Competing Visions of Political Community in the Middle East: the Kurdish Model as an Alternative to Theocracy and Nationalism

Visões Conflitantes da Comunidade Política no Oriente Médio: o Modelo Curdo como uma Alternativa à Teocracia e ao Nacionalismo

Hanifi Baris

(PhD, Leverhulme Early Career Fellow, CISRUL/University of Aberdeen, UK)

E-mail: hanifi.baris@abdn.ac.uk

Abstract

Democratic Confederalism, the model of political community developed by the dominant Kurdish political movements in Northern and Western Kurdistan (Turkey and Syria), is not only a model for the recognition of Kurdish national rights, autonomy or self-government. It is but an ambitious and comprehensive model of political community that has become a competitor to the three dominant visions of political community in the Middle East, namely nationalism, Islamism and (neo)Ottomanism. The model is designed to primarily tackle political domination, although it also addresses social and gender inequality, economic exploitation, environmental degradation and climate change. It therefore gets into direct confrontation with the existing political establishments in Turkey and Syria in particular and in the Middle East in general. Additionally, since the Kurdish political movement tries to realise its program without authorization from nation-states, their agenda and praxis are not tolerated by established orders and confronted violently in the region. Their program is perceived as a threat to the national security of the states involved. Hence, I argue, it is ultimately up to a Kurdish *act of foundation* whether the model will survive the current hostility and emerge either victorious or as an alternative to the existing models.

Keywords: Democratic Confederalism; Radical Democracy; Pan-Islamism; Rojava Revolution, Kurdish Autonomy.

Sumário

O Confederalismo Democrático, o modelo de comunidade política desenvolvido pelos movimentos políticos curdos dominantes no Norte e no Oeste do Curdistão (Turquia e Síria), não é apenas um modelo para o reconhecimento dos direitos nacionais curdos, autonomia ou autogoverno. É apenas um modelo ambicioso e abrangente de comunidade política que se tornou um concorrente das três visões dominantes da comunidade política no Oriente Médio, a saber, nacionalismo, Islamismo e (neo)Otomanismo. O modelo é projetado principalmente para lidar com a dominação política, embora também trate da desigualdade social e de gênero, exploração econômica, degradação ambiental e mudança climática. Portanto, entra em confronto direto com as instituições políticas existentes na Turquia e na Síria em particular e no Oriente Médio em geral. Além disso, como o movimento político curdo tenta realizar seu programa sem a autorização dos Estados-nação, sua agenda e práxis não são toleradas por ordens estabelecidas e são confrontadas violentamente na região. Seu programa é visto como uma ameaça à segurança nacional dos Estados envolvidos. Portanto, eu argumento, em última análise, depende de um ato curdo de fundação se o modelo sobreviverá à hostilidade atual e emergirá ou vitorioso ou como uma alternativa aos modelos existentes.

Palabras-chave: Confederalismo Democrático; Democracia Radical; Pan-Islamismo; Revolução Rojava; Autonomia Curda.

1. Introduction[1]

"We left Ankara [and] became a party, we arrived at the Middle East [and] became an army, we will achieve statehood through opening up to the world"[2] was a widely quoted maxim of Abdullah Ocalan (Serxwebûn 1998, 2)[3], the imprisoned leader of the PKK[4] (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê-Kurdistan Workers' Party). This maxim was quoted three times in the party's official periodical *Serxwebûn* in November 1998 issue, shortly after Ocalan was forced to leave his sanctuary in Syria. Several years later, he was promoting the idea of "politics beyond the state, political organization beyond the party, and political subjectivity beyond the class" (Akkaya and Jongerden 2015, 162). Moreover, Ocalan adopted a semi-anarchist tone in his prison writings and rejected the idea of founding a Kurdish nation-state, arguing that the State is "the 'original sin' of humanity" (Akkaya and Jongerden 2015, 171). In 2005, he penned down *The Declaration of Democratic Confederalism,* in which he drew a framework for a new politics of emancipation based on his prison readings and engaments (Öcalan 2005). This declaration has become a blueprint that guides the Kurdish movement in their struggle for democracy and atunomy since then. "The system of nation states", Ocalan argues in the declaration, "has become a serious barrier to the development of society and democracy and freedom since the end of the 20th century" (Öcalan 2005, 1). What should one make of this transformation in Ocalan's ideas, which are followed to their letter as goals by the dominant Kurdish political movement in Turkey? The PKK (hereafter will be referred, interchangeably, as *the Kurdish political movement*, *Kurdish movement* or *Kurdish liberation movement*) was founded to liberate Kurdistan and Kurds from foreign domination, although this was the first step in a socialist revolution in Turkey. What then, if not a Kurdish nation-state or a new State in Kurdistan, would achieve this? "The only alternative is democratic confederalism" declared Ocalan; referring to the model he developed "for the resolution of the problems of the Middle East" (*Ibid.*).

This paper focuses on the project of *Democratic Confederalism* developed by the Kurdish political movement for the purpose of resolving the Kurdish issue and addressing the ongoing state of war in the Middle East.

---

1 Dr Baris' current work is funded by the Leverhulme Trust and the University of Aberdeen, UK. This paper is based on a section in author's PhD thesis titled "Beyond multiculturalism, away from state-oriented nationalism: self-rule through residential political communities in Kurdistan" ([link](#)).

2 Original text: "Ankara'dan çıktık partileştik, Ortadoğu'ya çıktık ordulaştık, dünyaya açılarak devletleşeceğiz." Ocalan was a student at Ankara University when he decided, together with several like-minded students, to leave Ankara for Kurdistan and start a revolutionary national liberation movement from there. They founded the party in 1978 in North Kurdistan (Southeast Turkey) and left Kurdistan for Lebanon to train in guerrilla warfare; thus, they formed a guerrilla army in the Middle East. The last step in this journey was founding a unified, socialist Kurdistan, a strategy that seems to have been abandoned.

3 Abdullah Ocalan was 'the Chairman' (of the PKK) until that year, after which he gained an impersonal title called 'the Leadership', elevating him to an everlasting institution-like symbolic figure of the movement he led in person almost for three decades. Ocalan has been the ideological guru to and acquired the spiritual leadership of the dominant Kurdish political movements in Turkey and Syria since his imprisonment. He was also one of the parties in failed peace talks between the PKK and the Turkish government in 2009 and 2013.

4 The PKK was founded as an armed political party in 1978 in Northern Kurdistan, with the aim of liberating Kurdistan from colonialism, exploitation and oppression of the Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi and Syrian states. The PKK remains as the core of a cluster of civic, political and military organizations that drive the Kurdistan liberation movement in Turkey plays a major role in Kurdish politics in Syria. In comparison, its influence is minor in Iran and Iraq.

The main argument is that the project is not based on existing models of minority rights or nation and state-building, but aspires to establish a new model of political community that challenges and undermines the existing hegemonic ones; i.e. the Islamic *Ummah* and the nation-state system. The project also indicates that the Kurdish political movement is not just a national liberation movement, but it also aspires to establish a trans-border and transnational political community that is based on ethics, not on national or cultural identity. The novelty of the model is that while the hegemonic models are based on ethnic, religious or national identities, the Kurdish movement appeals to democratic and civic principles and widely accepted standards such as autonomy, self-rule, individual and group rights, gender equality, social justice and ecology. The Kurdish model of political community emphasizes ethico-political values more strongly than its rivals:

> Democratic modernity is the roof of an ethics-based political society. As long as we make the mistake to believe that societies need to be homogeneous monolithic entities it will be difficult to understand confederalism. Modernity's history is also a history of four centuries of cultural and physical genocide in the name of an imaginary unitary society. Democratic confederalism as a sociological category is the counterpart of this history and it rests on the will to fight if necessary as well as on ethnic, cultural, and political diversity. (Öcalan 2011, 24)

Accordingly, the project of *Democratic Confederalism* aspires to establish ecology-friendly, Aristotelian face to face political communities that are based on a stateless model of autonomous communes and their assemblies, town and city councils, and regional assemblies. The project envisages a gradually structured residential sovereignty nested in a confederal system that is designed to evolve into trans-border cooperation and coordination between the local and regional autonomous political entities. The model is proposed specifically for the solution of "the Kurdish Question" (a term I am not fond of using) in Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq, and for ending ethnic and religious conflicts in the Middle East in general. It undermines political principles and institutions that favour the existing nation-state system, such as exclusive membership, the exercise of political power through representation only, territorial state, and indivisible/absolute sovereignty.

Two practical factors might be behind this transformation of the politics of the Kurdish movement: (I) the end of the Cold War, for it reduced the chance of support for left-leaning national liberation movements from a superpower; and (II) the high human and economic costs of founding a nation-state for Kurds in a Kurdistan divided between four nation-states. However, these two factors do not explain such a radical ideological shift, although Ocalan is known for their pragmatism. The literature suggests that Ocalan's individual engagement with contemporary political ideas from his prison cell have made the real change in his politics (Akkaya and Jongerden 2012a; 2012b; Biehl 2014; Enzinna 2015; In der Maur and Staal 2015). It led him to develop a different approach to the political, social and economic issues that deprive the Kurds of their freedom and plague the Middle East with ethic and religious violence[5].

---

[5] Ocalan's personal transformation was the outcome of his capture and imprisonment in 1999. He maintained his importance and relevance to his party and his supporters, and familiarized himself with contemporary literature on post-Marxism, feminism, anarchism and radical democracy. He consequently developed the project of *Democratic Confederalism*, based on three pillars called *Democratic Autonomy,*

The human, ideological and organizational/structural elements that separates the Kurdish political movement from a typical nationalist movement have been extensively discussed and well-established in literature (TATORT Kurdistan 2011; 2014; Gunes and Gürer 2018; Gunes 2020; Gunes and Yadirgi 2020; Gunes 2012; Akkaya and Jongerden 2015; 2013; 2011; 2012c; Gunter 2015; Graeber 2014b; Matin 2019; Taussig 2015; Miley 2020). It should suffice to say that the model of political community that the movement tries to establish fundamentally differs from and clashes with the existing ones: namely, the Islamic *Ummah*, nationalism and neo-Ottomanism. The recent escalation of war between the current Turkish government and the PKK in Turkey, and the hostility of the Turkish government towards Syrian Kurdish autonomy is the clearest manifestations of this clash between competing Turkish and Kurdish visions of political community in the Middle East. "We will not allow the cantonization of Syria" sad the Turkish PM (*Radikal*, 04.12.2015), referring to the Kurdish cantons in Syrian Kurdistan; while his deputy stated that the peace talks that started between the PKK and the Turkish government in 2013 were abandoned because a new political project was implemented by the PKK affiliates in Syria (*Radikal* 08.10.2015).

This brings us to three sets of questions. First, there is the issue of understanding the new, anti-statist agenda developed by Ocalan and adopted by the PKK and its affiliates. Why is Democratic Confederalism a better option in addressing the Kurdish issue than founding a nation-state for Kurds in Kurdistan? Why the Kurdish movement does not seek or demand territorial autonomy or a multicultural model of minority rights, instead of pursuing a more ambitious agenda of democratizing the Middle East? Second, we must analyse the impacts of this project on the relationships of the actors and the dynamics of the conflict/struggle in Kurdistan, Turkey and beyond. How does this project affect the praxis of the Kurdish political movement within and outside Turkey? How does the existing political establishment in Turkey react to this project? Are they relieved because the dominant Kurdish movement in Turkey and Syria no longer seek to establish their own state? Does this project help or hamper the communication or negotiation between the sides to the conflict in Turkey and Syria? Along with these empirical questions, there are also some theoretical issues to be explored. What changes does the project offer with regard to the existing political system in Turkey and in the Middle East? What does this project tell us about political community in general? What theoretical implications and contradictions with regard to political autonomy, self-determination and sovereignty arise from this project?

Therefore, the discussion in this paper revolves around three corresponding observations. *First,* the Middle East undergoes a crisis generated by competing visions of political community akin to the one at the beginning of the twentieth century. Both the Kurdish issue and the project of Democratic Confederalism should be analysed against this background. *Second,* the Kurdish political movement cannot be categorised as a typical nationalist movement.

Democratic Nation and *Democratic Republic*, as a model for the solution of the Kurdish issue in the Middle East and as a project to transform the Middle East into a peaceful, ecology-friendly region for all, in which nation-states and borders eventually become obsolete. In less than a decade, all political institutions affiliated with the PKK all over Kurdistan went through a transformation and reorganization to adapt to the new model.

Not only because it abandoned its initial goal of founding a Kurdish nation-state in *Kurdistan* (the homeland of the Kurds), but also because it challenges both practical manifestations of and theoretical justifications for the nation-state. *Third,* Kurdish politics in Turkey can no longer be placed within the framework of minority rights, because the Kurdish movement attempts to found an alternative political community to the nation-state. This amounts to *the act of foundation*, in Arendtian sense. This means that the movement acts like a constituting power. As a political subject that is engaged in *the act of foundation,* the movement builds a political community of its own, sets up its own institutions and procedures, relies on its power and resources in defending its gains, and attempts to gain control over natural resources, instead of simply demanding their rights to be respected by governments, hostile or friendly. Thus, analysing the movement's politics through the lenses of 'ethnic nationalism' and/or minority rights would account to missing the big picture.

The objective here is demonstrating that although the Kurdish political movement promotes and implements a politics of national liberation that is not centred on founding a nation-state, their politics is not compatible with a territorial autonomy granted by the State. This indicates that the movement is motivated by *the will to power*. This is clearly manifested in the ideology and practice of the political subjects that drive the movement. The movement does not act like a classical avant-garde nationalist or revolutionary party which aims at seizing state power; it pursues, although not exclusively, the goal of making itself the ultimate political authority that exercises political power in the name of democratically organized self-governing towns and cities in Kurdistan.

2. The nihilist crisis in the Middle East and the three major visions of political community

The violence, destruction, and nihilism that seem to never stop in the Middle East have been devastating the region. The ongoing turmoil bears uncanny resemblances to the crisis of political community formation in Europe in the nineteenth century. The crisis that was the outcome of the meltdown of transnationally shared values and goals (mostly rooted in religion), induced by modern dynamics such as political centralization, secularism, and nationalism around the turn of the twentieth century in Europe, now haunts the Middle East. Europe has (or maybe had), in Foucault's words, settled "some of its violences" and managed to move from one "domination to [another kind of] domination" (Newman 2005, 42) via establishing the European Union. However, post-Ottoman societies are yet to resolve this crisis. Thus, a quick look at Nietzschean analysis of what would be awaiting Europe in the twentieth century will be useful here[6].

---

[6] It goes without saying that the forces at play in these two regions with distinct histories and different human compositions are in no way identical or probably even comparable in many respects. The same goes for their self-appointed missions, aims and objectives, and the conditions under which they mobilize, perform and act. Still, there is a clear direction that the events flow through or towards. This is what I am referring to. Yet again, I am aware that this is a rather unsettling comparison. Nevertheless, drawing attention to this aspect

The rise of nationalism and the ensuing discord in Europe during the nineteenth century was explained by Nietzsche through "the loss of a European voice" that deprived Europeans of the tools of cultivating "a common European spirit: Gradually the Christian ice was beginning to thaw, permitting the European continent to decompose into a set of rivalling and hostile nationalisms" (Elbe 2009, 75). Nietzsche contended that this was triggered by the advance of secularism, or the 'death of God' (*Ibid*.), which he thought unleashed a culture of 'nihilism' that was about to take Europe captive. Nihilism meant "that the highest values devalue themselves", and that "the aim was lacking"; because science and secularism had stripped Europe off of its Christian values that kept various peoples united (*Ibid*.). The replacement of that common aim, that uniting spirit, the argument goes, would not be possible in the short run. In the absence of a shared vision and after the erosion of common values, Europe would disintegrate into clashing and competing visions of political community; both at country and regional levels. Nietzsche's fears turned into reality quickly after the turn of the century, as if he had stated a self-fulfilling prophecy. Secular ideologies such as nationalism, socialism and fascism transformed the imperial contest into a competition for (re)designing the world according to forms of political community based on racial hierarchies or mastery of ideologies. The rest is well-known: the destruction brought about by two major wars. The (re)construction of a European community was only possible after the year 1989, through a series of agreements that gradually turned economic cooperation into political integration embodied by the European Union.[7]

The Middle-East, "as a set of peoples and societies articulated not only by […] state structures but also by other ties, old and new, that cross or challenge borders" (Albo 1993, 19), was undergoing a process of discord in the turn of the twentieth century, akin to what Europe was experiencing. The dismantling effects of the advent of nationalism and the disenchantment of subject peoples of the Ottoman Empire with political reforms aimed at centralization during the nineteenth century incited wars of independence and resistance against imperial authorities. This did not only shrink the multinational Ottoman empire, but the ensuing appropriation of political authority and state institutions by nationalist elites, and the foundation and maintenance of oppressive nation-states backed by Western imperialism ushered in an era of 'nihilism' that ravages the region ever since. The Middle East has been suffering a crisis of identity and purpose, triggered by the fading sense of a common history and the lack of a common vision among Muslim folks. This was crystalized in the discussions on how to prevent the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, summarized in the well-known essay *Uc Tarz-i Siyaset* (literally "three modes of politics", can be translated as *Three Political Currents*), written by the famous ideologue of Turkish nationalism Yusuf Akcura in 1904.[8] He accurately and vividly

---

could enable us to chart a map of analyses inferred from particular historical experiences of the nineteenth and twentieth century Europe. This might help us better understand the ongoing mayhem in the region and the direction it might take.

[7] This does not mean though, that the union is an ideal one, either for the West or for 'the Rest'; especially now that the union is shaken by Brexit; rising nationalism, racism, xenophobia; economic crisis that had hit several countries harder than others; and harsh criticisms for its passive stand vis-à-vis and indifference to humanitarian disasters, chief among them the refugee crisis and the drowning migrants in the Mediterranean.

[8] The essay was published in the newspaper *Turk* in Cairo, because Akcura was a member of a secret military organization involved in conspiracies against the Ottoman Sultan. He left the country in order to avoid prosecution. He lived in France until 1903 and studied politics there, and then settled in Egypt which was under the British rule. He returned to Istanbul after the restoration of constitutional

captured the dominant schools of political thought within the Ottoman body politic of the time (translation by David S. Thomas):

> [S]ince the rise of the desires for progress and rehabilitation spread from the West, three principal political doctrines have been conceived and followed in the Ottoman dominions. The first is the one which seeks to create an Ottoman Nation through assimilating and unifying the various nations subject to Ottoman rule. The second seeks to unify politically all Muslims living under the governance of the Ottoman State because of the fact that the prerogative of the Caliphate has been a part of the power of the Ottoman State (this is what the Europeans call Pan-Islamism). The third seeks to organize a policy of Turkish nationalism (Turk Milliyet-i siyasiyesi) based on ethnicity. [N]on-Turkish Muslim groups who have been already Turkified to a certain extent would be further assimilated. Those who have never been assimilated but at the same time have no national feelings would be entirely assimilated under such a program. (Akçura 1904, 6, 12)

After providing a detailed discussion on the "usefulness" and probable success or failure of these political doctrines, Akcura suggested, just as Nietzsche did in the case of 'Christian Europe', that "in recent times, under the impact of Western ideas ethnic and national feelings which previously had been subsumed by Islam began to show their force" (1904, 11–12). He was convinced that neither creating an Ottoman nation, united in community sentiment and political identity, nor uniting all Muslims under the symbolic power of the Caliph were viable political projects. The project of founding an Ottoman nation was doomed because non-Turkic peoples subjugated by the Ottoman rule "believed, they had experienced injustice and not justice, contempt and not equality, misery and not happiness. The Nineteenth century had taught them their past, their rights and their nationality on the one hand, and had weakened the Ottomans, their masters on the other" (*Ibid*. 8). The project of an Islamic political community would also fail, according to Akcura, because "The dominant current in our contemporary history is that of the nations. Religions as such are increasingly losing their political importance and force" (*Ibid*. 12). Thus, he concluded, the establishment of a political community based on Turkish ethnic nationalism (known as *Turanism* or *Pan-Turkism)* was the best way to prevent the collapse of the Ottoman state.

These projects appear as competing models of political community in Akcura's essay, although there is no equivalent term for 'political community' in Turkish. That is why the projects themselves do not appear as forms of political community, but they are only useful ideologies for preserving or capturing the seat of political authority, i.e. the State. What Akcura looks for is not uniting individuals and groups around shared values and common goals in order to establish a political community among equals. For him, the matter was following the most useful ideology that could prevent the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. This ideology was nationalism. Turkish nationalists, after seizing political power, should waste no time and engage in assimilating non-Turks in order for the nationalist project to succeed. In that sense, politics *a la* Akcura has been about discovering a useful ideology to obtain political power and maintain the *status quo*. There is no ultimate goal or 'the greater good' other than capturing state power. Indeed, Akcura asks, referring to Islamic, Ottoman, and Turkic interests: "are the interests of these three societies, which are political, religious, and ethnic, common?" (*Ibid*. 6).

---

monarchy in 1908. He served the Turkish nationalist elite who seized power through a coup d'état in 1913 as a prominent ideologue of German style organic nationalism and was revered by the Turkish political establishment until his death in 1935.

Akcura suggests that the Turkish nationalist elite should mobilize masses and resources to create a sense of Turkishness, an exclusive Turkish identity politics, and create a Turkish polity, ideally unifying all Turkic groups in Asia and Europe. He is not interested in social justice or in creating a diverse political community on the basis of equality and rights.

Each of the political currents discussed in Akcura's work envisaged distinct political affinities and suggested loyalty to different political authorities. Ideally, these competing political projects within the Ottoman polity would settle the internal discord and deal with the prevailing nihilism through a confrontation between rival doctrines and their movements, which would result in the foundation of one or multiple political communities, depending on the project would ultimately manage to dominate others. This was what happened in Europe in the course of the twentieth century. Albeit, there is a difference in the context of the Middle East: political actors in the region have never been powerful enough to handle their own affairs without interference from global actors since the beginning of the nineteenth century.

This does not mean that they had/have no agency. However, their agencies have not been the prevailing elements in the equation. Internal actors, forces and dynamics are not all to account for. The intervention of imperial European powers and the First World War disrupted the process of reshaping old political communities, founding new ones, and forming collective values in the entire Middle East. As Ulrichsen (2014) noted, major Western powers put a lid upon the working of socio-political dynamics within the region through invasions, agreements, military interventions and alliances before and after the First World War. This prevented Middle Eastern societies from shaping their own destiny and prolonged the enmities and conflicts in a way that best serves the interests of Western domination. External dynamics and powers still, to a great degree, design the politics in the region:

> It is thus no exaggeration to note that the First World War was pivotal to the creation of the modern Middle-East. It hastened the demise of the Ottoman Empire and paved the way for the emergence of a state-system (albeit under mandatory rule) that remains largely in place today. The entire political landscape of the region was reshaped as the legacy of the war sapped the ability of imperial 'outsiders' to dominate and influence events, and nationalist groups succeeded in mobilizing mass movements around distinctly national identities. New political movements and mass ideologies were intermixed with emergent debates around the identities and developmental trajectories of nation-states. […] it is harder to establish historical distance from events whose legacy continues to resonate throughout the region. (Ulrichsen 2014, 203–4)

Likewise, Tankersley, referring to Thomas Piketty, has pointed out that "Inequality is a major driver of Middle Eastern terrorism, including the Islamic State attacks on Paris earlier this month — and Western nations have themselves largely to blame for that inequality"; because "[…] a small slice of people controls most of the wealth, while a large — including women and refugees — are kept in a state of 'semi-slavery.' Those economic conditions […] have become justifications for jihadists, along with the casualties of a series of wars in the region perpetuated by Western powers. 'These are the regimes that are militarily and politically supported by Western powers […]. No wonder our lessons in social justice and democracy find little welcome among Middle Eastern youth'" (Tankersley 2015).

Consequently, not being able to resolve their own crisis of vision and identity and tackle the socio-political discords on their own, Middle Eastern societies are yet to end *this* nihilistic phase of their history (*this* – because nihilism, like other social phenomena, does not emerge or disappear once and far all; rather, it is always present, building up or spreading thin in cycles). Secular ideologies such as nationalism and socialism have been challenging the dominance of political Islam. Albeit none of them has been able to declare victory upon others, and the crisis is likely to be sustained until one of the century old visions or a new model of political community manages to establish its domination in the region. In Gramsci's words, "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear. The old world is dying away, and the new world struggles to come forth: Now is the time of monsters" (Merip 2015, 6).

Some analysts have argued that what we witness in the Middle-East is the equivalent of Thirty-Year' War in the seventeenth century-Europe (Lawson 2014; MacMillan 2015); while others contended that the developments amount to the collapse of Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, after which the post-World War I state borders in the Middle-East were drawn by France and Britain (Gaub and Pawlak 2013; Rabinovich 2014). Hardt and Negri too, refer to civil wars as a global problem and they are convinced that "The theory and practices of modern sovereignty were born by confronting this same problem, the problem of civil war-and here we are thrown back primarily to the seventeenth rather than the eighteenth century" (2004, 238). MERIP editors have succinctly summarised the ills of the contemporary Middle-East as "the frustration of participatory politics, the fixation upon state security at the expense of freedoms, the stubborn growth of inequality amidst great wealth, the lack of investment in education and other public goods, all in the shadow of outside interference and, now, imminent destruction" (2015, 6). What makes the problem worse is that none of the long-held grand-visions of political community, i.e. nationalism, pan-Islamism and (neo)Ottomanism seems to be promising.

The problem with Islamic political community, *the Ummah*, as Cundioglu pointed out, is that Islam has lost its universal voice especially in the Middle-East; it does not address its audience as "humanity" anymore, but sees them as "the faithful" (Oskay 2015). Thus, it is no longer able to bind the Kurds, Turks, and Arabs together even in the Sunni camp of the religion, let alone uniting all the sects under one umbrella. Islam has thus ceased to be a solution to the ongoing state of war in the Middle East. It is now part of the problem. Besides, Islam is not a goal even for the neo-Islamic or Pan-Islamic tendency in Turkish politics anymore. As Ozkan notes:

> The neo-Ottomanist label that is frequently attributed to Davutoglu [Turkish PM of the time] is misleading. He criticizes neo-Ottomanism in his articles for being too Western-oriented. Davutoglu is a pan-Islamist. He is deeply influenced by Islam, yet he also uses Islam to achieve his foreign policy goals. He believes in a Sunni Muslim hegemonic order led by Turkey that would encompass the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and include Albania and Bosnia as well. And I say Sunni because Iran is not part of this envisaged world. He argues that Turkey cannot be confined to its present-day borders. Should it continue to cling to its post-Cold War policy of preserving the status quo, Turkey will be destroyed. He believes that the nation-states that were formed in 1918 were artificial. But he does not idealize post-nation-state systems such as the European Union. To the contrary, he wants to

go back in time to an order based on Islamic unity, on which Turkey expands its power not through military power but by creating spheres of influence. But this is a fantasy that has no academic basis.

(Ozkan 2014, 2)

The reason behind Islam's loss of its universal voice is the very problem with another vision of political community: nationalism. Like Islam, nationalism, too, has become a means to ends for the political elite who utilize it to seize state power or to obtain political gains. Therefore, it has no quality to be a uniting civic force that bonds individuals and groups from different cultural, national or religious backgrounds in nation-states in the region.

Nation-states have mostly relied on oppressive, repressive and assimilationist policies to achieve or preserve unity among their citizens, and thus marginalized and persecuted either minorities or majorities under their rule. National ideologies in the region have no moral or ethical force left in their articulations, even rhetorically, to advocate for shared values and common goals. It is also not possible to match the borders of states with the exact boundaries of the people that supposedly belong to their nation, because no matter how one draws borders, there will always be a minority of this or that kind within the borders of a given state. Indeed, nationalism has been the problem itself since the very beginning of this crisis, causing genocides, ethnic cleansings and massacres almost every decade in the region. That is why it offers no viable solution to the ongoing crisis in the Middle East.

Lastly, Turkey's current government has been associated with pursuing a dream of neo-Ottomanism. This ideology or political vision did not stick even in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as Akcura (1904) pointed out a century ago. However, although neo-Ottomanism has played role in the electoral success of the current governing party in Turkey due to its positive image in the Turkish and Kurdish conservatives' collective memory, it is not high on the agenda of any major political actor as a uniting force in the Middle East. It appears rather as a tool of domination, utilized to legitimize the current Turkish government claims and agendas. Thus, the third grand-vision of political community is also not an option.

3. Democratic Confederalism: the Kurdish vision of political community as the fourth contender in the Middle East

Our foundations aren't the state's laws but civil disobedience and the universal human rights. We know that the state won't just hand us the democratic rights. So, our basis is not the rulers and their institutions, but democratic society and nature. We organize communes in the villages, and councils in the cities, and in that way try to organize democratic self-management.

A DTK[9] member, quoted in TATORT Kurdistan (2011, 28)

---

[9] Founded in 2005, in the city of Diyarbakir (Amed in Kurdish), Turkey, Demokratik Toplum Kongresi/Democratic Society Congress is an umbrella organization that brings together more than a thousand delegates from civil society organizations, political parties, municipalities and *de facto* city councils in Kurdistan of Turkey. The organization functions as a mechanism of democratising politics through opening it up to non-state institutions.

Here is where the project of Democratic Confederalism assumes relevance. Marginalized and persecuted by hegemonic systems of political community in the Middle East, the Kurdish movement has developed a model that is in direct confrontation with the old, major ones. A careful examination of primary and secondary sources on the ideology and praxis of the Kurdish political movement will reveal that liberating Kurdistan or obtaining group-specific rights for the Kurds have been only part of a larger scheme and a more ambitious programme pursued by the movement. For instance, Ocalan emphasizes that "The PKK never regarded the Kurdish question as a mere problem of ethnicity or nationhood. Rather, we believed, it was the project of liberating the [whole Turkish] society and democratizing it" (2011, 7). The movement's human composition and its ideology testify to this fact (Gunes 2012; Jongerden and Akkaya 2011; Akkaya and Jongerden 2012a; 2012b). Also, the movement's goals, aspirations, and actions serve a much more radical and transformative agenda than that of a typical national liberation movement (Öcalan 2005; 2011; TATORT Kurdistan 2011; Matin 2015; Akkaya and Jongerden 2015).

Developed by the Kurdish political movement's founder Ocalan, who drew mainly on ecologist, post-Marxist, postmodernist, anarchist and environmentalist political theorists (chief among them is the American political theorist Murray Bookchin), this project emerges as the fourth vision of political community that claims to have what it takes to 'fix' the Middle-East.[10] Focusing particularly on the destructive effects of nationalism and the oppressive characteristics of nation-states in the Middle East, and also emphasizing the more general issues about nation-states such as their class formation, their role in promoting individualism and capitalist modernity that are associated with environmental degradation, ecological destruction and subjugation of communities to centralized states, Ocalan is convinced that

> [T]he foundation of a separate Kurdish nation-state does not make sense for the Kurds. Over the last decades the Kurds have not only struggled against repression by the dominant powers and for the recognition of their existence but also for the liberation of their society from the grip of feudalism. Hence it does not make sense to replace the old chains by new ones or even enhance the repression. This is what the foundation of a nation-state would mean in the context of the capitalist modernity. Without opposition against the capitalist modernity there will be no place for the liberation of the peoples. This is why the founding of a Kurdish nation-state is not an option for me. The call for a separate nation-state results from the interests of the ruling class or the interests of the bourgeoisie but does not reflect the interests of the people since another state would only be the creation of additional injustice and would curtail the right to freedom even more. The solution to the Kurdish question, therefore, needs to be found in an approach that weakens the capitalist modernity or pushes it back.

(Öcalan 2011, 19)

---

[10] Analysts, especially the Kurdish intelligentsia, see the Kurdish bid to come up with a project of their own in order to offer an alternative in the form of a radical democratic model, as a welcome development in the Middle East that should be supported (for a webinar in which the Kurdish alternative vision of political community is put in perspective within this framework by academics and political activists see *Kurds and Democracy: in Conversation with Saleh Moslem*, in Muslim 2020). Because, after all, a project that 'solves' the Kurdish issue potentially brings peace to the Middle-East as well; since the Kurds live in four nation-states (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria) that have been the sources of much of instability in the region. Two of these states (Turkey and Iran) are regional powers who have been competing for prominence since the sixteenth century, and they use their 'Kurdish cards' very often to gain the upper hand in regional and global power-politics. Besides, with its almost 40 million population and rich oil and water resources, Kurdistan is one of the most important dynamics in the region, although not 'yet' one of the collective subjects. Thus, it is important what Kurdish actors do and whom they befriend in the region, since they are now stronger and determined more than ever in their modern history.

Ocalan suggests that "a system which takes into consideration the religious, ethnic and class differences in society" should be promoted (2005, 1). "For Kurdistan", he argues, his system does not "interpret the right to self determination to establish a nation state, but develops its own democracy in spite of political boundaries" (*Ibid*.). The project necessitates that Kurdish activists, politicians and organizations build grassroots democratic institutions within each part of Kurdistan, such as communes, councils, popular assemblies, regional assemblies; youth, women, economic and ecological councils, and then bridge them together to create a bond that reaches beyond national boundaries:

> Within Kurdistan democratic confederalism will establish village, towns and city assemblies and their delegates will be entrusted with the real decision-making, which in effect means that the people and the community will decide. Democratic confederalism of Kurdistan is not a state system, but a democratic system of the people without a state. With the women and youth at the forefront, it is a system in which all sectors of society will develop their own democratic organisations. It is a politics exercised by free and equal confederal citizens by electing their own free regional representatives.

(Öcalan 2005, 1)

Ocalan suggests that political actors in Kurdistan and in the greater Middle East should not wait for the nation-states to accept the demands for democratization and social justice put forward by citizens. They should take the necessary steps for liberating Kurdistan and creating a peaceful Middle East on their own, relying on their agency and power. This is what Mouffe (1989) and Jongerden (2015) refer to as radical democracy or radicalising democracy: expanding political space beyond legal and formal institutions, forming grassroots forums, councils and assemblies open to universal participation of residents (not only citizens), building coalitions among different sections and sectors of society, and practicing democracy through a culture of solidarity without being authorized by the State. These tactics and strategies have all been implemented in Northern and Western Kurdistan (Turkey and Syria) more powerfully than in other parts of Kurdistan.

Although the project has been developed by the Kurdish political movement originated in Northern Kurdistan (*Kurdistana Bakûr* in Kurdish, Southeast Turkey), and although it was partially implemented there in some towns and cities through building communes, councils and assemblies and declaring autonomy (TATORT Kurdistan 2011), it is in the process of being 'fully' realized in *Rojava,* i.e. Western/Syrian Kurdistan, through the ongoing radical democratic experiment and social revolution (TATORT Kurdistan 2014; Haenni and Quesnay 2020; Hunt 2019; Rojava Information Center 2019; Aretaios 2015; Knapp and Jongerden 2014; Tax 2016; Gupta 2017; Knapp, Flach, and Ayboğa 2016; Leo 2018; Allsopp and Wilgenburg 2019). Therefore, referring to his impression of the implementation of the model in *Rojava*, Taussig emphasizes that he was "overwhelmed by the strangeness of it all; by the openness of people, their crazy generosity, and the splendor of their cause, a first in the Middle East if not in world history", (2015, 3). David Graeber (2014a; 2014b) presented similar remarks about *Rojava* and the implementation of radical democratic politics there. Many academics and commentators in Turkey have hailed the revolution in *Rojava* and named the experiment as "a model for the whole Middle-East" (Altan 2014).

Miley argues that "the HDP and the Ocalan model of *democratic confederalism* remain the country's [Turkey's), and the region's, greatest hope for peace" (2015, 1). Hence, it seems that Democratic Confederalism has already left its mark on politics; specifically in the Kurdish regions of Turkey and Syria, as a new model of political community that challenges the hegemony of political Islam and the nation-state.

There is but one problem with this optimism: the PKK, the developer and promoter of this project is still criminalized in Turkey, Syria and Iran, and it is on the list of 'terrorist' organizations in the EU and the US. It is looked upon with suspicion even by a good deal of religious/conservative Kurds. This means that the Kurds are on their own in promoting, establishing, maintaining and protecting their vision of political community. In other words, founding the kind of political community envisaged in the project of Democratic Confederalism will require "the act of foundation" *a la* Arendt (1963, 125–235), because unless the act of foundation is carried out, there will be no alternative political community to speak of.

4. Conclusion

I tried to contextualise the model of Democratic Confederalism. I argued that since the Kurdish political movement was "born from the left" (Jongerden and Akkaya 2011) in Turkey, it did not limit itself with promoting Kurdish rights, but pursued a greater agenda of revolution and democratization of Turkey and the Middle-East. Thus, the project they developed is not only a model for the recognition of Kurdish national rights, autonomy or self-government, but an ambitious and comprehensive model of political community that is designed to tackle political domination, social inequality, economic exploitation, gender inequality, environmental degradation and other ethical concerns.

Drawing on Akcura's (1904) work, which is known as the essay that 'started everything' when it comes to discussions on clashing visions of political community in the Middle East, I argued that the Kurdish political movement tries to implement its project in order to expand its sphere of influence, and hence, it gets into direct confrontation with the existing political establishment in Turkey in particular and in the Middle East in general. Additionally, since the Kurdish political movement tries to realise its program without authorization from nation-states, their agenda and praxis is not tolerated by established orders and confronted violently in the region. Their program is perceived as a threat to the national security of the states involved. Here, Mouffe's (1989) formulation of *radical democracy*, Hardt and Negri's (2004) critical approach to representation and sovereignty and their notion of *multitude* as the political subject, Bookchin's (2015) theory of *libertarian municipalism* that suggest founding city states instead of seizing state power should be identified as theoretical inspirations for the model.

Lastly, I also argued that notwithstanding how a political authority legitimises its exercise of power, it is ultimately *the act of foundation* and the founding authority that determines the kind and characteristics of a political community, and not the other way around.

5. Bibliography

Akçura, Yusuf. 1904. "Uc Tarz-i Siyaset (Three Policies)." Istanbul: Carrie Books. http://vlib.iue.it/carrie/texts/carrie_books/paksoy-2/cam9.html.

Akkaya, Ahmet Hamdi, and Joost Jongerden. 2011. "The PKK in the 2000s: Continuity through Breaks?" In *Nationalisms and Politics in Turkey : Political Islam, Kemalism and the Kurdish Issue*, edited by Marlies. Casier and Joost. Jongerden, 143–62. London: Routledge.

———. 2012a. *PKK Uzerine Notlar*. Istanbul: Vate Yayinlari.

———. 2012b. "Reassembling the Political: The PKK and the Project of Radical Democracy." *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 14 (April): 1–16. http://ejts.revues.org/4615.

———. 2012c. "The Kurdistan Workers Party and a New Left in Turkey: Analysis of the Revolutionary Movement in Turkey through the PKK's Memorial Text on Haki Karer." *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 14 (April): 1–18. http://ejts.revues.org/4613.

———. 2013. "Confederalism and Autonomy in Turkey: The Kurdistan Workers' Party and the Reinvention of Democracy." In *The Kurdish Question in Turkey: New Perspectives on Violence, Representation and Reconciliation*, edited by Cengiz Gunes and Welat Zeydanlioglu, 186–204. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203796450.

———. 2015. "Reassembling the Political: The PKK and the Project of Radical Democracy." In *Stateless Democracy*, edited by R I der Maur and J Staal, New World, 158–91. Amsterdam: New World Summit.

Albo, Xavier. 1993. "Our Identity Starting from Pluralism in the Base." *Boundary 2* 20 (3): 18–33. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/303338.

Allsopp, Harriet, and Wladimir van Wilgenburg. 2019. *The Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflicts*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Altan, Mehmet. 2014. "'Ortadoğu'nun Yeni Modeli: Kürtler.'" Ilke Haber. 2014. http://www.ilkehaber.com/yazi/ortadogunun-yeni-modeli-kurtler-12260.htm.

Arendt, Hannah. 1963. *On Revolution*. 1990th ed. London: Penguin Books.

Aretaios, Evangelos. 2015. "The Rojava Revolution." *OpenDemocracy*. https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/evangelos-aretaios/rojava-revolution.

Biehl, Janet. 2014. "Impressions of Rojava: A Report from the Revolution." ROAR Magazine. 2014. https://roarmag.org/essays/janet-biehl-report-rojava/.

Bookchin, Murray. 2015. *The Next Revolution: Popular Assemblies and the Promise of Direct Democracy*. London: Verso.

Elbe, Stefan. 2009. "What Future for the European Political Community? Nietzsche, Nationalism and the Idea of the 'Good Europeans.'" In *The Future of Political Community*, edited by Jens Bartelson and Gideon Baker, 72–89. London: Rotuledge.

Enzinna, Wes. 2015. "A Dream of Secular Utopia in ISIS' Backyard." *The New York Times Magazine*, November 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/29/magazine/a-dream-of-utopia-in-hell.html?emc=edit_tnt_20151124&nlid=56257975&tntemail0=y&_r=1.

Gaub, Florence, and Patryk Pawlak. 2013. "Sykes-Picot and Syria." *European Union Institute for Security Studies* 34 (1): 1–2. http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Alert_34-Sykes-Picot_and_Syria.pdf.

Graeber, David. 2014a. "Rojava'dan on Yaş Genç Döndüm (Interview in Turkish)." Evrensel. 2014. https://www.evrensel.net/haber/100431/david-graeber-rojavadan-on-yas-genc-dondum.

———. 2014b. "Why Is the World Ignoring the Revolutionary Kurds in Syria?" The Guardian. 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/08/why-world-ignoring-revolutionary-kurds-syria-isis.

Gunes, Cengiz. 2012. *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey: From Protest to Resistance*. London: Routledge.

———. 2020. "The Transformation of Turkey's Pro-Kurdish Democratic Movement." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2020.1801245.

Gunes, Cengiz, and Çetin Gürer. 2018. "Kurdish Movement's Democratic Autonomy Proposals in Turkey." In *Democratic Representation in Plurinational States*, 159–75. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-01108-6_8.

Gunes, Cengiz, and Veli Yadirgi. 2020. "Introduction: The Transformations in Kurdish Politics and Society in Turkey Since 2000." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2020.1801246.

Gunter, Michael M. 2015. "The Kurds in the Changing Political Map of the Middle East." *Kurdish Studies* 3 (1): 64–81.

Gupta, Rahila. 2017. "How Rojava-Inspired Women's Councils Have Spread across Europe." OpenDemocracy. 2017. https://www.opendemocracy.net/rahila-gupta/rojava-inspired-womens-councils-europe.

Haenni, Patrick, and Arthur Quesnay. 2020. "Surviving the Aftermath of Islamic State: The Syrian Kurdish Movement's Resilience Strategy." European University Institute. https://doi.org/10.2870/985895.

Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. 2004. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: The Penguin Press.

Hunt, Stephen E. 2019. "Prospects for Kurdish Ecology Initiatives in Syria and Turkey: Democratic Confederalism and Social Ecology." *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 30 (3): 7–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/10455752.2017.1413120.

In der Maur, Renee, and Jonas Staal. 2015. *Stateless Democracry*. New World. Amsterdam: New World Summit.

Jongerden, Joost, and Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya. 2011. "Born from the Left: The Making of the PKK." In *Nationalims and Politics in Turkey: Political Islam, Kemalism and the Kurdish Issue.*, edited by Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden, 123–42. Abingdon: Routledge. https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/662653.

Knapp, Michael, Anja Flach, and Ercan Ayboğa. 2016. *Revolution in Rojava: Democratic Autonomy and Women's Liberation in Syrian Kurdistan*. 1st ed. London: Pluto Press.

Knapp, Michael, and Joost Jongerden. 2014. "Communal Democracy: The Social Contract and Confederalism in Rojava." *Comparative Islamic Studies* 10: 87–109.

Lawson, Greg R. 2014. "A Thirty Years' War in the Middle East." The National Interest. 2014. http://nationalinterest.org/feature/thirty-years-war-the-middle-east-10266.

Leo, Jubault. 2018. "Radical Democracy , Citizenship and Development : Radicalizing Participation to Achieve Transformative Change - The Cases of Chiapas and Rojava." University of London.

MacMillan, Steven. 2015. "The 'New Thirty Years War' in the Middle East: A Western Policy of Chaos?" Global Research - Centre for Research on Globalization. 2015. http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-new-thirty-years-war-in-the-middle-east-a-western-policy-of-chaos/5469351.

Matin, Kamran. 2015. "Why Is Turkey Bombing the Kurds?" OpenDemocracy. 2015. https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/kamran-matin/why-is-turkey-bombing-kurds.

———. 2019. "Democratic Confederalism and Societal Multiplicity: A Sympathetic Critique of Abdullah Öcalan's State Theory." *Geopolitics*. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2019.1688785.

Merip, The Editors. 2015. "On ISIS." *Middle East Research and Information Project*, no. 276. http://www.merip.org/mer/mer276/isis.

Miley, Thomas Jeffrey. 2015. "The Kurdish Question: Prospects for Peace and Justice in Turkey & the Middle East." The Thots. 2015. http://thethots.com/2015/10/05/the-kurdish-question-prospects-for-peace-and-justice-in-turkey-the-middle-east/.

———. 2020. "The Kurdish Freedom Movement, Rojava and the Left." *Middle East Research and Information Project* , no. 295 (July). https://merip.org/2020/07/the-kurdish-freedom-movement-rojava-and-the-left/.

Mouffe, Chantal, and Paul Holdengraber. 1989. "Radical Democracy: Modern or Postmodern?" *Social Text*, no. 21: 31. https://doi.org/10.2307/827807.

Muslim, Salih. 2020. "Kurds and Democracy: In Conversation with Saleh Moslem." Transregional Center for Democratic Studies. December 10, 2020. https://blogs.newschool.edu/tcds/2020/12/03/online-kurds-and-democracy-in-conversation-with-saleh-moslem/.

Newman, Saul. 2005. *Power and Politics in Poststructuralist: New Theories of the Political*. London: Rotuledge.

Öcalan, Abdullah. 2005. "The Declaration of Democratic Confederalism." Kurdmedia. 2005. http://www.kurdmedia.com/article.aspx?id=10174.

———. 2011. *Democratic Confederalism*. London: Transmedia Publishing Ltd.

Oskay, Çınar. 2015. "Dücane Cündioğlu: İslam Dünyası 'Ey İnsanlar' Deme Yeteneğini Yitirdi." Radikal. 2015. http://www.radikal.com.tr/hayat/ducane-cundioglu-islam-dunyasi-ey-insanlar-deme-yetenegini-yitirdi-1491460/.

Ozkan, Behlul. 2014. "Early Writings Reveal the Real Davutoglu." Al-Monitor. 2014. http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/08/zaman-davutoglu-ideologue-behlul-ozkan-academic-akp-islamic.html.

Rabinovich, Itamar. 2014. "The End of Sykes-Picot? Reflections on the Prospects of the Arab Satet System." *Middle East Memo*. Washington D.C. https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-end-of-sykes-picot-reflections-on-the-prospects-of-the-arab-state-system/.

Rojava Information Center. 2019. "Beyond the Frontlines: The Building of the Democratic System in North and East Syria." Qamişlo. https://rojavainformationcenter.com/background/political-sys- tem-documents.

Serxwebûn. 1998. "Komplo Bitmedi, Kavga Sürüyor." *Serxwebûn*, November 1998.

Tankersley, Jim. 2015. "This Might Be the Most Controversial Theory for What's behind the Rise of ISIS." The Washington Post. 2015. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/11/30/why-inequality-is-to-blame-for-the-rise-of-the-islamic-state/.

TATORT Kurdistan. 2011. *Democratic Autonomy in North Kurdistan*. Porsgrunn: New Compass.

———. 2014. "Democratic Autonomy in Rojava." New Compass. 2014. http://new-compass.net/articles/revolution-rojava.

Taussig, Michael. 2015. "The Mastery of Non-Mastery." Public Seminar. 2015. http://www.publicseminar.org/2015/08/the-mastery-of-non-mastery/#.V-xn5vArK01.

Tax, Meredith. 2016. "The Rojava Model ." *Foreign Affairs*, October 14, 2016. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-10-14/rojava-model.

Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. 2014. *The First World War in the Middle East*. London: Hurst and Co. Ltd.