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JINEOLOGY: KURDISH “FEMINISM” IN THE DOCTRINE OF DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALISM AND THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF THE DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION OF NORTHERN SYRIA (ROJAVA)¹

Abstract

There can be no doubt that among many problems of the Middle East inadequate status of women is of paramount importance. It might come as a surprise, then, that the most radical doctrine of feminine emancipation was formulated by the Kurdish socialist freedom movement from Turkey and is being implemented in war-torn Syria in the *de facto* autonomy called the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, better known as “Rojava”. The doctrine is named jineology (in Kurdish *jineoloji*) and constitutes one of three pillars of democratic confederalism (together with libertarian democratic socialism and ecologism), the ideology of Abdullah Öcalan. Apo, as he is called, proposed a socialist revolution that would include women’s liberation and would take place in human hearts and minds rather than on the battlefields. First, the system of education needs to accept progressive methods and contents. Second, women ought to become active participants in the political, social, and economic life, especially in order to marginalize the state through creation of a multi-level self-government. Third, they need to be able to defend themselves (also physically) against men, nations-states waging wars, industrialists, and capitalists. The theoretical foundation of these changes is

¹ The date of text validity is 1st July 2018.

referred to as jineology, understood as a discipline belonging to social sciences, similar to gender studies. These are the ideals that are being implemented in Rojava and manifested in the Social Contract, the constitution of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria.

KEYWORDS

feminism, jineology, Kurdistan, Rojava, democratic confederalism, Öcalan, Middle East, Syria

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feminizm, dzineologia, Kurdystan, Rożawa, demokratyczny konfederalizm, Öcalan, Bliski Wschód, Syria

1. INTRODUCTION: WOMEN AND THE REVOLUTION IN ROJAVA

There is no doubt that among many problems haunting the Middle East, which include ethnic and sectarian tensions, permanent deficit of democracy and violation of human rights, inadequate status of women is of paramount importance. Inequality or, strictly speaking, blatant discrimination takes place in three aspects: law and politics, economy, culture and ideology (including religion), affecting both public and private spheres of social life. Certainly, a solution for the region is yet to be found and whilst the search continues many concepts are proposed. One of them is jineology (in Kurdish *jineolî*), the so-called “Kurdish feminism”, and foundation of a doctrine called “democratic confederalism”, conceived by the controversial leader of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party², Abdullah Öcalan. *Prima facie* it might come as a surprise that Kurdish liberation movement in Turkey promotes and stresses emancipation of women. As history of Kurdish people is marked by centuries-long political dependence, constraint and oppression, one would expect any party to address conservative communities in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran with irredentism instead of a gender-oriented program. And yet, as Öcalan claimed, “the solutions for all social problems in the Middle East should have woman’s position as focus”³. Apo⁴, as Öcalan is

² In Kurdish *Partiya Karkeren Kurdistanê, PKK*.

³ A. Öcalan, *Liberating life: Woman’s revolution*, Cologne 2013, p. 52.

⁴ NB “Apo” is both a diminutive of the name Abdullah and the Kurdish (Kurmanji) word meaning “uncle” or “guardian”. Such denomination underlines the guidance of Öcalan, whose ideology and leadership are to bring back freedom and welfare to Kurdistan (the concept relies

called by his followers (the “apoists”), accentuates not “freedom for all”, but “freedom for everyone”⁵.

Up to the late 1990s PKK remained a stereotypical communist national-liberation movement. Freedom of the Kurds was to be gained through the popular revolution. The party appealed to the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism⁶ and primarily concentrated on actions of terror or even regular war with the Turkish army in South Anatolia⁷. After decades of heavy fighting with obvious violations of the international humanitarian law on both sides, Turkish secret service finally managed to capture Öcalan in 1999 (on the run in Kenya). Shortly afterwards, the Kurdish leader was sentenced to death in a trial that – according to the European Court of Human Rights – did not meet basic standards of due process and violated the European Convention on Human Rights⁸, however, due to the negotiation process of the Turkish access to the European Union, the capital punishment was later converted into life imprisonment. He has been kept in solitary confinement in a special high-security prison on the İmralı island ever since and PKK is still almost universally considered to be a terrorist organization⁹. Chances of re prosecution are illusory¹⁰.

both on socialist and Middle East cults of personality). While political doctrine of Öcalan is called “democratic confederalism”, his political program and movement are referred to as “apoism”.

⁵ On Rojava, which adopted apoism and supposedly strives for a political alternative as the solution for the Middle East, see e.g. A. Hosseini, *The spirit of the spiritless situation: The significance of Rojava as an alternative model of political development in the context of the Middle East*, “Journal of Socialist Theory” 2016, Vol. 44, No. 3, pp. 253–265.

⁶ E.g. Party Program of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), http://apa.online.free.fr/imprimersans.php?id_article=746 (accessed 1.07.2018).

⁷ See A. Marcus, *Blood and belief: The PKK and the Kurdish fight for independence*, New York, London 2017, *passim*; D. McDowall, *A modern history of the Kurds*, London, New York 2007, p. 420 *et seqq.*; A.K. Özcan, *Turkey's Kurds: A theoretical analysis of the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan*, London, New York 2006, *passim*; M. van Bruinessen, *Between guerrilla war and political murder: The Workers' Party of Kurdistan*, “Middle East Report” 1988, No. 153, pp. 40–50; E.J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A modern history*, London, New York 1994, p. 312 *et seqq.*

⁸ As stated in the Judgment of the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights made on 12.05.2005 in the case Öcalan v. Turkey (App. No. 46221/99), Art. 3, Art. 5 para 3, Art. 5 para 4, Art. 6 para 1, Art. 6 para 1 taken together with Art. 6 para 3 (b) and (c) of the European Convention on Human Rights (i.e. clauses on imposition of the death penalty following an unfair trial; right to have lawfulness of detention decided speedily by a court; freedom from unlawful deprivation of liberty; right to be brought promptly before a judge; right to a fair trial) were violated.

⁹ See Decision of the Council of the European Union (CFSP) No. 2017/1426 of 4 August 2017 updating the list of persons, groups and entities subject to Art. 2, 3 and 4 of Common Position 2001/931/CFSP on the application of specific measures to combat terrorism, and repealing Decision (CFSP) No. 2017/154 (O.J. L 204/95); R. McHugh, *Öcalan, Abdullah (1948–)*, (in:) G. Martin (ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, Thousand Oaks 2011, p. 439; K. Yildiz, P. Breau, *Terrorism, the law of armed conflicts and the PKK*, (in:) K. Yildiz, P. Breau (eds.), *The Kurdish conflict: International humanitarian law and post-conflict mechanisms*, London, New York 2010, pp. 139–165.

¹⁰ See A. Marcus, *op.cit.*, p. 296.

Öcalan's stay in prison inspired him to question his legacy and revise his views. Almost overnight, he appealed for a peaceful resolution of the Kurdish-Turkish conflict. Apo engaged in self-criticism, cutting himself off from the ideology and methods of operation of the PKK¹¹. Soon, he published a new manifesto – “Declaration of democratic confederalism in Kurdistan”¹², in which he preached libertarian socialism and stateless grassroots organization. The new doctrine of democratic confederalism is based on several foundations: criticism of the nation state, participatory democracy, ethnic and religious tolerance, a concept of confederalization of the Middle East, social economy (cooperativism), social ecology (neither deep nor shallow ecology), and gender equality. This philosophy is openly inspired by the communalism (communitarianism, libertarian municipalism) of the somewhat forgotten American eco-anarchist, Murray Bookchin¹³. Thus, the doctrine of democratic confederalism presents itself as a libertarian socialism based on the neo-Marxism¹⁴, ecologism and, finally, feminism. The abolition of gender discrimination is rudimentary for all apoists. Statism, nationalism, capitalism, environmental degradation and patriarchalism are integral elements of the so-called capitalist modernity, yet another paradigm in history of exploitation. It is impossible, therefore, to liberate Kurdistan without bringing freedom to women¹⁵.

Öcalan proposed to implement his doctrine by engaging in independent self-government structures (democratic confederalism as a constitutional form) and reforming the culture (democratic autonomy as a way of life). Instead

¹¹ A. Öcalan, *Prison writings*, Vol. I, *The PKK and the Kurdish question in the 21st century*, London 2011, p. 44 *et seqq.*, p. 54 *et seqq.*, p. 64 *et seqq.*, *passim*; *Idem*, *War and peace in Kurdistan: Perspectives for a political solution of the Kurdish question*, Cologne 2009, p. 28 *et seqq.*; *Idem*, *Democratic nation*, Cologne 2016, p. 63 *et seqq.* Cf. M. Leezenberg, *The ambiguities of democratic autonomy: The Kurdish movement in Turkey and Rojava*, “Southeast European and Black Sea Studies” 2016, Vol. 16, No. 4, p. 676.

¹² A. Öcalan, *Declaration on the democratic solution of the Kurdish question*, Neuss 1999. In fact, it was a series of short essays attached to the letter of appeal sent to the European Court of Human Rights (as evidence of the peaceful and democratic views of the convict).

¹³ However, apoist concepts are also influenced by the writings of i.a. Antonio Gramsci, Leon Trotsky, Immanuel Wallerstein, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Karl Popper, Michel Foucault, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Erich Fromm, Fernand Braudel, André G. Frank; and in case of emancipation of women and anthropology – of Friedrich Engels, Vere Gordon Childe, Judith Butler, and Seyla Benhabib. See A. Öcalan, *Democratic nation...*, *passim*; *Idem*, *Democratic confederalism*, Cologne 2011, *passim*; *Idem*, *The political thought of Abdullah Öcalan: Kurdistan, woman's revolution and democratic confederalism*, London 2017, *passim*; *Idem*, *Manifesto for a democratic civilization*, Vol. I, *Civilization: The age of masked gods and disguised kings*, Cologne, Porsgrunn 2015, *passim*; *Idem*, *Manifesto o the democratic civilization*, Vol. II, *Capitalism: The age of unmasked gods and naked kings*, Cologne, Porsgrunn 2017, *passim*.

¹⁴ It rejects orthodox Marxism with its rough and obsolete concept of class struggle and determinism, instead paying attention to the problems of free will, exclusion and inequality.

¹⁵ *Idem*, *Democratic nation...*, p. 10 *et seqq.*; *Idem*, *Manifesto for a democratic civilization*, Vol. I..., p. 23.

of a bloody revolution, he opted for a change in human minds and hearts. Similarly, the new aim for the Kurdish people was not a formal sovereignty within the political system of nation states, but everyday liberties regardless of existing borders. Social education, socialization of economy, pro-environment action and democratization of every aspect of human life (from family, through commune, to judiciary) with its multi-level self-administration of various ethnic, religious, and social components were to lead to the destruction of democratic modernity. The doctrine and its various programs are being developed and realized in all-Kurdish apolitical (and thus tied to PKK) umbrella organizations such as Kurdish National Congress (KNC or KNK¹⁶) and Kurdistan Communities Union (KCU or KCK¹⁷)¹⁸.

Democratic confederalism is currently being realized in a place which is seemingly the least suited for implementation of feminism – war-torn Syria. The entity which adopted the doctrine is called Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS) and widely known as “Rojava” (i.e. West Kurdistan¹⁹). It is a *de facto*²⁰ autonomy in the North and East of Syria established in 2012 (however, proclaimed in 2014²¹) as a result of the withdrawal of most of the Syrian forces to the south of the country and almost non-violent disarmament of the remaining rest (the so-called “Revolution in Rojava”). It consists of three regions: Afrin (in Kurdish *Efrîne*), which from early 2018 has been occupied by Turkish army and its affiliated Islamist guerrilla groups; Euphrates (in Kurdish *Fîratê*); and Jazeera (in Kurdish *Cizîrê*)²². In the East of Syria a few provinces liberated from the so-called Islamic State are affiliated with the DFNS, although are not part of its structures, thus constituting the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.

The autonomy is accepted, or at least seems to be supported, not only by Kurds, but also by non-Kurdish and non-Muslim inhabitants (i.e. Arabs, Syrians,

¹⁶ In Kurdish *Kongreya Neteweyî ya Kurdistanê, KNK*.

¹⁷ In Kurdish *Koma Civakên Kurdistan, KCK*.

¹⁸ See e.g. A.H. Akkaya, J. Jongerden, *Reassembling the political: The PKK and the project of radical democracy*, “European Journal of Turkish Studies”, <http://ejts.revues.org/4615>, (accessed 30.09.2018); J. Jongerden, *The Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK): Radical democracy and the right to self-determination beyond the nation state*, (in:) G. Stansfield, M. Shareef (eds.), *The Kurdish question revisited*, London 2018, pp. 245–257.

¹⁹ In Kurmanji (Northern Kurdish) *Rojava* and *Rojavayê Kurdistanê*, respectively.

²⁰ The DFNS has not yet received the international recognition, and its representation was not invited to the previous peace talks in Geneva between the participants of the Syrian Civil War, however, as a non-state actor it is an entity of the international law bound by the norms of the international humanitarian law and – mostly through its military representatives and as a combatant – maintains quasi-diplomatic relations with various states (including Syrian Arab Republic, French Republic, and United States of America).

²¹ Charter of the Social Contract, (in:) Under Kurdish Rule. Abuses in PYD-run enclaves of Syria, Human Rights Watch Report, Washington 2014, pp. 54–75.

²² Regions were previously called “cantons” as the Federation was loosely modelled on the Swiss system of governance.

Assyrians, Turkmen, Yazidis), as it protects them from the so-called Islamic State (ISIL). The DNFS has been the decisive force in combating the fundamentalists, and for this reason is (or at least used to be) supported by the US-led international coalition against ISIL (especially the United States of America and French Republic). On the other hand, it has rather ambiguous relations with the Syrian Arab Republic and is violently opposed by the Republic of Turkey, which perceives the Kurdish governing party PYD (Democratic Union Party)²³ and its military forces (gender-mixed) YPG²⁴ and (female) YPJ²⁵ as directly tied to PKK and thus posing a terrorist threat to its security. In December 2018 President Recep Erdoğan announced a plan for an imminent invasion on the rest of the DFNS's territory²⁶. If it comes into existence, the peculiar experiment in socialist-democratic self-government and the emancipation of women, would be abruptly ended, as it already happened in invaded Afrin.

Despite the lack of political stability and a certain provisional nature of the system of governance²⁷, Democratic Federation of Northern Syria deserves our attention. First, it is one of the most daring (because of its radicalism and unfavorable circumstances) attempts to realize libertarian socialism. Second, its law and politics seem worth of an analysis. From 2012 the multi-layer structure of self-government has been established, which allows for ethno-federalism, territorial self-government and self-administration of various ethnic, religious, and social components. On the regional and federal level these structures were supplemented by republicanism of committee system of government. The Social Contract²⁸, i.e. the constitution of Rojava, is one of few attempts within the Middle East constitutionalism at unique, free from the colonial legal legacy, statebuilding.

Of course, the political regime of the DFNS still requires a conscientious research by officers of international organizations and political scientists in order to assess its legitimacy and to verify whether democracy, social economy and social ecology were implemented. So far Rojava is a subject of an information warfare: it is advocated by the socialist and anarchist movements and apolitical propagandists (in Kurdistan and around the world)²⁹, while being condemned by

²³ In Kurdish *Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, PYD*.

²⁴ In Kurdish *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, YPG*, ‘People’s Protection Units’.

²⁵ In Kurdish *Yekîneyên Parastina Jin, YPJ*, ‘Women’s Protection Units’.

²⁶ B. McKernan, M. Chulov, *Turkey primed to start offensive against US-backed Kurds in Syria*, “The Guardian”, [theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/12/turkey-primed-to-start-offensive-against-us-backed-kurds-in-syria](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/12/turkey-primed-to-start-offensive-against-us-backed-kurds-in-syria) (accessed 15.12.2018).

²⁷ DFNS declares itself to be a future autonomous region of the yet-to-be democratic and federal Syria.

²⁸ Social Contract of the Democratic Federalism of Northern Syria, vvanwilgenburg.blogspot.com/2017/03/social-contract-of-democratic (accessed 1.06.2018).

²⁹ E.g. J. Biehl, *Impressions of Rojava: A report from the Revolution*, “Roar Magazine”, <https://roarmag.org/essays/janet-biehl-report-rojava> (accessed 10.09.2018); J. Biehl, (in:) Z. Omrani, J. Biehl, *Thoughts on Rojava: An interview with Janet Biehl*, “Roar Magazine”, <https://roarmag.org/>

Turkey and Turkish-affiliated sources³⁰. The so-called “engaged academics” are also divided³¹ and only a handful of partial reports by United Nations³² or NGOs such as Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch³³ exist. It seems safe to say that Rojava is an anocracy (a hybrid regime), where political rights are limited, while most of the other human rights are protected. One thing is certain, though. Rojava Revolution was a feminine revolution and democratic confederalism is a doctrine that stands behind this liberation³⁴.

2. JINEOLOGY AS PART OF THE DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALISM

It seems clear for Abdullah Öcalan that women are discriminated against. The weak position of women in the Middle East, very often including their

essays/janet-biehl-interview (accessed 10.9.201); D. Graeber, P. Öğünç, *No. This is a genuine revolution*, Znet, <https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/no-this-is-a-genuine-revolution> (accessed 10.09.2018); C. Ross, *The Kurds' democratic experiment*, “The New York Times” 30.09.2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/09/30/opinion/the-kurds-democratic-experiment.html (accessed 2.07.2018).

³⁰ More on this subject: M. Tax, *Droga w nieznane. Kurdyjki walczące z tak zwanym państwem islamskim*, Warszawa 2017, p. 303 *et seqq.*

³¹ E.g. M. Knapp, A. Flach, E. Ayboğa, *Revolution in Rojava: Democratic autonomy and women's liberation in Syrian Kurdistan*, London 2016, p. 61 *et seqq.*; J. Jongerden, *Governing Kurdistan: Self-administration in the Kurdistan regional government in Iraq and the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria*, “Ethnopolitics” 2018, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 61–75; Cf. A. Baczko, G. Dorronsoro, A. Quesnay, *Civil war in Syria: Mobilization and competing social orders*, Cambridge, New York 2017, p. 169 *et seqq.*; E. Savelsberg, *The Syrian-Kurdish movements: Obstacles rather than driving forces for democratization*, (in:) D. Romano, M. Gurses (eds.), *Conflict, democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria*, New York 2014, p. 85 *et seqq.*

³² Between a rock and a hard place: Civilians in North-Western Syria, Monthly Human Rights Digest, June 2018, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of the Human Rights Report, *passim*.

³³ E.g. Under Kurdish Rule. Abuses in PYD-run Enclaves of Syria, Human Rights Watch Report, Washington 2014, *passim*; M. Ekman (ed.), *Syria 2017*, International Legal Assistance Consortium Report, Solna 2017, *passim*; R. Khalaf, *Governing Rojava layers of legitimacy in Syria*, Chatham House Report, London 2016, *passim*; We had nowhere else to go. Forced displacement and demolitions in Northern Syria, Amnesty International Report, London 2015, *passim*.

³⁴ See e.g. C. Ross, *The most feminist revolution the world has ever witnessed*, “Vice Magazine”, www.vice.com/en_uk/article/43dmgm/the-most-feminist-revolution-the-world-has-ever-witnessed (accessed 2.07.2018); M. Knapp, A. Flach, E. Ayboğa, *op. cit.*, p. 61 *et seqq.*; D. Dirik, *Women's autonomy and self-defense in Rojava/Northern Syria*, lecture given at the Conference “Democratic Confederalism: Developments and Perspectives of Autonomous Experiences in Rojava/Northern Syria” in Bolzano, 21 April 2017; C.R. Isik, *Kurdish women struggle for a next system in Rojava*, The Next System, <https://thenextsystem.org/kurdish-women-struggle-for-a-next-system-in-rojava-kurdistan-northern-syria> (accessed 10.09.2018).

unequal legal status or domestic violence, supports the thesis of universal subjugation. Even if Kurds have for many years displayed a relatively liberal disposition in this regard – say the apoists³⁵ – one should not take it as an expression of a conviction, but rather as a symptom of social realism. It was the adaptation to rough conditions that made Kurds treat their women relatively better than other Muslim communities. What is more, Kurdish women are discriminated against on two levels: because of their gender and of their ethnic origin. Thus, their experience is unique and cannot be equated with the experience of others, especially white women from the West. In other words, we are dealing here with just another case of intersectionality of discrimination, as specified in case of the American critical theory i.a. by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw.

This contention is confirmed by ethnological and sociological studies (e.g. Polish academics Leszek Dzięgiel³⁶ and Adrianna Maško³⁷). The state of constant threat and mobilization, in which Kurdish tribes have been living for centuries (difficult living conditions in high mountains, armed conflicts – first internal and later external) caused Kurdish women to take over many functions traditionally reserved for men. As a result, they were less disadvantaged compared to other Muslim communities, even in case of customs, family relations or lifestyle (especially in the cities). Even centuries ago it was not uncommon that women led Kurdish tribes during a war or at least played a substantial role in war-time politics, starting with a princess (Mir) Xanzad in the Emirate of Soran (16th century) and Kara Fatima Khanum ("Black Lady Fatima"), a chieftain of a Marash tribe fighting in a Crimean War along her male co-tribesmen and Lady Adela Khanum (1847–1924), the ruler of the Jaf tribe and Halabja province³⁸.

Even today many women often engage in partisan activity in Turkey, Syria or Iran (especially in PKK or PKK-related formations) and even in a regular political activity. Apart from Rojava, whose extraordinary system is a breakthrough for all Kurdish communities, contemporary Kurdish women engaged in the public

³⁵ D. Dirik, *Jaki Kurdystan dla kobiet?*, (in:) N. Petros (ed.), *W stronę demokracji bezpieczeństwa. Podstawy ideologiczne ruchu kurdyjskiego w Turcji oraz Autonomii Rojavy*, Zielonka 2015, p. 57 *et seq.*; A. Öcalan, *Liberating...*, p. 40 *et seq.*; Manal Hussein, (in:) T. Schmidinger, *Rojava: Revolution, war, and the future of Syria's Kurds*, London 2018, pp. 164–166; Asya Abdullah, *ibidem*, pp. 210–213.

³⁶ See L. Dzięgiel, *Węzeł kurdyjski*, Kraków 1992, pp. 183, 318 *et seq.*

³⁷ A. Maško, *Wolna i waleczna – kobieta kurdyjska między mitem a rzeczywistym losem*, "Przegląd Narodowościowy" [Review of Nationalities] 2012, Vol. 1, pp. 147–170.

³⁸ See M. von Bruinessen, *From Adela Khanum to Leyla Zana: Women as political leaders in Kurdish history*, (in:) S. Mojab (ed.), *Women of a non-state nation: The Kurds*, Costa Mesa 2001, pp. 95–112; S. Mojab, *Women in Iraqi Kurdistan*, (in:) W. Giles, J. Hyndman (eds.), *Sites of violence: Gender and conflict zones*, Berkeley 2004, pp. 108–133; *Eadem*, *The solitude of the stateless: Kurdish women at the margins of feminist knowledge*, (in:) S. Mojab (ed.), *Women of a non-state nation: The Kurds*, Costa Mesa 2001, pp. 1–22; K. Mukriyani, *The political situation of Kurdish women in the South of Kurdistan in the 20th century*, (in:) A. Abbas, P. Siwiec (eds.), *Kurdowie i Kurdystan iracki na przełomie XX i XXI wieku*, Poznań 2009, pp. 39–46.

sphere include politician Leyla Zana in Turkey (awarded Sakharov Prize by the European Parliament in 1995 for her struggle for democracy) and Hero Ibrahim Ahmed Talabani, the former First Lady of Iraq, the wife of late President Jalal Talabani and a well-known public figure in the region. Still, the activity of these women was rather an effect of a higher necessity and not a conscious rejection of even a partial cultural displacement. There is no doubt that except for the Northern Syria, the status of Kurdish women is yet to be elevated.

However, in a deeper sense, the problem of gender inequality applies to all humanity. Certainly, democratic confederalism would not be worth our interest as a feminist or quasi-feminist doctrine if it were limited to a few sociological observations on the status of women in the nation at the other end of the world. The assessment of the surrounding reality led Abdullah Öcalan to consider anthropology, and historiosophy, in which he followed the balance of power between the rulers and the ruled, the exploiters and the exploited, man and nature, as well as men and women. At first, says Öcalan, life took place in small communities in harmony with nature, which the communalists call a “natural society”. Their order was based on the principles of solidarity with equal redistribution and decisions were made democratically with the participation of all inhabitants. Tribes did not resemble today’s families: private relationships had not yet evolved, and children were treated as common. The lack of private property excluded stratification caused by the division of labor and uneven distribution of resources. People were free and equal, supporting each other and living in peace. It was the so-called “primitive socialism”. What is more, the culture was built around women, whose position was strengthened by the figure of mother (giver of life) and the cult of a goddess (it was matricentric while not matriarchal). This order existed for thousands of years, shaping the social nature of people. To this day, says Öcalan, our image of paradise is a reminiscence of that world and is rooted in the subconscious³⁹.

However, during the Neolithic revolution the processes of social hierarchization and institutionalization of economic exploitation and political power took place. These phenomena completely changed the civilizations of the Fertile Crescent. First, a class of priests and political leaders, living off from a surplus of peasants’ production was formed. Second, the matricentric culture was transformed into patriarchic (as a result of a tension between the male and female lifestyles: hunting-armed guardianship vs. gathering-cultivation). Third, urbanization associated with the privatization of property happened. As a result, the first states with their social stratification, ideology and dominant religions emerged. They perpetuated obedience and used the law to enforce it⁴⁰.

³⁹ A. Öcalan, *Liberating...*, p. 14.

⁴⁰ *Idem*, *Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization*, Vol. I..., p. 34 et seq., 98 et seq.

The described processes led to the establishment of a hegemony. Because the first male rulers owed their position to their aggression (necessary to kill animals and repel assailants), the political power became more and more oppressive, belligerent and greedy. Equality and solidarity were abolished, while society was subjugated to elites (first to kings and priests, and later to politicians, capitalists, and intellectuals). Furthermore, in the patriarchy the structure of power was recreated in family, where man dominated his wife and children. He exercised his authority over relatives and used them to multiply his possessions and social influence. In the first instance, he forced the wife to take over a household and to do unpaid work for “his” estate and “his” sons, while withdrawing from a public and intellectual life. Hence, the “domestication” of women was nothing more than the oldest form of exploitation. Men, just as socialist feminists believe, became the first *bourgeois* and women – the first proletariat⁴¹.

The new hierarchy was symbolized by a ziggurat situated in the center of a city. Ziggurats in the ancient Mesopotamia were pyramid-like structures performing functions of a temple, a palace and a granary. At their top, it was assumed, lived a god, below resided priests and rulers, while the lower levels were occupied by soldiers and, on the ground floor, merchants and officials, who made their money and exercised their power. Thus, ziggurats focused all the attributes of a state: hierarchy, force, administrative power, ideological influence, and economic exploitation. And there is no coincidence, that within their walls, literal objectification of women took place also (as Öcalan blatantly wrote: “these were the first brothels”⁴²). Hence, domination was quadruple: ideological, political, economic, and sexual⁴³.

Therefore, for Öcalan, the loss of freedom began thousands of years ago in Sumner. The social disjuncture has dominated the society for thousands of years, for all later cultures drew on these patterns, duplicating the dominance and perpetuating the objectification of classes, women, and the environment⁴⁴. In the writings of Apo, the whole contemporary civilization is personified by a figure of a brutal male, driven by the need for domination over nature and other people, especially women (the so-called rape culture)⁴⁵. The mechanisms

⁴¹ *Idem*, *Liberating...*, p. 46 et seqq.; *Idem*, *Democratic nation...*, p. 39 et seqq.; B. Erzincan, *Women and self-defense*, Komun Academy, <https://komun-academy.com/2018/06/28/self-defense-in-the-kurdish-womens-movement> (accessed 10.09.2018).

⁴² A. Öcalan, *Manifesto for a democratic civilization*, Vol. I..., p. 104.

⁴³ *Idem*, *Liberating...*, pp. 9–10, 13, 16 et seqq.; *Idem*, *Manifesto for a democratic civilization*, Vol. I..., p. 98 et seqq., 103–104.

⁴⁴ *Idem*, *Liberating...*, p. 9 et seqq.; *Idem*, *Manifesto for a democratic civilization*, Vol. I, p. 116; D. Dirik, *Witch, slut, murderer: Shaming and other tools of patriarchy*, Komun Academy, <https://komun-academy.com/2018/06/28/witch-slut-murderer-shaming-and-other-tools-of-patriarchy> (accessed 12.08.2018).

⁴⁵ A. Öcalan, *Liberating...*, p. 49 et seqq.

of subjugation and repression are, therefore, universal. Discrimination reproduces statism, nationalism, capitalism, industrialism, and social conservatism⁴⁶.

By creating his own anthropological theory, Abdullah Öcalan (clearly inspired in this aspect by Samuel N. Kramer, Henri Frankfort, Friedrich Engels and Vere G. Childe) elevated the problem of the status of women. Since the objectification is directly related to the subjugation of humanity, a true revolution must assume not only the abolition of an oppressive state, but also the feminine liberation. There can be no free Kurdistan without free Kurdish women. The new socialist-democratic autonomy is to be the vanguard of progress in this respect, demanding not to create a Kurdish state with its own government, but the independent self-government of all ethnic and religious communities and social components of Kurdistan, including women. Thus, Öcalan treated women as the driving force of the revolution. In this regard the brotherhood (within the triad of liberty-equality-brotherhood) shall be replaced with sisterhood of mothers and daughters fighting the capitalist modernity shoulder to shoulder with their husbands and fathers⁴⁷.

Consequently, gender emancipation is one of the four pillars of democratic confederalism (along with democratism, socialism, and environmentalism). The theory standing behind this aim is jineology (in Kurdish *jineolojî*, the neologism made from the Kurdish words: *jîn*, meaning ‘woman’, and *lojî*, a derivative from Greek *logos*, meaning i.a. ‘knowledge’ and ‘order’)⁴⁸. Drawing from the critical theory and the New Left, the apoists propose new culture, with its own political and economic system, ethics and esthetics. Above all, the new dimension of citizenship is to be created. Feminine liberty must be realized, giving women the right to self-determination and self-identification, and thus, the choice of a social role and lifestyle. Since the new principles of the new society are personal liberation, equality and solidarity, instead of a formal equality between the genders, jineology stands for a material one that allows for the equality of persons. Gender, in contrast to sex, is only a social construct, and so – since it became an instrument of discrimination – it must be overcome. The concepts of “weak gender”, “woman’s work” or “feminine role” arose only to culturally institutionalize the subjugation and do not result from actual conditions⁴⁹.

Yet, establishing the idea of emancipation as a substantial part of a political philosophy is one thing, and developing a consistent program for its realization is another. Every political doctrine, as we know, must combine both theoretical concepts and practical prescriptions regarding the distribution of power, especially as it comes to the system of governance and the law. Democratic confederalism

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 39 *et seqq.* See also M. Knapp, A. Flach, E. Ayboğa, *op. cit.*, p. 62 *et seqq.*

⁴⁷ D. Dirik, *Jaki Kurdystan...*, p. 56; A. Öcalan, *Liberating...*, *passim*.

⁴⁸ See Z. Diyar, *What is Jineoloji?*, Komun Academy, <https://komun-academy.com/2018/06/27/what-is-jineoloji> (accessed 12.09.2018).

⁴⁹ A. Öcalan, *Liberating...*, p. 11 *et seqq.*

believes that the liberation of women is necessarily of an integral character, i.e. it is realized either in all aspects or not realized at all, because the subordination of women is hidden in the very ideas of state, private property, and conservative social structures. The existing social marginalization and internal alienation should be replaced by an inclusive society and self-fulfillment of individuals.

Therefore, according to Öcalan, the democratic revolution requires deconstruction of all social institutions, in particular the family. If relations are to be based on mutual recognition and partnership, the patriarchal family and the higher levels of kinship structures, as for example clans, must give way to egalitarian civil society. In conditions of universal equality and solidarity, even the classical models of friendship, love or parenthood are no longer valid. No man should be the property of another, neither in a form of a legal, social and economic subjugation of wives to their husbands, nor as an emotional entanglement. True freedom is only possible if we overcome our feelings and needs (e.g. the desire to have *one's own* husband, father, lover, brother, friend or son), as they enslave us. “The deepest love constitutes the most dangerous bonds of ownership. We will not be able to discern the characteristics of a free woman if we cannot conduct a stringent critique of the thought, religious and art patterns concerning woman generated by the male dominated world”, wrote Apo⁵⁰. Hence, a true revolutionary does not allow herself to experience personal passions or devotion, or even to favor her own offspring⁵¹.

Instead of a family, a commune shall become the basic cell of a social structure. Certainly, it leads to a subordination of the private sphere to the public, but that is exactly why it is complementary with the socialist-radical republican postulate of a total democratization of life. The existence of a traditional organic family, difficult to penetrate by social factors, would be a threat to the apoist project. Democratic confederalism is in line here with findings of the Second Wave Feminism (famous slogan *the personal is political*): autonomy in the private sphere may lead to re-enslave women or to perpetuation of the patterns of subjugation. The relationship between sexism and power is, after all, based on reproductive domination in the family. Until the whole society is rebuild, the abandonment of personal ties is to be required only from the active revolutionaries – fighters (NB celibacy is especially advisable if fathers are to send their daughters to partisan troops stationing in mountains⁵²) and party members. It should be also

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 37 *et seqq.*; *Idem*, *Manifesto for a democratic civilization*, Vol. I..., p. 68; *Idem*, *Democratic nation...*, pp. 42–44.

⁵² For some time breaking this rule was in PKK punished by the death penalty and, interestingly, it did not apply to Öcalan himself who set-up the party with his wife, Kesire Yıldırım. See A. Marcus, *op. cit.*, p. 43 *et seqq.*, 196 *et seqq.*; H. Manna, *Öcalanism: Ideological construction and practice*, Geneve 2017, p. 29. It is worth noting, though, that at first the women in PKK were discriminated against. The party resembled many other communist liberation movements in Asia and Africa, which declared feminine equality and emancipation, but used female members for their

emphasized that this radicalism is not shared by many apoists and since the revision of his views, even Apo himself has not stressed it.

Nonetheless, the substantial factual differences between a man and a woman cannot be thoughtlessly ignored. Revised apoism does not question the existence of sexes but only of gender discrimination. What is more, Öcalan believed that women have an ethical advantage over man, as they benefit from a more developed emotional intelligence, empathy, and sympathy. They live in harmony with nature⁵³. Their existence focused around cooperation, creation and life, while men (the “dominant males”) tend towards rivalry, destruction and war (the so-called *welatparêzî* principle)⁵⁴. Men should follow women in this regard and kill the masculinity hidden within their unconscious that drives them to aggression, rape and exploitation⁵⁵. Thus, a new man would arise: the “natural man”, who lives in solidarity with his fellow compatriots and in symbiosis with the environment⁵⁶. Equality does not exclude diversity, and a man is not necessarily the enemy of a woman⁵⁷.

Society shall be transformed on three levels, with a use of persuasion and resetting cultural patterns rather than an actual fight. It is to be a revolution in human hearts and minds. First, a broad educational program aimed at reversing the existing stereotypes and re-creation of customs shall be introduced. The new curriculum, taught through the critical pedagogy (as in e.g. Paulo Freire theory, which allows for the questioning of an authority, critical thinking and humanizing a pupil⁵⁸) in free schools at all levels (primary schools, ideological academies, vocational courses, universities) accessible for men and women equally, shall establish the society based on unbiased social knowledge⁵⁹. Second, educational efforts shall be supplemented by a net of civil society organizations (associations, foundations, unions), assisting women in their efforts to realize their full

own political causes (e.g. in suicide bombings) and for strengthening male leadership. The slow improvement of this situation in the apoist movement took place only in the 1990s – on the one hand due to the revision of the program by Öcalan, and on the other due to the actual (unintended) self-empowerment of women.

⁵³ *Make Rojava green again*, London 2018, p. 36 *et seqq.*

⁵⁴ The bond between a woman and life is inherent and is expressed by the very kinship of words *jin* ‘a woman’ and *jiyan* ‘life’.

⁵⁵ As Asya Abdullah, the former Co-chairperson of the Democratic Union Party (the governing party in the DFNS) and one of the most influential officials in Rojava, said: “If women don’t participate in politics, there will be wars, because men wage wars and do not take decisions for peace. For that reason, feminism isn’t just a movement for the protection of women’s rights, but much more than that” (T. Schmidinger, *op. cit.*, p. 212).

⁵⁶ The process of such purification has been referred to by apoists as the “eternal divorce”, *Introduction to jineoloji*, Neuss 2018, p. 41.

⁵⁷ A. Öcalan, *Liberating...*, p. 54; *Idem*, *Democratic nation...*, p. 44.

⁵⁸ See P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, New York, London 2005, p. 40 *et seqq.*; *Idem*, *Education for critical consciousness*, New York, London 2005, p. 19 *et seqq.*

⁵⁹ *Introduction to jineoloji...*, p. 77 *et seqq.*

potential, providing help to those in need (e.g. supporting single mothers after a divorce, setting-up feminine cooperatives) and representing them in public life (e.g. lobbying in local, regional, and federal legislatures)⁶⁰. These entities would procure women with resources and an institutional prop necessary for coordination of their political efforts and taking responsibility for their own fate. Self-organization of women shall be based on the principles of self-administration, democracy, equality, and female solidarity. Thus, women’s status derives from their ability to socialize.

The third element of the emancipationist strategy would be the consistent inclusion of women in political life: in the institutions of direct democracy and military formations⁶¹. Jineology, therefore, is not limited to the criticism of patriarchalism and the demand for the transformation of culture, but it calls for the creation of a new system of government that would include, represent, and protect women. Only in authentic, i.e. participatory and pluralist, democracy it is possible to empower women⁶². Hence, it is not enough to reconstruct only social institutions. The political system and law must also be reformed. To achieve it formal legal equality in civic and criminal law is crucial. Moreover, one might even need to introduce legislation on positive discrimination in a form of a parity in collegiate bodies or support feminine efforts in economy and culture. Hence, full citizenship would be restored to women and their cause interlinked with the confederalist order.

And finally, women – as well as a whole society and every person – shall defend their status and existence. It is a law of nature that each living organism is capable of. It has a moral ground in deterring an aggressor – either physically or politically (in case of humans who lead a social life). This ability and moral title are the basis for the theory of the rose: woman, with her natural disposition and fragile constitution, is as a rose, however, even this beautiful flower has thorns which allow it to scare off, or even hurt, anyone who dares to touch it. Hence, women should be armed with a sense of self-worth and knowledge (jineology as a discipline is a weapon in this sense) and should be prepared (trained and motivated) to engage in a combat necessary for their protection against aggressors⁶³. Therefore, even though the revolution is to take place in human minds, one cannot ignore the material aspect of the struggle. Mixed or separate female militia and

⁶⁰ See e.g. G. Örmek, *Women’s cooperatives as an alternative model*, (in:) *Network for an Alternative Quest: Challenging capitalist modernity alternative concepts and the Kurdish quest*, Bonn 2012, pp. 207–211.

⁶¹ A. Öcalan, *Liberating...*, p. 55 et seqq.; G. Acconcia, *Kurdish commander Rangin: International coalition against Isis only in words*, (in:) S. Putinja, *The women combatants of Rojava*, http://www.academia.edu/29274417/The_Women_Combatants_of_Rojava (accessed 24.08.2018); D. Dirik, *List z Kurdystanu*, “Inny Świat. Kwartalnik Anarchistyczny” 2015, No. 1, p. 19; K. Pavičić-Ivelja, *The Rojava revolution: Women’s liberation as an answer to the Kurdish question*, “West Croatian History Journal” 2016, No. 11, p. 138 et seqq.

⁶² A. Öcalan, *Liberating...*, p. 50, 54 et seqq.

⁶³ *Introduction to jineoloji...*, p. 102.

military formations are not only instruments of political representation and emancipation, but also a safeguard of a physical security in the very basic sense.

3. JINEOLOGY AS A DISCIPLINE

As already explained, jineology as a doctrine is the theoretical foundation of the reconstruction of the political system, the law and the mores. The very essence of this change, however, is to be made through the revision of the existing paradigm – the narrative adopted in politics and culture. Hence, jineology becomes something more than a mere doctrine. It is a “philosophy of liberation” and a “sociology of freedom”, a “science itself”⁶⁴. In other words, it is also an interdisciplinary field of humanities, which addresses the issue of women’s position in society, culture and law⁶⁵.

Jineology is founded upon the belief that the current paradigm is detached from the society and true knowledge. Modern politics, culture and science have been used as a tool of subversion, serving interests of the ruling classes (against the exploited), males (against females) and men (against nature). They have provided the “truths”, rationales needed for legitimization of exploitation and sexism. In addition, women have been eliminated from science – both as researchers and as a subject of research⁶⁶. Positivism and scientism, the whole Enlightenment modernist project, are to be rejected then, as they have contributed to the cultural hegemony we now perceive⁶⁷. Jineology identifies and criticizes patterns of discrimination, because only after the deconstruction is completed, a creation of a new paradigm, based on solidarity and equality of sexes, will be possible⁶⁸.

At another level, jineology is not a criticism, but knowledge that has been lost to women and hidden by centuries-long distortion of consciousness. Women need to retrieve it, to become aware of their role in society and nature, to start actively re-shaping the order. As Zilan Diyar wrote: “Jineoloji is a river finding its own way. The ideas of every woman, her study, the data she finds, the secrets her mother whispers in her ear, the power of interpretation, these are all drops

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 76 et seqq.

⁶⁵ A. Öcalan, *Liberating...*, p. 57 et seqq.; *Introduction to jineoloji...*, p. 7 et seqq.

⁶⁶ Therefore, democratic confederalism is also suspicious of universities and research establishments financed by a state and intends to replace them with its own academics. On jineology as a separate subject course taught at the University of Rojava see *Jineoloji Faculty*, jineoloji.org/en/jineoloji-faculty (accessed 12.08.2018).

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 15 et seqq.

⁶⁸ G. Kaya, *Why jineology? Re-constructing the sciences towards a communal and free life*, (in:) R. In der Maur, J. Staal (eds.), *Stateless democracy. The New World Academy Reader*, Utrecht 2016, p. 83 et seqq.; *Introduction to jineoloji...*, p. 12 et seqq.

that strengthen the flow of this river. Its most beautiful aspect is its spontaneous enlightenment of social blindness”⁶⁹.

The true science relates to and includes all social groups. It addresses their problems, devotes attention to them and takes their perspectives into account. Hence, in methodology jineology adopts a holistic perspective, rejecting the simple reductionism of the subject-object division⁷⁰. Not only many perspectives, but also of various disciplines (linguistics, history or herstory, sociology, archeology, economics, medicine, political science, philosophy, sociology, and even theology) are to be included. The true knowledge, it must be emphasized, is therefore intersubjective: it connects particular truths of individuals, classes, genders, communities. This approach is proper to the 20th-century ideology of difference and critical theory, questioning the existence of objective truth and abstract categories. Therefore, in many regards jineology resembles gender studies. Unlike them, however, it adopts the perspective relevant to the Middle East. It may speak *in abstracto* about universal phenomena, engage in activities in Europe and Russia⁷¹, and even call for the internationalist feminist direct action⁷², but still, it’s main base is the Kurdish “women’s freedom struggle”.

Through deconstruction of the misleadingly objective modernist paradigm, the new ethics, science and aesthetics shall be construed and thus – a beautiful and fair to women life achieved⁷³. For Apo there is no doubt that this is crucial and possible. As he wrote: “Woman’s success is the success of society and the individual at all levels. The 21st century must be the era of awakening; the era of the liberated, emancipated woman. This is more important than class or national liberation. The era of democratic civilization shall be the one when woman rises and succeeds fully”⁷⁴.

4. JINEOLOGY AS PART OF THE POLITICAL AND LEGAL SYSTEM OF DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION OF NORTHERN SYRIA

The political and legal system of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria – at least *de iure* – corresponds with the doctrine of democratic confederalism,

⁶⁹ Z. Diyar, *op. cit.*

⁷⁰ A. Öcalan, *Manifesto of the democratic civilization*, Vol. II..., pp. 25–26; *Idem*, *The seeker of truth*, (in: T.J. Miley, D. Venturini (eds.), *Your freedom and mine: Abdullah Öcalan and the Kurdish question in Erdogan’s Turkey*, Montreal, Chicago, London 2018, pp. 309–316.

⁷¹ See *Introduction to jineoloji...*, p. 10.

⁷² D. Dirik, *Women’s internationalism against global patriarchy*, “Roar Magazine” 2018, No. 8, <https://roarmag.org/magazine/womens-internationalism-global-patriarchy> (accessed 20.09.2018).

⁷³ A. Öcalan, *Liberating...*, p. 54 *et seqq.*; *Introduction to Jineoloji...*, *passim*.

⁷⁴ A. Öcalan, *Liberating...*, p. 58.

including jineology. The fundamental act of law of the autonomy is the already mentioned Social Contract (SC), which is a constitutional proposition for the (whole) democratized and federalized Syria of the future and, at the same time, the already binding act of the highest law in Rojava. Art. 2 of the SC states *expressis verbis* that women's freedom is, alongside democratism and environmentalism, one of the pillars of the order. The other values that allow the system to take its proper shape are: freedom, equality, solidarity, security of women, welfare of nature, and the dignity of the individual. Moreover, the universal declarations of human rights and international law of human rights are recognized as a source of the law in the DFNS⁷⁵.

Consequently, the important principles of DFNS are the principle of federalism, the principle of democratic society, the principle of equality, the principle of social justice, the principle of social economy, and the principle of ecological society. Although most of them are related to the status of women, the principle of equality is the most relevant in this context. In DFNS it includes three components: 1. equality before the law (formal equality of every person), which is also the basis of anti-discrimination and emancipation policies in relation to women and minorities, 2. civic equality (political equality), connected to the principle of a democratic society and the participatory nature of the system, and 3. equality of opportunities and social security, connected to the principle of social justice. This results in the rejection of all stratification and hierarchization, especially based on gender. According to Art. 13 of the SC, the legislature is obliged to adopt laws necessary for the protection of rights and liberties of women and gender equality, while the systemic directive for all public authorities is non-discrimination (Art. 11 SC). Moreover, every person, regardless of gender, should be provided with equal access to offices, education, healthcare or work. The principle of equality does not exclude, however, the positive discrimination and affirmative action taken towards groups previously disadvantaged. Social justice, as well as the principle of equality *per se* (in its material aspect), require that special provisions are introduced in order to ensure full and universal participation in public life. Since discrimination has been systemic, it is assumed that the system must be used to neutralize it. This applies in particular to the women and youth.

This approach is very broad, concerns all areas of life, both public and private (the non-discrimination provision applies also horizontally), political, social or

⁷⁵ The SC refers to this catalogue four times: in the Preamble and in Art. 68 para 4 (a guideline), in Art. 17 (a value and a principle), and in Art. 54 para 4 (a source of fundamental rights). It also refers to universal human rights, not to "human rights" recognized by the law of Islam as in e.g. Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam adopted in Cairo on 5 August 1990, <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/instree/cairodeclaration.html> (accessed 10.09.2018) or in Arab Charter on Human Rights by the Council of the League of Arab States on 22 May 2004, <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/instree/loas2005.html?msource=UNWDEC19001&tr=y&auid=3337655> (accessed 10.09.2018) that cannot be reconciled with the universal human rights (e.g. because of the unequal treatment of women).

cultural. Even the family in the DFNS is to be democratic and egalitarian, i.e. – as 14 of the CS states – based on the voluntary participation and partnership of its members. Consequently, each spouse of age makes an autonomous and independent decision to conclude or terminate marriage (institutions of lay marriage, divorce, judicial separation and social security for female divorcees have been introduced). Arranged, forced and child marriages are forbidden, while polygamy is accepted only if a given family was set-up prior to the establishment of the new laws. Sexual and domestic violence, not to mention the so-called honor killings, are criminalized and severely punished.

Women in the DFNS enjoy full electoral rights (active and passive). In all collegial organs of public authorities, but also in social organizations and in political parties, each gender is represented by at least 40% of members. In governing bodies, the *hevserok* or *hevserokatî* (dual leadership) rule applies, which ensure that each body is headed by a man and a woman, preferably from different social segments (thus, there are co-spokespersons in ministerial departments, co-presidents in regional and federal governments, co-chairmen in committees and councils, co-chairmen in political parties, and even co-chairmen in cooperatives etc.).⁷⁶ These principles are valid at all levels of direct self-government and representative democratic government. Gender pluralism is a directive also in the democratized justice system, where 40% representation applies in peace (conciliation) committees (pre-court ADR measure set-up in each commune) and justice councils (collectivized people's courts). As a result, the system of governance allows for equal representation of men and women, one of the elements of social division of power in Rojava⁷⁷. What is more, the all-women (i.e. run only by women) feminine (i.e. devoted to affairs involving women and family) bodies in legislatures⁷⁸, organs of executive power⁷⁹ and judiciary⁸⁰ were established. In addition, parallel all-women structures, similar to all organs, legislative, executive and judiciary powers exist, however, they function merely as advisory boards and have no formal authority (sort-of “feminine shadow cabinet”)⁸¹.

⁷⁶ On the organization of the local self-government and representational government in the DFNS see T. Schmidinger, *op. cit.*, p. 129 *et seqq.*; M. Knapp, A. Flach, E. Ayboğa, *op. cit.*, p. 84 *et seqq.*

⁷⁷ See M. Ekman (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 119; M. Knapp, A. Flach, E. Ayboğa, *op. cit.*, p. 164 *et seqq.*

⁷⁸ I.e. committees, which serve as departments in councils of self-government, and boards, which serve as organs of regional and federal parliaments.

⁷⁹ I.e. ministerial departments in executive councils within self-government and representative government in regions and federation.

⁸⁰ I.e. peace committees and justice councils – even though the latter exist only *de iure* (Art. 69 para 6 of the SC).

⁸¹ The internal system of the communes in Rojava, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2018/04/the-internal-system-of-the-communes-in-rojava> (accessed 6.08.2018); M. Knapp, A. Flach, E. Ayboğa, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

As for the social engagement, the multi-layered network of non-governmental feminine organizations, just as democratic confederalism prescribes, plays an important role in consolidation and action of the whole emancipatory movement. Art. 20 and 80 of the SC explicitly guarantee a freedom of creation and activity of NGOs (in reality, though, these rights are rather limited)⁸². Women have an equal right to participate in all types of social associations and political parties, as well as entities of the social economy or the media, but often (as mentioned) decide to organize themselves separately with a support of relevant local authorities⁸³.

Local councils organize academies and courses devoted to women (ranging from civic and ideological training to PC courses), set-up or support female cooperatives and communes, run centers for single mothers, divorcees and all other women who are in need for a social care⁸⁴. There are special places made available for all these activities, which are called *mala jinan* ‘women’s houses’. *Mala jinan* are located in every city and are open every day twenty four hours seven days a week, except for holidays. Every woman can come there and take part in the work of a given committee or board, sign up for a course, participate in an ideological academy, enter into democratic society non-governmental organizations of various kinds, or just meet and talk.

The coordination of the whole women’s movement is the task of the *Kongreya Star*, founded in Northern Syria in 2005 under the name of *Yekîtiya Star* ‘The Star Union of Women’⁸⁵⁸⁶, but there are other coordinating organizations, e.g. *Tevgera Jinên Ciwan* devoted to young women. All of them are also included in the TEV-DEM, Movement for a Democratic Society, (in Kurdish *Tevgera Civaka Demokratîk*), a sort-of a popular front movement for all NGOs, cooperatives, trade unions and, at some point, apolitical parties and bodies of self-government. Apart from the coordination and support of every-day activities of smaller

⁸² Art. 2 para 1, Art. 4 *et seqq.* of the Decree No. 3 of 2017 issued on 11.02.2017 by the Legislative Council of the Jazeera Canon Law of Organizations, Associations and Civil Society Institutions (unpublished in English, in author’s archive).

⁸³ Cooperatives operate according to the not-for-private-profit model: range of production is co-set by a local council and a quota of goods is turned over for a given purpose (each cooperative participates in the decentralized planned economy), while profit (after deduction of costs, employees’ salaries and taxes) is spent on statutory and social goals, see M. Knapp, A. Flach, E. Ayboğa, *op. cit.*, p. 208 *et seqq.*; model statute of a powerhouse in a form of a cooperative, The internal system of the electric cooperatives, Cooperatives in Mesopotamia, <https://mesopotamia.coop/the-internal-system-of-the-electric-cooperatives> (accessed 12.08.2018).

⁸⁴ At times, they also assist female formations of the Asayish (militia) in investigations conducted in cases of domestic violence.

⁸⁵ Interestingly, the word “star” in the name of all feminine apolitical organizations relates not only to a star (which is a universal symbol of socialist, anarchist and freedom movements), but also to the goddess Ishtar, also known in the historic region of Kurdistan as “Inanna” (M. Knapp, A. Flach, E. Ayboğa, *op. cit.*, p. 84).

⁸⁶ See *Kongreya Star: About the work and ideas of Kongreya Star, the women’s movement in Rojava*, <https://undercoverinfo.files.wordpress.com/2016/09/k-star.pdf> (accessed 20.09.2018).

organizations, *Kongreya Star* set-ups academies and conducts vocational courses in *mala jinan*, publishes books, magazines and leaflets (e.g. on the rights and liberties of women in Rojava). The idea behind the whole project is, of course, not only jineology, but also democratic confederalism. Its motto is: *Jin, Jyyan, Azadî!* 'Women, life and freedom!'⁸⁷.

Women's voluntary⁸⁸ participation in militia and military formations is also important. As already mentioned, the Kurdish partisan troops of various parties have been recruiting women for centuries now, however, it was the apoist movement in the last couple of decades in the 20th century which brought a real breakthrough in this regard. The engagement of women was considered to be a form of elevation of their status, since the solidarity among the soldiers was to abolish the discrimination. The parity of 40% for each of the genders has been applied to the officer corps and many women were admitted⁸⁹. With the passing of time, not only mixed troops but also separate female army with its own female command was introduced in Turkey by PKK (YJA-Star⁹⁰, set up in 1984). The model of organization of those forces, knowledge and experience gathered by them, not to mention personal support (through commanders and trainers), were later brought by PKK to Syria, when the Rojava Revolution took place. This is how Women's Protection Units or Women's Defense Units, the famous YPJ, came into existence in 2013⁹¹. The army became one of the symbols (and tools) of the Revolution, actively taking part in the (victorious) war with the so-called Islamic State and (lost) defensive operation against Turkey in Afrin⁹².

The participation in the armed struggle is the most important factor of the emancipation of women in the DFNS. First, as the apoists say, it allowed individuals who engaged in training or combat, or even had a chance to interact in the changing society, to regain their subjectivity and independence. The feeling of being needed and active became crucial for the new confident female citizens. Second, the importance of the symbolism cannot be overstated. Rojava presents itself as an autonomy respectful of women's status and safety, especially since YPJ fought the so-called Islamic State, which openly advocates the fundamentalist subjugation of women. For this reason, some of the female soldiers in YPJ are

⁸⁷ See *About us*, Komalen Jinen Kurdistan, <http://www.kjk-online.org/hakkimizda/?lang=en> (accessed 10.09.2018).

⁸⁸ Women are excluded from the general conscription.

⁸⁹ In case of YPG see YPG Rules of Procedure, (in:) Under Kurdish rule..., pp. 76–87.

⁹⁰ YJA-Star – In Kurdish *Yekîneyên Jinên Azad ên Star* 'Free Women's Units'.

⁹¹ NB Many non-Kurdish ethnic and religious groups in Northern Syria, i.a. Syriacs, introduce their own female militias and guerrillas.

⁹² See e.g. Call for accountability and protection: Yazidi survivors of atrocities committed by ISIL, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of the Human Rights Report, Washington 2016, p. 6; The PKK's fateful choice in Northern Syria, Middle East Report No. 176, 2017, International Crisis Group Report, Brussels 2017, *passim*; M. Knapp, A. Flach, E. Ayboğa, *op. cit.*, p. 149 *et seqq.*; A. Marcus, *op. cit.*, p. 172 *et seqq.*

women who travelled to Syria from the West in order to fight against the terrorism and for the socialist-feminist cause (most notably late Anna Campbell a.k.a. Hêlîn Qerecox, an English activist and Alina Sanchez a.k.a. Lêgêrîn Ciya, a medical doctor from Argentina, who both become martyrs, the celebrated *shahid*). Third, being a significant military force in a para-state waging a war necessary for its survival, made YPJ (and thus women as a social segment) and important political center. This is the “theory of the rose” in its highest form⁹³.

5. CONCLUSION

According to Vitoria Federici, Rojava is most likely the only case of contemporary endogenous political project that has any chance of success⁹⁴. Although the DFNS is not recognized as a state according to the international law, the system set up by the apoists has evolved into a functioning autonomy which performs all the vital functions traditionally attributed to the state. At the same time, the political leaders dismissed any claims to formal independence, concentrating on the realization of the democratic confederalist model. Despite some achievements, among them the victorious confrontation with the so-called Islamic State, the DFNS still faces numerous difficulties, both external (trade embargo, relations with the Syrian Arab Republic, the threat of invasion by the Republic of Turkey) and internal (lack of rule of law and instability of the system of governance, problems related to the transitional justice). One thing is certain, though. The socialist-democratic revolution in the Northern Syria has become a chance for thousands of women to actively engage in social, political, economic and even military life. The doctrine of democratic confederalism which serves as a theoretical foundation of this change, aims at reconstruction of a whole culture, stripping it of discrimination, exploitation and subjugation of women that so often harms societies in the Middle East.

⁹³ See also i.a. M. Düzgün, *Jineology: The Kurdish women's movement*, “Journal of Middle East Women's Studies” 2016, No. 2, p. 284 *et seqq.*

⁹⁴ V. Federici, *The rise of Rojava: Kurdish autonomy in the Syrian conflict*, “The SAIS Review of International Affairs” 2015, Vol. 35, No. 2, p. 83; see also C. Cemgil, *The republican ideal of freedom as nondomination and the Rojava experiment: 'States as they are' or a new socio-political imagination?*, “Philosophy and Social Criticism” 2016, Vol. 45, No. 4–5, pp. 1–10; C. Cemgil, C. Hoffmann, *The 'Rojava revolution' in Syrian Kurdistan: A model of development for the Middle East?*, (in:) M. Tadros, J. Selby (eds.), “IDS Bulletin” 2016, Vol. 47, No. 3, pp. 53–76.

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