished branch, its local army, likewise flanks the PYD: the People's Protection Units or Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG) (Bengio, 2020). Since the Syrian question started to erase slowly as a conflict, these YPG men have gotten themselves more on the constraint of shows than of their association, not wondering whether to annihilate some public venue, or the central command of a political development restricting the system (Radpey, 2020).

Chapter 2: The road to Rojava making:

1. The Arab Springs:

a. Historical Background:

“The riveting moral power of the Arab Spring comes from its homegrown quality. This is about Arabs overcoming fear to become agents of their own transformation and liberation.”

(Roger Cohen, 2016)

After analyzing the historical background of the Kurdish community and understanding more the origins of the struggle, in this second chapter, I will focus on the political background. Indeed, this chapter covers all the main events that led to the creation of Rojava, and in the last part of this same chapter, explains the different aspects of Rojava as a region.

I firstly started by explaining the concept of Arab spring and its impact on Syria, to then analyze the role of ISIS in the revolution in Syria mainly, to move on to the fight of Kobané as a major event in the role women will take in the making of Rojava. To conclude this chapter, I will go in detail about the making of Rojava, analyzing the constitution and the structure of it.

Two words have an extremely exceptional representative ramification. Surely, "Revolution" is one of them. The word reference helps us to remember its meaning:

- A revolution can be a sudden and violent change in the political and social construction of an express that happens when a gathering rebels against the experts in force and takes power.
- It is likewise the development of an item around a point of convergence intermittently taking it back to a similar spot (Radpey, 2020).

The Arab world was enormously shaken in 2011 by a development of an uncommon nature from social orders that challenge the techniques for tyrant government to which they have been oppressed for quite a long time. Beginning from Tunisia, this development immediately acquired Egypt, then, other nations of the Maghreb and the Middle East (Vincent 2011).

Despite differences in context and structures, we are dealing with a phenomenon of protest emulation on an Arab scale. Never has the region seen such deployment against the existing regimes. These, widely referred to as "Arab revolutions," are at the very least revolutionary in terms of their originality and dual national and regional dimensions (Elsewi, 2011).

In general, revolutions are "better understood than predicted" (Kuran, 1995). Nobody anticipated the Arab revolutions, any more than the Iranian revolution of 1978-1979 or the European revolutions of 1989. Furthermore, there is no shortage of ex-post forecasts, if we

consider the explanations that make the processes and causes so clear that the revolutionary crisis is unavoidable (Elsewi, 2011).

The first wave of anti-government revolts in Arab countries erupted in December 2010 in Tunisia, and then a second arose in Egypt two months later. They then spread to Arab-Muslim societies in North Africa and the Middle East. To put these different waves of revolts into perspective, the first step is to understand their context and nature.

Origins of conflicts guide us to the result of it, by opening our eyes on the reasons behind it. The existing dictatorial military regimes, which focused wealth on the hands of the fortunate few, were unable to encounter the demands of the growing generations. One of the reasons of the revolts is therefore the youth's refusal to accept the established order that had previously maintained consistency in these countries (Radpey, 2020). Moreover, this revolution has been made public and went viral all over the world due to the youth's use of modern online technological innovations. As Elsewi (2013) states, pointing the important curve technologies gave to the revolution: "Social networking sites and mobile telephony encourage people to form proximate and global relationships in ways that never would have been possible or permissible under strictly state-controlled regimes of communication. The torture videos encourage Egyptians to envision and articulate a different kind of adversarial relationship between the self and the previously imagined patriarchal and benign state" (p. 101).

Thus, socioeconomic distress, as well as youth oppression, are at the core of the uprisings, which go beyond a basic rebellion of educated young people against oppressive rules.

On the one hand, one of the most pressing issues has been the sociocultural factors that contribute to mass unemployment. The rise in unemployment has also hampered the transition from adolescence to adulthood, affecting social structures and causing frustration that the new generation of the early twenty-first century was not willing to accept (Gelabert, 2013). On the other hand, and perhaps even more concretely, these regions saw a rise in the inflation rate of food items, which was preceded by poverty that gradually spread to all segments of the population. The governing political hierarchy have been unable or unwilling to implement effective social, political, and structural changes to address these issues (Gelabert, 2013).

Throughout all the articles I read and the research I conducted, most of the authors agree that the Arab Spring was, indeed, unexpected and did not have a clear plan from the beginning. It was the reaction of the youth, mostly wanting a better future for themselves. Several articles have different views on which factor mainly started this revolution. Some authors, such as Elsewi (2013), state that media is mainly the biggest pillar in making the revolutions spread

from a country to its neighbors, by adaptation. These authors claim that social media made it possible for the revolution to catch the attention of the West and make the revolution possible. Other authors, such as Esther Gelabert (2013), support the idea that the revolutions were made possible due to the courage and the awareness of the youth. Indeed, these authors support the point that the famous revolutions we witnessed in history such as the French Revolution for instance was made possible by the people, knowing that social media did not exist at that time. One of the most important point of this chapter is to give space to analyze in depth the impact of this revolution on Syria. As we went through how it started in Tunisia and then Egypt, I chose this map to show the separation of the Arab world in two, by the countries that changed the regime, and by the countries that kept the “old dictator” regime.



Figure 3: Map of countries that achieved Arab Spring
 Source: Council Foreign Relations, Kali Robinson, 2020

b. The Arab Spring in Syria:

“What, after all, is a better example of chaos theory than the harassment of a street vendor in Tunisia leading to a civil war in Syria?”

— Joshua Keating, in "Can Chaos theory teach us anything about Foreign Policy", (2013).

As it is shown on the map, Syria revolution is a different case from Tunisia. In this part of the thesis, I will go through the impact of the Arab Spring in Syria.

On January 31, 2011, approximately 100 Syrian people peacefully demonstrated in Damascus' Arnous Square. They were silent, carried candles and signs that simply said "Na'am al houryé" (yes to freedom).

Syrians had justifications to protest an oppressive and corrupt regime that had been inflicted on them for over 40 years. Following General Hafez Al-coup Assad's d'état in 1970, the Baathist regime, which is presently the subject of intense opposition in Syria, was formed. Syria had

encountered an agitated post-independence period, fluctuating between parliamentarism and dictatorship prior to the establishment of this regime (Belhadj, 2014). Despite its strong appearance due to an effective dictatorial system, the previous regime faced numerous crises and protests before the 2011 civil war. Numerous internal issues (political and economic) along with the emergence of a rebellion from political Islam (particularly the Muslim Brotherhood) against a regime considered secular and anti-Sunni are all sources of destabilization that must be addressed (Vincent, 2020). The major factor that helped the regime to maintain its control on the country is, according to Van Veen and Macharis (2020) is the absence of a viable alternative.

Thus, given chronic political and economic crises, the "Assad regime" has survived the death of its first leader. The Syrian regime is referred to in the literature reviewed as the "Assad system," and it is cited as a leading cause of the civil war. Including these deep historical roots, the Syrian crisis is primarily the result of three immediate political, societal, and economic factors.

First, Bashar el-Assad adapted his political system slowly to become fully a dictator. He had control over every aspect of the country, and mostly over the military system. As the author Belhadj (2012) states, Bashar al-Assad transfers and/or promotes military personnel based on a variety of criteria, such as loyalty, influence, competence, support from one or more high-ranking officers, region of origin, religion, and family ties. As a result, these appointments help reinforce a complex community balance, primarily between Alawis and Sunnis, with the result that some cannot supplant others. Vincent (2020) focuses mostly on how controlling and strict the regime occurred to be. He explains that the autocratic structure of the regime is driven by a relatively executive authority personified by the head of state and the primacy of the Baath party through the political coalition of the National Progressive Front (FNP). Following the Syrian reform of 2012, the Syrian political regime was not multiparty. The Syrian government aimed to outlaw all the opposition parties and continues to govern under a state of emergency, which expands the president's powers.

The factor is a key aspect of the creation of Rojava. According to CCN in a statistic published in 2014, Kurds make up about 10% of the population in Syria. Bashar al Assad made several moves against the Kurdish community since the years 2000. In October 2008, the Syrian regime issued Decree 49, which intended to deport residents of Syria's border areas from their homes. This had a particular impact on the Kurdish minority, who were prohibited by Syrian law from buying and selling property or passing it down to their heirs (Minority Right Group International, 2018).

As we saw in the previous section, Kurdish community in Syria has very tight violent and discriminating history. Legislative Decree No. 93 dated 23/08/1962 and using what were known as census committees spread all over the province, the Syrian authorities in Hasaka randomly stripped tens of thousands of Kurdish families of their Syrian nationality (United Nations Human Right Council, 2011). Another example is how the Syrian regime continues denying Kurds in Syria the basic rights associated with their ethnic identity. For instance, the government exerts various forms of pressure to prevent Kurds from celebrating Nowruz, the Kurdish New Year, on March 21, 2010 (United Nations Human Right Council, 2011).

Kurdish community had many struggles in Syria. As a minority, this group felt trapped and denied basic human right. According to all the authors mentioned above, all of them agreed on the concept that the regime of Bashar el Assad is the main reason why the revolution started in Syria. The political system failed to satisfy the expectation of the population and find itself under the light of the revolution. The situation in Syria is different from Tunisia, mostly due to the military system. On the opposite of Bashar el-Asad, both Mubarak and Zin Abidin ben Ali did not have a full control on the army, which was a key factor in helping the revolution to take place. Syria, on the other hand, had a military system directly under the control of the Presidency. The Kurdish community took the occasion, on the beginning of the Arab spring, to try to change their situation.

According to Minority Right Group International (2018), the Syrian regime continues to deny Kurds in Syria the basic rights associated with their ethnic identity. Kurdish parties were suspicious of the opposing party Syrian National Council (SNC), whose leader, Bourhan Ghalyoun, had emphasized Syria's "Arab" nature. Kurds also feared that the SNC's relations with Turkey would stifle their demands for full civil and political rights (Minority Right Group International, 2018).

However, with the terrorist group Daech growing its influence on the country, this non-involvement method quickly changed, to give place to what we know nowadays as the region of Rojava.

2- The creation of Rojava:

a.ISIS In Syria:

“After the Islamic State, even al-Qaeda appears ‘moderate’.”

Sam Harris, Maajid Nawaz (2015), Islam and the Future of Tolerance: A Dialogue

The Arab Spring made more impact in Syria than in any other country that lived it, since it gave place for the biggest terrorist group of the 21st century, Daech, also known as ISIS in the Western world.

Daesh's history is intertwined with that of al Qaeda. As confirmed by Hassan Hassan (2018) “narratives about the origins of Islamic State ideology often focus on the fact that Zarqawi and Osama bin Laden, both Sunni extremists, diverged on the idea of fighting Shiites and on questions of takfir, or excommunication.” It all began with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The existence of over 100,000 Soviet troops is disturbing. Westerners believe the Soviets want to get closer to the strategic routes of the Arabian Gulf, by which a large portion of the world's oil passes (Gourdon, 2015).

Hassan Hassan (2018) also explains: “The Jordanian had a dark vision: He wished to fuel a civil war between Sunnis and Shiites and establish a caliphate. Although he was killed in 2006, his vision was realized in 2014—the year ISIS overran northern Iraq and eastern Syria.”

Many think that Daech started in Syria. While the Islamic state began its creation and attempts in Iraq, as far as records have showed, in the early years of 2000. After the attempt of 9/11, joining a terrorist group became more and more common among these countries. Throughout my research, I came across many interviews from different people around the globe, explaining how Al Qaeda is a starting point, however Daech disposes of more resources (as media influence made the movement go viral very fast)

It started first as *dawla al-islamia fel Iraq*, translated from Arabic to the Islamic state in Iraq, to then become: *Al dawla al Isalia fel Iraq wal Shem*, which translates to the Islamic states in Iraq and the Middle East, to finally become known, until today, as the Islamic state. This transition in the names shows how the movement got more confident and more resources and does not only plan to remain in Iraq but rather expend its power and presence.

Demonstrators took to the streets in Syria in March 2011 to demand the resignation of Bashar al-Assad. Syria's regime reacts with arms and purposefully incites civil war. Assad then made every attempt to enhance the tiers of the opposition by enlisting the help of religious extremists. In fact, between March and October 2011, he granted amnesty to a large number of them (Gourdon, 2018).

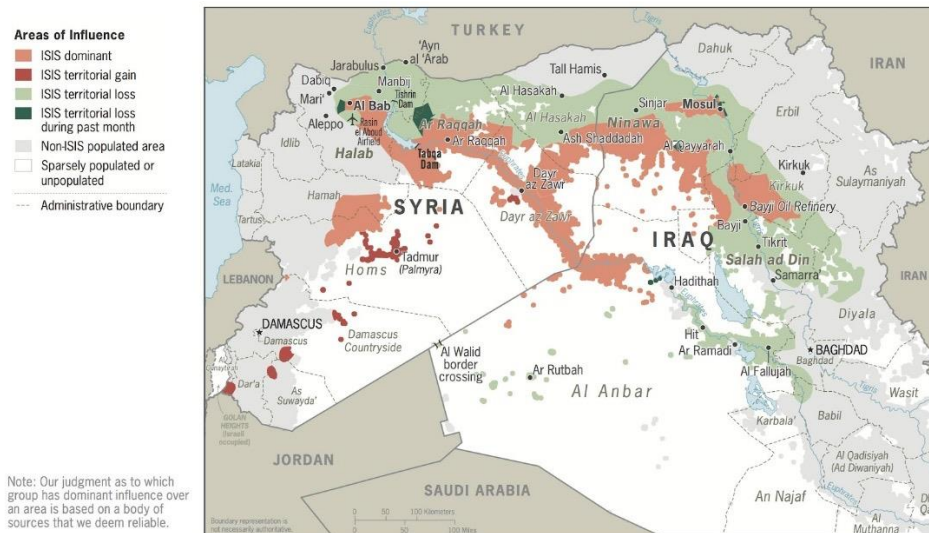


Figure 4: Maps of ISIS presence in Kurdish regions

Source: CIVIL SOCIETY KNOWLEDGE CENTER – 2017

Baghdadi dispatched one of his followers, Abu Mohammad al-Joulani, to Syria in August 2011 to establish a new branch of AQI. In January 2012, Joulani was successful in establishing the Al-Nusra Front. Al-Nusra quickly evolved and grew to become one of Syria's most powerful rebel organizations (Gourdon, 2018). The Syrian conflict has contributed a lot in the rise of ISIS and its early successes allowed it to attract many fighters and control a portion of the Turkish-Syrian border, maintaining external supply routes.

Al-Nusr Front, or also known as Jabhat al-Nusra (JN), is a Syrian terror organization battling against Bashar Al-Ba'athist Assad's regime in Syria with the aim of implementing an Islamist state. With around 5000 members, JN is far from the largest group fighting in the conflict, but it has frequently been characterized as the most effective (Wilson Center, 2013).

ISIS has been under the light for the past ten years, especially after the raising of the Arab Spring. All the authors mentioned in the previous part state the importance of Daesh in the making of the Syrian Civil War. Many authors pointed the importance of Iraq in the beginning of the conflict, to then settle in Syria. Iraq has been the main home to the creation of the group, and the political situation before 2011 made Iraq the perfect target for a new home. Attacking Kurdish groups in Syria, and due to the very tight geopolitical situation, makes also Iraq Kurdish a target. Indeed, all the authors also mentioned the importance of the geographical position of Daesh, from emerging in Iraq and taking control slowly over the cities on the border, to make Syria an easier target. The impact of ISIS did not only stop in Iraq and Syria, but they also delivered their famous name and went internationally, as we all assisted in the last decade to the flourishing of terrorist attacks all over the world, from Tunisia to France and US.

Kurdish minorities all over the frontiers of Syria and Iraq started slowly to manifest, as was mentioned on the previous part, and they found themselves having a crucial place in their states. The following part will analyze one of the main conflicts that lead to the unity of the Kurdish people, namely the Kobane battle.

b.Kobane Fight:

As mentioned previously, Kurdish people suffered as a minority group in Syria. For this reason, it is important to point out the events that lead to the creation of a new era. This thesis could not contextualize all the events that occurred in the history of Kurds in Syria; however, I chose this case study to understand more the way Kurdish minority took a big step into politics and in the creation of Rojava.

There is no denying that the battle of Kobane (September 2014 - January 2015), which pitted the troops of the People's Protection Units (YPG), the armed wing of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), Syria's main Kurdish party, against those of the Organization of the Islamic State (OEI), is now prominently featured in the Kurdish gesture.

The maps below confirm the importance of the placement of Kobane. On the North of Syria and on the frontier of Turkey, which led the conflict to include also Turkish troupes, along with Syrians and Kurds.



Figure 5: Map of Kobane

Source: World Map website Kobane City Town Maps

After analyzing the geography of Kobane, we need to contextualize the events. It is essential to understand the strategy of Syria against Daesh and how important was the role of PYD. After establishing complete authority over the Kurdish regions, the PYD declared the formation of three independent federations in northern Syria in November 2013: the canton of Jazira (the northern half of the governorate of Hassaké), the canton of Kobane (a Kurdish enclave north-east of Aleppo centered on the city of Kobane / An al-Arab), and the canton of Afrin (another Kurdish enclave north-west of Aleppo). These three areas have a combined population of about 1.5 million people (Desoli, 2015).

Each county has a complex organizational system, with Defense, Health, Education, Labor, and Social Affairs Commissions that are colloquially referred to as "ministries." The PYD has established local committees in each town and village to oversee the distribution of humanitarian aid, public health issues, and other services. However, most public structures, such as health clinics, schools, and hospitals, are still partly prescribed by the Syrian government. Salaries for civil servants continue to arrive from Damascus, and hospitals continue to receive small amounts of medicine from the Syrian Ministry of Health (Desoli, 2015).

In the meanwhile, ISIS advanced and attempted to expand its territory. Why did ISIS convey all its forces against the limited village of Kobane rather than more powerful ones, such as the eastern part of Aleppo or the last pockets of the Syrian regime's presence in Deir ez-Zor? The organization's goal was to establish a caliphate and Sharia law in Iraq and Syria. Daesh should have taken Kobane to consolidate their hold in the region. The Daesh's capture of Kobane might have spelled the end of the Kurdish existence in this area: a true ethnic cleansing that was almost certainly irreversible (Deszpot, 2014).

In July 2014, a first attack against Kurdish villages around Kobane failed due to heavy opposition from YPG fighters (Ponnet, 2016). From August 2-7, 2014, a new Daesh offensive caught the Iraqi Kurds completely off guard; the peshmerga (Iraqi Kurdish armed forces) withdrew in a stampede from the Sinjar district, bordering Syria, and other towns in the "disputed territories" between Mosul and the Iraqi Kurdish towns of Dohuk and Erbil. ISIS took control of these areas, which were primarily inhabited by Yazidi Christians and Kurds. (Desoli, 2015). The YPG demonstrated to be better equipped to deal with new IS innovations than the peshmerga. Two years of armed conflict and a chain of victories have allowed it to get to know its opponents, improve its military power, and keep soldiers moral high.

After the intervention of the US-led coalition, the international media labeled the fight for Kobane as "strategic," bringing it to the forefront of public attention. This battle took on

significant symbolic significance: for the global community, it was about showing that its bombardments could halt the jihadists; for IS, it was about sustaining its undefeated streak and permanently breaking the motivation of the Kurdish forces (Desoli, 2015). Turkey decided to submit a small contingent of Iraqi peshmerga to endorse the YPG on the ground after a series of negotiations and American pressure. The existence of these reinforcements, as well as a few brigades of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), in Kobane was mostly symbolic, but it helped to break the PYD and YPG's political and military isolation (Desoli, 2015).

The city had been razed and the surrounding countryside had been completely depopulated after four months of fighting and strikes. The YPG's losses were estimated to be around 500 combatants, while IS's losses were estimated to be around 1,200. The Syrian Kurds had triumphed over adversity, but at a high cost in blood and suffering. Massive damage to homes and infrastructure has occurred. Civilians have been displaced between Turkey and other parts of Syria, and a return date appears to be a long way off (Desoli, 2015). This event marked the presence and the importance of the Kurdish troupes. All authors mentioned in this part indicated the importance of their role. Finding concrete data and statistics might be tricky considering reporters and writers do not often have the chance to travel. Despite this, I could gain knowledge and find many journals, interviews describing the events. Authors did not connect the importance of this event with the role of the Bashar el-Assad Regime; throughout my research, just few authors such as Dora Serwud (2020) and Suleiman Al-Khalidi (2019) mentioned the role of Bachar elAsad in this conflict. It is essential to understand the context of this war to emancipate the events that occurred after it. This part focused mainly on the role of FYP, while in the following sections I will analyze more the construction and the role of women in it.

During this conflict, on the border of Turkey another important event occurred, the creation of Rojava. In the next paragraph, I will examine Rojava, the link between this region and Kobane, and then, focus on the Kurdish female revolution.

c.Rojava:

“The example of Rojava teaches us humility; not to assume that the Middle-East is an unremittingly conservative place and not to assume that the modernity associated with Western culture, especially capitalist modernity, is more likely to deliver a just and equal society.”

(Rahila Gupta, 2016)

This thesis started by stating who are the concerned group of people in this war, which are here, the Kurdish, then continued explaining who the Kurdish people in Syria are, their struggle, their history, and their fight for equality. After understanding who the Kurdish are, we moved into understanding the events that occurred in 2011 that touched Syria, in this case, the Arab spring. After explaining the Arab spring internationally, we saw the difference between the impact of the Arab spring in other countries and in Syria. We moved then, into understanding who is this terrorist group and the impact of it in Syria, to understand the rage to change and the creation of Rojava.

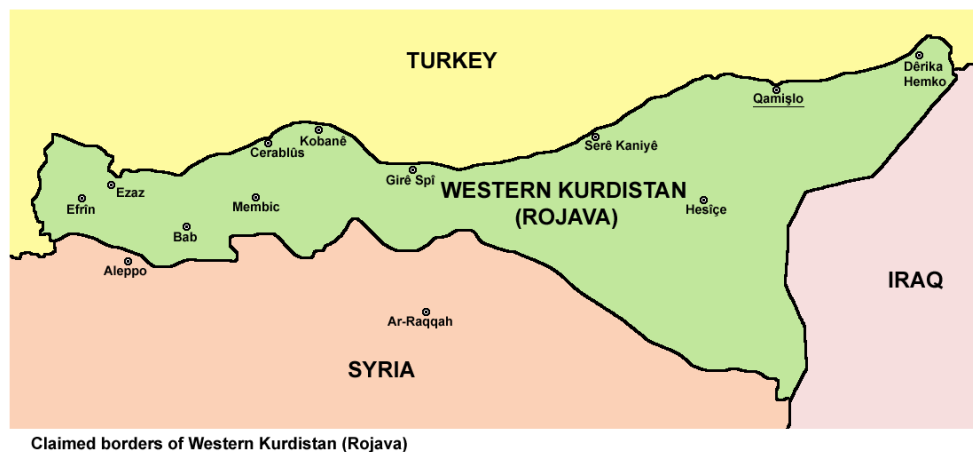


Figure 6: Borders of Western Kurdistan (Rojava),

Source: Panonian, 2014

To understand what Rojava means it is necessary going back to the end of summer 2014. The world's attention was then focused on the opposition of another Kurdish city in northeastern Syria, with a very familiar name in this thesis, this time under attack by the Islamic State. At the time, with the conflict of Kobane, I heard for the first time of the KPP groups taking the control over cities in Syria. Rojava was not yet under the spotlight; however, it had already started to construct itself few years before that summer.

i. PYD road to power:

After Turkey forbidden the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party), numerous Kurds sympathizing with the PKK immigrated to the Syrian region known as Rojava. These Kurds are considered the founder of the Democratic Union Party, a Kurdish organization in Syria, in 2003 (PYD) (Federici, 2015).

Both the PKK and the PYD advocate democratic autonomy within the current state, combining elements of Kurdish nationalism and socialism. The Syrian government made illegal the PYD, along with the other Syrian Kurdish parties, and convicted its leader, Salih Muslim, to life

imprisonment while in exile in northern Iraq. Muslim returned to Syria briefly after the Arab Spring in 2011 to rally support for his party among the local Kurdish population. Large numbers of PKK fighters reportedly accompanied Muslim to Syria, where the party's military wing, the YPG, was formed (Federici, 2015).

Since 2011, the PYD has played a minor role in the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change, an alliance of Arab and Kurdish left-wing groups from within Syria, which advocates for dialogue with the Assad regime and opposes foreign intervention.

Following the removal of the Assad regime's army and administration from parts of northern Syria in 2012, the PYD seized the opportunity to take full control of three Kurdish cities: Jazira, Kobane, and Afrin. In these regions, where it now preserves law and order, the PYD was able to govern (Federici, 2015).

The PYD's unexpected rise to power in 2012 is frequently attributed to the party's disciplined organization and impressive potential to develop conflict dynamics. Its close ties with the PKK also supplied the group with the coaching, resources, and weapons it needed to strengthen its current position. The YPG became one of the most powerful-armed actors in northern Syria thanks to the PKK support (Dirik, 2017). When power uncertainty started, many Syrians saw the PYD's success as aspect of the Assad regime's strategy to weaken the Syrian opposition and its regional backers. There is little doubt that the Syrian army withdrew voluntarily from the Kurdish region, enabling the PYD to take over peacefully (Federici, 2015).

ii. Abdullah Ocalan ideology:

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), like many other national liberation movements, saw the establishment of an independent state as the solution to the discrimination and hatred it faced. In the late 1990s, the PKK, led by Abdullah Ocalan, began developing an alternative to the national and socialist states (Dirik, 2017). Ocalan came to the realization that the root of humanity's "freedom problem" was the creation of a state, not its absence. Confronted with a dominant and formalized system for the last five thousand years via patriarchal society, capitalism, and the nation-state, the proposed paradigm seeks to be in direct opposition - through the application and advancement of women's liberation, ecology, and democracy from the ground up (Dirik, 2017).

Ocalan also created another crucial ideology, the "democratic nation." This concept considers society to be founded on a common social contract and fundamental ethical principles, such as gender equality. As a result, all individuals, identities and characteristics of groups, ethnicities, religions or beliefs, languages, and gender can freely express themselves, contributing to the

diversity of a nation, founded on an ethic that ensures its democratization. The more diverse a country, the more robust its democracy. The various groups and sections are also in charge of their own democratization (Dirik, 2017). Kurds, Arabs, Syrians, Christians, Armenians, Turkmens, and Chechens are attempting to forge a new harmony in Rojava. Across the border in Turkey, the People's Democratic Party (HDP) project has been based on the same rationalism (Federici, 2015).

iii. The establishment of Rojava:

After establishing itself as the predominant military and political force in Kurdish areas, the PYD reunified its provinces under Rojava's transitional administration in 2013.



Figure 7: Flag of Rojava

Source: RIC Rojava Information Center website

The symbol features the Arabic words "Autonomous Administration" encircled by seven red stars indicating the territories of northeast Syria, and an olive branch and a spike of grains, two plants widely cultivated. The words "Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria" are written around all the symbols in Arabic, Kurmanji, Syriac, and Turkish, the languages spoken in the region. The blue and yellow semicircles that surround the entire symbol portray the Euphrates River and the region's "permanent spring." (Atassi, 2014).

Rojava's establishment has reshaped the Kurdish nationalist agenda, enabling the PYD to put the PKK leader's philosophies and concepts of democratic independence and confederacies into practice. Encircled by the Assad regime, Turkey, and ISIS, most Kurds have committed to this project for the time being as a means of protecting their people and territory (Federici, 2015). This project has occurred in Tandem with a growing heavily armed Kurdish nationalist effort in Syria. As the conflict between the Assad regime, armed opposition groups, and ISIS intensified from 2012 to 2014, the YPG had no choice but to join the fray. The jihadi groups

are the main enemies for territory and resources, and the confrontation reached a climax with the Kobane conflict, as we saw in the previous paragraph (Federici, 2015).

The PYD has attempted to govern the region through bottom-up self-management by establishing councils, constructing institutions such as schools and prisons, and establishing civil protection forces to protect the region.

Of course, raising society's awareness in a short amount of time is challenging, particularly in a territory that has experienced war, embargoes, and where ancient mentalities are perpetuated, and old despotic constructions are deeply institutionalized. Academies arrange an alternative education system with the aim of encouraging a strong social mentality, whereas self-management creates a living standard through daily practice in all spheres of life (Dirik, 2017). Women and the youth organize themselves independently, embodying social dynamics that strive more democracy and less hierarchy. They establish themselves "to the left" of the democratic autonomy, model and they are launching innovative aspects of knowledge supply of power (Dirik, 2017).

iii. Structure:

Finding reliable interviews and detailed articles regarding Rojava was not an easy task. Since this region is so isolated and usually do not welcome many foreigners, I had to search many articles in many languages to get as many information available online. The political structure of Rojava is the main key on the introduction of women in power. With the help of the figure below, it is possible to understand the role of women in the constitution and in decision making. Rojava, unlike any other self-ruled region, had built a very meticulous structure and designed a very specific ruling system, in a small period. Everything started in 2012 and the Kurdish minority managed to create a system that allows each municipality and council to get equal opportunities, balancing men, and women, and adopting a scheme from down to up. Making the citizen be part of the choices of the region is a key factor in the making of Rojava.

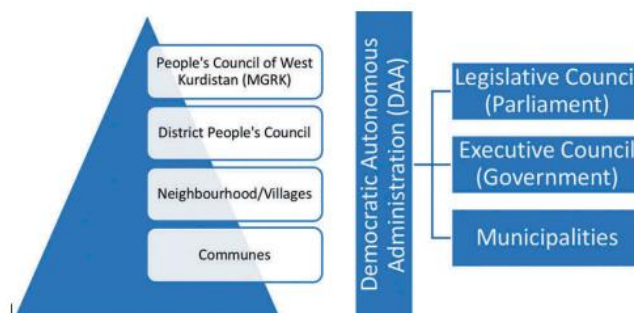


Figure 8: Structure of democratic confederalism and democratic autonomy in the Rojava Cantons
 Source: Knapp, M. Flach, and E. Ayboga. 2016. *Revolution in Rojava: democratic autonomy and women's liberation in Syrian Kurdistan*

The concept of democratic confederacies was implemented in Syria in 2011 under the governance of the Democratic Union Party (PYD). In September 2011, the PYD participated in the formation of the National Coordination Committee for the Forces of Democratic Change (NCC) (Dinc, 2020). In 2013, an executive power, the Autonomous Administration, organized by the TEV-DEM and initially made up largely of political executives developed within the PYD, was established in northern Syria in the liberated areas of the regime's presence, a space that we will commonly refer to as "Rojava," which is Kurdish for "West" (Loez, 2021). Cezîre (Jazirah), Kobanî (Ain Al-Arab), and Efrîn (Afrin) cantons declared democratic autonomy through a provisional constitution in January 2014 (Dinc, 2020). From 2013 to 2019, its territorial control expanded as ISIS-controlled areas were emancipated, encompassing an increasing number of Arab communities as well as Syrians, Armenians, Turkmens, and Ezidians (Loez, 2021)

Among others, I found an article in which the journalist had the chance to visit families in Rojava and Kobane, take pictures, and ask several questions to local vice presidents about the ruling system. The journalist Loez (2021) describes his visit: "at the end of April 2018, in a house in a district of Kobanê, the 12 co-presidents of the various municipalities of the district meet. Women and men, most of whom are in their 40s or 50s, are in equal proportions". He later proceeds to explain that Kobanê is divided into 91 communes, each with 100 to 150 families. There are two co-presidents in each municipality, as well as six commissions: services, health, peace (justice), self-defense, economy, and political organization. There are meetings once a week. At each meeting, written reports are prepared and sent to TEV-DEM. A monthly report is generated on the 20th of each month. In September, there were elections for commune presidents, with a high turnout. The co-chairs choose the committee leaders after they have

been elected. "When it is not possible to escalate to a higher level (district, town, region), the members of the municipalities are responsible for settling." (Loez, 2021).

The Assemblies of towns, provinces, defined as "towns extended to the nearby areas which are connected to it"; region, defined as "one or more cantons or territories geographically connected and sharing historical, demographic, economic, and cultural characteristics"; and finally, the Congress of Democratic Peoples, which oversees all the other assemblies (Loez, 2021).

Dinc (2020) also extends our vision by stating that: "The commune (an assembly that consists of households) made up the base of this bottom-up model, which was followed by neighborhoods/villages (composed of communes), district people's councils (the city, coordinated by Democratic Society Movement (TEV-DEM) composed of political parties, social movements and civil organizations). MGRK was made up of all cities, villages, and communes. In all these four levels, there are eight commissions for women, defense, economics, politics, civil society, free society, justice, ideology, and health (which was not a direct part of MGRK)." (p. 52).

The Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (FDNS) was established in March 2016, with the goal of uniting all the region's populations within the Autonomous Administration's political project. It is politically portrayed by the Syrian Democratic Council (CDS) and militarily defended by the Syrian Democratic Forces (FDS), which helps bring together all elements of the population, most notably the YPG (People's Protection Units), which is predominantly Kurdish but also includes Arab and Syrian soldiers. The FDS are characterized as a self-defense force tasked with defending the FDNS and its citizens from external threats. Welatparezî, the capacity to protect society, is an important aspect of democratic confederacies (Loez, 2021).

To sum-up the role of each, while the municipalities are the place for solving local difficulties and the organization of daily life, the councils draw up action plans and a political line, guaranteeing cohesion and effective coordination. At the beginning of the revolution, in the newly liberated areas, the assemblies started by setting up People's Councils and then, in a second step, more decentralized organizational structures in the form of communes. The municipalities are working for the advent of a "moral-political" society, built with individuals aware of the challenges of social issues and involved in daily self-governance. This is conceived as a matter of common responsibility and not as something to be submitted to bureaucratic elite. Contrary to all coercion and the rule of law, this system is based on the free and voluntary participation of everyone (Dinc, 2020).

Specifically, these two last authors made a very detailed description of the structure of Rojava. Both had the same explanation regarding the scheme, presenting all the sides of the ruling

structure with the same dates and with the same events. On the one hand, Loez (2021) had a much more detailed description since he went to Rojava to talk directly with locals, explaining all the different names and different roles. On the other hand, Dinc (2020) introduced more in depth the role of women within the constitution.

For this reason, in the next two chapters, I will introduce the concept of female militant and feminism changes in history, to examine Dinc's (2020) work and discover the role of women in the making of Rojava and the gender revolution they strive to achieve.

Chapter 3: Women in conflicts:

After going through the historical background of the Kurdish community and the making of Rojava during ISIS invasion in Syria and in the making of Rojava, this chapter introduces the role of women in the region, in particular militant women and the role of women in conflict. It is essential to understand from where these Kurdish women inspired themselves to achieve their turning point in history. In this part of the thesis, I will firstly start by separating the concept of Gender and Sex, to then move to women and their role in wars and conflicts, to finally conclude by a crucial event involving a specific group that inspired Kurdish women: Yezidi genocide.

1. Conceptual frame:

a. Gender versus Sex:

Whereas "sex" refers to biological characteristics such as anatomy, "gender" refers to a social and cultural construct. Indeed, the social roles and characteristics (physical and behavioral in particular) that are socially and culturally given to either men or women are heavily influenced by the principles that a society conveys. As a result, the genre is not "natural" or inextricably tied to a person's sex, but rather differs based on the period and culture of a given society (Milot, 2013). Furthermore, as Mazurana and McKay (2004) point out, "gender can limit or expand people's options and influence on all aspects of their existence - opportunity to earn a living, for example, access to education, choice of career or profession" (p. 19).

Thus, gender "represents an analytical tool that, in a very broad sense, tells us that there is something social in what appears natural" (Parini, 2010, p. 32).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (report of 2011), "sex" refers to "the biological and physiological characteristics that distinguish men from women, such as

reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormones, and so on." While the concept of gender is defined as "socially determined roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a society considers appropriate for men and women".

The Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) is the first international human rights device to include a description of gender. Gender is defined as "the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men".

Donald Steinberg, in his article on the Lusaka Treaty (Angola) for the OSCE25 Magazine in 2009, reports the ramifications not only for women, but also for the nation's stability. Having stated a priori "that no provision of the agreement was discriminatory against women" and retained that "the agreement was exempt of any sexist consideration," Steinberg later discovered "that a peace agreement" devoid of any sexist consideration "was, by definition, discriminatory against women" after arriving in Luanda (Steinberg, 2009, p. 12 apud Milot, 2013 p.22).

As a result, "international interventions in these regions were frequently divorced from the realities of women and girls, as well as the activists who worked with them" (Barry, 2005, p. 93). While the authors agree that gender neutrality in peace agreements is harmful to women and condemns them (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003; Pankhurst, 2008), these chords remain the norm today.

b. Gender Integration from a Feminine Perspective:

It is crucial to highlight that the gender-mainstreaming point of view does not simply focus on women, although they are frequently the targets and beneficiaries of these programs. This is driven by the fact that they are typically the most underprivileged members of communities.

It is therefore critical to recognize that conflict-resolution initiatives that do not consider gender issues "will most likely reinforce existing problems and power imbalances between men and women, undermining any chance of real development for the entire community" (Whitbread, 2004, p. 43). In other words, adopting a gender mainstreaming perspective in peace processes is more than an obligation; it is a requirement.

This acknowledgement, regrettably, is far from being taken for granted. First, there have been countless feedback at this organization's location, particularly on the gap between the UN's

policy statements and research papers on the one hand, and the implementation of these policies on the other (Falquet, 2003; Whitworth, 2004, p. 120; Chemillier-Gendreau, 2010).

Thus, one of the techniques used by feminists to persuade authorities and military personnel of the importance of adopting the gender mainstreaming perspective is to present it as a tool that will help them do a better job (Milot, 2013). Indeed, the ability of stakeholders to understand and interact with the population often determines the success of a mission. According to the NGO International Alert (Whitworth, 2004, p. 120), "gender mainstreaming is possible and can improve the effectiveness of operations".

Whitworth, on the other hand, advises us about the repercussions of such a tactic. Initially, the word "gender" loses its critical definition since it is now used as a problem-solving tool. (Milot, 2013). Indeed, as soon as it is used to assist officials or military personnel in being more effective in their work, a slew of issues (such as the legitimacy of operations) is automatically ruled out (Whitworth, 2004, p. 121). Therefore, "it forces critics to abandon any alternatives for radical change that will be dismissed as impractical, idealistic, and irrelevant to the central concerns of the institution" (Whitworth, 2004, p. 121).

These constraints imposed by the appropriation of "gender" deprive it of its critical political potential and shift our focus away from those affected by peacekeeping operations and toward those who contribute. Even while attempting to make the reality of the people affected by some missions more visible, it is the leaders' priorities, limits, and concerns that will shape the questions and determine the answers to be applied. (Milot, 2013).

Yet nowadays, the importance attached by the United Nations to the issue of gender is mainly inconsistent, especially in the context of armed conflict. When women's organizations request it, the organization pays attention to the issue of gender, but it remains silent when it comes to enforcing these policies (Whitworth, 2004 apud Milot, 2013 p. 32).

Although there have been numerous developments in the UN system concerning the topic of women and gender throughout its history, these advances are not yet considered as central or crucial. In fact, if the need for a gender perspective is not obvious, if the stated goal of increased efficiency is not apparent, and if UN officials are not convinced that applying a gender analysis will help them prevent or end the violence as soon as possible, there is no valid reason for them to do so (Milot, 2013).

2. Women, war, and resistance:

To fully comprehend the relationship between military, war, and women, it is critical to concentrate on the instrumentalization of gender identities by parties involved in armed conflicts. Since these notions of femininity and masculinity are retained when the time arrives for peaceful coexistence and reconstruction, this instrumentalization has a fundamental influence on women both during the outbreak of hostilities and in post-conflict situations. These attitudes influence peace efforts as well as women's participation in all processes designed to restore peace and honoring their human rights.

Masculinity, as a gender construction, refers to a set of social traditions and cultural portrayals associated with the male body (Richardson, 1994, p. 245). This masculinity is amplified tenfold in the context of armed conflict. The militarization procedure, a concept occurring in societies that will soon face violence, exhibited by a rise in the number of weapons on the territory and high military spending (Turenne-Sjolander, 2011), guarantees that "values, ideologies, and Military behavior patterns exert a dominant influence in society". Indeed, militarization aids in the propagation of male and female identities initially conveyed by patriarchal society (Perez, 2007, p. 11).

a. Historical Women's appearance on the battlefield in the Middle East:

These warriors were frequently sovereigns. Ahhotep I, queen of Egypt, is said to have fought the Hyksos invaders at the head of her troops about sixteen centuries before our era (Boutron, 2019). Others will follow her example, including the Chinese Fu Hao, the Breton Boudicca, and the Queen of Palmyra Zénobie, to name a few of the most famous historic figures. Women of lower social status have also commanded armies. The most popular of them is, of course, the Maid of Orleans, who was burned at the stake for, among other things, refusing to take up arms and instead fighting in men's clothes (including armor), demonstrating the taboo surrounding the use of weapons (Palmieri and Herrmann, 2009).

The research of women's roles in the Resistance must consider the social context of the time. Women have the status of a civil minor, which can exacerbate the challenges in getting involved but already uncovers a paradox: these tenacious women have fulfilled their civic duty without having the legal right to do so (Callewaert 2014).

We must therefore keep in mind the historical differences in the roles devolved between men and women. "The woman is confined to her home, devoted to domestic duties." In some ways, the Resistance depicts these roles obsolete because it encourages women to break the law, to

leave the protective cocoon represented by their home, to enter illegality, to join the Resistance. "She walks across the house's threshold" (Veillon 1998).

According to Dominique Veillon (1998), the female Resistance is thus divided into two poles: daily resistance organized around key attributes but complicated to interpret, and resistance centered on the true role that women have been able to play, participating in movements or networks. Women's activities in the Resistance are frequently an extension of their regular tasks, i.e., feeding, caring for, clothing. These female occupations, which are critical to the logistics of the Resistance, are rarely listed and are frequently overlooked by women themselves.

Kurdish women struggle can be represented a unique feminist resistance; however, literature and history marked many Middle Eastern women emerging in different kind of resistance.

As religion and cultural traditions are inextricably linked in the East, we will see these two aspects working together, including in claims. This trait can also be found in the fight for women's emancipation led by women (Mansour, 2016).

Women's "gendered identities are crafted through religious and nationalist discourse" (Abu-Lughod, 2002 p.789) Because "Islamic movements themselves have emerged in a world's developed by the intense engagements of Western powers in Middle Eastern lives," it is likely that the primary concern of women and men is to communicate collective solidarity in the face of external threats (Holt and Jawad, 2013).

Women's status as "mothers of the nation," historically and symbolically, has meant that the nation has frequently been identified through "the iconography of familial and domestic space." (McClintock, 1993, p.62) Because of this idealized version — or restriction — of women's roles, nationalist activism has tended to take place outside of the private sphere, excluding women (Holt and Jawad, 2013).

In comparison to Western women, who are frequently depicted as having a powerful and liberated status, there is a noticeable trend to portray Middle Eastern women as inferior and imprisoned by their traditions and cultures. This lack of reliable academic standpoint, about Middle Eastern women in the nineteenth century, is largely due to the scarcity of literature that presents any different experiences of Middle Eastern women (Afshar, 2016; Meriwether, 2018 apud Khodry, 2020 p. 206).

To obtain a more detailed and analytical picture of women's dynamics in the Arab world, persecution, victimization, violence, or marginalization must be illustrated alongside women's (in)existing reactions to their situations (Khodry, 2020). Resistance, according to Foucault and Gordon (1980), takes place once authority is used to persecute and suppress others. As a result,

resistance is inextricably linked to persecution by the strong or prominent group, which possesses greater power and access to resources. Different types and degrees of oppression can elicit a wide range and degree of resistance (Meriwether, 2018; Siljak, 2014 apud Khodry 2020, p. 208).

According to Véronique Dudouet (2015), there is a spectrum of answers to persecution. This contains dynamic behavior that can be used, merged, or modified based on time, space, and type of oppression. There are two major analytical classifications on the spectrum. The first category includes traditional political behavior such as party politics, advocacy, dialogue, diplomacy, negotiations, and litigation, whereas the second operates outside of traditional political channels.

Across the region, while Iraqi women express their opposition through traditional activities and broad civil society activism that extends beyond the local level, Palestinian women participate in unconventional unarmed or peaceful resistance through Sumud and cultural resistance, as well as armed/non-peaceful resistance. In response to Turkish state oppression, Kurdish women engage in nonviolent resistance by becoming active fighters in the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Khodry 2020).

It is impossible to mention all the movements that occurred in the Middle East and North Africa in term of female resistance; for this matter, I chose to focus on the most relevant female resistance group at the center of this topic that emerged and helped to create the state of Rojava and make Kurdish female combatant take the arms and try to make a change: Yezidi women struggle.

b. Yezidi Women:

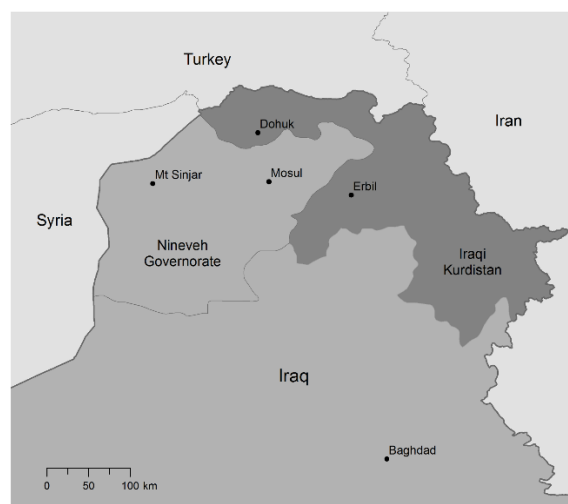


Figure 9: Map of Northern Iraq.

The Yezidis follow an ancient religion that blends Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. They number less than 1.5 million people and are primarily found in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Armenia. The largest Yezidi community—approximately 400,000 people—lived in the Mount Sinjar area of Nineveh governorate, about 150 kilometers west of Mosul. Sinjar's Yezidis have long been one of Iraq's most vulnerable and impoverished communities. After decades of discrimination, marginalization, and neglect under Saddam Hussein's regime, they have faced increasing persecution from Sunni extremists in recent years.

Following the Arab Spring upheavals, Daesh proclaimed an Islamic Caliphate in Syria and Iraq. ISIS fighters managed to capture the center of Iraq's Nineveh governorate in June 2014 and declared a campaign to purge their Caliphate of non-Arab and non-Sunni Muslim communities, willing to commit countless brutalities against civilians. Yezidis, a Kurdish religious minority, were one of the most heavily affected communities due to their ethnicity and religion. ISIS launched an attack on the Yezidi ancestral homeland in northwestern Iraq, close to the Iraqi Syrian border, in August 2014 (Ibrahim, Ertl, Catani, Ismail & Neuner, 2018).

Women have been the most persecuted members of the Yezidi community. The kidnapping of Yezidi women is considered demasculinizing for men who are incapable of defending their wives, daughters, and mothers. Pre- or extramarital sexual relations, whether voluntary or involuntary, destroy a woman's honor and thus the honor of the entire family (Nouri, 2021). People, who have sexual relations with non-Yezidis, as a rule, give up their Yezidi identity and faith. As a result, it was possible that these women would be unable to return to their community. The fear of abduction of Yezidi women was fueled by the historical context as well as the cultural embeddedness of honor (Nouri, 2021).

When an approximate 3,537 Yezidi women were kidnapped in 2014, this fear became a terrifying reality (Nouri, 2021). The United Nations has classified IS's massacres of Yezidis during the Sinjar attack as genocide. (United Nation, 2021). The United Nations Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic explored the violations committed against Yezidis and recorded that the Yezidi people were exposed to mass murders, rape, sexual violence, enslavement, brutality, and forcible transfer (Ibrahim, Ertl, Catani, Ismail & Neuner, 2018).

Said and Francis (2017) flew to Iraq to discover more about these women. They follow the Journey of Nisreen Abdallah, a commander in the YPJ militia. Nisreen explains that approximately 200 women and children from northern Iraq have been freed in various parts of

Syria so far. Kurdish YPG militia and its all-female YPJ brigade helped rescue them in the end of 2015 in what she described as covert operations into IS territory. For security reasons, Abdallah declined to provide additional information (Said and Francis, 2017).

Syrian militias launched this mission as part of their US-backed offensive on Raqqa, the Islamic State's base of operations in Syria (Said and Francis, 2017).

Kurdish Women in Rojava helped Yezidi women to arm themselves and join ideologically, socially, politically, and militarily with the framework laid out by Abdullah Öcalan (Dirik, 2021). Yezidi delegates from both the mountain and the refugee camps formed the Shengal Founding Council in 2015, requiring a framework of autonomy independent of the central Iraqi government or the KRG. (Dirik, 2021).

Several committees for education, culture, health, defense, women, youth, and the economy organize everyday issues. The council is centered on democratic autonomy, as articulated by Abdullah Öcalan, and has been met with fierce opposition from the KDP, the same party that fled Shengal without a fight. The newly formed YB (Shengal Resistance Units), the all-female YPJ-Shengal, and the PKK are fortifying the frontline against the Islamic State group (Dirik, 2021).

Chapter 4: The Revolution is Female:

1. Militant Feminism as a Form of Resistance:

“Women and weapons, women and war, women and the struggle for national liberation, women and death – that had a special significance. Kurdish women would free themselves from their enslavement by fighting.”

(Sakine Cansiz, 2013)

This first chapter will analyze the role of women in the making of Rojava and their revolution in Kurdistan. It will go in details analyzing the famous concept of Jineoloji, with mainly two authors Gülan (2021) and Lebrujah (2020) and will cover their different perspectives about this concept. I will then try to demonstrate how the gendered revolution occurred in detail, by giving specific examples and taking into consideration the feedbacks and knowledge I gained in my interviews. In this part, I refer to many authors that specialized in Middle East Feminism and in particular studies from Kurdish women in Rojava. I strive to demonstrate the importance of several events in history that led women to reach their climax in their revolution after the Arab Spring in Syria.

a. The jineolojî :

i. The roots of jineolojî:

These Kurdish women fighters who exclaim proudly and incredulously, "Women, life, freedom!". Women did not find themselves suddenly under the light of the war having a big role. Everything came slowly in history, but historians and writers agreed on putting a word on this unique revolution, as Jineoloji.

The jineolojî (from the Kurdish word "jin," which means "woman," and "lojî," which refers to the suffix logos, which means "word, speech" which is used in the building projects of learned feminine nouns) could easily be transcribed as "women's science." Jineolojî is a recent theoretical elaboration conceived by the Kurdish women's movement over the last ten years, and it should be viewed as the conclusion of a long maturing process within the Kurdish movement (Gülan, 2021).

The duration from the PKK's foundational congress in 1978 to the 1990s is marked by low women's involvement and is structured around figures such as Sakine Cansz (Gülan, 2021,). The coup attempt in Turkey on September 12, 1980, was process and increased repression, with few options other than long-term imprisonment, the implementation of jihadist and revolutionary groups, or exile in Europe (Lebrujah, 2020). In 1979, Öcalan and other PKK activists agreed to enter the Bekaa plain to arrange the opposition and train militarily and politically. It initiated its first operation in 1984.

With the emergence of the PKK and its establishment in civil society, visible through protests of solidarity and support with the armed resistance, a new cycle began in the early 1990s (Gülan, 2021). The Turkish state's war in Turkish Kurdistan during those years resulted in an increase in female participation beginning in 1991. The confinement and resistance of activists, such as Sakine Cansz and Gültan Kşanak in Turkish prisons, clashes with the PKK, and the actions of female combatants, such as Beritan and Zilan, have all had a significant impact on women's war involvement and cultural legacy (Lebrujah, 2020).

The number of women fighters enhanced until the progressive institutionalization of the presence of women with the first congress in 1993 where the participation of women was officially debated, resulting in the formation of the first army forces exclusively composed of women and, in 1995, the formation of the first autonomous body under the name YAJK (Gülan, 2021).

Following Öcalan's imprisonment in 1999, the women of the YAJK agreed to construct a women's party, which was identified at the beginning as the PJKK, and is now known as the PAJK. Since 2005, the women's party has been a part of the KJK (Komalên Jinên Kurdistan, Kurdistan Women's Communities) confederation, that also contains all the Kurdistan women's liberation movement and the Kurdish social, political, and self-defense organizations (Gülan, 2021).

The women's movement then generated many texts, relying, among other things, on Öcalan's texts, to highlight the theories of rupture, eternal divorce, killing "the dominant male," transforming men, and the need for women to self-organize into single-sex groups within the structure of the Women's Liberation ideology. Some viewed women's participations in the armed resistance, as a danger due to the daily diversity and the alleged impossibility of women leading an armed struggle; and it was only through a tough and fierce struggle that they were successful in establishing their presence definitively (Gülan, 2021).

Brought to life in its early years by a Marxist-Leninist project for Kurdistan's independence, the PKK, from which the women's movement arose, is moving steadily towards a project of democratization of the country, with an acknowledgement and implementation of minorities' rights in Turkey and more broadly in the Middle East. The movement has now adopted democratic confederacies based on women's rights, ecology, and democracy (Gülan, 2021).

Thus, beginning in the 1980s, the movement, like many other revolutionary movements, reflected on the role of women in the struggle and in society, with the notable exception that gender relations and women's liberation became the constructing paradigm in the 1990s. If Öcalan's texts from the 1980s portray women as "temptresses" who can keep men away from the conflict, those from the 1990s present women as oppressed within the family space as well as fighters and liberators (Gülan, 2021).

When the paradigm shift associated with organizational feminization occurs, the history of civilizations is described as a long history of the patriarchal system's enslavement of women, and liberation will have to pass through women and break with the masculine order. The 1990s are thus pivotal in understanding women's struggles, their encounters with feminism, and the upheavals that their presence causes within the movement (Gülan, 2021).

The new paradigm inside the organization led the leader, particularly after his incarceration in 1999, and the entire women-led movement, to reshape the political project in terms of a broader assimilation of issues of kind (Lebrujah, 2020).

ii. The jineolojî: a global construction:

Öcalan defines the jineolojî in his 2008 book "Sociology of freedom," which is the third volume of the Manifest for a Democratic Civilization, a five-parts volume written between 2005 and 2010. The movement in Kurdistan and Europe quickly read, discussed, and enriched the leader's prison writings, and jineolojî has been gradually developed to solidify the women's movement and include ideological advances in the social and scientific fields. (Lebrujah, 2020).

At the 8th PAJK Congress in 2011, the first jineolojî committee was formed in the mountains to discuss the theoretical and managerial contributions of a sociology of freedom and a science of women. Jineolojî committees are formed in all four regions of Kurdistan as well as in Europe. In 2014, the first jineolojî conference was held in Cologne, Germany (in 2015 it took place in Stockholm, and in 2016 in Paris). It is accompanied by a conference in the mountains in 2015, which discusses the information of the book *Emergence to jineolojî* and calls for a science of women based on an explicit dialogue between science and society (Lebrujah, 2020).

That year, the book *Jineoloji Tartşmalar* (Debates on jineolojî) helped bring together several articles written entirely by political prisoners of the movement in Turkey, thus sealing the link between Europe, Kurdistan's mountains, and prisons, uncovering the transnational dynamics of the Kurdish movement. This stage of discussion and production culminated in the creation of the review *Jineolojî*, which was released on March 8, 2016 (Lebrujah, 2020).

Finally, in 2017, a jineolojî center was established in Brussels, and jineolojî academies sprouted up in several cities. Since 2017, jineolojî centers and a jineolojî faculty have been established in Afrin, Derik, Manbij, Kobane, and Heseke, as well as a jineolojî faculty at the University of Rojava. Because of the repression of the Kurdish women's movement by the AKP government in Bakur (Turkey), the PDK in Bashur (Iraq), and the Iranian regime in Rojhilat (Iran), the work of jineolojî has been able to be more highly formed in Rojava and in Europe since 2016 (Lebrujah, 2020).

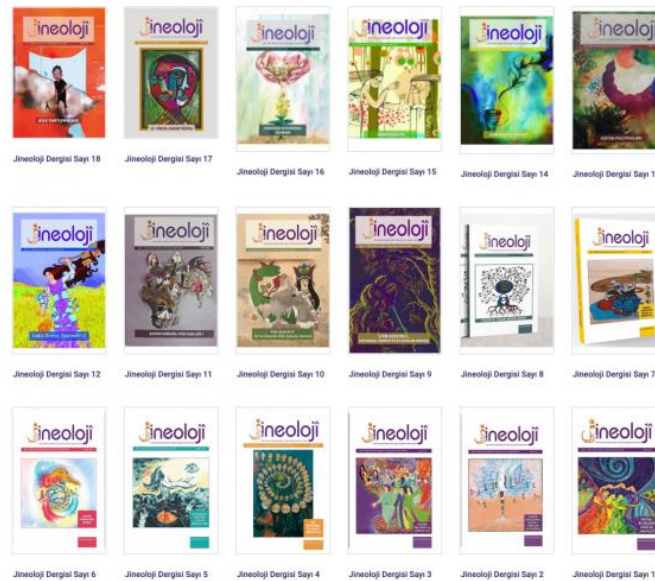


Figure 10: Different Jineoloji

Source: Ritimo Journal, 2021

b. Women Militant:

Every time we mention Rojava, one of the first images we get in our mind is those young women holding weapons and smiling to the camera. This image clearly does not capture the complexities of Kurdish women's lives, nor does it consider the challenges they face as members of an ethnic minority in the four countries that share Kurdistan. It is, however, historical fact. As we have seen in the previous chapters, Kurdish women have participated in politics and military activities due to their people's long history of armed resistance and movement for the national cause.

Information regarding the military and political training of these women is not easy to find. Indeed, I was very difficult to get inside of their world and to understand how women are recruited, how they train and other details.

According to Fédora Hélène (2019) who had the chance to go to Rojava and live there for some time, she summarizes the process as follows: “They will be engaged and will go through a 45-day training course at the Military Academy before claiming their own autonomous army”. In addition to this, Lava Selo (2018) in her article “Women’s rights in Rojava” points the structure and the techniques on how female fighters train each other. After her interview with Nesreen Abdullah, 37, the official spokesperson and Public Relations Officer of the Women’s Protection Units who joined in 2011, the author explains the process as “when asked about the duties associated with women, Nesreen stated that "a war against terror entails a lot of invasions, and

when we want to raid a village in which there are women, we send a higher number of women combatants out of respect for the social rules of the community." Women militants select women and their homes to avoid any uncomfortableness or embarrassment with male fighters." "Women fighters also play a significant role where there are children on the raid site," Nesreen added. Children are not usually afraid of women, even when they are carrying a weapon in such missions" (p. 16).

The YPJ, Women's Protection Units linked to the PYD and the PKK, fight for the recognition of their country, from cultural emancipation to the development of a participatory multiethnic, feminist, and emancipated democracy in fairness and social balance, without leaning towards capitalism or ancestral patriarchal societies."

Today, estimating their number is difficult. In Syria, female combatants would make up "half" of the YPG, the Kurdish Popular Protection Units affiliated with the PKK that are fighting Daesh (around 40,000 soldiers) (Beunaiche, 2014).

Kurdish women leave their homes for 45 days to attend the Syrian Women's Academy for training. Women will be educated in gynecology (women's sociology) and direct democracy to actively participate in municipal councils and in self-defense. There is also instruction in women's history and feminist struggles (Hèlene, 2019).

The goal of these women is to come up with an independent Kurdistan and maintain a peaceful political Rojava. To accomplish this, these women soldiers depend partly on their psychological superiority over the jihadists. They are convinced that Daesh men are frightened of being killed by a woman whose bullets would close the gates to paradise. Whether true or not, this belief appears to give Kurdish fighters strength. A Kurdish suicide bomber blew herself up near Kobane on Sunday, October 12, 2014, during members of the Islamic State group, killing several dozens of them. It was a symbol of their bravery as well as the YPG's inferiority in the face of the jihadist enemy (Beunaiche, 2014).

As well, Paola Bonomo (2018) in her article entitled "Dans le commando il y avait aussi une femme" compares the Kurdish women in Rojava struggle as a flower, more precisely a rose. She explains that Kurdish women exercise militarized self-defense through the ranks of the YPJ, but also by constructing buildings and organizations whose goal is social transformation, using an intersectional approach in which feminist fight and liberation battle are intertwined. The "rose theory" describes Kurdish women's resistance: as a rose created with thorn bushes, women learn self-mechanisms to protect themselves and express their own existence. She continues her analysis by stating that Kurdish women are unsheathing their thorns to combat the Islamic State, which poses a serious threat to the equal society they are constructing, in a

notion of self-defense that incorporates direct action - even violent action - and the building of self-managed social, political, and economic structures. Because, as one movement leader put it, "self-defense must begin in the head." You cannot overcome oppression if you see yourself as a victim.

Rojava is not simply the first Middle Eastern region to have an army of women on the front line with the biggest terrorist group of the 21st century, it is the first and unique example we have worldwide. When these women bear arms, they do so less out of belief and more to avert the fate of society, the weight of traditions. Kurdish society is based on traditional and patriarchal supremacy, and women's rights are the result of a synthesis of religion, culture, and nationalist practices. The Kurdish woman is, thus, subjected to strong pressure within this patriarchal and nationalist project because she is both the honor of the Nation and must as such be meaningful of it as the holder of national cultural values. Kurdish women must be loyal not only to their country, but also to their families and in-laws (Dubuy, 2015).

However, the responsibility of the militant Kurdish women is very heavy in this battle where patriotism and feminism are mixed, because these women represent, according to the traditional, historical conception of the Kurdish women, an object of desire that should be avoided. According to this viewpoint, the militant woman must intensify her efforts to highlight her willingness to undergo profound personality change (Dubuy, 2015).

Expectations of Kurdish women PKK activists are thus very significant: women must not only participate in armed struggle, but also start behaving like good patriotic mothers, and even sacrifice themselves for the cause in an exemplary manner like the Kurdish divinities of the golden age. These martyred women commit suicide bombings "out of love for humanity and life." Within these organizations, and according to the theory of the free woman, women must give up their femininity, just as men elsewhere must quit their manhood according to the concept of the new man (Dubuy, 2015, p. 98-99).

To be nearer to their leader, Kurdish PKK fighters must abandon the characteristics of their femininity and commit to having no relationship with PKK fighters. This guarantee is also a deciding factor that will persuade families to send their daughters to fight the guerrillas, knowing that they will not have physical contact or romantic relationships with men.

There is then a significant gap between the idealized image of the free and independent Kurdish fighter and the truth of connections within the PKK's war (Dubuy, 2015). Female moments of self-esteem generate a balance of power, which women invest in camps, villages, and towns alike. Resistance methods develop and help spread on three levels: within the circle of female combatants, through contact between female combatants and other women (resistant or not),

and within the latter's circle. These exchanges serve as the foundation for formulating demands and achieving a balance of power (Martin and Lotta, 2016).

Discussions are arranged around the practices that have been put in place. The party institutionalizes those that are maintained as valid by organizing their transfer. The PKK, for example, devotes a portion of its program from the start of the armed struggle to training cadres to transmit party political lines to activists and politicize civilians. However, in the early 2000s, the first Women's Academy was established in Amed (Diyarbakir), Bakur, with the goal of teaching civilians the party is new lines on gender equality. As a result, the party is adapting to the reality of a force for proposing women within it, while maintaining control over the "teaching" of official "lines" concerning equality (Martin and Lotta, 2016).

2. Gender Revolution:

a. Bodies' standardization:

“Without having free women, you don't have a free society”

Viyan D. (February 2016), 21 years old, YPJ Rojava, killed fighting ISIS.

Since the involvement of women into Kurdish armed movements in the 1950s, combatants' entry into the militants has been represented by the implementation of the peshmerga dress (women as well as men). Traditional male dress in Kurdistan consists of loose-fitting pants with a long strip of fabric holding the waist in place, square woven in a grid varying according to political and family associations. From the beginning of the twentieth century's revolts, this outfit formed itself as a collective military uniform. When women first picked up arms, they embraced it and, as a result, chose to use "masculine" codes (Martin and Lotta, 2016). The goal has been then to standardize bodies to establish their existence in a space that is still recognized masculine. In the early 1990s, the Iranian Kurdish parties established bases in Bashur, due to financial difficulties. They occasionally fight alongside the PUK in wars against the Baath. Women combatants are thus more numerous in the (mixed) units of the Rojhelat parties (Kurdistan of Iran) (Martin and Lotta, 2016).

Although formed and created to minimize inequalities, the uniformization injunctions caused by these codes generate new forms of violence against women. For example, because "cis" men have no rules, the question of the latter is explicitly excluded from an everyday life organization based on their own "needs." As a result, the women devised guerrilla-specific solutions (lack of hygiene, little access to water, no privacy). They tear small pieces of fabric from their

clothing, belt, veil, or camana (very thick mask hiding the face and only showing the eyes) and use them as temporary protection (Martin and Lotta, 2016).

As per the PDKI's military commanders in the 1980s, the involvement of women could only be supported by promoting strict equality of ability and thus of treatment. The majority of the warriors supported the party's political stance against the so-called "feminine" distinguishing signs. Short hair is indeed very rare for women outside of military camps in Kurdistan, Iran; vibrant hair is introduced as a characteristic of "femininity" and beauty, and those who choose to go against such standards are few. Having arrived at the party camps, on the other hand, is frequently the opportunity for a break-up and many of them wield clippers and scissors to create a variety of short haircuts (Tank, 2017).

Since 2000, the "Free Women's Academy," which aims to deepen Calan's theory and operates under rules very similar to those of the Mahsum Korkmaz Academy, has been training trainee units in Iraqi Kurdistan's mountains (Grojean, 2013). The goal of the training, which typically lasts seven to eight months, is to not only learn political and military skills, but also to reshape one's character to bring about a society based on the "mother goddess." Men can also stay there for "rehabilitation" sessions that last up to nine months. They are chosen based on their encouragement and self-growth (for example, "being ashamed of being a man," as one ex-guerrilla told us), and the teachings they receive are solely geared toward "being ashamed of being a man" a female point of view. (Grojean, 2013).

The primary objective is for them to be free of the oppressive masculinity that persecutes them and leads them to oppress women and other men. Women made menstrual cycle apparent and legitimate by organizing, forcing party leaders to put it on the political agenda. Following this, the secretariat financially supports the periodic protections and institutionalizes the presence of privacy and hygiene spaces within the base camps. Today, the party's Peshmerga are all given a small monthly stipend to cover their basic needs. Women receive slightly more money than men. The difference represents the cost of periodic protection (Martin and Lotta, 2016).

All Öcalan desired radical transformations appear to us to be the consequence of a political will that has not always been well accepted by the women's movement. The detachment of men and women is supported first by the fact that women must be able to organize themselves independently to free themselves from the slave status that the men of the PKK continue to maintain despite themselves. It is therefore advisable to set aside a space for them where they can develop self-confidence while also protecting them from men who frequently still regard them as property (Grojean, 2013). The concept is also that those who discover their own path

to liberation, which may or may not be that of men, who must, in turn, free themselves from their dominating virility (Grojean, 2013).

b. The 'dominant male' and the liberation of women:

Photographs of martyred women hung on the wall can sometimes serve as an inspiration. There is a formal way of congratulating somebody on his or her new hairstyle in Kurdish. Co-aspirants and leaders alike, especially those giving military instructions, often compliment a few slightly shorter locks. Fighters sometimes do not wear make-up, do not wax, and adopt authoritative and severe demeanors. However, recovering what defines the "masculine" or does not define it necessitates the possession and comprehension of a set of unspoken codes and rules (Martin and Lotta, 2016). The unification of these is punctuated by a set of implicit and explicit injunctions and calls to order, formulated both between comrades and by the hierarchy. Women's integration does not challenge these codes but is based on the concept of a "valid" body, which is that of men (Martin and Lotta, 2016).

These challenges, however, allow for instants of meeting and solidarity among women. They encourage the formation of intimate, trusting, and self-esteeming spaces. The parts, for example, can be exchanged between them or given to newcomers. There is a lot of advice floating around about how to keep them clean invisibly. The locals welcome the Kurdish forces units as they move from village to village (Tank, 2017).

The women then encounter themselves in the company of other women. These gatherings represent an opportunity for the villagers to provide the combatants with access to water and bathrooms, as well as new clothing. The establishment of these spaces gives legitimacy to practices and allows them to be considered. These resistances can also occur in groups. Slowly, the women arrange transmission among themselves in the camps, then from the camps to the villages during combatant groups' itineraries. Women politicize these practices through words and transmission, turning them into tools of collective resistance (Martin and Lotta, 2016). The female participation in the units, particularly their resistance, creates de facto awareness, which leads to discourse over time.

After many research, I concluded that women did not have to only sacrifice their families and their home life to fight. They left everything behind to be able to protect their nation. They had to also give up their femininity and transform themselves into fighters. Not only they needed to train on how to hold weapons, but also train on how to hide their femininity to focus on the

war. I can conclude that the double pressure on these women made them have more visibility and curiosity. I understood, after my several discussions with the first interviewee, a young 26-year-old Iranian woman who lived with her sisters the revolution of Rojava, those women who participated were very young. She explains to me that it is easier to train, maintain, and especially convince younger women than older to join. As they do not have children or any obligations, some of them willingly present themselves to be part of YPJ. She explains to me that not only some of them were filled with the motivation to liberate their cities, but also to liberate themselves. Some young girls, before the beginning of the revolution, were very strictly living under the protection of their families. As she mentioned the traditions of Iran, she said that for women to go out on their own is not an easy step. Some girls willingly throw themselves in this revolution to also prove to themselves and their families that they can achieve it.

Katarina Pavičić-Ivelja (2017) summarizes the idea of Azadeh in her article "The Rojava Revolution: Women's Liberation as an Answer to the Kurdish Question" affirming that it is not enough to fight Daesh with tanks and weapons for the Rojava revolution to find success. Ensure that the principles of gender equality, inclusion without regard to ethnic origin, and freedom, upon which this revolution is based - which can be perfectly summed up by the Kurdish slogan "Jin, Jiyan, Azadî" (Woman, life, freedom) - become internalized in the minds of all Rojava citizens. There is a need for women to become carriers of change on the battlefield and in daily affairs. Even if it is not their primary mission, the YPJ is a feminist movement. As such, it could, according to Abdullah Ocalan's previously described ideas on women's liberation as a means of achieving freedom for all, benefit all residents of Rojava's liberated territories (p. 144). She proceeds later her article by affirming how women liberated Kobane mainly by being women.

Indeed, as mentioned in the previous part, Rojava found success in fighting ISIS as their ideology is based on females as the weak gender. What a surprise to find them with weapons and grenades in the entrance of every city they tried to invade. She also mentioned one of the biggest influence and inspiration of women fighter, not yet mentioned on the thesis, Arin Mirkan. The author explains that being killed in fight by a female fighter of the YPJ is viewed a shame and a great dishonor by ISIS militants, emphasizing the horrific position of women and the mindset toward them upheld by ISIS fighters. Regardless of, or perhaps because of, such contexts, women played a critical role in the liberation of Kobane – the famous martyr city that rose from its own ashes and resisted the Islamic State (p. 144).

She continues stating that it was not only women, but a specific YPJ fighter known as Arîn Mîrkan, who became the representation of unconditional resistance, a hero, and one of the most

iconic martyrs of the women's struggle for freedom, who attempted to help all residents of Rojava once and for all shatter "the myth of ISIS's undefeatable fascism" (p. 145). Arîn Mîrkan was a young Kurdish revolutionary woman and soldier in the Women's Protection Units who made headlines in October 2014 when she carried out a suicide attack east of Kobane (p.145). I was very surprised by how these women step up from their femininity to give place to their combatant side. After further discussions with the second interviewee, a young Syrian woman who witnessed Rojava Revolution, she explained to me how women, with time, tried to slowly bring back their feminine side on the table. Indeed, as fertility was being considered as a political matter, the concept of formalizing bodies - particularly through hair play - was progressively being converted. Indeed, after all the images I saw, I notice that women from the beginning of the revolution until nowadays have changed their appearance. Farah explained to me that combatants start to wear make-up privately in single-sex areas, then in mixed-sex areas. As a result, the men combatants gradually start talking about the women's role in armed resistance movements. Whatever the result of the discourse (acknowledgement, recognition, or disapproval), this rebellion and its implementation allow for the recognition of main difficulties. Forming these questions, despite of their outcome, allows for an understanding of these difficulties: by asking them, they impose them.

In term of political situations, the realities changed since the 90s. Kurdish women, for instance, occupied only six parliamentary seats out of 105 in the Kurdish regional government, the first step toward autonomy that had not yet been recognized by the international community (Dubuy, 2015). Since the Arab spring of 2011, quotas are in place, and women are thus well recognized in parliamentary assemblies. For instance, in the regional parliament of Iraqi Kurdistan, one-third of the 111 seats are reserved for women; after 2008, in the government of Iraqi Kurdistan, there were three women out of 42 ministers; 40 percent of the elected representatives of the Kongra-Gel (the Kurdish People's Congress, the KCK parliament, pro-Kurdistan) (Dubuy, 2015).

The imposition quota system benefits the rise to power of women as their voice can rise and they can impose their ideology. Women gain power in this system because they are symbolized, and they can thus completely engage in political decision-making to protect the destiny of this vulnerable minority.

c. Women, nationalism, and war: A Feminist Perspective:

“We have a secret weapon...it is called Nationalism”

(Ho Chi Minh, 1956)

1. Nationalism and feminism within Kurdish women's organization:

Pictures of women as brave combatants, victims of war, forced prostitution, and refugees, all evoke conversations on gender and nation, which have been virtuously presented by feminist critical theorists, such as Najmabadi (1993; 1997), Yuval-Davis (1997; 1989), Nagel (1998), Landes (2001), and others.

Their central argument is that the cultural status of women is highlighted as an essential indicator of a nation's development (Weiss, 2018). In political ideology, the nation is typically portrayed as a feminine figure, such as a mother, bride, or virgin, all of which demand the fierce love and devotion of her (male) children (N. Begikhani, W. Hamelink and N. Weiss, 2018). The nation in the image of the mother, who cares for, protects, and mediates, rearticulates “the notions of children's duties to their parents into those of (male) citizens' duties to the motherland” (Najmabadi, 1997).

Such images of a feminine nation are primarily devoted to understanding its people as male descendants (Nazand Begikhani, Wendelmoet Hamelink and Nerina Weiss, 2018). Although heritage always includes both men and women, this gender specific imaginary focuses on the male descendants, the “sons of Kurdistan” (Aktürk, 2016), who were tasked with defending their nation from exogenous threats, sacrificing their lives for their homeland, and defending their freedom, honor, and women (King, 2008).

The goal of national identity includes, among many other factors, envisioning a national past, present, and future, as well as common customs and a metaphorically constructed society (Santoire, 2020). The concept of nation is sometimes based on a sense of difference from others, with the goal of forming a collective identity (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Anderson 1991). Nationalist narratives are frequently told as if the gender dimension is unimportant, and that men and women encounter nationalism equally (Enloe, 1990).

Nationalism has been inexorably tied to the state and its organizations, and state institutions, like military bodies, have been and continue to be male dominance: "it is therefore no surprise

that the culture and ideology of male power go hand in hand with the culture and ideology of hegemonic nationalism" (Santoire, 2020). Masculinity and nationalism communicate well, and the modern incarnation of Western masculinity emerged around the same time and place as modern nationalism (Nagel 1998, p. 248-49).

One of the key traits of ethnic and nationalist initiatives is their reliance on the building projects of myths and symbols to establish a collective identity. Feminist researchers have contributed significantly to this literature by illustrating how gender and the roles associated with the traditional femininity and masculinity play an important role in the construction of nationalist fictions and myths (Santoire 2020).

Throughout the twentieth century and beyond, feminist thinkers and scholars have focused on the topic of 'women and war.' Classical feminist approaches to this topic have concentrated on two concepts: women's bodies and sexualities as violable objects used as war strategies, and women's active role and participation in war and militant organizations in defense of their communities, nations, and nationalist projects (p. 3).

The first is based on the traditional perception of gender roles, which holds that men are active subjects, soldiers, warriors, and aggressors, whereas women are passive agents of war, victims, weepers, mothers, and wives stationed at home, vulnerable to rape, aggression, and slavery. The second one takes an approach that challenges these concepts, viewing women as active agents who are physically and psychologically strong enough to participate in war and military activities (N. Begikhani, W. Hamelink and N. Weiss, 2018).

Bénédicte Santoire (2020) focuses on the image of the women as the center of the nation. She explains that the symbolic building of "the" woman as a national symbol is, indeed, not new. Women would be targets and strong symbols in philosophical discourse by giving birth, (re)producing the boundaries of ethnic and national groups, participating centrally in the ideological (re)production of the community, collaborating in political struggles, and ensuring national culture and patrimonial heritage to children (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989, p.7-8). Furthermore, nationalist projects frequently refer to the female body in national narratives (for example, "mother country") (Yuval-Davis, 1997).

This perspective is also portrayed in the revolution of gender in Rojava. As mentioned by the authors, the exercise of the right to self-determination necessitates the existence of a distinct group (objective identification criteria: language, religion, common history, and subjective: wanting to live together). The Kurds represent a distinct group because they share a common history, are predominantly Sunnis, and have a distinct culture that allows the group to be identified. Women are the guardians of this culture, a distinguishing feature of Kurdish identity

that allows one to identify the holder of the right to self-determination under a traditional interpretation of self-determination in international law (Dubuy, 2015).

The feminist approach encourages looking beyond these objective criteria to develop a gendered understanding of self-determination. The traditional interpretation of self-determination in international law places the right to self-determination in the hands of the people, which includes both men and women. It is not a matter of providing a "gendered" portrait of this holder, who remains a member of the people rather than a minority or vulnerable group such as women (Dubuy, 2015).

Bénédicte Santoire (2020) inspired herself by the two authors Cynthia Enloe (1990) and Dubuy (2015). She explains that the presence of nationalist movements has facilitated women's political participation. On the other hand, they have frequently been pushed to the margins, seen as icons rather than activists. "The situation of women is not considered by movements fighting for self-determination," writes Dubuy, "and when these groups come to power by achieving this self-determination, the question of women's status is often ignored" (Dubuy 2015, p. 110). She poses the following question: "Doesn't the fight for identity serve the feminist cause by camouflaging the feminist cause, by forcing her to remain quiet because she was seen as a device alongside the political conflict?" (p.962) Kurdish women's action is no exception, because "we ask women to be united in their common ethnicity with men" (2015). Furthermore, we observe that associations defending the rights of Kurdish women are frequently continuations of political organizations for self-determination, and thus are not entirely self-contained (Dubuy, 2015).

In parallel, N. Begikhani, W. Hamelink and N. Weiss (2018) explain the same concept adding the factor of globalization. Indeed, globalization and development of information and communication technologies have called into question traditional theoretical and analytical approaches, prompting feminist thinkers to reflect on new developments and incorporate historical, national, and cultural realities of women in relation to war and armed conflict across disciplines (Zarkov, 2006). Traditional questions about the roles of women in war, militarism, and armed struggle, as well as the effects of war and conflict on women, have been developed to address modern social power relations in a globalized world and to link the identity of female actors in war and militarism to feminist knowledge and theories (Nazand Begikhani, Wendelmoet Hamelink and Nerina Weiss, 2018).

These reflections resulted in new ideological and methodological conceptions, signaling a shift from previous feminist theory of women and war to a more crucial conceptualization of sexual

victimizations and raped female victims on the one hand, and women's agency on the other (Zarkov, 2006).

Mélanie Dubuy (2015), as the previous authors in this part, analyzes also the very thin link between nationalism and feminism and how these two concepts affected one another by giving another perspective. She explains that this gender dominance within a group claiming self-determination is not unusual in history, and when this fight (for the feminist cause) is faced with another fight, that of national liberation in the face of oppression, the internal struggle within the group is erased in favor of the nationalist cause. As a result, tensions between nationalism and feminism are extremely high. We ask the woman not to stifle the national liberation enterprise or the fight against the oppressor, the fight for gender equality being a breach in this monolithic structure, the group being formed indifferently of men and women. Kurdish women's actions are no exception (Dubuy, 2015).

Women who fought in national liberation wars were subjected to double pressure from both the colonizer and the colonized men. To present oneself as "worthy" of gaining independence, the fight against the colonizer went through a dual movement of identifying a national identity, allowing assembly, and implementing national reforms. The woman was to serve as a showcase in this struggle to demonstrate how much the territory from which she came deserved this independence. Thus, the woman conveyed a Western cultural model, demonstrating to the colonizer that the latter's codes were well integrated by the colonized. This Western model was also integrated through the detainment of women in the private sphere and at the heart of the patriarchal family model (Dubuy, 2015).

2.Limitations:

To understand the new image of Kurdish women, we must look back in time to analyze the origins of feminism for these women. Kurdish feminism was founded and established historically within Kurdish nationalist organizations. As a result, national emancipation appears to have been the primary goal of Kurdish feminist groups in the past (Begikhani, 2003; Mojab, 2004). Due to the obvious close connection among female empowerment and the (armed) fight for Kurdish rights and autonomy, this section examines how women's activism has formed in different parts of Kurdistan, as well as how women activists in different regions have addressed women's conditions related to war and violence to understand how women are considered to be a new form of subjugation (N. Begikhani, W. Hamelink and N. Weiss, 2018).

First, war circumstances have usually tended to avoid the rise of independent women's activism, as women activists were frequently forced to prioritize the accomplishment of basic human

rights over women's rights (Alinia, 2013). Second, ongoing violence and vulnerability are some of the long-term consequences of war that have a significant impact on the lives of Kurdish women. Women's activism has thus emerged in the aftermath, or as a direct result, of previous wars, and in the context of a "continuum of violence" (Bourgois, 2004).

In addition, Kurdish women activists assisted women and their families who had been impacted severely by genocide, conflict, and displacement, or assisted women in fighting legal battles with the state because of missing and murdered relatives. Finally, the participation of female combatants in Kurdistan's armed struggle has created a heroic image of the women activist, namely the armed Kurdish heroine defending her nation. This image of the armed heroine can be interpreted as a two-edged sword. On the one hand, female combatants claim that their participation in armed struggle is proof of their emancipation from patriarchal control. Their involvement, on the other hand, is part of a difficult increase in the militarization of Kurdish society, as well as the "formation of a 'tragic mind' that perceives violence as the surest provider of justice and hope" (N. Begikhani, W. Hamelink and N. Weiss, 2018).

History has shown that the Kurdish minority suffered because of this subjugation enterprise (destruction of the Kurdish Republic in 1946, use of chemical weapons against the Iraqi Kurds in Halabja). All of these are examples of violence used to prevent Kurdish political expression. Today, Turkish authorities prohibit any expression of Kurdish nationalism. More than 3,000 Kurdish villages have been destroyed since 1984, and 2 million people have been displaced because of the fighting (Dubuy, 2015). Even so, international humanitarian law does not adequately solve the multiple layers of persecution that Kurdish women face.

The Kurdish woman is the object of subjugation on two counts: as a woman and as a member of a minority (Dubuy, 2015). Kurdish women, like Kurdish men, are rejected certain rights recognized in the CEDAW convention on the abolition of all forms of discrimination against women or the 1966 Pact on civil and political rights, such as the freedom to talk their language in public. They are also tortured and raped in prisons; a practice prohibited by international law under the 1984 convention (Dubuy, 2015). These Kurdish women are also subjected to a more subtle form of oppression. It is the oppression exercised by male dominance within the Kurdish social model (harassment, forced marriages, marriages arranged from childhood, female adultery, crimes of honor, etc.) (Dubuy, 2015).

In practice, movements fighting for self-determination have shown that they do not consider the situation of women. When they have some power, they do not suppress measures that are "cruel" to women (gender discrimination, repudiation of infidelity for women) (Dubuy 2015). This is how, in the 1990s, the two major parties in Iraqi Kurdistan's regional parliament, the

PUK and the PDK, denied overturning the Kurdish government's penal measures (decree-laws), measures that allowed polygamous marriages, gave men the authority to divorce in envy, and permitted them to kill their wives, daughters, and sisters when they were guilty of adultery (Dubuy, 2015).

The revolution however helped Kurdish women to impose themselves in the society. In Syria, the democratic autonomy proposal, which is led by women, has resulted in the formation of a Legislative Assembly of the Democratic and Autonomous Authority of Western Kurdistan. This body, which oversaw characterizing the political structure and writing the Constitution, was dominated by women. As an outcome, the resulting January 2014 Constitution guarantees equality without discrimination between men and women in all aspects of life, and torture is forbidden (Santoire, 2020).

Following their triumph over the jihadists in the city of Kobane, the Kurds in Northeast Syria issued a new decree professing equality between men and women and denouncing violence and discrimination against women. The text seeks to establish several rights concerning working conditions and remuneration, the benefit of maternity leave until the third child, the denunciation of honor crimes, and the establishment of equal rights for men and women in matters of "heritage." (Dubuy, 2015). The text continues to forbid marrying before the age of 18 or marrying for a woman against her will. This significant advance is a direct affront to the jihadists' desire to destroy women's rights in the Syrian portion of the territory under their control (Dubuy, 2015).

Conclusion:

This thesis started by demonstrating the importance of the historical background in creating the conflict of Rojava. Firstly, I went through the struggle of Kurdistan as a population to then understand the background of Kurdish minority in Syria. These years of injustice, war and searching for identity, has slowly merged a feeling of revolt within the Kurdish minority in Syria.

The second chapter is explaining how women started to be more present and began their road to liberation. To understand the impact of these courageous combatants, I examined different aspects of Rojava, such as its structure, ideology, and construction. Rojava's establishment has converted the Kurdish nationalist agenda, enabling the PYD to put the PKK leader's philosophies and hypotheses of democratic independence and confederacies into practice. This initiative has occurred in Tandem with a growing militarized Kurdish nationalist effort in Syria. As battle between the Assad regime, armed opposition forces, and ISIS intensified from 2012

to 2014. Within this battle, emerged the position and the role of women, and in particular gender revolution within Kurdish women.

In the second chapter, I went through the Arab Spring firstly as a historical movement, then more specifically in Syria, and then I examined one of the major pillars of women revolution against gender, Daesh. Indeed, this terrorist group was the main reason behind the emerging of Rojava. They started attacking and destroying the country, and measures had to be taken. In this part, I explored how Kurdish minority and government reacted. Confronted with the ruthless violence and oppression of nonviolent demonstrations, the Syrian revolution has progressively become militarized. Along with the Free Syrian Army, which, like the Syrian National Council and the Coalition of Opposition Forces, has struggled to keep the property and has imposed itself as the sole security force of the Syrian people, numerous revolutionary armed groups have emerged.

On the other hand, in Kurdish regions in which the Kurdish political movement's experience is characterized by its disapproval of armed struggle, the revolution has maintained its peaceful character. It was thus prepared to obstruct the emergence of armed groups until July 2012. But, convinced by the lack of opposition forces in these areas, the regime retreated its troops in the summer of 2012, redeploying them to repress the rebellion in other areas, particularly Homs and Aleppo (Renard-Gourdon, 2015).

Before moving to the fight of Kobane, I went through the measures taken by Kurdistan in the beginning. Indeed, to fill the void left by the regime, the PYD established armed forces for popular protection known as YPG and YPJ. The regime's forces were quickly replaced by these units (Renard-Gourdon, 2015). The existence of these armed units has no bearing on the peaceful nature of the Kurdish struggle. Indeed, these units are not intended to fight the Assad regime, let alone to achieve Kurdish national rights through armed force. Their sole mission is self-defense and the defense of Rojava's Kurdistan against any armed attack, whether from the regime or the opposition. It is up to the Kurds to defend their "third way" (Renard-Gourdon, 2015). Kobane fight was a turning point in the creation of Rojava and the gender revolution that followed.

In our third chapter, I demonstrated the role of women in history in struggle armed, especially when it comes to Middle Eastern women, and tried to cover the concept of gender versus sex, to separate it from each other and get a clearer version about the chapter. I concluded this chapter by going through a major event that inspired Kurdish women into the making of their own gender revolution.

In the last part of the thesis, I tried to answer my questions in the introduction. I adopted a structure that goes from the general to more and more specific topic to finally reach my main thesis basis.

The goal of this thesis was not to discover the "truth" about women. To judge Kurdish fighters nor to question if either their way of dealing with the circumstances around them is neither wrong nor right. Are these fighters extraordinary? They are either heroes, victims, or terrorists. These were not the questions that encouraged me to start this thesis. Rather, we addressed the following research questions: "How did the Kurdish feminist movement contribute to the improvement of the territory's political situation", and "How are Kurdish women sustaining Rojava during the Syrian crisis and contributing to the development of an independent Kurdistan in the future".

At the end of this analysis, I can conclude that each case is unique, and that the position of the Kurdish women in the battle for identity varies, sometimes as temple guardians, sometimes as simple auxiliaries, and sometimes as combatants. They are not afraid to give their lives for the sake of a political goal. This involvement is influenced by the shape and intensity of the political conflict. I also mention that the relation between the political cause and the feminist cause is not completely automated, that Kurdish women have indeed been capable of serving the cause of self-determination without claiming gender equality, feminist requests dedicated to promoting the social status of Kurdish women, striving at the consecration of a series of rights to improve the lot of Kurdish women. On the other hand, the political cause, the physical as well as violent fight for self-determination in which they have been involved, have allowed Kurdish women to flourish by imposing their authority and becoming men's equals.

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Appendix: Semi-Structured interview Script:

Name:

Last name:

Nationality:

How long have you left Kurdistan?

How would you describe the Kurdish community in Syria?

How would you describe the influence of the Arab Spring in Syria?

How would you describe the influence of women during the Arab Spring?

Take me through the timeline of the creation of Rojava?

How would you describe the role of women before the revolution?

What are the main axes of changes before and after the revolution for the role of Women in society?

What are the main characteristics of Rojava as a Region?

How would you define the role of women in the fight of Kobané?

What was the role of women in everyday life in Rojava?

What was the impact of Women in Northern Syria?