

Exit-With-Autonomy or Autonomy-Without-Exit? Divergent Political Trajectories in Rojava and the Kurdish Regional Government

Critical Sociology
1–18

© The Author(s) 2021

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/08969205211048547

journals.sagepub.com/home/crs**Spencer Louis Potiker** 

University of California, Irvine, USA

Abstract

This paper argues that sociological analysis of social movements has undertheorized non/anti-state social movements. It is argued that an alternative modality of resistance to that of movements seeking reform through the state or the capture of state power through revolution is to exit the world-system and set up parallel structures of governance and production. A conjunctural inter-regional comparison is taken up in order to map the inter-scalar and historical causal factors that led to exit-with-autonomy in Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava) and autonomy-without-exit in Iraqi Kurdistan (Kurdish Regional Government). The paper shows that in order to exit the world-system social movement actors in Rojava used strategic loyalty bargains and political voice at specific historical conjunctures in order to maintain their movement and seize on non-state political opportunities. These same non-state political opportunities were not available for the social movement actors hoping to exit the world-system in the Kurdish Regional Government.

Keywords

Rojava, Kurdistan, Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), Exilic Politics, Political Opportunity Theory, Social Movements, Comparative-Historical Sociology

Introduction

On 6 October 2019 the Rojava Revolution burst onto the international scene. However, this date does not represent the outbreak of the revolution, the changing of power within the region, nor the formation of a revolutionary group of activists. Rather, this date represents the day in which former President of the United States, Donald Trump ended military support for the activists in Rojava, allowing the Turkish military to invade and occupy the predominately Kurdish region of Syria. The mainstream media in the United States, perpetuating the orientalist¹ discourse it is so prone to,

Corresponding author:

Spencer Louis Potiker, Department of Global and International Studies, University of California, Irvine, 579 Social Science Tower, Irvine, CA 92697, USA.

Email: spotiker@uci.edu

often only chastised Donald Trump on account of betraying western allies in the otherwise “backward” Middle East. What is missing in this coverage is what was known for years by those of the international left following the Rojava Revolution since its outbreak in 2012. Namely, the abandonment of the activists in Rojava signals the possible destruction of a crucial experiment in mutual aid, alternative collective forms of production, ecological sustainability, non-state governance, feminism, high-intensity democracy, and partial escape from the capitalist world-system.

Prior to the withdraw of United States troops from Rojava and the subsequent media coverage directed at the region, most common knowledge of Kurdistan in the United States was centered on the partially autonomous Kurdish territory located within the borders of Iraq. This partially autonomous territory is known as the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). As will be detailed below, the KRG is a neoliberal statelet with close relations to world and regional powers like the United States and Turkey. The KRGs political economy sharply contrasts with that of the radical project in Rojava. The KRG is a hierarchically organized statelet that is tightly linked to the world-economy and interstate system through economic relations such as the export of oil and political relations such as the signing of international agreements.

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, the paper aims to locate the causal mechanisms that led to the divergence in the political trajectories of the KRG and Rojava. More specifically the paper is interested in why the broader movement for exit from the world-system has temporarily succeeded in Rojava and failed to take hold in the territory controlled by the KRG. By exit from the world-system I mean “escape from capitalist relations and processes of accumulation that [are] bundled up with state control” (Grubačić and O’Hearn, 2016: 1). While both Kurdish regions gained political autonomy in recent history only Rojava has been able to exit the world-system. Rojava can thus be classified as “exit-with-autonomy” because of the non-hierarchical cooperative politics and economics that exist within the region. The KRG then can be classified as “autonomy-without-exit” due to the ethnic self-governance in the region that corresponds to the hierarchical logics of the capitalist world-system (Grubačić and O’Hearn 2016). Second, the paper is interested in the possible ways in which the radical experiment in Rojava might be continued despite the recent Turkish invasion and occupation.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: first, the relevant literature is discussed. This includes literature on social movements and non-state spaces. After the literature review a methods section introduces the conjunctural methodology used for comparing the two Kurdish regions. After the methods section I give a justification for the case selection. Next, a brief overview of Kurdish political history is taken up in order to provide the necessary background for the cases. Then the comparison is carried out with special attention paid to the specific historical conjunctures and inter-scalar relations that caused the divergence of political trajectories in the two Kurdish regions.

Literature Review: Social Movements, Political Opportunities, and Exilic Politics

Mainstream social movement theories within sociology have at best struggled to grapple with and at worst been unwilling to acknowledge non/anti-state social movements. These theories include, but are not limited to, resource mobilization, relative deprivation, frame alignment, political opportunity, and dynamics of contention (Gurr, 1970; McAdam et al., 2001; McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Meyer, 2004; Snow and Benford, 1988). Williams (2017) reconceptualizes how some of these theories might be used in order to analyze non/anti-state social movements. Political opportunity theory is an analytical approach Williams (2017) believes can be reconfigured to account for non/

anti-state movements. Two of the central opportunities within political opportunity theory are the increased availability of powerful allies and a decline in the states capability to repress movement actors (McAdam, 1996; Williams, 2017). These political opportunities are easily transferable to non/anti-state social movements, but for one reason or another these movements have been overlooked in the literature.

Aside from their lack of analysis of non/anti-state movements, mainstream social movement theories also tend to be rooted in reformist sentiments and thus also struggle to account for revolutionary social change. Although sociological theories on revolution are not rooted in reformist sentiments like the aforementioned theories on social movements, they are also largely focused on the change of state power (Foran, 2005; Moore, 1966; Skocpol, 1979; Tilly, 1978). Both of these state-centered approaches contribute to an epistemological problem in the social sciences in which the state is privileged as the site of social change (Grosfoguel, 2006).

Despite the overwhelming majority of social movement theory that is focused on the change of state power through either reform or revolution there is a growing literature analyzing the potential local actors have to resist or deflect state power, processes of capital accumulation, and various other unjust hierarchies by either setting up parallel structures of governance and production or escaping geographically the purview of state surveillance (Grubačić and O'Hearn, 2016; Lynd and Grubačić, 2008; Robinson, 1980, 1983; Scott, 2009; Zibechi, 2010, 2012). For the purpose of this paper, I use the concept of self-imposed exile—referred to here as “exilic politics” or “exilic spaces.” Grubačić and O'Hearn (2016) coined the term exilic spaces in their recent book *Living at the Edges of Capitalism: Adventures in Exile and Mutual Aid*. Exilic spaces are defined as “Those areas of social and economic life where people and groups attempt to escape from capitalist economic processes, whether by territorial escape or by attempts to build structures that are autonomous of capitalist processes of accumulation and social control” (Grubačić and O'Hearn, 2016: 42). I choose to use the term “politics” instead of “spaces” at times in the remainder of the paper to signal the importance of political intent to the exilic space.

In order to have a full understanding of the relations between exilic spaces and states it is important to introduce Hirschman's (1970) concepts of exit, voice, and loyalty. Although Hirschman's conception of exit, voice, and loyalty were originally written about firms, organizations, and states, Grubačić and O'Hearn (2016) applied these concepts to exilic spaces. According to Grubačić and O'Hearn (2016), in order to partially exit a world-system, non-state actors often need to make loyalty bargains with other forces in the world-system or use political voice within the world-system. Loyalty bargains are normally made with regional or hegemonic powers, but also can be made with other non-state actors such as local rebel militias or global civil society. Voice is normally used by exilic actors in order to negotiate with state actors in the world-system. Voice can take the form of open rebellion, threat of rebellion, and a variety of other agentic strategies that exilic actors can use to resist incorporation into the world-system.

The ability of an exilic space at a particular historical conjuncture to make a loyalty bargain or use effective political voice is one way to operationalize Williams's (2017) reformulation of political opportunity theory to meet the analytic demands of studying non/anti-state movements. Loyalty bargains can be conceptualized in tandem with the availability of a powerful ally in political opportunity theory while the ability to use political voice is more tenable when a state cannot repress rebellion. Moreover, loyalty bargains or the need for a powerful ally is more necessary when either political voice is weak or the ability for a state to repress a movement is strong. Because loyalty bargains can be unstable and political voice can be weak exilic spaces are often precarious. As will be seen in the analysis below, loyalty and voice in the midst of a complex web of inter-scalar relations of force are of central importance to partial exit from the world-system.

Methods: Conjunctural Inter-Regional Comparison

This paper uses a conjunctural inter-regional comparison (Leitner and Sheppard 2020) in order to locate the combination of historical factors that led to the divergence of political outcomes in Rojava and the KRG. The conjunctural comparative methodology used in this analysis draws strongly from Antonio Gramsci (1971). For Gramsci conjunctural analysis was thoroughly intertwined with what he called “relations of force.” According to Gramsci (1971), “international relations intertwine with these internal relations of nation-states, creating new, unique historically concrete combinations,” the “relation between international forces and national forces is further complicated by the existence within every State of several structurally diverse territorial sectors, with diverse relations of force at all levels” (182). In this analysis I pay particular attention to relations of force at the world, national, and regional scales.

To further guide the conjunctural inter-regional comparison in Kurdistan I follow Leitner and Sheppard’s (2020) call to spatialize the conjuncture in order to include “extra-territorial causal factors – events and processes happening in other places at broader geographic scales” (492). Extra-territorial causal factors are heightened for movements operating in the global south as state institutions tend to have less self-determination at the periphery of the system due to interventionist policies of state actors at the core of the system. Additionally, I follow Leitner and Sheppard’s (2020) three-dimensional spatiotemporal ontology in order to account for “horizontal connectivities, vertical inter-scalar relations and geohistoric trajectories of. . . regions” (497). In other words, I pay particular attention to the relations between the broader social movements happening across Kurdistan, the relationships these social movements have to their occupying states and other states in the world-system, as well as the historical context in which the movements for autonomy happened within. Along with giving analytical attention to the multiplicity of forces and accumulated antagonisms that led to the divergence in outcomes between the KRG and Rojava conjunctural analysis also gives us key insights into the possible lines of emergence for the exilic actors in Rojava (Clarke, 2014).

In order to find the causality of the variation in the political trajectories of Rojava and the KRG primary and secondary historical sources are used. These include ethnographies, written histories, published interviews, and policy reports on the region. This allows for a situating of the cases within their historical, economic, political, social, and geographic contexts and gives us insight on the causal mechanisms that contribute to their divergence.

Case Selection: Why Rojava and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG)?

There are multiple reasons why the KRG and Rojava were chosen over the other Kurdish territories as well as other locales that practice autonomous or separatist politics. First and foremost is the fact that state-collapse in these two regions led to partially autonomous territories. Without the collapse of the occupying state in both Turkey and Iran—Kurdistan’s two other occupying states—Kurdish self-determination is greatly hindered. Along with the potential for Kurdish self-determination due to state collapse are the remarkably similar policies the Ba’ath regimes in both Iraq and Syria had toward their Kurdish populations. Both Iraq and Syria’s Kurdish regions had settler colonial Arabization policies thrust upon them in the 1970s. These policies were aimed at controlling the productive processes within the Kurdish regions as well as giving land in the Kurdish regions to Iraqis and Syrians close to the regime. Also, as will be covered in detail below, when the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK)² was expelled from Turkey in 1980 it was the Kurdish regions of Syria and

Iraq that hosted the expatriated militants. After hosting the PKK for almost two decades the PKK was expelled from both Iraq and Syria in 1998.

Along with the similar state-level relations of force that the Kurdish populations interacted with in Iraq and Syria is the similarities of the culture, language, and identity that is prominent across Kurdistan. This helps to control for any cultural or linguistic factors that may have explanatory power when doing the comparison. For this reason, the two areas in the larger geographic entity Kurdistan were chosen rather than examining other partially autonomous and independent ethnic regions in the world-system.

The political makeup of the post-state-collapse Kurdish regions also contributed to the motivation of the case selection. Rojava's exilic politics are rooted in high-intensity democracy, collectivism, environmentalism, anti-racism, and feminism. According to Cemgil and Hoffman (2015), the goal of the revolutionary economy in Rojava is to "keep surpluses within local communities, maintaining the long-term ecological sustainability of production and democratized access to resources over short-term exhaustion of resources and investor profit." The way in which Rojava practices exilic politics deserves much more analytical attention than can be given here. Briefly, in Rojava the council democracy system extends democratization into just about every aspect of social life. Democracy is extended to the economy by managing resources through councils, communities, and cooperatives. Meaning the economy "is communal rather than statist or private" (Knapp et al., 2016: 42). Aside from the distribution of resources the democratic council system creates democratized ways to organize healthcare (health assemblies), the justice system (peace committees), and education (political academies). Thus, Rojava can be classified as "exit-with-autonomy." Meaning they practice cooperative and non-hierarchical exilic politics and economics (Grubačić and O'Hearn, 2016).

On the other hand, the KRGs autonomous politics are rooted in developmentalism, foreign capital investment, oil export, and neoliberalism. This has led to a nepotistic economy where members of the two ruling parties and Peshmerga fighters³ receive monthly allotments while other segments of the Kurdish population have fallen on hard times. Along with the deprivation of the Kurdish working class there has been a massive influx of migrant workers from Bangladesh and the Philippines. According to one account they are "treated practically as slaves, they are poorly paid and even sexually exploited" (Knapp et al., 2016: xxviii). Thus, the KRG can be classified as "autonomy-without-exit." Meaning, the KRG practices ethnic self-governance, but still corresponds to the broader hierarchical logics of the capitalist world-system (Grubačić and O'Hearn, 2016). Despite having similar historical contexts, the two cases have vastly divergent outcomes making them prime candidates for comparative-historical analysis (Skocpol and Somers, 1980).

For the purpose of this comparison an investigation into structural exilic politics over a relatively large and recognizable territory is taken up rather than an analysis of geographic exilic politics. Structural escape is defined as cracks in the world-system where groups can practice direct democracy and mutual aid. Geographic escape is defined as existence within remote regions such as mountains and steppes that are separate from the state and the capitalist mode of production (Grubačić and O'Hearn, 2016). In other words, this paper is interested in studying exilic politics that sets up parallel structures of governance and production on a relatively large scale across a continuous swath of territory that interacts with the world-system in a meaningful way. Grubačić and O'Hearn (2016) state that many actors practicing exilic politics combine the use of geographic and structural escape in setting up their exilic community. This study is interested only in structural escape over a relatively large and recognizable territory.

The reason for this is two-fold. First, within the region of Kurdistan located within Iraq the PKK practices a type of mixed structural and geographic exilic politics in the upward of 650 mountain villages they control outside the surveillance of the KRG (Wahab, 2017). This type of exilic

politics is practiced throughout all of Kurdistan by the PKK and their affiliates. Therefore, if the investigation was interested in all types of exilic spaces the case selection based on two regions of Kurdistan contained within the national borders of Iraq and Syria would be distorted. Along with this is the relative lack of recognition geographically exilic politics gain in the world-system. As Wallerstein (2004) points out, many regions in the world-system have claimed autonomy, but without mutual recognition this proclamation is relatively meaningless. Only in Rojava has there been a significant recognition by global civil society as well as local rebel militias of the proclaimed autonomy. Therefore, the definition of exilic politics for the purpose of this paper is narrowed to a politics that intends to set up structures of governance and production within a relatively large and defined territory recognized, at least partially, by a significant number of regional and global actors. This of course is not a perfect definition, as exilic spaces are always partial and precarious and the line between recognition and non-recognition is at times blurred.

One important asymmetry in the cases that is not included as a causal difference in the divergent outcomes must be pointed out at this point. The oil reserves in Rojava and the KRG are vastly unequal. Estimates put the amount of oil in the KRG between 30 and 60 billion barrels making it the eighth largest oil holder in the world (Khorshid, 2014; Ünver, 2016). According to the United States Energy Information Administration (2015), Syria has 2.5 billion barrels of oil under its ground. 50-60% of Syria's oil production comes from the Cizîrê region in Rojava (Cemgil and Hoffman, 2015). By this estimate Rojava has between 1.25 and 1.5 billion barrels of oil under its ground. Although there is an inadequacy in oil reserves, in 2010, before the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, Shell was producing 90,000 barrels of oil per day from the Cizîrê region in Rojava (Lebsky, 2016; Potiker, 2019). The corporate interest in Rojava's oil coupled with the fact that the United States has repeatedly tried to shift power in Rojava to the regions affiliate of the KRGs ruling party—the Kurdish National Council (ENKS), a political party much more likely to export oil to the United States (Burç and Oveysi, 2019)—is the reasoning behind not including the unequal oil resources as a causal mechanism in the divergence of political outcomes. In other words, securing access to oil has an obvious role in geopolitical strategy, but oil interests both in terms of extraction and logistics are present in both regions despite the unequal quantities of the reserves. However, due to the fact the KRG is able to sustain payments to military and bureaucratic officials through revenue from oil, it is important to the maintenance of the government there and thus may be a tangential reason as to why the PKK has not been successful in the territory controlled by the KRG.

Because this paper is interested in the potential of exilic politics to create and sustain an exilic space Rojava is used as a primary or positive case. In other words, Rojava is a case of partially successful exilic politics to gain territorial continuity and international recognition. The KRG is then used as a secondary or negative case. Meaning, the KRG is used as a case of the failure of exilic politics to gain territorial continuity and international recognition. With this in mind I now turn to the historical context in which the social movements in Kurdistan took shape.

The Historical Context of Kurdistan's Social Movements

Starting in the 16th century the Kurdish population had negotiated autonomy with the Ottoman Empire. The Kurdish population lived in the borderlands of the Empire and were given their autonomy in exchange for serving as defense units. This formal autonomy as negotiated with the Ottoman Empire was structured through the Bitlisî policies (Klein, 2011; Ünver, 2016). The Bitlisî policies fell apart following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. France and England were victorious in World War I and a series of agreements to divide the remaining pieces of Ottoman territory were made between these geopolitical powers. The Sykes-Picot agreement (1916) divided large parts of

Kurdistan between the United Kingdom and France as part of their spheres of influence (Ünver, 2016). Four years later, the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) was signed. In the Treaty of Lausanne Turkey relinquished its claims to the remaining pieces of the Ottoman Empire. The treaty “failed to mention Kurdistan, resulting in a lack of formal recognition within the nation-state system” (Potiker, 2019: 79). The result of the treaty of Lausanne was the formal recognition of the French and English mandate territories of Syria and Iraq respectively as well as the formal borders drawn around Iran and Turkey. After the treaty of Lausanne was agreed upon by the colonial world powers and the regional state actors, Kurdistan was formally split between the formerly recognized nation-states of Turkey (Bakur), Iran (Rojhilat), Syria (Rojava), and Iraq (Başur).⁴

Since the breakdown of the partial autonomy granted by the Bitlisi policies there have been a plethora of variegated freedom struggles carried out by Kurdish social movement actors. In recent years two movements have not only been active in Kurdistan, but partially succeeded. In 1992 a nationalist movement established a partially autonomous territory known as the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Başur. With help from the United States the KRGs two dominant political parties—the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan Party (PUK)—secured “autonomy-without-exit” within the formal borders of Iraq. In Rojava an exilic social movement headed by the Democratic Union Party (PYD)—a sister party to the PKK—secured “exit-with-autonomy” within the formal borders of Syria during the Syrian Civil War. The following sections detail the historical conjunctures in which these two regions in Kurdistan gained partial autonomy and why the political trajectories diverged.

Rojava: Exit-With-Autonomy

In order to understand how the exilic space came to be in Rojava following the 2012 Rojava Revolution the historical processes that shaped it must be understood. As mentioned above Kurdistan was not given statehood in the series of treaties that divided up the Middle East following World War I. From that point forward a plethora of nationalist anti-colonial parties emerged across Kurdistan. One of these anti-colonial parties was the PKK. The origins of the PKK can be traced to a meeting of six activists in the mountains of Bakur in 1973, but officially the PKK was founded in 1978 as a Marxist-Leninist national liberation party. The original aim of the PKK was to gain recognition as a nation-state in Bakur (Knapp et al., 2016). In the PKKs vision, once the Kurdish state was established through waging guerrilla warfare on Turkey the next phase was to bring about a classless society (Yarkin, 2015).

The PKKs original strategy of waging guerrilla war within the formalized borders of Turkey to establish a nation-state as well as its socialist party politics made it natural allies with the Soviet Bloc during the Cold War. Turkey was a NATO member and was allied with the United States and the Western European powers. In Iraq and Syria the Ba’ath Party—a Pan-Arabist political organization connected to tricontinentalism—had taken control of the state machinery. Although the Ba’ath regime in both Iraq and Syria had a history of Kurdish repression within their own nation-states the broader Soviet Bloc politics aligned the PKK, although tacitly, with the Pan-Arabist movement now in power.

In 1980 there was a *coup d’état* in Turkey led by the Turkish National Security Council. The *coup d’état* resulted in the military government in Turkey ushering in martial law. The military government banned communist organizing, trade unions, and evoked Kemalism, which declared all national identities other than Turkish to be illegitimate. Kemalism not only does not recognize the existence of Kurdish people, but also criminalizes Kurdish cultural practices. Beyond the criminalization of being Kurdish, communism was also criminalized. The combination of these factors as well as an incursion by the military government of Turkey into the Kurdish areas

in order to kill and detain PKK activists led many PKK members to flee Turkey in the early 1980s (Knapp et al., 2016).

Due to the tacit alliance the PKK had with the Ba'ath regime they were able to flee into Rojava and Başur.⁵ Many of the PKK activists fled to Rojava due to the historically porous border between Turkey and Syria, although the PKK does have a large presence in the Qandil Mountains in Northern Başur. Among these activists that fled to Rojava was the PKK's intellectual leader Abdullah Öcalan. Öcalan would spend nearly 20 years in Rojava until the geopolitical situation in the Middle East changed.

In Syria the Ba'ath regime repressed and jailed many Kurdish activists, but the PKK was careful to not antagonize their safe haven as they continued to organize their quest for national self-determination in Bakur. This tacit loyalty bargain held for many years as the PKK continued their struggle against Turkey while largely living in the border towns of Rojava (Knapp et al., 2016).

Due to the weakening of the Soviet Union in the latter part of the 20th century and its ultimate collapse in 1991 the geopolitics in the region began to change. The Ba'ath regimes were no longer tied to the PKK through Soviet Bloc politics. In 1998 the loyalty bargain between the PKK and the Ba'ath regime in Syria broke down due to Syria signing the Adana Agreement with Turkey. One of the stipulations in the Adana Agreement was that the Ba'ath regime agreed to expel the PKK from within the borders of Syria.

When Öcalan left Syria to seek asylum in post-apartheid South Africa due to his expulsion he was intercepted and imprisoned. He has spent over 20 years in prison where he has written extensively on his theory for a democratic society. Öcalan's theory—democratic confederalism—is at the core of Rojava's exilic politics. According to Öcalan (2017) the “nation-state. . . is the national governor of the worldwide capitalist system, a vassal of capitalist modernity which is more deeply entangled in the dominant structures of capital than we tend to assume: It is a colony for capital” (35). His image is displayed on the sleeves of the uniforms of the armed unit of the movement—the People's Protection Unit (YPG) and Women's Protection Unit (YPJ). He serves as a martyr, a guide, and a protagonist to the story of Rojava. According to an ethnography on Rojava done by Knapp et al. (2016), one thing they were often told was “you mustn't forget, the head of the PKK lived here for twenty years. . . . His work shaped the way we think” (63).

Although the PKK was expelled from the formal borders of Syria in 1998 a system of underground political education had already been set up in 1993. In 1995 the PKK adopted as their official platform Öcalan's theory of democratic confederalism (Öcalan, 2017)—a type of exilic politics that aims to set up an alternative to the world-system through exit rather than participation in the world-system through the gaining of state power—and began propagating this through their political academies.

This political education planted the seeds of the revolutionary movement and in 2003 the next generation of activists practicing exilic politics in Rojava started a fugitive democratic council system under their new organization—the PYD (Knapp et al., 2016; Schmidinger, 2018). These activists formed the PYD due to the PKK being banned in Syria as well as the PKK being considered an international terrorist organization. The PYD like the post-ideological transformation PKK no longer sought national self-determination, but instead exilic autonomy. The PYD differed from the early PKK movement activity in that they were no longer solely focused on emancipation in Bakur, but now wanted autonomy in Rojava.

The political academies are still active today and form the veritable backbone of Rojava's exilic politics. The academies “can be established whenever activists and social movements feel necessary, they are oriented toward meeting the basic needs of the broad population, and they are open to everyone, educating activists and all interested people” (Knapp et al., 2016: 181). One of the more remarkable disciplines taught in Rojava's many political academies is the discipline of

Jineolojî. According to Dorşîn Akîf, the head of a women's academy in Rojava, Jineolojî is an attempt to "overcome women's non-existence in history." She continues, "Concepts are produced and reproduced within existing social relations. . . we want to establish a true interpretation of history by looking at the role of women and making women visible in history" (Knapp et al., 2016: 71). Jineolojî is central to overcoming patriarchy which democratic confederalism puts at the forefront of social revolution.

Now that the history of Kurdish organizing and education in Rojava is understood a discussion of the Syrian Civil War and the Rojava Revolution can begin. The collapse of the Syrian state was part of the broader Arab Spring movement in the Middle East (Knapp et al., 2016). Though multiple foreign countries would end up getting involved in the Syrian Civil War, the war was not started by direct intervention of any imperialist nation.⁶ The transfer of power in Rojava was grassroots organized and mostly peaceful. Communities surrounded governmental buildings and *unmade* the state by negotiating bureaucrats and military officials representing Syria in Rojava out of office. The revolution began in the city of Kobane at 1 a.m. on 19 July 2012 when activists occupied state buildings and told Syrian officials that if they lay down their monopoly on the use of force their security would be guaranteed (Knapp et al., 2016). The officials seeing no other option, due in part to the broader onset of the Syrian Civil War, were compelled to turn governance over to the up to that point fugitive democratic confederalist system already operating in large swaths of Rojava. The armed unit of the movement, the YPG and the YPJ, were also already using political voice by protecting these democratic confederalist structures. After Kobane and by extension the canton of Kobanî came under control of the PYD the cantons Cizîrê and Afrîn followed. Only in Cizîrê did fighting break out where several people lost their lives. After the main cities in Rojava transferred power the pattern continued in town after town. Only the city of Qaşmîlo, where the international airport in Rojava is located, remained under the Ba'ath regimes control (Knapp et al., 2016).⁷

During the Syrian Civil War, the communities in Rojava and the militias they govern have had to either use political voice or make temporary loyalty bargains with both non-state and state actors in order to maintain their exilic status. The self-proclaimed Islamic State was the biggest existential threat for the majority of the war. In 2014 Rojava pushed the Islamic State out of the city of Kobane with little to no help from international state actors.⁸ Instead of loyalty with an international state actor, Rojava used political voice or what is called in the movement "self-defense." Self-defense entails the YPG and YPJ protecting the communities in Rojava from incursion by extra-territorial actors. Following the military victory in Kobane the actors in Rojava made a loyalty bargain with a group of actors known as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and by affiliation also made a tacit loyalty bargain with the United States. This was done out of strategic necessity as Rojava is surrounded by hostile actors. The movement actors in Rojava are tepid of this loyalty bargain as many of the militants are veterans of the PKK struggle or were educated by veterans of the PKK struggle. The PKK as a former Soviet Bloc political party and a current anti-capitalist organization is wary of the United States as an ally as they know them to be the imperial power in the capitalist world-system. However, with the more immediate existential threat of the Islamic State joining forces with the SDF was a strategic move few would object to.

There are several geopolitical powers involved in the Syrian Civil War. The United States was supporting the SDF and by extension the exilic actors in Rojava, Turkey supports the Free Syrian Army composed of military personnel that defected from the Assad regime, and a coalition of Russia and Iran supports the reinstatement of the Assad regime. Although the PYD made a strategic loyalty bargain with the SDF and by extension the United States they were accused of playing both sides. According to a 2012 Washington Institute for Near East Policy Report, "The PYD is positioning itself to benefit from Assad's likely fall. . . At the same time, by cooperating with Assad, the PKK appears to be aligning itself with the Syria policy espoused by Iran and Russia"

(Cagaptay, 2012). Along with this the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK)—the affiliate to the PYD and PKK in Rojhilat—and Iran ceased hostilities in 2011. The cease fire came as the Rojava Revolution was gaining momentum and is possibly a result of Iran and PJAK realizing the potential gains of an alliance (Cagaptay, 2017; Wahab, 2017). In alliance with Russia, Iran has been on the side of restoring Assad and the Ba’ath regime’s power since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War. However, this does not mean Iran does not see the potential for allying with the exilic community in Rojava. According to a 2017 Washington Institute for Near East Policy report, Iran is interested in using Rojava as part of a land bridge to the Mediterranean (Balanche, 2017).

Recently Turkey invaded and occupied Rojava. The invasion and occupation of Rojava by Turkish forces began in the Afrîn region on 6 March 2018. 18 months later on 6 October 2019, after the United States removed their troops from the region—meaning the loyalty bargain between the PYD and the United States broke down—Turkey invaded the whole of Rojava. Turkey aims to crush the PKK affiliated revolution through occupation and ethnic cleansing. Outside of using political voice or “self-defense” the movement actors in Rojava will now need to find geopolitical backing in the form of a loyalty bargain with other groups if they hope to maintain the scale of their exilic space. Because the borders of Rojava have been militarized by the KRG and Turkey it is difficult for PKK militants and their affiliates as well as members of the international left who want to come fight in the international freedom brigade for Rojava to make it to the front lines. This makes using political voice more difficult (Potiker, 2019). One possible loyalty bargain is with the allied Iranian, Russian, and the Assad regimes. In fact, since the original draft of this paper Russia has begun to mediate negotiations between the exilic project in Rojava and the Assad led Syrian State. Another possible loyalty bargain is with the global civil society and the world’s social movements. Interestingly, Rojava has developed a system of dual sovereignty to negotiate with both sets of actors. The democratic council system that governs Rojava interacts with the world’s social movements while a second structure of power that closely resembles a state has been formed to negotiate in the interstate system.

As can be seen from the history of the Rojava movement loyalty bargains coupled with decreased capacity of a state—whether it is the occupying state, a regional power, or a global power—to repress exilic politics are of significance for the maintenance of the exilic space. In instances in which loyalty bargains are not available political voice or self-defense is used. These two strategies are not mutually exclusive as even when Rojava had loyalty bargains with the SDF and United States they still used political voice in order to defend their communities.

Loyalty bargains and decreased capacity of a state to repress exilic politics are tightly linked because as the capacity for state repression increases loyalty bargains become more necessary. Loyalty bargains are inherently unstable and thus the exilic space in Rojava is precarious. The history of loyalty bargains in Rojava can be broken up into two bargains and two bargain breakdowns. First, the PKK had a loyalty bargain with the Assad regime based on the broader Soviet Bloc politics they were both a part of, as well as an agreement that the PKK would only organize toward self-determination in Bakur. At this point the loyalty bargain with the Assad regime was not enough to ensure an exilic space because the Assad regime still had the capacity to repress its existence in Rojava. The loyalty bargain broke down in 1998 when the Assad regime turned their backs on exilic actors in Rojava. At this point the exilic project was forced underground. In 2011 the Assad regime decreased their capacity to repress the exilic space. A year later the Rojava Revolution occurred. After the Rojava Revolution, in the midst of the Syrian Civil War, a loyalty bargain was not immediately necessary for the maintenance of the exilic space and instead political voice or “self-defense” was used. In 2015, only after sustaining massive loss during the fights against the Islamic State did the PYD decide to make another loyalty bargain. This time with the SDF and by extension the United States. This loyalty bargain broke down on 6 October 2019 when the United

States could not transfer power in Rojava to the ENKS and the Islamic State was no longer an existential threat that both groups shared. Thus, the United States abandoned the Rojava Revolution as many activists feared from the onset of the loyalty bargain.

Now a regional actor—Turkey—is occupying Rojava and the capacity of a state actor to repress the movement has returned. Loyalty bargains become more necessary for exilic spaces as the capacity to repress the exilic space is strengthened. Outside of political voice or “self-defense” by the Kurdish population a new loyalty bargain is needed in order to limit Turkey’s capacity to repress the exilic space. I now turn to an analysis of the KRG in Başur.

The Kurdish Regional Government: Autonomy-Without-Exit

Başur was the first area of Kurdistan to have a nationalist movement. In 1920 tribal elites called for the formation of Kurdistan within the English mandate territory of Iraq. Although the PKK exists within the Qandil Mountains of Northern Başur they were never able to come to prominence within the ecology of nationalist movements in Başur nor have they been able to carve out an internationally recognized exilic space within the KRG. This is in part due to factionalism within the Kurdish independence movement itself and the relative strength of the KDP and PUK in Başur.

The ruling KDP party has a decades-long tension with the PKK. Although the KDP is currently ideologically opposite of the PKK as a conservative, pro-capitalist, and western friendly political party, this was not always the case. The KDP was originally founded in Rojhilat in 1946 as a nationalist anti-colonial party. The party quickly spread to Başur under the guidance of the Barzani family, who still control the party to this day. In the early years of the party after some internal struggles the party claimed a left-nationalist platform, although they did emphasize an inclusive big-tent platform for all ideologies that supported Kurdish self-determination. The party at the time was supported by the Soviet-Union who buttressed the party’s aim of overthrowing the monarchies in Iran and Iraq (McDowall, 1996).

Eventually the party splintered led by two groups of intellectual leaders. Mustafa Barzani led one faction of the KDP and leftist intellectuals Ibrahim Ahmad and Jalal Talabani led the other faction. After the second Kurdish Iraqi War (1975), the Barzani family fled to Rojhilat. Within this power vacuum Jalal Talabani announced the formation of the PUK (McDowall, 1996). Both parties claimed a left-nationalist agenda. Despite this commonality, armed conflict between the two parties proceeded in spurts for the next 22 years. During the majority of this time the PKK remained entirely focused on national liberation within the formal borders of Turkey. Even after the PKK fled Turkey in the early 1980s to both Rojava and Başur the ultimate goal of the PKK was to set up a Kurdish state in Bakur.

In 1994, two years after the KRG gained partial independence, the Kurdish Civil War broke out in Başur. The PKK joined the PUK in their fight against the KDP. Iraq, Turkey, and Iran supported the KDP. In 1998 the ending of the war was arranged by the United States through a peace accord. As part of the agreement both the PUK and KDP agreed to expel the PKK from their territory (Makovsky, 1998). The KDP and the PUK have remained hostile to the PKK to this day.

Along with intra-Kurdish factionalism and relative strength of other Kurdish political organizations debilitating the PKKs ability to successfully set up a relatively large-scale exilic space in the KRG is the nature of state collapse in Iraq. The United States was directly involved in both of the KRGs moves toward self-determination because of its interventionist policies in the First (1990) and Second Gulf Wars (2003). The United States was able to design imperial strategies in the region largely due to the weakening and ultimate collapse of the Soviet Union. This is because the Ba’ath regime was no longer supported by the Soviet Union allowing for an unhindered United States military to intervene in the region. The United States is openly hostile to the PKK because

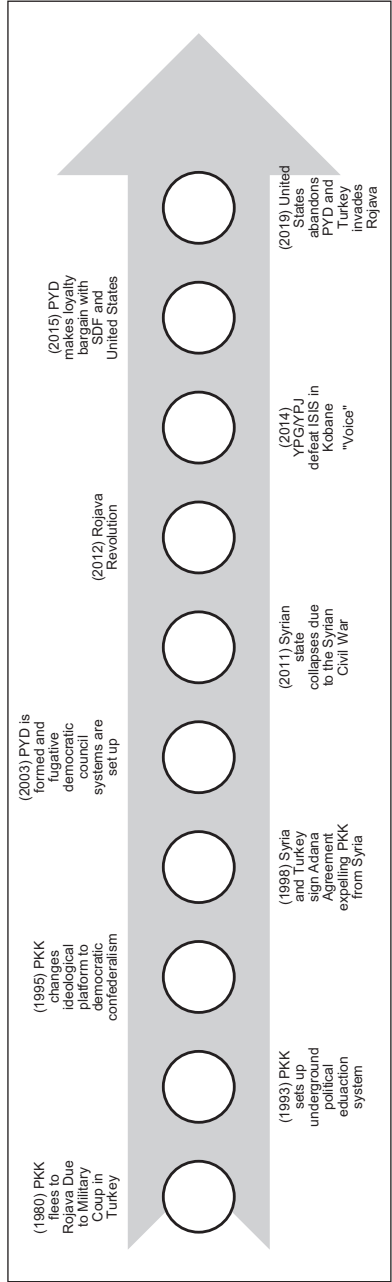


Figure 1. Rojava Timeline.
 Author's illustration of Kurdish social movement history in Rojava.

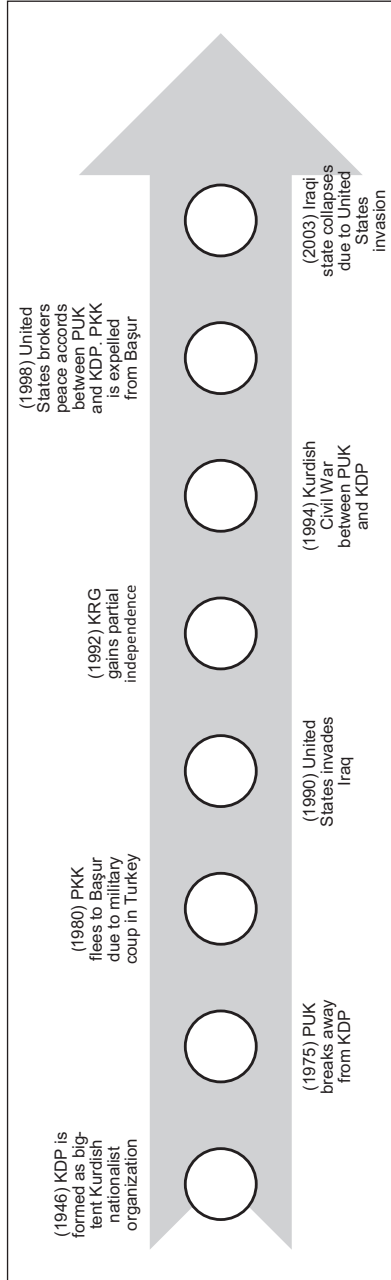


Figure 2. Kurdish Regional Government Timeline.
Author's illustration of Kurdish social movement history in Başur.

of its broadly socialist politics as well as its guerrilla tactics. The United States classifies the PKK as a terrorist organization and does not want a partially autonomous zone to be controlled by the organization. Even in Rojava once the existential threat of the Islamic State lessened the United States attempted to shift power in the region to the ENKS (Burç and Oveysi, 2019), but has done so unsuccessfully thus far. Turkey is also a major sub-imperial power in the region. Since the 1980s the Turkish government has launched cross border raids into the Qandil Mountains of Başur in order to attack the PKK. This stopped briefly when the United States was occupying Iraq but started again in recent years (Park, 2012). Turkey is connected to the KRG through the construction of an oil pipeline and the KRG and Turkish governments have a relatively strong relationship.

Therefore, after the PUK abandoned the PKK when negotiating peace with the KDP the PKK was left without an ally to form any sort of loyalty bargain with in Başur. The Ba'ath regimes sovereignty was limited over the Kurdish region due to the newly granted and internationally recognized autonomous region known as the KRG, although any loyalty with the Ba'ath regime would not have allowed for an exilic space to take hold at a large scale. All the regional actors at the time supported the KDP and thus the PKK was not able to negotiate any kind of loyalty bargain to set up a territorial continuous exilic space within the KRG controlled territory. When the Iraqi state collapsed in 2003, thus limiting its capacity to repress exilic politics within its region, the KRG was already controlling Başur and was openly hostile to the PKK. Along with this is the fact that the United States was consistently occupying Iraq for the next several years which made it next to impossible for the PKK to create a territorially recognized exilic space through using political voice. Thus, in KRG territory there was no potential for a loyalty bargain after the PUK abandoned the PKK nor was there the capacity to use effective political voice. Despite Iraqi state collapse there was always the capacity for state and military actors in the world-system to repress the exilic space.

Conclusion

In this paper the causal mechanisms that led the KRG toward autonomy-without-exit and Rojava toward exit-with-autonomy were analyzed. It was shown why the broader movement for exit from the world-system has temporarily succeeded in Rojava and why it has failed in the KRG. Also, the paper analyzed the possible pathways toward continuing the exilic space in Rojava.

This paper attempted to fill the gaps in the literature on social movements in sociology by analyzing non/anti-state politics. In particular the paper used Williams' (2017) reformulation of political opportunity theory in order to account for political opportunities of exilic spaces (Grubačić and O'Hearn, 2016). The paper also synthesized political opportunity theory with Hirschman's (1970) concept of exit, voice, and loyalty to show how movement actors navigate relations of force at different scales. The paper used an inter-regional conjunctural comparative method in order to give analytic attention to horizontal relations between Kurdish regions, vertical inter-scalar relations between the Kurdish regions and states in the world-system, and the historical specificities that shaped the divergent political trajectories in Kurdistan. The political opportunities that were shown to be most important to the success of exilic politics were the inability for a state in the world-system to repress the exilic space as well as the availability of a powerful ally to the exilic actors. These two political opportunities are often tightly linked. As the state's ability to repress a movement increases so does the need for a loyalty bargain with a powerful ally in order to maintain the exilic space. The ability for an exilic space to use successful political voice is also linked to these political opportunities. When a state has the capacity to repress an exilic space political voice is less tenable. When the exilic space has access to a powerful ally another state will then have less capacity to repress the exilic space.

In Rojava loyalty bargains were available since the 1980 exodus of the PKK from Turkey. First the PKK made a loyalty bargain with the Ba'ath party of Syria in order to organize their national liberation movement oriented toward the Kurdish region of Turkey while living in Rojava. However, this loyalty bargain did not result in an exilic space in Rojava as the Assad regime was still able to repress any territorial autonomy. When this loyalty bargain broke down in 1998 due to the signing of the Adana Agreement the organizing was forced underground.

The inability for a state in the world-system to repress exilic politics in Rojava came in the form of state collapse in Syria in 2011. In 2015, several years after the Syrian state collapsed and the Rojava Revolution began the Syrian affiliate party of the PKK—the PYD—made a loyalty bargain with the SDF and therefore with the United States. Up until the loyalty bargain Rojava made with the SDF and United States, Rojava used political voice during the Syrian Civil War in order to maintain itself as an exilic space. The loyalty bargain with the SDF and the United States broke down several years later as the United States withdrew their support for Rojava and allowed the state of Turkey to intervene in the region. Thus, the ability for a state actor to repress the exilic space returned.

In the KRG no loyalty bargains were readily available to the PKK activists. Once the Kurdish Civil War ended in the Kurdish region of Iraq the PUK abandoned the PKK in favor of aligning themselves in an electoral democratic system with the KDP. At the time all the regional and world powers were not allies of the PKK and supported the KDP. Along with no loyalty bargains being available for the PKK in the KRG the United States was consistent in its interventionist policies and military occupation in Iraq for the better part of 20 years. This made the use of political voice less tenable. Thus, the PKK was forced into the Qandil Mountains of Başur.

Going forward both the PKKs old relationship to the Ba'ath regime and their new relationship with the state of Iran make possible potential loyalty bargains for the project in Rojava. As stated above, Iran has an interest in using Rojava as a land bridge to the Mediterranean and the PYD affiliates in Iran—PJAK—have ceased hostilities with the Iranian government. Russia also recently began mediating negotiations between the Assad led Syrian State and the exilic project in Rojava. Furthermore, with the election of President Joe Biden there has been renewed United States military involvement in Syria. However, because the United States in the past has shown dedication to supporting affiliates of the KDP in Rojava the PYD activists should be skeptical of any loyalty bargain with the United States. How the values of the Rojava movement will be compromised by whatever loyalty bargain they make is unknown, but barring self-defense the existential threat of Turkey may require a new loyalty bargain with a regional or world power. Another potential loyalty bargain is with global civil society and the world's social movements. If activists from around the world can put enough pressure on world and regional powers the Turkish invasion and occupation of Rojava could potentially be hindered.

Acknowledgements

I am thankful to Yousuf Al-Bulushi, Charles C. Ragin, and David A. Smith for their comments in the process of writing this paper. Thank you to the participants of the Core/Periphery Relations Roundtable sponsored by the Political Economy of the World-Systems section at the 2020 American Sociological Association Conference for your thoughtful comments and feedback. Thank you to the Kugelman Center for Citizen Peacebuilding at the University of California, Irvine for supporting this research. Finally, thank you to *Critical Sociology* editor, David Fasenfest and to the reviewers for their helpful comments.

Funding

This article disclosed the receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was supported by the Kugelman Center for Citizen Peacebuilding at the University of California, Irvine.

ORCID iD

Spencer Louis Potiker  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9089-9157>

Notes

1. Orientalism here refers to a constructed depiction of the Middle East made by the Western/United States media.
2. Refer to appendix A for a glossary of political party abbreviations.
3. Peshmerga fighters are the military unit of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG).
4. These names are the Kurdish names for the region. I will from here on use the Kurdish names when discussing these regions. At times Başur will be recognized as the KRG, as this is where the KRG is located.
5. At this historical moment the KRG had not yet been established.
6. Although it may be argued that the civil war was escalated by regime collapse in neighboring Iraq as a result of intervention by the United States.
7. This was most likely more of a strategic move than an inability to take the city. Because Rojava is not recognized by the interstate system they are unable to operate an international airport (Potiker, 2019).
8. They did have help from international civil society as many militant communists and anarchists from around the world rushed to the aid of the Kurdish population of Rojava and their nascent political project.

References

- Balanche F (2017) Rojava Seeks to Break Out in Syria. Report, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 12.
- Burç R and Oveysi F (2019) Rojava is Under Existential Threat. *Jacobin*, February 22.
- Cagaptay S (2012) Syria and Turkey: The PKK Dimension. Report, *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, April 5.
- Cagaptay S (2017) Reaching a U.S.-Turkish Deal in Syria: Four Steps. Report, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 12.
- Cemgil C and Hoffman C (2016) The 'Rojava Revolution' in Syrian Kurdistan: A Model of Development for the Middle East? *Institute of Development Studies Bulletin* 47(3): 53–75.
- Clarke J (2014) Conjunctures, crises, and cultures. *Focaal* 70: 113–122.
- Foran J (2005) *Taking Power: On the Origins of Third World Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gramsci A (1971) The Modern Prince. In: Hoare Q and Smith GW (eds) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York, NY: International Publishers, 123–205.
- Grosfoguel R (2006) World-Systems Analysis in the Context of Transmodernity, Border Thinking, and Global Coloniality. *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 29(2): 167–187.
- Grubačić A and O'Hearn D (2016) *Living at the Edges of Capitalism: Adventures in Exile and Mutual Aid*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Gurr T (1970) *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hirschman A (1970) *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Khorshid R (2014) Kurdistan Regional Government's Foreign Policy Post-2003: A Strategic Relational Analysis. M.A. Thesis, Department of Politics, University of Tampere.
- Klein J (2011) *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zones*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Knapp M, Flach A and Ayboğa E (2016) *Revolution in Rojava: Democratic Autonomy and Women's Liberation in Syrian Kurdistan*. London: Pluto Press.
- Lebsky M (2016) The Economy of Rojava. In: Cooperation in Mesopotamia. Available at: <https://mesopotamia.coop/the-economy-of-rojava/> (March 17, 2016).
- Leitner H and Sheppard E (2020) Towards an epistemology for conjunctural inter-urban comparison. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 13: 491–508.

- Lynd S and Grubačić A (2008) *Wobblies and Zapatistas: Conversations on Anarchism, Marxism and Radical History*. Oakland, CA: PM Press.
- Makovsky A (1998) Kurdish Agreement Signals New U.S. Commitment. *Report, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, September 29.
- McAdam D (1996) Conceptual origins, current problems, future directions. In: McAdam D, McCarthy JD and Zald MN (eds) *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunity, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 23–40.
- McAdam D, Tarrow S and Tilly C (2001) *Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McCarthy JD and Zald MN (1977) Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory. *American Journal of Sociology* 82(2): 478–499.
- McDowall D (1996) *A Modern History of the Kurds*. New York, NY: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd.
- Meyer DS (2004) Protest and Political Opportunities. *Annual Review of Sociology* 30: 125–145.
- Moore B Jr (1966) *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Öcalan A (2017) *The Political Thought of Abdulla Öcalan*. London: Pluto Press.
- Park B (2012) Turkey, the US and the KRG: moving Parts and the Geopolitical Realities. *Insight Turkey* 3: 109–125.
- Potiker SL (2019) Obstacles to Insurrection: Militarised Border Crossings Hindering the Rojava Liberation Struggle. *Anarchist Studies* 27(2): 77–102.
- Robinson CJ (1980) *The Terms of Order: Political Science and the Myth of Leadership*. Chapel Hill, NC: University North Carolina Press.
- Robinson CJ (1983) *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Chapel Hill, NC: University North Carolina Press.
- Schmidinger T (2018) *Rojava: Revolution, War, and the Future of Syria's Kurds*. London: Pluto Press.
- Scott JC (2009) *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Skocpol T (1979) *States and Social Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Skocpol T and Somers M (1980) The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22(2): 174–197.
- Tilly C (1978) *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- United States Energy Information Administration (2015) Syria: International energy and data analysis. Available at: https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries_long/Syria/syria.pdf www.eia.gov/beta/international/country.php?iso=SYR, (June 24, 2015).
- Ünver AK (2016) Schrödinger's Kurds: Transnational Kurdish Geopolitics In The Age Of Shifting Borders. *Journal of International Affairs* 69(2): 65–98.
- Wahab B (2017) Iran's Warming Relations with the PKK Could Destabilize the KRG. *Report, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, February 6.
- Wallerstein I (2004) *World-Systems Perspective: An Introduction*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Williams DM (2017) *Black Flags and Social Movements: A Sociological Analysis of Movement Anarchism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Yarkin G (2015) The ideological transformation of the PKK regarding the political economy of the Kurdish region in Turkey. *Kurdish Studies* 3(1): 26–46.
- Zibechi R (2010) *Dispersing Power: Social Movements as Anti-State Forces*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Zibechi R (2012) *Territories in Resistance: A Cartography of Latin American Social Movements*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.

Appendix A. Glossary of Abbreviations.

Abbreviation	Name	Location	Exit-With-Autonomy/ Autonomy-Without-Exit
ENKS	Kurdish National Council	Rojava	Autonomy-Without-Exit
KDP	Kurdish Democratic Party	Başur	Autonomy-Without-Exit
KRG	Kurdish Regional Government	Başur	Autonomy-Without-Exit
PJAK	Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan	Rojhilat	Exit-With-Autonomy
PKK	Kurdish Workers Party	Bakur (Pan-Kurdish)	Exit-With-Autonomy
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan	Başur	Autonomy-Without-Exit
PYD	Democratic Union Party	Rojava	Exit-With-Autonomy
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces	Syria	Variegated Politics
YPG	People's Protection Unit	Rojava	Exit-With-Autonomy
YPJ	Women's Protection Unit	Rojava	Exit-With-Autonomy