

Rebel governance and gender in northeast Syria: transformative ideology as a challenge to negotiating power

Pinar Tank

To cite this article: Pinar Tank (2021) Rebel governance and gender in northeast Syria: transformative ideology as a challenge to negotiating power, Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal, 6:1-3, 69-87, DOI: [10.1080/23802014.2022.2115547](https://doi.org/10.1080/23802014.2022.2115547)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23802014.2022.2115547>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 08 Sep 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 494



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

Rebel governance and gender in northeast Syria: transformative ideology as a challenge to negotiating power

Pinar Tank 

Dimensions of Security Department, Peace Research Institute, Grønland, Norway

ABSTRACT

The Democratic Union Party (PYD), the dominant Kurdish political party in Northern Syria, has led a vanguard movement for autonomy based on Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan's ideology of democratic confederalism. A central component of this ideology is the focus on gender equality (jineoloji). Ideology has served as a potent mobilising force in particular by empowering women, a group that is often at the margins of power in traditional Kurdish society, and is a cornerstone of the Rojava revolution. However, it also presents challenges for the PYD in their relations with local tribes on whom the PYD depends for sustaining the Kurdish position in the northeast. Turkey's interventions have given the tribes a new position in the conflict and for the PYD, this means that negotiating power with the tribes will be increasingly critical to their own position. In an effort to retain a dominant position how will the PYD, no longer a vanguard movement, relate to key elements of their gender ideology? This article examines the challenges of transformative rebel governance ideology in negotiating with traditional social structures examined through the lens of gender.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 22 November 2021
Accepted 17 August 2022


KEYWORDS

Syria
PYD
ideology
gender
tribes
Kurds

Introduction

Since 2012, north-eastern Syria, popularly known as Rojava,¹ has been ruled by the Kurdish forces of the Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat/PYD), despite external interventions and internal opposition seeking to weaken their power. The Kurdish-led administration is guided by the revolutionary ideology of “Democratic Confederalism” solidly anchored in the grassroots movement through a myriad of organisations that engage actively with its ideological precepts. This makes compromises, that would allow for greater power sharing and inclusivity of other political forces, challenging. A key PYD representative illustrates the dilemma thus: “Generally in revolutionary movements the leaders are dogmatic, grassroots are practical. Problem here is the reverse. We need to work on this.”² This statement exemplifies the tension between ideology as it is understood pragmatically at the elite level and its ideological assimilation at the grassroots.

The article examines this dilemma through the empirical case of the relations between the PYD and the Arab Sunni tribes in north-eastern Syria seen through the lens of gender.

CONTACT Pinar Tank  pinar@prio.org

It also reflects on how PYD ideology fares in addressing challenges from other Kurdish opposition groups in Syria. Gender is a useful analytical frame since there is a clear contrast between the PYD's vision of women's societal roles and that of local Arab tribes. Thus, the article focuses on the tensions created when two opposing ideologies meet one another in a competing governance space beyond the purview of the state. It aims to contribute to the literature on rebel governance by illustrating how vanguard movements such as the PYD are constrained by their ideology in negotiating power with established tribal actors in Syria's northeast. With this, the article hopes to engage with the wider research on the ways in which armed non-state actors govern in civil wars (Loyle et al. 2021; Huang 2016; Arjona, Kasfir, and Mampilly 2015; Mampilly 2011).

The polyethnic area of north-eastern Syria is home to large groups of Kurdish, Arab, and Assyrian communities as well as smaller groups of Turkmen, Armenians, and Circassians. At its establishment, Rojava consisted of the self-governing cantons in the areas of Afrin, Jazira, Euphrates, Razza, Tabqa, Manbij, and Deir ez-Zor.³ Rojava is often popularly referred to in the media as "an experiment" in rebel governance. Its ambition is to serve as a model for a "future decentralized system of federal governance in Syria" as stated in its constitution, the Social Contract. However, the areas that the Syrian Kurdish PYD seek to control around the Euphrates River valley and parts of northern Syria are also populated by Arabs and Kurds with strong tribal affiliations.

As part of the movement towards autonomy, younger generations of PYD sympathetic Kurds mobilised the ideology of democratic confederalism in an internal power struggle with tribal structures. However, this ideology faces opposition, both internally – from the Syrian regime, Kurdish opposition groups, and local tribes – and externally, from neighbouring states Turkey, Iran, and Iraq, hostile to Kurdish nationalism and/or the PYD. The intervention of external actors in the conflict (particularly after the defeat of ISIS) and their empowerment of local tribes raises questions of how the PYD engages with tribal groups in a counter effort to consolidate their own political position.

Tribes have traditionally existed alongside state structures, maintaining greater importance in states that remained more traditional and whose economies relied more on agriculture than industry (Dukhan 2020). While they have often been mobilised to support central powers in Syria, by the same token, they have also been able to use external actors' interest in them to secure advantages in tribal rivalries. The outbreak of the Syrian revolution in 2011 initially undermined the mostly Sunni Arab tribes while strengthening religious and ethnic minority tribes. The Sunni Arab tribes who had been co-opted into allegiance with the Assad regime were weakened while the strategic importance of ethnic minority tribes including Kurdish, Turkmen, Alawite, Druze, and Christian tribes rose due to the mobilisation of ethnic minorities by actors engaged in the conflict (Ali 2019). Scholars argue that the Arab Uprisings and the resultant fissures in the state, as evidenced by rising sectarianism, jihadism, and identity politics in Syria, later empowered tribal structures (Dukhan 2020). Both the regime and the Syrian opposition have attempted to mobilise the tribes, while the internationalisation of the Syrian conflict and fluctuations in alliances have eroded the position of tribes as independent power brokers (al-Musarea 2019). Despite the increasing relevance of their role, studies examining tribal rule and its relation to governance systems remain under-researched (Dukhan 2020).

This empirical study aims to contribute to the literature on tribes in Syria and more broadly on the role ideology in rebel governance. It is based on primary sources collected

through a selection of interviews, official PYD documents, and social media accounts as well as secondary sources including academic studies and grey literature.⁴ It aims to address the research gap identified by Curtis and Sindre (2019, 388) who point out that for many scholars (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Duffield 2001; Fearon and Laitin 2003), “ideas are important insofar as they may play a useful role in recruitment and mobilization, but they tend not to be analysed as systems of belief setting out alternative visions of state governance.” The ideology of the PYD represents a significant shift from local actors’ understandings of governance, particularly the role of women in governance structures in Rojava [Autonomous Areas of Northeastern Syria (AANES)] under PYD rule. Gender equality is actively promoted in these areas as a cornerstone of the Syrian Kurdish revolutionary movement’s ideology (Knapp, Flach, and Ayboga 2016; Tank 2017). How does this system of belief fare in its interaction with local tribal groups?

Theoretical approaches

A clear conceptual definition of tribes and tribal governance is challenging despite the importance of tribes as the basis of socio-political community in the Arab world. Although definitions of tribalism abound, so do the exceptions to narrow understandings of the term. Khoury and Kostiner (1990, 4) in their seminal work *Tribes and States in the Middle East*, state that as ideal types “tribes represent large kin groups organised and regulated according to ties of blood or family lineage” in opposition to states that govern through the ultimate monopoly of power in a given territory and whose loyalties are based on the cooperation of a “multiplicity of ethnic, economic, bureaucratic and political groups.” However, they point out that the reality is much more complex. Tribal and state structures often create rural-urban hybrid governance models “held together by traditional tribal characteristics of solidarity (*asabiyya*), true (and more often fictitious) kinship ties, patron-client relationships, and tribal customs and laws. Although traditional tribal organization is disappearing in the urban setting, modern tribes maintain elements of tribal culture and retain the ability to mobilize politically and militarily” (Asfura-Heim 2014). As such, anthropological approaches currently focus “on the multiple social aspects associated with tribalism” and distance themselves “from a perspective considering tribal societies as a stably structured cohesive whole” (Vismara 2018). Rosen (Vismara 2018, 3) argues against the essentialized understanding of tribes as an evolutionary step and rather thinks of them “as a family of socio-political forms,” where adaptability is a key distinction. Likewise, Jabar (2003) points to the fluidity of tribalism and using the case of Iraq, notes that tribalism can co-exist with contemporary ideologies and social and political movements. This understanding of the fluidity of tribalism is of more relevance in defining the relationship between new governing elites (PYD) and more traditional governance (tribes).

Examining the role of Kurdish tribes in particular, Van Bruinessen (1992) argues that tribes are not simply leftovers from a primordial past but equally creations of “the state, rather than a social and political formation preceding it.” Historically, support for tribal leaders throughout Kurdistan was often seen by state rulers as a balance against the threat of more radical counter-state rebels, particularly at a time when societal modernisation weakened tribal leaders opening up spaces for new actors (De Jong 2016). In a similar manner, this strategy of *étatist tribalism* was adopted by ruling elites towards Arab

tribes in Syria/Iraq. Jabar (2000) defines “etatist tribalism” as the ways in which “patronage networks and symbolic culture are integrated into the state to strengthen the power of its elite”. In the case of the Turkey-based Kurdistan Workers’ Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan/PKK), a precursor to the PYD, it was the state’s brutal repression and the failure of the tribal system in protecting Kurds in Turkey that strengthened the more radical PKK. The PKK’s resulting ideology stood in opposition to what its leader, Öcalan, determined to be the patriarchal culture of both tribe and state.⁵ However, before examining this ideology closer, a brief historical overview of the rise of the PYD provides a context to understanding how it came to be a dominant actor in the northeast.

The rise of PYD control in Arab majority areas

The outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011 provided an opportunity for the Kurds to organise themselves but they remained cautious of retribution by the Assad regime. In 2012, faced with greater opposition to his regime and the beginnings of the civil war, President Bashar al-Assad withdrew from northern Syria to focus on quelling dissent in the south. This was a turning point in the struggle for Kurdish self-rule in Syria as the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and their armed wing, the People’s/Women’s Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel/ Yekîneyên Parastina Jin), took over power in the three cantons of Afrin, Kobane and Jazira in what was the beginning of the PYD’s autonomy project. A non-contiguous zone of governance, bordering on a hostile Turkey in a resource rich area of the country, the Autonomous Administration’s chances of survival were small. Furthermore, the establishment of a Kurdish entity in the areas populated by tribes brought about new tensions and efforts at accommodation between key internal actors – the PYD, the local tribes, the regime – and external actors.

Traditionally, Kurdish tribes in Syria and Turkey have moved across the borders of the modern state and relations between the Kurds and tribal leaders vary geographically and have often been dependent on the success of divide and rule policies of regional governments (both nationally – within Kurdish groups – and regionally – supporting Kurdish groups in border states)⁶. McDowall (2000, 15) illustrates how tribes in Kurdistan have led rebellions against the state but were also at times co-opted by the state to quell rebellions of competing Kurdish tribes. One of the major incursions of Kurds from Turkey to Syria has its roots in the Turkish state’s brutal response to the Shaykh Said revolt in the 1920s which resulted in thousands of Kurds fleeing from south-eastern Turkey and settling in Syria.⁷ Cross-border Kurdish relations continued and from the 1970s onwards, and when the conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurds intensified, the PKK developed its base in Syria. There was a dual approach by the Syrian government towards the Kurds, oppressing local Kurdish groups while supporting the PKK, a policy that was to later strengthen the impact of the PKK on Syrian Kurdish politics.⁸

The leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan was based in Syria from where he trained his fighters in the Lebanese Bekaa (under Syrian control) and in Zabadani, on Syrian soil (Netjes and van Veen 2021). The Assad regime’s support for the PKK translated into leverage towards Turkey on other issues such as water rights from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers on which Syria depended as a downstream country (Williams 2001). The PKK operated openly from Syria until 1998 when Öcalan was expelled from Syria under Turkish military threat and eventually captured. In 2011, the PKK returned to

Syria, negotiating with Damascus for a gradual return to the three Kurdish areas bordering Turkey (Afrin, Ayn al-Arab, and Jazeera). As part of the bargain, the PKK and its local organisation, the PYD, would control Kurdish protestors and refrain from joining the opposition Free Syrian Army (FSA) (Baczko, Dorransoro, and Quesnay 2018, 167). PYD leader Salih Muslim Muhammad was pardoned by the regime and allowed to return to Syria from Iraq, joined by militants from the party (Ibid). The PKK also mobilised upwards of 1000 militants to support the PYD in Syria (ICG 2013). Analysts believe that it was the PYD's connections with the PKK that allowed the PYD to establish, mobilise, and arm its militias the YPG/YPJ so quickly (Netjes and van Veen 2021).

Between 2012 and 2015, the PYD and its military, the YPG/YPJ, were able to establish themselves as the ruling Syrian Kurdish party in the northeast, increasing their power over Syria's Arab populated north and east. In 2014, the PYD published its founding document, the Charter of the Social Contract, which established self-rule based on the ideology of democratic confederalism in what was then known as Rojava. In order to reflect the multi-ethnic character of the areas under their control, Rojava was later renamed the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) to make it more inclusive of other ethnicities. The Social Charter explains the guiding principles of the political system and civil administration in force in the three areas of Afrin, Jazira, and Kobane at that time (2014). Already in Article 2, it emphasises localised rule and states: "Authority resides with and emanates from the people of the Autonomous Regions. It is exercised by governing councils and public institutions elected by popular vote." It underscores the role of governance by noting that, "The people constitute the sole source of legitimacy of all governing councils and public institutions, which are founded on democratic principles essential to a free society." Among other things, the Social Contract Charter mandates that all decisions are made through people's houses, who deliberate in groups of 15–30 and use consensus decision making to address issues ranging from energy, food distribution, and social problems, including sexual violence and domestic conflict (Acik 2014).⁹

In 2015, the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) were established as a military alliance dominated by the Kurdish YPG/YPJ but also composed of members from the Arab tribes in northeast Syria.¹⁰ These were encouraged to join in the expanded military organisation by the United States in an effort to make it more appealing to ethnic Arabs living in eastern Syria, even as the leadership remained Kurdish.¹¹ The political wing of the SDF was named the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC). Not unsurprisingly, US efforts came under heavy criticism from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan who accused Washington and its allies of "supporting terrorism" by supporting the YPG/YPJ which Turkey regards as an extension of the PKK – labelled a terrorist organisation in Turkey.¹² The Arab tribes were instrumental in helping the SDF capture the two predominantly Arab provinces of northeast Syria, Raqqqa, and Deir ez-Zor, from the Islamic State (Arafat 2019). From 2016 onwards, the SDF under the leadership of the YPG/YPJ governed in the Arab majority areas of Raqqqa and Deir ez-Zor through the Syrian Democratic Council. The regions of Raqqqa, Tabqa, Manbij, and Deir ez-Zor were incorporated into the Autonomous Areas of Northern and Eastern Syria (AANES) in September 2018.

The revolutionary ideology of the PKK/PYD

In the relationship between the PYD and the Arab tribes, one of the key questions is how the ideology of the PYD can be reconciled with traditional tribal culture. The definition of ideology in use here is of a “logically coherent belief system” which guides action (Mullins 1972; Putnam 1971; Sartori 1969) and is the basis for how the society at the individual or group level rationalises itself (Knight 2006).

As a vanguard movement with an ideologically revolutionary project, the PYD has a vision of society that guides its political praxis. Within the field of rebel governance, Stewart (2021) notes that transformative ideologies make for challenging governance projects which are undertaken only if the long-term goal of rebel leaders is determined by revolutionary ambitions. Her key point is that “governance is a politicized process beset by trade-offs and costs” where the assumption of consistent military benefits from rebel rule may be balanced against rebel rulers’ aims of social transformation (Ibid, 7). In the case of the PYD, it is the ideology defined by the writings of PKK leader Öcalan, that guides the revolutionary project. Loyalty to his vision is paramount, creating hierarchies of power and control within all structures of government institutions. Despite the PYD’s rhetorical commitment to grassroots democracy, Allsopp and van Wilgenburg (2019, 138) note that “... decision making was based on developing and preserving the democratic autonomy project and Öcalan’s ideology, rather than on local representation and popular mandates”.

Although in prison in Turkey since 1999, PKK leader Öcalan’s ideas form the foundation of the PYD’s political project which outlines a progressive ideology. The PKK’s radical transformation has given rise to a debate among scholars of the PKK regarding the organisation’s political evolution. Recognising the PKK’s move away from a Marxist-Leninist ideology aimed at national liberation and independent statehood, some scholars argue that this was brought on in part by “defeat” and subsequent learning through opposition to the Turkish state (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2012; Gunes, 2012; Jongerden 2019). They state that the PKK’s present ideology is the fruit of an internal, ongoing, intellectual debate anchored within the organisation. Others point to discrepancies between theory and practice (as noted above in Allsopp and Van Wilgenburg 2019) and claim that an authoritarian vein runs through the ideological project (Leezenberg, 2016). They argue that change within the organisation is at best superficial (Savelsberg 2016), not based on collective deliberations but rather directed from above (De Jong 2016).¹³ These discussions are relevant to understanding the evolution of the PKK’s ideological thinking and its impact in Rojava, in particular the adaptability of the ideology to the local context.

However, there are critical differences between the cases of the PKK and the PYD which are both contextual – Turkish state oppression versus the Syrian civil war – and temporal. Firstly, the PKK’s ideological transformation, documented in Öcalan’s writings, occurred over two decades of opposition to the state [and even then came as a shock to his followers (Jongerden 2019, 77)]. The PYD’s ability to adapt the ideology on the ground suffers from a shorter perspective of time (since 2012) and occurs in a vacuum of state power in which the PYD have engaged in rebel governance – with local opposition from competing groups. Secondly, although the PYD elites may appreciate the need to adapt and transform, the problem is maintaining credibility at the grassroots level in a movement that gains its legitimacy and is mobilised through its ideology.

It is worth addressing Öcalan's ideas in detail since they are actively discussed, absorbed, and enacted in praxis by his followers.¹⁴ Doing so, illustrates the tensions, broadly speaking, between two very opposing views of the world – that of the Kurdish PYD and that of Arab tribes.

Briefly, Öcalan attacks what he regards as the four pillars of the nation-state – nationalism, sexism, positivistic science, and religiosity (his term “religiousness”) which have served, in his view to create unequal and undemocratic societies. In his writings, he rejects the individualism of capitalist modernity stating: “Capitalist modernity, which attacks social identity and prefers individualism to community, is far from the truth. To recognise this requires reaching the truth through an “economic-ecological-democratic society” (Öcalan 2017). He is critical of the nation-state for enforcing “homogeneous citizenship” and its effort to create “a single national culture”, and “a single national identity” (Öcalan 2017, 61). An important ideological pillar of the nation-state according to Öcalan is its sexism which serves to exploit women. His writings have been effective in mobilising younger generations of Kurds, and most particularly women, who have a key role in the PYD/PKK (Tank 2017). Some scholars of the PKK (Özcan 2007) argue that Öcalan's approach purposefully sought to break the bounds of traditional feudal Kurdish society in Turkey through the mobilisation of emancipatory politics, replacing the allegiance to kinship groups with allegiance to the separatist movement. In so doing, his ideas served as a contrast to the traditional social and cultural mores of Kurdish society and provided an alternative to tribal culture in areas where it predominated.

Öcalan's radical ideas of autonomy, expressed as democratic confederalism, emerge from the Kurds' historical relationship to the Turkish state. In the feudal system existing until the early 20th century in Turkey, Kurdish demands towards governing authorities were negotiated through tribal chiefs. However, this mediation role became obsolete with the move towards the modern nation-state (McDowall 2000, 15). The move from feudal structures to a modern nation-state meant that the link between the citizen and the state became more direct as the state assumed the monopoly on power, collecting taxes and gaining legitimacy through providing services. However, in cases where the state was unable, or unwilling, to fulfil the social contract and instead, neglected populations, such as in the Kurdish areas in south-eastern Turkey, this created an opening for rebels to establish alternative order in a context of disorder (Duyvesteyn 2017, 670). Rebel insurgents of the PKK actively engaged in the formation of political order outside and against the state as “counter state sovereigns” (Mampilly 2011).

Öcalan (2012) notes that that the emergence of the nation state replaced the feudal structures and a collective conception of identity provided by tribes and clans with national ideology and accumulation of capital and power. Not least, the Kemalist state created a homogenous “Turkish” identity into which alternative identities were assimilated without “meaningful minority rights” (Romano and Gurses 2014, 12). However, in Öcalan's conception, the modern nation-state with its centralised bureaucratic administration hinders democratisation in the Middle East (Öcalan 2018, 20). Using Galtung's concepts of negative and positive peace, Gurses (2020, 308) notes that there is an evolution in Kurdish resistance to the state, moving from “a negative peace” understood as only ending violence, to “positive peace,” emphasising social justice and “an egalitarian distribution of power and resources.” Öcalan argues for the political integration of society through “participatory democracy” (Öcalan 2018, 26), political organisation in which all

groups and identities can express themselves. Democratic confederalism devolves power to the grassroots through self-administration in villages and districts made up of confederal structures creating an order which is defined as “democracy without a state” (Ibid, 21).

His ideas of participatory democracy and gender equality have been used to recruit young Kurdish men and women to the movement, rejecting other forms of political authority. The empowerment of women can be traced back to the transformations that have taken place in the PKK over time. Caglayan (2012) notes that an important distinction of the PKK uprisings in the 1970–80s was the mass mobilisation of women while Gurses (2018, 49) referring to the Syrian war context illustrates to which extent gains in women’s rights are a combination of “progressive ideology and war dynamics.” Although the PKK early on focused its ideology and efforts on creating a more gender equal society, it was the Syrian war that provided the “opportunity” for Kurdish women to define their future roles as well as gaining international attention for their cause (Tank 2017). The struggle for equality was more difficult in Turkey in the context of a conflict, localised primarily in the southeast with brutal state repression, but without the vacuum of centralised state control. Gültan Kışanak, the first female co-mayor of Diyarbakir, a predominantly Kurdish city, spoke of the difficulty of surmounting patriarchal traditions and attitudes within Kurdish society dismissing women’s political issues with the argument that society was not ready for these changes. In her words: “This is not something we were given. We had to fight for every single advance” (Kisanak cited in Gurses 2018, 53). The support of the leadership and ideology was instrumental in providing the endorsement necessary to pursue gender equality.

The engagement of young women with the YPG/YPJ organisation has led to criticisms over forced recruitment of minors from human rights organisations.¹⁵ Turkey, in particular, has emphasised the forced recruitment of young women given their experiences with the Turkish-Kurdish PKK. According to PKK scholar Özcan, the recruitment of women to the organisation served as a tactical measure designed to destroy the structures of feudal Kurdish society.¹⁶ Kurds in Turkey’s Southeast preferred the security provided by family and tribe where women were delegated to the bottom of a tribal hierarchy. Öcalan, in his early writings, identifies the institution of the family as the central building block of the patriarchal system. He writes (2010): “The family is a small state conceived by men. The meaning of the family throughout the whole history of civilisation lies in the strength bestowed on it by the rulers and the state apparatus. The orientation of the family towards male dominance and, through that, its successfully attained function as nucleus for statist society guarantee that women carry out limitless, unpaid work . . . If we don’t recognise the fact that the family is a micro-model of the state, a competent analysis of middle-eastern society is impossible.” Thus, the ideology of the PKK/PYD promotes women’s liberation weakening traditional structures and replacing them with the party organisation, and in this way, recreating a more progressive “family” within the liberation movement (Tank 2017).

The PYD’s gender politics encounter tribal culture

The gender policies of the PYD present a challenge for the conservative views of gender in tribal societies. Joseph (1996, 8) notes: “It is the conflation of gender and kinship, and the patriarchal structuring of kinship that allows people to view women in terms of family,

and states to mediate their relationship to women through their roles as mothers and wives. This conflation facilitates the recognition, valorization and entitlement of women primarily in relation to the ways in which they are different from men.” Women’s roles are valued through their engagement within the private sphere, not the public. Alsharekh (2018) notes that within urban tribes, the “social evolution of tribal women has also demanded they retain tribal conservatism.” Using the example of the UAE, Al Najjar and Allagui, describes how the melding of modernity with conservative values has given rise to “invented traditions” and Page notes the branding of the Emirati woman as “honored for her femininity, beauty, respect for tradition, and staying ‘in place’ . . . Modernity must be tempered by tradition” (Alsharakh, 2018).¹⁷ And while the nation-state is in theory an important site through which women can gain protection against other “political communities, patriarchies, and religious and secular non-democratic forces” (Joseph, *ibid*), it has not historically been a site of gender inclusivity or representation in the Middle East.

However, this understanding of women as relegated to the private sphere is challenged by the active engagement of women in governance structures in areas under PYD control. The praxis is informed by the theory of “Jineoloji” or women’s science disseminated through women’s academies and civil society institutions. Jineoloji argues that knowledge and science are disconnected from society and controlled by dominant groups as a foundation for their power. As part of the revolutionary project, Jineoloji serves to give women and society access to science and knowledge in order to strengthen “the connections of science and knowledge to society” (Knapp, Flach, and Ayboga 2016).

This results in two key developments. Firstly, it challenges the idea of women’s role in society recognising them as political actors (Tank 2017). Secondly, by including women in political processes, it increases the focus on gender issues in society more broadly. Anne Phillips (1995, 66) defines this as the “politics of presence,” stating, “There are particular needs, interests, and concerns that arise from women’s experience, and these will be inadequately addressed in a politics that is dominated by men.”

The predominance given to women in governance is engrained in the Charter of the Social Contract – the constitution that is the basis for governance in Rojava.¹⁸ This mandates that all decisions be made through people’s houses, where a minimum of 40% of decision-making participants on all administrative levels must be women (in practice) (Acik 2014). This commitment is also reflected at higher levels. For example, the PYD has a male and female co-chair in all institutions, organisations, and associations – including medical, educational, military, and police councils.

Given the 40% gender quota for all institutions and organisations in PYD-dominated areas, tribal leaders have had to negotiate with women. In May 2020, the President of the Executive Committee of the Syrian Democratic Council (the SDF’s political wing), Ilham Ahmed, announced that women were “now welcome to join men in social lounges called al-Madhafah, where important tribal and political matters are discussed.”¹⁹ The al-Madhafah, a Bedouin lounge or guesthouse, is symbolically important in tribal culture and it is a rarity for women to be allowed access to this gendered public space. The consequences of these interactions are expressed in the words of activist Stera Abdo: “We can imagine that the thinking of the tribes is slowly changing. The tribal leaders are already sitting around a table with female politicians and discussing, so it is just another

step that women from the tribes get involved” (Lucente 2020). Thus, for her, tribal women’s engagement is a logical step in this direction.

Other aspects of the PYD’s gender politics have not been as readily accepted, particularly when they encroach upon the private sphere. In the PYD-run areas of Kobani and Manbij, there were efforts to outlaw the practice of polygamy. Manbij, an overwhelmingly conservative and tribal Arab area, was taken over by the SDF in August 2016. The SDF allied themselves with tribal figures (and former Free Syrian Army fighters) to establish their position in Manbij, placing a local notable, Farouk al-Mashi from the Al-Bou Banna tribe, as head of the SDF’s Legislative Council in Manbij. The SDF also set up the Manbij Military Council with leaders of local Arab armed factions (al-Saidawi, 2018).²⁰ Governance in Manbij was organised on the PYD’s revolutionary principles. This meant that women were suddenly given the right to divorce (previously a right for men only); to inherit property on an equal basis with men; and to keep their children and their homes in a marital break-up. In Kobani, the PYD were able to pass laws against polygamy however, the ensuing backlash from tribal leaders in Manbij, resulted in the PYD granting an exception (Nordland 2018). The latter examples illustrate the ability of the PYD to recognise the limits of their governance ideology and the balance needed to collaborate with local actors.

PYD relations to tribes: The priority of inclusive governance and security

While the ideology of self-administration should in principle appeal to tribes in Syria who have struggled with a centralising Syrian regime, other aspects of the ideology of democratic confederalism such as grassroots engagement and gender equality prove challenging to tribal culture where the hierarchy of patriarchal power dominates. Heras (2020, 3) points out that although problems between the PYD/SDF and the tribes are distinct from area to area, the “common denominator is autonomy” and that those tribes that are most resistant to PYD rule are so because they want to “run their own affairs according to their own customs, while keeping their armed tribespeople local and controlling local resources for themselves”.

At this juncture, the most pressing issue for the tribes is that of security provision. This is also an issue easily taken advantage of by external actors seeking to mobilise tribal loyalties to their own advantage. In the summer of 2020, the security situation for the tribes in the northeast worsened with targeted killings of notables in the Deir ez-Zor region, areas protected by the SDF. Following the assassination of Sheikh Hamoud al-Hafli and the wounding of Sheikh Ibrahim Khalil Abboud al-Gedaan al-Hafli of the Aikidat tribe,²¹ the Aikidat and Zubaid tribes issued a statement in August that demanded greater security in the Deir ez-Zor region to be provided by the International Coalition and in an ultimatum demanded that the AANES devolve power to the Arab tribes, release women and children from Al-Hol camp, and “push the process of a political solution in Syria”.²²

In response, the AANES organised a series of community-based “national symposiums” (Cristou 2020). These were intended to address tribal grievances with AANES rule and reassure attendees of the AANES’ commitment to pluralism. Attempting to address criticism of PYD dominance in governance, a member of the SDC’s presidential council, Ali Rahmoun, assured participants at the meetings that the AANES “does not exclude anyone [or] differentiate between its components [ethnic groups].”²³

Other divisions within the AANES also present a threat to stability and the PYD governance model. One of the greatest challenges to PYD rule is opposition from the Turkey-supported Kurdish National Council (KNC) whose ideology, based on Kurdish nationalism, is fundamentally different from that of the PYD, nor does it share the PYD's progressive views on gender.²⁴ In November 2019, the SDC (under the auspices of the US government) initiated talks between key regional Kurdish groups including the KNC, the PYD, and allied Kurdish parties. The intention is to form a single Kurdish political party that unites the existing parties and enables greater power sharing in the northeast. The willingness of the PYD leaders to engage in talks with the KNC illustrates their willingness to adapt to the geopolitical context but in so doing, they risk weakening the PYD's gender commitments. In an interview Aldar Khalil, a member of the co-chairmanship of the PYD, noted that one of the points of contention between the two sides is "co-chairmanship and women's freedom" (ANHA Hawar News Agency, 26 September 2020).

A further stumbling block to governance is the tension between the PYD/PKK and the SDC regarding the PYD's close relationship with the PKK (Netjes and Hauch 2020). This emanates from an ideological opposition to the PKK's understanding of US role in the region. In an interview on 29 October 2021, Cemil Bayik, a key figure of the PKK leadership, stated that the PKK remained committed to Syrian unity and an end to foreign occupation.²⁵ Referring to the "close and warm" relations with former president Hafez al-Assad and his family, he noted that plans for decentralisation announced by the Syrian regime in April 2021 "opened the door to reconciliation" (Kurd Press, 29 October 2021). Aldar Khalil expressed that they were ready for direct dialogue with Damascus in an interview to Rojava TV stating, "... the solution must be with the regime, but not in Geneva but in Damascus" (Hawar News Agency, 1 November ANHA: Hawar News Agency 2020).

These statements are at odds with SDF/SDC officials who maintain a close relationship with the United States. A month prior to Bayik's interview, in September 2021, SDC co-chairman Ilham Ahmed travelled to the US to reaffirm US support and assistance for northeast Syria (Van Wilgenburg 2021). Her visit was followed by an SDC delegation meeting at the White House in which the American administration once again extended its support and according to the SDC, noted that the organisation "represents a great political alliance at the Syrian level." External power engagement is thus an additional factor that is creating divisions between competing ruling factions in the AANES. The two sides are divided in their approach to intra-Kurdish unity talks and relatedly, the larger question of the role of "non-Syrian PKK cadres within the AANES" which the SDF has promised to remove (Cengiz 2022).

Since efforts at inclusive governance have primarily focused on intra-Kurdish unity, tribal leaders from the Baggara and Ogeidat have expressed frustration at being excluded from Kurdish unity talks. Some tribal shaykhs in Raqqa and Hasaka province have raised the same objection, although these areas are more mixed (Netjes and van Veen 2021, 65). The inability to find enduring power-sharing arrangements to include local tribal leaders has enabled external actors to mobilise resistance against PYD rule. However, the inclusion of the Arab population and the support of the Arab tribes are key to the region's security, particularly in the Deir ez-Zor region where there has since 2020 been a rise in IS activity (Ibid Christou). For the PYD, this means that negotiating and including local tribes in governance will be increasingly critical to maintaining their own political position.

Elections planned for 2022 would for the first time include areas with Arab majority populations. However, at the time of writing, planning for these elections has not crossed the first hurdle of resolving intra-Kurdish conflicts while preparations for the process have been criticised by opposition Arab majority parties as lacking transparency (Dri 2021). The issue of inclusive governance has since the start consistently been the target of criticism by local actors and international observers of PYD rule (ICG 2014).

Turkey, which considers the establishment of a Kurdish-led autonomous entity an internal threat impacting its own Kurdish issue, seeks to de-legitimise PYD rule in the northeast (Tank 2020). Turkish efforts have been focused on the immediate Syrian border region in addition to Manbij which are areas of influence in its “safe zone”, established after the 2019 intervention. Its multiple interventions into northern Syria have given tribes a new position in the conflict. Along with the Syrian regime and Iran, Turkey’s outreach to local tribes serves to define spheres of influence and weakens the Kurdish position in the northeast (COAR 2019). In this context, Turkey initiated the founding of the Supreme Council of Syrian Tribes and Clans which held its first conference in the city of A’zaz on 21 December 2018, bringing together more than a hundred tribes and clans including Arab, Kurdish, Turkish, Christian, Alawite, and Druze. The conference was intended to create a unified body that could take part in the political negotiations concerning Syria’s future and the premise of these negotiations was to promote the unity of Syria (Al-Khuder 2019). According to the deputy head of the council, Sheikh Rafi Ukla er-Raco, one of the common goals expressed by the tribes, including the Kurdish tribes is to resist “PYD terrorism as well as the Syrian regime and its allies” (The Syrian Observer, 4 January 2018). However, Turkey’s effort to organise resistance against PYD rule and the Assad regime is unlikely to succeed given the lack of a unified approach among the clans themselves with some tribal leaders benefiting from their close relations with AANES authorities. Furthermore, Turkey’s endeavours have been met with counter efforts by both the SDC and the Assad regime. A month before the Turkey-supported conference noted above, the “Council of Elders and Dignitaries of Syrian Tribes” was held in Hasakah city to discuss the Turkish threat to the region (al-Khuder, op. cit.)

Conclusion

This volume presents several cases of rebel groups willing to adjust their strategies in order to recruit or co-opt local elites in contexts of conflict.²⁶ To succeed, all rebel groups require a deep knowledge of the local socio-political landscape and need to be well versed to navigate local politics (Skjelderup 2022, this issue). The case of the Kurdish PYD is one in which a rebel group with deep historical relations with the region is very far removed ideologically from existing elites, while also committed to a transformative ideological agenda.

The PYD-led AANES is often rightfully seen as more progressive and democratic than other regimes in the region in large part due to its ideological commitment to concepts such as grassroots democracy and gender equality. Yet, it is not without challenges in attempting to enforce a radical ideology in a conservative socio-political landscape – in a country still in conflict. The transformative ideology of the PYD/PKK and the revolutionary nature of the Kurdish-led administration in Syria’s northeast have had to make difficult compromises that would allow for greater power sharing and the inclusion of

tribal leaders. Difficulties in adapting to the local context are partly a consequence of internal power dynamics within the PKK/PYD configuration. Not least, the involvement of the PKK in governance as an ideological vanguard party is proving problematic. This is, however, denied by figures close to the PKK such as Aldar Khalil, a member of the Presidential Board of the PYD, who maintains: “Our model is devoted to autonomous management of the community, and therefore the absence of the will of the people in the election, participation, and administration would bring us backwards into the past.”²⁷ Human rights groups such as the International Crisis Group, however, argue that diluting the dominance of the PKK on the Syrian Kurdish PYD would give other Kurdish and non-Kurdish parties a real local governance role thus rendering the “one-party” rule of the “democratic self-administration of the YPG-PYD, less undemocratic” (ICG, 2017).

Presently, the relationship between the tribes and the opposition, be it the Kurdish PYD or other, Sunni militias, is less about ideology and more about survival. In Syria, this has meant allying with whomever could provide security. The nature of the PYD relationship to the tribes is not fixed but fluid. As Dukhan, notes: “The allegiance of tribal elders is mutable. The same tribal leaders in Raqqa who in October 2017 declared their support for the SDF had previously appeared in a 2013 video pledging allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Some had even pledged their allegiance to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in 2011” (Dukhan 2020). Issues of security being more immediate may solicit a greater willingness to compromise.

The tension around opposing models of governance – one, emerging from an ideologically revolutionary model and the other, from a conservative understanding of kinship and gender – are more difficult to negotiate. Furthermore, mobilising the pragmatism required to make compromises at the senior levels of PYD leadership may entail a loss of credibility at the grassroots for the PYD’s ideological project. Ten years after the establishment of the AANES, these tensions are openly discussed by the leadership. In an interview with Medya TV on 17 April 2022, Foza Yusuf, a member of the leadership council of the PYD and an architect of the Social Contract, spoke of the challenges of putting in force the concepts in the Social Charter noting the importance of negotiating between “moral and gender changes brought on by the revolution” and the “social reality” of the local context. Yusuf stated: “There are concepts created by the revolution. I mean, how loyal will we be to these concepts that the revolution created, how do these concepts define us? How do the concepts that are used define us?” She ends by pointing out the importance of creating balances “between global rights and global norms as well as our societal realities” in a way that would allow the AANES to develop its future democratically (Medya TV, 17 April). This negotiation is likely to define critical aspects of PYD ideology and its practice, in particular the role of gender in the AANES.

Notes

1. Officially renamed the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) in 2018 acknowledging its polyethnic composition.
2. Author interview with PYD representative, Kurdish Institute, Belgium, 1 July 2019.
3. Control of Afrin passed to Turkey following its military incursion “Operation Olive Branch” in 2018 and it now administers the city providing education and security (Aydıntaşbaş 2020).

4. The interviews, attained with informed consent, are anonymised in the text and were conducted in Oslo and Brussels among PYD representatives. They were selected due to their key strategic positions in the organisation. Due to the outbreak of COVID, the number of interviews were limited as planned research trips had to be cancelled. I have also included publicly available media interviews to expand my sample.
5. Important to note in this context is that Öcalan does not come from a prominent clan in Turkey unlike other Kurdish political party leaders in Iraq, for example Masoud Barzani of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) or Jalal Talabani of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).
6. An example is Syrian support for the PKK until 1998 and the Turkish support for the KDP in Iraq.
7. The revolt was an effort by Kurdish shayks to revive the caliphate and sultanate system. It differed from earlier uprisings because it was initiated and organised by a Kurdish political organisation, *Azadi* (Freedom), that recognised Naqshbandi Shayk Said's ability to mobilise the Zaza speaking tribes (for whom he was one of the most respected shayks) (van Bruinessen, 1992, 265).
8. A month after the outbreak of the conflict in April 2011, the Syrian regime, in an attempt to win over the Kurds, allowed for *ajanib* Kurds to apply for citizenship which they had been denied earlier. Decree 49 of the 7 April 2011 was limited in its scope as it did not cover *makutumiin* Kurds nor did it address the issue of compensation (Allsopp 2014, 173).
9. A minimum of 40% of decision-making participants on all administrative levels have to be women (in practice). This commitment is also reflected at higher levels. For example, the PYD has a male and female co-chair in all institutions, organisations, and associations – including medical, educational, military, and police councils (Benathan, 2014).
10. Joining the SDF were also some Assyrian/Syriac militias and smaller Armenian, Turkmen, and Chechen forces.
11. Not least, the recruitment of Arabs to the SDF was encouraged by the United States to deflect claims that it chose to support the Kurds against Arabs, Turkmen, and other groups.
12. It is also noted as a terrorist organisation by the EU as well as the United States according to official EU, and US government, sources (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A62014TJ0316&qid=1634482630482>, <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organisations/>)
13. These debates are outlined in Jongerden (2019).
14. In a foreword to a book on Öcalan's texts, the notes that these "writings are intensively studied and heavily discussed by the Kurdish rebels and activists, and practical concepts are derived from these discussions". (Öcalan 26: 2017).
15. Human Rights Watch (Motaparthi 2018) noted that recruitment often occurred in displaced persons' camps, thus targeting "vulnerable families in need of social support or humanitarian assistance". The children between the ages of 13–17 enlisted voluntarily and in some cases were who had experienced difficult domestic situations according to HRW.
16. Interview, N.O. Özcan, 13 October 2002, Ankara.
17. Al Najjar, Allagui, and Page are all cited in Alsharakh, 2018.
18. The Social Charter can be found at <http://peaceinkurdistancampaign.com/resources/rojava/charter-of-the-social-contract/>
19. Tweet by Elham Ahmad. <https://twitter.com/ElhamAhmadSDC/status/1265624305293017089>
20. Not least, the recruitment of Arabs to the SDF was encouraged by the PYD's external sponsor, the United States, to deflect claims that it chose to support the Kurds against Arabs, Turkmen, and other groups.
21. While numbers are not entirely reliable due to over reporting by the tribes themselves and under-reporting by rivals, the Akidat tribe is one of the largest is believed to number between 700000 to 800000 members. Its members live near the Euphrates basin in Syria, in Iraq and in the Gulf (Al-Kanj 2020).

22. Statement issued on Facebook on 11 August: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063890012919> (accessed 17 September 2021). In an interview with journalist Rena Netjes, an Ogidat sheikh from al-shuhail stated: "We want to open direct channels with the International Coalition, and with the Americans.. We do not want to work with the SDF" (Twitter, 21 August 2020). <https://twitter.com/RenaNetjes/status/1293616793710481408?s=08>
23. Home page of the Syrian Democratic Council: <http://m-syria-d.com/en/?p=2778>
24. Although the political programmes of all Kurdish political parties including the KNC mention women's rights, statements of support for gender equality are not always evident in practice. For example, KNC party leadership is dominated by men whereas there is a legal requirement for women's representation at leadership levels in the PYD (and TEV-DEM) (Allsopp and Van Wilgenburg 2019, 79).
25. Bayik is one of the five founders of the PKK and part of the PKK's three-man Executive Committee, the leading body of the organisation.
26. See contributions by Skjelderup (2022, this issue), Skretting (2022, this issue), and Lia (2022, this issue).
27. *Syrian Democratic Times* interview with Aldar Khalil, 1 July 2020.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank colleagues on the Rebel Governance project for their invaluable feedback in the writing of this article, as well as the editors of the special issue, and peer reviewers for their constructive comments.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This study was supported by a grant from the Research Council of Norway.

Notes on contributor

Pinar Tank is a Senior Researcher at the Peace Research Institute, PRIO, and an area studies scholar working in the Middle East. Her doctorate was about civil-military relations in Turkey in the early 2000s. She works presently on projects examining the interplay between Turkey's foreign and domestic policies from both a geopolitical and the humanitarian perspective. She has also conducted research on gender as a mobilising factor of PKK/PYD ideology. She is now engaged in a larger project on rebel governance where her focus is on Northeast Syria. Her work has been published in various academic journals such as *Security Dialogue*, *Turkish Studies*, and *Conflict, Security and Development*. Her most recent publications include "Turkey as an emerging donor in humanitarian assistance" in Pacynska, A. (ed.) *The New Politics of Aid: Emerging Donors & Conflict-Affected States* (2020: Lynne Rienner) and "Between Human and State Security: Turkey's Syria Policy under the Justice and Development Party (AKP)", *The International Spectator* (November 2021).

ORCID

Pinar Tank  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4754-5377>

References

- Acik, N. 2014. "Kobane: The Struggle of Kurdish Women against Islamic State." *Open Democracy*, 22 October. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/necla-acik/kobane-struggle-of-kurdish-women-against-islamic-state>
- Akkaya, A. H., and J. Jongerden. 2012. "Reassembling the Political: The PKK and the Project of Radical Democracy." *European Journal of Turkish Studies*. doi:10.4000/ejts.4615.
- Al-Kanj, S. 2020 September 8. "Who Is behind Wave of Killings of Tribal Sheikhs in East Syria." *Al Monitor*. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/09/syria-deir-ez-zor-arab-tribes-kurdish-forces-assassination.html>
- Al-Khuder, K. 2019. "The Conflict Has Torn Apart Syrian Tribes, but They Remain an Important Player." *Atlantic Council*, July 11. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriacouncil/the-conflict-has-torn-apart-syrian-tribes-but-they-remain-an-important-player/>
- al-Musarea, A. 2019. "The Role of Syrian Tribes: Betting on a Lost Cause." Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Fikra Forum*, 26 March. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/role-syrian-tribes-betting-lost-cause>
- Al-Saidwi, H. 2018 October 5. "The Meaning of Manbij." *Diwan* Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center. <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/77417>
- Ali, H. 2019. *Post-Arab Spring: The Arab World Between the Dilemma of the Nation-State and the Rise of Identity Conflicts*. London: Palgrave.
- Allsopp, H. 2014. *The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identity in the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Allsopp, H., and W. Van Wilgenburg. 2019. *The Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflicts*. Vol. 2. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Alsharekh, A. 2018. "Tribal Social Evolution and Gender: Conflict in Urbanized Tribal Units." *LSE Middle East Centre Workshop Blog*, 3 August. blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2018/08/03/tribal-social-evolution-and-gender/
- ANHA: Hawar News Agency. 2020. "Khalil: PNK parties are ready to share their seats with ENKS." 26 September. <https://hawar.news.com/en/haber/khalil-pynk-parties-are-ready-to-share-their-seats-with-enks-h19490.html>
- Arafat, H. 2019. "PKK Leader Jailed in Turkey Sends Message to Arab Tribes in Northeast Syria." *Kurdistan 24* online, 18 August. <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/20512-PKK-leader-jailed-in-turkey-sends-message-to-arab-tribes-in-northeast-syria>
- Arjona, A., N. Kasfir, and Z. Mampilly. 2015. "Introduction." In *Rebel Governance in Civil War*, pp. 1-21. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Asfura-Heim, P. 2014. "No Security without Us': Tribes and Tribalism in Al-Anbar Province in Iraq." Center for Stability and Development. Center for Strategic Studies. DOI: https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/cop-2014-u-007918-final.pdf
- Aydıntaşbaş, A. 2020. "A New Gaza: Turkey's Border Policy in Northern Syria." *European Council on Foreign Relations*, May 28.
- Baczko, A., G. Dorronsoro, and A. Quesnay. 2018. *Civil War in Syria: Mobilization and Competing Social Orders*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Benathan, R. 2014. "Guns, Widows & What You Don't Hear About in Syria: An Interview with Margaret Owen." *Bad Housekeeping: Writing a New Generation of Gender*. 17 January. <https://www.bad-housekeeping.com/2014/01/17/guns-widows-what-you-dont-hear-about-syria-an-interview-with-margaret-owen/>
- Çağlayan, H. 2012. "From Kawa the Blacksmith to Ishtar the Goddess: Gender Constructions in Ideological-Political Discourses of the Kurdish Movement in Post-1980 Turkey." *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 14. <http://journals.openedition.org/ejts/4657>
- Cengiz, M. E. 2022. "The PYD-PKK Relationship Under Scrutiny." European University Institute, Middle East Directions Programme Blog, 10 January. <https://blogs.eui.eu/medirections/the-pyd-pkk-relationship-under-scrutiny>
- Center for Operational Analysis and Research. 2019. "Tribal Tribulations: Tribal Mapping and State Actor Influence in Northeastern Syria." 6 May. <https://coar-global.org/2019/05/06/tribal-tribulations-tribal-mapping-and-state-actor-influence-in-northeastern-syria/>

- Christou, W. 2020. "Can the Autonomous Administration Solve Its Tribal Problem in Northeast Syria?" *Syria Direct* <https://syriadirect.org/can-the-autonomous-administration-solve-its-tribal-problem-in-northeast-syria/>.
- Collier, P., and A. Hoeffler. 2004. "Greed and Grievance in Civil War." *Oxford Economic Papers* 56: 563–595. doi:10.1093/oep/gpf064.
- Curtis, D. E. A., and G. M. Sindre. 2019. "Transforming State Visions: Ideology and Ideas in Armed Groups Turned Political Parties – Introduction to Special Issue." *Government and Opposition* 54 (3): 387–414. doi:10.1017/gov.2018.51.
- De Jong, A. 2016. "A Commune in Rojava ?" *New Politics* XV (4). Winter 2016: 69–76.
- Dri, K. F. 2021. "Rojava's Road to Elections Is Riddled with Obstacles." *Rudaw*, January 28. <https://rudaw.net/english/analysis/28012021>
- Duffield, M. 2001. *Global Governance and the New War: The Merging of Development and Security*. London: Zed Books.
- Dukhan, H. 2020. *State and Tribes in Syria: Informal Alliances and Conflict Patterns*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Duyvesteyn, I. 2017. "Rebels and Legitimacy: An Introduction." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 28 (4/5): 669–685. doi:10.1080/09592318.2017.1322337.
- Fearon, J. D., and D. D. Laitin. 2003. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." *American Political Science Review* 97 (1): 75–90. doi:10.1017/S0003055403000534.
- Gunes, C. 2012. *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey: From Protest to Resistance*. London: Routledge.
- Gurses, M. 2018. *Anatomy of a Civil War: Sociopolitical Impacts of the Kurdish Conflict in Turkey*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Gurses, M. 2020. "The Evolving Kurdish Question in Turkey." *Middle East Critique* 29 (3): 307–318. doi:10.1080/19436149.2020.1770448.
- Heras, N. A. 2020. "The Battle for the Tribes in Northeast Syria." *Geneva Centre for Security Policy*. <https://dam.gcsp.ch/files/doc/tribes-northeast-syria>
- Huang, R. 2016. *The Wartime Origins of Democratization: Civil War, Rebel Governance, and Political Regimes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- International Crisis Group. 2013 January 22. "Syria's Kurds: A Struggle within A Struggle." *Middle East Report* (136). <https://crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/syria-s-kurds-struggle-within-struggle>
- International Crisis Group. 2014 May 8. "The Flight of Icarus? The PYD's Precarious Rise in Syria." *Middle East Report* (151): DOI. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/flight-icarus-pyd-s-precarius-rise-syria>
- Jabar, F. A. 2000. "Shaykhs and Ideologues: Detribalization and Retribalization in Iraq, 1968-1998." *Middle East Report* 215: 28–31. doi:10.2307/1520152.
- Jabar, F. A. 2003. "Sheikhs and Ideologues: Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Tribes under Patrimonial Totalitarianism in Iraq, 1968-1998." In *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*, edited by F. A. Jaber and H. Dawod, 69–109. London: Saqi.
- Jongerden, J. 2019. "Learning from Defeat: Development and Contestation of the "New Paradigm" within Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)." *Kurdish Studies* 7 (1): 72–92. doi:10.33182/ks.v7i1.507.
- Joseph, S. 1996. "Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East." *Middle East Report*, no. 198: 4. doi:10.2307/3012867.
- Khoury, P. S., and J. Kostiner, eds. 1990. *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Knapp, M., A. Flach, and E. Ayboga. 2016. *Revolution in Rojava: Democratic Autonomy and Women's Liberation in Syrian Kurdistan*. London: Pluto Press.
- Knight, K. 2006. "Transformations of the Concept of Ideology in the Twentieth Century." *The American Political Science Review* 100 (4): 619–626. doi:10.1017/S0003055406062502.
- Leezenberg, M. 2016. "The Ambiguities of Democratic Autonomy: The Kurdish Movement in Turkey and Rojava." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16 (4): 671–690. doi:10.1080/14683857.2016.1246529.

- Lia, B. 2022. "The Islamic State's Tribal Policies in Syria and Iraq." *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 1–20. doi:10.1080/23802014.2022.2147990.
- Loyle, C. K., K. Cunningham, R. Huang, and D. Jung. 2021. "New Directions in Rebel Governance Research." *Perspectives on Politics* 1–13. doi:10.1017/S1537592721001985.
- Lucente, A. 2020. "Northeast Syrian Women to Participate in Meetings on Tribal Matters." *Al-Monitor*. 2 June. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/06/women-participate-meetings-tribal-politics-northeast-syria.html#ixzz77fTovFX1>
- Mampilly, Z. C. 2011. *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life during War*. Reprint ed. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Pres.
- McDowall, D. 2000. *A Modern History of the Kurds*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Motaparthly, P. 22 June 2018. "Human Rights Watch Letter on Child Recruitment to the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (Pyd)-led Autonomous Administration and Peoples 'Protection Units (YPG)." Accessed 25 September 2021 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/03/human-rights-watch-letter-child-recruitment-kurdish-democratic-union-party-pyd-led>
- Mullins, W. A. 1972. "On the Concept of Ideology in Political Science." *American Political Science Review* 66 (2): 478–510. doi:10.2307/1957794.
- Netjes, R., and L. Hulch. 2020. "The Gordian Knot of Kurdish Unity Talks in Syria." *The Atlantic Council*, September 22. <https://atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-gordian-knot-of-kurdish-unity-talks-in-syria/>
- Netjes, R., and E. van Veen. 2021. "Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist: The YPG/PYD during the Syrian Conflict." *CRU Report*. <https://clingendael.org/pub/2021/the-yppgyd-during-the-syrian-conflict/>
- Nordland, R. 2018. "Women are Free, and Armed, in Syria's Kurdish-Controlled North." *New York Times*. 24 February. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/24/world/middleeast/syria-kurds-womens-rights-gender-equality.html>
- Öcalan, A. 2010. "The Revolution Is Female." Abdullah Öcalan's writings in 'Il Manifesto'. 9 March. <http://www.freedom-for-ocalan.com/english/hintergrund/schriften/ilmanifesto.htm>
- Öcalan, A. 2012. *Democratic Confederalism*. London: Transmedia Publishing Ltd.
- Öcalan, A. 2017. *The Political Thought of Abdullah Öcalan*. London: Pluto Press.
- Öcalan, A. 2018. "How to Live, What to Do, Where to Start." *Internationalist Commune Online* DOI <https://internationalistcommune.com/how-to-live-what-to-do-where-to-start-by-abdullah-ocalan/>
- Özcan, N. O. 2007. "PKK Recruitment of Female Operatives." *Terrorism Focus* 4 (28). [https://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=4394](https://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=4394)
- Phillips, A. 1995. *The Politics of Presence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Press, K. 2021. "Cemil Bayik Says Future of Kurds Lays with Damascus." 29 October. C. and A. Maxa. 2019. "Against Anarchism - Abdullah Öcalan's Theoretical Traces" *The Kurds before a Regional Transformation*, edited by F.I. Seyder. Vienna: Lit Verlag. <https://kurdpress.com/en/news/1644/Cemil-Bayik-says-future-of-Kurds-lays-with-Damascus/Lechowski>
- Putnam, R. 1971. "Studying Elite Political Culture: The Case of Ideology." *American Political Science Review* 65 (3): 651–681. doi:10.2307/1955512.
- Romano, D., and M. Gurses. 2014. *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Sartori, G. 1969. "Politics, Ideology, and Belief Systems." *The American Political Science Review* 63 (2): 398–411. doi:10.2307/1954696.
- Savelsberg, E., D. Romana and M. Gurses 2014. "The Syrian-Kurdish Movements: Obstacles Rather Than Driving Forces for Democratization." In *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East*, edited by D. Romana and M. Gurses New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Skjelderup, M.W. 2022 "Insurgent Engagement with Kinship Group Authorities: Production of Order and Governance in Somalia's Lower Jubba Province." *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*. 1–17. doi:10.1080/23802014.2022.2130968.
- Skretting, V. B. 2022 "Tribal Engagement Strategies in the Islamic Emirate of Azawad." *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*. 1–20. doi:10.1080/23802014.2022.2111461.

- Stewart, M. 2021. *Governing for Revolution: Social Transformation in Civil War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- The Syrian Observer*. 2018. "Supreme Council of Tribes and Clans Completes Tour inside Syria." 4 January. Van Bruinessen, M. 1992. *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*. London: Zed Books. https://syrianobserver.com/news/21516/supreme_council_tribes_clans_completes_tour_inside_syria.html
- Tank, P. 2017. "Kurdish Women in Rojava: From Resistance to Reconstruction." *Die Welt des Islams* 57: 404–428. doi:10.1163/15700607-05734p07.
- Tank, P. 2020. "The Shifting Turkish Agenda in Syria's Evolving Conflict: Understanding the Drivers of Turkey's Policy in Syria." *PRIO Paper*. Oslo: PRIO. <https://www.prio.org/publications/12295>
- Van Bruinessen, M. 1992. *Aga, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Van Wilgenburg, W. 2021. "US Officials Meet with SDC Leader in Washington." *Kurdistan 24 online*. 29 September. <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/25726-US-officials-meet-with-SDC-leader-in-Washington>
- Vismara, E. 2018. "The Contemporary Nature of Tribalism. Anthropological Insights on the Libyan Case" Christian Michelsen Institute." *CMI Working Paper* WP 2018:12. <https://www.cmi.no/publications/6695-the-contemporary-nature-of-tribalism>
- Williams, P. 2001. "Turkey's H₂O Diplomacy in the Middle East." *Security Dialogue* 32 (1): 27–40. doi:10.1177/0967010601032001003.